

## Astrologers *avant la lettre*: Cicero's Use of *astrologus*

If the vocabulary of any language owes as much to one man as English does to Shakespeare the language is Latin and the man is M. Tullius Cicero. Indeed, English speakers themselves are hard pressed to escape the latter's shadow: Ciceronian coinages include quality, moral, evidence, indifference, convenience, humanity and essence (see esp. Powell 1995). This paper discusses a Ciceronian usage that failed to catch on, or at least had a very long incubation period: 'astrologer.' Classical Latin has three principal nouns denoting astrological practitioners: *Chaldaeus*, *mathematicus* and *astrologus*. While we make a hard and fast lexical distinction between astronomers and astrologers, the ancients did not, and all three terms are used in reference to both divinatory and non-divinatory activity.

Drawing on usage statistics for these words up to the third century C.E. I make three main arguments regarding Cicero's use of the term *astrologus*. (1) Cicero is our only source to use *astrologus* in definite reference to astrology prior to Vitruvius who uses it twice in contexts suggestive of astrology. (2) Cicero *always* uses the term in reference to the type of astral divination attacked at *Div.* 2.87-99 (i.e. astrology). This is the meaning at *Div.* 2.146 and at *Verr.* 3.129 which are often thought to reference astronomers rather than astrologers (so Le Bœuffle 1987, 62). (3) Cicero's use of *astrologus*, both its frequency and its meaning, presents a marked contrast to how the term is used in contemporary and later authors (up to the second century at least). Although the term itself remains popular in the Augustan period, cases where it has an astrological significance remain relatively rare. After the Augustan period there is a precipitous decline in the overall use of the term, while it is no more likely to be used of astrology than of any other astral expertise.

In the conclusion I situate these findings against the broader background of the use and development of these three terms in Greek and Latin, and suggest that Cicero's idiosyncratic use of the term *astrologus* is motivated. It represents an attempt to bring lexical clarity to a conceptual divide between astronomy and astrology whose boundaries had only recently begun to solidify in Greek thought, and which Cicero himself addresses for the first time in Latin in *De Divinatione*.

### Bibliography

Le Bœuffle, André. 1987. *Astronomie, Astrologie Lexique Latin*. Paris: Picard.

Powell, J.G.F. 1995. "Cicero's Translations from Greek." In *Cicero the Philosopher*, edited by J.G.F. Powell, 273–300. Oxford.