

EXPELLING MISCONCEPTIONS: ASTROLOGERS AT ROME

PAULINE RIPAT

FREDERICK CRAMER PUBLISHED his magisterial *Astrology in Roman Law and Politics* in 1954. Though not the first discussion of the role of astrology in Roman society and politics,¹ it has the air of being, if not the last word, at least the most authoritative. Its influence is witnessed by the frequency with which the work is referenced in successive scholarship that touches, however lightly, upon astrology or astrologers in Rome. The views Cramer espouses—that the science of astrology swept the Roman world to win the devotion of the Roman people and the Roman emperors, that emperors consequently loved and feared astrology—have become standard in scholarly discussions and student textbooks alike. On this line of argument, it seems that the repeated expulsions of astrologers from Rome or Italy (at least eight times, and possibly as many as eleven between 139 B.C.E. and 175 C.E.)² require little more by way of explanation: expulsions of astrologers are the natural conclusions of general belief in the powerful science and consequent imperial ambivalence toward it. But in the decades since the question of why astrologers were expelled has been laid to rest, to my knowledge it has not been asked how the expulsions were undertaken. The introduction of this question instantly strips away the facade of historical certainty from the whole phenomenon. How were astrologers rounded up and forced from the city? And from “how?” we are immediately left grappling with another question that eludes easy grasp: “who?” How does one identify an astrologer so as to expel him? It then remains only to face the inexorable resurrection of “why?” It is the aim of this article to navigate the choppy historical waters we find ourselves plunged into, with the deflation of the convictions that have so long buoyed discussion. Astrology unquestionably enjoyed great popularity and credibility in Roman antiquity. It has deservedly been a topic of interest in the history of science. But it is much less clear that astrology deserves the pride of place it has so long held in Roman political history, particularly at

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1. See Cramer 1954, 1–2, for previous handlings of the subject.

2. See Cramer 1954, 232–48. Confidence is invested in the expulsions of 139 B.C.E., 33 B.C.E., at least one of two reported for 16 or 17 C.E. (discussed further below), 52 C.E., 69 C.E., 70 C.E., 93 C.E. (though see discussion and n. 31 below), and 175 C.E. For legal actions against diviners, including astrologers, into later antiquity (which is beyond the scope of the present discussion), see Desanti 1990, 133–77; Fögen 1993; Hano 2005.

the expense of attention paid to its practitioners, the astrologers themselves. The neglect astrologers have long suffered at the hands of modern historians is made manifest by a fast search in *L'Année philologique*: “astrology” turns up more than ten times as many hits as “astrologer” (110 to 9). Yet if the expulsions of astrologers are to be understood, we must stop looking to astrology for answers and start looking to the long-neglected astrologers themselves. These, I argue, must be investigated as an amorphous and self-selecting social category, whose aims and methods are best understood in light of modern works on subcultures. Official objections to these self-styled astrologers must be situated in the context of recent work done on the maintenance of order in the early Empire, while mass-media studies, cautiously wielded, will help to inform and make sense of seemingly inconsistent responses. The impression that the root of the expulsions lay in imperial anxiety over astrology will be shown to be a fallacy of modern scholarship, and one that has tended to subordinate the more probable causes: legitimate concerns over the maintenance of public order and political stability that go far beyond imperial anxieties over self-image or self-interest. My discussion falls into three parts. First, the problems with accepting previously drawn conclusions will be discussed; second, the identity, aims, and methods of astrologers as an entrepreneurial category will be sought; third, the causes of the expulsions will be reconsidered.

1. THE LIMITS OF TRADITIONAL EXPLANATIONS

Historians have usually approached the mass expulsion of astrologers by focusing on astrology's proclaimed ability to foretell the death of emperors and the fate of those who might replace them. At the risk of misrepresenting any individual scholar's argument, or of not presenting individual scholars' entire arguments, a composite of the usual explanations for mass expulsions of astrologers forms along the following lines.³ Astrology enjoyed exceptional credibility and prominence among the majority of the ancient Roman population because, unlike traditional forms of divination, it appeared to be rooted in immutable natural laws and objective observations.⁴ Thus imperial anxieties were threefold: astrology might prove another to have an imperial horoscope; an ambitious rival for the throne might be falsely convinced that he had an imperial horoscope; and astrology might result in the real or purported death date of the emperor becoming known, inspiring a fulfillment

3. Potter (1994, 173–74) offers an important variation on what follows, that is, that prophets might cause problems by offering “prophetic commentaries on the general state of affairs.” This idea will be explored more fully in the third section, below.

4. E.g., Gordon (1997, 145) states that astrology was deemed superior to the “traditional forms of divination practised by the ancient state” because it claimed “objective knowledge,” and cites Manilius *Astron.* 4.913–14: *an minus est sacris rationem ducere signis / quam pecudum mortes aviumque attendere cantus?* Konstan (1997, 170) concurs: “a good case can be made that astrology reflected an interest in scientific precision rather than a need for reassuring superstition.” Wallace-Hadrill (2005, 64–65) states that traditional, official forms of Roman divination “are essentially non-scientific” and that from Augustus onward, preference was shown for astrology as “a form of knowledge predicated on the application of rational principles to a highly complex body of material by professionals.” Contrast Davies 2004, 166 n. 75. Firm. Mat. *Math.* 8.1.6.1–2 argues that belief in the gods and astrology are not mutually contradictory; see Champeaux 2005, 110–11. Cf. also Plin. *HN* 37.100 and Dio Cass. 53.27.2.

of the prophecy.⁵ Astrologers were therefore expelled en masse when “plots or pretenders used astrology to unsettle the populace,”⁶ that is, “every time that a private individual made use of their art for the purpose of meddling in the affairs of state—whether it was a matter of knowing whether one’s political ambitions were successful or of informing oneself of the destiny of the prince.”⁷ Expulsions “were meant as temporary measures to cope with momentary problems” rooted in elite rivalry.⁸ Their efficacy was undermined by the amnesty shown to those astrologers who were members of the elite, or who were employed by members of the elite: only “street astrologers,” those who prophesied in public areas of the city, were targeted for expulsion. The futility of the expulsions is demonstrated by their frequent repetition.⁹

Individual elements of this narrative are not disputable. The general connection between concerns over popular unrest and purges of astrologers, for example, is sound, and is a point to which I shall return in the last section. It cannot be denied, moreover, that astrology continued to be practiced in spite of the expulsions and bans, nor that the activities of those astrologers patronized by the non-elite might be viewed with suspicion by members of the upper classes. It is also true that our sources often revel in relating the paranoia some emperors suffered that astrology might prove a rival member of the elite to have an imperial horoscope.¹⁰ But the narrative outlined above suffers from two problems, which I will address in turn. First, and most spectacularly, the evidence does not support a clear cause-and-effect relationship between elite political competition, the use of astrology, and the mass expulsion of astrologers. Second, previous explanations have assumed that it was clear whom the expulsion notices targeted. In fact, the identification of astrologers in Roman antiquity is a sticky business indeed.¹¹

At the most basic level, the connection between treasonous activity of ambitious men on the advice of individual astrologers and mass expulsions of astrologers is not an obviously logical one. Conspiracies are, by definition, secretive until they are either nipped in the bud or successful. It is not clear how astrologers could stir up the population by proclaiming the imperial horoscope of an already-failed contender—nor is it easy to see how the proclamation of an imperial horoscope of a successful contender could cause displeasure and so expulsion. It is certainly plausible that individual astrologers might be specifically targeted for exile to particular places on the heels

5. Cramer 1954, 115; MacMullen 1966, 131; Barton 1995b, 57; Sogno 2005, 171; Baudy 2006, 109; cf. Fögen 1993, 20–26, 254–315.

6. MacMullen 1966, 133; Barton 1994, 50.

7. Graf 1997, 55.

8. Cramer 1954, 233; MacMullen 1966, 133. Cf. also Noy 2000, 37.

9. E.g., Cramer 1951, 29, and 1954, 115; Barton 1994, 44; Potter 1994, 174. Beck (2007, 127) comments that “the astrological riff-raff drifted back and the well-connected never left.” Cf. also Johnston 2008, 153. Tac. *Hist.* 1.22 is felt to be the locus classicus for this sentiment, where astrologers are described as the *genus hominum potentibus infidum sperantibus fallax, quod in civitate nostra et vetabitur semper et retinebitur*.

10. Juvenal (10.94) famously portrays Tiberius on Capri *cum grege Chaldaeo*; cf. Dio Cass. 57.19.3–4, 58.27, and Suet. *Tib.* 62.3. Dio Cass. 67.15.6 has Domitian similarly checking the horoscopes of illustrious men, and then murdering them (even those, Dio states, who were not ambitious); cf. Suet. *Dom.* 10.3. Note also Herodian 4.12.3–5 for Caracalla’s purported use of diviners to remove his rivals.

11. Cf. Rutgers (1998, 104–5), who notes that even in the expulsion of Jews from Rome it is not easy to imagine “how individual Jews were at all identified” so as to be expelled.

of treasonous activity in which they were deemed complicit. But mass expulsions, in which astrologers were told to leave from Rome or from Italy to go anywhere else, would serve no obvious purpose. It is thus unsurprising that the evidence itself does not support a connection between conspiracy and mass expulsion of astrologers on several counts. Most damning is the observation that none of the eight reasonably well-attested mass expulsions of astrologers can be definitively tied to the treasonous astrological activity of the elite. The earliest expulsions, for example, are recorded as driven not by the astrological activities of ambitious individuals, but rather from a desire to rid Rome of un-Roman habits. Valerius Maximus (1.3.3) relates that “Chaldaeans” were expelled by praetorian edict from Italy in 139 B.C.E. lest they mislead the Romans by selling them foreign knowledge; Jews were expelled at the same time for the same reason.¹² Dio (49.43.5) reports that Agrippa, as aedile in 33 B.C.E., cast astrologers and sorcerers (τοὺς ἀστρολόγους τοὺς τε γόητας) from the city as part of his program to clean up Rome and the Romans, along with flushing out the sewers and providing free haircuts.

It is worth addressing in some detail the next expulsion, which targeted astrologers and magicians,¹³ and which took place in the early years of Tiberius’ reign. This expulsion, at least, is often taken to have been the result of the astrological activities of Libo Drusus in 16 C.E. and of Tiberius’ consequent paranoia.¹⁴ Though four major sources for the expulsion exist (Tacitus, Suetonius, Dio, and Ulpian—each in its own way problematic when read in light of the others),¹⁵ Tacitus’ version (*Ann.* 2.27–32), being the fullest, has generally been given pride of place in the interpretation of the events. He tells us that Libo Drusus’ weakness for listening to astrologers, magicians, and dream interpreters (*ad Chaldaeorum promissa, magorum sacra, somniorum etiam interpretes*) caused him to be framed by one of his senatorial friends for plotting against Tiberius. The evidence brought against Libo demonstrated that he had made silly and even pathetic (*stolida, vana, si mollies acciperes, miseranda*) inquiries about his wealth, and a list allegedly written in Libo’s hand featured suspicious marks next to the names of senators and members of the imperial family. In despair of absolution, Libo took his own life before the trial was concluded. Tacitus ends the tale by cataloguing the honors passed by the senate to celebrate Libo’s suicide; after justifying his inclusion of these with the comment that the reader might thus know how long the pestilence of sycophancy has infested the senate (*quorum auctoritates adulationesque retuli ut sciretur vetus id in re publica malum*), he finally mentions the *senatus consulta* against astrologers and magicians. Though Tiberius’ own denigration has been confined to the description of his circumspect treatment of Libo

12. See also Beard, North, and Price 1998, 113 n. 157.

13. Tac. *Ann.* 2.32: *facta et de mathematicis magisque Italia pellendis senatus consulta*. Dio Cass. 57.15.8 recounts actions against τοὺς τε ἀστρολόγους καὶ τοὺς γόητας. Suet. *Tib.* 36 mentions Tiberius’ expulsion of astrologers (*mathematici*) along with his expulsion of followers of Egyptian and Jewish rites. Ulpian (*Collatio legum Mosaicarum et Romanarum* [hereafter *Mos. et Rom. legum coll.*] 15.2.1) recounts details of the decree published at this time against *mathematicis Chaldaeis ariolis et ceteris, qui simile inceptum fecerunt*.

14. E.g., Cramer 1954, 238; Barton 1994, 44; Gury 1996, 233; Graf 1997, 54; Beard, North, and Price 1998, 231.

15. See n. 13 above.

(*Ann.* 2.28–30), Tacitus undoubtedly means us to connect the expulsion—and indeed the execution of at least two men, presumably astrologers¹⁶—with Tiberius’ famed paranoia.

But before we imagine Tiberius rejoicing in secret over the senate’s compliance with his unexpressed wishes, or heaving sighs of relief that Libo and his astrologers failed to unseat him, we must exercise caution. Tacitus’ narrative does not give free rein to interpretations of imperial paranoia over astrology, and Tacitus’ account in some aspects does not jibe well with the evidence of other sources.¹⁷ Leaving aside Tacitus’ well-known agenda for presenting Tiberius in the worst possible light and his habit of manipulating his record of events to serve his purposes,¹⁸ there is a remarkable absence of astrology in the testimony against Libo. Indeed, had Tacitus not mentioned that Libo put stock in the forecasts of astrologers, it is unlikely that anyone would have imagined the presence of astrologers in any of the alleged shenanigans based on the evidence alone. The questions Libo was said to have posed were at once hyperbolic and sufficiently closed-ended to be better suited to other forms of divination that rendered yes-or-no responses—perhaps sortition, for example, rather than astrology¹⁹—while Tacitus provides no reason to think that the suspicious marks on the list of senators had astrological significance. The only “specialist” to give evidence (2.28) was a necromancer named Junius (*Iunius quidam, temptatus ut infernas umbras carminibus eliceret*).

Other problems exist. The number of decrees passed and their dates also make it less easy to link the specific acts of Libo Drusus with the mass expulsion of astrologers. Tacitus and Dio both indicate that two *senatus consulta* were passed. It is uncertain, however, if they understand the first to be the Augustan decree of 11 C.E. banning the consultation of seers (μάντις) alone or about another’s death, or if two decrees were passed within months of each other in 16 C.E., or if one was passed in 16 and the other in 17, the first lenient, the second harsher, or one against magicians, the other against astrologers.²⁰ Tacitus and Dio each gather at least one of the decrees in his narrative of events of 16, but Ulpian dates the (only? second?) edict to the consulship of Pomponius and Rufus, that is, 17.²¹ Suetonius provides no hint of a date. Given that Ulpian is unique among the four sources in that he has no obvious historiographical agenda, it is perhaps best to follow, along with

16. Tac. *Ann.* 2.32: *L. Pituanus saxo deiectus est, in P. Marcium consules extra portam Esquilinam, cum classicum canere iussissent, more prisco advertere*. Possibly as many as 130 people are said elsewhere to have been put to death as a result of the expulsion edict, presumably for noncompliance; see Gordon 1999, 166.

17. Fögen (1993, 89–143) discusses the approaches different ancient historians took to diviners and their clients in their narratives, including the tale of Libo Drusus; Rives (2006, 61–62) considers the various historians on Libo Drusus’ case in particular. See also Sánchez-Moreno Ellart 2009, 210, 214.

18. Smallwood 1956, 318; McCulloch 1984, 26–28; Davies 2004, 157.

19. Tac. *Ann.* 2.30. On lot oracles, see Potter 1994, 23–29. Note that Klingshirn (2006) divides methods of private divination along skill level and hence economic lines, identifying itinerant lot oracle as unskilled, cheap, and hence lower class, in contrast to astrology and haruspicy. However, as evidence exists to suggest that all economic classes might use astrology and haruspicy (e.g., Cato *Agr.* 5.4; Cic. *Div.* 1.132; Juv. 6.542–91), a general division of methods based on economics is suspect.

20. Two decrees: Tac. *Ann.* 2.32.3; Dio Cass. 57.15.8. Edict of 11 C.E.: Dio Cass. 56.25.5. Various dates and targets of decrees: Cramer 1951, 21; Goodyear 1972, 284–85; Barton 1994, 44; Beard, North, and Price 1998, 231 and n. 68.

21. Rogers 1931, 203 n. 3; Goodyear 1972, 284–85.

Francis Goodyear, Ulpian's dating.²² The chronological gap between the trial and the expulsions calls into question the relationship between the two as strictly cause-and-effect; furthermore, the other sources make it difficult to link Libo's actions, the expulsions, and Tiberius' alleged astrological fears. Suetonius, Dio, and Velleius Paterculus each mention Libo's conspiracy, but none identifies it as the cause of the expulsion(s).²³ Suetonius even includes the expulsion among Tiberius' acts for the public good,²⁴ which suggests that he, at least, did not understand it to be a result of Tiberius' anxieties. And we may doubt Tiberius' astrological fretting as the cause under yet another heading. Identifying Tiberius behind the expulsion(s) demands that we understand him to have broken with his early habit of emulating Augustus' behavior twice—first by urging such an ill-disguised act of personal vengeance,²⁵ and second by admitting personal anxiety about unofficial diviners. Augustus himself had sought only to limit the scope of prophetic activity, and, to offset any suspicion that he was doing so out of fear for his own life, he published the astrological details of his own birth for any and all to make conjectures.²⁶ In short, while it is indisputable that at least one expulsion decree was issued against astrologers under Tiberius, it is uncertain that it was passed in the same year as Libo's conspiracy, or even as a result of the conspiracy. It is at the very least difficult to conclude with any conviction that the expulsion notice was pushed by Tiberius as a result of his anxieties about the occult activities of Libo Drusus.²⁷

But even if we were to persist in interpreting Tacitus to imply that Tiberius masterminded the expulsions in a pathetic attempt to assuage his fears over astrological predictions, successive expulsions do not point to elite conspiracies and astrological inquiries. Some think that Vitellius' expulsion of 69 C.E. was caused by the popular rumor of Vespasian's favorable horoscope, though the ancient sources do not suggest that Vespasian was personally behind the rumor as some sort of astrological conspirator.²⁸ Vitellius' action resulted in the publication of his own (incorrect) death date, but this information was noised about in response to the expulsion; no source identifies it as the cause.²⁹ Nothing by way of conspiracy is mentioned in conjunction with Vespasian's expulsion of the following year.³⁰ Only Jerome reports that Domitian's expulsion of philosophers in 93 C.E. included astrologers;

22. Goodyear (1972, 285) observes that "Ulpian's date remains acceptable, since neither [Tacitus] nor Dio can be expected to adhere strictly and invariably to an annalistic framework when treating closely related sequences of events or groups of items." Contrast the opinions of Cramer (1954, 237–38) and Rogers (1931).

23. Libo's conspiracy: Suet. *Tib.* 25; Dio Cass. 57.15.4–5; Vell. Pat. 2.129.2, 2.130.3. Expulsion: Suet. *Tib.* 36; Dio Cass. 57.15.8; Velleius Paterculus does not mention the expulsion at all.

24. Listed in Suet. *Tib.* 33–37. See Kelly 2007, 158; Williams 1989, 775.

25. On Tiberius' facility in weathering personal slights and attacks up until 23 C.E., see Bauman 1996, 61.

26. Dio Cass. 56.25.5. Potter (1994, 256 n. 4) notes that Dio's report does not suggest that the publication of the horoscope was contemporary with Augustus' edict. Lewis (2008) provides the most recent interpretation of Augustus' horoscope.

27. See also Sánchez-Moreno Ellart 2009, 210, 214.

28. E.g., Potter 1994, 175; on the circulation of the rumor, see Tac. *Hist.* 2.78.

29. Suet. *Vit.* 14.4; Tac. *Hist.* 2.62; Dio Cass. 64.1.4 (note that Dio obscures the fact that the astrologers had forecast the incorrect day of Vitellius' demise; they had forecast October 1, but he died on December 20). See Cramer 1954, 244; and Barton 1994, 49.

30. Dio Cass. 65.9.2.

Suetonius, Aulus Gellius, Dio, and Philostratus mention only philosophers, and none mentions astrological intrigue.³¹ Finally, Jerome and Ulpian both mention a mass expulsion—the last in Roman history—of astrologers under Marcus Aurelius, but the date has been conjectured in modern times to be 175 C.E. precisely in order to connect it to the revolt of Avidius Cassius.³² In fact, of all the expulsions of astrologers reported, only one, the expulsion of 52 C.E., has any possible connection to treasonous inquiries. Tacitus (*Ann.* 12.52) mentions the exile of Lucius Arruntius Furius Scribonianus for inquiring of astrologers after Claudius' death shortly before he reports a *senatus consultum* banning astrologers from Italy.³³ But the connection even here is not as direct as is normally assumed, as I shall argue in the final section.

The evidence further undermines conclusions of imperial paranoia as we hear of crises of treasonous horoscopes that brought no mass expulsions. Augustus' slave Telephus, for example, is said to have conspired against his master as though fate had promised him imperial power (*quasi debita sibi fato dominatione*), while Aemilia Lepida was charged in 20 C.E. with consulting astrologers about the members of the imperial family (*Chaldaeos in domum Caesaris*), and Lollia Paulina was accused in 49 C.E. of consulting astrologers concerning the emperor's marriage (*Chaldaeos, magos . . . super nuptis imperatoris*)—but astrologers were not purged as a result of any of these.³⁴ Nor did expulsions follow on the heels of the rumors of the imperial horoscopes of Rubellius Plautus, Mettius Pompusianus, or even the future emperors Vitellius and Nerva.³⁵ And finally, the observation that astrologers were often expelled jointly with other groups—sorcerers, philosophers, magicians, for example—must lead us further to the conclusion that the science of astrology itself was not the problem, or at least was not the main problem, for imperial and senatorial authorities.

Plainly, the evidence calls into question the appropriateness of the traditional focus on astrology as a political concern, and thus casts doubt upon astrology as the cause of the repeated expulsions of astrologers. But in attempts to understand the expulsions, no less problematic is the lack of attention that astrology's purveyors have received. If mass expulsions are to be understood, surely as a preliminary we must seek to define the characteristics that marked individuals out as belonging to the targeted community; expulsion notices are meaningless if no one is certain who is meant to go.³⁶ But no

31. Suet. *Dom.* 10.3; Gell. *NA* 15.11.3–5; Dio Cass. 67.13.2–3; Jer. *Chron.* 93–94 C.E., cf. also 89–90. Cramer (1954, 245) gathers the evidence.

32. Ulpian at *Mos. et Rom. legum coll.* 15.2.5–6; Tert. *De idol.* 9; Cramer 1954, 247; Ménard 2004, 41; cf. Desanti 1990, 53 n. 45, 57–59.

33. Dio Cass. 61.33.3b also mentions the expulsion, but does not connect it with Scribonianus.

34. Suet. *Aug.* 19; Tac. *Ann.* 3.22–23, 12.22. Nor, it should be noted, did expulsions of any kind follow the conviction of Claudia Pulchra (Tac. *Ann.* 4.52) in 26 C.E. for cursing the emperor (*veneficium in principem et devotiones*), acts that presumably required the professional help of magicians.

35. Rubellius Plautus: Tac. *Ann.* 14.22; Mettius Pompusianus: Suet. *Vesp.* 14, Dio Cass. 67.12.2–4; Vitellius: Dio Cass. 64.4; Nerva: Dio Cass. 67.15.4–6. Cramer (1954, 242) discusses the scant evidence for an expulsion of astrologers in 68 C.E., perhaps after the affair involving Pammenes and the horoscope of Marcus Orosius Scapula (Tac. *Ann.* 16.14), but ultimately concludes that it is not convincing.

36. Unless they are to be understood as symbolic, as indeed some have understood Roman bans on various types of religious activity; see, e.g., Frankfurter 1998, 26. Though the symbolism of maintenance of religious

systematic attempt has been made to draw the parameters of the astrologers' classification.³⁷ Instead, the general assumption has been that an astrologer is someone who knows and practices astrology, except when we would prefer not to think of someone who knows and practices astrology as an astrologer.³⁸ The result is that gross inconsistency of identification runs roughshod through modern discussion. Thrasyllus, for example, whom Suetonius presents as "a literary man rather than as an astrologer,"³⁹ is generally declared in modern sources to have been an astrologer,⁴⁰ whereas the emperor Tiberius, Thrasyllus' friend and pupil, was not an astrologer, he merely knew and practiced astrology.⁴¹ Regulus, calculating false hope for Galba's daughter-in-law with a bedside horoscope, is perhaps a scoundrel, but no astrologer.⁴² No one would suggest that Vespasian's expulsion of astrologers was meant to include his son Titus, though Titus is reported to have demonstrated to two conspirators the futility of their machinations by dashing off their horoscopes.⁴³

Thrasyllus' son Balbillus, on the other hand, is often said to have taken his father's place among the favored "court astrologers." According to Cramer, for example, the father-son pair "emerge from the host of nameless and little known court astrologers of the first century," wording that ought to make us suspicious that a well-defined category of first-century "court astrologers" could be a modern fiction.⁴⁴ It is presumably Balbillus' astrological abilities in conjunction with his familiarity with Nero that have made him the exemplar of the "court astrologer" in scholarly imagination, as he is reported to have offered his astrological advice to Nero on the occasion of the sighting of a comet in 64 C.E., and to have made predictions about Nero's reign.⁴⁵ Yet there is no evidence that he was retained at court for the expressed purpose of casting horoscopes. On the contrary, Balbillus, whose literary rendering of a battle between dolphins and crocodiles drew rapturous praises from Seneca, spent years as the Prefect of Egypt, and held a variety of other official non-astrological positions away from Rome during his long career.⁴⁶ Why should Balbillus be an astrologer, and particularly a "court astrologer," rather than merely another man who knew astrology? Indeed, if consultation by an emperor is enough to earn one the title, we must accordingly count Theogenes, off in his studio in Apollonia, a court astrologer,⁴⁷ Hadrian's uncle

purity might be present in the expulsion of astrologers, I do not think that these events functioned solely or even primarily on this level, as will be made clear below.

37. The words translated into English as "astrologer" are *Chaldaeus*, *mathematicus*, and *astrologus*. By the first century C.E., if not before, the terms were interchangeable.

38. Beard, North, and Price (1998, 231) remark upon the problems of determining a legal definition of "astrology," however.

39. Barton 1994, 43; Cramer (1954, 92–93) and Oliver (1980, 130–31) recount Thrasyllus' many intellectual accomplishments.

40. E.g., Cramer 1954, 82; Barton 1994, 43; Gordon 1997, 151.

41. Tacitus remarks upon Tiberius' astrological skill at *Ann.* 6.20.

42. *Plin. Ep.* 2.20.

43. *Suet. Tit.* 9.2; see also *Plin. HN* 2.89 for Titus' compositions on astronomical phenomena.

44. Cramer 1954, 82. Cf. Molnar 1998, 139. Barton (1994, 49) similarly notes that "the role of court astrologers is harder to evaluate."

45. *Tac. Ann.* 6.22; *Suet. Ner.* 36.1; cf. *Dio Cass.* 65.9.2. On this comet, cf. *Tac. Ann.* 15.47 and *Dio Cass.* 62.18.2–3 (where *μάρτυρες* give Nero advice rather than a single Balbillus).

46. *Sen. Q Nat.* 4A.13; *Tac. Ann.* 13.22; Cramer 1954, 112–15; Gury 1996, 254.

47. As indeed Barton (1995a, 39) does. See *Suet. Aug.* 94.12.

a court astrologer,⁴⁸ and quite possibly even Titus a court astrologer.⁴⁹ The problem with this haphazard identification of some men such as Thrasyllus and Balbillus as astrologers is that it beckons us toward weak conclusions of imperial hypocrisy where expulsions are concerned. It is even common now to read opinions to the effect that astrologers such as this father-son team would not be “incommoded in the least” by expulsion notices, due to their high connections.⁵⁰ But men like Thrasyllus and Balbillus more probably stayed in Rome because it did not occur to them or to their contemporaries to consider themselves targets of the expulsion notices, simply because they did not count themselves as astrologers: knowledge and practice of astrology did not make one an astrologer any more than an interest in cooking makes one a professional chef.⁵¹

This is not to say that no one who serviced the elite could consider himself an astrologer. But unexamined categorization of some men as “privileged” astrologers promotes an unfounded impression of discrete categories of astrologers who were easily defined by activity, reputation, clientele, and consequently, treatment. An imaginary hierarchy of astrologers—carefree “court astrologers” at the top, despised and expelled “street astrologers” at the bottom, with an unbridgeable gap of skill and privilege in the middle—does not bear examination. Though “court astrologers” might gambol unchecked through modern discussion, “street astrologers” have been treated to greater definitional consideration. Problems nonetheless remain. Starting once again from the practice of astrology itself, three features are traditionally thought to have marked “street astrologers” off, by implication, from “elite astrologers” and “court astrologers.” First, street astrologers peddled a debased or simplified form of astrology to answer the mundane inquiries of the rude masses, while those who serviced the elite are expected to have practiced a more intellectually rigorous and pedigreed form of astrology. Roger Beck, for example, speaks of “the vulgar activities of street astrologers” muddying the name of astrology, that is, the kind of astrology practiced by the “gentleman” astrologers, while David Potter similarly remarks that “the typical horoscope that a person could expect to receive from an astrologer on the street was, not surprisingly, less detailed.”⁵² Second, street astrologers sold their questionable “services” for money.⁵³ The shameless pursuit of money for nothing and attempts to cheat the ignorant masses inspired extreme disdain for street astrologers among the elite, who, if Cicero (*Off.* 1.42.150) can be taken as representative, saw little honor in having to perform even honest work for

48. SHA *Had.* 2.4. Note that the author calls him not an astrologer, but a man who knew astrology (*peritia caelestium callens*).

49. Vespasian was reported to make use of the services of astrologers; see Dio Cass. 65.9.2.

50. Potter 1994, 174.

51. Though later authors might refer to them as such; see, e.g., Suet. *Calig.* 19.3, *Ner.* 36. However, cf. Haack (2002, 132) on those who practiced haruspicy within a familial tradition though within a private context: “on pouvait donc aussi pratiquer l’haruspicine sans se faire appeler *haruspex*.”

52. Beck 2007, 130; Potter 1994, 19. See also Oliver 1980, 131; Barton 1995b, 93; Gury 1996, 238; and Gordon 1997, 149–51. Haack (2002, 132) and Rasmussen (2003, 140, 178) make a similar distinction between *haruspices*, and Johnston (2008, 118) also posits a difference of activity between high- and low-status *manteis* in the Greek world.

53. Nice (2001, 163–66) gathers the evidence.

a living, and who resented the “power [the paid diviner] might generate” among the populace.⁵⁴ Third, and as we have seen, “street astrologers,” unlike their privileged counterparts, found no friendly loophole extended to them to escape expulsion.

It must be admitted that evidence can be found that seems to support these impressions. Most famously, Cicero (*Div.* 1.132) presents Quintus expounding his distaste not for all astrologers, but for astrologers of the circus (*de circo astrologi*) since they had neither knowledge (*scientia*) nor skill (*ars*).⁵⁵ By way of comparison, Artemidorus defends his choice to heed the experience of the prophets of the marketplace who he acknowledges were widely scorned by polite society.⁵⁶ And “street astrologers” might be paid, and might stir up popular anxiety. For example, Livy (25.1.8 and 39.8) presents prophetic charlatans fleecing peasants and gaining influence over them; and Valerius Maximus (1.3.3) explains that the expulsion of 139 B.C.E. was ordered because astrologers were “casting a money-grubbing fog over foolish and silly minds with their lies and false interpretation of the stars” (*levibus et ineptis ingeniis fallaci siderum interpretatione quaestuosam mendaciis suis caliginem incipientes*).⁵⁷ But the impression of well-defined and separate categories of astrologers whose characteristics did not overlap and whose membership was static must be questioned under a number of headings, as the evidence in fact suggests on the contrary a spectrum of possibility within which any given astrologer might move.

Though papyrological evidence preserves horoscopes that bear witness to a wide swath of mathematical skill, it is not possible to identify these remains confidently as the work of either “street astrologers” or “elite astrologers.”⁵⁸ It might be assumed that the “worse” and “better” stuff is the work of the former and the latter respectively. This is not an unreasonable assumption: the more detailed and intellectually rigorous productions would presumably command a higher price, and their purveyors would be more likely to be patronized only by those who could pay it, while wealth conferred time and resources for the necessary education. These binary considerations might, it seems, over time result in two parallel strains of astrology, one intellectually complex for the consumption of the rich, one intellectually bankrupt for the consumption of the poor. But the certainty of this impression is undermined by both the anonymous nature of the evidence and its paucity. While men like Thrasyllus and Balbillus might be safely presumed to have been capable of complex math, it is uncertain what others, particularly those who were not connected to the elite, were really doing. On the one hand, a cautionary note is sounded

54. Beard, North, and Price 1998, 113, cf. 161; Klingshirn 2006, 146. Cf. also Cic. *Div.* 1.92 and MacMullen 1966, 139–40, 328 n. 11.

55. As Klingshirn (2006, 148–49) discusses. Quintus in the same place claims he has no use for other “street” diviners; see Pease 1973, 335–36. Cameron (1976, 60 n. 1) discusses the possibility that Quintus is paraphrasing Ennius in his identification of circus astrologers as despicable, and the potential of an early date for the presence of astrologers in Rome; contrast Nice 2001.

56. Artem. 1 *praef.*

57. Thus Paris; Nepotianus says merely *ne peregrinam scientiam venditarent*.

58. See Neugebauer and Van Hoesen 1959 for a collection of original horoscopes; Brashear (1995, 3456) provides further bibliography.

by the comparison of magical evidence in the form of curse tablets bearing complicated formulae in Latin written in Greek letters or vice versa: expertise might not have been as important as the impression of expertise, and we might uncharitably suppose that the rich were sometimes as easy to dupe as the poor.⁵⁹ On the other hand, in the absence of horoscopes that are incontrovertibly the work of “street astrologers,” hostile but general literary descriptions exist, such as those of Cicero, Livy, and Valerius Maximus just mentioned, but these concentrate not on what astrologers are doing so much as for whom they are doing it (a point to which I shall soon return); these are balanced by a small number of detailed attacks upon the specific activities of astrologers that can surely bear no resemblance to contemporary practice. Sextus Empiricus and Hippolytus, for example, ridicule the “Chaldaeans” for sitting in elevated positions awaiting the announcement of the birth of a child (delivered up the hill via the sound of a gong) so as to be able to record the aspect of the zodiac at precisely that moment.⁶⁰ At the same time, astrological treatises, which might be assumed to be the work of loftier astrological intellects, and which describe complicated formulas for casting horoscopes, provide advice about delivering horoscopes to members of all levels of society—slave, freed, free, rich, and poor.⁶¹

Modern supposition of a real difference of activity between “street” and “elite” astrologers must therefore be suspected to be based not upon examination of their systems, but rather upon the scorn of the ancient authors: the implied logic is that if the elite dismissed street astrologers as charlatans, it must be because they were performing an inferior service. However, since these literary descriptions do not dwell upon the specific actions of astrologers, but rather upon where and for whom they are performing them, the interpretive approach adopted in the categorization of other amorphous activities (such as the definition of “religion” versus “superstition” or “magic”) is called for. The denigration of an activity by an elite source often depended not upon the nature of the action, but rather upon the context of the action and upon the identity of the person performing it.⁶² Application of this approach here would lead to the conclusion that the “quality” of astrological activity was beside the point, and that instead the clientele of any given astrologer dictated reputation.⁶³ We must presume that the relative “quality” of the clientele itself was determined largely by observing the blatant marker of social worth in Roman society in general, that is, by noting the degree of physical inconvenience one

59. See, e.g., Audollent [1904] 1967, nos. 267, 269, 270, 271; cf. nos. 264, 266.

60. Sext. Emp. *Math.* 5.27–28; Hippol. *Haer.* 4.4.

61. Thorndike 1913; MacMullen 1971; Konstan 1997, 160; contrast Gordon 1997, 149–51, and Beck 2007, 48–49. Note, e.g., Dorotheus of Sidon *Carmen astrologicum* 1.10–12 on the horoscopes of slaves, and 1.22 on the native’s position of wealth or poverty, while 1.15–20 refers to subjects relevant to all freeborn people, such as the nature of parental and fraternal relations. Section 2.31 allows for different interpretation of the results based upon the status of the inquirer, suggesting that one might expect a range of customers. If bias toward any demographic category is evident, it is that of sex: the majority of interpretations are relevant to males rather than to females.

62. E.g., Beard, North, and Price 1998, 214–27; Stratton (2007, 6–9) summarizes key arguments. Kling-shirn (2006, 148–49) notes a similar relationship in the assessment of the value of lot oracles.

63. Cf. O’Neill 2003, 152–54; see also Dio Chrys. *Or.* 70.4 on identifying people by the company they keep.

member of any given relationship suffered to commune with, or to acknowledge, the other. It has long been recognized that undertaking the trouble to attend the morning levy of an important man was a mark of respect, and thus an acknowledgment of social inferiority, on the part of a social underling. The observation of who went to whom is surely significant in the determination of the quality of a specialist's clientele, and thus also in the determination of the quality of the astrologer. The socially lowly must go to the astrologer in public places in order to benefit from his expertise—Horace comments on the freedom he, as an unillustrious sort, has to hang around in such crowds, while his commentator Porphyrio mentions that men of high rank would be ashamed to be seen as members of such audiences.⁶⁴ But the illustrious might summon the specialist, as a less-illustrious “friend,” to their homes. As usual, the rule is best demonstrated by trumpeted exceptions when the opposite is undertaken. Philostratus (*VA* 5.10.1) reports a noteworthy coup for Apollonius: the governor of Baetica, wishing to see Apollonius but unable to prevail upon him to visit, came to Apollonius, “putting aside the dignity of his office” (ἀφελὼν τὸν τῆς ἀρχῆς ὄγκον). We might also compare Pliny's (*Ep.* 3.11) zeal to proclaim the magnanimity of his gesture of visiting his philosopher friend Artemidorus in his suburban home. To return to the negative sentiments recorded by Cicero and Valerius Maximus, these are perhaps best understood not as reflections of real difference in “quality of service,” but rather as an exercise in undercutting non-elite divinatory activity, thinly clothed as a dismissal of foolishness. This perspective is further encouraged by Peter O'Neill's study of popular communication unregulated by elite authorities, in which he finds that elite attempts to control popular speech are manifested as derogatory descriptions meant to undermine its value and power.⁶⁵ The paternalistic concern over cunning men fleecing the poor also rings hollow: the spending habits of the poor rarely concerned the rich.

Next, the acceptance of money for services is not a viable criterion for distinguishing the “quality” of different astrologers.⁶⁶ “Street” astrologers who provided services for cash cannot be contrasted with those who serviced the elite on the assumption that the latter inevitably eschewed such vile transactions, as compensation clearly figured in the relationship that astrologers might have with clients of all echelons of society. Tacitus (*Ann.* 16.14) reports the activities of Pammenes, an astrologer still running a mail-order business in horoscopes while in exile on a Cycladic island in 66 C.E., who was “embraced by the friendship of many men thanks to his fame in astrology” (*Chaldaeorum arte famosum eoque multorum amicitiiis innexum*); one of these friends was both wealthy enough to be sending him a pension, and illustrious enough to be suspected of conspiring to usurp the throne. For his part, Lucian describes

64. Porphyrio on Hor. *Sat.* 1.6.114, cited by O'Neill (2003, 139 n.10): (*fallacem Circum vespertinumque pererro / saepe Forum; adsisto divinis; porro autem altiorem dignitatis homines erubescunt fere in his vulgi circulis stare, quod tamen sibi licere facere Horatius dicit per vitae libertatem, in qua non esset si in senatoria dignitate constitutus esset*). Note that equestrians were forbidden from gathering around actors performing in the streets (*Tac. Ann.* 1.77), presumably because it was an activity considered to be beneath their dignity.

65. O'Neill 2003.

66. Nor in distinguishing astrologers from other specialists, as Klingshirn (2006, 146–47) does. Tell (2009) discusses charges of venality against sophists and seers as invective.

the negotiation of salary between hired service providers (including philosophers and prophets) and employers in the houses of the wealthy, in which the former end up accepting a pittance when the latter self-interestedly adopt the moral high ground with the suggestion that arguments over money ought not to sully the purity of education.⁶⁷ It was not just street-corner astrologers who depended upon their art for their livelihood.

Finally, “street astrologers” were not the exclusive targets of expulsion. Later interpretations of the exile of Publius Nigidius Figulus are instructive. A senator of the Late Republic, a Pompeian, a polymath, and a student of the occult and of astrology, he died in exile in 45 B.C.E. The circumstances of his exile, and more particularly, of his failure to be recalled, remain the subject of discussion,⁶⁸ but his divinatory interests seemed to offer a plausible explanation to later generations, who stress his facility with astrology and other occult practices.⁶⁹ And why not? Ptolemy Seleucus, widely held to be a “court astrologer” to Otho and Vespasian, was referred to by Juvenal as *saepius exul*,⁷⁰ and we have just visited Pammenes, astrologer to the rich, in exile on his island. Given Pammenes’ residence at a famed destination for political exiles, he and perhaps also Ptolemy Seleucus were not the victims of a mass expulsion, but were individually exiled in response to specific circumstances.⁷¹ But it seems that astrologers who serviced the elite were not necessarily unaffected by mass expulsion notices either. Dio (65.9.2) reports that Vespasian expelled astrologers from Rome, for all that he made a habit of consulting the best of them; the apparent paradox Dio comments upon is that Vespasian expelled those whose services he used, not that he retained some and sent others away. Domitian’s expulsion of philosophers from the city in 93 C.E. provides an intriguing comparison. According to Tamsyn Barton, “the philosophers meant were presumably the street-corner purveyors of wisdom, who could well stir up the people in times of unrest,”⁷² that is, those targeted were the philosophic counterparts of “street astrologers.” It is, however, during this same expulsion that we discover that Pliny’s particular friend Artemidorus—certainly no “street philosopher”—has taken up residence outside the city (Plin. *Ep.* 3.11.2).⁷³ Is this because of the order? Pliny does not say for certain, as he is too occupied with recounting his boldness in visiting Artemidorus at such a time. Surely Pliny need not have been so brave had the ban not sought to restrict communion with “gentleman philosophers” too. The lines

67. Lucian *De mercede conductis* (esp. 19, 24, 27, and 40); cf. Dio Chrys. *Or.* 13.32.

68. Rawson 1985, 94; Desanti 1990, 21–30; Rives 2006, 63; Sánchez-Moreno Ellart 2009, 214–16.

69. Cramer 1954, 64; Barton 1994, 37–39; Gordon 1999, 261; Lewis 2008, 308–9, 323–24; Suet. *Aug.* 94.5; Dio Cass. 45.1.4; Jer. *Chron.* 45 B.C.E. Cf. also Cic. *Fam.* 4.13, *Vat.* 6.14.

70. Juv. 6.557–59; Tac. *Hist.* 1.22. 2.78; Suet. *Oth.* 4.1; Plut. *Galb.* 23.4; on Ptolemy and Seleucus as likely being the same person, see Cramer 1954, 132–35 and below; cf. Chilver 1979, 84–85.

71. Bingham (2003, 397) discusses the Cycladic Islands as the favored place to send “citizens perceived to be a threat to the emperor.”

72. Barton 1994, 50.

73. Philostratus (VA 7.11.4) describes a man of consular rank leaving Rome at the same time for the same reason. The sources disagree whether the expulsion was from Rome or from Italy; see Suet. *Dom.* 10.3, Dio Cass. 67.13.2–3, and Sherwin-White 1957. Compare also the experience of Musonius Rufus, the first-century philosopher, equestrian, and Artemidorus’ father-in-law: MacMullen 1966, 48, 65; Tac. *Ann.* 15.71, Dio Cass. 62.27, Philostr. VA 4.46.1–5, 5.19.2, 7.16.2.

demarcating different statuses of astrologers are therefore faint and perforated, while the distinction between astrologer and those who understood astrology is not immediately obvious. At the very least, it can no longer be considered obvious who was targeted during mass expulsions and who was not.

2. WHO WENT AND WHY? ASTROLOGERS AND SUBCULTURES

An approach different from those previously adopted is needed to understand better whom the expulsions targeted, whether the expulsions were obeyed, and why they were repeated. Given that the concern here is to understand mass expulsions, not the suppression of individuals, it is necessary to consider astrologers as a perceived community within the larger community of Roman society, and to attempt to recapture, if not the actual identifiers of this community's membership, at least the processes by which membership might have been determined. To this end, conclusions drawn about subcultures from sociological studies and works of more recent history can be useful. Though it is clear that astrologers were never a subculture in the modern sense of a cohesive social group bound by common interests and beliefs to the near exclusion of other social relations,⁷⁴ studies of subcultures can be helpful for finding ways to think about the creation of social categories and imagining their membership. This is particularly so since they stress the differences between the external perception of a sub- or separate community and the internal realities of the membership.⁷⁵ The following characteristics of a subculture prove the most helpful for thinking about astrologers as a social category. First, a subculture, as a multiethnic conglomeration, is often imagined by outsiders to be generically "foreign" in that its members are not from "here." The black-and-white logic of this reasoning supposes that if the practices, demeanors, or attitudes that characterized members of the group were from "here," they would be mainstream, and the participants would be members of regular society; but in reality the activities of subcultures are not necessarily from elsewhere, nor is their membership. Second, subcultures appear to be disorganized from the outside, but often adhere to well-defined structures that are perceptible, and matter, only to those on the inside. Third, membership in subcultures is fluid, and its members are self-selecting. That is, an individual can pass in and then out of a subculture's membership to enter a different subculture. Finally, subcultures offer their participants alternative social hierarchies. Advancement is possible through participation in activities different from those that bring advancement in mainstream social hierarchies. Since participation in subcultures often involves by necessity the transgression of mainstream social norms, subcultures can often be considered "countercul-

74. Note that this, the "monoculture" definition, is just one approach to subcultures; another would be to consider them as heterogeneous and porous. See Gelder 2005, 11. Either way, astrologers are probably not to be imagined as a community whose members spent a great deal of time with each other. The presence (or absence) of subcultures in Rome has been prominently argued with reference to sexual preference; see, e.g., Richlin 1993; Taylor 1997; Williams 1999, 218–24.

75. Gelder (2005) assembles a vast collection of brief essays on aspects of subcultures from which emerge the themes identified in the following; note also his introduction (1–15). Hebdige 1979 is the seminal study for modern discussions of subcultures.

tures,” which, paradoxically, often come to impart some kind of authority to their members in mainstream society too by virtue of their very refusal to obey accepted behavioral patterns. This description of “transgressive authority” is a familiar refrain, but it is nonetheless worth raising here simply to stress that it is not merely the practice that renders authority to a practitioner, it is equally a practitioner’s attitude.

I shall argue that four ideas about astrologers must be embraced in light of these observations. First, by the Late Republic, if not earlier, astrologers did not exist as a monolithic and natural community whose membership was bound together by the bonds of common ethnicity or practice; second, the category of the Expellable Astrologers—the category of people who were targeted by, and who responded to, expulsion notices under the Empire—was a synthetic fabrication with the demonstrable birth date of 17 C.E.; third, membership in this category was fluid, because members were self-selecting, and membership was determined more by self-identification than by knowledge, skill, or some immutable characteristic; and finally, it was these astrologers’ desire to achieve professional success by positioning themselves not as mouthpieces for the ambitious elite, but as independent voices of counterauthority, that got them expelled.

As a preliminary, it is best to justify thinking in terms of subcultures to identify astrologers rather than in terms of social minorities. Put otherwise, it must be shown that astrologers were not a monolithic, easily identifiable, and thus easily expellable category, since modern perception is often to the contrary. Common ethnicity has long been doubted. Although Aulus Gellius might have crossly insisted upon calling astrologers Chaldaeans, that is, as “Babylonians,” when we consider Petronius’ fictionalized Greek astrologer with an Egyptian name, Serapa, or Scribonius and Sulla, astrologers with Roman-sounding names who were consulted by Livia and Caligula respectively, or the exiled Egyptian-sounding Pammenes skilled in Babylonian astrology, it must be concluded that (by the end of the Republic, at least) astrologers came from all over.⁷⁶ We might even question whether many or most astrologers in Rome were “foreign” in the sense of being new immigrants from the ends of the empire, though this is certainly how a good number of them wished to be thought of. David Noy notes that most real foreigners living in Rome did not make a point of fostering their ethnicity as a personal identifier.⁷⁷ Those who did make a point of advertising “foreignness” thus generally had an ulterior motive for doing so; for example, as Marie-Laurence Haack has demonstrated, some *haruspices* chose to adopt location-specific Etruscan names in a bid to prove their qualifications.⁷⁸ Strabo (17.1.29) and Aulus Gellius (*NA* 14.1.2–3) both express disdain for those who claimed to depend upon ethnic intellectual traditions that they did not really understand, suggesting

76. Gell. *NA* 1.9.6; Petron. *Satyr.* 76; Suet. *Tib.* 14.2, *Calig.* 57.2; Tac. *Ann.* 16.14. Note Treggiari 1969, 204, on the early ethnic identity of *Chaldaei* in Italy; see also Plin. *HN* 35.199.

77. Noy 2000, 157–60.

78. Haack 2006, 103–4.

that such sorts were perceived to be common.⁷⁹ Undoubtedly, claiming to hail from the land that birthed astrology had value for astrologers, and it was even more useful that there was popular confusion over where that actually was—was it Babylon, Greece, or Egypt?⁸⁰ Ultimately, no one but pedants much cared:⁸¹ generically “eastern” was good enough. Thus we must suspect Otho’s Ptolemy and Vespasian’s Seleucus as being one and the same—he took his name from one eastern dynasty or another⁸²—and thus too we meet Propertius’ (4.1b.77–78) fictionalized astrologer, Babylonius Horos. The latter, a chimaera of name and lineage,⁸³ is perhaps a comment either on the falsified foreign credentials of many astrologers, or on the Romans’ lack of interest in being precise about their provenance.

In the absence of common ethnicity, there is a tendency to suppose that astrologers were unified by the common and nonnatively Roman practice of astrology. This assumption is encouraged by insinuations in our sources that it was possible to imagine various kinds of diviners as easily identifiable and homogeneous groups, particularly if they practiced forms of divination rooted in non-Roman traditions. The *haruspices*, for example, are always referred to as an undifferentiated group of Etruscans who excelled in the practice of extispicy.⁸⁴ Yet John North observes that the people dismissed so generically by Roman sources are in fact discovered to be individuals with unique identities and achievements, to judge by their presentation in non-Roman sources.⁸⁵ We should, in short, be wary of following our sources too far when it comes to positing monolithic communities of diviners based on common “foreign” activity. This is all the more so since astrology itself was not a monolithic pursuit. Though they do not consider the consequences for identifying practitioners, those who focus on ancient astrology have long recognized that “astrology” is an unspecific title that refers to a multiplicity of multiethnic practices. Babylonian astrology influenced Greek astrology, and through it, Egyptian astrology, but was different from both; traces of each exist in our evidence, pointing to their practice in Rome; but there is no reason to suppose that astrology failed to continue to develop throughout Roman history in the hands of individual practitioners. There were also different kinds of astrology for different purposes, including medical astrology, and catarchic astrology, meant to identify the best time for an undertaking, in addition to genethliacal horoscopes based on birth date. An obvious dividing line between these types of astrology and other forms of divination was often lacking. Though astrologers are thought to have generally contemplated mathematical tables rather than the heavens themselves,⁸⁶ and though Umbricius, Juve-

79. Cf. Plin. *HN* 37.192, where disgust is shown at the assignment of *barbara nomina* to ordinary stones to make them seem unusual.

80. Gury 1996, 254; Beck (2007, 9–19) provides a very useful brief history of the Babylonian, Egyptian, and Greek strands of astrology and their mutual influences.

81. E.g., Diod. Sic. 1.81.6, 2.29–30; Strabo 16.2.24, 17.1.3; Plin. *HN* 18.210–11; cf. Lucian *De astrologia*.

82. Cramer 1954, 132–35; cf. Damon 2003, 151. See also Tac. *Hist.* 1.22, 2.78; Suet. *Oth.* 4.1; Plut. *Galb.* 23.4; Juv. 6.557–59.

83. Kidd 1979, 174–75.

84. Haack 2002, 112.

85. North 1990, 67–68.

86. Lehoux 2004, 240.

nal's disgruntled *haruspex*,⁸⁷ insists that he does not understand constellations (*motus astrorum ignoro*, 3.42–43), anecdotal evidence demonstrates that “professionals” identified as both *haruspices* and astrologers might interpret comets, and both might pronounce death dates.⁸⁸ Confusion thus arises in the sources over whether certain men were astrologers or *haruspices*; consider the example of Sudines, called by Strabo (16.1.6) a *mathematicus*, but a *haruspex* by Frontinus (*Str.* 1.11.15).⁸⁹ Moreover, though modern scholars regularly suggest that in the early Empire, popular faith in astrology overwhelmed popular conviction in other, more traditional, forms of prophecy,⁹⁰ it seems that astrology was received by the population at large not much differently than haruspicy. Tacitus (*Ann.* 15.47) relates the popular credence given to *haruspices*' reading of a deformed calf in the same breath as he relates the portentous appearance of a comet—both *imminentium malorum nuntia* for Nero, and thus presumably not the interpretations of Nero's prophetic staff or of the college of *haruspices*. Suetonius (*Tib.* 63) too provides an instructive anecdote. He tells us that Tiberius sought to curb private consultation of *haruspices*—this is either a renewal of Augustus' legislation of 11 C.E. against the consultation of generic “seers,” μάντιες (Dio Cass. 56.25.5), or a historiographical doublet of the same.⁹¹ But either way, the tale demonstrates the potential power felt to exist in haruspicy in the first century C.E., the very time when modern scholars imagine it to have been drowned along with other forms of divination in the mania for astrology.⁹² No emperor depended exclusively upon astrological messages to advertise his fated right to rule,⁹³ and though Juvenal might bemoan what he saw as the contemporary craze for astrology (6.553–91), his criticisms are couched within a litany of scorn for all other kinds of prophetic forms too.

It then comes as little surprise that the comparisons to be made between astrology and astrologers do not stop with haruspicy and *haruspices*. Dorotheus of Sidon, author of a first-century C.E. astrological treatise, includes in his fifth book tips on dealing with questions that seem to mirror those

87. See Nice 2003 for the identification.

88. On astrology and comets, see Balbillus' famous interpretation of 64 C.E. (Suet. *Ner.* 36); on *haruspices* and comets, see Ramsey 2006, 110–13, and Serv. ad. Verg. *Ecl.* 9.46. Suet. *Iul.* 81.2 and Dio Cass. 79.7.2 both contain examples of *haruspices* informing inquirers of their death dates. Note Plin. *Ep.* 2.20, in which Regulus, after computing Galba's daughter-in-law's horoscope, rushes off to check his results with a *haruspex*.

89. Barton (1995b, 38–40) provides this and other examples. Note that a *haruspex* might be referred to as a *vates* (e.g., Livy 1.56; Luc. 1.584–85), and that the famous tale of Aelius Tubero indicates that *haruspices* might (like augurs) interpret bird signs (Val. Max. 5.6.4; Frontin. *Str.* 4.5.14; Pliny *HN* 10.41).

90. See, e.g., Wallace-Hadrill 2005, 65: “The triumph of Augustus is also the triumph of astrology. . . . From Augustus onward, astrology and other predictive sciences . . . flourish, and traditional divination disappears below the horizon.”

91. Note that Dio's passage is often assumed to refer to astrologers alone—a modern assumption, not an ancient one: see, e.g., Sánchez-Moreno Ellart 2009, 213. Dio Cass. 57.18.5a reports that Tiberius also edited the Sibylline books—possibly confusing Tiberius with Augustus (Suet. *Aug.* 31).

92. On the continued consultation of *haruspices* in the fourth century, see, e.g., Firm. Mat. *Math.* 2.30.4, and Champeaux 2005. On suppression of haruspicy in the later Empire (and thus its continued credibility), see Desanti 1990; Fögen 1993; Komorowska 1998, 165 (cf. 154 n. 11); Hano 2005; and Sogno 2005, 172, 175. Davies (2004, 166 n. 75) opines that astrology received more attention in our sources than haruspicy: “[h]aruspicy was less scandalous and therefore received less exposure in our painfully incomplete records which tend to assume the normal apparatus rather than foreground it.” Note examples of elite ambivalence about the claims of astrology: Cic. *Div.* 87–99, *Fat.* 15–16; Sen. *Suas.* 4; Plin. *HN* 2.23; Tac. *Ann.* 4.20, cf. 6.22.

93. On the propagandic use of haruspicy in this capacity, see Haack 2005.

included in the *Sortes Astrampsychi*, a form of lot oracle encased in a book.⁹⁴ Barton notes that the law did not differentiate between magic and astrology,⁹⁵ perhaps in part because the practices might overlap: Dorotheus, for example, gives pointers (5.32) on the best constellations under which to exorcise a demon from a man using incantations, drugs, or religious acts. Medical writers such as Galen might approve of the use of astrology in medicine, blurring the line between these two ostensibly distinct activities.⁹⁶ Dorotheus again proves his activities to be a case in point, as he makes suggestions (5.18) about the optimal time to perform an abortion, advises the best time for administering medications and treatments for particular ailments, and provides tips on prognostication (5.38–41). Should we consider Dorotheus an astrologer, a sorcerer, or a doctor? The overlap between astrology and other divinatory practices is thrown into sharper focus by an offhand comment by Dio. He tells us that Tiberius, under the tutelage of Thrasyllus, became so proficient in prophecy (μαντεία) that he even identified a demon by interpreting his own dream. It is therefore uncertain whether we are to imagine Tiberius as an astrologer (in accordance with his teacher's reputation), a dream interpreter, or a sorcerer.⁹⁷ The problem is probably best solved by thinking of astrology not as an exclusive science in strict polarity with other forms of divination (as has so often been assumed), but as a specialization that meshed well with other ancient prognostic and diagnostic practices—and by recognizing that astrology was just one of the services any given diviner in Rome might offer.⁹⁸ As Ramsay MacMullen has noted, those who claimed expertise in one form of divination often claimed it in several, though specialization in one kind was certainly an option.⁹⁹ To be sure, given that the provision of divination was a competitive business, it was prudent to be as well versed as, or better versed than, the competition in as many different methods as possible, even if only to dismiss them as inferior to one's own specialty.¹⁰⁰ This overlap of activity probably best explains the variety of groups that were expelled with astrologers at different points. Joint expulsions are best understood not as actions against separate groups, but rather as attempts to be comprehensive. For example, to return to the two *senatus consulta* of 17 C.E. to rid Rome of

94. Stewart (2001) provides the text, Hansen (1998, 285–324) a translation of the *Sortes Astrampsychi*. Cf., e.g., Dorotheus' advice at 5.9–12 (buying and selling property) with nos. 31, 81, 99 of the *Sortes Astrampsychi*; 5.16–17 (marriage) with nos. 17, 23, 27, and 80; 5.29 and 31 (illness) with nos. 24, 42, 54, and 59.

95. Barton 1994, 51; see also Dolbeau 2003, 169, 177–78. Faraone (1999, 74) describes an astrologer who wields magical love apples. Note also Plin. *HN* 30.2. Cf. St. Augustine's multit talented *haruspex* (*Conf.* 4.2), who demonstrates that the line between *haruspices* and magicians might be hazy too.

96. Barton 1995b, 53; Sánchez-Moreno Ellart 2009, 201–2. Gordon (1999, 231) identifies the relationship of magic to healing. On other combinations of specialized talents, see also Mart. 2.7; Juv. 6.548–52; Plin. *HN* 30.18; Plut. *X orat.* 833; Lucian *Alex.* 5.

97. Dio Cass. 57.15.7: καὶ μέντοι τῷ τε Θρασύλλῳ ἀεὶ συνὸν καὶ μαντεία τινὴ καθ' ἐκάστην ἡμέραν χρόμενος, αὐτὸς τε ἀκριβῶν οὕτω τὸ πρᾶγμα ὥστε ποτὲ ὄναρ δοῦναι τινὴ ἀργύριον κελευσθεῖς συνείναι τε ὅτι δαίμων τις ἐκ γοητείας οἱ ἐπιπέμπεται καὶ τὸν ἀνθρώπον ἀποκτείνει.

98. Even the authors of astrological treatises are often not necessarily to be identified first and foremost as astrologers; see Barton 1995b, 48, 203 nn. 260 and 261.

99. MacMullen 1966, 129. Cf. Goodyear (1972, 269) on the ban of 17 C.E.: "Often, no doubt, the same individuals practiced in more than one field, which may explain why *conectores* are not included in the ban on *astrologi* and *magi*." See also Gury 1996, 244–45.

100. Compare theurgists expressing distaste for astrology, augury, and haruspicy in the *Chaldaean Oracles*, in Johnston 1990, 86.

unsavory diviners, it is possible that two were necessary since the first was either too vague or too specific to identify whom the senate meant.¹⁰¹

But what appears as a confusion of purveyors and activity to us and to the general ancient population probably did not seem so to the various practitioners themselves. The fictionalized Nectanebo in Pseudo-Callisthenes' *Alexander Romance* (4) demonstrates what might have been quite common practice among the various "specialists" of Rome: the self-conscious claim of one identity when several might have been adopted. When asked by Queen Olympias what forms of divination he uses, Nectanebo tells her that he is a master of them all: dream interpretation, omen interpretation, augury, astrology, sorcery, just to name a few; but he refers to himself as a magician and an astrologer.¹⁰² In reality, however, prophetic abilities were of little benefit without an audience or a market, and a mere statement that one was in fact really a such-and-such sort of diviner would probably not have been adequate to convince those around. Thus the desire to be familiar with a wide swath of prophetic arts was balanced by a desire to claim mastery in a particular area of knowledge that might be ever more subdivided to become ever more specialized.¹⁰³ The advertisement of that specialization was undertaken not so much through the practice of the knowledge itself, but rather through observing the fine lines of difference of activity, appearance, or demeanor that defined those who were associated with that knowledge. In other words, it was the external characteristics that suggested one had the specialized knowledge or skill.¹⁰⁴

The philosopher Apollonius of Tyana, for example, is presented by Philostratus in his *Life of Apollonius* as an astrologer (e.g., 3.41.1, 4.43.1–2), prophet (e.g., 3.43, 4.10, 5.12; cf. 4.44.3 and 8.30), clairvoyant (e.g., 8.26.1), wonder worker (e.g., 4.20.3, 4.44.2), and one who even knows how to raise the dead (4.45.1–2) and practice necromancy, though he chooses not to (8.7.43–44). Unsurprisingly, he is eventually brought to trial by Domitian as a sorcerer (7.11.3, 7.17.1, 7.20.1–2).¹⁰⁵ He huffily defends himself: he is no sorcerer—if he were, he would have been visiting private homes in the dead of night for one-on-one meetings with clients (8.7.7). Rather, he is a philosopher, a fact

101. Note that Haack (2002, 112–13 and n. 6) understands these expulsions to include private *haruspices* too; Dio Cass. 57.15.8 suggests that diviners of all varieties were expelled. See also Desanti 1990, 37–39; Rives 2006, 62. Johnston (2008, 176–77) argues that magicians and diviners in general were cemented together in the minds of the ancient population by virtue of the fact that they all performed services for money and claimed superior knowledge.

102. ἡ δὲ εἶπεν ποῖα σκέψαι χρώμενος τὸ ἀληθὲς ἀπαγγέλλαις; ὁ δὲ εἶπεν· καλῶς ἀπεφῆνο, ὃ βασιλίσσα· πολισχιδῆς γάρ ἐστι τῆς σκέψεως ἡ κρίσις· εἰσὶ γὰρ ὄνειροκρίται σημειολύται ὄνειροσκοποὶ μάντιες ἀμιμονάντιες γενεθλιασχοὶ μάγοι ἀστρολόγοι. ἐγὼ οὖν πάντων τούτων ἐφαπτόμενος, κατ' ἐξοχὴν προφήτης ὄν Αἰγύπτου, καὶ μάγος εἰμὶ καὶ ἀστρολόγος.

103. Barton 1995b, 91; Gordon 1997, 143–44, 150. Cf. Artem. 4.20 for the advice to give detailed, rather than simple, explanations of dream interpretations to avoid looking unknowledgeable.

104. Plin. *Ep.* 1.10 describes how the physical appearance of Euphrates, the Syrian philosopher, commands respect. Cf. Hor. *Ars P.* 295–301, on the distinguishing physical features of poets. Apollonius (Philostr. *VA* 7.15.3) persuades Damis to change his philosopher's clothes for regular clothes, lest he be targeted for arrest; on the other hand, the distinctive dress of the priests of Isis allowed Domitian (Tac. *Hist.* 3.74, Suet. *Dom.* 1.2) and M. Volusius (App. *BCiv.* 4.47; Val. Max. 7.3.8) to hide in plain sight. Richlin (1993, 541–43) discusses the physical markers of *cinaedi*. Cf. Taylor 1997, 322–23.

105. Talbert (1978, 1621–22) and Bowie (1978, 1666–67, 1673–79) discuss characterizations of Apollonius as a magician in the ancient sources.

proven by his frugal diet of nuts (8.7.13, 27–28),¹⁰⁶ his long, unkempt hair (8.7.17), and his penchant for living in temples (1.8.2; 4.40.4). While his commanding manner of speaking distinguishes him from beggars (4.39.1), it is his habit of making imperious statements rather than asking questions that separates him from sophists (1.17.1).¹⁰⁷ These affectations, then, are the lines demarcating a philosopher, or rather, one kind of philosopher, though they are clearest, and matter the most, to those on the inside.¹⁰⁸

I suggest that the astrologers of Rome were similarly self-selecting: not everyone who understood or practiced some form of astrology would claim the title, and those who did claim the title probably had other areas of ability and expertise. The concern of the self-proclaimed astrologers would then be to achieve professional success in the competitive divinatory marketplace by differentiating themselves via behavior or attitude from their competition in a way that was suggestive of extraordinary authority; knowledge of some form of astrology alone would not be enough. It then remains to be seen what attitude marked off the self-proclaimed astrologer. I suggest that in 17 C.E., that is, the year of the Tiberian expulsion supposedly caused by the Libo Drusus affair, it came to be a flagrant disregard for recognized authority, and this attitude became a convenient vehicle for another goal, that is, fame.

There is a tendency to imagine astrologers as anonymous figures, either crouched over their mathematical tables in the homes of the elite, or providing readings in shadowy corners at the edge of the Circus Maximus.¹⁰⁹ But evidence suggests that anonymity was anathema to the self-proclaimed astrologer. On the contrary, self-proclaimed astrologers and competing specialists desired notoriety.¹¹⁰ Indeed, a bitter epitaph bears witness to the betrayal felt by those who put too much stock in an astrologer's fame.¹¹¹ As Apuleius and others demonstrate, fame brought crowds, in which the astrologer was at the center, advertising his wares;¹¹² crowds ensured the spread of rumor and reputation, and reputation brought clients. It is clear that specialists, including astrologers, sometimes had regular, well-organized adherents either to draw attention

106. On Apollonius' diet differentiating him from specifically magicians, see Potter 1994, 165–66. Apuleius provides another famous example of a self-proclaimed philosopher accused of being a magician; see Rives 2003, esp. 322–28.

107. Cf. also Dio Chrys. *Or.* 13.10–12, 70.8–10, 72; and Thorndike 1913, 423.

108. Lucian (*De mercede conductis* 25) comments on the beard and cloak as markers of “true” philosophers, who are then employed in illustrious households less for their lectures than for their ability to be examples of conspicuous consumption. Physical characteristics were not foolproof markers of identity, however, as Lucian notes elsewhere (40) that there are those who parade falsely as philosophers by wearing the clothes but who offer prophecies, love charms, or curses instead of erudition. Cf. Taylor 1997, 339–40, on meaningful subcultural mannerisms and signals among homosexual and bisexual men that were misunderstood by larger society.

109. E.g., Pease 1973, 335: “We are probably to imagine these quacks as chiefly haunting the arcade around the outside of the Circus, one of the most disreputable parts of the city.”

110. See Artem. 2.36, 3.21, 4.47; Gury 1996, 245. Firmicus Maternus' much later advice (*Math.* 2.30) on the proper comportment of an astrologer, that is, to lead a quiet life and to be unconcerned for material gain, was presumably felt to be necessary since many behaved in the opposite manner.

111. *CIL* 6.4.27140: [*de*]cepit utrosque maxima mendacis fama mathematici.

112. Apul. *Met.* 2.12; for a *haruspex* in the middle of a crowd (*in contione*), see Serv. ad. Verg. *Ecl.* 9.46. Cf. Lucian *Alex.* 9. O'Neill 2003, 145: “fortune tellers and astrologers were said to find an audience *in . . . vulgi circulis*.”

or to spread reputation;¹¹³ Dio (61.33.3b [Zonaras 11.10]) reports that the “adherents” of the astrologers banished in 52 C.E. were also punished (καὶ οἱ αὐτοῖς συγγινόμενοι ἐκολάσθησαν). Artemidorus reveals that the private affairs of the famous specialist might even suffer from the same sort of public scrutiny of famous figures so common in popular media today, relating a tale of a famous prophet who had to leave Rome in shame when it was discovered that his wife was cheating on him.¹¹⁴

As we have seen, the admiring, if sometimes critical, crowds were made up of the general masses, not members of the elite. But this is not to say that fame could not win one invitations to the homes of illustrious clients—recall once again Pammenes, kept comfortable in exile on his Cycladic island thanks to the wealthy “friends” whom he had won through his fame as an astrologer.¹¹⁵ This fact once again suggests that the real difference between “street astrologers” of the Circus and Forum and the astrologers who serviced the elite was not practice, skill, or whether they took compensation for their services, but the degree of fame and success they had experienced, and hence whether their lowly clients came to them in public places or they were summoned to the houses of the illustrious. Though gaining an illustrious client could mean becoming a member of that person’s permanent household staff,¹¹⁶ it did not necessarily mean this at all. Well-known philosophers, prophets, diviners, and astrologers often give the impression of being free-lance agents who might engage in professional relationships with a variety of clients at once, or over the course of their professional lives.¹¹⁷ For example, Ptolemy Seleucus, Juvenal’s *saepius exul* (6.557), is identified as one of Poppaea’s astrologers. And yet he is free to accompany or join Otho in 69 C.E. in Lusitania (Tac. *Hist.* 1.22; Suet. *Oth.* 4.1; Plut. *Galb.* 23.4). Cynthia Damon observes that “[i]t is odd that one of Poppaea’s associates accompanied Otho in his quasi-exile,” but it is perhaps less odd if we do not consider him to be a member of Poppaea’s household.¹¹⁸ He is then later discovered giving advice to Vespasian (Tac. *Hist.* 2.78.1). He was, in short, the member of no one’s household or staff—instead he gives the impression of working on contract. Similarly, Artemidorus (4.2, 4.59) advises getting to know the habits of one’s client to

113. Nice 2003, 406. Plin. *HN* 29.9 mentions the adoring crowds that might attend a famous astrologer; Plut. *Sull.* 5.5–6 comments on the retinue of Orobazus, a Chaldaean. Lucian *Alex.* 24 describes Alexander of Abonoteichus’ use of itinerant messengers to advertise his exploits and promote his fame. Nippel (1995, 87 n. 2) suggests that the banishment of philosophers and magicians during the first century C.E. might have been “partly motivated by suspicion of organized groups.” Cf. also Nippel 1995, 93–94, on the riots caused by actors and their “organized supporters,” and the punishments and expulsions and restrictions meted out.

114. Artem. 5.69. Contrast Neugebauer and Van Hoesen (1959, 121, L 123, I) for a popular celebrity being released by the governor of a province thanks to the riotous pressure applied by his fans.

115. Tac. *Ann.* 16.14.

116. Consider the career of the Stoic Diodotus with Cicero: Cic. *Att.* 2.20.6, *Acad.* 2.36.115, *Brut.* 90.309. Lucian (*De mercede conductis* 39–40) demonstrates that the relationship could also be ended by the host.

117. This fluidity and flexibility of relationship is mirrored in recent considerations of the system of patronage itself; see Mouritsen 2001, 73–75, with references, and Eilers 2002, 1–17. Cf. Herennius Sículus’ relationship with Gaius Gracchus; he is identified as both the famous man’s *haruspex* and *amicus* (Val. Max. 9.12). Note also Artem. 3.2, where dreams of becoming a prophet indicate a great deal of travel for the dreamer; cf. also 4.4 and 5 *praef.*

118. Damon 2003, 151.

facilitate the interpretation of his dreams, but there is no suggestion that this familiarity should regularly extend to a permanent relationship.

Thus fame was the aspiration of the self-proclaimed astrologer, and the law, ironically, made fame much easier to achieve. By proscribing certain activities, it prescribed how influence and fame might be won by demonstrating oneself to be a counterauthority. It is often said that the law makes criminals,¹¹⁹ and in 17 C.E., the law made Expellable Astrologers, that is, the type targeted by, responsive to, and as we shall see, exploitative of, mass expulsion orders. This was the year that at least one of the *senatus consulta*, mentioned above, was passed, supposedly in response to the treasonous horoscoping of Libo Drusus. Ulpian (*Mos. et Rom. legum coll.* 15.2.1) provides the most information about the law itself:

praeterea interdictum est mathematicorum callida inopstura et obstinata persuasione. nec hodie primum interdicti eis placuit, sed vetus haec prohibitio est. denique extat senatus consultum Pomponio et Rufo cons. factum quo cavetur, ut mathematicis Chaldaeis ariolis et ceteris, qui simile inceptum fecerunt, aqua et igni interdicatur omniaque bona eorum publicentur, et si externarum gentium quis id fecerit, ut in eum animadvertatur.

Also banned is the crafty and stubbornly persuasive fraud of the astrologers. It is not just in modern times that this has been banned, rather, it is an old prohibition. In short, there is a decree of the senate dating to the consulship of Pomponius and Rufus [17 C.E.] that prescribes exile and property confiscation for *mathematici*, Chaldaeans, soothsayers, and all who do similar things, or death (?) if the person is a foreigner.

Certainly this was not the first prohibition that affected astrologers and other specialists in unofficial forms of divination. As mentioned above, in 139 and 33 B.C.E. astrologers had been driven from Rome (Val. Max. 1.3.3; Dio Cass. 49.43.5). As recently as 11 C.E., Augustus had a law passed that forbade seers (τοῖς μάντεσιν ἀπηγορεύθη) to give prophecy to anyone alone, or to prophesy to anyone about death even if not alone (Dio Cass. 56.25.5). But the actions of 139 and 33 B.C.E. were no more than statements, like modern restrictions on smoking and public nudity, that there were places unsuitable for certain activities; these did not outlaw the activities themselves or their purveyors. The law of 11 C.E. is not unlike modern legislation against driving under the influence of alcohol, in that it aimed to control users' behavior in defined contexts as much as or more than the purveyors' behavior.¹²⁰

The *senatus consulta* of 17 C.E., on the other hand, presented a different kettle of fish, as they identified for the first time purveyors of unofficial forms of divination, including astrologers, as criminals who were subject to punishment. This year also stood, at least in popular memory, as the first time that punishment was actually meted out.¹²¹ The law and events of 17 C.E.

119. Note Beccaria's observation in Bellamy 1995, 20–21, and the discussion of deviance as a social, legal, and political concept in Cohen 2002, 4–9; cf. Sen. *Clem.* 1.23.

120. Potter (1994, 174) and Gordon (1999, 261) note that this legislation proves that divination in and of itself was not illegal.

121. Gordon (1999, 262) reports the information contained in the Chronicle of 354, which "claims that it was under Tiberius that *venenarii and malefici* were for the first time arrested and executed." Note that Gordon himself sees nothing remarkable about this expulsion, describing it as "no more than another routine repression of 'astrologers and magicians.'" Much discussion has been devoted to whether the legal actions of 16/17 C.E.

swathed any who chose to adopt such identities for themselves in an aura of rebellious danger. In the Late Republic and Augustan period the problem was not so much that purveyors of astrology were anti-authoritarian in their demeanor (though it is to be expected that they, as other diviners, might reflect the climate of popular sentiment),¹²² but rather that they were as often as not yes-men, promising long lives and happy futures to individuals; this earned them the general disdain of senators whose authority to no small extent rested in its gloomy capacity to save the Roman community from dire prodigies and portents.¹²³ After 17 C.E., the self-proclaimed astrologer, now the Expellable Astrologer, had forever a handle and an edge. If they chose, astrologers could now embody the anti-authoritarian attitude that is not merely assumed to exist by the law, but is even explicitly reflected in our legal sources: Ulpian (*Mos. et Rom. legum coll.* 15.2.1–3) informs us that nearly every emperor after Tiberius renewed the legislation against prophets of all stripes, including astrologers, “because they often practice base arts against the public peace and the *imperium* of the Roman people” (*quoniam nonnumquam contra publicam quietem imperiumque populi Romani improbandas artes exercent*). It is frequently observed that the law identifying astrologers as criminals had the side effect of granting authority to astrology; but the ostentatious disregard for the law is what granted authority to individual self-proclaimed astrologers, and thus presented one avenue to success and fame. The most daring demonstration of unconcern for the law and thus the most effective form of self-promotion was no doubt prophesying the death of the emperor. Thus, after 17 C.E., rashes of astrologers declared the imminent death of the current *princeps*. Witness, for example, Mercury’s exasperated exclamation in the *Apocolocyntosis* that the astrologers who have been prophesying Claudius’ death on a monthly basis should be allowed to be right for once,¹²⁴ or consider Ascleptarian, the astrologer who was dragged before Domitian for making predictions about the life of the emperor.¹²⁵ Anecdotes of death prophecies in historical narratives are often significantly silent about the actual inquirer, leaving the impression that these declarations were made autonomously by astrologers as a form of self-advertisement. Suspicion must meet the stories spread about by the Egyptian Apollonius, or by Larginus Proculus of Germany, who claimed to have been hauled to Rome to be put to death for having forecast the impending fates of Caligula and Domitian respectively,

were extensions of the *lex Cornelia*; see, e.g., Desanti 1990, 33–41; Rives 2006, 61–62; Sánchez-Moreno Ellart 2009, 208–10. (The Latin text of the Chronicle of 354 [edited by Roger Pearse] can be found at http://www.ccel.org/ccel/pearse/morefathers/files/chronography_of_354_16_chronicle_of_the_city_of_rome.htm.)

122. Serv. ad. Verg. *Ecl.* 9.46, cited and discussed by Ramsey (2006, 112–13), provides an example of a *harsupex* giving an alternative interpretation to Caesar’s comet *in contione*. See also Potter 1994, 173–74.

123. Barton 1994, 40; Gordon 1999, 261; Nice 2003, 406; Davies 2004, 161, 166–68; Wallace-Hadrill 2005, 64. See Cic. *Div.* 2.99 on the positive horoscopes delivered to the triumvirs; cf. also Plut. *Sull.* 37.1 for a similar prediction delivered to Sulla. The consul Octavius is said by Plutarch (*Mar.* 42.4) to have been fatally persuaded by a favorable horoscope to remain in Rome when Marius seized the city. Given this tendency toward positive, incorrect predictions, it is probably significant that Thrasyllus was sometimes imagined to have earned his reputation as a “true” astrologer by interpreting a horoscope in a negative light (Tac. *Ann.* 6.22; Dio Cass. 55.11.2); though cf. Oliver 1980 and Suet. *Tib.* 14.4.

124. Sen. *Apocol.* 3: *patere mathematicos aliquando verum dicere, qui illum, ex quo princeps factus est, omnibus annis omnibus mensibus efferunt.*

125. Suet. *Dom.* 15.3; Dio Cass. 67.16.3. See also Desanti 1990, 77–78; and Sijpesteijn 1990.

since each was supposedly and conveniently saved by the realization of his prophecy before the sentence was carried out.¹²⁶ The astrologer Sulla was reputed, perhaps thanks to his own efforts, to have informed Caligula of his impending death.¹²⁷ Such claims were intended to cause a buzz, and evidently did, to judge by the fact that even we know about the prophetic prowess of these otherwise unknown figures.

But self-proclaimed astrologers were not confined to forecasting the emperor's death to advertise themselves as daring stirrers of the political pot. The independent and inventive nature of Expellable Astrologers is perhaps best detected by examining what our historians have to say about the competing imperial horoscopes of elite men. Self-proclaimed astrologers were often less likely to take sides in a preexisting power struggle at the top than to precipitate the appearance of such a situation by creating and spreading rumors. A case in point is provided by the competition for power between Nero and Rubellius Plautus that developed seemingly without the action of either in 60 C.E. (Tac. *Ann.* 14.22). Plautus, try as he might to live a quiet life, found himself the talk of the city after someone decided that the heavens were pointing him out as a replacement for Nero. O'Neill argues that it is the showmen-prophets at the center of crowds who were responsible for the creation and circulation of these stories.¹²⁸ Mettius Pomposianus, another unfortunate man who was popularly rumored to have an imperial horoscope, found himself spared by Vespasian, but murdered by Domitian for this unwitting reputation (Suet. *Vesp.* 14; Dio Cass. 67.12.2–4). Vespasian was informed in 69 C.E. that during his absence in the East, the various prophets of Rome had been expounding his imperial fate to the population (Suet. *Vesp.* 5–7; Tac. *Hist.* 1.86, 2.78).¹²⁹ Although these reports encouraged him to action, and although Vespasian's supporters in Rome are suspected by some to have been behind the favorable prophecies that were in circulation,¹³⁰ the rumors are presented by our sources as circulating independently of Vespasian; such, at the very least, was a plausible scenario. Nerva's life was imperiled for similar reasons: through no action or fault of his own, his horoscope was bruited as imperial—a situation that almost got him killed, but also helped to convince him to join the side of the conspirators against Domitian (Dio Cass. 67.15.4–6).

Astrologers are in evidence advertising disruptive messages in other situations too. Tacitus, for example, reports a chorus of astrological prophecies attending Tiberius' retirement to Capri to the effect that he would not return (Tac. *Ann.* 4.58). These kinds of activities were not isolated to Rome or Italy. Ptolemy Seleucus' visit to Otho in Lusitania, to reveal the stars' indication

126. Dio Cass. 59.29.4, 67.16.2. Note that it was up to the governor of the province to administer justice there—particularly where the treatment of non-Romans was concerned; see Lintott 1993, 54–59.

127. Suet. *Calig.* 57.2, where Sulla is said to have been personally consulted by Caligula: *consulenti quoque de genitura sua Sulla mathematicus certissimam necem appropinquare affirmavit.*

128. O'Neill (2003, 145) and Davies (2004, 174 and n. 106) note further that elite men could discover their names banded about as potential emperors in popular rumor without their own agency.

129. Dio Cass. 64.8 reports a spate of prodigies negative for Vitellius (and consequently potentially positive for Vespasian).

130. E.g., Potter 1994, 173. Henrichs (1968) discusses the oracles and omens Vespasian received in Egypt; these do seem likely to have been the work of Vespasian's supporters.

that 69 would be a very good year (Tac. *Hist.* 1.22), is probably more famous than unique: Philostratus (VA 5.10.1, 5.28, 7.4.3) also tells of Apollonius' attempts to rouse dissent in the provinces.¹³¹ And natural disasters offered great opportunities for crowd-seeking prophets; Apollonius decries the descent of astrologers upon the vulnerable, earthquake-shaken cities of Asia, and elsewhere provides evidence that public calamities might be identified by prophets of various types as caused by the inappropriate behavior of emperors.¹³² It is therefore understandable that Suetonius (*Vit.* 14.4) reports Vitellius' loathing of astrologers as equivalent to that of his hatred for writers of lampoons (*nullius tamen infensor quam vernaculis et mathematicis*)¹³³—the results of their actions might be similarly eroding to an emperor's ability to maintain respect and authority with the population. The whittling effect of the popular rumor mill could indeed have profound consequences. Tacitus (*Hist.* 1.89.2) credits it with helping to speed the unraveling of a tottering dynasty, remarking that Nero was chased from the throne by rumors rather than by violence.¹³⁴ A riled-up crowd might even apply pressure on the legitimate authorities to act or to rescind edicts. Dio (55.31.2–3), for example, reports that Augustus undertook some public religious rites to mollify a crowd that had been made anxious by the bizarre acts of a female prophet.¹³⁵ Domitian's withdrawal of his law about viticulture is variously attributed to the circulation of Sibylline-like verses and the arrival of embassies encouraged by crowd-drawing specialists (Suet. *Dom.* 14.2, cf. 7.2; Philostr. VA 6.43).¹³⁶ The exceptional Apollonius of Tyana once again proves the rule by convincing a crowd to stop its violence against a magistrate considered responsible for a food shortage (Philostr. VA 1.15).¹³⁷ It is no wonder that Dio (52.36.3) imagines Maecenas directing Augustus to retain divination but to remove sorcerers (γόητες)—surely a generic term for “specialists” of various fame-seeking sorts here—because they incite revolution (νεοχμοῦν ἐπαίρουσι).¹³⁸

131. Bowie (1978, 1660–62) discusses the dubious historicity of Apollonius' political escapades, but it is still significant that Philostratus expects his audience to find them plausible.

132. Philostr. VA 6.41, 8.5.2. See also Potter 1994, 172–73.

133. “Writers of lampoons” follows Rolfe's translation of *vernaculis* ([1914] 1970). On this meaning, cf. Mart. 1.41.2 and 10.3.1. Rives (2002, 287–88) discusses slander and concerns for public order reaching back to the Early Republic.

134. While Suetonius (*Ner.* 47) implies that the rumors in question were those pertaining to the revolts in the provinces, Potter (1994, 173) suggests that the rumored interpretations of various prodigies that marked, or were said to mark, the end of his reign did equal damage.

135. It is undoubtedly significant that there were serious food shortages around the same time and that violence threatened; see Garnsey 1988, 24–27, 220–22; Erdkamp 2002, 101; and Dio Cass. 55.27.3. Yavetz (1969, 15, 17) provides further examples of emperors bowing to public pressure, though our sources make no mention of the role of “specialists” in these.

136. SHA *Marc.* 13.6 recounts an attempt by a prophet to feed popular fear with apocalyptic predictions during already-troubled times, and Marcus Aurelius' magnanimous methods of defusing the situation. Note also the *probra in magistratus* and *dissensio vulgi* brought about by the *certamina histrionum* reported in Tac. *Ann.* 1.54 and 1.77, the mutinous sentiments whipped up by the *gregarius miles* and former *dux theatralium operarum* Percennius (*Ann.* 1.16), and by Vibulenus (*Ann.* 1.22–23), another *gregarius miles* but with no theatrical background, through his own histrionics.

137. Note that Apollonius is in the same place credited with resolving civil conflict wherever he went in Asia during this time, despite the fact that he continued to observe a vow of silence. Erdkamp (2002, 104–5) discusses this anecdote and a similar one involving the Cynic philosopher Pancrates in Philostr. VS 1.23.

138. Cf. also Ulpian at *Mos. et Rom. legum coll.* 15.2.1–3 and Paulus *Sent.* 5.21.1–2.

But there is another way the law against astrology was advantageous for astrologers seeking to claim an authoritative identity, as its renewal appears to have been manifested in expulsions of astrologers from Rome or Italy. On the face of it, the protean nature of membership in the category of astrologer would seem to render any attempt at expulsion equivalent to an attempt to scoop water from a bucket with a slotted spoon. Perhaps this is one explanation why astrologers were never cast once and for all from Rome or Italy: in theory, the city could be rid of astrologers without a single person leaving, provided everyone who had embraced the identity gave it up.¹³⁹ But the identity could be just as easily readopted when it seemed safe to do so.¹⁴⁰ There is, however, every reason to suppose that some self-proclaimed astrologers did physically, and perhaps even ostentatiously, leave the city in response to various bans of the early Empire. Given the public nature of their pursuits, when faced with renewed legislation, self-proclaimed astrologers would have the choice either of relinquishing the activity and staying in the city, or of embracing the persona of an Expellable Astrologer and leaving. Leaving the city would have the pragmatic advantage of being able to continue business elsewhere, and also the desirable effect of proving definitively to the population at large that one was not some inconsequential diviner, but an Expellable Astrologer of great and dangerous skill.¹⁴¹ Philostratus (VA 7.11.4) provides a significant comparison in the detail that during Domitian's ban of philosophers, a certain Telesinus chose to leave the city as a philosopher rather than stay as a consular, and so proclaimed his primary identity. This opportunity to publicize one's identity as an Expellable Astrologer could result in real benefits, an observation that seems paradoxical, as removal from the city was intended to neutralize, not inflate, the exiles' influence. Exile was the usual punishment in lieu of physical execution for the elite, since removal from the city translated into political death:¹⁴² *autoritas* and influence were useless, indeed, nonexistent, in a vacuum since they required constant feeding in the form of manifest displays.¹⁴³ However, for those whose authority did not derive from traditional, officially sanctioned activities, offices, status, and trappings, expulsion proved that one had been recognized as a threat to the same tradition that endowed legitimate authorities with influence—thus, fame and influence were not decreased, but increased. Juvenal comments upon the notoriety, and thus fame and success, of astrologers who advertised

139. See Suet. *Tib.* 36 and Dio Cass. 57.15.8 on the pardon extended under Tiberius to astrologers who promised not to practice any longer.

140. Cramer 1954, 232–33.

141. Gury (1996, 256–57) offers another explanation for the desirability of physical isolation from regular society for the astrologer: this situation underscores his intermediary position between the human and divine.

142. Relegation beyond the one-hundredth milestone was a common punishment for the non-elite too. For example, this was the punishment for freedmen who were convicted under the *lex Aelia Sentia* of 4 C.E. for ingratitude toward their ex-masters; see Gardner 1993, 41–50. Though Tacitus (*Ann.* 13.26–27) imagined this punishment as an enforced beach holiday, it is clear that removal from the city was intended as a penalty. Cf. Artem. 1.51, where dreams suggesting necessary removal from the city are said to be bad for everyone.

143. Cf. Val. Max. 2.10.5, where P. Rutilius's *autoritas* is preserved thanks to the displays of public gratitude by the Asian population after wrongful exile.

themselves as freshly returned from exile—particularly, it seems, from places where those deemed to be threats to the emperor were sent (6.557–64).¹⁴⁴

praecipuus tamen est horum, qui saepius exul . . .
 inde fides artis, sonuit si dextera ferro . . .
 nemo mathematicus genium indemnatus habebit,
 sed qui paene perit, cui vix in Cyclada mitti
 contigit et parva tandem latuisse¹⁴⁵ Seripho.

Most famous is the one who has most often been in exile . . .
 It breeds trust in his skill if a handcuff clatters on his right hand . . .
 No astrologer will be credited with talent if he hasn't been condemned,
 Only the one who scarcely escaped with his life, who managed to be sent
 to a Cycladic island by the skin of his teeth,
 And who bided his time in obscurity on tiny Seriphos.

Seen from this angle, the mass purges of astrologers were not blows by the “mailed fist”¹⁴⁶ of the Roman authorities slamming down on persecuted astrologers who could not help being what they were, but rather opportunities knocking on the doors of fame-seeking entrepreneurs: we see not expulsion but voluntary exodus. We would most probably hear of mass purges of other self-identified engagers in illicit activity—adulterers, for example—if there were some benefit for individuals in being publicly identified as an adulterer.

3. THE REPETITION OF EXPULSIONS

If the self-selecting nature of expelled astrologers explains who went and why they went, we must still ask why legislation against astrologers was renewed, since it seems that astrologers left en masse only in response to an official action. If Juvenal was aware that expulsion translated into benefits for the astrologers, it is unlikely that the emperors remained ignorant. To address this problem, we must consider where the self-proclaimed astrologers were and what they were doing against a more general backdrop of imperial concerns and, I suggest, in the light of modern theories of mass communication. This combination of information and approaches will allow conclusions to be drawn that are sufficiently flexible to address at last a question that has begun to nag: why were there so many expulsions of astrologers in Roman history, and yet, why were there not more?

As we have seen, self-proclaimed astrologers were self-fashioned “loose cannons” in the midst of admiring, and possibly disconcertingly well-organized, crowds.¹⁴⁷ The ability of an individual invested with authority to conduct the

144. Bingham 2003, 397. MacMullen 1966, 133–34: expulsion gains “fame, as by official endorsement.” Cf. also Gury 1996, 247. Tacitus (*Ann.* 14.50) comments on the popularity of banned books.

145. I follow Braund 2004; the manuscripts have *caruisse*.

146. Cramer (1954, 233) uses the image.

147. These might quite reasonably recall the difficulties of the Late Republic related to gangs, *collegia*, and unofficial collectivities; on these, see Lintott 1999, 74–88; and Nippel 1995, 29–30. Vanderbroeck (1987, 52–66, esp. 61–62) describes the communicative and mobilizing function of an array of “intermediate leaders,” people in direct contact with segments of the larger population. Though the intermediate leaders Vanderbroeck has in mind are attached to politicians, a specialist’s adherents could be understood to perform functions similar to those of the *claqueurs* in particular.

behavior of the crowd has long been recognized; consider the positive example of Vergil's (*Aen.* 1.148–53) famous metaphor of the great man soothing the raucous mob with his presence, and the negative (if seen from an imperial perspective) examples of the small successes experienced by Pseudo-Marius, a false Drusus, and a collection of fake Neros who sought to appropriate the authority of the person they imitated.¹⁴⁸ Therefore, and on the face of it, it seems that self-proclaimed astrologers, authoritatively armed with their counterauthority cachet, might have the ability to influence public opinion—not, as with these last examples, to rally support for themselves, but to wear away support for the current emperor. This is particularly so since the views astrologers espoused would be ostensibly rooted not in personal sentiment, but rather in astrological findings: this apparent objectivity might render the messages persuasive, and worthy of crediting and passing on. It is worth pausing here for a moment over the concept of “public opinion” to define it more closely. Public opinion, as it would matter to the Roman authorities, must surely be taken not as the sum of the sentiments of the individuals who made up the Roman population, but rather as the opinion that any one individual would feel comfortable voicing in public.¹⁴⁹ That is, public opinion must be understood not as popular consensus so much as accepted and vocalized views, opinions whose vocalization promotes still wider-spread acceptance and dampens open dissension. The influence latent in the persons of self-proclaimed astrologers might therefore stand in direct conflict with an emperor's need to maintain good public opinion, especially as it pertained to his duty and ability to maintain peace in the city.¹⁵⁰ Imperial concerns over the activities of popular political pot-stirrers and detractors extended beyond egocentric concerns for reputation, as the repression or avoidance of *seditio* in the public areas of the city was considered one of the emperor's duties.¹⁵¹ Benjamin Kelly has recently demonstrated that the ideal of an emperor able to command order by virtue of popular respect for his authority had application in actual imperial comportment.¹⁵² Summoning troops to quell public disturbances was considered a last resort, and one far less preferable to making a personal appeal to the crowd. Actions dictated posterity, as the successful employment of nonviolent tactics or the resort to violence is used by ancient historians to characterize “good” and “bad” emperors respectively.¹⁵³

Self-proclaimed astrologers might, as we have seen in the previous section, influence popular opinion in their pursuit of their professional aims—but given the relatively small number of expulsions we hear of in Roman history, it is also clear that they did not always influence it, or did not always influence it profoundly enough to render them a sufficiently large thorn in the impe-

148. Millar 1964, 217–18; Yavetz 1969, 58–73; Tac. *Hist.* 1.2.1, 2.8; Suet. *Ner.* 57.3; Dio Cass. 58.25.1, 66.19.3b–c; cf. Tac. *Ann.* 2.39–40; Dio Cass. 57.16.3–4.

149. Jeffres (1997, 118–31) discusses this concept in the context of modern mass media.

150. O'Neill 2003, 145; Yavetz (1969, 22) also comments on the necessity of maintaining the “confidence of the people” and the ability of this confidence to be undermined by rumor. Contrast Griffin (1991, 40–41), who denies the threat posed by “lampoons and grumbling at street corners.”

151. Kelly 2007, 156–60; contrast Nippel 1995, 98.

152. Kelly 2007; contrast Yavetz 1969, 11–12; Griffin 1991, 39–40; and Nippel 1995, 90–98.

153. Kelly 2007, 162–63.

rial side to inspire an expulsion notice. In fact, it seems that self-proclaimed astrologers were expelled relatively rarely in comparison with the number of daring and dire forecasts they made. If we recall Ulpian's statement (*Mos. et Rom. legum coll.* 15.2.1–3) that nearly every emperor renewed legislation against diviners and astrologers, it is possible that expulsions were ordered more often than we think.¹⁵⁴ But it must be presumed that more dreadful and undermining predictions were made about public safety, or about the appropriateness of the emperor's behavior, or about the appropriateness of the emperor himself, than caused expulsions. There were, for example, the various rumors mentioned in the previous sections that resulted in no mass expulsions. Perhaps even more significant is the fact that comets were much more common than we hear about in our (extant) historical sources. Comets often appear in our sources as indication of calamities to follow—plagues, conspiracies, wars, changes of leader—and, as we have seen, were variously interpreted by *haruspices* and astrologers. According to John Ramsey, modern estimates suggest that within a hundred-year period, there are approximately twenty comets or astral objects bright enough to be seen by the naked eye.¹⁵⁵ But no mention of any comet exists in our historical sources between the years 13 and 54 C.E., or between 79 and 117 C.E. It is, to say the least, unlikely that the comets went unnoticed, uninterpreted, and uncommented on by astrologers or other diviners.

We are consequently left to wonder: if astrological prediction plain and simple did not necessarily make astrologers a constant threat, and if their fame seeking and their ability to command the attention of large segments of the population did not either, what did make them a threat? Or rather, when did all of these factors in combination make them a threat? And, as I shall address a little further below, were they a real or a perceived threat? It is at this point that studies of modern mass media can prove useful for contemplation of ancient history. Indeed, it is perhaps necessary to consider this field here because expectations of the role mass media can play in the formation of public opinion have been implicitly embraced in previous explanations for the expulsion of astrologers. The so-called “hypodermic needle” model, in which the media exercise absolute control over public opinion,¹⁵⁶ lurks beneath assertions to the effect that “from any point of view an emperor whose death date was known was a dead emperor,” and behind conclusions that widespread conviction in the power of astrology threatened chaos and inspired expulsions whenever a member of the elite chose to use astrology to further his own aims.¹⁵⁷ Mass-media studies have moved away—and so too should ancient historians—from this simplistic model of message-as-cause and its pure adoption-as-effect, to contemplate instead the ongoing debate about the degree to which the media influence public opinion.¹⁵⁸ Though no

154. His categorization of perpetrators by action at 15.2.3 (*nam qui de principis salute, capite puniti sunt vel qua alia poena graviore adfecti: enimvero si qui de sua suorumque, levius*) seems to suggest, however, that mass expulsions were not ordered as much as individuals were punished.

155. Ramsey 2006, 13–14; Barton 1995b, 39–40.

156. Jeffres 1997, 12–17.

157. Barton 1995b, 57. See also, e.g., Cramer 1954, 115, and MacMullen 1966, 131.

158. Cohen and Young 1973, 10–11; Jeffres 1997, 17; Stevenson 2002.

consensus on this point is likely to be reached, it is noteworthy that the media are now thought to be but a single factor in the formation of popular opinion, along with “existing beliefs, feelings, and information held by media consumers, and other environmental factors.”¹⁵⁹ If it has been demonstrated that now, in the age of mass media, public opinion is not something to be directly controlled, it cannot be posited that in antiquity, when no mass media existed, an astrologer could cause pandemonium simply by referring to a troubling horoscope. Instead, adopting the approach encouraged more recently by mass-media studies allows us to consider the conclusion that astrologers were just one force among many in the molding of opinion, and were not always, and perhaps not even often, a dominant force.¹⁶⁰ On this understanding, the daring, disruptive, or dire predictions of astrologers might only influence popular opinion in a problematic way when the audience was already receptive to such interpretations of the current state of affairs. In other words, astrologers did not cause problems so much as help to exacerbate preexisting difficulties, perhaps threatening to bring events to the point of crisis—but only when other factors were at play encouraging such results.¹⁶¹

There were two situations in which self-proclaimed astrologers might step into the limelight as potential threats to those in positions of recognized power, and therefore find themselves the target of renewed expulsions. The first is when a new emperor occupied a newly captured, and thus not uncontested, throne. The ability to maintain public order at this point would have been vital for the very reason that it would have also been so precarious; at the same time, such situations would have provided a great deal of fodder for prophets and omen interpreters of all varieties, including astrologers. Thus it is unsurprising that both Vitellius and Vespasian sought to rid the city of astrologers either in advance of their arrival, or very soon after: the city of Rome was or had recently been a war zone, and media control was as important to a brand-new emperor then as it is in political coups now.¹⁶² The other situation that might occasion an expulsion was when popular unrest threatened and the emperor felt that his personal authority was being dangerously eroded, to the point that he would be unable to quell difficulties in the city without resorting to violence. But this was not simply when his death date had been forecast and broadcast, or when another member of the elite was unwittingly advertised to have an imperial horoscope. On the contrary, expulsions would come at the end of a long series of events causing popular dissatisfaction with the emperor or popular uncertainty over continued political stability. At this point, dire predictions of astrologers could seem to be the tipping point between order and chaos in the city, chaos that the emperor, bereft of the ability to command

159. Jeffres 1997, 17; cf. Cohen 2002, 49–58.

160. See Potter 1994, 173–74: “some of the prophetic problems attested at Rome can be connected not with highly placed political rivals of the emperors, but rather with general popular unease, prophetic commentaries on the state of affairs.”

161. Allport and Postman (1958) provide the classic study of the factors that influence the spread of rumor. See also McCombs and Becker 1979, 34–36.

162. Dio Cass. 64.19.3. The 2002 documentary *The Revolution Will not Be Televised* (directed by Kim Bartley and Donnacha O’Brian) about attempts to unseat Hugo Chávez in Venezuela presents a compelling modern example.

popular respect, would be unable to quell except with force.¹⁶³ Consider the expulsion of 52 C.E., for example, a situation supposedly precipitated by Furius Scribonianus' consultation of astrologers about Claudius' demise. But a closer look at Tacitus' description of the events makes it clear that there was more to it (*Ann.* 12.52):

Fausto Sulla Salvio Othone consulibus Furius Scribonianus in exilium agitur, quasi finem principis per Chaldaeos scrutaretur. . . . pater Scriboniani Camillus arma per Dalmatiam moverat; idque ad clementiam trahebat Caesar, quod stirpem hostilem iterum conservaret. neque tamen exuli longa posthac vita fuit: morte fortuita an per venenum extinctus esset, ut quisque crederet, vulgare. de mathematicis Italia pellendis factum senatus consultum atrox et inritum.

In the consulship of Faustus Sulla and Salvius Otho, Furius Scribonianus was exiled on the allegation that he was using astrologers to determine the emperor's death. . . . His father, Camillus, had stirred up a rebellion in Dalmatia, and Claudius was seeking a reputation for clemency by showing mercy to a hostile family. But the exile died shortly after this; it was banded about whether he expired by chance or by poison, as was each person's opinion. A harsh but useless decree of the Senate was passed expelling astrologers from Italy.

While Scribonianus' exile was clearly the result of his consultation of astrologers, it is not at all clear that this same consultation caused their mass expulsion. Claudius' concern does not appear to have been rooted in an astrologically identified death date, or even in Scribonianus' potential ability to unseat him; the problem seems to have been the rumors that circulated over the cause of Scribonianus' death, which subverted Claudius' magnanimous gestures designed to prove his clemency, and indeed, complete lack of concern on these same points. Astrologers may well have been behind the rumors that Scribonianus had died by mischief—death by poison is attested in astrological treatises and horoscopes¹⁶⁴—and it is therefore presumably the broadcast of the rumors of Scribonianus' death rather than Scribonianus' earlier consultation of astrologers that got them expelled. But perhaps this expulsion would not have taken place if the previous year had not featured rioting in the forum over a grain shortage¹⁶⁵—a shortage that had been construed as a *prodigium*, and a riot from which Claudius barely escaped with his life—and a host of other prodigies that were interpreted, again, possibly by astrologers, as evidence of further impending calamity.¹⁶⁶ By 52, in short, it may have been that Claudius was sufficiently concerned about his ability

163. Cf. Nippel (1995, 49), who notes that disturbances, even over grain shortages, generally had more than one cause. O'Neill (2003, 142) notes that discussion in informal gatherings had the potential "to lead to direct action" against recognized authorities.

164. Neugebauer and Van Hoesen 1959, 84 (L65, V = Vett. Val. 2.41). Cf. O'Neill (2003, 145–46) on damaging rumors of Agricola's death by poison under Domitian.

165. The grain supply was critical in the loss or maintenance of civic order, and the *princeps* was considered personally responsible for it; see Yavetz 1969, 137–38; Garnsey 1988, 29–31; Kneppel 1988, 166; Griffin 1991, 35; Nippel 1995, 85–87; and Erdkamp 2002.

166. Tac. *Ann.* 12.43; Suet. *Claud.* 18–19. Dio Cass. 60.11 does not mention the riots, only Claudius' zeal to ensure grain supply; cf. Gai. *Inst.* 1.32c. Note that Yavetz (1969, 134) connects the expulsion with the *prodigia* of 51 C.E. and not with Scribonianus. For the role of rumor in the shaping of collective behavior, see Vanderbroeck 1987, 12.

to command respect in the city and so to ensure public order that the removal of rumormongering astrologers was seen as necessary.

Concerns over the location and stability of imperial authority may have similarly preceded the expulsion of 17 C.E. Widespread doubt about what the future held following Augustus' death is certainly to be expected; one need only compare the current sense that the days of Cuba as we know it number the same as Fidel Castro's. At the very least, Romans had no recent experience with the peaceful transfer of supreme power, and quite possibly no real expectation of it in the years immediately after Augustus' death. The consequent scrutiny of Tiberius' worthiness in combination with the expectation of challengers ensured that the years since Tiberius' accession to the throne were plagued by events and interpretations of events that called his suitability to rule into question.¹⁶⁷ The unsolved murder of his co-heir, Agrippa Postumus, in 14 C.E. cast doubt upon Tiberius' character from the beginning.¹⁶⁸ The Libo Drusus fiasco and his famous suicide in 16 C.E. portrayed Tiberius as eager to cover up his insecurities with cruelty. Tiberius' attempts to counteract this interpretation are evident in his concern to profess on oath his determination to pardon Libo had only Libo not killed himself first.¹⁶⁹ But the most significant event was perhaps the surfacing of Clemens, Agrippa Postumus' servile impersonator, in 16 C.E. According to Tacitus (*Ann.* 2.39–40, cf. 3.30 and Dio Cass. 57.16.3–4), Clemens was ushered into an Italy awash in rumors, inspiring such gladness and hope that civil war would have broken out if he had not been swiftly captured and privately executed. And to cap it all off, the grain supply in the early years of Tiberius' reign was fraught with difficulties that he strove with Herculean effort to overcome.¹⁷⁰ Perhaps by 17 C.E., the sense was that the tipping point of public order was nigh, and that time for action against astrologers and diviners had come, since these might be supposed to be responsible for sustaining, or even increasing, public doubt about Tiberius.

But, one will note, the tipping point was not reached in 17, nor was it reached in 52. Was this simply because of the suppression of astrologers and other diviners, or because the impending crisis was in fact only a "crisis" whose imminence existed more in perception than in actuality? It is interesting, and potentially productive, to read the events of the early years of Tiberius' rule alongside modern studies of "moral panics."¹⁷¹ These document the modern mass media's inflation of relatively innocuous or exceptional events into signs of the (deteriorating) times: these incidents are recast as both symptoms and results of declining morality. The victims are empathetic figures, such that the wider population can imagine suffering similarly at the hands of the perpetra-

167. Tac. *Ann.* 1.72 reports that critical verses in circulation in the initial years troubled Tiberius: *hunc quoque asperavere carmina incertis auctoribus vulgata in saevitiam superbiamque eius et discordem cum matre animum*. Cf. Dio Cass. 57.18 on the circulation of Sibylline prophecies in 19 C.E., purportedly to Tiberius' detriment.

168. Suet. *Tib.* 22; Tac. *Ann.* 1.6.

169. Tac. *Ann.* 2.31; cf. Suet. *Tib.* 23 for Tiberius' displays of grief at Agrippa Postumus' demise. Levick (1999, 197) doubts his sincerity.

170. Williams 1989, 782, with references; see also Vell. Pat. 2.94.3, 2.126.3.

171. Cohen 2002 is the classic study. I am indebted to Benjamin Kelly for suggesting this line of inquiry to me.

tors, who are themselves mosaics of negative stereotypes: subcultures, minorities, and foreigners often provide the material.¹⁷² The concern generated rarely stays focused on a single incident, but rather becomes diffused over “a whole spectrum of problems and aberrations,”¹⁷³ ultimately identifying as additional troublemakers elements of society that might share only one characteristic (which is imagined to be “key”) with the original perpetrators.¹⁷⁴ Punishment tends to be out of proportion with the actual transgressions, partly because the “threat” has been magnified, and partly because the authorities tend to want to “send a strong message” to potential future troublemakers. Those identified as agents of moral decline are often not guilty of much under that particular heading, for all that their punishment is imagined to be an important step toward its arrest. Taken as a whole, moral panics are thus representative of larger, deep-seated concerns over social changes and threats of instability.

Much of this will sound familiar to students of oriental religions in Rome, whose adherents found themselves expelled from Rome or otherwise punished when political stability was threatened or social changes loomed.¹⁷⁵ “Moral panics” provide an attractive, though not perfect, means of understanding the expulsion of astrologers too.¹⁷⁶ The ingredients of modern “moral panics” do not present themselves in antiquity tidily enough to assert absolutely the presence of this phenomenon at the point of expulsions; the absence of the mass media in antiquity, for example, presents an initial problem. The difficulty of understanding the precise nature and cause of moral panics and their inaugural incidents even in recent times, when participants can be interviewed, breeds despair that the ancient sources could ever yield up enough information for confident conclusions. Yet the “moral panic” framework allows us to connect several anecdotal details offered up by our sources, and removes the necessity of crediting emperors with too much cool calculation or “official policy” when it came to astrologers and diviners. Indeed, a complicating factor in the consideration of the expulsions is that we simply do not know who was behind the *senatus consulta* of 17 and 52 C.E.—was it the emperor, or members of the senate?¹⁷⁷ But perhaps the answer to this question is less important than raising awareness about the social and political climate that may have inspired the expulsion notices.

Let us thus return to 17 C.E. as a possible case study. As we have seen, unassuaged doubts about Tiberius’ continued reign manifested themselves in rampant rumors of contenders, even to the point of advertising a resurrected Agrippa Postumus. Rumor here might be suspected of performing the function of sustaining and even fulfilling anxieties over the uncertainties the future held, paradoxically by ensuring the certain identification of the generic contenders everyone was expecting. In this sense, rumor might be understood

172. Cohen 2002, 39–45.

173. Cohen 2002, 39.

174. Cohen 2002, 64–65.

175. E.g., Williams 1989; Gruen 1990, 34–78; Rutgers 1998; Beard, North, and Price 1998, 91–96, 230–31.

176. Noy (2000, 39) and Beck (2007, 127) see the expulsions as intermittent methods of cleansing Rome and Italy of the “morally undesirable.”

177. See Talbert (1984, 171) on the manifestation of the wishes of the emperor in *senatus consulta*.

to take up the function of the mass media: by seeming to confirm subconscious expectations, both rumor and the mass media provide, as Stanley Cohen points out, “the reduction of ambiguity.”¹⁷⁸ Thus far it seems fair to posit anxious uncertainty at the popular level, but diffused anxiety at the level of the senate too over potential instability can best be detected in response to two incidents. First, Tacitus (*Ann.* 1.76) reports the flooding of the Tiber in 15 C.E.; Dio (57.14.7) mentions it too, along with a variety of other prodigies. Tacitus tells us that Asinius Gallus, inclined to see the flood as an omen, suggested consulting the Sibylline Books, a proposal that Tiberius squashed. Second, new sumptuary legislation was debated in the senate in 17 C.E., again according to Tacitus (*Ann.* 2.33; cf. Dio Cass. 57.15), who in fact divulges this anecdote immediately after his notice of the expulsion of astrologers. Tiberius blocked this proposal too with the statement that decaying morals were not currently a problem, but that action would be taken should they become so (*non id tempus censurae nec, si quid in moribus labaret, defuturum corrigenda auctorem*). Both recourse to the Sibylline Books and the introduction of sumptuary legislation were typical senatorial responses to uncertainty, as attempts to reestablish the *pax deorum* and old Roman values (and thus the way things used to be, as opposed to the frightening direction they were currently headed).¹⁷⁹ Presumably Tiberius objected to these courses of action because he, at least, did not wish to give the impression of concern over stability, or because he was concerned about what the Sibyllines might be interpreted to say, or because sumptuary legislation was unlikely to be popular. But the expulsion of astrologers—and the showy, indeed, archaic, execution of at least two of them¹⁸⁰—might be understood similarly as an attempt by some members of the senate to make a public statement about the necessity of “putting things right” by putting a brake on what was perceived to be a downward slide into the unsettled unknown. This proposal, if not authored by Tiberius, was at the very least not stopped by him.¹⁸¹ This is perhaps because astrologers and diviners, whose professional success depended to no small extent upon the cultivation of “otherness,” were unlikely to be empathetic figures with whom the general population of the city might identify and so object to their mistreatment. By removing those the senate saw as promoting uncertainty and diverting the attention, religious and otherwise, of the Roman people from its traditional focus on the senate and the *princeps*, a measure of

178. Cohen 2002, 36; see also 59: “Ambiguity, which gives rise to anxiety, is eliminated by structuring the situation to make it more predictable. On this basis, anxiety, say, about an unidentified flying object, can be reduced by defining the object as a flying saucer and then assimilating similar phenomena into this cognitive framework.” On the elite perception of the general population as prone to be swayed by rumors to panic and disorder, see Ménard 2004, 20–25.

179. Macrobius (*Sat.* 3.17) recounts Roman sumptuary legislation, which he describes as reactive to the declining situation rather than proactive (e.g., 3.17.10: *leges . . . bonae ex malis moribus procreantur*). Rasmussen (2003, 53–116) gathers together the evidence for public prodigies and their expiation during the Republic.

180. See n. 16.

181. Dio (57.15.8) insinuates that Tiberius was the champion of the expulsion order, even to the point of having a tribune veto the senate’s attempt at leniency; Suetonius (*Tib.* 36) reports that it was Tiberius who practiced leniency toward any astrologers who promised to give the practice up, perhaps suggesting that authorship was the senate’s; Tacitus (*Ann.* 2.32) is entirely vague on authorship.

the familiar hierarchy might be once again assured. The vilification and punishment of astrologers and diviners, in other words, allowed for the comforting semblance of a necessary wrenching of social priorities back into position, though the astrologers and diviners themselves were only tangentially related to the larger concerns their treatment was supposed to address.

The reader may well by this point wonder how this explanation differs from those proffered for the expulsion of other communities, or alternatively, may ask if we have not come full circle, since paranoid authorities skulk behind the expulsions after all. Notwithstanding the suggestion by Tacitus (*Ann.* 2.85) that the Roman authorities might consider Judaism a choice, the self-selecting nature of astrologers makes ethnic communities like the Jewish population and the professional community of astrologers not strictly comparable.¹⁸² Thus, unlike the expulsion of, say, the Jewish population in 19 C.E., which must surely have caused hardship—not least of all professional—for members of the targeted community,¹⁸³ expelled astrologers stood to benefit professionally from their own expulsion. It is furthermore quite possible that the Jewish population was not in any way responsible for its own expulsion, but rather presented itself as an easy target in suspicious times.¹⁸⁴ The astrologers, on the other hand, might not have been instrumental in the real or imagined rocking of the ship of state, but this was perhaps not for lack of trying. And there are important differences between traditional explanations for the expulsions and this one. The paranoia is not the emperor's alone, but rather anxiety is more widely diffused through pockets of society; the anxiety is furthermore connected to the science of astrology in only the most tangential way. The lack of official concern about astrology, and indeed, about the public activities of astrologers in the normal course of things is bolstered by the apparent fact that the Roman authorities recognized that it was best in most cases to ignore the attempts of would-be political arsonists. Punishing the ringleaders of rumor would only exacerbate matters by lending the stories an air of validity and thus increasing the popular authority of their purveyors.¹⁸⁵ When smaller fires of public opinion were beginning to catch, expulsions were still a last resort rather than an immediate course of action; in situations when an unsuspecting contender for the throne had been popularly identified and increasingly feted, for example, the first step was to remove not the rumormongers, but rather the contender from the city or from life, but either way, from the public eye. So doing would have taken the wind out of rabble-rousing sails more effectively than removing the rabble-rousers themselves. Nero thus requested of Rubellius Plautus that he retire away from the rumor-spreaders to his holdings in Asia out of consideration for peace in the city (*Tac. Ann.* 14.22).¹⁸⁶ However, the majority of astrological predictions must not have caused much of a ripple in the collective consciousness of the

182. See further Williams 1989, 779.

183. E.g., Acts 18:2–3.

184. See esp. Rutgers 1998; contrast Williams 1989.

185. Suetonius (*Ner.* 39) comments on, of all people's, Nero's remarkable forbearance in this regard. Cf. Constantine's behavior in *Lib.* 19.19, discussed by Kelly (2007, 164).

186. O'Neill 2003, 145.

Roman population. Traces of the hundreds, perhaps thousands, of prophecies that failed to capture popular attention appear only in the vague statements about the ineffectiveness of prophecy or the untruthfulness of diviners that mark so many of our sources.¹⁸⁷

CONCLUSION

Astrology has occupied a privileged position in modern historical narratives for perhaps two reasons. On the one hand, there is a desire to credit the Romans with an eager embrace of “science” (and a consequent snub of “superstition”) when they got the chance.¹⁸⁸ We imagine the Romans wearily drumming their fingers over useless livers, heaving impatient sighs as they attempted to impose meaning on the random actions of birds, and then leaping at the opportunity to engage in a kind of rationality at long last in the form of astrology—only to place too much confidence in the new technology. The impulse to think this is meant, no doubt, as a sort of compliment to the Romans’ intelligence, for all that it overstates the distinction between astrology and more “traditional” forms of divination, particularly as they were popularly received. This is not, however, to question astrology’s place among the ancient sciences so much as to ask whether we should continue to apply the label of superstition to haruspicy, for example.¹⁸⁹ On the other hand, we are perhaps guilty of taking a certain pleasure in thinking of the powerful Roman emperors as slaves to their paranoia. Imperial concern over the power of astrology dapples the writings of our ancient sources: Suetonius (*Ner.* 36), for example, is at pains to explain that Nero murdered a swath of elite men because of the appearance of a comet, and used the later discovery of two conspiracies merely as a pretext. For his part, Tacitus (*Ann.* 15.47) generalizes in his description of 64 C.E. that Nero “always” (*semper*) assuaged his paranoia over comets by killing noble Romans, ignoring the fact that Nero killed no one when a comet appeared in 60 C.E. (cf. *Ann.* 14.22). That emperors should be ruled by hope and fear, and thus epitomize the weakness of the human condition so despised by ancient authors,¹⁹⁰ is appealing, and the fascination is increased when imperial hope and fear is thought to be pinned on astrology, a practice we know to be empty: these sorts of details make history interesting. But Roman history is not in danger of becoming boring if we foreground the professional location and concerns of astrologers above the purported political power of astrology. On the contrary, examination of the expulsions in this light allows us to consider the presence and perceived power of what might be considered independent media sources in Roman society, self-proclaimed astrologers pursuing their professional goals. We are allowed a glimpse at the struggles over popular opinion that existed not between members of the elite, but between emperors and popular personalities whose intermittent influence

187. E.g., Tac. *Hist.* 1.22; Mart. 9.82; *Anth. Pal.* 11.159, 164; cf. also 160–61 and Dio Chrys. *Or.* 77, 78.33.

188. See n. 4 above.

189. Rasmussen (2003, 199–217) takes up this inquiry; see also Wallace-Hadrill 2005, 64.

190. Lucian *Alex.* 8; cf. Tac. *Hist.* 1.22. See Gury (1996, 255) on the astrologer as a manipulator of emotions and imagination.

is otherwise lost to us: the expulsions are the shadowy vestiges of the actions of figures whose presence in Roman society our historians never bring into sharp focus. It is clear, moreover, that self-proclaimed astrologers were not the only figures who might present themselves as popular rallying points. Actors, philosophers, diviners of all kinds might perform a similar function—and many of these found themselves targeted by restrictive legislation and expulsion notices too. Yet expulsion was not the first or only choice that emperors had to deal with popular detractors, and we should therefore not conclude that these sorts were rare merely because we hear of relatively few expulsions. On the contrary, they were doubtlessly ubiquitous and consistently active, and the ancient preoccupation with describing astrologically paranoid emperors must surely be suspected as fueled at least in part by successful advertising campaigns of the self-proclaimed astrologers. But as astrology as a practice cannot in itself be found at the root of any expulsions of astrologers, and astrologers themselves are not to be thought of as primarily defined by astrology rather than by their professional concerns, we in the present must avoid falling prey to these ancient acts of self-promotion, and focus attention instead on imperial concerns over public opinion and rival media.

University of Winnipeg

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