

Voynich Manuscript Research

Chapter 3 – Astrology

Abstract:

The astrological section of the Voynich Manuscript has long been regarded as enigmatic and decorative. However, within the framework of medieval iatromathematics (medical astrology), these diagrams take on a practical function. This chapter argues that the zodiacal illustrations are in fact a medical calendar, integrating herbal remedies, reproductive cycles, and celestial influences.

Introduction

In the 15th century, medicine was inseparably linked to astrology. Physicians and midwives believed that the position of the Moon and planets influenced the human body, the strength of herbs, and the success of treatments. The zodiacal diagrams in the Voynich Manuscript can thus be interpreted as keys to the practical use of its botanical and pharmacological knowledge.

Structure of Zodiac Diagrams

The astrological folios contain circular diagrams with zodiac symbols (e.g., Taurus). Female figures, sometimes enclosed in star-like or bath-like compartments, surround the central zodiac sign. The number of compartments often ranges between 28 and 30, likely corresponding to lunar or menstrual cycles.

Medical-Astrological Function

According to the medieval “Zodiac Man” (homo signorum) scheme: Aries ruled the head, Taurus the neck, Cancer the stomach, Virgo the intestines, Scorpio the reproductive organs, and so forth. These diagrams functioned as calendars for: (1) collecting herbs, (2) timing the intake of remedies, and (3) scheduling treatments such as baths and bloodletting.

Symbolism and Interpretation

The repeated female figures likely symbolize organs, humors, or reproductive states. Circles of 28–30 figures point to lunar months and menstrual cycles. Zodiac symbols anchor the application of remedies to specific celestial phases.

Comparative Context

Similar medical-astrological calendars appear in European manuscripts of the 15th century. The Voynich zodiac section, however, is unique in combining encrypted text, botanical drawings, and astrological charts into a single codex.

Illustration 1: Voynich Manuscript – Taurus (enhanced)

References

- Kieckhefer, R. (1989). Magic in the Middle Ages.
- Ptolemy, Claudius. Tetrabiblos (15th century editions).
- Thorndike, L. (1923). A History of Magic and Experimental Science.
- Paracelsus (16th century manuscripts on astrology and medicine).