

RESEARCH ARTICLE

Patronage, cultural politics and the marginalization of astrology in seventeenth-century France: the case of J.-B. Morin and of his polemics with Pierre Gassendi and his circle

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Abstract

During the transition from the early to the modern era, the marginalization of astrology from the learned world marked a significant shift. The causes of this phenomenon are complex and still partially obscure. For instance, some sociological interpretations have linked it to a broader shift in mentality among the gentry and bourgeoisie, while other scholars attributed the decline to the emergence of the ‘new science’. Focusing on the case of Jean-Baptiste Morin (1583–1656), this paper examines the changing dynamics of patronage for what has been termed ‘the last official astrologer’. It demonstrates that Morin’s appointment as professor of mathematics at the Collège royal and his prominence within the French court were expressions of a cultural politics in which his patrons were deeply invested. Conversely, Morin’s efforts to restore astrology lent validation to the belief systems of his patrons. The paper further analyses Morin’s fall from grace during his polemics with Gassendi and his circle, highlighting the political context of the Fronde and a growing public weariness regarding the relationship between politics and astrology. Ultimately, this case study reveals that in the French context, the marginalization of astrology was not solely determined within the ‘learned jurisdiction’. Instead, the shifting cultural and political investments of the ruling classes played a significant role.

By the first half of the seventeenth century, the space for the art of astrology within the Parisian scholarly world had considerably narrowed. Overall, this process of marginalization, which had begun in the early sixteenth century, had several causes, some of which are still partially unclear.¹ Certainly, however, in the early seventeenth century, French

¹ For different perspectives on the marginalisation of astrology see Steven vanden Broecke, *The Limits of Influence: Pico, Louvain, and the Crisis of Renaissance Astrology*, Leiden and Boston: Brill, 2003; Rienk Vermij, ‘The marginalisation of astrology among Dutch astronomers in the first half of the 17th century’, *History of Science* (2014) 52(2), pp. 153–77; Rienk Vermij and Hiro Hirai, ‘The marginalisation of astrology: introduction’, *Early Science and Medicine* (2017) 22(5–6), pp. 405–9; H. Darrel Rutkin, ‘How to accurately account for astrology’s marginalisation in the history of science and culture: the central importance of an interpretive framework’, *Early Science and Medicine* (2018) 23(3), pp. 217–43.

astrology was under attack on different fronts.² The papal bull of 1631 (following that of 1586), as well as the Council of Trent, questioned the legitimacy of judicial astrology, and forbade the diffusion of prognostications on the welfare of the rulers.³ Officially, the Church allowed the practice of natural astrology of conjectural nature, one limited to ‘agriculture, navigation and medicine’.⁴ However, in 1619, the theologians of the Sorbonne had already contested the notion of celestial inclinations and deemed it impious, only condoning judgments connected to humours and corporeal complexions, which, however, they claimed to be very uncertain.⁵ From the mid-sixteenth century onwards, astrological publications in Paris came under growing, though erratic, censorship; judicial courts, too, began to crack down on certain astrological practices they deemed unlawful.⁶ At least in France, the Jesuit order was leading an open anti-astrological campaign.⁷ Influential intellectuals – such as François de Cauvigny, Marin Mersenne and, later, Pierre Gassendi – publicly criticized both natural and judicial astrology, regarding them both as impious and ungrounded.⁸ While the use of astrology was still allowed in medicine, its employment was often criticized. A prominent physician and professor of medicine at the Collège royal and opponent of experimental medicine, Guy Patin (1601–72), to name one example, is credited to have stated that even the ‘experimental physicians’, whom he fiercely opposed, ‘predict better in one day than these liars throughout their lives. And even the peasants are more successful in that’.⁹

It was in this context that the astrologer, physician, and mathematician Jean-Baptiste Morin (1583–1656) became professor at the Collège royal of Paris in 1630.¹⁰ As the name

² Steven vanden Broecke, ‘From cosmic governance to governmentality: shaping sublunary order in seventeenth-century French critiques of astrology’, in Miguel A. Granada (ed.), *Unifying Heaven and Earth: Essays in the History of Early Modern Cosmology*, Barcelona: University of Barcelona Press, 2016, pp. 317–19.

³ Petrus Rietbergen, *Power and Religion in Baroque Rome: Barberini Cultural Policies*, Leiden: Brill, 2006, p. 386. For a partial transcription of text of the bull of 1631 see ‘Appendice’, in Tommaso Campanella, *Opuscoli astrologici* (tr. Germana Ernst), Milan: Rizzoli, 2003, pp. 253–67.

⁴ Campanella, op. cit. (3), p. 262; H. Darrel Rutkin, ‘Is astrology a type of divination? Thomas Aquinas, the index of prohibited books, and the construction of a legitimate astrology in the Middle Ages and the Renaissance’, *International Journal of Divination and Prognostication* (2019) 1, pp. 36–74; see also Rutkin, op. cit. (1).

⁵ Hervé Drévilion, *Lire et écrire l’avenir: L’astrologie dans la France du Grand Siècle (1610–1715)*, Seyssel: Champ Vallon, 1996, pp. 63–5; Lynn Thorndike, ‘Censorship by the Sorbonne of science and superstition in the first half of the seventeenth century’, *Journal of the History of Ideas* (1955) 16(1), pp. 119–25.

⁶ Jean Sanchez, ‘Lois des astres, lois des hommes, lois de Dieu: Théologiens, magistrats et philosophes face à la question de l’astrologie en France (1560–1628)’, PhD dissertation, Ecole normale supérieure, Paris, 2022.

⁷ Drévilion, op. cit. (5), pp. 57–61; but see also Luís Miguel Carolino, ‘The Jesuit paradox: intellectual authority, political power, and the marginalisation of astrology in early modern Portugal’, *Early Science and Medicine* (2017) 22(5–6), pp. 438–63.

⁸ François De Cauvigny, *Réfutation de l’astrologie judiciaire*, Paris: Toussaint du Bray, 1614; Aaron Spink, ‘Cartesian anti-astrology’, *Lias* (2020) 47(2), pp. 182–4; Rodolfo Garau, ‘Gassendi’s critique of astrology’, *Lias* (2020) 47(2), pp. 143–74.

⁹ Gabriel Naudé and Guy Patin, *Naudaeana et Patiniana, ou Singularitez remarquables prises des conversations de MM. Naudé et Patin*, Paris: Chez Florentin & Pierre Delaulne, 1701, p. 110.

¹⁰ Guillaume Tronson, *La Vie de maistre Jean Baptiste Morin, natif de Ville-Franche en Bauilois ...*, Paris: Chez Jean Henault, 1660; Pierre Costabel, ‘Morin’, in Charles C. Gillespie (ed.), *Dictionary of Scientific Biography*, New York: Charles Scribner’s Sons, 1980; Monette Martinet, ‘Jean-Baptiste Morin’, in Pierre Costabel and Monette Martinet (eds.), *Quelques savantes et amateurs de science au XVIIe siècle: Sept notices bibliographiques caractéristiques*, Paris: Société française d’histoire des sciences et des techniques, 1986, pp. 69–87; William L. Hine, ‘J.B. Morin: the last “official” court astrologer’, *Cahiers du dix-septième siècle* (1988) 2(2), pp. 121–34; Daniel Garber, ‘Morin, Jean-Baptiste (1583–1656)’, in Luc Foisneau (ed.), *The Dictionary of Seventeenth-Century French Philosophers*, London: Continuum, 2008, pp. 897–9; Aurélien Ruellet, ‘Deux documents inédits sur Jean-Baptiste Morin (1583–1656)’, *HAL Open Science*, 13 February 2015, at <https://hal.archives-ouvertes.fr/hal-01116353/document> (accessed 1 November 2022); Steven vanden Broecke, ‘An astrologer in the world-systems debate: Jean-Baptiste Morin on astrology and Copernicanism (1631–1634)’, in Natacha Fabri and Federica

suggests, this institution had a peculiar nature. Founded in 1530 by Francis I of France, its appointments depended directly on the king, although concretely it was up to the grand almoner of France to manage them.¹¹ In this sense, it is not surprising that scholars have seen Morin's appointment as due to a direct intervention of the French court.¹²

Several studies have demonstrated the intimate connection between the court and political environments and astrology in the early modern period.¹³ In seventeenth-century France, the control of astrological discourse – in the twofold sense of obtaining exclusive astrological consulting on the one hand, and controlling the diffusion of horoscopes and prognostications on the other – was a concern of the royal court and of the government.¹⁴ During the reign of Louis XIII, the government exploited astrological predictions of a universal monarchy to legitimize its political agency; it aimed at the control, rather than the suppression, of the astrological discourse.¹⁵ Overall, the use of astrological prognostication as an instrument of political intelligence and influence is testified to by exemplary cases such as the protection bestowed on Campanella, to whom Richelieu also granted a pension.¹⁶ The French government issued condemnations of judiciary astrology in 1560, in 1579 and again in 1628, but while the earlier condemnations framed it as a crime against God, the latter characterized it as a factor in political turmoil, following the cases of astrologers who had predicted the imminent death of the king. However, these ordinances were rarely applied.¹⁷

With regard to this intimate connection between astrology and political power, scholars have paid attention to the relationship between social structures, cultural politics and the early modern marginalization of astrology. They have argued that in the second half of the seventeenth century the marginalization of astrology from most European learned circles underwent a decisive acceleration; as a result, astrology would eventually be confined to popular culture, having been abandoned and criticized by the ruling classes. As Vanden Broecke effectively summarizes,

First of all, it became increasingly difficult to find astrological practitioners among Europe's academically trained mathematicians and philosophers. Secondly, the robust presence of astrological textbooks and detailed predictions in European print culture took a strong downturn. Thirdly, astrology seems to have become more alien to the cultural horizon of Europe's elites, and a suitable subject for satirical moves of social distinction.¹⁸

Concerning the English context, Curry suggested that this process was far from being a neutral by-product of the profound transformations (at once scientific, intellectual and religious) of early modern societies. Rather, this marginalization was the result of a

Favino (eds.), *Copernicus Banned: The Entangled Matter of the Anti-Copernican Decree of 1616*, Florence: Olschki, 2018, pp. 223–41.

¹¹ Marie-Madeleine Compère, 'Collège royal', *Publications de l'Institut national de recherche pédagogique* (2002) 10(3), pp. 407–13, 409; André Tuilier and Marc Fumaroli, *Histoire du Collège de France*, vol. 1, Paris: Fayard, 2006.

¹² Martinet, op. cit. (10), p. 71; Hine, op. cit. (10), p. 125.

¹³ Günther Oestmann, H. Darrel Rutkin and Kocku von Stuckrad (eds.), *Horoscopes and Public Spheres: Essays on the History of Astrology*, Berlin and Boston: De Gruyter, 2005; Monica Azzolini, *The Duke and the Stars: Astrology and Politics in Renaissance Milan*, Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2013; Vanden Broecke, op. cit. (1); Rietbergen, op. cit. (3), esp. Chapter 8, pp. 95–142.

¹⁴ Dré villon, op. cit. (5).

¹⁵ Dré villon, op. cit. (5), pp. 94–5.

¹⁶ Dré villon, op. cit. (5), p. 113–20.

¹⁷ Dré villon, op. cit. (5), pp. 94–5.

¹⁸ Vanden Broecke, op. cit. (2), p. 317.

struggle for cultural hegemony that consisted of an anti-astrological campaign ‘conducted not by a single social class, but by a cross-class alliance composed of the gentry and aristocracy and the fledging middle classes’.¹⁹

How far can Curry’s analysis be applied to understand the process of marginalization of astrology in other European contexts, particularly in France? Additionally, what methodological approaches can shed light on the changing attitudes of the ruling classes towards astrology during the marginalization phase?

The case of Morin, as I show in this paper, adds a qualified nuance to Curry’s analysis and casts light on the dynamics of marginalization of astrology in France across the first half of the seventeenth century. As Morin’s case shows, astrologers did not passively accept their decline, but rather sought to defend their status and that of their discipline, often proposing attempts to restore astrology to its former grace on the basis of a renewal of its theoretical or technical frameworks, and by defending its orthodoxy and liceity.²⁰ Morin stands as perhaps the most emblematic figure of this resistance, a cause he pursued throughout his career.²¹ Notably, he was the last astrologer in France to have the chance to be so from the advantage point of a prestigious position, that of professor at an institution such as the Collège royal.²²

By reconstructing the system of patronage that enabled him to hold such a position, this paper shows that, in the first half of the seventeenth century, French ruling classes were still invested in the support of astrologers within higher institutions of learning. Several scholars have emphasized the importance of patronage and clientelism within the sociopolitical system of early modern societies.²³ Biagioli demonstrated the central role of patronage in the development of early modern science. He claimed that given ‘the nexus between social status and credibility’, ‘high social status was the password to cognitive legitimation’. Consequently, ‘patronage was the institution through which social status and credibility could be gained, and the court was the space in which the most powerful patronage relationships could be established’.²⁴ Aurélien Ruellet’s recent study showed that private patronage and governmental patronage of science were not clearly distinguished in early modern societies before the formation of scientific academies; on this basis, he argued that aristocratic patronage of science remained relevant mostly as a tool to orient government favours towards the client through the manipulation of public offices, rather than for producing immediate material benefit.²⁵ Building on these analyses, this paper also shows that the patrons’ belief systems – in addition to their general aim of strengthening their positions by influencing the allocation of offices to their clients – played an important role in their decision to promote clients’ careers. In fact, astrologers like Morin were not only still regarded as assets to obtain private astrological counselling of political relevance; they also provided theoretical validation to a

¹⁹ Patrick Curry, ‘Astrology in early modern England: the making of a vulgar knowledge’, in Stephen Pumfrey, Paolo Rossi and Maurice Slawinski (eds.), *Science, Culture, and Popular Belief in Renaissance Europe*, Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1991, pp. 174–291, 286; Patrick Curry, *Prophecy and Power: Astrology in Early Modern England*, Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1989.

²⁰ Michelle Pfeffer, ‘Reassessing the marginalization of astrology in the early modern world’, *Historical Journal* (2023) 66(5), pp. 1152–76.

²¹ Vanden Broecke, op. cit. (9).

²² Hine, op. cit. (10).

²³ Elie Haddad, ‘Noble clienteles in France in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries: a historiographical approach’, *French History* (2006) 20(1), pp. 75–109.

²⁴ Mario Biagioli, *Galileo, Courtier: The Practice of Science in the Culture of Absolutism*, Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1993, p. 18.

²⁵ Aurélien Ruellet, *La maison de Salomon: Histoire du patronage scientifique et technique en France et en Angleterre au XVII^e siècle*, Rennes: Presses universitaires de Rennes, 2018, available at <http://books.openedition.org/pur/46963> (accessed 10 August 2022), in particular Chapter 4, ‘Conclusion’ and ‘Conclusion générale’

system of beliefs they shared with their patrons. In this sense, I argue, the belief in astrology and the continuing recourse to astrological counselling on the part of political elites, as well as their intention to promote astrology as part of their cultural politics, were important factors in the persistence of astrology within French institutions of learning and, in general, within seventeenth-century French intellectual discourse. I then suggest that the weakening of Morin's relationship of patronage during the Fronde provided the occasion for the attack by Gassendi and his circle that Morin underwent starting from 1649. This attack, according to Hatch's influential analysis, marked the death by 'public execution' of astrology in early modern France.²⁶ But, contrary to Hatch's argument, my analysis demonstrates that the 'death' in question was not simply the result of intellectual challenges. I present evidence for a diminished interest in astrology among Morin's patrons, coupled with an increased caution regarding public perceptions of the connection between political authority and astrological advice.

Concerning the broader scholarly discussions on the marginalization of astrology in the early modern period, this case study shows that analyses of patronage relationships of astrologers by political elites are important factors in accounting for the different ways and speeds over which such processes unfolded. It demonstrates that in a context in which government and private support of science was not clearly demarcated, the ruling classes' attitude towards astrology – whether rooted in personal belief or shaped by its perceived social acceptability – had considerable influence on the persistence, or decline, of astrology. This influence extended to astrology's recognition as both a valid theoretical pursuit and a socially accepted practice. This adds a new, and I believe significant, interpretive framework for understanding the marginalization of astrology to those already proposed by existing scholarship.²⁷ Furthermore, this approach sheds light on the broader social implications of the phenomenon, showing that explanations based solely on intellectual factors – typically regarding the marginalization of astrology as an inevitable result of changes in the wider scientific context – although bearing relevance, are ultimately insufficient.

Patronage, astrology, and the French court

Morin's astrological counselling: Bérulle, Condren, politics, and Louis XIII's health

Scholars agree that Morin's appointment at the Collège royal was due to his astrological consultancy; but so far, there is little consensus on how this was achieved, or on the nature of his subsequent relationship with the French court. Morin started practising astrology while he was an ordinary physician of the Bishop of Boulogne, Claude Dormy, (1614), whose incarceration he claimed to have successfully predicted in 1617.²⁸ He then spent four years at the service of the Abbé de la Bretonnière, before becoming physician of the Duke of Luxembourg, minister and favourite of the king, a man whom, however, Morin deeply disliked.²⁹ During this period, he made for himself the reputation of a strenuous defender of the intellectual status quo by issuing a polemical pamphlet in 1624 against the anti-Aristotelian theses that Anthoine Villon, Jean Bitaud and Estienne de Clave had intended to discuss on 24 and 25 August of that year in the palace of Queen Marguerite. The theses were censored by the Faculty of Theology of the Sorbonne,

²⁶ Robert Alan Hatch, 'Between astrology and Copernicanism: Morin – Gassendi – Boulliau', *Early Science and Medicine* (2017) 22(5–6), pp. 487–516, 497.

²⁷ Rutkin, op. cit. (1).

²⁸ Hine, op. cit. (10), p. 124; Martinet, op. cit. (10), p. 70. See also Tronson, op. cit. (10), pp. 17–20.

²⁹ Martinet, op. cit. (10), p. 70.

while the Parliament of Paris issued an arrest against the trio.³⁰ Recalling the text of the Sorbonne's condemnation, Morin famously opened the pamphlet by stating that 'there is nothing more seditious and dangerous than a new doctrine: and I say not only in theology, but also in philosophy'.³¹ In a society that was still shaken by the civil disorders of the sixteenth century, intellectual novelties represented a danger; in this sense, Morin's pamphlet 'represent[ed] the assimilation of philosophical heresy as a species of religious heresy' – an approach that Morin would later repropose in his polemics against Gassendi.³² However, Morin had previously published *Astrologiarum domorum cabala detecta* (1623),³³ so he may have also intended to safeguard his own position from possible accusations of heterodoxy, given the Sorbonne's pronouncement against judiciary astrology.³⁴

During this period, Morin also made two acquaintances that changed his career, with Cardinal de Bérulle, leader of the Oratorians, and Charles de Condren. Bérulle had already served as a chaplain to King Henry IV and was intimate with the king's mother, Queen Maria de' Medici. Condren – who was confessor of Gaston d'Orléans – had strong ties with the party (formed by Maria and Gaston) that challenged Louis XIII and opposed Richelieu's ascent to power. The party partly inherited the political objectives of the Ligue and embraced the spirit of the Catholic Reformation, aiming to reach peace between the Catholic realms as an anti-Protestant measure in foreign policy, while drastically reducing tolerance for non-Catholic churches in domestic policy. Bérulle, in particular, was actively engaged in the reconciliation between Maria de' Medici and Louis XIII following the death of Henry IV. While he initially favoured Richelieu's rise as prime minister of France, he eventually entered into conflict with him on matters of foreign and internal policy.³⁵

The duo had a keen interest in astrology.³⁶ Bérulle was profoundly influenced by Neoplatonic occultism and astrology. His writings contain numerous references to astrology, reflecting his belief in a cosmology where celestial bodies cast influence on terrestrial events.³⁷ For this reason, he may have read with interest Morin's early work, *Astrologiarum domorum cabala detecta* (1623), and (as I shall show) remained impressed by Morin's astrological abilities. Condren would later redact (presumably around 1640) an opinion on the licit use of astrology upon Richelieu's request. Here, recalling Sixtus V's 1586 bull *Coeli et terrae*, he condemned as impious the astrologers who drew

³⁰ Didier Kahn, 'Entre atomisme, alchimie et théologie: La réception des thèses d'Antoine de Villon et Etienne de Clave contre Aristote, Paracelse et les "cabalistes" (24–25 août 1624)', *Annals of Science* (2001) 58(3), pp. 241–86.

³¹ Jean-Baptiste Morin, *Réfutation des thèses erronées d'Antoine Villon ...*, Paris: Chez l'auteur, 1624, p. 3: 'il ny a rien de plus seditieux & pernicieux qu'une nouvelle doctrine: le ne dis pas seulement en Theologie, mais mesme en Philosophie'.

³² Daniel Garber, 'Defending Aristotle/defending society in early 17th-century Paris', in Claus Zittel and Wolfgang Detel (eds.), *Wissensideale und Wissenskulturen in der Frühen Neuzeit/Ideals and Cultures of Knowledge in Early Modern Europe*, Berlin: Akademie Verlag, 2002, pp. 135–60, 149.

³³ Jean-Baptiste Morin, *Astrologiarum domorum cabala detecta ...*, Paris: Moreau, 1623.

³⁴ Thorndike, op. cit. (5), p. 121.

³⁵ Jean Félix Nourrisson, *Le cardinal de Bérulle: Sa vie, ses écrits, son temps*, Paris: Didier, 1856, esp. pp. 220–3; François Monfort, *Petite vie de Pierre de Bérulle: Fondateur de l'Oratoire de Jésus*, Paris: Desclée de Brouwer, 1997. Charles E. Williams, *The French Oratorians and Absolutism, 1611–1641*, New York: Peter Lang, 1989.

³⁶ Hine, op. cit. (10), p. 124; Steven vanden Broecke, 'Catholic spirituality and astrological self-care in seventeenth-century France: Jean-Baptiste Morin's *Astrologia gallica* (1661)', *Lias* (2020) 47(2), pp. 124–35.

³⁷ Paul Cochois, 'Bérulle et le pseudo-Denys', *Revue de l'histoire des religions* (1961) 159(2), pp. 173–204, 174; Frédéric Miquel, 'Révélation et révolution au XVIIe siècle: L'écriture christocentrique de Bérulle', *Equinoxes: A Graduate Journal of French and Francophone Studies* (2007) 8, at www.brown.edu/Research/Equinoxes/journal/Issue%208/eqx8_Miquel.html (accessed 20 August 2022); Pierre de Bérulle, *Oeuvres complètes de Bérulle*, Paris: J.-P. Migne, 1856, e.g. pp. 593, 643, 813, 815, 1525.

predictions about contingent events; he then distinguished a form of licit ‘natural astrology’ belonging to physics, which investigated the celestial causes of sublunary effects. However, Condren’s response to Richelieu also contained elements of strong ambiguity, since he ultimately claimed that the Church could not determine what is contingent, thus leaving the issue to be decided by laymen. This implicitly left space for astrological prediction on a number of matters, including the drawing of nativities.³⁸ Condren, in Morin’s words, ‘was very knowledgeable in judiciary astrology’. One may even speculate that Condren developed his reflections on astrology in a dialogue with Morin, ‘during the time of twelve years when [Morin] had the honour to be in his close friendship’.³⁹ Several passages of Morin’s posthumous work, *Astrologia Gallica* (1661), point to the fact that Morin provided Condren with horoscopes.⁴⁰

To use the categories proposed by Sharon Kettering, Bérulle acted as a broker in connecting a scholar of inferior ranking, Morin, with powerful patrons – from Queen Maria de’ Medici to Princess Louise-Marie de Gonzague, to (as I will show) Richelieu.⁴¹ Thanks to Bérulle, Morin started providing astrological counselling to Maria de’ Medici concerning Louis XIII’s precarious health, prognostications which therefore had a sensitive political connotation. In general, discussion of the king’s welfare had the potential to produce destabilizing effects on the social and political order; as such, as emphasized above, they were regulated by both French law and the Church. In the French political landscape of the time – marked by the hostility between Richelieu and the party composed by Maria and the king’s brother, Gaston d’Orléans – the matter had peculiar political value. Morin would later brag that his appointment to the professorship of mathematics at the Collège royal – left vacant by the death of the Scottish mathematician David Sinclair in June 1629 – was due to his prediction of a positive outcome of Louis XIII’s famous ‘Lyon disease’ of 1630.⁴² It may well be that on that occasion Morin was asked for a prognostication. But – despite what Hine suggests – it was not this particular prediction which gained him the professorship at the Collège, because Morin was nominated in August of the previous year (1629), and sworn in in February 1630.⁴³ His appointment was rather due to the concerted efforts of his patrons – Bérulle, Condren and Maria. Yet, although at this point of his career Morin was certainly connected with the *parti*

³⁸ Charles de Condren, ‘Cinquiesme discours sur l’astrologie, fait par le commandement de Monseigneur le Cardinal de Richelieu’, in *Recueil de quelques discours et lettres du R.P. Charles de Condren*, Paris: chez Antoine Vitray, 1643, pp. 189–260, esp. 211–12, 223–4, 226–9; Neil Tarrant, ‘Reconstructing Thomist astrology: Robert Bellarmine and the papal bull *Coeli et terrae*’, *Annals of Science* (2020) 77 (1), pp. 26–49.

³⁹ *Recueil de lettres des sieurs Morin, de La Roche, de Neuré et Gassend ...*, Paris: Courbé, 1650, pp. 46–47: ‘sçavoit fort bien l’Astrologie iudiciaire’, ‘pendant l’espace de douze ans que j’ay eu l’honneur d’estre en son étroite amitié’.

⁴⁰ Morin, *Astrologia gallica principis & rationibus propriis stabilita ...*, Hagae-Comitis: Ex typ. A. Vlacq, 1661, e.g. pp. 650, 663, 689.

⁴¹ I use the terms ‘broker’, ‘client’ and ‘patron’ mainly according to the definitions provided by Sharon Kettering, *Patrons, Brokers, and Clients in Seventeenth-Century France*, New York and Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1986, pp. 3–7. See also Kettering, ‘Patronage in early modern France’, *French Historical Studies* (1992) 17(4), pp. 839–62; Kettering, *Patronage in Sixteenth- and Seventeenth-Century France*, Aldershot: Ashgate/Variation, 2002.

⁴² *Recueil de lettres*, op. cit. (39), p. 46. In September 1630, Louis XIII – a king of delicate health – coming back from a military campaign in Savoy, fell ill of a haemorrhagic fever in Lyon. Indirectly saving also Richelieu’s career, the un hoped-for recovery of the king was widely publicized in France as a providential intervention. See Stanis Perez, ‘The sick power: Louis XIII, Richelieu and the “Lyon’s disease” (1630)’, *La revue du praticien* (2017) 67(8), pp. 922–5.

⁴³ Hine, op. cit. (10), p. 126; Guillaume Du Val, *Le Collège Royal de France: Ou institution, établissement et catalogue des lecteurs et professeurs ordinaires du Roy ...*, Paris: Bovillette, 1644, p. 36; Marin Mersenne, *Correspondance du P. Marin Mersenne 1628–1630* (ed. Marie Paul Tannery, Cornelis de Waard and René Pintard), 17 vols., Paris: Beauchesne, 1997, vol. 2, pp. 449–50; Tronson, op. cit. (10), p. 25.

dévot, his appointment cannot be simply interpreted as part of the party's strategy to expand its influence by distributing offices to its members, for Léon Bouthillier de Chavigny (1608–52) also played a fundamental role in Morin's appointment.⁴⁴ Chavigny was one of the chief ministers and *fidèles* of Richelieu's; Orest Ranum famously described him as one of 'Richelieu's creatures'. He remained always faithful to the cardinal until his death, while acting as mediator between the cardinal and the party of Gaston d'Orléans and Maria.⁴⁵ Evidence points to the fact that Morin provided a number of prognostications for Chavigny, to the extent that later Pierre Bayle would describe Chavigny as dependent on Morin's astrological judgements for any political and personal decision.⁴⁶

Scholars have demonstrated that in the context of early modern political systems, patronage and brokerage should be seen as methods of governance consisting of the distribution of offices to loyal supporters and political allies.⁴⁷ Scholars have also claimed that these practices were ways for the ruling elites to craft their own images and identities.⁴⁸ Recently, Ruellet has also explored the role of aristocratic patronage of science, arguing that its main relevance, beyond occasional forms of material maecenatism, consisted in providing favours to clients by mediating with the centralized governments through the manipulation of public offices, in a framework in which government and private patronage of the sciences was not yet clearly distinguished.⁴⁹ While demonstrating the validity of these analyses, the example of Morin's appointment casts light on the dynamic of scientific patronage from a different perspective: that of the cultural political investment of patrons and brokers. As seen, Morin's appointment was due to the concerted efforts of a number of patrons who belonged to different parties. Their choice of advancing Morin to an office which carried a higher status and thus a greater 'sociocognitive legitimation' not only displayed the intention of rewarding a client; it also promoted an already highly contested discipline (as astrology then was) within early modern French academia.⁵⁰ In doing so, they were also providing official validation to a system of belief in which they were invested.

A new document on Morin's appointment: Bérulle's letter to Richelieu

A letter from Bérulle to Richelieu of 7 July 1629 offers new perspectives on Morin's appointment, as well as on his future relationship with Richelieu. Here, Bérulle writes to Richelieu to inform him about the recommendation of Madame de Combalet – who was Richelieu's niece and Maria's *dame d'atour* – to Maria to entrust Morin – who had left his former patron, the Duke of Luxembourg – with the chair of mathematics at the Collège.⁵¹ Bérulle described Morin as an excellent mathematician, who 'published several books on this science, some of which he dedicated to Monsignor the Cardinal of Richelieu'.⁵²

⁴⁴ Tronson, op. cit. (10), pp. 24–5; Morin, op. cit. (40), pp. v–vi, 622, 641–2; Hine, op. cit. (10), p. 126.

⁴⁵ Orest Ranum, *Les créatures de Richelieu*, Paris: Editions A. Pedone, 1966, pp. 103–29.

⁴⁶ Pierre Bayle, *The Dictionary Historical and Critical of Mr. Peter Bayle* (tr. Pierre Desmaizeaux), 4 vols., London: J.J. and P. Knapton, 1737, vol. 4, p. 261; Morin, op. cit. (40), p. 778–81.

⁴⁷ Kettering, op. cit. (41), 1986.

⁴⁸ Biagioli, op. cit. (24), p. 5.

⁴⁹ Ruellet, op. cit. (25).

⁵⁰ I borrowed the expression 'sociocognitive legitimation' from Biagioli, op. cit. (24), p. 18.

⁵¹ Pierre Grillon (ed.), *Les papiers de Richelieu*, 6 vols., Paris: Editions A. Pedone, 1980, vol. 6, p. 453: 'Madame de Combalet a parlé à la Reine pour un nommé Monsr. Morin, qui a esté à Mr de Luxembourg e[t] n'y est plus, pour luy faire avoir, par le moyen de Sa Majesté, une chaise vacante de Mathématiques.'

⁵² Grillon, op. cit. (51), p. 453: 'C'est un excellent homme en cette profession. Il a fait plusieurs livre en cette science. Il en a dédié quelques-un à Monseigneur le cardinal de Richelieu.' It is uncertain to what volumes Bérulle alludes since none of the publications that Morin issued before 1629 was dedicated to Richelieu.

Notably, up to then Morin had mainly published texts on astrology (none of which were dedicated to the cardinal).⁵³ So Bérulle reflected a traditional vision that understood the art as part of the mathematical sciences and curriculum.⁵⁴ Morin, Bérulle added,

is known by the Queen mother, and it is he who provided assurance on the prompt health of the King [Louis XIII] in Villeroy by writing on this to the physicians who treat his Majesty and giving them advice on certain observations that they must make in their cures. For he is a physician and a mathematician at once.⁵⁵

The king's disease in Villeroy – a tertian fever – finds attestation in Richelieu's *Mémoires*, which confirms the plausibility of Bérulle's version.⁵⁶ Even more interestingly, Bérulle highlighted Morin's ability to issue astrologically based political predictions: he claimed that '[s]ix months ago, [Morin] predicted the peace of Languedoc, as glorious and advantageous as we see it. I cannot understand how [the astrologers] can speak of things that depend on so many minds and circumstances'.⁵⁷

Many elements of this letter should capture the reader's interest. First, Morin is presented as an expert in medical astrology – a practice that was still considered licit by the Church and the French government, and was still widely diffused, though, as I have emphasized above, it was already an object of criticism and mistrust – at least outside the court. Within the court, however – this letter shows – it was still a widely accepted and sought-after practice, whose successful application would gain its practitioner popularity and gratitude among patrons. Second, Bérulle also introduces Morin as an expert in the prognostication of political events. In *Astrologia Gallica*, Morin would later theorize and defend the usefulness of astrological elections in the practice of government, describing it as an essential instrument that allows kings and ministers to seize the propitious moment for political action or to refrain from it.⁵⁸ But, even if presented as conjectural, the prediction of major political events – such as the 'peace of Languedoc' (possibly the Peace of Alais of 28 June 1629) – was certainly of doubtful heterodoxy and legality, given its potential to create political unrest and the fact that it concerned seemingly contingent events: surely, this went way beyond the recommended use of astrology for 'medicine, agriculture, and navigation' recalled by Urban VIII's 1631 bull and by the French legislation in 1628.⁵⁹ Bérulle, however, was likely aware that he was writing to someone – Richelieu – who shared his own belief in astrology's potential to unfold future political events.⁶⁰

⁵³ Morin, op. cit. (33); Morin, *Ad australes et boreales astrologos pro astrologia restituenda epistolae*, Paris: Moreau, 1628; Morin, *Nova mundi subluarum anatomia ... authore Joanne Baptista Morino ...*, Paris: apud N. Du Fossé, 1619.

⁵⁴ H. Darrel Rutkin, 'Astrology', in Katharine Park and Lorraine Daston (eds.), *The Cambridge History of Science*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006, pp. 541–61, 544–6; Du Val, op. cit. (43), p. 36, describes Morin as 'excellant ... en Arithmetique, Geometrie, Musique, Astrologie, & autre parties de sa Profession'.

⁵⁵ Grillon, op. cit. (51), p. 453: 'Il est cognu de la Reine mère, e[t] c'est luy qui donna assurance de la prompte santé du Roy à Villeroy e[t] en escrivit aux médecins qui traittoient Sa Majesté et leur donna advis de quelques observations qu'ils devoient faire dans leur remèdes. Car il est médecin e[t] mathématicien tout ensemble'.

⁵⁶ The circumstance of the king's sickness in Villeroy finds confirmation in Richelieu, *Mémoires du cardinal de Richelieu* (1627) (ed. Robert Lavollée), 11 vols., Paris: Honoré Champion, 1926, vol. 7, p. 94.

⁵⁷ Grillon, op. cit. (51), p. 453: 'Il y a six mois qu'il prédit la paix de Languedoc, glorieuse et avantageuse, comme nous la voyons. Je ne sçay pas comme ils peuvent parler de choses qui dependent de tants de testes e[t] de tant de circonstances'.

⁵⁸ Morin, op. cit. (40), pp. 772–4.

⁵⁹ Monica Azzolini, 'The political uses of astrology: predicting the illness and death of princes, kings and popes in the Italian Renaissance', *Studies in History and Philosophy of Science Part C*, (2010) 41(2), pp. 135–45, 144; Brendan Dooley, *Morandi's Last Prophecy and the End of Renaissance Politics*, Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2002, p. 169.

⁶⁰ Richelieu, *Maximes d'état et fragments politiques du cardinal de Richelieu*, Paris: Imprimerie nationale, 1880, p. 8: 'Il y a fort peu d'empereurs à qui les astrologues de leur temps n'ayent prédit les événements futurs. Les

In this sense, this letter shows how French elites had in private a quite liberal relationship with the issue of astrological prediction, despite public distinctions about the scope and liceity of its employment. Further, it also points to the importance that not only medical but also political predictions had in the Richelieu court; and this not only in the framework of their 'public' employment – that is, to spread propaganda or to discredit political adversaries – but also as token of a belief system that validated their issue and circulation. In this sense, the promotion of astrology within institutions of learning by French political elites may well be seen as an expression of their desire to reproduce a specific cultural agenda in which they were invested. Thus, at least in this case, the mechanisms of patronage of science were motivated not only by the promotion of *fidèles* in official positions, but also by intellectual affinity. Morin – at once astrologer and strenuous defender of the intellectual status quo – was likely seen as an ideal element.

Astrological counselling at the French court

Richelieu's political project also aimed at reinforcing the control of the state over culture and education.⁶¹ There is, however, no evidence that Richelieu directly promoted Morin's tenure at the Collège Royal. But details indicate that, starting from the time of his appointment at the Collège, Morin sought to establish a relationship of patronage with Richelieu, by providing him with astrological prognostications of a political and medical nature. The political line of Richelieu, characterized by strong realism, had created a number of frictions with Bérulle and the *parti des dévots*, composed, among others, by Maria de' Medici and Gaston d'Orléans. The friction came to the fore especially in 1629, following the peace treaties with England and the anti-Spanish alliance with the Netherlands which Richelieu had orchestrated and Bérulle and the *dévots* opposed. Queen Maria, in particular, wanted a peace with the Habsburgs, who were then ruling over the Holy Roman Empire and Spain, and propounded a politics of primacy of Catholicism over the monarchy. In October 1629, Bérulle died. In 1630, the clash between Richelieu and the *parti des dévots* reached its peak, eventually culminating in the 'Day of the Dupes' (10 and 11 November 1630) and in a temporary ban of Maria de' Medici and Gaston d'Orléans from the reign.⁶²

The clash between the *dévots* and Richelieu, however, also had astrological implications. Renouard, secretary of the king, had informed Richelieu that the queen mother had given the astrologer and physician Duval a commission to compile the king's nativity. Richelieu discovered that Duval had acted together with the king's physician, Charles Senelle, to compile these prognostications, and that Senelle had relationships with Madame du Fargis – a former dame of honour to the queen who had been expelled by Richelieu from the court, and was now siding with Richelieu's main opponent, Gaston. In these letters, Duval informed her of the astrological prognostications concerning the imminent death of the king. These letters represented a crucial piece of intelligence for weakening the king's authority and planning the future of the French government. Once the plot (which was addressed against Richelieu's authority as much as against the king's) was discovered, Senelles and Duval were condemned to a life sentence for *lèse-majesté*.⁶³ However,

ecclésiastiques sont les vrais astrologues du monde. Ils doivent avoir, par raison, plus de cognoissance du Ciel qu'aucuns autres, puisque Dieu les a honorez d'un ministère qui consiste particulièrement à le cognoistre. Ils annoncent à Vostre Majesté que s'il luy plaist prendre soing de la réformation de l'Eglise, il sera plus grand'.

⁶¹ Natalie Zemon Davis, *Society and Culture in Early Modern France*, Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1975; Henri-Jean Martin, *Livre, pouvoirs et société à Paris au XVII^e siècle, 1598–1701*, Geneva: Droz, 1999.

⁶² William Farr Church, *Richelieu and Reason of State*, Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1972, esp. Part III, pp. 197–236.

⁶³ Grillon, op. cit. (51), vol. 6, p. 366; Lynn Thorndike, *A History of Magic and Experimental Science*, 7 vols., New York: Columbia University Press, 1941, vol. 7, p. 99.

the former at least was later released and became the personal physician of the president de Paule.⁶⁴ As the queen mother was temporarily expelled from the kingdom, in a public statement the king openly alluded to the astrologers' 'strange and evil sciences'.⁶⁵

The scandal allowed Richelieu to make a clean sweep not only of his political opponents, but also of the astrologers who frequented the king's court. Yet the purge left Morin untouched, despite the fact that he mainly owed his position at court and at the Collège to the intercession of Bérulle and Maria, who opposed Richelieu's party, and despite the fact that he may also have been asked to issue a prognostication on the king's health around that time.⁶⁶ The following year (1631), Morin dedicated to Richelieu his *Famosi et antiqui problematis de telluris motu ... solutio* – a pamphlet in defence of geocentrism, which also employed astrological arguments.⁶⁷ This move signalled his new loyalty towards the cardinal and his detachment from Maria's party. This observation demonstrates that, particularly in the realm of scientific patronage, the relationship between patron and client was quite dynamic, and does not fit into the model of a 'total self-giving or boundless loyalty of the follower' as traditionally suggested by scholars like Roland Mousnier.⁶⁸

During the following years, Morin provided Richelieu with astrological prognostications of political relevance. For instance, in 1632, Richelieu was concerned about the fate of his ally, King Gustavus Adolfus of Sweden, the main opponent of the empire during the first part of the Thirty Years War, whose defeat, he feared, could determine the outcome of the war from the side of the empire. Richelieu asked Morin to predict the sort of the king; Morin predicted that he was going to die.⁶⁹ Indeed, Gustavus Adolfus was fatally injured by a bullet when the Swedish Army encountered the Imperial Army of Albrecht von Wallenstein at Lützen in November 1632, roughly two months after the date on which Morin predicted this would have happened. Further, in 1631, Morin claimed to have predicted, upon Richelieu's request, the death of Albrecht von Wallenstein, another key figure in the war.⁷⁰ Morin reportedly issued other prognostications on the behest of Richelieu, such as on Richelieu's health and presumed moment of death, and would later publicly attest to the accuracy of his own predictions.⁷¹ Morin's position within the court arguably reached its highest peak in 1643, when Richelieu asked him to draw the nativity of Louis XIV at the very moment of his birth – for which he later gained the appellation of 'official court astrologer'.⁷² Morin later described in *Astrologia Gallica* the accurate measurements he took on that occasion at the birthplace of the future king in St-Germaine-en-Laye – evidence of his efforts to provide the cardinal with the most precise nativity of the future king.⁷³

The downfall: the Fronde and Morin's polemics with Gassendi and his circle

The services provided to Richelieu, however, only partially paid off. Morin – who claimed to have invented a method for the calculus of the longitudes, a discovery that the French

⁶⁴ Drévilion, op. cit. (5), 104–6.

⁶⁵ *Declaration du roy, sur la sortie de la Reine sa Mere et de Monseigneur son Frere, hors le royaume (Paris, 12 août 1631)*, Paris: Par Antoine Estienne, P. Mettayer et C. Prevost, 1631, p. 7: 'sciences curieuses et mauvaises'.

⁶⁶ Tronson, op. cit. (10), p. 63.

⁶⁷ Morin, *Famosi et antiqui problematis de telluris motu, vel quiete, hactenus optata solutio ...*, Paris: Apud authorem, 1631. The pamphlet defended geocentrism also on astrological bases. See, for instance, p. 136.

⁶⁸ Roland Mousnier, 'Les fidélités et les clientèles en France aux XVIe, XVIIe et XVIIIe siècles', *Histoire Sociale* (1982) 15(29), pp. 35–64, 42: 'don total de soi ... dévouement sans limites du fidèle'.

⁶⁹ Tronson, op. cit. (10), pp. 68–9; Morin, op. cit. (40), p. 399–401.

⁷⁰ Tronson, op. cit. (10), pp. 70–1; Morin, op. cit. (40), p. 402. See also Hine, op. cit. (10), p. 126.

⁷¹ *Recueil de lettres*, op. cit. (39), p. 48; Morin, op. cit. (40), p. 613–14.

⁷² See Hine, op. cit. (10), p. 129.

⁷³ See Morin, op. cit. (40), pp. 555–6.

government had promised to reward richly – was not granted the prize after a commission of scientists deemed his discovery irrelevant for practical uses. Richelieu, who provided him with a generous grant for constructing a quadrant, ultimately denied him the greater award.⁷⁴ Morin continued to offer astrological counsel to Richelieu, but only through the proxy of Bouthillier; later, he expressed his resentment toward Richelieu.⁷⁵ It was only several months after Richelieu's death that Morin finally was given the longitude reward in 1643 by the new prime minister, Mazarin.⁷⁶

Morin's biographer, Tronson, mentions Mazarin among the list of 'friends' – that is, the prominent supporters – of the astrologer. However, unlike Richelieu – who, in Tronson's words, 'did not disdain to admit [Morin] to the secret of his cabinet, and to consult him concerning very important affairs' – there is no suggestion that Morin provided Mazarin with astrological counselling.⁷⁷ Similarly, there is no mention of prognostications made on Mazarin's behalf in Morin's *Astrologia Gallica*. This fact may be significant because Morin customarily referred to the powerful figures who availed themselves of his counselling in order to legitimize his status and ability as an astrologer. This (as well as the issues I will discuss in the next section) may point to Mazarin's scarce interest in astrological counselling; in fact, unlike Richelieu, references to astrology appear to be absent from both his correspondence and his biography.⁷⁸

Two events, however, contributed to destabilizing Morin's position. The first was the Fronde (1648–53).⁷⁹ During the 'Fronde of the Princes' (1649–53), in particular, a group of noblemen (including Condé, La Rochefoucauld, Nemours, Conti and Longueville, in addition to the usual suspect, Gaston d'Orléans) exploited the clash between Mazarin, the Parliament, and part of the gentry – caused by the government's attempt to raise tax revenues – to increase their personal power at the expense of the Crown. In this scenario, Mazarin left Paris in September 1648 along with the young King Louis and Queen Mother Anne; he could only return after Condé's defeat in February 1653.⁸⁰ Chavigny, who had worked against Mazarin during the Fronde of the Parliament (1648–9) and had associated himself with Mazarin's enemy, Condé, was briefly arrested twice in 1648; liberated by order of the Parliament in the same year, he momentarily regained influence in 1651, before changing sides again and eventually losing all of his power, as well as his life, in 1652.⁸¹ If one also considers that, by 1642, Richelieu, Maria De' Medici, Bérulle and Condren – all of whom were Morin's former patrons – were dead, one can see that Morin suddenly found himself without stable patronage protection.

Perhaps for this reason, Morin may have sought the protection of Gaston d'Orléans, with whom he was likely acquainted given their mutual friendship with the late Father Codren. Gaston had temporarily gained control of Paris and the favour of its gentry, and was hoping (once again) to exploit the circumstances to seize power. His good star

⁷⁴ Hine, op. cit. (10), p. 129; Jean Pares, 'Jean Baptiste Morin (1583–1654) et la querelle des longitudes de 1634 à 1647: Thèse de 3e cycle'. PhD thesis, Ecole des hautes études en sciences sociales, Paris, 1980; Ruellet, op. cit. (25).

⁷⁵ On this see Ruellet, op. cit. (25); Bayle, op. cit. (46), vol. 4, p. 260.

⁷⁶ Hine, op. cit. (10), p. 129.

⁷⁷ Tronson, op. cit. (10), pp. 27–8: 'il ne desdaignoit pas de l'admettre dans le Secret de son cabinet, & de le consulter sur des affaires tres-importantes'.

⁷⁸ Jules Mazarin, *Lettres du cardinal Mazarin pendant son ministère*, Paris: Imprimerie nationale, 1872; Pierre Goubert, *Mazarin*, Paris: Fayard, 1990; Sarah Nelson, 'Marie Mancini writing for her life', *Early Modern French Studies* (2021) 43(2), pp. 128–4.

⁷⁹ Louis Madelin, *La Fronde*, Paris: Flammarion, 1931; Richard J. Bonney, 'The French civil war, 1649–53', *European Studies Review* (1978) 8(1), pp. 71–100; Orest Ranum, *The Fronde: A French Revolution, 1648–1652*, New York: Norton, 1993; Ranum, *Paris in the Age of Absolutism*, Philadelphia: Pennsylvania State University Press, 2002.

⁸⁰ Ranum, *Paris in the Age of Absolutism*, op. cit. (79), p. 290.

⁸¹ Ranum, op. cit. (45), 125–9.

was, however, soon to be overshadowed by that of Condé, especially in reason of the latter's personal success in battle, which matched the mentality and values of the younger generation of rebellious princes.⁸² On the occasion of the solar eclipses of 8 April 1652, Morin (along with Gassendi's former disciple, Antoine Agarrat) performed an observation at the request of Gaston and of his court at the Luxemburg Palace.⁸³ Ruellet suggests that Morin may have been chosen to conduct the observation in the hope of obtaining prognostications on the astrological significance of the eclipsis vis-à-vis the turbulent political situation of those years.⁸⁴ This impression is confirmed by the manuscript bundle 'Eclipse de Soleil. 8 avril 1652' held at the Bibliothèque de l'Observatoire de Paris (A3/3 [5]), containing a short writing of Morin's. Here, Morin emphasizes that the observational data of the eclipses were recorded by Gaston's personal physician (likely with the aim of dressing a horoscope concerning Gaston), and highlights the significance of the eclipse in relation to Condé's recent military advancements.⁸⁵ However, in *Astrologia Gallica* Morin recalls that he drew from the eclipse some forecasts concerning his own health, without mentioning any prognostication (of either political or medical relevance) concerning Gaston.⁸⁶ Moreover, while in a number of passages of *Astrologia Gallica* Morin does discuss features of Gaston's natal theme, which indicates that that he had, in fact, engaged at some point with his horoscope, Gaston's chart does not appear in the text, unlike the natal charts of Morin's other patrons.⁸⁷ This is noteworthy because Morin typically took the opportunity to showcase the confidence that notable individuals had in his predictions. Gaston was later rumoured to have received a prediction concerning his incarceration based on his horoscope – and in fact he was exiled by Mazarin in 1652 to the Château of Blois, where he died in 1660.⁸⁸ But there is no evidence that the prediction was issued by Morin, at least on that occasion.

This sudden loss of patronage protection may have also been at the root of the coordinated attack against Morin which began in 1649. In that year, the disagreements between Morin and Gassendi and his circle – which included Neuré, Barancy, de la Roche and Gassendi's pupil Bernier – suddenly reignited with the appearance of Gassendi's *Apologia*.⁸⁹ Morin himself had initiated the dispute in 1643, when, with a pamphlet ironically entitled *The Broken Wings of the Earth*, he attacked Gassendi's defence of Galileo's theory of motion and of Copernicanism contained in his *De motu impresso a motore translato* (1642).⁹⁰ A *Recueil* of letters exchanged by Gassendi, Morin, Neuré, De la Roche and Barancy – which was at the heart of what Hatch deemed a 'public execution'

⁸² Ranum, *Paris in the Age of Absolutism*, op. cit. (79), p. 295.

⁸³ Jean-Baptiste Morin, *Eclipsis solis observata parisiis in Aurelianensi palatio*, Bibliothèque Mazarine, MAZ 274 A 13; Ruellet, op. cit. (25), Chapter 1.

⁸⁴ Ruellet, op. cit. (25), Chapter 1.

⁸⁵ 'Eclipse de Soleil. 8 avril 1652', Bibliothèque de l'Observatoire de Paris, A3/3 (5).

⁸⁶ Morin, op. cit. (40), p. 556.

⁸⁷ Morin, op. cit. (40), pp. 510, 511, 513.

⁸⁸ Naudé and Patin, op. cit. (9), pp. 109–10.

⁸⁹ Pierre Gassendi, *Petri Gassendi Apologia in Jo. Bap. Morini librum, cui titulus 'Alae telluris fractae' ...*, Lyon: Barbier, 1649.

⁹⁰ Pierre Gassendi, *Petri Gassendi De motu impresso a motore translato. Epistolae duae. In quibus aliquot praecipuae tum de motu vniuersi, tum speciatim de motu terrae attributo difficultates explicantur*, Paris: apud Ludouicum de Hequeuille, 1642; Monette Martinet, 'Chronique des relations orageuses de Gassendi et de ses satellites avec Jean-Baptiste Morin', *Corpus* (1993) 20–1, pp. 47–64; Carla Rita Palmerino, 'Atomi, meccanica, cosmologia: Le lettere galileiane di Pierre Gassendi', PhD thesis, Università di Firenze, 1998; Hatch, op. cit. (26); Paolo Galluzzi, 'Gassendi and l'affaire Galilée of the laws of motion', *Science in Context* (2001) 14(S1), pp. 239–75; Carla Rita Palmerino, 'Two Jesuit responses to Galileo's science of motion: Honore Fabri and Pierre Le Caze', in Mordechai Feingold (ed.), *The New Science and Jesuit Science: Seventeenth Century Perspectives*, Dordrecht: Springer Netherlands, 2003, pp. 187–227.

of astrology – was published in French in 1650.⁹¹ Notably, the editor of the *Recueil* was Augustin Courbé, printer and ordinary librarian of Gaston d'Orléans; up to that point, he had mostly published works connected to courtly recreational themes.⁹² The argument was thus entering the court environment from a main door, in a moment of particular political tensions; that is, during the Fronde.

Personal antipathy and resentment motivated Gassendi's circle to launch their attacks, particularly because Morin, in his initial polemical exchanges following the Galileo affair, remarked that Gassendi's arguments in favour of Copernicanism aligned him with a doctrine explicitly forbidden by the Church, nearly accusing him of heresy.⁹³ The group mainly targeted the orthodoxy and legality of Morin's activity as an astrologer, openly accusing him of being a sorcerer.⁹⁴ To these accusations, Morin replied that the Church and his Fathers still recognized the liceity of the application of astrology to medicine, navigation and agriculture, and also pointed to the fact that the compilation of nativities was an essential part of medical astrology. He then recalled how Condren had defended the liceity of the application of astrology to these fields, and how Richelieu, as well as Queen Maria, had availed themselves of his astrological predictions.⁹⁵ But here Morin's listing of patrons in his support displays his loss of grasp on prominent elements of the French court: in addition to Richelieu, Maria and Condren (who by 1650 had all passed away), the only other figure that he quotes in the *Recueil* is Chavigny, whose position was at that point severely undermined by his participation in the Fronde in the anti-Mazarin party.⁹⁶

Morin's seemingly weakened position in the French court, as well as within the landscape of political tumult that characterized the Fronde, likely created the perfect occasion for a personal settling of accounts, but some elements point to the broader political significance of this dispute. Indeed, the *Recueil*, as well as the anti-Morin publications that followed it, contained explicit attacks against Mazarin. This appears significant if one also considers that Gassendi's main patron, Louis de Valois, Comte of Alais (1593–1653), governor of Provence, had been involved in the Fronde and had sided with the anti-Mazarin party. By the time the *Recueil* was published, Alais was in open conflict with Mazarin, who would later destitute Alais and recall him to the court in 1650.⁹⁷ Gassendi remained faithful to Alais throughout the period of the Fronde, also providing him with political, diplomatic and possibly even ideological support.⁹⁸ In the *Recueil*, Neuré recalled how, despite laws, prohibitions and even 'anathemas' by the Church and state, 'this vermin' – that is, the astrologers – 'sprout despite the remedies, and always produces some Morins who thanks to their audacity penetrate the cabinets of the greats, and cannot be driven away that through some gratification ... It is this', Neuré continues, 'that makes today the astrologer Morin so proud and insufferable because he has obtained a pension thanks to the superficiality [*facilité* – perhaps even 'imbecility'] of the

⁹¹ *Recueil de lettres*, op. cit. (39); Hatch, op. cit. (26), p. 497.

⁹² 'Augustin Courbé (libraire, 159.?-166.?)', data.bnf.fr, at https://data.bnf.fr/fr/12398723/augustin_courbe (accessed 28 May 2022).

⁹³ Palmerino, 'Atomi, meccanica, cosmologia', op. cit. (90); 'Au lecteur', in *Recueil de lettres*, op. cit. (39), p. v.

⁹⁴ *Recueil de lettres*, op. cit. (39) pp. 25–8, 87.

⁹⁵ *Recueil de lettres*, op. cit. (39), pp. 46–50.

⁹⁶ *Recueil de lettres*, op. cit. (39), p. 15; 'Chavigny (Léon Bouthillier, comte de)', in François Bluche (ed.), *Dictionnaire du Grand-Siècle*, Paris: Fayard, 1990, p. 318.

⁹⁷ Jean Duquesne, *Dictionnaire des gouverneurs de Provence*, Paris: Editions Christian, 2002, p. 189.

⁹⁸ Jean-D. Charron, 'La Fronde en Provence: Gassendi médiateur entre le Comte d'Alais et les frondeurs de Digne, d'après trois lettres inédites', *Annales du Midi* (1961) 73(56), pp. 399–403; Olivier Bloch, 'Gassendi et la politique', *Littératures classiques* (1987) 9(1), pp. 51–75.

Ministers', clearly referring to the pension that Mazarin had granted to Morin on the occasion of the *querelle des longitudes*.⁹⁹

Open attacks against Mazarin continued in the follow-up of the polemics, and in particular in *Anatomy of the Ridiculous Mouse* (1651) and *The Ashes of the Ridiculous Mouse* (1653).¹⁰⁰ At least one of the editors of these volumes had possible connections with the anti-Mazarin party.¹⁰¹ The texts' authorship was taken by Gassendi's pupil, François Bernier, but Morin repeatedly claimed that Gassendi was the truthful author of the texts. Indeed, I recently published evidence that points to the fact that Morin's impression was well grounded, justifying a call for the reattribution of the two works to Gassendi.¹⁰² The *Anatomy* takes issue also with Morin's self-proclaimed adhesion to the Church's recognition of the use of astrology for navigation, medicine and agriculture, by mentioning his supposed role as an astrological consultant for Mazarin. Referring either to Mazarin's continuation of the Thirty Years War after his ascent to power, or (more likely) to his role in the Fronde, Bernier (or Gassendi) wrote,

you should feel ashamed to flaunt [your astrology] further, after it caused so many evils throughout France, since you dissuaded the gullible minister not to persuade to peace the good Queen because you predicted, on the basis of his natal chart, that he would have fallen from his ministry as soon as peace had been made.¹⁰³

Morin denied the accusation.¹⁰⁴ However, Bernier (or Gassendi) restated it in the *Ashes*, arguing that Morin had been publicly reproached by 'a noble Abbey', at the table of 'an illustrious governor [or bishop], who holds Rhodes thanks to his bravery', as well as several other witnesses.¹⁰⁵ Thus the dispute clearly carried a wider political significance, raising questions about the influence of astrology on the decision-making processes of political elites – a subject frequently addressed in the French anti-astrological writings of that period.¹⁰⁶

⁹⁹ *Recueil de lettres*, op. cit. (39), p. 73: 'Cette vermin pullule contre les remedes, & produit toujours des Morins, qui penetrant par leur hardiesse jusque dans les cabinets des Grands, n'en peuvent estre chasses que par quelque gratification ... C'est ce qui rend aujourd'huy l'Astrologue Morin si fier & si insupportable, à cause qu'il a obtenu des pensions de la facilité des Ministres'.

¹⁰⁰ François Bernier (or Pierre Gassendi?), *Anatomia ridiculi muris* ..., Paris: Michel Soly, 1651; François Bernier (or Pierre Gassendi?), *Favilla ridiculi muris* ..., Paris: E. Martini, 1653.

¹⁰¹ George Lepreux, *Gallia typographica: Ou, Répertoire biographique et chronologique de tous les imprimeurs de France depuis les origines de l'imprimerie jusqu'à la Révolution*, Paris: Honré Champion, 1911, pp. 160–1; 'Notice de personne: Mabre-Cramoisy, Sébastien', in BnF, *Catalogue général*, at <https://catalogue.bnf.fr/ark:/12148/cb123071289> (accessed 10 August 2023). On Martin see Jean de la Caille, *Histoire de l'imprimerie et de la librairie: Où l'on voit son origine & son progrès, jusqu'en 1689*, Paris: La Caille, 1689, pp. 298–310.

¹⁰² Rodolfo Garau, 'Evidence for re-attributing to Pierre Gassendi the authorship of *Anatomia ridiculi muris* (1651) and *Favilla ridiculi muris* (1653)', *Early Science and Medicine* (2024) 29(4), pp. 381–405; Jacques Halbronn, 'Pierre Gassendi et l'astrologie judiciaire: Approche bibliographique', in *Quadricentenaire de la naissance de Pierre Gassendi, 1592–1992: Actes du Colloque international Pierre Gassendi, Digne-les-Bains, 18–21 mai 1992*, 2 vols., Digne-les-Bains: Société scientifique et littéraire des Alpes de Haute-Provence, 1994, vol. 2, pp. 255–70, 256.

¹⁰³ Bernier (or Gassendi?), op. cit. (100), 1651, p. 168: 'ac debere te suppedere, iactare illam adhuc, postquam fuit tot, tantorumque per totam Galliam malorum causa; dissuasus abs te credulo Ministro, ne Pacem Regine optime suaderet, quoniam futurum provideres ex Themate eius natalitio, ut ministerio excideret, ubi pax primum peracta foret'.

¹⁰⁴ Jean-Baptiste Morin, *Jo. Bapt. Morini ... Defensio Suae Dissertationis de Atomis et Vacuo; Adversus Petri Gassendi Philosophiam Epicuream. Contra Francisci Bernerii Andegani Anatomiam Ridiculi Muris* ..., Paris: Apud autorem, 1651, p. 193.

¹⁰⁵ Bernier (or Gassendi?), op. cit. (100), 1653, p. 221: 'praeter Praesulem illustrem, qui sua fortitudine Rhodum tenet, praeter Abbatem Nobilem'.

¹⁰⁶ Cauvigny, op. cit. (8).

Morin might well have bragged in public about his influence on Mazarin's political decisions. Indeed, rumours about Mazarin's proneness to taking political decisions on the basis of astrological counsel may also be found elsewhere. Nicolas Goulas, to name one, argued in his *Mémoire* that, despite having been advised to do so, Mazarin avoided using force to suppress the revolt of the Parliament in 1648 because he had received astrological predictions that undertaking anything dangerous in that year could cause his downfall.¹⁰⁷ However, Morin's reaction suggests that he did not provide Mazarin with this particular prognostication. As discovered by Pintard, in the days following the publication of the *Ashes*, Morin wrote two letters (dated by Pintard to September and November 1653) to Mazarin – who had returned to Paris in February that year – to denounce Bernier and Gassendi and urge their incarceration, pointing to the gravity and groundlessness of their accusations. Clearly, he would not have written this letter if he had in fact provided Mazarin with the aforementioned prognostication. If he had, Mazarin would have lost faith in the confidentiality of Morin's counselling, with possible serious personal repercussions for Morin. However, Mazarin appears to have taken the matter seriously enough, since he issued replies – now lost – to Morin's letters.¹⁰⁸ In December 1653, Bernier then filed a formal denunciation against the duo, mostly restating what he had expressed in his letters to Mazarin.¹⁰⁹ Gassendi's and Bernier's 'unorthodox' Epicureanism certainly played a role in Morin's complaint – but even more so did their claim that Mazarin would be 'credulous toward the astrologers', which Morin showed by quoting the passages from the *Anatomy* and the *Ashes* recalled above. He added,

calling the Minister 'credulous toward the astrologers' means to accuse him of imprudence. And accusing him of having persuaded the Queen not to make peace because he was afraid to lose his ministry means to accuse him to be the principal and proximate cause of all evils that France has suffered and still suffers; without mentioning the consequences that may follow from these dangerous accusations for the life and honour of his Eminence.¹¹⁰

While Morin pointed out that he did not need more than Mazarin's word to discredit the imposture, he stressed its potential to create political turmoil and even sedition, and that it presented a clear danger to Mazarin's life and honour, as well as to his own.¹¹¹

Morin's denunciations, however, did not achieve the hoped-for result: neither Bernier nor Gassendi were persecuted or arrested, nor is there evidence that Mazarin intervened to restore his client's honour. Morin eventually reconciled with Gassendi – already gravely ill – in 1654.¹¹² But the content of Morin's denunciation, as well as of his letters to Mazarin, is telling. The generation of patrons who supported Morin's career made no secret of their interest in astrology; in private, they sought astrological counselling

¹⁰⁷ Nicolas Goulas, *Mémoires de Nicolas Goulas ...*, vol. 2, Paris, Librairie Renouard, 1879, p. 309.

¹⁰⁸ René Pintard, *Le libertinage érudit dans la première moitié du XVII^e siècle*, Paris: Boivin, 1943, pp. 396–7. The manuscripts of the letters are preserved at the archive of the French Ministry for Foreign Affairs (France vol. 891, f°398–9 and 396–7).

¹⁰⁹ Monette Martinet, 'Dénonciation de Jean-Baptiste Morin contre Bernier et Gassendi', *Corpus* (1992) 20–1, pp. 215–20.

¹¹⁰ Martinet, op. cit. (109), p. 215: 'l'appellant Ministre credule aux astrologues, c'est le vouloir accuser d'imprudence. Et l'accusant d'avoir persuadé la Reyne de ne faire la paix; de peur qu'il ne fut dépossédé de son ministère, c'est l'accuser d'estre la principale et prochaine cause de tous les maux que la France a souffert et souffre encore: sans parler des conséquences qui s'ensuivroient d'icelles accusations pernicieuses à l'honneur & à la vie de son E'.

¹¹¹ Martinet, op. cit. (109), pp. 216–19.

¹¹² Martinet, op. cit. (90), pp. 63–4.

for matters of medical and political relevance. In the case of Mazarin, in contrast, the accusation of being ‘credulous toward the astrologers’ becomes a sensitive political matter, of which – it is worth noting – Morin himself appeared aware. One can even speculate that it is for this reason that Mazarin, once returned to power, took no steps to protect the honour of his troublesome client (as well as his own) against the crossfire of his adversaries.

Morin died in 1656; his chief work, *Astrologia Gallica*, was published thanks to the financial support of Marie Louise Gonzaga. Morin had predicted that she would become a queen, and she indeed became queen of Poland in 1645. But the publication did not change the course of the marginalization of astrology in France. Although some followers of Descartes’s attempted to provide – against Descartes’s intentions – a mechanistic rationale to the issue of astrological influence, in 1666 Colbert announced that the Académie would not publish writings of astrological nature.¹¹³ Louis XIV finally prohibited the publication of astrological almanacs in 1682.¹¹⁴

Conclusions

In his influential article, Hatch interpreted the dispute between Morin and Gassendi and his circle within the framework of the affirmation of Copernicanism over astrology. The ‘New Science’, he claimed, ‘established its authority and autonomy by rejecting astrology ... Astrology became a rallying cry for the Copernican cause and a target for the New Science. In the end, if the fate of astrology was decided by learned jurisdiction, the death of astrology was by public execution’.¹¹⁵

By showing the falling trajectory of Morin’s relationship of patronage from the regimes of Richelieu to that of Mazarin, this paper argues that, on the contrary, this process was not decided exclusively by learned jurisdiction. My analysis shows that the French ruling classes’ interest in astrology, as well as their resort to astrological prognostications for matters of political and personal relevance, was an important factor in the promotion of astrology within scholarly institutions, as well as, more broadly, within the intellectual discourse, at a moment when the French learned environment was seemingly distancing itself from the art. Moreover, I have shown that the ‘public execution’ of astrology, which had Morin at its centre, while it was certainly motivated by a specific intellectual and scientific agenda (in addition to personal resentment), also found its occasion in a moment when the patronage protection bestowed on Morin, and likely also interest in his astrological counselling, fell short. This may point to a broader change of attitude of the French ruling classes towards astrology, or at least indicate a new awareness of and attention to the public perception of the relationship between astrology and political power. As Patin commented, ‘I do not believe at all in judicial astrology and in what is said about it. It’s just lies and trash made to deceive the princes. Almost all Princes feed on all these follies, while they deceive & mistreat their subjects &c’.¹¹⁶ These elements may have been a factor – among others – in the more general demise of astrology that followed.

As seen, Curry suggested that the marginalization of astrology in the British context ultimately resulted from a cross-class alliance that targeted astrology within the framework of a specific cultural policy. The case highlighted in this paper represents a more

¹¹³ Aaron Spink, ‘Claude Gadoys and a Cartesian Astrology’, *Journal of Early Modern Studies* (2018) 7(1), pp. 151–71; Spink, op. cit. (8).

¹¹⁴ Hatch, op. cit. (26), pp. 515–16.

¹¹⁵ Hatch, op. cit. (26), pp. 489; Vanden Broecke, op. cit. (10).

¹¹⁶ Patin in Naudé and Patin, op. cit. (9), p. 109: ‘Je ne crois rien de toute l’astrologie judiciaire, ni de tout ce qu’on ne dit. *Sunt figmenta & nugamenta ad decipiendos Principes*. Presque tous les Princes se repaissent de toutes ces folies, tandis qu’ils trompent & maltraitent leurs sujets’.

nuanced situation. Certainly, in France, as well as elsewhere, the ruling classes were increasingly subject to the fascination of the ‘New Science’. Gassendi’s fortune, for instance, was due to patrons – such as Peiresc and de Valois – who had keen interest in direct astronomical observation and Galileanism. An engraving from the 1640s portrays de Valois sitting on a throne and surrounded by allegorical figures representing his two main interests – war and astronomy (Figure 1). Similarly, Gassendi owed his appointment to the chair of mathematics at the Collège royal to Alphonse-Louis du Plessis de Richelieu (1582–1653), brother of the most famous Armand, Archbishop of Lyon, who had keen interest in the astronomical debates of the time as well as in Epicureanism, and possibly disliked astrology.¹¹⁷ In short, Gassendi was at the centre of a network of patrons that looked to the ‘New Science’ for their self-fashioning. However, the case of Morin shows that, at least until the 1650s, elements of the French elites continued to promote astrology within institutions of learning and the court as part of their system of patronage and of their cultural politics. Even Mazarin – who may have not have availed himself of Morin’s counsel and displayed wariness towards the public perception of the relationship between politics and astrology – still offered him a pension, as well as, at least to a certain extent, his protection. Yet Morin’s shortage of patronage support in the late years of his life may indicate that the attention of French elites was now being directed elsewhere.

Overall, this case study indicates that exploring the evolution of patronage relationships offers valuable insights into the marginalization of astrology in the seventeenth century. It presents an approach that moves beyond merely intellectual explanations for astrology’s decline, highlighting the importance of examining social and political factors. While in the seventeenth century the marginalization of astrology was under way in most European contexts, the pace and unfolding of that process was influenced by the ruling classes’ proneness to endorse or discourage both the practice of astrology and its recognition as a legitimate discipline. Sanchez’s recent study, for instance, showed that the censorship of astrological writings dropped in France during the regency of Maria de’ Medici, the patron of a number of astrologers, including Morin. As a result, the number of astrological publications increased during the 1610–23 period.¹¹⁸ Omodeo showed that direct patronage interventions of the electoral prince Friedrich Wilhelm (1620–88) on institutions of learning in Brandenburg–Prussia, as well as his own interest in astrology, determined the continuation of the academic teaching of a ‘mechanized’ form of astrology well into the second half of the seventeenth century.¹¹⁹ Together with this case study, these examples show that the alliance between ruling and intellectual classes, which Curry saw at the root of the marginalization of astrology in seventeenth-century England, was highly context-dependent, taking place at different times and under different circumstances elsewhere in Europe. This case study also testifies to the necessity, highlighted by Omodeo, to create a bridge ‘between the cultural politics of science and

¹¹⁷ See Pierre Gassendi, *Institutio astronomica, juxta hypotheseis tam veterum, quam Copernici, et Tychonis*, Paris: Apud Ludovicum de Heuqueville, 1647, p. i, where Gassendi distinguishes between ‘astronomy’ and ‘astrology,’ dismissing the latter as ‘rubbish’ (*nugas*). Gassendi, writing to thank Richelieu for his appointment at the Collège royal, would not have done so if Richelieu had believed in astrology. Furthermore, Gassendi’s appointment, along with manuscript evidence, supports Richelieu’s interest in Epicureanism. For example, the ‘*Epitome totius physiologiae Epicuri, cum animadversionibus doctissimi Gassendi*’ (Municipal Library of Lyon, ms. 247), written by an Antoine Turnier, appears to have been requested by Richelieu, as suggested by its dedication (ff. 2).

¹¹⁸ Sanchez, op. cit. (6), p. 336.

¹¹⁹ Pietro Omodeo, *Defending Descartes in Brandenburg–Prussia: The University of Frankfurt an der Oder in the Seventeenth Century*, Dordrecht: Springer, 2022, pp. 88–98.



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Figure 1. An engraving representing Louis-Emmanuel de Valois, Count of Alais, the governor of Provence.
 Source: gallica.bnf.fr/Bibliothèque nationale de France.

the political economy of knowledge', thus increasing our understanding of the cultural--political dimension of the processes of transformation of knowledge.¹²⁰

Acknowledgements. I am deeply grateful to the many colleagues with whom I discussed this research, particularly Pietro D. Omodeo, Steven vanden Broecke, Darrel Rutkin, Jean Sanchez, Matthias Schemmel, Sophie Roux, Aurélien Ruellet, Daniel Garber, Stefano Farinella and Christopher Steinbiß. I am also very grateful to Amanda Rees for her editorial work. I also thank the two anonymous referees for their invaluable comments. Additionally, I would like to acknowledge the support of the ERC Grant 725883 EarlyModernCosmology, led by principal investigator Prof. Pietro D. Omodeo at Ca' Foscari University of Venice, and the University of Hamburg's Institute for Liberal Arts & Science, especially Professor Matthias Schemmel.

¹²⁰ Pietro Omodeo, *Political Epistemology: The Problem of Ideology in Science Studies*, Cham: Springer, 2019, p. 3.

Cite this article: Garau R (2024). Patronage, cultural politics and the marginalization of astrology in seventeenth-century France: the case of J.-B. Morin and of his polemics with Pierre Gassendi and his circle. *The British Journal for the History of Science* 57, 603–622. <https://doi.org/10.1017/S0007087424001316>