

ZODIAC : Ancient Astral Science in Transformation

The introduction of the zodiac triggered an ultimately global and enduring transformation of astral science and other realms of scholarship which took shape in Babylonia, Egypt and the Greco-Roman world between the 5th century BCE and the 3rd century CE. It was accompanied by three seminal innovations that are constitutive for modern astronomy and astrology : (1) a zodiacal turn –the zodiac became the central concept for interpreting, predicting, computing and representing celestial phenomena, (2) a mathematical turn –the emergence of mathematical methods that employ the zodiac for computing planetary, lunar and solar phenomena, and (3) a personal turn in astrology –the emergence of horoscopy and related forms of astrology that cater to private individuals as opposed to earlier forms that exclusively served rulers. While originating in Babylonia, these innovations were transformed through interactions with Egyptian, Greco-Roman and other ancient cultures of astral science, mathematics, religion, philosophy and iconography. The ZODIAC project aims to develop a new account of the emergence, spread and cross-cultural transformations of zodiacal astral science by addressing both textual and iconographic sources from different ancient cultures to reveal the strategies that fostered acceptance in new contexts.

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