

Eudoxus of Knidos: Founder of Greek (Hellenistic) Astrology

Eudoxus himself was the legendary Hermes who founded astrology.

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I have an announcement that should be of general interest to the astrological community. It concerns the origins of Western astrology in the Greek world, and the new beginning it was given at this time.

For about twenty years now, I have been talking about the highly systematic character of Greek astrology. For me this was an almost certain sign that there was one guiding intelligence behind the initial development of this astrology, meaning that it must have been the work of one man or a small group of men pursuing a common program. We here at Project Hindsight—I, Robert Schmidt and my wife Ellen Black—believe we have found that man. He was the celebrated Greek polymath Eudoxus of Knidos, who in fact had a large following of students.

We would go even further and say that Eudoxus was developing his astrology sometime around the middle of the fourth century B.C.E. This effectively moves the founding era of Greek astrology back about two hundred years. The astrology that made its appearance during the first or second century of the Christian era in the time of “Nechepso” and “Petosiris” was not *invented* at that time, but merely made *public*, as Firmicus Maternus himself says.

Why do we make this claim? There is no historical report that Eudoxus was an astrologer. In fact, historian of Greek mathematics Thomas Heath has this to say about him:

“He was a *true man of science* if there ever was one. No occult or superstitious lore appealed to him. Cicero says that Eudoxus...expressed the opinion and left it on record that no sort of credence should be given to the Chaldeans in their predictions and in their foretelling of the life of individuals from the day of their birth.”

However, this statement should be compared to a remark by the Roman naturalist Pliny: “Eudoxus, who has endeavored to show that of all the branches of knowledge the magic art is the most illustrious and beneficial, ...”

The easiest way to reconcile these two statements is to say that Eudoxus rejected *Chaldean* divinatory astrology, not the possibility of astrology itself. None of this, to be sure, is evidence that Eudoxus was the progenitor of Greek astrology.

It is not implausible, however, to suppose that he was interested in *cosmology*, as were many Greek thinkers of his day. As Diogenes Laertius tells us, he lectured on the cosmos, the gods, and the celestial appearances.

What was cosmology in Eudoxus’ day? With roots going back to the early Pythagoreans, it was the attempt to conceptualize the cosmos as a well-ordered, well-arranged *whole*. When Socrates was a young man, Anaxagoras took cosmological speculation to an entirely new level with his introduction of *nous* ‘divine mind’ as the ordering principle of the cosmos, responsible for everything that was, is, and will be. It is impossible to overestimate the impact that this statement had on later Greek philosophers. If one could understand how the divine mind ordered the cosmos, one could presumably develop a prognostic art on the basis of such a cosmology.

There is nothing, then, to *rule out* the possibility that Eudoxus intended to develop a cosmology with prognostic potential, but where is the hard evidence?

Surprisingly, it is embedded in the very names of the twelve signs of the zodiac and in the deific names for the seven planets in their Greek spellings.

It was Eudoxus who assigned Greek names to the signs of the zodiac for the first time, or at the very least finalized the process; of this there is no doubt. When the spellings of these names are studied individually and in comparison with each other, the four elemental triplicities emerge in their association with the four physical elements, along with numerous attendant concepts.

The assignment of names to the five planets (Helios and Selene being already given) most likely took place during Eudoxus’ own lifetime. We have compelling

evidence that it was he who assigned the deific names as well. A study of the spellings of these Greek names points immediately to the classification of the planets into the two planetary *sects*, a distinction so fundamental to Greek astrology.

Thus, the central planetary concept of sect and the central zodiacal concept of elemental triplicity are both embedded in the celestial nomenclature of Eudoxus.

We cannot say for certain whether Eudoxus lived to develop his astrological cosmology further; it may have been completed by his students over a period of time. But if others developed the astrology further, they must have been privy to the secrets of Eudoxus' naming scheme.

Who then was this man Eudoxus of Knidos? According to the most recent scholarship, he was born on the island of Knidos on the shores of Asia minor around 390 B.C.E. This would make him about 37 or 38 years younger than Plato and about 7 or 8 years older than Aristotle; he in fact had close ties to Plato and the Platonic Academy and would have known many of its associates including Aristotle.

Eudoxus was widely travelled. In his youth he studied mathematics under the distinguished Pythagorean Archytas of Tarentum in Italy, and Diogenes Laertius regards him as the last member of the original Pythagorean school. Eudoxus spent sixteen months with the priesthood in Egypt. At some point he wrote a book called *Tour of the World* in which he described the customs and institutions of many countries. This is significant because many astrological sources correlate the twelve signs of the zodiac with the countries of the known world.

Today Eudoxus is known primarily for his work in astronomy and mathematics, but he was also a physician. In fact, his birthplace Knidos was near the island of Cos where Berossus later set up shop and taught Chaldean astrology. Knidos and Cos were the centers of two rival schools of medicine. This is suggestive because there are indications that one of the earliest applications of astrology was to medicine.

In the lineage reported by Firmicus Maternus, Hermes is said to be founder of the astrological tradition. He first transmits his doctrines to Asclepios and Anubio. The doctrines then pass from them to Nechepso and Petosiris, who make them public. Certain other legendary figures write commentaries on this published work.

It is generally assumed that accounts such as these are fictions created by the authors of astrological texts for the purpose of giving their own works an air of authority through divine origin. We moderns should not, perhaps, be so quick to attribute such motives to these ancient writers. We should at least consider the possibility that what we have before us is an account, albeit legendary, of an actual historical event.

I have said that there is strong evidence that Eudoxus of Knidos was the progenitor of Greek astrology. Legend says it originated with Hermes Trismegistos. It would seem a fair assumption, then, that the Hermes Trismegistos of the astrological tradition was a pseudonym for Eudoxus himself.

This brings us to the *Corpus Hermeticum*, a collection of dialogues of a philosophical and theological nature in which Hermes plays the major role and Asclepios is also a participant. Scholars have long speculated over the question of whether there is any relationship between these dialogues and the “technical” astrological, alchemical, and magical writings attributed to Hermes. Is it at all plausible that Eudoxus had something to do with the *Corpus Hermeticum*?

The dialogues in the *Corpus Hermeticum* purport to have been written originally in the Egyptian language. Eudoxus spent a considerable time in Egypt with the priesthood, and even “went native” while there. He was highly regarded by the priesthood.

In Diogenes’ biographical account we find Eudoxus associated with some writings that went under the strange title ‘the so-called *Dialogues of Dogs*’, which might bring to mind something like Aesop’s *Fables*. However, in serious writing the Greek word *kunos* ‘dog’ often means ‘servant of a god’.

According to Eratosthenes, Eudoxus composed these dialogues himself. Others were of the opinion that Eudoxus translated them from Egyptian, from which we may infer that these dialogues had some Egyptian elements in them.

One tradition has it that Hermes Trismegistos was himself the translator of a number of Egyptian sacred writings into Greek.

We must, then, seriously entertain the possibility that Eudoxus of Knidos was also the author/translator of the dialogues found in the *Corpus Hermeticum*, which consist of dialogues between men who would regard themselves as servants of a god, in this case the 'divine mind' Nous.

What you have just read is not intended to *demonstrate* our claim that Eudoxus of Knidos was the progenitor of Greek astrology, only to remove some of the *implausibility* of an otherwise outrageous claim.

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EUDOXUS BIOGRAPHY by Diogenes Laertius

Eudoxus of Cnidos, the son of Aeschines, was an astronomer, a geometer, a physician and a legislator. He learned geometry from Archytas and medicine from Philistion the Sicilian, as Callimachus tells us in his *Tables*. Sotion in his *Successions of Philosophers* says that he was also a pupil of Plato. When he was about twenty-three years old and in straitened circumstances, he was attracted by the reputation of the Socratics and set sail for Athens with Theomedon the physician, who provided for his wants. Some even say that he was Theomedon's favourite. Having disembarked at Piraeus he went up every day to Athens and, when he had attended the Sophists' lectures, returned again to the port. After spending two months there, he went home and, aided by the liberality of his friends, he proceeded to Egypt with Chrysippus the physician, bearing with him letters of introduction from Agesilaus to Nectanabis, who recommended him to the

priests. There he remained one year and four months with his beard and eyebrows shaved, and there, some say, he wrote his *Octaëteris*. From there he went to Cyzicus and the Propontis, giving lectures; afterwards he came to the court of Mausolus. Then at length he returned to Athens, bringing with him a great number of pupils: according to some, this was for the purpose of annoying Plato, who had originally passed him over. Some say that, when Plato gave a banquet, Eudoxus, owing to the numbers present, introduced the fashion of arranging couches in a semicircle. Nicomachus, the son of Aristotle, states that he declared pleasure to be the good. He was received in his native city with great honour, proof of this being the decree concerning him. But he also became famous throughout Greece, as legislator for his fellow-citizens, so we learn from Hermippus in his fourth book *On the Seven Sages*, and as the author of astronomical and geometrical treatises and other important works.

He had three daughters, Actis, Philtis and Delphis. Eratosthenes in his writings addressed to Baton tells us that he also composed *Dialogues of Dogs*; others say that they were written by Egyptians in their own language and that he translated them and published them in Greece. Chrysippus of Cnidos, the son of Erineus, attended his lectures on the gods, the world, and the phenomena of the heavens, while in medicine he was the pupil of Philistion the Sicilian.

Eudoxus also left some excellent commentaries. He had a son Aristagoras, who had a son Chrysippus, the pupil of Aëthlius. To this Chrysippus we owe a medical work on the treatment of the eye, speculations upon nature having occupied his mind.

Three men have borne the name of Eudoxus : (1) our present subject ; (2) a historian, of Rhodes ; (3) a Sicilian Greek, the son of Agathocles, a comic poet, who three times won the prize in the city Dionysia and five times at the Lenaea, so we are told by Apollodorus in his *Chronology*. We also find another physician of Cnidos mentioned by Eudoxus in his *Tour of the World* as advising people to be always exercising their limbs by every form of gymnastics, and their sense-organs in the same way.

The same authority, Apollodorus, states that Eudoxus of Cnidos flourished about the 103rd Olympiad, and that he discovered the properties of curves. He died in his fifty-third year. When he was in Egypt with Chonuphis of Heliopolis, the sacred bull Apis licked his cloak. From this the priests foretold that he would be famous but shortlived, so we are informed by Favorinus in his *Memorabilia*.

There is a poem of our own upon him, which runs thus :

It is said that at Memphis Eudoxus learned his coming fate from the bull with beautiful horns. No words did it utter ; for whence comes speech to a bull? Nature did not provide the young bull Apis with a chattering tongue. But, standing sideways by him, it licked his robe, by which it plainly prophesied "you shall soon die." Whereupon, soon after, this fate overtook him, when he had seen fifty-three risings of the Pleiades.

Eudoxus used to be called *Endoxos* (illustrious) instead of Eudoxus by reason of his brilliant reputation.

Having now dealt with the famous Pythagoreans, let us next discuss the so-called "sporadic" philosophers. And first we must speak of Heraclitus.