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***A Review of Cardano's Cosmos: The Worlds and Works of a Renaissance Astrologer,*
by Anthony Grafton.**

Cambridge: Harvard UP, 1999. 284 pages. Hardcover: \$35.00.

Reviewed by James Guba

From tabloid readers to world leaders, whether seeking "new" prophecies of the long-dead and discredited Nostradamus or, like Adolf Hitler and François Mitterand, preferring private astrological consultations, many in modern Western societies have looked to the stars for guidance. The desire for secret knowledge about future events extends back at least twenty-five hundred years from the Babylonian civilization. Historian Anthony Grafton, the author of numerous acclaimed works on Renaissance and Enlightenment intellectual and cultural history, explores another star-crossed age, sixteenth-century Europe, in his most recent book. Through the writings and professional rivalries of Girolamo Cardano (1501-1576), an Italian mathematician, physician, and astrologer, Grafton reveals both continuity and change in the occult tradition during one of its periods of greatest revival.

From Cicero and Augustine to Pico della Mirandola and Luther, critics abounded of the notion that planets could predict, if not determine, the destinies of men and empires. Many others, including Pope Paul III, Philip Melancthon, and England's King Edward VI, were enthusiastic consumers of occult prophecies. Grafton skillfully establishes the intellectual framework of Renaissance Europe, beginning with an introductory review of the basics of astrological data and interpretations. Astronomy and astrology were not considered separate fields: recording the paths of the heavenly bodies was the precondition for subsequent analysis. In a powerful extended analogy comparing astrologers to modern economists, Grafton writes that both "tried to bring the chaotic phenomena of everyday life into order by fitting them into sharply defined quantitative models." Succeeding chapters examine the vibrant market for astrological treatises, especially in Germany and Italy, across all religious and social lines. Cultivating private clients (and commissions) formed the other entrepreneurial side of the discipline. The work's most significant chapter analyzes Cardano's re-evaluation of the works of the second-century Alexandrian astronomer Ptolemy. Inspired by the humanistic recovery

of medical texts by Galen and Hippocrates, Cardano's exploit of textual archeology confirmed the paradoxical coexistence of classical authority with empirical method. The final chapters consider other aspects of Cardano's life and works, including divination, dream interpretation, and autobiography.

The work shares the same meticulous scholarship and lively wit of Grafton's other monographs, articles, and essays. The research is anchored in manuscripts and Renaissance printed editions from thirteen European and American archives and libraries. Ingenious comparisons and analogies bridge the gap between the sixteenth century and the modern reader. In addition, the work integrates themes from Grafton's other writings, including the relationship of empiricism and the traditional authority of texts, the authenticity of citations, and the pervasiveness of plagiarism and forgery. Grafton's new work makes another important contribution to the intellectual, social, and cultural history of Early Modern Europe.

by JAMES GUBA

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