Astrology and other Occult Sciences in Seventeenth-Century New Spain

Ana Ávalos

This article focuses on the relationship and mutual influence of astrology and other so-called occult sciences within the context of Seventeenth-Century New Spain. By presenting some case studies of inquisitorial trials against astrologers, it explores the interrelation between astrological and physiognomical ideas and practices in order to shed some light on the moral dimension of these natural philosophical fields of knowledge. During the early-modern period, both astrology and physiognomy were regarded as tools for self-understanding and the understanding of others by means of interpretation of natural signs. Thus their history is key for understanding the shaping of the boundaries between the natural and the moral realms.

Este artículo está enfocado en la relación e influencia mutua entre la astrología y otras ciencias ocultas dentro del contexto de la Nueva España del siglo dieciseis. Al discutir algunos procesos inquisitoriales contra astrólogos, explora la interrelación entre ciertas ideas y prácticas tanto astrológicas como fisionómicas con el objetivo de enfatizar la dimensión moral de estos campos del conocimiento pertenecientes al ámbito de la filosofía natural. Durante los siglos dieciséis y dieciseis, tanto la astrología como la fisonomía eran consideradas como herramientas útiles para el auto-conocimiento y el conocimiento de los otros a través de la interpretación de signos naturales. Su historia es, por lo tanto, clave para entender la formación de las fronteras entre los espacios de lo natural y lo moral.

The term Occult Sciences is problematic in many ways. When used to refer to certain arts or disciplines during the early modern period, it seems to respond more to modern presuppositions than to a contemporary understanding of the boundaries between different fields of knowledge. However, there are two reasons why we should not set this term aside completely (yet). First, because I believe that some recent studies on the history of early-modern astrology, while trying to show that this discipline was not regarded as occult or pseudo science at the time, have focused mainly on the relationship between astrology and other fields of knowledge which are now regarded as proper science, namely astronomy and medicine. By doing so, these studies, paradoxically, might reinforce the science/pseudo-science dichotomy and fail to contribute to the reconstruction of the pre-modern intellectual landscape in all its complexity.

Secondly, I think that one needs to acknowledge that the historiographic trend aimed at reassessing the role of magic and the occult in the history of science and technology has contributed in giving astrology a more central position within scholarly discussions about early modern science. In this sense, it is perhaps important to underline that many studies on astrology during the early modern period are framed within broader discussions about the origins of modern science, which is in turn one of the main elements of the narrative of modernity. The history of

* European University Institute.

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astrology has thus been shaped by some questions concerning this bigger narrative: the rupture with scholasticism; the shaping of disciplinary boundaries; the decline of superstition, and the triumph of rationality; the transmission of knowledge from one cultural context to the other; and the importance of non-Western intellectual traditions. There is, however, much work to be done before the proper link between the history of astrology and the history of western science can be established. A more accurate picture of the way in which astrology was practiced and understood during this period needs to take into account a greater variety of cultural contexts.

In this article, I will focus mainly on the relationship between astrology and physiognomy, two disciplines which have been gathered under the umbrella of the so-called occult sciences, within the context of seventeenth-century New Spain. I will present some case studies of inquisitorial trials against astrologers that show how astrological and physiognomical ideas were often interwoven. More important, they show how, by looking at this interrelation it is possible to shed new light on certain aspects of astrology which remain obscure when this discipline is only studied in relation to other now legitimate sciences.

1. Astrology, physiognomy, and politics

In 1641 Friar Nicolás de Alarcón was denounced to the Inquisition in Guatemala for practicing astrology and making predictions for the president of the High Court (Real Audiencia) of Guatemala.1 Captain Álvaro deQuiñones Osorio was appointed by royal decree of April 14, 1633 as successor of Captain Diego de Acuña (1626-1633) for the presidency of Guatemala.2 Son of Diego Pérez de Quiñones and Francisca Osorio, Álvaro Quiñones was born in 1575 in the Spanish city of Leon, where he was appointed as governor.3 In March 1609 he took his vows in the military Order of Saint James of Compostela.4 He married Doña Juana Salazar

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2 Real Provisión a D. Alvaro de Quiñones Osorio, dándole título de capitán general de la provincia de Guatemala. (1633). AGI; INDIFERENTE, 452, L. A. 15, ff. 171-172. See also: Nombramiento de D. ÁlvaroQuiñones Osorio para el cargo de Presidente de la Audiencia, cargo que desempeñaría por ocho años y con 5000 ducados de sueldo anuales. (1633). AGCA, AL. 23, leg. 4577, fol. 90.
3 Expediente para la concesión del título de caballero de la orden de Santiago a Alvaro de Quiñones. (1609). AHN, OM-EXPEDIENTILLOS, N. 210. According to the witnesses who testified for the concession of the title, Quiñones was born either in 1577 or in 1579. According to his horoscope, he was born in 1576.
4 Founded in the twelfth century, it owes its name to the national patron of Spain. Unlike the contemporary orders of Calatrava and Alcántara, which followed the severe rule of the Benedictines of Citeaux, Santiago adopted the milder rule of the Canons of St. Augustine. It had a mixed character between hospitaler and military order.
y Zuñiga in 1635. In his chronicle, the Dominican Francisco Ximénez described Quiñones as "a restless man, who took care of his office even during meals, or when travelling in his carriage. He had an outstanding instruction for political matters, and his ability for governance made him a highly respected man. His only defect was his immoderate inclination to become richer during his governance." Quiñones governed Guatemala until 1642, when he left the city with his family and his fortune; he died at sea on his way to Peru.

Friar Nicolás de Alarcón was born in Mexico City in 1616, from the marriage of Diego de Alarcón Bordado and Mariana del Castillo, both of them born in the capital of the New Spain. At the age of thirteen he took his vows in the Order of Our Lady of Mercy. The Mercedarian Order was founded in 1218 in Barcelona by Pere Nolasch as a lay congregation dealing with the ransoms of Christian captives in the hands of the Muslims. It was approved in 1235 by the bull Devotionis vestrae of Gregory IX, which recognized its existence and conferred the Rule of St Augustine upon it. After the approval, the Order entered a period of sustained expansion, and by the time of Nolasch's death in about 1245 the Order had expanded throughout the Crown of Aragon, with some sixteen foundations. After Nolasch's death, the Order kept expanding in the Kingdom of Aragon and the Occitan, and spread into the Kingdom of Castile, numbering over thirty houses in 1270.

In the New World, the history of the Order began with the journeys of Christopher Columbus. According to the Italian chronicler Peter Martyr D'Anghera, Columbus was accompanied by at least one Mercedarian friar during his second journey to the Caribbean in 1493. "From this moment the province was committed to an overseas enterprise to which it would devote much of its energy and from which it would, years hence, derive great wealth. Time would demonstrate the Castilian Mercedarians to be among the few Spanish religious congregations prepared to accept the challenge of expansion in the New World."

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5 Copia de las capitulaciones matrimoniales de Alvaro Quiñones Osorio, presidente de la Audiencia de Guatemala (1646). AGI; Guatemala, 16, R.7, No. 46.  
8 Causa contra Fray Nicolás de Alarcón de la orden de nuestra señora de las Mercedes sobre las figuras que ha levantado conforme esta astrología judiciaria en favor de Don Alvaro de Quiñones Osorio, caballero de la orden de Santiago Marques de Lorenzana presidente de la real Audiencia de Guatemala. (1641). AGN; Inquisición, Vol. 370, exp. 1. (From now AGN-370). All the biographical information is taken from his own discurso de vida, given during the first hearing: folios 129 to 135.  
in America was founded in Santo Domingo in 1514, and the first one in Central America (Tierra Firme) was established in Panama in 1522. From Panama the Order expanded northwards through Nicaragua and Chiapas, while Peru was the entrance gate to the south. In 1563, the provinces of Guatemala, Cusco, Lima, and Chile were founded, and Tucumán, Santo Domingo, Quito, and Mexico completed the total of eight provinces in the New World by the beginning of the seventeenth century.

In Spanish America, the Order acquired certain features that distinguished it both from its parent order in Spain, and from other religious orders. The main scope of the Order in the New World was not the ransom of Christian captives but the collection of alms for rescuing those who were imprisoned during their journeys from Spain to America and vice versa. The task was theoretically shared with the Trinitarians, but this Order was never properly established in the New World. Apart from the collection of alms, the Mercedarians were supposed to perform the same duties as the rest of the orders: spiritual guidance for the Spanish population, and conversion of Indians and blacks.

The first priest to set foot in New Spain was the Mercedarian Bartolomé Olmedo, who arrived with Hernán Cortés in 1519 as his chaplain and adviser. In spite of their early arrival, however, the Mercedarians found it difficult to convince the civil authorities of the benefits of establishing the Order in the capital of New Spain, where the rest of the major Orders had already established their convents. In the capital


14 Borges, P. (1992), p. 14. By the 1540s the leading figures in the American Church had come to regard the Order as unfit for missionary work. This could be explained by the fact that Mercedarians participated not only in the process of spiritual conquest, but also in the military campaigns of colonization organized during the sixteenth century. Due to their participation as chaplains in these campaigns, the Mercedarians were granted with individual property (encomiendas) like the rest of the settlers. They could thus not be considered as a mendicant Order, and this dubious status was not suitable for a missionary endeavour. The Order was banned from creating any further foundations in the Indies, and restrictions were placed on the dispatch and movement of personnel. However, the Order began a slow rehabilitation by 1547, and started building up a major missionary presence in America. By 1770 it numbered 1933 friars in 115 houses, even though the number of Mercedarians coming from Spain remained the lowest of all orders: 2.5% of the total of fifteen thousand missionaries traveling to the New World between 1493 and 1824.


16 The convent in Mexico City, known as Convento Grande was founded in 1601 and served as a house for the instruction of religious from different places within the New Spain. See:
of Guatemala, by contrast, they encountered favourable conditions for their establishment, namely the absence of other religious Orders.\textsuperscript{17} By 1563, the convent of Santiago was consolidated as head of the \textit{Provincia de la Presentación}, which celebrated its first provincial chapter in May 1563.\textsuperscript{18} At the outset, the \textit{Presentación} included the convents of Guatemala, Real de Chiapa, Honduras, El Salvador, Nicaragua, and Mexico. In Mexico, however, the Mercedarians claimed autonomy arguing that the great distance between Mexico and Guatemala was both dangerous and problematic.\textsuperscript{19} The independence of the Mexican \textit{Provincia de la Visitación} (with the convents of Mexico, Veracruz, Morelia, Tacuba, Oaxaca, Atlisco, and Colima) was granted by a papal brief of December 1615, and a royal decree of June 1616.\textsuperscript{20} The relationship between both provinces, as the story we are about to recount here shows, was certainly not always free of conflict. [Images #1 and 2].

In the autumn of 1640, Friar Nicolás arrived from Mexico to the Convent of Santiago de Guatemala as the new lecturer of theology. European tradition for the education of novices, which implied the study of theology both in convents of the Order and in universities of the major cities. Before the foundation of the University of San Carlos in Guatemala in 1676, students from central America used to study theology at the Royal University in Mexico City, and came back to their convents after six years.\textsuperscript{21} University was thus a place of interaction for students and professors of different provinces, as well as for members of different religious Orders. Friar Nicolás de Alarcón, for instance, studied Grammar and Rhetoric at the Jesuit College of \textit{San Pedro y San

\textsuperscript{17} León Cazares, M. C. (1999). \textit{La Orden de Nuestra Señora de la Merced: redención de cautivos en el Arzobispado de México}. México, UNAM, p. 61.

\textsuperscript{18} In 1563, the provinces of Lima, Cuzco, Chile, and Guatemala emerged, each with its own provincial, but exempt from the authority of the general. Taylor, B. (2000), p. 90.

\textsuperscript{19} Pérez Rodríguez, P. N. (1968). \textit{Religiosos de la Merced que pasaron a la América española}. Madrid, p. 129.

\textsuperscript{20} Pérez Rodríguez, P. N. (1968), p. 129. Chiapas was the only part of Mexican territory which remained in the province of Guatemala after 1616.

\textsuperscript{21} Historical Synthesis (1997), p. 123.

\textbf{Image 1. Mercedarian Convent in Guatemala.}
Pablo in Mexico City. He went to Puebla to study Arts at the convent of his Order, and then went back to Mexico City to study theology both at the Mercedarian convent and at the Royal University.

In 1637, Friar Nicolás started teaching at the Arts Faculty of the Convent in Mexico City, where he stayed until he was sent to Guatemala by the general vicar of his Order, Friar Diego de Velasco. In July 1641, roughly a year after Friar Nicolás had been appointed as lecturer of Theology in the convent of Santiago, the general vicar received a complaint about the astrologer. It came from Guatemala to Mexico City in the form of a letter written by a scribe (escribano) called Sebastián Ramírez, who was sent into exile by president Quiñones as a consequence of an astrological prediction. As he referred to the general vicar of the Order:

A little friar who came from there [Mexico] has ruined me because he cast a figure to the president's liking [...] In this figure, the astrologer told the president that a pale and black-bearded scribe was going to destroy him (this was after seeing me imprisoned), and believing in it as if it were the faith or a saying of Saint Thomas, the president has punished me more severely [...] Your highness [should] find the necessary remedy to the case, which is scandalizing the whole republic [...] 24

22 In August 1573 the viceroy granted the provincial of the Society of Jesus, father Pedro Sánchez, and seven rich neighbours of Mexico City permission to organize the foundation of the College of San Pedro y San Pablo. Between 1575 and 1576 the Jesuits founded three more colleges: San Gregorio, San Bernardo and San Miguel. In 1588 they founded San Ildefonso, which integrated in one institution the older colleges of San Bernardo, and San Miguel. San Pedro y San Pablo was closed in 1597 due to lack of budget, among other reasons. In 1618, it was merged with San Ildefonso too. See: Flores Padilla, G. (2001), El patronato laico de un colegio jesuita: San Pedro y San Pablo de la ciudad de México, in González, E. (ed), Colegios y Universidades, México, UNAM, pp. 17-36. and Díaz y de Ovando, C. (1951), El Colegio Máximo de San Pedro y San Pablo, México, UNAM.

23 In Spanish colonial America, the escribano was a notary of various types: the royal escribano (or escribano de número) was the equivalent of today's public notary; the escribano of government was directly under the supervision of the governor and his lieutenants; the escribano of register, mines, and reports were similar to the private property registrar in Spain, and dealt with the ownership and exploitation of mines and the registry and certification of incoming and outgoing loads of freight cargoes as well as passengers; the escribano of cabildo kept the books of the town hall (cabildo) and the minutes of its meetings. Artiles, J. (1969). The Office of Escritano in Sixteenth Century Habana. The Hispanic American Historical Review, 49(3), p. 499.

24 'Un Frailecito mozo que vino de allá me ha echado a perder por haber alzado figura a su
Three months later, on October 7, 1641, the commendator of the Mercedarian convent in Santiago testified against Friar Nicolás before the commissary of the Holy Office in Guatemala. According to this witness, it was publicly known that Friar Nicolás had established the exact day on which the scribe had to be sent into exile by the President: September the 14th, 1641. Within astrological practice, these kinds of predictions were known as *elections*, and they consisted in the casting of horoscopes to choose an auspicious moment to begin any kind of enterprise.

Another witness said that the President had talked one day with Friar Nicolás about some astrological figures while they were travelling together in his carriage. From these figures they inferred that a scribe with certain physical traits was going to harm the president: pale, black-bearded, and always looking at the floor. Motivated by this prediction, the president imprisoned the scribe, and sent him into exile on the day chosen by the astrologer. Moreover, this witness had seen the president looking at some books with images of the faces of men and animals, and some other books which might be forbidden because their authors were Flemish and French. A third witness, by contrast, said that the reason
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why the President sent the scribe away “was not because of astronomical conjectures,” but because he was positive that the scribe was going to harm him. 29 Not all witnesses thus agreed that an astrologically auspicious moment had been elected for the scribe’s exile, but all of them talked about the way in which Friar Nicolás had identified the president’s enemy by means of physiognomy.

In general terms, physiognomy is the discernment of character from physical features, 30 the discipline that seeks to detect from an individual’s exterior their character, disposition, or even destiny. 31 The most accurate term to refer to the “theory of physiognomy as it was presented to early modern readers of books on the subject” is the classical word physiognomony, which derives from the Greek physis (nature) and gnomon (indication, knowledge, judgement, essence). 32 A more colloquial term was the word fisnomy (sometimes spelt physnomy or phisnamy) which referred to “that general, intuitive, even unconscious ability that human beings (including those who are blind or deaf) somehow have, which enables them to discover something about a person simply by looking at, and listening to, them.” 33 The term physiognomy was used in several ways during the early modern period: one was to refer to the face or the whole physical appearance in a merely anatomical sense; another one was to refer to a specific physical trait that expresses an internal characteristic; finally, it was also used to designate the theory, discipline, or art of physiognomy. 34 In what follows, the term physiognomy will be used as being a more standard concept, and more representative of the heterogeneity of the subject.

The earliest known work on physiognomy originated in the classical period and is attributed to Aristotle; it exercised an enormous influence right down to the seventeenth century. 35 The pseudo-Aristotelian Physiognomicar furnished the conceptual foundation for physiognomy, and established the main modes of discovering people’s character. The first mode deals with the significance of human resemblance to a specific

pañero al dicho Fray Nicolás de Alarcón dijo le prestaría un libro de los referidos y se lo prestó con tal se lo volviese.” AGN-370, f. 14.
29 “…que sabe con cierta ciencia que el motivo del dicho marqués para echar de aquí a la tal persona que fue Sebastián Ramírez, escribano del Valle, no fue tanto por conjeturas astronómicas, sino por saber el dicho Marqués con cierta ciencia los graves daños que el dicho Sebastián Ramírez intentaba hacerle con informaciones de que tuvo noticia cierta el dicho marqués” AGN-370, f. 33.
33 Porter, M. (2005), p. IX.
34 Porter, M. (2005), p. XI.
animal, which in turn is endowed with a particular “mental character”.  

Secondly, we find the physiognomy of racial difference which distinguishes appearances and characters along ethnic lines and their corresponding behavioral patterns.  

The third method consists of assigning specific physical traits to a given disposition of the soul, such as anger, fear, and so on.  

Pseudo-Aristotle mentions later in the text that there is another way of doing physiognomics, suitable for those who already know philosophy, which nobody has ever experienced. This method relates a certain inner disposition with another one or more, and deduces that whenever one is present, the other will be found as well.  

Besides explaining the different methods, the pseudo-Aristotelian treatise provides a list of ‘signs’ which remained fundamental for physiognomical interpretation: movements, postures, color, facial traits, hair, quality of the skin (smooth or rough), the voice, being fat or slim, the single parts of the body, and the whole physical aspect. Not all signs, however, are equally significant for discerning the person’s inner character; a hierarchy among signs must also be taken into account. The most reliable signs are the regions of the eyes and forehead, head, and face; next comes the chest and shoulders, followed by the legs and feet; the stomach is the least relevant.  

“In a word, the clearest signs are derived from those parts in which intelligence is most manifest.”  

Even though the text does not mention it explicitly, it is possible to infer that the most important inner characteristics to be discovered by physiognomy are courage, cowardice, kindness and wickedness.  

During the Renaissance and early modern period, it was not surprising for astrologers to also have a vast knowledge of physiognomy. Moreo-

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37 “Altri poi seguivano questo stesso criterio, ma nella loro indagine non partivano dagli animali, ma dal genere umano stesso, distinguendo secondo le razze, quante differiscono per aspetto e carattere, come ad esempio Egizio, Traci e Sciti, e similmente facevano una raccolta dei tratti distintivi.” Pseudo-Aristotele (1993), p. 60.  


40 “In ogni scelta dei segni alcuni segni danno indicazioni più chiare sul soggetto rispetto ad altri. I più chiari sono quelli che si trovano nelle posizioni più favorevoli. La posizione più favorevole è la zona degli occhi, della fronte, della testa e del volto, al secondo posto quella del petto e delle spalle, poi quella delle gambe e dei piedi; proprio all’ultimo posto quella del ventre.” Pseudo-Aristotele (1993), p. 121.  

ver, the art of physiognomy was not only an area of interest for specialized scholars, but for anyone who regarded it as a useful tool for deciphering other people, whether friends or enemies. The extent to which physiognomy was considered useful is reflected in the considerable number of older physiognomic texts that were printed in Latin and the vernacular during the last decades of the fifteenth and the early decades of the sixteenth centuries. Such compendia offered the reader physiognomic clues for detecting the secret features of their enemies.

It is extremely difficult to derive a stable meaning for the various physical features subject to interpretation, especially in our case, since we do not have documentation for the possible sources. We can, however, get a general idea of what these features could stand for. One of the traits mentioned repeatedly in the physical description of the scribe is his pale-ness (descolorado or palido), a feature with relatively consistent meaning, namely, cowardice. Pseudo-Aristotle taught: “a certain paleness in the face” is one of the distinctive signs of the coward; white skin can also be a sign of dissoluteness; a white face, by definition soft and cold, was considered to belong to a woman; thus in a man it was regarded as a sign of effeminacy. One witness mentioned that the scribe had small hands, which could also be considered a typically feminine sign; long, thin hands are also a sign of cowardice. Two witnesses said that the scribe was medium sized, but only one said he had small body, which is generally associated with a melancholic complexion. Most witnesses said he was black-bearded, a contrary signification to an effeminate hairless face. The absence of facial hair in young boys and women alike explained a shared characteristic, namely the tendency to lie. In general, the lack of facial hair was believed to be the result of excess cold and dryness, and was seen as a sign of unreliability and cunning.

Some traits are mentioned only once, such as a round face, a head with some white hair, and that he was always looking at the floor. If round face meant chubby, then it signified laziness, and, again, cowardice. Moving the eyes down could mean either weakness and effeminacy, or depression and pessimism. The eyes, however, more than any other physical fea-

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42 I segni del codardo sono: capelli morbidi, rilassatezza, non energia nel fisico, polpacci larghi in algo, un certo palore nel volto, occhi spenti e che spesso si chiudono, estremità dei corpi deboli, gambe piccole, mani lunghe e sottili, fianchi piccoli e deboli, e teso nei movimenti, non è attivo, ma indolente e spaventato, l'espressione del volto è mutevole e depressa.” Pseudo-Aristotele (1993), p. 57.
43 “I segni del dissoluto: di pelle bianca, villosa, capelli dritti, grossi e neri, anche le tempio son coperte di capelli dritti; l'occhio é lucido e libidinoso.” Pseudo-Aristotele (1993), p. 83
ture, refused every sort of simple synthesis. Generally, small eyes were a bad sign, and usually an indication of deceit, because they cannot be clearly seen. Eyes that were too big were not such a good sign either; the most common meaning was sluggishness, or sloth, or dullness, and it was often seen as ox-like. If they appeared luminous and moist, they revealed an elevated soul capable of great things, if somewhat inclined to choler, drunkenness, and an excessive desire for glory. A moist look was, on the whole, better than a dry look. Some eyes looked up, some down, some inclined to the left (apathy), some to the right (adultery). Some moved, others were more fixed; some opened one way, some another; their meaning changed accordingly.49

In sum, we could say that most of the scribe’s physical signs, as described by the witnesses at the trial, corresponded to a cowardly effeminate. One of the deponents spoke explicitly about his moral qualities, saying he was “very cunning and [...] not well intentioned.”50 Nobody, however, talked about the distinctive mark on his left cheek, which is registered on his travelling permit of 1632. The scribe travelled to Spain that year in order to meet his sister and bring her back to the New World with him.51 I want to emphasize here that the physiognomic eye was much more highly developed at a time when identification was not based on photographs like today. Describing facial and bodily traits in detail was more frequent because it was necessary; deciphering the hidden meaning of those traits, however, was reserved only to a few. It is thus not surprising that the president of Guatemala himself was versed in the art of physiognomy. As Friar Nicolás declared in his defence: “in physiognomic matters the said president is an eminent man and has no need of my judgment in order to conjecture that he [the scribe] was mercurial, except that the physiognomy of the said scribe is not mercurial according to the precepts of astrology.”52

In his written defence, Friar Nicolás explained that he had discovered in the president’s revolution for the year 1640-41 that he was going to have a mercurial enemy. In astrological practice, revolutions of the year could refer either to a general horoscope to forecast world affairs, or to an individual analysis of the planetary positions on the anniversary of a person’s birth. According to this revolution, Mercury was in the twelfth house,

50 “Dijo que [Sebastián Ramírez] es un hombre de buena estatura no muy alto cari redondo y barbinaegra y la cabeza pinta algo en cano y le parece será de más de cuarenta años de edad y hombre muy ladino y demasiado en su oficio y no de buena intención....” AGN-370, f. 180.
51 Expediente de información y licencia de pasajero a Indias de Sebastián Ramírez y Jerónima Ramírez, hermanos, hijos de Sebastián Ramírez Cano y de María Ramírez Castaño a Nicaragua. (1632), AGI, Contratacion, 5413, No. 30.
52 “Fuera de que en materias de fisionimia [sic] el dicho Marqués es hombre eminente y no había menester juicio mío para conjecturar que aquél era el mercurial además de que la fisionimia [sic] del dicho Sebastián Ramírez no es de mercurial según los preceptos de astrología....” AGN-30, f. 124v.
which is the house of secret enemies, as Francesco Giuntini explains. And because Mercury rules writing and letters, the enemies were going to be scribes. However, he never extended his judgment beyond this conjecture, and he could not have identified this particular scribe as the president’s enemy because he had never seen him before.

On April 11, 1642 the Mexican inquisitors asked the commissary of Guatemala to send Friar Nicolás to Mexico City for his appearance in court. Friar Nicolás, however, on his way to the capital attempted to escape from justice’s hand and went back to Santiago. It was not until the following year, on February 13, 1643, that Friar Nicolás was captured in the house where he was hiding. He was immediately imprisoned in the convent of his Order in the capital of Guatemala. Ten long months of prison, without any light and bounded with fetters of iron, were the Mercedarian’s torture. On January 7, 1644 he arrived to the convent of his Order in Mexico City. His first hearing before the inquisitors took place on April 19, and the second one on July 14. More than one year later, on August 18, 1645, the fiscal of the inquisition presented his criminal accusation against Friar Nicolás.

On December 14, 1645 the Mexican inquisitors called two Jesuit censors, lecturers at the College of San Pedro y San Pablo, in order to evaluate the contents of the trial against Friar Nicolás de Alarcón. After a week, the examiners concluded that:

It does not seem that Friar Nicolás performed any astrological judgements which should be condemned or qualified as illicit. However, after reading the documents and charts he drew up, it seems that he went too far on reading a lot about such subjects. And it seems that he touched the forbidden because these documents contain some cases regarding free will and contingent events which do not fall within the natural knowledge of Astrology. On the contrary, they are expressly forbidden by Sixtus V’s constitution (renovated by Urban VII), which is the north [the guide] of our discourse.

Both censors suggested that, for a more accurate evaluation of the case, the inquisitors should call an expert on the subject, such as the Merce-

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53 “En esta conformidad digo que en la revolución del año de 40 hasta el de 41 hallé al Planetá Señor de la duodécima casa en la 5 casa en signo de Escorpión, que buscando su significación en clave de Francisco Juntino, que es libro que tengo dicho dice el aforismo que denota que los enemigos ocultos le harán provincialmente falsedades y por ser Mercúrio que serán mercuriales estos enemigos.” AGN-370, f. 124.

54 “Aunque por el proceso formado contra Fray Nicolás de Alarcón en razón de haber hecho juicios astrologicos en materias prohibidas no parece realizaba cosa que conocidamente se debiese condenar y calificar por ilícita, pero habiendo leído los papeles y figuras astrológicas que según parece el dicho hizo, digo parece haber excedido de leyder [sic] mucho en semejantes materias y haber tocado en lo vedado por contener estos papeles pronósticos de casos tocantes al libre albedrío y otros muy contingentes, que no caen debajo del conocimiento natural de la Astrología, antes expresamente están vedados en la constitución de nuestro muy santo padre Sixto V, renovado por la santidad de Urbano VIII y porque esta constitución ha de ser el norte [la guía] por donde hemos de guiar este discurso...” AGN-370, f. 168.

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Cronos, 9: 3-32
darian Friar Diego Rodríguez, professor of Mathematics and Astrology at the Royal University of Mexico. This request, as Trabulse suggested in his work on the origins of modern science in Mexico, could have been a strategic move from the Jesuits in order to protect Friar Nicolás. According to Trabulse, the friendship of the accused with such a notorious character as Friar Diego could only result in the inquisitors' mercy. I believe, however, that other factors need to be taken into account when trying to explain the outcome of Friar Nicolas' trial. Mainly, I consider that the distance between Guatemala, were the trial started, and México City, where it was concluded, produced a detachment of the case from the specific socio-political context where some hostilities against Friar Nicolás might have been rooted. The case was suspended on October 10, 1646, and the Mercedarian astrologer was declared innocent.

2. Astrology, physiognomy, and the fortune of religions

In December 1654, Melchor Pérez de Soto was apprehended by the Inquisition in Mexico City for practicing judicial astrology and possessing forbidden books. Pérez de Soto was born in Cholula in 1606 and worked, like his father, as an architect. He was the son of Juan Pérez de Soto, born in Galicia, and Ana de León García, who was in turn daughter of an hidalgo conquistador, Sebastián de Espinosa, and Elvira de León from Guatemala. He learned to read and write in the schools of Francisco de Clavijo and Juan García, and began to study Latin but gave up in order to help his father, who taught him architecture. In 1628 he married Leonor de Montoya, and together they had 8 or 9 children who died in early


57 Causa a Melchor Perez de Soto, astrologo, sobre retener libros prohibidos de astrologia juridica y usar de ella. Biblioteca del INAH, Sección de Manuscritos, Inquisición, vol. 2 (1649-1654), ff. 126-238 (From now INAH-2). The inventory of his library is in: Inventario de los libros que se le hallaron a Melchor Pérez de Soto, vecino de esta ciudad y obiero mayor de la santa Iglesia catedral de ella. Los cuales se metieron en la Cámara del secreto de este Santo Oficio. AGN, Inquisición, Vol. 440, ff. 1-107.
childhood. In December 1643, he left for California as cosmographer on a frigate for a three-month exploration voyage. On February 18, 1653 Pérez de Soto was granted the position of maestro mayor of the cathedral and the royal buildings of Mexico City. At the time of his apprehension he was working on the calculations for moving the bells from the old to the new Cathedral.

Pérez de Soto's first hearing took place on January 14, 1655 before inquisitors Francisco Estrada y Escobedo, Juan Sáenz Mañozca, and Don Pedro de Medina Rico. The defendant had requested the hearing because, after trying to figure out in his cell the reason of his imprisonment, he concluded that he had not failed in fulfilling his Christian obligations. Therefore the reason might be that he had done some astrological judgements, such as those concerning Provincial elections of a religious order or nativities. He had also been consulted for finding stolen objects, and had made judgements "according to the rules of astrology which he have studied". Finally, he had also requested the translation into Spanish of some Latin books on astrology to be able to study the subject, "because this confessant does not know Latin, and he also had had translated into Castilian some books on geometry, and astronomy, arithmetic because they are related to the science of architecture which he practices."

The inquisitors then proceeded to ask the defendant to give more details on these predictions. First, they asked "what kind of judgements he had done about the Provincial elections and the rules by which he had done them." Provincial chapters, as established by a real cédula issued in 1570 by Phillip II, were to be celebrated every five or more years in the Spanish Colonies instead of every three years, as the Council of Trent established. The traditional rule was modified due to the fact that the

68 Melchor Pérez de Soto contrae matrimonio con Doña Leonor de Montoya. (1628). AGN, Matrimonios, Vol. 64, exp. 20, ff. 75-77.
60 Real Cédula concediendo título de maestro mayor de la obra de la catedral Melchor Pérez de Soto. (1653). AGN, Reales Cédulas, Vol. 18, exp. 448, f. 241v.
61 "Dijo que habiendo quedado ayer solo en su cárcel se puso a discurrir cual causa sería la de su prisión y haciendo memoria de su vida le parece que no ha faltado a las obligaciones de cristiano a lo menos de manera que él lo pueda haber advertido en las cosas de nuestra santa fe católica que en lo demás se confiesa por muy gran pecador, de lo cual infirió que puede ser que por algunos juicios astrológicos que ha hecho, como preguntarle quién habla de salir Provincial en alguna religión o por algunos nacimientos de personas." INAH-2, f. 277.
62 ...,y ha dicho su parecer en dichos casos y también en otros en que han sucedido algunos hurtos preguntándole por la cosa hurtada y por el ladron en que ha dado su parecer conforme a reglas de astrología que ha estudiado..." INAH-2, f. 277.
63 ...,y ha hecho traducir algunos libros latinos tocantes a ellas al lenguaje español para poderlo estudiar porque este confesante no sabe latín y también ha hecho traducir en castellano algunos libros de geometría y astronomía, arítmética [sic] por tocar tanto a la ciencia de arquitectura que profesa..." INAH-2, f. 277.
64 "Preguntado qué juicios ha hecho acerca de las elecciones de Provincial y por qué reglas se ha gobernado en ellos". INAH-2, f. 277b.
metropolitan Cathedrals in the New World were too far from each other and thus it was very difficult and expensive to call the prelates together every third year.65

Provincial elections were a crucial issue in New Spain’s political life, and astrological predictions concerning their outcome were more frequent than one might expect at the outset. This is, I believe, one of the distinctive characteristics of the practice of astrology in New Spain, where provincial elections were an important issue of the power conflicts between Spanish and Creoles. After the first years of colonization, it became evident that neither the regular nor the secular clergy, could continue their expansion by only relying on a peninsular clergy. However, the discrimination against the American born candidates for the habit arose simultaneously with the acknowledgement of the need of Creole participation. Contrary to what happened among regular friars, the conflict between Spanish and Creoles was not so intense among the seculars because they did not intervene in the election of their superiors.66 “The creolization of the orders created unforeseen stresses, since Spanish-born friars continued to monopolize the higher provincial offices. Nativistic prejudices persisted, manifesting themselves in rivalry between Peninsulars and Creoles, and giving rise to serious internal altercations.”67 Such altercations were supposed to find a solution in the system called alternativa (alternation) which established that a Spanish and a Creole should alternate in every provincial election. Between 1612 and 1629, a series of Papal Bulls commanded that, in all American provinces, the post of provincial should be held by a Spanish, and then by a Creole after a period of three years.68

When referring to the Americanization of the secular clergy in Guatemala, Van Oss explains that this process took place more rapidly and to a greater extent than in the case of the regular clergy, precisely because the former never experienced the factionalism that drove the orders to the alternativa. “Once institutionalized, the alternativa persisted, requiring the continued sending of friars from Spain, and thus artificially maintaining a substantial peninsular minority which would otherwise doubtless have tended to disappear [...] If it had not been for the alternativa, the Creole majority would have been even larger.”69 Even though I have

no elements to confirm that a similar process occurred in New Spain, it is interesting to observe that astrological prophecies reflected, to a certain extent, the intense controversies about the creolization of religious orders.

In 1627, Pope Urban VIII issued a Bull establishing the alternation system for the Augustinian Order. According to Rubial, the history of the Augustinian Order in New Spain can be divided in four clearly differentiated stages during the seventeenth century according to the problem of alternation. Between 1627 and 1658, the confrontation between Creoles and Spanish was circumscribed within a legal frame; the Spanish friars, regardless of their reduced number, could keep their right to alternation, while two Creole factions were struggling for a dominant position within the Order. Between 1658 and 1675, the Creole monarchy was consolidated, the Bull of 1627 was suspended, and the Creole faction enjoyed absolute dominance. Between 1675 and 1681 the alternation system was re-established, but attempts for a structural reform were unsuccessful. Finally, between 1681 and 1705, the legal fiction of the alternation was kept, but the Creole faction controlled de facto the majority of the provincial elections.

According to one of the witnesses of the trial against Melchor Pérez de Soto, the accused had predicted the outcome of the Augustinian elections celebrated in 1648, when the Spanish Francisco Jiménez was appointed as provincial, and died on December 19 of that same year. The witness testified that, on the eve of the election, Pérez de Soto cast a horoscope to determine the outcome of the election. The answer was that there would be two elected candidates, but one would die shortly after because of the negative aspect of the Moon with Saturn. The prediction proved to be true, “for the young Friar Francisco Jiménez died within a couple of months and was succeeded by Friar Diego Pacheco, who was very old.”

Pérez de Soto himself confessed to have been also asked to predict the results of the Franciscan Provincial elections of 1648 and 1654. Concerning the former, he explained that he had gone one day to a bookshop and found the bookseller Antonio Calderón trying to predict the outcome of the election. Antonio Calderón was the son of Paula Benavides, one of the best known printer and booksellers of the seventeenth century. She

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72 Rubial García, A. (1990), p. 44.
73 “...la figura indicaba haber dos provinciales, uno mozo y otro viejo y que quizás el uno de ellos iba a salir por padecer algún detrimento en la salud, por el mal aspecto de la Luna con Saturno...” INAH-2, f. 236.
74 “...y salió en esta ocasión por Provincial Fray Francisco Jiménez que era mozo y murió dentro de pocos meses y le sucedió Fray Diego Pacheco, que era muy viejo...” INAH-2, f. 236.
took care of the business after her husband (Bernardo Calderón) died, and at her death, her sons took over and kept it in the family until the eighteenth century. One can easily imagine that the owner of one of the largest private libraries of the viceroyalty at the time, containing more than 1,500 volumes, would pay frequent visits to this bookshop. During one of these visits, Pérez de Soto saw that Antonio Calderón had a hat with some slips of paper inside. In each slip he had written down the names and last names of the candidates for the election, and asked one of his younger brothers to draw one of the slips from the hat.

When Pérez de Soto found out what the prediction was about, he "reduced the discourse to astrological principles" and observed that, at one in the afternoon, the Sun was in the ninth house, which is a religious house, together with Mars, which is a planet fond of arms. Therefore, he concluded that the provincial was going to be red-haired and fond of arms. During his deposition before the Holy Office on March 6, 1655 Antonio Calderón declared that, after listening to Pérez de Soto's judgement, his mother, his brother, and himself said that the blondest candidate was Friar Alonso de Lima, and the astrologer replied: _then he will be the one._ According to the chronicles of the city, Friar Alonso de Lima was elected on November 28, 1648 when the 42nd Franciscan provincial election was celebrated.

Concerning the Franciscan chapter of 1654, Pérez de Soto declared that over the Christmas season of the previous year (1653) a Franciscan called Friar Juan de Uvilla asked him who the next provincial was going to be. The defendant needed to know the exact time when the election was

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77 "...el caso fue que Antonio Calderón, vecino de esta ciudad y librero que es de la calle de san Agustín que al presente es sacerdote y entonces no lo era estaba un día en su tienda y tenía en un sombrero echadas diversas cédulas escrito en cada una el nombre y apellido de los que parece que podían ser provinciales y hacia que un muchacho hermano suyo metiera la mano en el sombrero y sacase una de dichas cédulas para ver el nombre del que salía". INAH-2, f. 278.

78 "...reduciendo el discurso a preceptos de astrología vio que por ser la una del día el sol estaba en la nona casa con Marte y que era casa de religión la dicha nona casa y que por estar el sol en ella y Marte aficionado a armas, sería el provincial que había de salir hombre bermejo y aficionado a armas". INAH-2, f. 278.

79 "...y entonces este testigo, dicha su madre y hermano le dijeron al dicho Melchor Pérez que el más rubio y bermejo que había entre los propuestos era Fray Alonso de la Lima y entonces dijo el dicho Melchor Pérez ese será." INAH-2, f. 257v.

taking place, and with the given information (23rd of December, at 7:00 AM) he cast a figure. His interpretation was that, according to the ascendant sign (Capricorn) and its correspondent physiognomy, the next provincial was supposed to have a face which resembled a goat. 81 According to physiognomic tradition, the goat was always associated with lust. The Pseudo-Aristotelian Physiognomica explains that slim and strong legs, though associated with birds and not with goats, are lustful. 82 A person who has hairy legs is lustful, see the goats; 83 someone who has reddish eyes is lustful, like the goats; 84 and those who have a piercing voice can never get enough pleasure, like goats. 85 The Franciscan Friar Juan de Uvilla talked to Pérez de Soto about the interpretation of the astrological figure, and “decided that the stars pointed definitely to his election, for though he was fat he did have slender, goat-like legs and arms, and he lifted up his habit in proof.” 86

We find here another example of the way in which astrological and physiognomical ideas were interwoven. In this case, it would be interesting to know the sources from which Pérez de Soto had acquired his knowledge on physiognomy. He made no reference to any specific author, but we know that his library contained some of the classic works on the subject, such as Della Porta’s De humana physiognomonia, both in Latin and Italian, 87 or Jerónimo Cortés’s Libro de phisomn-

81 “...según el signo que salió por el ascendente que fue Capricornio el cual da por fisonomía que el que había de salir por Provincial habla de tener el rostro semejante a el de la cabra...” INAH-2, f. 279.
83 “Chi ha le gambe pelose è lussurioso: si vedano i capri.” Pseudo-Aristotele (1993), p. 113
In this case, it is also worth noting that astrological and physiognomical ideas were also mixed with magical practices. Pérez de Soto was not so sure about his prediction on the election, because he knew that the judgement “could be fallible for he was not a perfect astrologer”, for which it was necessary “to be a good Latinist and a good philosopher.”90 Therefore, the Franciscan priest asked if it would be useful for him to know the names of all the competitors. Pérez de Soto asked the priest to write all the names down, and took the list to his house. “By the rule and Pythagorean wheel which is found at the end of Venerable Bede’s book in which he deals with astrology”, Pérez de Soto made a judgement by combining the letters of the names, with the numbers of the days of the Moon and of the Planet that governed that day.91 One of the witnesses of the trial, who had translated Bede’s work for Pérez de Soto, explained that “in this book it was taught how to prognosticate by assigning a number to each letter composing a name, and with the result one would look for the prognostication in the figure or wheel, which was at the end of the book.”92

In the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, Bede’s works were known through the different editions of his Opera omnia: 1544-1545 and 1554, Paris; and Basel, 1563, reprinted in Cologne in 1612, and 1688.93 The

88 Libro de Phisionomia Natural y varios secretos de la naturaleza, el qual contiene cinco tratados de materias diferentes no menos curiosas que provechosas. Impreso en Valencia, en casa de Chrysostomo Garriz, Vendese en casa del mismo Auctor, 1598. It was listed anonymously in the inventory (Castanien, 1951, p. 172).
89 “Y unos cuadernos de letras de mano del licenciado Diego Pérez de Mesa en romance”. INAH-2, f. 241v.
90 “...siempre ha entendido que dicho juicio podía ser falible por no ser éste perfecto astrólogo y ser menester muchas partes para el conocimiento de lo referido como ser buen latín y buen filósofo”. INAH-2, f. 279.
91 “...y por la regla y rueda pitagórica que está al fin del libro del Venerable Beda en que trata de la astrología hizo juicio por el nombre y letras porque comenzaba y todas las del nombre y juntando las letras del número y los días de la luna y los del día del planeta que reina en aquel día que se hace el juicio se hace suma de todo y sacados los treinta por los que quedan se va a buscar a dicha rueda el número que sale si está en grado superior o inferior y según esto se juzga”. INAH-2, f. 279.
92 “Y también tenía el susodicho otro cuaderno que le trasladé de latín en romance sacados de un libro grande de Beda que entiendo que le tiene todavía en que se enseñaba a pronosticar por el nombre de algunos dando a cada letra cierto número y según cierta cuenta se buscaba luego en una figura o rueda el pronóstico, lo cual estaba en el dicho libro al fin” INAH-2, f. 242.
93 Born at the end of the seventh century near Jarrow, Durham, Bede was a Benedictine historian and theologian, who also devoted his time to the study of natural philosophy. He is known as the father of English history and as one of the best medieval historians. His main work, the Historiae ecclesiasticae gentis Anglorum, was completed in 731. He composed a philosophical work (De metrica arte), a rhetorical study (De schematibus et tropis), and various works on arithmetic and chronology. Within the field of natural philosophy, Bede composed De temporum ratione, which contains a remarkable theory of tides; the De loqua...
Basel edition of 1563 was included in Pérez de Soto’s inventory, though no translation of any of Bede’s treatises is registered. John Hervagius’ edition of 1563 was so popular and influential “that a large part of the commentary of the intervening centuries that professes to discuss Bede’s works is actually discussing the work of Hervagius [...Perhaps no] other single edition of any other author has ever foisted upon the public ore spurious or corrupt works without subsisting evidence.” One of these spurious treatises was *De Mundi Celestis Terrestrisque Constitutione*, which dealt with cosmological and astrological topics. It is divided in two parts: *De Mundo* (About the Universe) and *De Anima* (About the Soul). It is in the first part where an exposition of astrological topics, such as the Houses and the Zodiac, is found.

Apart from *De Mundi Celestis*, the Basel edition included other treatises which might have been the source of Pérez de Soto’s references to Bede’s astrological teachings, such as *De planetarum et signorum coelestium ratione*, *Prognostica temporum*, or *De nativitate infantium*. He did not refer to any specific work, so we can only assume that he referred to some general concepts he had grasped from his reading of this series of treatises.

By using the Pythagorean wheel in Bede’s book, Pérez de Soto predicted that the successful candidate of the Franciscan election of 1654 was...
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going to be Friar Juan de Sicilia. The bookseller Antonio Calderón had himself attempted to predict the outcome of the election, in which he was particularly interested because one of the competitors was his uncle Friar Gabriel de Benavides. His divination method was more rudimentary than the use of the Pythagorean wheel. Just as he had done during the election of 1648, Calderón put some slips of paper with the names of the candidates inside a hat, and took one of them out.\(^9\) The name written on the slip was Friar Tomás Manso, who was actually elected as the new provincial of the Order.\(^{100}\)

Besides these predictions regarding provincial elections, Pérez de Soto confessed to have cast figures on the arrival of new Archbishops, viceroys, and even inquisitors to predict the events of their terms of office.\(^{101}\) In his defence, he argued that what he had done was permitted according to the rules of trustworthy authors who dealt with the subject. "Astrology was not his profession; he was led to investigate and use it only by vain curiosity or by the desire to give pleasure to some friends and acquaintances who had asked him for information."\(^{102}\) He promised that, if he had gone too far in his practice of astrology, he would amend his behavior and never again have anything to do with the science.\(^{103}\) Unfortunately, Pérez de Soto did not get an opportunity to amend his behavior. After two months of imprisonment, he was killed on March 16, 1655 by his cellmate Diego Zedillo, who in turn committed suicide.\(^{104}\)

3. Astrology, chiromancy, and physiognomy

So far we have talked about the relationship between astrology and physiognomy in the trials against Friar Nicolás de Alarcón, and Melchor Pérez de Soto. The case of Nicolás de Aste is another good example of this interrelation. On the 1\(^{st}\) of April of 1617, Aste was accused before the Holy Office in Mexico City by a blacksmith who carved for the accused two talismans with the image of a golden dragon. In one of the hearings, Aste confessed to have raised an astrological figure at the request of a man who wanted to know when his son was going to die. The astrologer did not know the son, but guessed his physiognomical traits: tall, slim,

\(^{9}\) "Y que habrá mes y medio, con ocasión de la elección del provincial de San Francisco de esta Provincia de México a que era opositor Fray Gabriel de Benavides, tío de este testigo y hermano de su madre; entre sus mismos hermanitos echó las suertes en la forma que ha declarado para saber por su consuelo si le caía al dicho su tío, como no le cayó y le parece que salió de los papelillos el en que estaba escrito el nombre de Fray Tomás Mansso, que fue el electo." INAH-2, f. 258.

\(^{100}\) Ocaranza, F. (1934), p. 91.

\(^{101}\) INAH-2, f. 238.


\(^{104}\) See: Causa criminal a Diego Zedillo Jurador. Este reo se ahorcó en su cárcel a los 5 de abril de 1655. AGN, Inquisición, Vol. 457, exp. 1, folios 1-39.
a bit dark-skinned, big eyes, and narrow forehead. After the father confirmed the description, Aste predicted that he was going to die of violent death because the Lord planet of life and the Sun were in violent signs and Mars was in quadrature, which is a sign of violent death.\textsuperscript{105} The astrologer also foretold that the assassin was going to be a relative, whom he identified by means of physiognomy. The killer was going to be a very small man, young, a bit hunchbacked, with long hands, and big mouth. Moreover, Aste also foresaw that the cause of the crime would be a woman, because Mars was with Venus in quadrature with the Sun.\textsuperscript{106} After a long night of nightmares, Aste met the father of the victim the following day, and he confirmed that his son had been killed by his cousin, whose traits matched the astrologer's description.\textsuperscript{107}

As we can see, the physiognomical eye scrutinized every kind of bodily trait, but there was also a degree of specialization, which focused on the lines of the forehead and hands. Metoposcopy is to the forehead what chiromancy is to the palm of the hand; they claim to interpret a person's character and/or destiny from the lines and other marks in these areas of the head and the hands. Whether metoposcopy and chiromancy were considered as branches of physiognomy or as independent arts is not certain.\textsuperscript{108} And the classification becomes even more complicated if one takes into account the wide variety of bodily signs which could be interpreted by the physiognomer, such as moles, nails of the feet and hands, color of the eyes, voice, laughter, dreams, or even handwriting. Most early modern authors usually dealt with more than one of these subjects in their treatises on physiognomy, but some texts appear to be more specialized. In 1611, for instance, Prospero Aldorisio published his \textit{Gelotoscopia}, a treatise on the art of judging character from laughter, and his \textit{Idengraphicus Nuntius}, on the art of judging character from handwriting. Handwriting is an interesting example of a border case between strictly bodily signs, and external circumstances. The latter were also taken into account by natural philosophers who studied the formation of individual's character. For instance, the Italian philosopher and mathematician Scipione Chiaramonti, considered the voice, movements of the body, or care of the person as internal signs, while the weather,
region, and education were outward circumstances, which were also useful for reading a person’s mind and character. ¹⁰⁹

Moles were regarded as a very significant bodily sign; their interpretation was repeatedly discussed in physiognomical treatises, and frequently associated with astrological doctrine. According to Porter, from 1540 onwards tracts on moles and chiromancy often appeared printed alongside expositions of physiognomical doctrine in the same work. On the contrary, from the late seventeenth century onwards expositions of chiromancy, moles, dreams, and fortune telling (but not physiognomy) were much more numerous than those including physiognomy. ¹¹⁰ Some treatises on moles also discussed astrological physiognomy, and dealt with the correspondence between the signs of the Zodiac and moles or birthmarks. ¹¹¹

In this last part, I will focus on chiromancy, also known as palmistry, and its relation to astrology. According to a legend, Aristotle found a book in Herme’s altar about the hand written in golden letters, and sent it as a gift to Alexander the Great. What is true is that within the Aristotelian work, the hand shows clear magic-divinatory characters. The argument is the following: those animals with numerous articulations or whose non-articulated parts are movable have a longer life; those that have junctures, like fish, have a shorter life. This is the basis for the explanation which states that those who have a long line crossing through the whole palm of the hand, and therefore have a hand which folds completely, will live longer than those who don’t. ¹¹²

Because it belonged to the category of divinatory arts, chiromancy was explicitly forbidden by Sixtus V’s Bull and the Roman Indexes of 1554 and 1559. Like in the case of astrology, some natural philosophers tried to establish the scientific basis of chiromancy. Such was the case of the Jesuit professor Inácio Vieira, who taught chiromancy in Lisbon in 1712. When defining his subject matter, he asserted: Chiromancy ‘is not a small part and no less certain a part of physiognomy. However, bad use

¹⁰⁹ Thorndike, L. (1941). History of Magic and Experimental Science. New York: Columbia University Press, Vol. VIII, p. 450. The treatise were Chiaramonti exposed his physiognomical doctrine is De coniectandis cuiusque moribus et latitantibus animi effectibus published at Venice, in 1625. Maclean, I. (2002, p. 186) refers to this work as Semiotike, but, as far as I know, the only work published by Chiaramonti in 1625 is De Conjectandis cuiusque moribus et latitantibus animi effectibus, which indeed deals with physiognomy.
¹¹¹ Ludovico Settala’s De Naevis explained that the seven apertures of the face corresponded to the planets; the last book of Cardano’s Metoposcopia, contains a didactic series which delineates the correspondence between moles and the twelve signs of the Zodiac; in his Physiognomie, Chiromancie Metoposcie, published in London in 1653, Richard Saunders studied the physiognomical and astrological interpretation of moles and birthmarks.
and false application have made it hateful. We will free chiromancy from this charge, by declaring certain what is proved and false what is false.\footnote{Leitao, H. (2006). "Jesuits Teaching Astrology and Chiromancy in Lisbon, in J. O'Malley, G. A. Bailey, S. J. Harris, and T. F. Kennedy, eds., The Jesuits II. Cultures, sciences, and the arts, 1540-1773, Toronto, University of Toronto Press.} The argument of the Jesuit was similar to the one set forth by Cocles (Bartolomeo della Rocca), author of the \textit{Chyromantie ac physionomie anastasis cum approbatione magistri Alexandri de Achillinis}, printed in Bologna in 1504. Cocles sustained that chiromancy was a more reliable science than physiognomy, with a more solid basis, because the characteristics of the hand, contrary to facial traits, persist from birth to death without major changes.\footnote{Premuda, L. (1968), p. 522.}

Despite the fact that chiromancy could have been regarded as an independent art, the analysis of the palm was an integral part of the physiognomic gaze, and thus chiromancy was often incorporated into treatises about physiognomy throughout the early modern period.\footnote{Premuda, L. (1968), p. 101.} During the Renaissance some natural philosophers reserved certain parts of their physiognomical treatises to the art of chiromancy, such as the 24 folios out of 214 in Scriptoris's work, which are dedicated to a theoretical introduction and a practical guide on the art. Others authors composed entire works on the subject, such as Joannes ab Indagine's (1467-1537) \textit{Introductions Apotelesmaticae} or Cocles's work just mentioned above.\footnote{Ziegler, J. (2005), p. 522.}

Indagine's treatise was first published in a Latin folio in Strasbourg in 1522, and it enjoyed an immediate European-wide success: by 1523 it had been translated into vernacular German; by 1536 into Dutch; by 1545 into French, with at least 23 different editions between 1545 and 1666 alone; and by 1558 into English.\footnote{Porter, M. (2005), p. 157.} Like in the case of physiognomy, Giovanni Battista Della Porta (1538-1615) was the great authority on chiromancy during the Renaissance and early modern period. His treatise \textit{Della chirofisonomia} was translated into vernacular by Pompeo Sarnelli and printed in Naples in 1677. In this text he regards the hands as the most wonderful part of the human body for their noble functions, and supreme position.\footnote{Premuda, L. (1968), p. 97.} Big and well formed hands, according to Della Porta, are characteristic of generous, intre-

\footnote{Premuda, L. (1968), p. 522.}

\footnote{There is another work on physiognomy and chiromancy called \textit{Physiognomiae et chiro-mantiae compendium} or \textit{Complexionbüchlin}, usually (but falsely) ascribed to Cocles. According to Groebner, V. (2004, p. 372) it was a sixteenth century edition based on the \textit{Secretum Secretorum} and the writings of Michael Scotus. According to Zaccaria, R. (1989, p. 305) the \textit{Physiognomiae compendium quantum attinet ad partes inter captitis, gullam et collum} was printed in Strasburg in 1533, and it was a re-edition of the \textit{Chyromantie ac physionomie Anas-tasis}, regarding the physiognomical part.}
is a sign of melancholy, while the Jovial hand indicates great and noble aspirations, and the Venereal hand shows a Venereal complexion.¹¹⁹ In his work Della fisonomia di tutto il corpo umano (1637) Della Porta affirmed that different personalities, such as the thief, the clever man, the unfaithful, or the docile, could be inferred by the distinctive features of the hands.¹²⁰ In short, the hands were for Della Porta a clear hint of people's temperaments, the inclinations of their soul, and the duration of their lives.

Pérez de Soto, the librarian-astrologer, declared during his trial that more than once he was asked by nuns to read their hands and foresee their future. One of the witnesses testified that a woman had asked Pérez de Soto what a white stain on a nail of the forefinger meant. He replied that such stain signified that she was going to receive a message from a clergyman. After a short period, the woman received indeed a message from a religious called Juan del Rosal, chaplain at the Hospital of Our Lady, who had called her to work for him.¹²¹ Another witness

¹²¹ "...una mujer llamad María de Mayorga, de quien en otros dichos suyos tiene dicho, le dijo a este declarante habrá másde dos años poco más o menos no se acuerda en que parte que le había salido a ella una pinta blanca en una uña del dedo índice, no sabe si de la mano derecha o izquierda y que había la susodicha consultado al dicho MPS sobre lo que significa la dicha pinta y el dicho MP le respondió que denotaba que tendría un recaudo [la palabra se usaba con el significado del actual recaudo] de un clérigo. Y que dentro de breve tiempo había tenido ella un recaudo de un clérigo llamado Juan del Rosal, capellán del Hospital de Nuestra Señora en que la llamaba para acomodarla en su servicio como en efecto se acomodó en su servicio y le sirvió algún tiempo". INAH-2, ff. 250v-251.
Ana Ávalos declared that Pérez de Soto had once held her left hand, which is the hand that is read in women’s case. The signs on the hand signified that she was going to be a nun because there were two lines on her palm at the beginning of her forefinger which were equal and formed a cross.\(^\text{122}\)

During his second hearing, Pérez de Soto himself declared that he read for the first time “about the lines of the hand” fifteen years earlier in a manuscript text that captain Pedro Porter Casanate had given him.\(^\text{123}\)

The notebook contained “some drawings of hands and signs applied to the fingers and the planets”. He did not read the whole text, but he knew that a certain line signified that the person was married; when the line called “the line of life” was long it meant that the life will be long, and when it was short that life will be short.\(^\text{124}\)

Once he had seen the hand of a girl staying at his house and told her that she should be a pious person because her life was going to be short. The girl became a nun and told her fellows the anecdote. Afterwards, the nuns of the convent asked Pérez de Soto to read their hands, but he explained that what he had told the girl was only with the intention of advising her to be a virtuous person, and not because he really knew about these matters.\(^\text{125}\)

The case of the Dominican Friar Pedro de Martir provides another interesting example of the relationship between astrology and chiromancy, and the way in which this link was perceived. Pedro de Martir was accused before the Holy Office in the city of Puebla on April 13, 1611, by a member of his order called Bartolomé Sánchez. The witness recalled a time when he was talking with a fellow of his convent who said that the accused knew “more about being a sorcerer than an astrologer, because

\(^{122}\) “...y de hecho le cogió a esta testigo la mano izquierda (diciendo que era la que se miraba a las mujeres) rehusando esta testigo y diciendo que no quería saber cosa que la diése a pesadumbre y que habiéndole visto las rayas de las manos el dicho MP le dijo que si como tenía en la palma de la dicha mano al principio del dedo índice dos rayas que estaban parejas e iguales las tuviera en cruz había de ser religiosa...” INAH-2, f. 286v.

\(^{123}\) “Y que la noticia que este confesante tuvo de la significación de las rayas de las manos fue de un cuaderno manuscrito que habrá quince años poco más o menos que le dio su compadre Don Pedro Porter Cassanate, caballero de la orden de Santiago [governador y capitán general del reino de Chile] que profesa astrología y matemática y marinería, que pasó a los Reinos del Perú con el Conde de Alba”. INAH-2, f. 286.

\(^{124}\) “...y que en el dicho cuaderno están dibujadas algunas manos con signos y aplicados en los dedos a los planetas y por haber leído en él acaso porque no lo ha leído todo, que una raya que parece garabato, demuestra que el que la tiene ha de ser casado y la tenía el dicho hermano, allí le ofreció acordarse y por eso se lo dijo y que este cuaderno se hallara entre sus papeles. Y que también se acuerda que por lo que leyó en dicho cuaderno de una raya de las manos que llaman de la vida, que si es larga será larga la vida y si es corta será corta la vida según dice en dicho cuaderno...” INAH-2, f. 286v.

\(^{125}\) “y que viéndole las manos a una niña que tenía en su casa un día para que entrase monja en la encarnación como con efecto lo es y se llama María de San Juan, la dijo que fuese buena religiosa porque había de vivir poco, de que ha resultado ser monja recogida y tratar de virtud, la cual lo ha dicho a algunas de las religiosas de dicho Convento y entrando este confesante en él a la obra de una celda, dichas religiosas le han pedido le vea las rayas de las manos y él se ha escusado diciendo que no entiende de aquello diciendo así mismo que lo que dijo a María de San Juan había sido como a modo de consejo de que fuese religiosa virtuosa y que de presente no se acuerda otra cosa que toque a las rayas de las manos.” INAH-2, f. 286v.
he left me here some words to invoke the devil."126 Sánchez also recalled that on one occasion the said Friar Pedro Martir had told him, by looking at the lines on his hand, that he would have a serious illness at the age of 32, but if he would overcome it he was going to live forty or fifty years. Furthermore, the said Friar Pedro Martir announced to other religious some signs they had in their bodies, by measuring the lines of the hands with a compass and saying things that were going to happen.127

The second witness, Friar Francisco de Gracia, declared that Friar Pedro Martir once told him, by looking at the lines on his hands, that he had had three illnesses when he was a kid, one of them very serious. Martir predicted that the witness was going to be sick again in the future and was going to become a prelate at the age of 28. His subjects were going to like him, but he was also going to have a mortal enemy. The witness declared that he had somehow believed in what Martir said because of what he said about his childhood illnesses. Because Martir had come very recently from Spain, there was no chance that he would know about them before.128 According to this witness, Martir had shown to other clergymen that they had occult signs in their bodies, or wounds, or other things, and he told some of them that they would have opportunities with great lords, or with women, and some other things.129 Finally, the witness declared that he had seen some papers with "Iberian characters which seemed to be about astrology" that other religious had taken out from some printed books on astrology.130

126 "...y en esta ocasión dijo este declarante a Fray Juan Navarro mucho sabe de estas cosas Fray Pedro Martir y le respondió el dicho Fray Juan Navarro pues mucho más sabe de hechicero de que de astrólogo porque me dejó aquí unas palabras con que invocaba al demonio". Testificación contra Fray Pedro Martir (dominico) por astrólogo y quiromántico. (1613), AGN, Inquisición, Vol. 478, exp. 43, ff. 309-326. (From now AGN-478). The case is mentioned in Jiménez Rueda, J. (1946), p. 213.

127 "En otra ocasión dijo a este declarante el dicho Fray Pedro Martir mirándole las rayas de las manos que a los 32 años de edad había de tener una grave enfermedad y que si escapaba de ella llegaría a 40 ó 50 años. Y así mismo delante de este declarante anunció el dicho Fray Pedro Martir a otros religiosos señales que tenían en su cuerpo midiéndoles con un compás las rayas de las manos y así mismo les decía cosas que les habían de suceder..." AGN-478, f. 311.

128 "Así mismo dijo este declarante que le había dicho el dicho Fray Pedro Martir mirándole las rayas de las manos que había tenido siendo de pequeña edad tres enfermedades y la una de ellas muy grave y que siendo de mayor edad de la que ahora tendría otras y que siendo de edad de 28 años tendría una prelación en la cual le querrían bien sus súbditos y que tendría un enemigo mortal que le desearía la muerte y que esta que declara le dio algún crédito por haberle dicho lo de las enfermedades que había tenido considerando que siendo forastero y no habiéndole visto en su vida le anunciaba lo que le había sucedido..." AGN-478, f. 314.

129 "...y a otros señalaba que tenían en su cuerpo ocultas señales a unos de golpes y otras cosas y les decía que tenían cabida los unos con grandes señores, otros con mujeres y otros muchos casos..." AGN-478, f. 314.

130 "Y así mismo dijo saber este que declara hallado en la celda donde vivía en compañía de Fray Juan Navarro unos papeles con caracteres ibéricos que parecen de astrología los cuales sabe que el dicho Fray Juan Navarro sacó de unos libros de astrología que andan impresos..." AGN-478, f. 314.
Another witness, Friar Juan Navarro, talked about a whole series of magical practices and spells. According to this deponent Friar Pedro Martir had seen the image of his mother reflected in water; he had spoken of a way to become invisible by putting in one's mouth the stone that a swallow has in its head; he had taught other clergymen some words to attract women; he had showed them a spell to make dead people appear inside a room, by mixing sulphur, alcohol [aguardiente], and some herbs. In the last part of his deposition, Navarro spoke about some mixed magical-astrological practice: the said Friar Pedro Martir had once explained that in order to make appear a man armed with fire in a room it was necessary to write down some letters on an empty piece of paper when the Moon was under certain sign.

Martir, who came from Valencia, was supposed to go to China with the general vicar of the order, but the vicar did not want to travel because he was ill. Therefore, Martir had to go to Oaxaca, and on his way there he stayed for some days in the Dominican Convent in Puebla. It would not seem too risky to conclude that members of religious orders turned to the tribunal of the Inquisition whenever they did not want to accept a new member, accusing him of being an astrologer, sorcerer, chiromancer. Once again, astrological predictions reflect some of the main conflicts within orders: the Spanish-Creole polemic during provincial elections, and the rivalry among members of the same order coming from different provinces of the viceroyalty.

**Conclusions**

While some divinatory arts were more clearly regarded as demonic and superstitious ways of divining the future, physiognomy had, like astrology, a more ambiguous status. From the religious perspective, both disciplines had to deal with the Church's condemnation of divination and the
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teological conflict between knowing the future and preserving free will. It was argued that astrology and physiognomy not only attempted to identify a person's character either by reading the stars or by interpreting physical traits, but in so doing they also aimed to predict the person's future. Physiognomists, in the same vein as astrologers, argued that visible marks of character indicated possibility, not necessity. As for the Catholic Church, its position remained ambivalent. Sixtus V's Bull, for instance, prohibited chiromancy, which can be regarded as a branch of physiognomy, but not physiognomy itself. Moreover, there was always room for manoeuvring, and the practitioners of these disciplines could object to the prediction of future events by their means, while at the same time keep employing them for making conjectures about people's character, personality, or inclination.

From the natural philosophical point of view, both astrology and physiognomy were conjectural disciplines, that is to say that their conclusions were inferred from signs (would say the defenders of such disciplines) or from defective evidence (would say the opponents). In the Middle Ages, the group of conjectural arts included "astrology, physiognomy, chiromancy, metoposcopy, dream interpretation and weather forecasting; in the Renaissance, the Paracelsian doctrine of signatures can be added to this list." For some Renaissance natural philosophers, such as Cardano or Magini, all investigations within the area of the divinatory arts were part of a rational and empirical attempt to build a conjectural knowledge which would be the closest possible to certainty.

According to Thorndike, "the popularity of physiognomy is to be accounted for by the fact that, while other forms of divination, including for many even judicial astrology, were condemned as superstitious, it was regarded as having a natural basis." I would say that, rather than a contrast, a comparison can be made between physiognomy and judicial astrology when speaking about this natural basis. During the early modern period, and with the spread of the new natural philosophy, the defenders of these conjectural disciplines advocated for the natural basis of the signs they interpreted, as well as the causal link between the signifier and the signification. Their power thus resided on the fact that they were understood and perceived as 'natural languages' which only the learned could decipher. For instance, Richard Saunders, an astrological physician based in London, claimed that physiognomy was a 'natural language' which descended from Adam through the written language of Hebrew, and that there was a mysterious, natural link, a 'resemblance' between the signifiers and the things signified.

According to Porter, one of the reasons why physiognomy could not be reduced to a mere curiosity or superstition by the new natural philosophy was the epistemological limitation of keeping the physical and moral spheres somehow joined. Even Francis Bacon, the great reformer of natural philosophy, agreed that the art of physiognomy was the scientia which dealt with the 'league' or 'common Bond between the soul and body'. Physiognomy was "the pre-verbal prism through which people came to interpret each other, be it in local, regional, national, or New World terms." I consider this moral aspect key for understanding both the strong bound between astrology and physiognomy, and their endurance in western intellectual tradition. Both disciplines were concerned with the primordial questions of human behaviour and man's self-knowledge. They aimed at a better understanding of the processes which shape human personality, and the possibility to transcend them. Thus their history, as Clarke states, can be located within the history of psychology or, more specifically, within the history of personality theory (called ethology, characterology or character typology). This perspective liberates both disciplines "from the procrustean bed of the history of the 'hard' sciences and it opens up what seems to me to be both a more appropriate and a somewhat neglected field of research.

The case studies I have presented here are micro-historical examples of the relationship between astrology, physiognomy, and other occult sciences in the seventeenth century. I do not pretend to reach any general conclusions from them, but merely to remark that these kinds of stories serve to remind us that astrology was not only the weak branch of astronomy which failed to survive the evolutionary process of science. Astrology served as a psychological tool for self-understanding and the understanding of others. And this moral dimension is perhaps key for comprehending the survival of the belief in astrology up to now.