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**“*APUD NAISSUM GENITUS*”: CONSTANTINE IN THE
MATHESIS OF FIRMICUS MATERNUS**

Abstract: The earliest source to mention Naissus as the birthplace of Constantine the Great is *Matheseos Libri VIII* by Firmicus Maternus. Written between 334 and 337, this treatise is the most complete astrological handbook in Latin preserved from the Classical period. As revealed by the author, it was composed at the request of his friend, Lollianus Mavortius, a high government official. In the closing chapter of the first book, Maternus discusses the influence of the stars on the physiognomy and disposition of men based on the place they were born, by concluding with the example of Constantine. In a lengthy laudatory passage, he informs us that the emperor was born in Naissus. The chapter closes with an invocation of the planets and a prayer for Constantine and his children, that the planets may grant them everlasting rule. In another segment, at the end of the second book of *Mathesis*, Maternus states how the emperor is exempt from the influence of the stars, that his fate is determined by the Highest God who governs all things and who appointed him to rule the entire world. Throughout the work, however, Maternus provides us with instances contradicting this statement, mentioning planetary aspects which influenced the emperor to make a certain decision, or those indicating that a person may become an emperor or otherwise be involved with an emperor; even in the case of Constantine, besides imploring the planets on his behalf, Maternus remarks how the emperor received his rule under favourable auspices and calls him fortunate. In this paper, I will analyze the afore-mentioned segments of the text in the context of historical and political conditions prevalent at the time it was produced. Thus, insight into mechanisms of accommodating divinatory practices in the new religious climate of the fourth century could be gained that in turn would further demonstrate the relevance of the *Mathesis* as a historical source for the study of Constantine and his age.

Keywords: Constantine, Naissus, Astrology, Early Christianity, Imperial Legislation.

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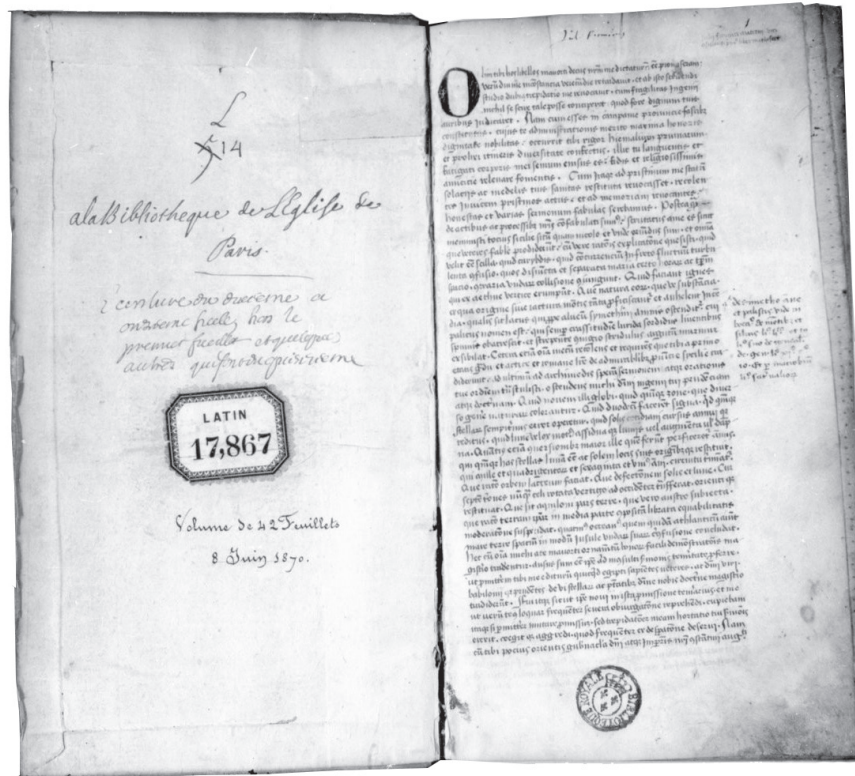


Fig. 1 The opening page of the *Mathesis* by Iulius Firmicus Maternus, 11th century, Paris, BnF, Ms. Lat. 17867.

Сл. 1 Почетна страница рукописа *Mathesis*-а Јулија Фирмика Матерна, XI век, Paris, BnF, Ms. Lat. 17867.

Matheseos Libri VIII by Iulius Firmicus Maternus is the most complete astrological treatise written in Latin that has come down to us from the Classical period.² It is also the earliest source to mention Naissus – the modern day Niš, as the birthplace of Constantine the Great. There has been much debate in historiography over the date of its composition, since the text itself presents us with several contradictory remarks.³ However, two statements allow us to determine the time frame in which it was written: the mention of a solar eclipse in 334 and a laudatory passage to the ruling emperor Constantine inscribed toward the end

² The majority of ancient astrological literature is written in Greek, the language of most of the scientific works in the Antiquity. The only other astrological text in Latin that has come down to us is the poem *Astronomica* written by Manilius in the first decade of the first century; however, it has largely been unknown in the Middle Ages and it is far less informative than the *Mathesis*.

³ For the most recent and extensive overview on the issue of the dating of *Mathesis*, see H. Mace, *Firmicus Maternus' Mathesis and the Intellectual Culture of the Fourth Century AD*, PhD Dissertation, University of St. Andrews 2017, 17–19, 22–28.

of the first book, which makes us conclude that the text must have been written during emperor's life, that is, before the end of the year of 337.⁴ The passage goes as follows:

“the lord and our Augustus, emperor of the whole world, the pious, fortunate and far-seeing Constantine, the oldest son of the deified Constantius, a prince of august and venerable memory, who was chosen to rescue the world from the rule of tyrants and to suppress evils at home by the favour of his own majesty, so that through him the squalor of servitude might be washed away and the gifts of secure freedom restored to us, and so that we might cast off the yoke of captivity from our already tired and oppressed necks. Always fighting for our liberty he was never deceived by the fortune of war, that most uncertain thing among human vicissitudes. Born in Naissus, from the first stage of his age he held the rudders of empire, which he had acquired under favourable auspices, and he sustains the Roman world by the salubrious moderation of his rule so that it enjoys an increase of its everlasting good fortune.”⁵

Translation is according to Timothy Barnes who emended this paragraph, since modern editions repeat the error of the eleventh-century scribe in the oldest preserved manuscript of the *Mathesis*, where it is written: “*Constantinus scilicet maximus divi Constantini filius*,” instead of *Constantii filius*. The name of Constantius is often confused with the name of Constantine in medieval sources and that mistake has led some researchers to assume that the emperor to whom Firmicus Maternus gives praise is in fact Constantine II, the son of Constantine the Great, which would place the composition of the *Mathesis* at a later date.⁶ Yet, the mention of Naissus as the birthplace of the emperor brings us to the conclusion that the Constantine in question seems to be Constantine the Great. It is known that Constantine II was born in Arles, Constantius II most likely in Sirmium, and the birthplace of Constans is uncertain.⁷ Yet, since another source, the anonymous *Origo Constantini Imperatoris*, chronologically close to the *Mathesis*, also mentions Naissus as the place of Constantine's birth, we can be fairly certain that Firmicus Maternus is indeed referring to Constantine the Great.⁸ Since *Origo* was written shortly after Constantine's death, the *Mathesis* can be considered as the older of the two sources.

⁴ Ancient Astrology Theory and Practice, *Matheseos Libri VIII* by Firmicus Maternus, trans. J. Rhys Bram, Park Ridge/NJ 1975, I, IV, 10; I, X, 13; 18, 29-30.

⁵ T. Barnes, *Constantine: Dynasty, Religion and Power in the Later Roman Empire*, Chichester 2014, 168-9, n. 38.

⁶ Mace, Dissertation, *passim*. Common occurrence of medieval copyist's error in supplanting the name of Constantius with that of his son was highlighted by L. Thorndike *History of Magic and Experimental Science During the First Thirteen Centuries of Our Era*, vol. 1, London 1923, 526.

⁷ Of Arles as birthplace of Constantine II, we learn from *Epitome de Caesaribus*, trans. T. B. Bachich, Buffalo NY 2018, 41 and Zosimus, *New History*, trans. R. T. Ridley, Canberra 2006, 33. Julian's Oration to Constantius mentions that he was born in Illyricum, and since it is recorded in Theodosian Code that Constantine was in Sirmium two months prior to the birth of Constantius in 317, it is probably there that his third son was born. Julian, *Orations I. 5D*, *The Works of Emperor Julian I*, trans. W. C. Wright, Cambridge MA 1913, 15; CTh. 11. 30. 7.

⁸ The Origin of Constantine: The Anonymous Valesianus pars Prior (Origo Con-

The laudatory passage quoted is found in the chapter devoted to the influence of the stars on the physiognomy and disposition of men based on the place they were born, and the author uses the example of the emperor to illustrate his point. Praise to the emperor was a literary convention in Classical writing; that in the *Mathesis* it is inserted in the section dealing with planetary effects on the people in different geographic zones may be more than a coincidence. Following this passage, Maternus invokes each of the planets, as well as the sun and moon, which were counted among the planets in ancient astronomy, and beseeches them to aid and protect Constantine and his sons:

“... by virtue of the harmony of your rule, and obedient to the highest god who gives you never-ending lordship, vouchsafe that Constantine the Most Great Princeps and his unconquered children, our lords and Caesars, rule over our children and our children’s children through endless ages so that, freed from all misfortune, the human race may enjoy everlasting peace and prosperity.”⁹

It has been put forward that the highest god mentioned in this passage, to whom Maternus claims the planets are obedient, is none other than the God of the Christians.¹⁰ In 343, Firmicus Maternus wrote a Christian polemic *De Errore Profanarum Religionum*- “On the error of profane religions” in which he urges the Emperors Constantius and Constans to suppress pagan rites in the western parts of the Roman Empire.¹¹ In earlier scholarship, it was doubted that the author of an astrological manual could be the author of a staunch attack on pagan religions and it was contested that both works were written by Maternus; however, a stylistic analysis has proven that indeed both works were written by the same person.¹² The later treatise is characterized by violent rhetoric which has been interpreted by some researchers as a sign of zeal of a recent convert.¹³ Still, there have been those, such as Lynn Thorndike, who believed that Maternus was a Christian even at the time he was writing the *Mathesis*.¹⁴

stantini), 2, trans. J. Stevenson, From Constantine to Julian: Pagan and Byzantine Views, A Source History, eds. S. N. C. Lieu and D. Montserrat, London 1996, 39–62, 43.

⁹ *Mathesis*, I, X, 14; 29–30.

¹⁰ Barnes, *Constantine*, 169.

¹¹ While the date of the polemic has been placed generally between 343 and 350, George Woudhuysen argues convincingly for 343 as the year Maternus wrote this work, based on the vivid description of Constans’ visit to Britain in 343 and the lack of mention of events that occurred later that year and the following one in the East, which indicates that news of Constantius’ victory in 343 and the Battle of Singara in 344 had not yet reached the West. G. Woudhuysen, *Uncovering Constans’ Image*, Imagining Emperors in the Later Roman Empire, eds. D. W. P. Burgersdijk and A. J. Ross, (Leiden/Boston 2018), 158–182, 172.

¹² C. H. Moore, *Julius Firmicus Maternus: der Heide und der Christ*, PhD dissertation, Munich 1897.

¹³ H. A. Drake, *Firmicus Maternus and the Politics of Conversion*, *Qui Miscuit Utile Dulci*: Festschrift Essays for Paul Lachlan MacKendrick, eds. G. Schmeling and J. D. Mikalson, (Wauconda ILL 1998), 133–150; M. Kahlos, *The Rhetoric of Tolerance and Intolerance – From Lactantius to Firmicus Maternus*, Continuity and Discontinuity in Early Christian Apologetics, eds. J. Ulrich, A.-C. Jacobsen, and M. Kahlos, (Aarhus 2009), 79–95.

¹⁴ Thorndike, *History of Magic*, 527–531. More recently, the view of Maternus as a Christian adherent at the time of his writing of the astrological handbook is also espoused in Woudhuysen, *Uncovering Constans’ Image*, 171.

In both works, Maternus uses the term *Summus Deus*, which is often found in the extant letters and documents of Constantine, as well as in the writings of some of the Church Fathers such as Lactantius.¹⁵ But it was also used by a great number of Romans, from those worshipping Jupiter, to those belonging to the cult of Mithras, as well as those that would consider themselves Hermetists or Neoplatonists. Thus, application of this term should be viewed as a part of a conscious effort to appeal to a broad religious audience, which certainly must have been the case with Constantine and Lactantius, as well as Maternus.¹⁶ Throughout the *Mathesis*, he talks of multiple gods, which should make us refrain or at least make cautious from leaping to conclusions when it comes to his religious adherence during the writing of this work. It is most likely that he did not want to alienate himself and his subject matter from any potential readers. It is possible that he was leaning towards Christianity already, or it may be that he wanted to appeal to those in the highest instances of power who had Christian predilections, such as the Emperor Constantine himself.

Producing a thoroughly Christian version of astrology would have been a highly risky endeavor, since opposing attitudes towards astrology and divination in general have been expressed in the writings of numerous early Church fathers, and prohibitions of astrological practice among Christian believers are found already in *Didache*.¹⁷ However, we have evidence of many Christians practicing astrology, as we can surmise from the complaints and condemnations of those same Church Fathers that testify of astrological activity among their congregation.¹⁸ There are also preserved horoscopes of persons with Christian names and epitaphs showing zodiacal signs alongside Christian symbols.¹⁹ While there were some heretical groups which tried to incorporate astrological theories into Christian teachings, there were many converts who simply continued consulting astrologers.²⁰ Some researchers have pointed out how Maternus

¹⁵ N. Lenski, *Early Retrospectives on the Christian Constantine: Athanasius and Firmicus Maternus*, Constantino prima e dopo Constantino/Constantine before and after Constantine, eds. G. Bonamente, N. Lenski and R. Lizzi Testa, (Bari 2012), 465–479, 476–477. Lactantius uses the term *Summus Deus* more than any other Latin Church Father, as concluded in E. DePalma Digeser, *The Making of a Christian Empire: Lactantius & Rome*, Ithaca/London 2000, 68.

¹⁶ *Loc. cit.*

¹⁷ The *Didache*, 3, trans. *M. B. Riddle* (Ante-Nicene Fathers vol. 7), Buffalo NY 1886. For an overview of writings of Early Christian Fathers on astrology, see T. Hegedus, *Early Christianity and Ancient Astrology*, New York 2007.

¹⁸ Tertullian, *On Idolatry*, 9, 1, trans. *S. Thellwall*, Buffalo NY 1885; Origen, *Homilies on Joshua*, 5, 6, trans. *B. J. Bruce*, Washington DC 2002.

¹⁹ In a group of papyri from late fourth-century Antinoe, there are horoscopes calculated for birth times of two men whose names- Ioannes and Kyrillos, lead us to conclusion that they must have been Christian. R. S. Bagnall, *Egypt in the Late Antiquity*, Princeton NJ 1993, 274. On the mid fourth-century tomb of a boy named Simplicius in Rome, the sign of Capricorn and the letters Alpha and Omega are carved. J. McCaul, *Christian Epitaphs of the First Six Centuries*, Toronto 1869, 54–55.

²⁰ On astrological beliefs among heretical groups, see Hippolytus, *Refutation of All Heresies*, 4.46–50, trans. *J. H. MacMahon*, Buffalo NY 1886; Irenaeus, *Against Heresies*, I, 15, 6; I, 24, 7, trans. *A. Roberts and W. Rambaut*, Buffalo NY 1885.

wished to present the practicing of astrology as respectable and lofty out of concern for the reception and survival of his profession in the increasingly Christianizing society.²¹ At the end of the second book, he gives a series of instructions to a practicing astrologer on how to conduct himself: “Be modest, upright, sober, eat little, be content with few goods... avoid plots; at all times shun disturbances and violence.” He also suggests what kind of life he should lead: “Have a wife, a home, many sincere friends”; he advises him to develop a virtuous character and to abide by moral and official laws.²²

The laws applying specifically to astrologers were imposed and regulated by an edict issued by Augustus in AD 11, in which it is demanded of them to perform their consultations in the open and in the presence of a witness; also, they were prohibited from speculating on the time of death of any person.²³ Maternus is reiterating these restrictions when he advises the prospective astrologer: “See that you give your responses publicly in a clear voice, so that nothing may be asked of you which is not allowed either to ask or to answer.”²⁴ Further on, he warns him not to answer on the life of the emperor and the republic:

“Beware of replying to anyone asking about the condition of the Republic or the life of the Roman Emperor. For it is not right, nor is it permitted, that from wicked curiosity we learn anything about the condition of the Republic. But it is a wicked man and one worthy of all punishment who, when asked, gives a response about the destiny of the Emperor, because the astrologer is able neither to find out nor to say anything.”²⁵

It is not only out of moral or legal concerns that Maternus advises against consultations on imperial and political topics; he claims that these matters are in fact impossible to predict:

“In fact no astrologer is able to find out anything true about the destiny of the Emperor. For the Emperor alone is not subject to the course of the stars and in his fate alone the stars have no power of decreeing. Since he is master of the whole universe, his destiny is governed by the judgment of the Highest God, since the whole world is subject to the power of the Emperor and he himself is also considered among the number of the gods whom the Supreme Power has set up to create and conserve all things.”²⁶

As Frederick Cramer observed, this was a departure from the traditional approach in which the fate of the ruler was predetermined and foretold by the

²¹ C. Sogno, *Astrology, Morality, the Emperor, and the Law in Firmicus Maternus' „Mathesis“*, Illinois Classical Studies 30 (2005), 167–176; H. Mace, *Astrology and Religion in Late Antiquity*, A Companion to Religion in Late Antiquity, ed. J. Lössl and N. J. Baker-Brian, (Hoboken NJ/ Malden MA 2018), 433–451, 447.

²² *Mathesis* II, XXX; 68-70.

²³ Frederick Cramer, *Astrology in Roman Law and Politics*, Philadelphia PA 1954, 279–280. The text of the edict has not been preserved, but some of its promulgations have been preserved by Cassius Dio. Dio's Roman History VII, 56, 25, 5, trans. E. Cary, London and Cambridge MA 1955, 57.

²⁴ *Mathesis* II, XXX, 3; 69.

²⁵ *Mathesis* II, XXX, 4; 69.

²⁶ *Mathesis* II, XXX, 5; 69.

stars.²⁷ In fact, some of the emperors had used their nativities to proclaim their glorious destiny and dispel any rumors of their impending fall or approaching death. That was the case with Augustus who made his horoscope public in the same edict of 11 AD, or Septimius Severus, who had the ceilings of reception halls in his palace painted with his horoscopes.²⁸ However, Maternus here presents us with a novel cosmological conception of a sovereign who is above the law of the stars and subordinate only to the Supreme God.

Yet, throughout the *Mathesis*, Maternus contradicts his own stance on the emperor's exemption from astrological determinism. Firstly, when he uses the example of Emperor Constantine to illustrate how the place of one's birth influences the complexion and character of the native.²⁹ In the same passage, he states that Constantine received his rule under favorable auspices and calls him fortunate, an adjective which could imply some degree of fatalistic notions. That he expects the planets to exert influence on the life of the emperor is revealed by the prayer addressed to them at the end of the first book. Furthermore, he identifies placements which indicate if a person shall become an emperor or be involved in the affairs of the emperor; e.g. "Located on the ascendant by day with Saturn, the Sun will make emperors or kings" or "the Moon moving from Mercury toward Jupiter will make the natives great and powerful, entrusted with papers and secrets of emperors."³⁰ He lists certain positions and aspects of planets which make a person an object of emperor's hatred and he points out those which caused the emperor to pass sentence on an individual whose chart he analyses in the second book of the *Mathesis*.³¹ This individual, as Maternus states, was well known to him and his friend, Lollianus Mavortius, to whom he dedicated his astrological handbook and at whose request he composed it. As Maternus mentions in the preface of the first book, at the time they met, Mavortius was a governor of Campania, when he commissioned the work on astrology, he was appointed governor of the entire East, "by the wise and respected judgment of our Lord and Emperor Constantine Augustus", and at the time it was completed, he claims that Mavortius was proconsul and designated *consul ordinarius*.³² Since the life and career of Mavortius are well attested in the sources, all of the positions mentioned by Maternus can be corroborated,

²⁷ Cramer, *Astrology in Roman Law and Politics*, 280.

²⁸ Suetonius, *Lives of the Caesars*, II, 94. trans. C. Edwards, Oxford 2000; Dio's Roman History, 77, 11, 1, trans. E. Cary, London and Cambridge MA 1955, 261.

²⁹ *Mathesis*, I, X, 13; 30.

³⁰ *Mathesis*, III, II, 20; III, III, 19; III, IV, 9, 30; III, V, 2, 21; III, VI, 1, 3, 24; III, VII, 2, 3, 13, 21; III, XI, 2, 17; III, XII, 1; III, XIII, 9, 10; III, XIV, 7; IV, XI, 8; IV, XIV, 5, 16; IV, XVI, 9, 10; IV, XIX, 21; IV, XXI, 9; V, II, 10; V, VI, 6; VI, II, 2; VI, II, 3; VI, II, 5; VI, III, 13; VI, XXXI, 55; VII, XXII, 4; VIII, XVI, 2; VIII, XXVI, 1, 13; VIII, XXVIII, 1, 81, 83, 87, 88, 91, 94, 97, 99, 101, 102, 108, 110, 111, 114, 116, 127, 130, 132, 137, 141, 146, 164, 179, 185, 215, 256, 280, 290, 292, 294

³¹ *Mathesis* II, XXIX, 18; III, II, 19; VII, XXIV, 3; VIII, XXV, 6, 68, 77, 260, 290. On the identity of the owner of that chart, see T. D. Barnes, *Two Senators under Constantine*, *The Journal of Roman Studies* 65 (1975), 40–49.

³² *Mathesis* I, pr. 2, 7, 8; 11–12.

except for the consulship which is evidenced at a much later date, in 355.³³ This has also been a source of confusion and suspicion regarding the date of the writing of the *Mathesis*.³⁴ However, the most probable explanation is that Mavortius was denied consulship at the time he was nominated and later appointed consul. It may be that the death of Emperor Constantine postponed his election or that his consulship was revoked by Constantine's successors.³⁵ It has even been suggested that the dedication of this astrological manual could have affected his election.³⁶

Whatever the case may be, Mavortius was certainly a high-profile and aspiring individual whose career was influenced by decisions of the highest instances of power in the state and the political circumstances surrounding it. Thus, it seems highly likely that any enquiries regarding his own future would involve calculation of nativities of the most important political actors, such as the emperor or his sons. Before devoting himself to the writing of the astrological handbook, Maternus abandoned his legal practice, as he claims in the fourth book of the *Mathesis*.³⁷ Being a lawyer, he must have been very well aware of legal restrictions on astrological activities imposed by the Augustan edict of 11 AD. He could have been familiar with cases in which accusations of illicit astrological inquiries led to the charges of treason, or were used as an evidence of plotting against the emperor in *maiestas* trials.³⁸

Since Maternus clearly believed that the stars had an impact on the life and decisions of an emperor, his statements in the second book of the *Mathesis* claiming otherwise thus may be perceived as a mere rhetorical device. His contention that emperors are exempt from astrological influence may have been expressed with a desire to flatter Constantine, perhaps conform somewhat to his religious inclinations and positions on astrological prognostication.³⁹ Also, what may have been an additional motive was an intention to absolve Mavortius of any suspicions of being involved in predictions concerning the fate of the

³³ Unlike Iulius Firmicus Maternus, Q. Flavius Maesius Egnatius Lollianus *signo* Mavortius is well attested in historical sources. A. H. M. Jones, J. R. Martindale, J. Morris, *The Prosopography of the Later Roman Empire*, vol. 1, AD 260–395, Cambridge 1971, 512–514.

³⁴ See Mace, Dissertation, 17–19, 22–28.

³⁵ R. S. Bagnall, A. Cameron, S. R. Schwartz and K.A. Worp, *Consuls of the Later Roman Empire*, (Atlanta 1987), 19.

³⁶ Lenski, *Early Retrospectives*, 472.

³⁷ *Mathesis* 4, pr. 2.

³⁸ Many of these cases are listed in Cramer, *Astrology in Roman Law and Politics*, 254–275.

³⁹ Since we do not have any explicit remarks in historical sources that would unambiguously reveal the attitude of Constantine towards astrological practice, in my upcoming paper, I have aimed to reconstruct and hypothesize on his stance by analyzing contemporary sources, legislative decisions, as well as a possible astrological background of Constantine's vision before the Battle of the Milvian Bridge. I devoted significant attention to the *Mathesis* of Firmicus Maternus and its novel cosmological conception of imperial power. I. Lemcool, "Our Own Augustus": *Constantine and the Use of Astrology in Imperial Propaganda, Prophetie, Prognose und Politik. Personengeschichtliche Perspektiven zwischen Antike und Neuzeit/ Prophecy, Prognosis, and Politics: Perspectives from the History of Persons Between Antiquity and the Modern Age*, ed. C. Hoffarth, (Frankfurt am Main, forthcoming.)

emperor. Thus, any overt references to the astrological chart of Constantine would have been unacceptable. Still, it may be that under numerous instances of astrological aspects listed in the *Mathesis* indicating the bearer of an imperial horoscope, some of them pertain directly to Constantine himself.

Many of these indicators involve aspects and positions on the ascendant, i.e. *horoskopus*, that is, the zodiac sign and its degree ascending on the eastern horizon at the time of the individual's birth. With regards to the rising sign-ascendant, the other cardinal points of the nativity chart can be calculated: descendant, the Midhaven or *Medium Coeli*, and *Imum Coeli*. Also, from the point of the ascendant, the positions of the twelve houses in the chart are determined. That is why Maternus calls ascendant "the cornerstone and basis of the whole nativity."⁴⁰ Its relevance is illustrated by the account Cassius Dio provides on the nativity charts painted in the palace of Septimius Severus, where he claims that on both of them the ascendant was depicted in a different sign.⁴¹

To calculate the ascendant on his own, an astrologer must be familiar with the exact time of day and the place of native's birth. February 27th as the date of Constantine's birth is recorded in both Chronograph of 354 and Polemius Silvius.⁴² The year of Constantine's birth, however, has been a contested issue in historiography, although it seems most likely that he was born in 273.⁴³ As has been concluded, Constantine presented himself younger than his actual age, presumably in an attempt to justify his inaction and silence during the Great Persecution of Christians, claiming he was "just a boy" at the court of Diocletian in 303, when in fact he was most likely thirty years old.⁴⁴ It seems that Maternus ascribed to Constantian propaganda when he says in the laudatory passage that "he held from his earliest childhood the imperial rule."⁴⁵ That prevents us from making an accurate reconstruction of the emperor's horoscope as Maternus and his friend could have calculated it. Whilst without the hour of birth, we would still be able to calculate the placements of each of the planets in the zodiac signs for the date of February 27th, without the year of birth, the only thing we can be certain about Constantine's nativity chart, regardless of the year, is that his Sun was in Pisces.

⁴⁰ *Mathesis*, II, XIX, 2; 48.

⁴¹ Cassius Dio, 77, 11, 1; 261.

⁴² *Corpus Inscriptionum Latinarum* I², eds. C. Hülsen, T. Mommsen, and W. Henzen, Berlin 1893, 255, 258, 259.

⁴³ For a discussion of historical sources and various propositions on the year of Constantine's birth in modern historiography, see N. Lenski, *The Reign of Constantine*, The Cambridge Companion to the Age of Constantine, ed. N. Lenski, Cambridge 2006, 59, 83, n. 1; T. Barnes, *The New Empire of Diocletian and Constantine*, Cambridge MA–London 1982, 39–40. The year of 273 as the year of birth of Constantine corresponds to accounts of most ancient authors on his age at the time of his death in 337, except for Constantine himself. Idem., *Constantine*, 2.

⁴⁴ Eusebius, *Life of Constantine*, II, 51, I, trans. A. Cameron and S. G. Hall, Oxford 1999, 112; Barnes, *Constantine*, 2; T. G. Elliott, *Eusebian Frauds in the „Vita Constantini“*, *Phoenix* 45 (1991), 162–171, 163–4.

⁴⁵ *Mathesis* I, X, 13; 30.

Still, it could be possible that among various astrological positions listed in the *Mathesis*, some of the characteristics and aspects belonging to the nativity chart of Constantine are revealed. Since Maternus provides more than twenty indicators of an imperial horoscope, there is a strong possibility that some of them were applicable to the ruling emperor. Of course, not all of them can be applied to the same chart. In the sixth book, while he discusses complex aspects, he gives a rather specific example:

“If Jupiter, Mars, Mercury, and Venus are located together on the ascendant, which is in Virgo, and Saturn is in Pisces in opposition to them, the Sun is on the anafora of the ascendant but the Moon is in Aquarius; and if all these are located in their own terms; this shows the chart of a most powerful emperor.”⁴⁶

Here, the ascendant is in the sign of Virgo, while later in the eighth book he says: “Whoever has the ascendant in the first degree of Capricorn will be a king or emperor.”⁴⁷ Obviously, different emperors throughout the history were born under different rising signs, and it would have been too apparent and facile if in the entire work only a single instance of an imperial ascendant was given. Also, Maternus did not compose his work for Mavortius only, although he addresses him throughout the book. In his invocation to the God the Creator in the opening of the fifth book, he states “we have written this book for Thy Romans in order that this subject may not be the only one which the Roman genius has not pursued.”⁴⁸ Maternus clearly intended his work to be read by future generations, however, at the end of the final book, he advises his friend not to reveal it to “inexperienced ears or sacrilegious minds”, but to give it to his sons and his closest friends, of whose virtue he is assured.⁴⁹ Thus, it was not only for the present moment and current concerns that Maternus was providing information; he was preserving the astrological lore in Latin language for posterity. Yet, in the very last passage, Maternus reminds his dedicatee that the book was produced for him alone and that he is its true interpreter and faithful guardian.⁵⁰ Undoubtedly, this was intended as a form of flattery to his patron, who was certainly of higher standing than him, but perhaps Maternus also wished to emphasize and assure Mavortius that issues relevant to him are to be found in the book.

In that context, we can perceive the mention of Naissus in the text. As stated above, the birthplace of an individual was necessary information for the calculation of their nativity chart. That may have been the reason Maternus found it convenient to insert the praise to the emperor in the section discussing the effect of the stars on people born in different geographic zones, wherein he included this relevant piece of information. That it does not appear in any other contemporary source is also revealing. Calculating the horoscope of any person, emperor included, would unavoidably entail calculating the time of their death. Despite the decree of the Augustan edict forbidding such inquiries, Maternus states that determining the span of native’s life is important to investigate upon

⁴⁶ *Mathesis*, VI, XXXI, 55; 215.

⁴⁷ *Mathesis*, VIII, XXVIII, 1; 294.

⁴⁸ *Mathesis*, V, praef., 4; 156.

⁴⁹ *Mathesis*, VIII, XXXIII, 2, 4; 302.

⁵⁰ *Loc. cit.*

drawing up of the chart and collecting all data.⁵¹ This is established by determining the power of the ruler of the chart: “For often, even though certain planets are well located, the ruler of the chart indicates a short span of life; the whole of what the well-placed planets had predicted is changed by an early death.”⁵² Further on, he informs Mavortius that he had explained in detail the computing of the time of life in a single book written for their friend Murinus.⁵³ He mentions two other books within the text of the *Mathesis*: one on the *Myriogenesis*, which was not yet finished at the time, and one which he had already written for Mavortius on the end of life.⁵⁴ Neither of the works survive and it is unknown if the *Myriogenesis* was ever completed. Its subject matter also seems unclear.⁵⁵ He mentions it in the chapter concerning the death of parents where he says: “If you wish to learn more about this matter in detail you must turn to my *Myriogenesis*, where many obscure things are discussed.”⁵⁶ Thus, we can see that Maternus was largely unconcerned over legal ramifications of his treatises providing technical information for calculation of a person’s time of death. Yet, providing information directly on how to calculate the nativity chart of the ruling emperor was a different matter which could bring the lives and careers of himself and his dedicatee under risk. However, considering how much interest Mavortius displayed on the topic of the time of death in an individual’s horoscope and to what extent his career depended on the goodwill of the emperor, it seems highly possible that other details concerning the positions of planets at the time of birth of Constantine were disclosed in the other books. As has been concluded, no one could have been able to practice astrology with only *Mathesis* at hand.⁵⁷

Some additional information could have been provided through aspects indicating other occurrences and circumstances of Constantine’s life known to Maternus and Mavortius which could have also been pertinent to the emperor’s chart. Mother of low-class is marked by the moon in the third or fourth house, or in aspect with Mars.⁵⁸ In the third book, Maternus states that Saturn in the second house from the ascendant makes native the murderer of his wife and children; the loss of wife and children is also marked by Jupiter in the seventh house in a nocturnal chart, and violence toward them, including homicide, is also signaled by Mars in the same house.⁵⁹ Violent and horrible death of a wife is also indicated by Mars and the Moon in opposition, as well as Jupiter and

⁵¹ *Mathesis*, IV, XX, 1; 144.

⁵² *Loc. cit.*

⁵³ *Mathesis*, IV, XX, 2; 144.

⁵⁴ *Mathesis*, V, I, 38; VI, II, 8; VII, IX, 8; VII, VII, 4

⁵⁵ On the meaning of the word *myriogenesis* and the topic of the purported book, see J. Tester, *A History of Western Astrology*, Woodbridge 1987, 137-9.

⁵⁶ *Mathesis* VII, IX, 8; 245.

⁵⁷ Tester, *A History of Western Astrology*, 142.

⁵⁸ *Mathesis*, III, XIII, 5, 7; IV, XXIV, 10; VI, XI, 12; 113, 114, 153, 191.

⁵⁹ *Mathesis*, III, II, 4; III, III, 15; III, IV, 21; 75, 81, 85

Mars on the degree of *Medium Coeli*, and an entire chapter in the seventh book is devoted to different aspects denoting murder of spouses, namely wives, as it is only those that are listed by Maternus.⁶⁰

With few relevant pieces of information, a person versed in astrology could reconstruct an entire nativity chart. By combining aspects and placements listed by Maternus that could have related to the chart of Constantine and comparing them to actual positions of planets on the date of his birth for the years around the third quarter of the third century, a skilled astrologer could confirm or disprove conjectures made in this paper. Even the year taken as the birth year by Maternus could be surmised, if the placement of the slow-moving planet such as Saturn could be determined in that tentative horoscope. Whatever the case may be, this astrological handbook has already proven to be a valuable historical source on the social and political conditions of the Late Antiquity.⁶¹ While in the future it may prove to be an even more significant source for the history of Constantine, the *Mathesis* of Firmicus Maternus is already a noteworthy source for the history of the city of Niš. Not only that it is the earliest source that informs us it was on the territory of the ancient town that once stood in its place that Constantine the Great was born, but that it was owing to that fortuitous circumstance that good fortune was bestowed upon the future emperor and the ruler of the whole world.

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„*APUD NAISSUM GENITUS*“: КОНСТАНТИН У *MATHESIS*-У ФИРМИКА МАТЕРНА

Matheseos Libri VIII Јулија Фирмика Матерна је најпотпуније астролошко дело написано на латинском језику које нам је сачувано из периода антике. Такође је и најранији писани извор који помиње Наисус, данашњи Ниш, као место рођења Константина Великог. Анонимни *Origo Constantini* такође пружа овај податак; међутим, како је овај текст настао након Константинове смрти, извесно је да је *Mathesis* старије дело. Наисус се у њему помиње у оквиру похвалног пасуса цару, на крају прве књиге, након разматрања утицаја звезда на особине и изглед људи на основу места њиховог рођења. Фирмик Матерно је аутор још једног дела- *De errore profanarum religionum* у којем се обраћа царевима Констанцију и Констансу да искорене паганске обреде у западном делу Римског царства. Због свог оштрог полемичког тона и ревноских хришћанских ставова исказаних у њему, Матерново ауторство овог дела је довођено у питање. Ипак, стилском анализом установљено је да он саставио оба дела, премда су и даље у историографији изражаване недоумице и различита становишта у вези његове верске припадности у време писања овог астролошког приручника. У сваком случају и независно од његових личних осећања, врло је вероватно да је Матерно желео да учини свој рад пријемчивим што већем броју људи, нарочито онима на највишим позицијама

⁶⁰ *Mathesis*, VI, XVII, 5; VI, XXX, 10; VII, XVII; 196, 207, 250.

⁶¹ L. Thorndike, A Roman Astrologer as a Historical Source: Julius Firmicus Maternus, *Classical Philology* 8 (1913), 415-435; Barnes, *Two Senators*; Drake, *Firmicus Maternus*; Kahlos, *The Rhetoric of Tolerance and Intolerance*; Lenski, *Early Retrospectives*; Woudhuysen, *Uncovering Constans' Image*.

власти који су фаворизовали хришћанство, попут цара Константина. Међутим, осуде практиковања и изучавања астрологије су већ била исказана у писањима црквених отаца. Упркос томе, поседујемо бројне доказе о хришћанима који су у првим вековима консултовали астрологе или инкорпорирали елементе астролошких теорија у своја учења. Осим бриге о рецепцији његовог дела од стране хришћанских читалаца, код Матерна се може уочити и тежња да покаже да је његово учење у складу са законима који су се односили на рад астролога, а који су били на снази од Августовог едикта из 11. год. н.е. Овим едиктом је астролозима било забрањено да обављају консултације без присуства треће особе, као и да одговарају на питања везана за било чију смрт. Матерно показује своје познавање закона упозоравајући будућег астролога на то, као и да не даје одговоре који се тичу цара и будућности државе. Напомиње како та питања не само да нису дозвољена, већ да је на њих немогуће одговорити, с обиром да звезде немају моћ над судбином цара који је владар читавог универзума, и да о њој одређује само највиши Бог. Међутим, Матерно показује бројне недоследности у самом тексту *Mathesis*-а. Сасвим је извесно да није сматрао да је цар изван астралних утицаја, будући да наводи преко двадесет различитих аспеката и положаја планета у наталној карти који указују да ће та особа постати цар или на неки начин бити блиска цару. Такође, наводи и оне аспекте који одређују какву ће пресуду цар донети над неким појединцем, као и на који начин ће цар бити некеме бити наклоњен. То што наводи Константина као најбољи могући пример за утицај звезда на људе у односу на место њиховог рођења и што га назива срећним и рођеним под добрим знамењима само по себи иде у прилог томе да није уистину сматрао да је цар изузет од астралних утицаја. Његове тврдње у супротно вероватно су последица тежње да изнесе додатне хвалоспеве цару или да донекле прилагоди своја учења хришћанским назорима. С друге стране, могуће је да је желео да предупреди било какве оптужбе на рачун свог пријатеља, Лолијана Маворција, на чији захтев је и написао књигу. Будући и сам адвокат, Матерно је морао бити упознат са бројним случајевима пресуда за завере против цара и веллеиздају које су донете на основу тога што је оптужени консултовао астролога у вези питања о цару. Без обзира на законске забране, у тексту *Mathesis*-а на неколико места се могу наћи подаци релевантни за одређивање начина и времена нечије смрти; Матерно чак истиче како је одређивање трајања живота прва ствар коју је потребно урадити при изради нечије наталне карте. Напомиње и да детаљније податке о рачунању може наћи и у другим књигама које је написао, а које нам нису сачуване. Будући да је Маворцијева успешна политичка каријера у великој мери била условљена вољом владајућег цара, извесно је да би му подаци о Константиновом хороскопу били драгоцени у одређивању даљег тока његове судбине. У том кључу можемо разумети и помен Наисуса као родног места цара Константина. Место рођења неопходан је податак за израчунавање асцендента спрам којег се одређују остале важне тачке у индивидуалном хороскопу, као и положај дванаест кућа у оквиру зодијака. Могуће је да се неки од бројних примера положаја асцендента, као и планета и звезда које су постављене управо на његовом степену, а који указују на царски хороскоп, односе управо на Константинов хороскоп, као и они који указују на неке друге податке и околности из његовог живота, које су могле бити познате Матерну и Маворцију. Тек детаљним упоређивањем свих ових евентуалних аспеката Константинове наталне карте и њиховом астролошком анализом, заједно са реконструкцијом положаја планета током III века н.е. би било могуће потврдити додатне информације које је Матерно могао пружити о изради царевог хороскопа. За сада, имамо његово место рођења које сам аутор истиче као значајан фактор у судбини Константина Великог.

