When scholars analyze the relationship between Judaism and Christianity on the one hand, and the practice of astrology and magic on the other, they are confronted with many biases and preconceived attitudes about the nature of these practices and their incompatibility with monotheistic theology. Therefore, an analysis of the complex history of astral magic in ancient Jewish discourses has to begin with a brief overview of previous research.

Many nineteenth- and twentieth-century historians, who made astrology the main focus of their studies, seemed to feel the need for justifying what they did. Auguste Bouché-Leclercq (1842–1924), for instance, opens his celebrated study on *L’astrologie grecque* (1899), with the witty remark that it is perhaps not a simple waste of time to study things with which other people have wasted their time. At the end of the nineteenth century, it was a widespread belief that European post-Enlightenment modernity had left astrological “superstition” behind for good, and that this discipline could now only be studied as a curiosity. This changed only with Aby Warburg (1866–1929), whose legendary lecture in 1912 on the cycle of frescos in the Palazzo Schifanoia and its astrological iconography suddenly moved astrology into the center of academic scrutiny. With his study *Heidnisch-antike Weissagung in Wort und Bild zu Luthers Zeit* (1920, Engl. as *The Renewal of Pagan Antiquity: Contributions to the Cultural History of the European Renaissance*), Warburg—and subsequently many scholars of the Warburg School—paid attention to the important role of astrology in the Renaissance, which he read as a conscious revival of ancient paganism.

Research into ancient astrology witnessed similar progress. Franz Cumont (1868–1947) and Franz Boll (1867–1923) collected and edited an incredible amount of astrological manuscripts and fragments from the ancient Greek world in the *Corpus codicum astrologorum Graecorum*. 
Wilhelm Gundel and his son Hans Georg published many studies about ancient astrology. Finally, Lynn Thorndike has to be mentioned, whose encyclopedic *History of Magic and Experimental Science* (1923–1958) covers no less than seventeen centuries. Thorndike and the other historians thus made accessible a cornucopia of primary sources that had previously been unknown or had not been taken seriously. At the same time, many historians of science (including Thorndike) had difficulties in interpreting astrological sources in a neutral way. Small wonder, then, that George Sarton dismissed these sources in 1951 as “superstitious flotsam of the Near East.” Despite the famous reply by Otto Neugebauer (1889–1990), published under the title “The Study of Wretched Subjects” in the scholarly journal *Iṣīs*, and Neugebauer’s insistence on the importance of astrology for our understanding of the history of the natural sciences, this area of scholarly research has something sleazy about it still today.

The reluctance of modern historians to analyze astrology as an important element of European cultural history—as well as the at times bitter and polemical fights between natural scientists and astrologers about the legitimacy of astrology—reveal one thing: at stake here are not only historical facts but also identities. Pushing astrology to the margins of natural science, rationality or the Christian religion confirms modern identities that like to see “the West” as enlightened, rational and immune to the “pagan past.”

Standing on the shoulders of the academic giants mentioned above, recent scholarship has tried to free itself from biased assumptions about astrology being merely a discipline of “pseudo-science” or “superstition.” Today, only few scholars would doubt that in Late Antiquity astrology held a key position among the accepted and well-reputed sciences. As *ars mathematica* closely connected with astronomy, it made its way into the highest political and philosophical orders of the Roman Empire and became the standard model for interpreting past, present and future events. Nevertheless, many scholars assume that the application of astrological theories is limited to the “pagan mind,” whereas Jewish and Christian theology is characterized by a harsh refutation of astrology’s implications. Unfortunately, this assumption is not the

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1 On this mechanism, see also Zika (2003).
2 See, for instance, Barton (1995); Oestmann et al. (2005).