

## Astrology and its Objects in the Middle Ages (Kalamazoo, 8–11 May 14)

2014 International Congress on Medieval Studies, Kalamazoo Michigan, May 8–11, 2014

Deadline: Sep 15, 2013

Ittai Weinryb

Astrology and its Objects in the Middle Ages

Session to be held at the 2014 International Congress on Medieval Studies, Kalamazoo Michigan, 8-11 May

Sponsored by the International Center of Medieval Art (ICMA)

Organizers:

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“The earthly figures are subjected to the figures of the sky, and this is why the wise men who construct images observe the entry of the stars in the celestial figures”—Ptolemy, *Quadripartitum*.

The objective of medieval astrology was to study the stars to determine optimum moments for human action. Proof of the effect of celestial bodies on the sublunary spheres was manifested everyday—tides, vegetal growth, and the changing of the seasons. That these astral forces determined human passions and personalities was taken for granted by the most influential thinkers of the Middle Ages. The stars needed to be consulted before undertaking any project, and the most important actions to synchronize with the skies were ritual ones—executed at opportune moments, physical rites gained energy and power from the sympathy of planets. Within this conceptual framework, where the movement of the celestial bodies impacts the physical world, the production of material images, talismans and objects was also determined by astral movements. Examples such as Gerbert of Aurillac’s speaking brazen head, GudioBonatti’s wax ship model, or the miracle-working crucifix from Meaux, are all but mere indicators of a plethora of examples where the movement of the stars was an active participant in the crafting and generation of material images.

Images and objects were central to the practice of astrology, but this material world has suffered in modern historiography. Astrological items have been labeled as marginal, pagan, or just plain fake. The contemporary historian has experienced marked discomfort in integrating a belief in astrology into a predominantly religious understanding of the Middle Ages, but this unease is clearly one not felt by medieval practitioners. Our session aims to overturn these misunderstandings and to investigate the practice of astrology as a positive generator and a formidable conceptualizer of images and their making. Not just God, but also the celestial bodies were very much part of the way people thought about and reacted to crafted images. The session thus seeks to

explore the material traces of charting and harnessing natural forces in the Middle Ages. In sum, our session seeks to investigate how images and objects operated within a world governed by astrology, and thus calls for a new understanding of the place and function of medieval astrology. Seasoned as well as early career scholars are invited to contribute their perspectives on topics regarding astrology and its objects in the Middle Ages. The session also seeks papers on issues of medium specificity and materiality, as concerns that arise directly from questions regarding astrology. Papers on issues of centrality or marginality of image making within the practice of astrology, as well as the reception of astrology as part of a sensory experience are also welcomed.

DEADLINE FOR PAPER PROPOSALS: 15 September 2013

Paper proposals should consist of the following:

1. Abstract of proposed paper (300 words maximum)
2. Completed Participant Information Form. available at: <http://www.wmich.edu/medieval/congress/submissions/index.html#PIF>
3. CV with home and office mailing addresses, e-mail address, and phone number
4. Statement of ICMA membership status (note: all participants in ICMA sponsored sessions are required to be members of the ICMA)

Funds may be available to defray travel costs of sponsored session participants

ALL PROPOSALS AND INQUIRIES SHOULD BE DIRECTED TO:

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For information about the ICMA: <http://www.medievalart.org>

For information about the International Medieval Congress: <http://www.wmich.edu/medieval/congress/index.html>

Reference:

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