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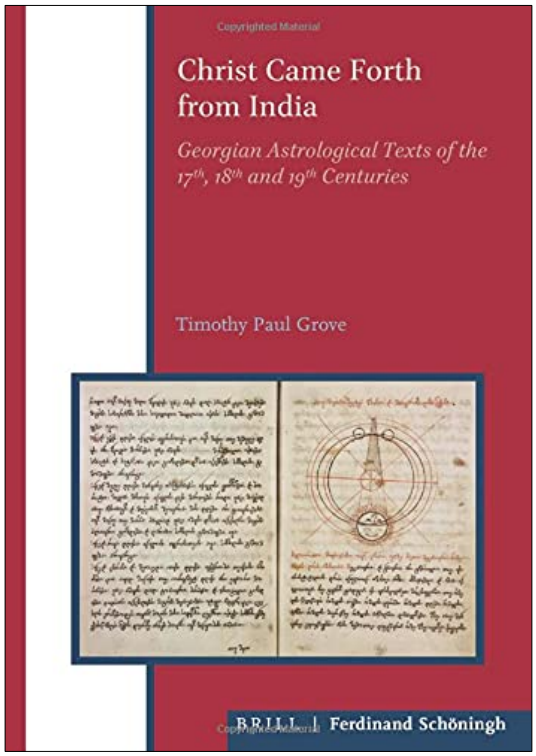
Christ Came Forth from India: Georgian Astrological Texts of the 17th, 18th and 19th Centuries, by Timothy Paul Grove. (Leiden, Brill 2021). Pp xxii + 463. ISBN 978-3-506-70516-7 (hardback), 165 × 240 mm, Euro 138.32.

Timothy Grove's examination of astrological texts from the Caucasian state of Georgia is Volume 15 in Brill's Eurasian Studies Library series. The book's title is eye-catching, but its relevance is not clear as there is little about Christ in the book and less about India than about the Greek-world. I suspect it is a hang-over from an earlier iteration of the research on which the book is based. In fact, the focus is on texts from the seventeenth and the nineteenth centuries, although both the historical and geographical nets are drawn from a much wider context, extending back to second millennium BCE Mesopotamia for textual antecedents and Europe, India and China for geographical reach.

The book begins with a short introduction to the history of astrology from Mesopotamia to Medieval Europe, taking in the Greek world, India and Persia, which serves as a foundation for later discussions of the textual origins of Georgian texts. Part 1 then consists of three further introductory chapters. Chapter 1 introduces Georgian history, Chapter 2 introduces astral and related divinatory practices from the region, and Chapter 3 introduces Christian divinatory practices, astrology in the decorative arts, calendrical questions and words for the Sun Moon and planets.

The use of the designation Georgia, as Grove makes clear, is modern: the state we recognise only took shape under Russian and Soviet rule, and the whole of the Caucasus is marked by ethnic and linguistic diversity. Regarding the history of the period,



Grove identifies three cultural phases. The first dates up to the thirteenth century when the region would have been the recipient of material from Persia and Byzantium, and from any cultures which they, in turn, drew on. This era was disrupted by the Mongol invasions from 1236 to 1243, followed by the incursion by Timur, after which the area passed under Ottoman control. From the early seventeenth century an astrological revival began under royal patronage, with texts coming from Europe including Italy, but also showing continuity with ancient practice.

Part 2 (Chapters 4–8) reports on the actual manuscripts in five further chapters, often with extended extracts, and Part 3 (Chapters 9–13) considers different application of astrology, such as medicine and the

weather, and includes a short conclusion (Chapter 14).

The major manuscripts which Grove considers include the Beltrano manuscripts from the seventeenth century, Manuscript A620 from around 1700, manuscript H503 from 1808 and manuscript S-5237 from 1864. He takes a broad definition of "… the foundational assumption of astrology … that celestial phenomena correlate somehow to life on Earth." (p. 7). This is sensible as it sidesteps questions of causation and whether it arises, say, from divine will, or celestial influences, and enables him to perform a textual analysis of the actual manuscripts. He develops a distinction between astrology and astronomy (always a problematic area for the history of both prior to the mid-seventeenth century), which I have not seen elsewhere:

> Any Premodern text that embodies the Ptolemaic (geocentric) cosmology may legitimately be described as an astrological text. A Modern text which is informed by a Copernican (heliocentric) cosmology may be described as an astronomical text. (p. 5).

He does, though, develop a three-fold typology which serves as an over-arching framework.

1. Agricultural astronomy deals with celestial phenomena, seasonal weather patterns and the agricultural year. Meteorological astrology or Astro meteorology can also be included under this heading.
2. Astrological divination is simple and technically includes: calendar divination, including lunaria, texts that give readings for the days of the lunar month; melothesia, which links parts of the body to the planets and the zodiac; and astrological dream interpretation.
3. Mathematical astrology, the most technically complex form, involving the calculation of horoscopes in which the planets and signs of the zodiac take up multiple mathematical relationships to each other either simply, or in combination, all of which have their own potential meanings. Other historians would refer to this form as 'horoscopic' or 'judicial' (in the sense that it makes judgements).

Grove has provided a service by compiling a huge amount of information concerning local ethnic practices and linguistic descriptions which would otherwise be impossible to track down. It may not be a matter of huge historical significance to know that in the Abkhaz language the Sun is *a-mra* and the Moon is *a-mza* (p.51), but for a comprehensive history of the planets we need to know this as much as we do the Latin, Arabic or Sanskrit names. That the Georgian word for the Sun, *mze*, is similar to the Abkhaz word for the Moon then becomes of wider cultural significance if we are considering linguistic transmission as well as the genderisation of the planets.

The overwhelming point of interest, however, as Grove demonstrates time and again, is that the texts he translates and transcribes, are part of the broader complex web of astrological ideas of which the earliest extant evidence is in Mesopotamian texts such as the *Mul Apin* (p. 41), and filtered through classical Greece, India, Persia and Medieval Europe, with some tenuous connections to China.

His claim that there were uniquely Georgian astrological concepts is supported by a list (p. 63), which includes the worship of the Sun and the Moon, the observation of the heliacal rising of certain stars, observation of stars from the tops of mountains, or tracing the course of the Sun and Moon during the year. However, any claim of uniqueness is difficult to sustain, considering the weight of evidence he presents to the contrary. Grove shows how connections with Italy were so close that horoscopes in one text, the *Almanacco Perpetuo* of 1653 (pp. 120 and 121), were of exactly the same style as examples in Italy. Grove does not mention that they were also of the same style as that found in William Lilly's Christian Astrology of 1649, the first major astrological text to be published in English. Astrology was clearly an international language (although, interestingly, such texts were introduced to Georgia at the same time as astrology was falling out of favour in Western Europe). As Grove concludes (p. 363),

> It will be necessary to develop a full understanding of the interrelationship between these texts … The more connections we can trace to their origin, the better we will understand the history (and prehistory) of Eurasia, and the closer we will come to reclaiming the wisdom of the ancient past.

The book's strength is as a source book. Grove himself stresses (p. 363) that there is further analysis to be done. The weakness is

a certain amount of repetition. For example, 'Astrometeorology', and 'Meteorological Astrology', are featured in Chapters 8 and 11. However, this is partly a consequence of the complexity of the task: to deal with primary sources of different types, sometimes from a variety of ethnic and linguistic contexts, and to place them in their historical and technical contexts. There is only one curious passage which stands out, an anachronistic denunciation of the *Almanacco Perpetuo* as

> … a veritable treasury of popular lore and pseudo-science … a handbook for hucksters, quacks and wise women, a somewhat sinister Italian counterpart to Poor Richard. (page 72).

Such language is unnecessary in a modern cultural history.

Overall, this is a book for the specialist, and it is designed to be consulted rather than read. It is a work of great scholarship which completes a gap in our knowledge of the combined history of astronomy and astrology. Grove is to be congratulated in extending the textual range of both.

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***The Recumbent Stone Circles of Aberdeenshire: Archaeology, Design, Astronomy and Methods*, by John Hill. (Newcastle-upon-Tyne, Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2021). Pp. xiii + 198. ISBN 978-1-5275-6585-2 (hardback), 150 × 210 mm, UK pounds 61.99.**

There has been a construction boom in Glasgow in the last few years, but it hardly compares to an earlier one in north-east Scotland. For reasons that will likely forever remain unknown, there was a major construction boom between 2620 and 2480 BCE, a period known as the British Late Neolithic. While this book about stone circles is focused on Aberdeenshire in north-east Scotland, the boom encompassed the entire island of Great Britain.

Experimental archaeologist Dr John Hill (University of Liverpool) tells us a total of 156 recumbent stone circles (RSCs) were built in England, Wales and Scotland. It

> … seems to have been a time of mobilising its people and resources to build 'megalithic' stone circles on a colossal scale … in terms of volume and tonnage, prehistoric Aberdeenshire was moving far more stone than what was required to build both Stonehenge and Avebury. (p. 35).

Developing a history of this period is fraught with difficulty as the peoples of that era left no written record that we know of yet. So, we must assume that merely by word of mouth (in whatever language they used) and personal demonstration, both the idea and desire to build these circles, and the practical knowledge to construct them, pervaded the British Isles. That alone is quite astonishing, but Hill's research goes further in identifying just what that practical knowledge was. The

> … process for setting out the station stones rectangles … originates from a technique which I have discovered to have been widely used across Neolithic Britain. As my experimental reconstructions demonstrate, this technique appears to have been in use since the very start of the Neolithic, circa 4000 BCE. (p. 162).

The technique Hill has decided upon is a simple one, as it must be:

> … the stone circles were intentionally planned and methodically set out using a rudimentary form of mathematics that involved folding lengths of rope. (p. 70).

That technique is an idea first broached by Richard Atkinson in 1986, in his study of Stonehenge. Hill also remarks the use of rope for measuring is attested in ancient Egypt. In this book he answers the two basic questions here:

> But how does this assumption translate into reality? And what do I mean by using ropes for setting out and measuring? (p. 16).

Hill makes it clear the idea people merely set out these stone circles 'by eye' in unsupportable. He convincingly shows

> … that the stone circles were not just chosen at random or picked out of a landscape haphazardly. On the contrary, measurements and dimensions were important. (p. 70).

The author identified 36 sites in Aberdeenshire that are in a sufficient state of preservation to test his ideas. The key to any