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## **Review of Tamsyn Barton’s book ‘ Ancient Astrology’**

Ancient Astrology written by Tamsyn Barton is a fresh and an objective perspective upon a persuasive yet often overlooked subject of social science.

The book has two important theses, one is the premise that astrology, physiognomies, and few other " pseudo-sciences," as are under practice within the various societies where they are largely accepted, have similar claim to the authenticity of these fields as in the case with the other subjects that contemporary Western societies consider to be " scientific." Secondly, it is suggested by the author that the study should be based more on the history of the " sciences"; and that every single " science," makes use of a grandiloquence to gain control and authority, which can easily be granted.

There is no need for a rhetorical device that Barton employs with regard to the citation of countless contemporary sages of sociology and other supplementary fields of study, in order to get convinced. By investigating the methods in which knowledge and power fashioned and strengthened each another in the field of astrology, physiognomies, as well as medicine of the great realm, Barton proposes to cast several suspicions on what she terms " the rationalizing program," which subsequently derive a firm, absolute line amidst science and pseudo-science while also appraising conventional thought processes based on the fact of how firmly it relies on the scientific side of the line. " That program is less entrenched than she thinks, at least among American and British historians of ancient medicine, but it is good to have this cogent, clearly written illustration of its short-comings."

Barton seeks to explore different modes of conjunction between knowledge and power. She endeavors to exhibit that knowledge was the goal while

creating theories was not. According to her, the proponents of science were not pursuing truth but power through the use of rhetoric. This is an interesting insight through which Barton explains all features of ancient literature, which otherwise would not be comprehensible. This, she does on the basis of rationalist assumptions. The rationalist assumption is that the knowledge must be available to all by way of a clear explanation of principles and techniques. None of the ancient manuals achieve this. On the contrary, they tend to attack holders of rival knowledge and even declare that mastery of these arts depend on intense discipline, while being subordinate to the author's authority. A case in example clearly is the question of astrology, where the practitioners of this art establish position of power by virtue of their doctrines and closeness to the rulers.

Barton uses 'The Power of images in the age of Augustus' to explain this concept. The emperor's nativity confirmed the intimacy between the perceptions of the stars with those of power. Barton is able to clearly deduce the astrologers' competition for followers, influence, and credibility. Their goal was neither clarity nor power, but rather in an effort to complicate, they would want to project the rival's system being simplistic, thereby, adding credibility to their own complex system and deduction.

Clarity was never the purpose of ancient astrologers. Astrologers behaving like sophists. Actually, physiognomists and physiognomy has intense rhetorical theory. The inferences made by Barton on rhetorical ethos as well as the dogma of physiognomy used fundamental cultural categories and oppositions. For instance, male not female, man not animal, are among the clear examples. The study of medicine finally is the most complex inference that Barton draws at a conceptual and detailing of documentation level.

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Barton intensely focused on Galen, who has captured an explicit and detailed account of his programs. There is actually an over-richness of evidence that he provides. Thankfully, Barton restricted her analysis to only Galen's prognostic tools, namely the pulse and the urine. Galen, as Barton rightfully notices, is akin to the modern Sherlock Holmes in making mystic observations and interpretations of pulse and urine. The physicians of that era competed with each other for status and this was possibly the most important aspects of their life. A successful healer at those times offered a very accurate diagnosis and also treated it well when compared with the rivals.

The ancient astrologers and physicians indulged in rhetoric and competed with each other, eventually creating more and more complex methods and systems in an attempt to hide knowledge from any inquirer. The fundamental belief that they held was that knowledge is power and they fiercely guarded this knowledge from their rivals. This is because rivals were also seen as inquirers, which they sought to protect their knowledge from. Knowledge was believed to be proprietary and wholly owned by these practitioners, in an attempt to hoard and progress their positions of influence and further improve their position of power in the society. Power was seen to be derived from the strategic knowledge that these practitioners hoarded. Knowledge was concealed in rhetoric, which was highly inexplicable to their rivals as well as the commoners. The knowledge was the source of their power and not the truth. Hence, Barton's inference that they were in search of power and knowledge, and not the scientific truth holds merit.

The medical practitioners and physicians in those early days, held on to the powers of diagnosis and accurate treatment of medical conditions of their

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patients, and fiercely protected this knowledge from rivals. Accurate diagnosis and treatment lent credibility with the commoners as well as the rulers alike. Credibility with rulers meant power and this power stemmed from their knowledge. Hence, the aggressiveness in protecting that knowledge.

Physicians and astrologers in the high empire had direct access to social as well as political power solely through the claims of their knowledge and nothing else. Galen has emphasized intensely on this access. However, Barton has not heeded too much to the connection between medicine and external power. Instead, her focus is more on the claims of Galen as well as how it was defended against rival physicians. Barton's inferences are not in any way weakened by the constraints by her of her enquiry. Her understanding of ancient technical literature indicates great clarity and authority and could even further her inquiry into the Foucault's connection between knowledge and power. The way she has put her arguments has opened a new dimension into how we could look at the ancient inquiry into the way in which nature functions and is designed. Barton has written her works in a way to make her mentor Geoffrey Lloyd proud of her and there seems to be quite an impression that Foucault's thoughts have made on Barton's thinking and writing.

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