

The Life and Work of Vettius Valens

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Every art and every craft is pleasing in proportion to the activity and the intelligence of its practitioners – Valens, *Anthologies*, VI, preface.

Vettius Valens is typically introduced in biographies as being a younger contemporary of Ptolemy (c.100-170 CE)¹ since analysis of his charts suggests he was most actively involved with astrology between 152 and 162² with continued involvement up to 188.³ His flourishing period therefore crosses the reigns of the Roman emperors Antonius Pius (138-161) and Marcus Aurelius (161-180).

Valens' nine-part *Anthologies* (i.e., 'Collections')⁴ is the most comprehensive account of astrological theory and practice to have survived from antiquity. Only the eight-part *Mathesis* of Firmicus Maternus comes close to its length, although Firmicus makes reference to only one example nativity, whereas Valens takes every opportunity to illustrate his teachings with horoscopes he has worked on or has knowledge of. Valens does not identify the names of his subjects, provide horoscope diagrams, or even give dates for most of the example charts he describes, but research by Otto Neugebauer in the mid-1950s proved each set of planetary positions to be an authentic horoscope that can be dated to the first or second century.⁵

In his identification of the oldest chart to “about sunrise” on 15 December 37 CE,⁶ Neugebauer failed to realise (but others quickly noted)⁷ that this was the horoscope of the Roman Emperor Nero, whose birth was recorded by the historian Suetonius in 121 CE: “Nero was born at Antium, on 15 December 37 A.D. ... The Sun was rising ...”⁸ Valens uses the chart as a typical example of how his techniques identify crisis periods, which in this chart occurs within the 31st year (68 CE, when Nero committed suicide). It is this rich supply of ancient chart-data that has made Valens' work of great significance to scholars of classical history, calendar systems, and astronomy; as well as students of ancient astrological techniques. Its value was underlined by Otto Neugebauer and Henry Van Hoesen in their 1959 work *Greek Horoscopes*, which says in regard to the “importance of the *Anthology* of Vettius Valens”:⁹

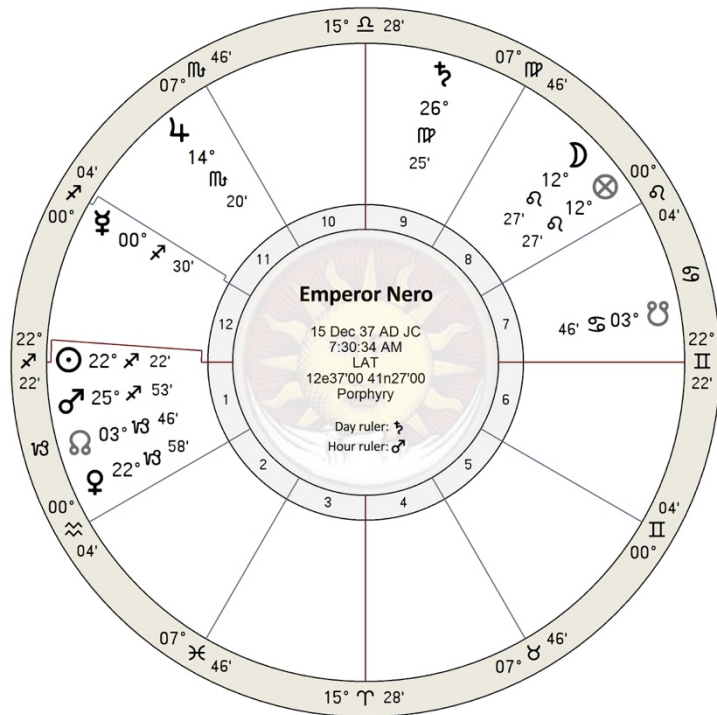
With its about 130 (partial or complete) horoscopes it contains twice as many examples of Greek horoscopes as all papyri combined. Without Vettius Valens (whose examples range from A.D. 37 to 188) we should have only five examples of “literary” horoscopes before A.D. 380.



Antonius Pius (138-161)



Marcus Aurelius (161-180)



The Roman historian Suetonius says of this chart:

“Nero’s horoscope at once occasioned many ominous predictions; and a significant comment was made by his father in reply to friendly

congratulations: namely, that any child born to himself and Agrippina was bound to have a detestable nature and become a public danger” (Graves, p.212).

Modern reconstruction shows Mars (25°53'♈) rising on the ascendant close to the Sun (22°22'♈), with Saturn dominating all three by square from 26°25'♏ and receiving the trine of Venus (22°58'♏: Venus is in the sign of Saturn; Saturn in the fall of Venus); Saturn’s dispositor Mercury (00°30'♈) falls in the 12th house by equal or quadrant division. Moon (12°27'♏) and placed in the 8th house by equal house or quadrant division) applies to the square of Jupiter (14°20'♏) which is in mutual reception with Mars.

About Valens: nationality & cultural influences

Almost all the reliable information we have about Valens comes from comments made in the *Anthologies* – these establish very few biographical details, to which speculative embellishments are often added by modern historians. For example, it is sometimes reported that Valens lived and worked in Alexandria as Ptolemy did, or established a school there.¹⁰ (This generates a tendency amongst biographers to juxtapose the astrological approach taken by these two important astrological authors, whilst highlighting the curious fact that Valens seems unaware of Ptolemy’s work despite the closeness of their interests, lifetimes and supposed localities).¹¹ In fact, the whereabouts of Valens at any particular time remain unknown – all he tells us is that he travelled widely in search of astrological knowledge and at some point journeyed to Egypt, where he paid money to “avaricious teachers” for information he considered unreliable.¹² He then set astrology aside whilst he led an ascetic and independent life occupied with other matters, before being drawn back to astrology with greater enthusiasm to establish the true principles of the predictive techniques his book is mainly concerned with: length of life and crisis periods. We do not know how long Valens remained in Egypt. Although it is reasonable to suppose he visited Alexandria, there is no certainty that he settled in or around that city, spent the bulk of his life in Egypt, or established a school there.

The single statement that he travelled to Egypt started to generate characterizations of Valens as Egyptian or ‘Alexandrian’ as early as the Sassanian period.¹³ Other Arabic references identify him with the appellation *al-Rūmī*, ‘the Byzantine’, which corresponds to what Professor of History of Science, David King terms “his accepted provenance, Antioch”.¹⁴ This finds support in the title accorded to him in manuscript ascriptions: ‘Vettius Valens of Antioch’, which indicates association with the once great metropolitan city of Antioch on the Orontes, in Syria, whose ruins lie near the modern city of Antakya in Turkey (‘Antakya’ is the Turkish variant of the Syrian *Antiokia*). Other ancient cities bore this name, but the fact that no further detail is given suggests no further detail was needed: Antioch was in Valens’ time the third largest city in the world (after Rome and Alexandria) and capital of the Roman province of Syria.



Founded in 300 BCE by Seleucus Nicator (former general of Alexander the Great, who gained control of Babylon after Alexander's death), and named after his father Antiochus, the site of Antioch was determined by ceremonial ritual¹⁵ to establish a western capital for Seleucus' rapidly expanding empire, which eventually stretched from modern-day Turkey to the borders of India (*see map 2, below*). Twinned with (and intended to replicate) the more eastern capital, Babylon, Antioch acted as a node for important trade routes that crossed from north-south and east-west, and quickly developed into a prosperous, densely populated cultural centre, which came to rival Alexandria as the chief city of the Near East. We do not know whether Antioch was Valens' birthplace, whether this was where he lived and worked for most of his life, or whether this name association was made because this is where he died or where his manuscript was found, but any connection with Antioch would suggest awareness of Babylonian principles of astrology, since the region was saturated with Chaldean philosophies. Franz Cumont made much of the importance of Antioch in the transmission of Babylonian astrology to the west in several of his works, stressing how –

The Seleucid princes of Antioch showed as great a deference to the science of the Babylonian clergy as the Persian Achaemenids had done before them. We find Seleucus Nicator consulting these official soothsayers about the propitious hour for founding Seleucia on the Tigris. ... The cities of Syria often stamp on their coins certain signs of the zodiac to mark the fact that they stood under their patronage. If the princes and cities thus acknowledged the authority of astrology, we may imagine what was the power of this scientific theology in the temples.¹⁶



The inclination of some modern biographers to nationalize Valens as Alexandrian rather than Byzantine or Syrian was strengthened by a misleading comment in *Greek Horoscopes*, where Neugebauer and Van Hoesen analyzed the 53 charts that include reference to the clima in which someone was born and concluded “such a distribution is in good accord with Alexandria as the locality where Vettius Valens and his predecessors collected their evidence”.¹⁷ However, this curious conclusion lies at odds with the data, which shows the number of charts cast for the clima of Alexandria is only two thirds of those cast for the clima of Syria, and less than those cast for the clima of Rome. The distribution is explained as follows:

Clima 1, Alexandria, clima 2, Syria and Palestine, and clima 6, Rome and Italy, furnish the majority of cases with 11, 17, and 15 persons respectively, whereas only 10 cases are left for the remaining climata.

Analysis of 53 charts where Valens mentions the clima		
Clima 1	Alexandria	11
Clima 2	Syria and Palestine	17
Clima 6	Rome and Italy	15
All other clima (3, 4, 5 & 7)		10

These results are confirmed by Neugebauer’s figure 36 (*GH*, p.184) which tabulates the charts over a timeline, revealing that charts cast for the clima of Rome become dominant after 150 CE, (the period Valens was most actively engaged with astrology).² With clima, we must remember we are dealing with parallels of latitudes, not specific locations, so none of this proves exactly where Valens was living or drawing his charts from, but serves to verify his own report that he “traversed the sea ... crossed many lands [and] surveyed many climes and nations”.¹⁸ We can certainly see that he was not constrained to one geographical area or ethnic outlook, but worked for natives of various nationalities at a time when there was free-flowing cultural exchange between Alexandria, Antioch, Rome, and other major cities connected by important trade routes. We see this also in the details of Valens’ technique and the sources he acknowledged:

- He makes no reference to Alexandria in his text¹⁹ but talks about the effect the obliquity of the ecliptic has on determining the cusps of the twelve houses, and how this causes great difference in the fortunes and lifespans of those born in Rome and those born in Babylon.²⁰
- In book I, Valens gives tables of ascension that Neugebauer establishes to be “operating with the sequence (*a*) which is based on Alexandria”, and yet Neugebauer admits, “... our table shows that the use of the proper clima [Alexandria] is not the rule but the exception. The majority of all values, can be explained as belonging to the clima 2.b (Babylon) and System B”.²¹
- Valens’ reference to his sources shows he mingled doctrines found in texts associated with ancient Egypt (Nechepso, Petosiris), Babylon (Soudines, Kidenas, Critodemus), and Persia (Zoroaster, Orion).²² He adhered to the Greek convention of following “Hipparchus for the Sun” but adopted the Babylonian tradition of placing the vernal point in the 8th degree of Aries, recommending the tables of Hipparchus, Apollinarius and others “if one applies the addition-factor of 8°, which I believe to be correct”.²³
- In contrast to Ptolemy, who referenced the old Egyptian calendar in his astronomical work,²⁴ Valens utilized the reforms of the Julian calendar and followed the convention of the Roman government in adopting the Alexandrian calendar set for the era of Augustus, which commenced the count of all dates from August 31, 30 BCE to celebrate the conquest

of Alexandria on that date by Gaius Octavius (later known as Augustus).²⁵ This perhaps tell us little about his own national preferences since, according to Albiruni, this imposed upon Egypt the calendar system previously employed by “the Chaldeans”.²⁶

- Apparently unaware of the more precise methods of astronomical computation set out by Ptolemy, which rested on spherical trigonometry and were facilitated by the circulation of Ptolemy’ *Handy Tables*, Valens relied on what are usually described as “Babylonian-style” methods of calculation, being purely arithmetical.

Whatever his geographical base, Valens was likely to have conceived of himself as being, essentially, a citizen of the Roman Empire. His ability to draw from a wide reservoir of works with great regional variety was aided by adoption of Greek as the preferred literary language of the Roman Empire, which continued the policy of Alexander the Great to impose that language on the scribes of all territories he conquered.

Valens: the man

Biographers want to report biographical details, and when few are known there can be a tendency to report supposition as fact. An example with Valens is the widely reported biographical speculation that he was born on 8 February 120 CE. This proposition was made by David Pingree, with the suggestion that the chart Valens refers to most often (especially in book I where he explains such things as how to calculate the ascendant degree, and from this the degree of the MC, the date of conception, *etc.*) was probably his own.²⁷

Pursuing this storyline means biographers not only have a date of birth for Valens, but a calculated date of conception too, along with the biographical details that are recorded as the experiences of the man this horoscope belongs to: his mother predeceased his father; at age 34 he fared well abroad and enjoyed friendships with superiors, but was in danger of being ruined by a woman and suffered cuts and bloodshed; a year later he encountered dangerous storms and pirate attacks at sea.

Pingree’s suggestion that this could have been Valens’ own horoscope is now repeated widely in the style of established fact; however, Valens nowhere claims this chart as his own and pointedly describes it as being that of someone else.²⁸ Nor does he admit to any of those life-experiences beyond stating that he travelled widely in search of astrological knowledge. He characterizes himself as a man of independent means, who avoided controversies and lived soberly, so it is hard to reconcile the biographical highlight of someone who suffered prospects of ruin because of entanglements with a woman with Valens’ own report of his lifestyle:

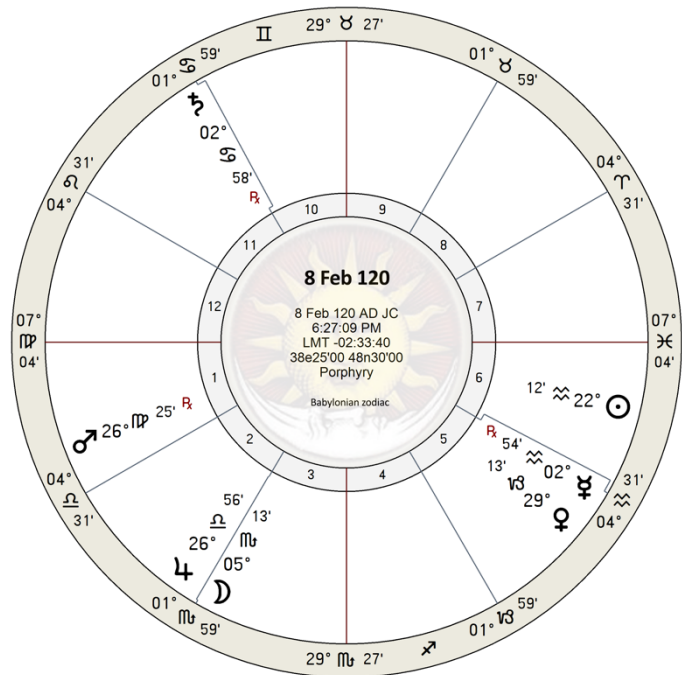
In my case, colorful horse races and the sharp crack of the whip have not carried me away, nor have the rhythmical movements of dancers, the vain charm of flutes, of the Muses, of melodious song, of those things which attract an audience by tricks and jesting delighted me. No, I have not even shared in those harmful, though profitable, actions, those actions of mingled pleasure and pain <=love>, nor have I consorted with those polluted and wretched <prostitutes>.²⁹

We can be certain that Valens knew his own chart (he taught methods that allowed computation or rectification of a chart with a specific degree for the ascendant and midheaven even when the time was unknown) because he made it a requirement for members of his school to know and progress their nativities, and factor this knowledge into their actions:

One who enrolls in my school must also know what basis his own horoscope has, and he must apply himself to forecasting after taking into account his active chronocrators, so that he might gain profit or testimony.³⁰

Given the pride Valens expresses for being unstintingly willing to tell the truth and hold nothing back from his reader (expected to be a trusted member of his school), and given his undoubtedly wide experience and client-base, Valens had no need to fall back upon use of his own chart for demonstrations of technique; much less to masquerade it as someone else's.

In any event, historians who claim Valens was born on this date in Antioch³¹ cannot have it both ways: this horoscope is one of only three chart examples in his work attributed to the most extreme latitude north that Valens recognised (clima 7) — demonstrating that the horoscope belongs to a man born in a latitude that falls through central Europe or higher.³² Despite the controversial nature of Pingree's casual proposal, it has nonetheless been taken seriously enough for academics to propose revision of the dates of compilation of the *Anthologies*, so that timed events attributed to this chart act as key life events for Valens.³³ The keen desire to attribute this chart to Valens regardless of the evidence (or lack thereof) has also generated a recent assertion that Valens must have been “a Ukrainian born Greek”.³⁴



Computer chart drawn for 8 Feb. 120 showing the planet positions described by Valens.

What we do know, based on what Valens writes, is that he was an earnest seeker of astrological truth. He reports how he travelled, laboured and made many sacrifices in order to learn the principles of astrology, yet frequently met with disappointment, frustration and confusion in attempting to unravel the logic of texts that were, in his opinion, deliberately obscure and put together in “a very complicated and hateful manner”.³⁵ He frequently complains about the writings of older/ancient astrologers and the teachings of other contemporaries: they are obscure, overly complex, long-winded, simple-minded, afflicted by envy or ignorance; and their effect is to beguile “with spectacular words and spells” and cause students to “become lost in a trackless wilderness”.³⁶

Valens explains that many of the principles he teaches are subject to divergence of opinion in older sources, and he shows no hesitation towards innovating or clarifying based on his personal experience or adherence to what he sees as a more logical approach. He takes pride in drawing comparison between the convoluted vagueness offered by others, and the fully demonstrated, detailed explanations he offers, showing awareness that the inclusion of real horoscope case studies was an unprecedented move that made his work uniquely valuable as a tutorial guide. The following remark is typical of many similar statements, usually made where he introduces an astrological technique by first explaining how others have treated the topic furtively:

... they have not taught a valid system. They have fenced in this topic with many devices and have left their readers a legacy of the greatest error and of futile investigation. Others, carried away in their ignorance by this mass of words, have added false systems and have deceived many. Still others, who saw the power of this science and who laid a foundation, did not add examples, because of their grudging spirit.³⁵

Valens acknowledges the eventual “help of a learned man” who provided sufficient instruction on the theoretical principles to act as a basis, upon which he developed understanding through daily practice and observation, encounters with many men, and personal acquaintance with “divinely-inspired and immortal theorems”. He revels in being willing to share his knowledge “without stint”, but stresses that he does so only for the benefit of those who are vitally interested and prepared to spend much time in their own study, so that they can make an equal contribution from their own insights. He expects his readers to be “initiates into this mystic art” and calls upon them to “preserve these matters in secret and not to share them with the vulgar, but only with those worthy of them and able to preserve and requite them as they deserve”. They are to lay aside other books, stick to the methods he has prescribed and vow to bestow upon his name the eternal and noble fame of being their guide:

...particularly since you are aware that I alone ungrudgingly illuminated this part of the truth which had never before been explicated by anyone.³⁵

Valens invokes fearful curses of afflictions from the gods, to be suffered by anyone who learns from his work and does not guard it against criticisms, editorial omissions, false reports, replications by others who fail to acknowledge him as their source, the removal of his name from any part of his work, or attempts to introduce the works of others into his own compendium. He was aware all those things were likely to happen, and one can only imagine the wrath he would have felt over a so-called tenth book (or *Additamenta*) which is known to be a later addition because it includes analysis of the birth and death of the Roman Emperor Valentinian III (2 July 419 – 16 March 455). Another chart of an unidentified person born in 431 forecasts death to occur in 505, which shows this text was added by someone towards the end of the 5th century, or turn of the 6th, simply because the author admits to using a method found in the work of Valens.³⁷

Valens seemed willing to undertake whatever inconvenience and expense was necessary to acquire the instructional works of writers he delighted in criticizing. We must assume a reasonable amount of wealth, or at least sufficient financial independence to make the pursuit of his life-interest possible. He apologizes that his writing style is unpolished and his content (due to enthusiasm or unhappy circumstance) is sometimes chaotically constructed.³⁸ Clearly, the art of writing was less important to him than the communication of his astrological interest, and in that regard he was evidently well-read — he makes no acknowledgement to older or contemporary astrological authors whose works have survived (such as Aratus, Dorotheus, Eudoxus, Geminus, Manilius, Ptolemy), but offers important references to many works now lost to us, (including those of Abraham, Apollinaus, Aristarchus, Asclation, Asclepius, Euctemon, Hermeios, Hermes, Hermippus, Hipparchus, Hypsicles, Kidenas, Meton, Philip, Orion, Seuthos, Soudines, Thrasyllus, Timaeus, and Zoroaster).²²

The principle sources Valens used for astrological technique were the 13th book of Nechepso (who he describes as ‘Divine’ and often refers to as ‘the King’, and to whom he attributes his understanding of the use of the Lot of Fortune); works by Petosiris, including one called *Oroi* (‘Conditions’);³⁹ and works by the (presumed Babylonian) astrologer Critodemus (c.50 BCE – 50 CE), including one called *Horasis* (‘Vision’).⁴⁰ To the latter he attributes the theory of Antiscia, distribution of chronocrators, and establishment of the critical places which determine the length of life.⁴¹ Despite referring to Critodemus as “divine” and “very wise”,⁴² he and the others are all criticized by Valens for writing books that are overly complex, full of bombast and verbiage, and impossible to understand without his own interpretation and development of their techniques.⁴³ Hence, using the ‘majestic plural’ Valens asserts in his 8th book:

Let the readers of our collected works, works which explicate all procedures, not say:
“This procedure is from the King, this other is from Petosiris, that one is from

Critodemus, etc.” Instead let them know that these men propounded their art in an obtuse and recondite fashion, and thereby showed that their science lacked a true foundation. We on the other hand supplied solutions, and not only revived this dying art, but also banked glory for ourselves and initiated other worthy men, attracting them not with the lure of money, but by recognizing them to be scholars and enthusiasts.⁴⁴

A more rounded literary interest is displayed by the many quotes Valens draws from Homer’s *Illiad* (and the works of Cleanthes, Euripedes and Orpheus), which are used as anecdotes to support his views on fate. These are firmly rooted in Stoic philosophy, exemplified in several digressions where he pauses instruction of astrological technique to dwell upon the importance of personal piety, which must include submission to destiny and the calm acceptance of providence, welcoming whatever the future has in store, and never rebelling against it in the hope of gaining a different ‘lot’. One passage begins with a statement that mirrors Ptolemy’s defense of the value of astrology (that “foreknowledge accustoms and calms the soul and prepares it to greet with steadiness whatever comes” *Tet.* I.3), although Valens is much heavier than Ptolemy in his adherence to determinism, asserting:

... those who have trained themselves in the prognostic art and in the truth keep their minds free and out of bondage; they despise Fortune, do not persist in Hope, do not fear death, and live undisturbed. They have trained their souls to be confident. They do not rejoice excessively at prosperity nor are they depressed by adversity, but they are satisfied with whatever happens. Since they do not have the habit of longing for the impossible, they bear steadfastly the decrees of Fate. They are alien to all pleasure or flattery and stand firm as soldiers of Fate.

It is impossible to overcome with prayers and sacrifices what has been established from the beginning or to gain for oneself something different, something more to one’s liking. What has been given will come about even if we do not pray; what is not fated will not happen, even if we do pray. Just as actors on the stage change their masks according to the poets’ words and act the characters as they should — sometimes kings, sometimes bandits, sometimes rustics, city people, gods — in the same way we too must act the parts assigned us by Fate and adapt ourselves to the chances of the moment, even if we do not like them.⁴⁵

The passage draws interesting parallels with Plato’s ‘Myth of Err’, in which the soul is considered indestructible and subject to a constant variety of experience through reincarnation, and in which strength of character is developed by the choices we make regardless of whether our allotted lives are subject to privilege or adversity.

So what kind of man was Valens, and did he manage to attain those lofty Stoic ideals himself? We can assume he never married or had children, but instead committed himself fully to his work and cherished the relationships he developed with like-minded students, (one of whom, Marcus, became the beneficiary of his work).⁴⁶ He was a sincere and heartfelt astrologer, passionate enough to travel the world in search of astrological treasures, confident enough to challenge all other authorities, and willing to invest in a lifework he knew would resonate in importance for centuries ahead. But no, he could not (as no one really can) avoid the sufferings of his own human frailties, which are revealed here and there. The real ‘connection’ with Valens as a person comes, for me, in the touching and poignant remark found at the conclusion of his third book. Here he asks for the reader’s understanding and forgiveness: the failing of his eyesight, the dimming of his mind, and the personal grief he suffered over the death of a precious student; none of these have left him unaffected, free of concern or emotionally undisturbed; all have combined towards the realisation that, now, alas, his own exhaustion and emotional grief have rendered him no longer able to make his work as perfect as he would like.³⁸

Sources & Endnotes

- ¹ E.g., Otto Neugebauer, *History of Ancient Mathematical Astronomy*, p.945 and *Exact Sciences in Antiquity*, p.175; Wolfgang Hübner, *Valens, Vettius* (www.encyclopedia.com/doc/1G2-2830906164.html); Robert Schmidt, *Vettius Valens, The Anthology Book I*, Preface, p.xv.
- ² In his *Chronology of Vettius Valens' Anthologiae*, published in 1954 (see *fn* 5), Neugebauer concludes that Valens “wrote the bulk of his work in the decade from A.D. 152 to 162” (p.67). His view is “Books III, IV, and V up to chapter 10 were written in succession between 152 and 159; then follows Book VII, with dates up to 165, using earlier material in the earlier book and perhaps making a few additions a few years later” (p.66). Later, in *Greek Horoscopes* (1959, p.176) Neugebauer writes:
- ...a large proportion of this material was gathered during the decades from about 140 to 170. Thus, during these years Vettius Valens himself was systematically collecting and analysing a large amount of statistical material of birth data, life histories, and deaths in order to confirm or modify the theoretical structure of astrology.
- ³ In 1996 Mark Riley, having completed his own English translation of *Valens' Anthologiae* the same year ([https://www.csus.edu/indiv/r/rileymt/Vettius Valens entire.pdf](https://www.csus.edu/indiv/r/rileymt/Vettius%20Valens%20entire.pdf)), published a 53-page introductory paper ‘A Survey of Vettius Valens’ (*Aufstieg und Niedergang der Römischen Welt*, II 36.7, De Gruyter, Berlin | https://www.csus.edu/indiv/r/rileymt/PDF_folder/VettiusValens.PDF). In ‘Appendix A’ Riley reviews the chart-dates and asserts book II.21 “must antedate 143/4” (p.23). Noting that three horoscopes lack reference to biographical events that are mentioned later (when reused as examples for judging crisis events), he expects this chapter to have been written before any of these events occurred. However, book II is still setting out the basic principles and does not focus on techniques that indicate crisis and length of life but those that indicate general prosperity and notability (by use of the Lot of Fortune, *etc*), so Valens had no reason to mention crisis events in this section; this does not mean they could not have occurred. Riley also rests on shaky logic when he dates book II.30 to later than 155 because a horoscope which *may or may not* be Valens’ own refers to an event in that year; and he is mistaken in referring to a horoscope in book VI.5 (which details an event in 184) as “The latest horoscope in the Anthologiae I-IX” (p.24). Neugebauer and Van Hoesen correctly note that a nativity mentioned in II.26 and dated to August 10 188 CE “is the latest date of a horoscope in Vettius Valens” (GH, p.130). By this they mean amongst those that can be considered authentic to Valens, not the known insertions of the late fifth century. In the Robert Schmidt translation of book II, part 1, Robert Hand adds an editorial note to the 188 nativity saying “This is the latest chart in Vettius Valens and gives us a latest possible date for his life” (p.50) – of course, if the chart is authentic it gives the *earliest* possible date for the end of his life – Valens could have lived a while beyond recording this nativity, but here is where his record of charts ends. Riley, however, writing as if the chart with the event dated to 184 is a lone example “ten years subsequent to any other investigation date” concludes in his ‘Survey’: “this must have been misdated or added by a later investigator” (p.24). Neugebauer and Van Hoesen show no concern over the legitimacy of this chart, or the later nativity dated to 188 in II.26, and it is interesting to note that their translation of the text (GH, p.130) and that of Robert Schmidt (II, part 1, p.50) reads as a prediction for what is in store for this child, whereas Riley’s (p.40) reads as an account of a life already lived, which obviously would require the chart to be spurious. (Riley, in footnote 4 of his ‘Survey’ kills Valens off at the age of 55, because he considered “The Anthologiae was completed around 175”). Though Neugebauer made a good start on the chronology of Valens, a great deal of confusion remains over why, and how reliably some of his books have been dated.
- ⁴ Scholars are inconsistent in their reference to the work as *The Anthology* or *The Anthologies* of Vettius Valens. The word ‘anthology’ generally means “a collection of literary passages or works, esp poems, by various authors” (www.thefreedictionary.com/Anthologia). The word derives from the medieval Greek *anthologeîn*, ‘to gather flowers’ which is why David Pingree, in introductory notes to his critical edition (*Vettii Valentis Antiocheni Anthologiarum libri novem by Vettius Valens*. Leipzig: B.G. Teubner, 1986), interprets the title to mean “the flowers of arithmetic”, and suggests from this that we have only extracts of the full, original work. (The notion of picking the ‘flowers’ of a work suggests that the best bits have been selected, in the same way that the Arabic title of *Ptolemy's Centiloquium, Kitab al-Tamara*, means ‘Book of the Fruit’).

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- ⁵ Otto Neugebauer. 1954. 'The Chronology of Vettius Valens' *Anthologiae*. *The Harvard Theological Review* 47 (1). Cambridge University Press: 65–67. www.jstor.org/stable/1508487. Each chart is dated by Neugebauer in *Greek Horoscopes*.
- ⁶ *Greek Horoscopes*, p.79. The chart is used as an example for teachings concerning the transmissions of aphetic points (*a.k.a.* 'releasings') in book 5: Riley, pp.108-9, Schmidt, *Books V & VI*, p.50.
- ⁷ Wolfgang Hübner, 'Sulla's Horoscope?' *Horoscopes and Public Spheres: Essays on the History of Astrology*, edited by Günther Oestmann, H. Darrel Rutkin, Kocku von Stuckrad (Walter de Gruyter, 2005) p.13: "At least four scholars conjectured independently that the horoscope transmitted by Vettius Valens for the year 37 CE must concern Nero". In his article on Valens in the *Complete Dictionary of Scientific Biography*, Hübner says the first identification was made by Benny Reece in 1969 (the bibliographical reference is: Reece, Benny Ramon. "The date of Nero's death." *American Journal of Philology* 90 (1969): 72-74).
- ⁸ Gaius Suetonius Tranquillus. 121 CE. *The Twelve Caesars*, translated by Robert Graves (Penguin, 1957), pp.211-2. Graves adjusted the date recorded in the original text to its Julian Calendar equivalent. The older translation by Alexander Thomson in 1796 (www.gutenberg.org/cache/epub/6391/pg6391.html | passage VI) shows how it was originally recorded: "Nero was born at Antium, nine months after the death of Tiberius [562], upon the eighteenth of the calends of January [15th December], just as the sun rose". Antium, about 30 miles south of Rome, is now known as Anzio: 12E37 | 41N27.
- ⁹ *Volume 48 of Memoirs of the American Philosophical Society* (hereafter '*GH*'); p.176. Neugebauer and Van Hoesen dated and translated every Greek horoscope available to look for clues on how the Greeks approached "the practice of computing the positions of the sun, moon and planets during any period of antiquity" (p.vii). Although some purely astrological sections were cut short, the work remains invaluable as a reference for Valens' charts. It remains in print and is available for full preview via Google Books: <https://books.google.co.uk/books?id=kEgnLpm06zQC>.
- ¹⁰ For example, S.J. Tester, *A History of Western Astrology* (p.46): "... the man came from Antioch, travelled widely, and came to rest in Egypt, In Alexandria, where he wrote, in Greek, his *Anthology* of astrology"; the 'Hellenistic Astrology Website', (www.hellenisticastrology.com/astrologers/vettius-valens/): "At one point in his life Valens traveled to Egypt in search of more precise time-lord techniques, and eventually he settled there and set up a school in Alexandria"; J.H. Holden, *A History of Horoscopic Astrology* (p.51): "... moved to Alexandria, Egypt, where he worked as a professional astrologer and proprietor of an astrological school".
- ¹¹ Their differences are generally summarized to be those of a pure theorist on the one hand, who is supposed to have no personal charts to draw upon (Ptolemy), contrasted with those of a working practitioner who has many (Valens) – this disregards the fact that Valens himself claims uniqueness amongst all ancient authors in being willing to share his chart examples, and it is clear he did not expect his treatise to escape the guard of his private circle of initiates. Although speaking informally, James Holden displays a typical line of thought in an interview conducted by Nina Gryphon | <http://gryphonastrology.com/blog/2008/09/02/astrologer-interview-james-h-holden-part-1/>:
Vettius Valens was living in Alexandria from about 150 to 175 AD, which would have overlapped Ptolemy's lifetime. He didn't know Ptolemy and never mentions him once... And Valens lived in the same town with Ptolemy and never heard of him, though Valens was a professional astrologer and also had a school of astrology. He would have known if the *Tetrabiblos* had been available; he would have had a copy; and he would have known all about it. And yet Valens's book is true to what was going on at the time. For example, I think it's got almost a hundred example horoscopes in it. Ptolemy's *Tetrabiblos* doesn't have a single one. So one is a theoretician, and the other one was a practicing astrologer.
- See also Riley's *Survey*, p.7.
- ¹² IV.II, Riley, p.77.
- ¹³ Although it was the view of David Pingree that Valens was Syrian, he associated a reference to an Egyptian writer that appears in Hugo of Santalla's 12th century introduction to *The Book of Aristotle*, with Valens, saying of a bibliographical reference to *Welis Egiptius* "that is, Vettius Valens, in the Sassanian-Arab fashion, as an Egyptian from Alexandria rather than a native of Antioch". David Pingree, 'Classical and Byzantine Astrology in Sassanian Persia', *Dumbarton Oaks Papers*, Vol. 43, 1989, p.228.
- ¹⁴ More recently, Professor of History of Science, David King, wrote: "Valens was known to the Arabs as Wālīs, sometimes with the appellation al-Rūmī, 'the Byzantine', which would correspond to his accepted

provenance Antioch, but also sometimes al-Misrī, ‘the Egyptian’, or, more specifically, al-Iskandarānī, ‘the Alexandrian’. David A. King, ‘Some Arabic Copies of Vettius Valens’ Table for Finding the Length of Life’, in *Symposium Graeco-Arabicum* II, ed. Gerhard Endress, Amsterdam, 1989, p.26.

Unfortunately, as Mark Riley points out in his ‘Survey’ (fn.3, p.45) Arabic reference to Valens (or ‘Walis/Welis’) may be confused with that of another writer of the same name. To this ‘other Valens’ are attributed treatises called *The Sultan, Rains, The Revolution of the Years of the World* and various lengthy passages on horary which are quoted by Umar al-Tabari (See Benjamin Dykes, *The Book of Nine Judges*, Cazimi Press, 2011; p.12). Benjamin Dykes is also of the opinion that this Valens “is probably not the historical Valens who wrote the Anthology”. In support of that view we might note that Vettius Valens, whilst he includes some instruction on inception charts, is highly critical of astrologers who try to predict anything from one single chart, rather than applying several prognostic techniques to a nativity and gaining certainty in the periods when they show combined support for indicating crisis periods. In book IX for example, he writes “One method combining with another contributes great certainty. For ‘one’ by itself attains nothing and has a vague and evanescent utility, since it is unsupported and aided by nothing” (Riley, p.160). Also, in his criticism of those who predict too much from inception charts Valens writes (Riley, p.156):

<I will not be> like some charlatans, who try to predict all activities from one beginning—not only activities but also lifespans—in their attempts to deceive the souls of their clients. It were preferable for <the astrologer> to cast the horoscope and then to begin to interpret it with sober reasoning, taking into account all the relative positions and the angles, not with a multitude of words, but with brevity leading to the truth. Such a man then would appear to be a guide to life, a good advisor and unerring prophet of Fate. Some things however happen to these ignorant men, lovers of money: these flatterers bring false delights and dull man’s reason; while they have the ethereal soul in their keeping, they snatch it from the heavens and dash it to the earth. As a result, most <of their clients> suffer grievous harm and gain for themselves foreknowledge with no foundation.

¹⁵ According to the fifth century Byzantine chronicle of John Malalas, Seleucus established the site of his capital city by making a sacrifice to Zeus on a mountain, then offering part of the sacrificial meat to an Eagle and watching where the Eagle carried the flesh to. The story is supported by coins of Antioch which show an eagle standing on a garlanded altar or holding the thigh of a sacrificed animal (see Howgego, Heuchert and Burnett, *Coinage and Identity in the Roman Provinces* (Oxford Univ. Press, 2007), p.149. Some accounts claim the city was named by Seleucus after his father Antiochus, according to other accounts this is the name of his son.

¹⁶ *Astrology and Religion Among the Greeks and Romans*, Dover, 1912; p.46. Comments made in other works include:

The researches of Assyriologists have shown that its [Babylon’s] ancient worship persisted under the Seleucids, and at the time of Strabo the Chaldeans still discussed cosmology and first principles in the rival schools of Borsippa and Orchoe. The ascendancy of that erudite clergy affected all surrounding regions, but more than anywhere else the Syrians, who were connected with the eastern Semites by bonds of language and blood. (*Oriental Religions*, p. 122.)

The Seleucids believed in Chaldean astrology, and the kings of Commene, as well as a great number of Syrian cities, had the signs of the zodiac as emblems on their coins. It is certain that this pseudo-science penetrated into those regions [eastern and western Syria] long before the Hellenistic period. (*Oriental Religions*, p.25.)

¹⁷ *GH*, p.183.

¹⁸ IX, Preface, Riley, p.151.

¹⁹ Riley takes it upon himself to insert a translator’s reference to Alexandria in book V although the text makes no call for this (p.105): “Just as men from all climes come to various cities, particularly to the royal city <Alexandria>, many men from all directions, but not all approaching by the same road”. Robert Schmidt’s translation of this point reads (Books V & VI, p.29): “Just as foreigners, when coming down to certain cities and especially to a royal area, sometime make their arrival otherwise than through a single path”.

- ²⁰ IX.7, R. p.157: “Therefore the layout of the XII Houses, which are arranged differently depending on the inclination of the ecliptic in different <geographical areas>, cause an extraordinary variation <in fortune>. Those born in Rome will not have the same lifespan as those born in Babylon, and vice-versa”.
- ²¹ *GH*, p.183. Also see endnote 32.
- ²² His sources include (refs. to Riley): Abraham (p.41-2), Apollinarius (p.117, 162), Aristarchus (p.161), Asclation (p.151), Asclepius (p.153), Euctemon (p.161), Hermeios (p.91), Hermes (p.92, 158), Hermippus (p.41), Hipparchus (p.14, 91), Hypsicles (p.70), Kidenas (p.162), Meton (p.161), Philip (p.15, 161) Orion (p.59), Seuthos (p.91), Soudines (p.162), Thrasyllus (p.161), Timaeus (p.44), Zoroaster (p.154). All of these works are now lost to us and Valens makes no reference to any of the older or contemporary authors whose works have survived (Aratus, Dorotheus, Eudoxus, Geminus, Manilius, Ptolemy).
- ²³ Book IX, Riley, p.162. Geminus (c. 1st cent. BCE) tells us:
- The two solstices and the two equinoxes occur, in the way of thinking of Greek astronomers, in the first degree of these signs [Aries, Cancer, Libra, Capricorn] but in the way of thinking of the Chaldeans, they occur in the eighth degrees of these signs”.
- To this point the translators add a footnoted remark “the spring equinox is, as Geminus says, “at the first degree” of Aries... This was also the convention of Greek mathematical astronomy in the tradition of Hipparchus and Ptolemy. But a Babylonian convention placed the equinoctial and solstitial points 8° within their signs”.
- James Evans and J. Lennart Berggren, *Geminus’s Introduction to the Phenomena* (Princeton Univ. Press, 2006), p.115 and *fn.* 8.
- ²⁴ R. L. Odom. 1965. ‘Vettius Valens & the Planetary Week’. *Andrews University Seminary Studies (AUSS)*, v.3 p.110-137, edited by Siegfried H. Horn | <https://digitalcommons.andrews.edu/auss/vol3/iss2/3/>; p.119.
- ²⁵ Speaking of the Roman government, Dio Cassius tells us “The day on which Alexandria had been captured they declared a lucky day, and directed that in future years it should be taken by the inhabitants of that city as the starting-point in their reckoning of time” (*Roman History*, LI.19 | http://penelope.uchicago.edu/Thayer/E/Roman/Texts/Cassius_Dio/51*.html); quoted by Odom, p.117.
- ²⁶ Albiruni, *Chronology of Ancient Nations*, trans. by C. Eduard Sachau (London, 1879) p.33 | <https://archive.org/stream/chronologyofanci00biru#page/32/mode/2up>; quoted by Odom p.121:
- It was Augustus who caused the people of Alexandria to give up their system of reckoning by non-intercalated Egyptian years, and to adopt the system of the Chaldeans, which in our time is used in Egypt.
- Valens work (I.10) gives us the oldest clear reference to the use of planetary day and hour rulers that flow sequentially through time without interruption, with every new week commencing on the Sun’s day (Sunday). Robert Odom argues (p.125) that this was the result of his knowledge that the first day of the era of Augustus (Thoth 1 / August 31, 30 BCE), fell upon a Sunday.
- ²⁷ Pingree, David, *Vettii Valentis Antiocheni Anthologiarum Libri Novem*. Leipzig: B.G. Teubner, 1986, pg.v.
- ²⁸ For example, reference to the chart in book V.6 is translated by Schmidt to read (pp.30-31) “For at the time he fared well upon a foreign land and had friendships with his superiors, and he was in danger of being ruined by a female person, and he encountered cuts and bloodshed”. It is translated by Riley to read (p.105): “During this period the client worked abroad, was a friend of great men, was in mortal danger because of a woman, and suffered cuts and bleeding”.
- ²⁹ IV, preface; Riley translation, p.113.
- ³⁰ Book VII, Riley, p.127.
- ³¹ Many biographers combine the suggestion that Valens was born in Antioch and this chart is assumed to be his horoscope; one example being Wolfgang Hübner’s entry on Valens in *Complete Dictionary of Scientific Biography* (<http://www.encyclopedia.com/doc/1G2-2830906164.html>): “Apart from the fact that Valens was born in Antioch scholars know very little about the life of the Greek astrologer. He seems to have published both his birth horoscope and his conception horoscope anonymously. The former dates from 8 February 120 CE”.
- ³² Valens identifies the chart as belonging to clima 7 in VII.5 (Riley, p.134; *GH*, p.116). Valens’ system of seven climes differs from that of Ptolemy (*Almagest* II.8), who most later authors followed. Neugebauer and Van Hoesen discuss its basis in *Greek Horoscopes* pp.4-5, where the left hand section of table 3 shows how Valens’ system compares with Ptolemy’s (the details of how Neugebauer calculated the latitudes of

the climes are beyond my understanding). The value attributed to clima seven under system B roughly correlates with the latitude of Borysthene, which in classical antiquity referred either to a region on the northern shores of the Black Sea (close to the modern day city of Ochakiv in the Ukraine) or the region marked by the Dnieper river, which runs into the Black Sea. Its belt of latitude is approximately 45-48°N, which covers the European territories of northern Italy, central France, *etc.*

³³ See endnote 3.

³⁴ The conjecture that this was Valens' own chart, coupled with assumption that reference to "klima 7" indicates a specific location in the Ukraine rather than a belt of latitude (See endnote 32), led Dave Roell of The Astrology Center of America (astroamerica.com) to nationalize Valens as "a Ukranian born Greek" in his introductory publication of Mark Riley's translation of Valens *Anthologies*, book One (p.22). Roell set the horoscope that is supposed to be Valen's own for Dnipropetrovsk, Ukraine, 48°N27 / 34°E59 (p.16), and from this proposed that horoscopes belonging to clima 6 are best set for Kerch in the Crimea (p.25). Roell's untimely death in 2014 prevented the completion of his publication and it is possible that he would have revised his opinion, published in a preliminary exposure of work that was still in the early stages of preparation.

³⁵ Book IV, Riley, p.77.

³⁶ Book II, Riley, p.47.

³⁷ Fifth-century Addition, Riley, p.171

³⁸ His conclusion of book III (R. p.70) reads:

These chapters which I have composed may seem unprofessional because they have been addressed to a youthful audience, my students, in such a way that they might find my introduction to this art comprehensible. In view of this fact, I had wished to revise them for greater accuracy, but I have not had the opportunity because my vision has been troubled and my intellectual capacity has been enfeebled by my deep sorrow for a precious student who has died. May the reader pardon me.

Valens also comments on his writing style in book VI (Riley, p.122):

I have composed this book not artistically as some do, performing an enticing "concerto" in their arrangement of words and their use of meter, charming their listeners with their mythological, mystifying obscurities. Although I have not used fine language, I have experienced much, have expended much toil, and have personally examined and tested what I have compiled.

³⁹ Book IX.I, Riley, p.152.

⁴⁰ Book IX, Preface, Riley, p.151.

⁴¹ Book III.7-8 and IV.26, Riley, p.62-3 and 91.

⁴² Book V.11 and IX, Riley p.108 and p.15.

⁴³ Book III.9, Riley, p.66.

⁴⁴ Book VIII.5, Riley, p.141.

⁴⁵ Book V.6, Riley, p.102.

⁴⁶ Book VII, Riley, p.37:

O Marcus, I have researched and discovered these matters with much ascetic labor, and I have compiled and published these systems. ... Estimating this work of years to be worth much money, I have left it to you, for money is easily spent and attracts envy and treachery, but my compositions will bring you a livelihood, fame, honor, pleasure, and profit, if you handle them in an orderly, secure manner (as I have described above), not in a controversial or trivial manner. ...May your wishes be fulfilled if you keep your oath.
I have finished.