

# GVIDONIS BONATI

## ON WAR

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translated from the original Latin text by:

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## BONATTI ON WAR

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### INTRODUCTION

#### **The Astrologer As Military Adviser In The Middle Ages And Renaissance**

It is now being recognised that the role of the astrologer as a counsellor to kings and to the powerful in Medieval and Renaissance Europe was far more extensive than was previously realised. Recent scholarship by D. P. Walker <sup>1</sup> and Frances Yates <sup>2</sup> has shown convincingly how widely accepted were the occult doctrines of magic and astrology upon which much of Renaissance philosophy rests. Yates, particularly in her *Rosicrucian Enlightenment*, has shown the importance of the magical-astrological tradition as the forerunner of the scientific movement in Europe and has hinted at its being the common source of both the Protestant Reformation and the rise of scientific societies in both Italy and England.

Hugh Kearny as well, in his *Science and Change 1500-1700*, emphasises the role of Neoplatonic, Pythagorean, Hermetic and Magical philosophies in the development of science both in the Renaissance and Early Modern Period <sup>3</sup>. Finally, E. A. Burtt's *The Metaphysical Foundations of Modern Science*, long ago became a classic in this field, showing the connections between the magical-astrological Neoplatonism of Ficino and Pico della Mirandola and the theory of heliocentricity <sup>4</sup>.

This state of affairs was the outcome of a long period of interest in occult philosophy by the intelligentsia of Europe which began in the twelfth century with the translation of Arabic scientific and philosophical texts and lasted until the end of the seventeenth century. By the thirteenth century astrology had become the Supreme Science to the rule of which all inferior elementary bodies were subjugated <sup>5</sup>.

The astrologer was viewed as the supreme scientist, the adherent of an art that claimed to deal with the underlying principles of all

sciences (not to mention politics, psychology and philosophy), to deal with the very laws of nature. It is therefore not surprising to find that increasingly from the twelfth century until the Renaissance, astrologers, employing texts and techniques translated from Greek and Arabic assumed the role of adviser in all areas of life and in all levels of society, including the business of waging war

In the thirteenth century, the court of Emperor Frederick II was a centre of astrological study <sup>6</sup>. Michael Scot, Frederick's court astrologer <sup>7</sup> dedicated his *Liber Introductorius*, and *Liber Particularis*, to the Emperor at the latter's request <sup>8</sup>. Much of Roger Bacon's *Opus Maius* is devoted to a discussion of magic and astrology. He includes lengthy sections on astrology and the importance of its study as well as its relation to the Christian religion <sup>9</sup>. In his *Opus Tertium* <sup>10</sup> he declares "it is manifest to all that the celestial bodies are the causes of generation and corruption in all inferior things. "

Astrological doctrine even penetrated the Papacy. Several Popes, such as Sylvester II, were avidly interested in astrology. Pope Paul III often relied upon astrological aid, and after the astrologer Luca Gaurico predicted Alessandro Farnese's, {Paul III} ascension to Bishop of Rome, he was made a Papal Table Companion, knighted and appointed Bishop of Giffoni in 1539. Later Gaurico, commissioned by the Pope, elected the most auspicious time for laying the corner stone of the church of Saint Peter for the "third restoration of the city". Vincentius Campanatius of Bologna, another astrologer, assisted by inspecting the sky with an astrolabe and declared the best time to the assembled crowd. The Cardinal of Albano {another adherent of astrology}, clad in a white stole and red tiara, set the stone bearing the mark of the Pope in the foundation <sup>11</sup>.

Kepler and Tycho Brahe submitted astrological reports to King Rudolph of Bohemia. Queen Elizabeth employed John Dee the astrologer/magician and Richelieu employed Jean Baptiste Morin D'Villefranche in the service of Louis XIII of France.

This list could be greatly lengthened but that merely deflects from the more immediate matter at hand. *The important observation being that already, by the end of the twelfth century the astrologer had become a source of advice much relied upon by the temporal and spiritual leaders of European Society.*

# GVIDONIS BONATI

FOROLIVIENSIS MATHEMATICI  
DE ASTRONOMIA TRACTATUS X.

Vniuersum quod iudiciariam rationem  
Nativitatum Aeris Tempetstatum,  
attinet, comprehendentes.

Adiectus est  
Cl.Ptolemaei liber Fructus, cum Commentariis  
vtilissimis Georgii Trapezuntii.

BASILEÆ, ANNO M D L,

Also known as Liber astronomiae  
or Liber astronomicus or Liber astrologiae.  
Columns 295 - 314 {1550, Basel (15) p.I. 848+62}  
translated by Robert Zoller.

## CHAPTER TWENTY ONE

### CONCERNING ONE DESIRING TO GO INTO THE ARMY OR TO WAR OR TO BEGIN A WAR, WHETHER A DUKE OR ANOTHER, WHOEVER HE IS, WHETHER HE WILL WIN OR NOT.

When there is some kind of war between some men or when it is hoped that there will be, (as often happens) and one of them {the contestants} comes to you, he wants to know from you what is able to happen to him as a result, whether he is king, emperor, mark, duke, count or (simply) a powerful man, <sup>1</sup> or any other person lay or cleric, who will lead an army; whether he is noble or commoner or a rustic, provided that he be leader of an army or of one fraction or party of some war, he is called leader <sup>2</sup> of that army or war; whether he was appointed <sup>3</sup> for superintending this purpose or for some other. And he desires to begin a war for someone or to go into an army against someone else.

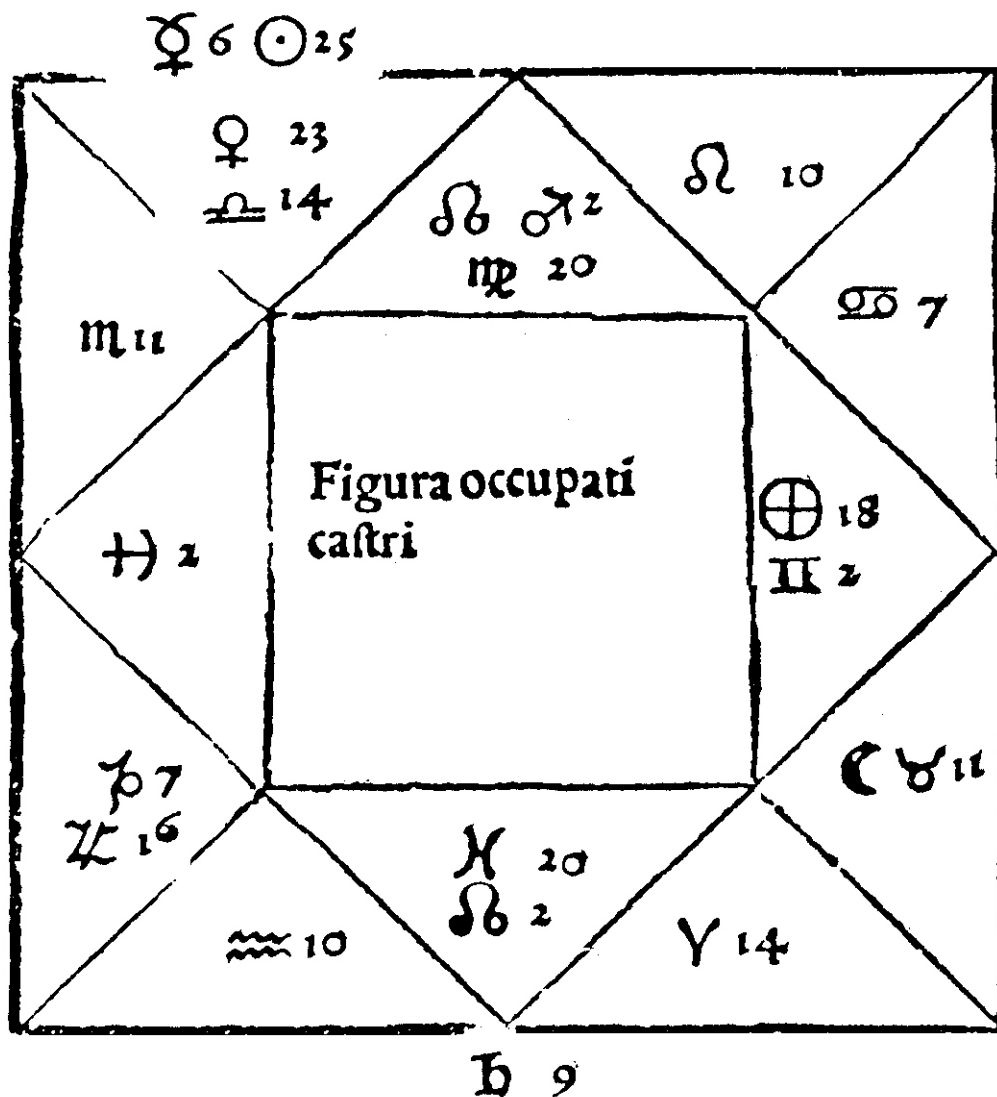
And concerning these things, he places <sup>4</sup> the question to you or he places the question himself regarding the condition of another, concerning whom he is extremely worried (and the one asked about is not the emperor nor the king,) you {the astrologer, referred to by Bonatti as "the artist"} will give the first {house} to him, and its lord, and see from which planet the moon separates, <sup>5</sup> and give that {planet} likewise to the querent <sup>6</sup> .

The seventh and its lord and the planet to which the moon is now joined you will give to the adversary. However, if he {the querent} were an emperor or a potentate, or ruler, and he asked concerning the deeds of the empire or kingdom or city which he ruled, you will give the tenth to him and the fourth to his adversary. But if he asked concerning his own business and something special which does not concern an act of the empire or the kingdom, or the city you will give the first to him and the seventh to his enemy and you will judge for him in all other things just as {you would} with another individual person.

But if the moon does not separate at that time from some {planet} nor is it joined to another, Zael says that the moon ought not to be dismissed in this work. You may see if the lord of the first is joined to the lord of the seventh and whether he {is joined} to him by a trine or sextile aspect with a perfect reception.

The Moon ought always to be considered as to whether it is fortunate or unfortunate, for if it is in the part from the tenth house to the beginning of the fourth, by way of the ascendant,<sup>66</sup> the "*suffragium*" will come to the querent and if in the other half<sup>67</sup> to the middle of the city.

Here is an example of this matter. When the aforesaid Count<sup>68</sup> was at the siege of a certain castle of an ally of Luca, he asked if he would occupy it.



{Figure II : Occupation of the Castle}

Bonatti Tractatus VI Col 313, Basel 1550 edition

## CHAPTER THIRTY

### ON ELECTING TIMES FOR GOING OUT TO WAR OR FOR FIGHTING THE ENEMY.

When you desire to elect an hour for someone desiring to go to war or for attacking enemies, fortify the ascendant and its lord, the second and its lord and weaken the seventh and its lord and the eighth and its lord. Let any of the houses of Mars or Saturn be ascending. The houses of Mars are stronger than the others and Scorpio is stronger than Aries. Whence, if you are able to do so, make Scorpio the ascendant and place Mars strong and fortunate.

And although some seem to disagree {with the statement} that Mars should be in the ascendant, if he is the lord of the ascendant, it will be extremely good if you can place any benefic in the ascendant with him, and adapt Jupiter {for this work} by placing him in the second or in the first, or in the eleventh for the soldiers or allies of the party beginning the battle <sup>71</sup>. Make Venus the lady of the seventh for the enemies and let her be weak. Make Mercury for his allies and place them in the first or second houses, or place them retrograde or combust or cadent from the angles or from any aspect of friendship to the seventh or eighth. But if Aries is ascending, let Mars, the lord of the ascendant, be likewise strong and fortunate. Weaken Venus, the lady of the seventh as has been said.

However, if you are not able to place either of the houses of Mars on the ascendant, place either of the houses of Jupiter or of Saturn there, and place that one whose house is ascending {so that} he is strong and fortunate in the ascendant or in the tenth or eleventh.

Fortify the lord of the second for his allies by placing him likewise in the ascendant or in the tenth or the eleventh or in the twelfth fortunate and strong and weaken the seventh and its lord and the eighth and its lord by every method you are able and afflict them in as much as you possibly can. Make it so that he <sup>72</sup> who afflicts them or at least one of them <sup>73</sup> and it is better that the planet by which the lord of the seventh is afflicted, is the lord of the ascendant or at least the lord of the second because that will be good.

Take care not to place Mars in the ascendant, unless he is the lord of the ascendant but arrange it <sup>74</sup> that he may aspect the ascendant or its lord by a trine or a sextile aspect because that will be a good

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