Astrology in the Contemporary Period in Denmark

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Historical Background

After being part and parcel of early modern intellectual culture (see the chapter Astrology in the Early Modern Period in Denmark in the present volume), astrology experienced a massive decline, but was like in other Western countries revived toward the end of the nineteenth century. The rise of astrology in the contemporary era in Denmark was here – as elsewhere – intimately connected with the successful dissemination of other esoteric currents, primarily the Theosophical movement, and until the mid-1950s astrology unfolded mainly within closed esoteric societies such as the Theosophical Society and the Anthroposophical Society. This period until the mid-1950s is not very well documented, and the present presentation will therefore mainly focus on astrology in late modernity.

One of the best-known astrologers of the first part of the twentieth century was Max Heindel (1865–1919), who was born in Denmark but emigrated early in life to Scotland and later to California, where he founded the Rosicrucian Fellowship and wrote several books on astrology, among others Message of the Stars (1917). However, he is not part of the development of astrology in Denmark, which only took off many years after his departure.

As for the period in focus in the present chapter, the earliest astrology book in Danish, Astrologi og symbolik (Astrology and Symbolism), was written by the Freemason Ove Rosmund (who later changed his name to Rosmon) and was published in 1926. Rosmon (1893–1961) is the most salient figure in Danish astrology prior to World War II. He also wrote the popular book De 12 mennesketyper. Den esoteriske astrologis grundprincipper (The Twelve Human Types: The Basic Principles of Esoteric Astrology) which was published in 1936 and later reprinted in 1944, 1956, and 1967.

The Theosophical Society expanded in Denmark during the 1920s and many of the pioneers of astrology came from this movement. Among these one can mention Poul Kastrup (1910–1964) and Carl V. Hansen (1907–1976). Together with the flamboyant astrologer, fakir, hypnotist, and illusionist, Louis Brinkfort (1888–1958), they published the occult magazine OM. Louis Brinkfort wrote one of the first Danish sun sign astrology books, Zodiakken – din fødseldag, din
skæbne (The Zodiac – Your Birthday, Your Destiny; published in 1947). Text passages from this book were used as sun sign descriptions in the divination machine in Copenhagen’s popular amusement park Tivoli.

Poul Kastrup was among the first to give astrology classes (beginning in 1952), and Carl V. Hansen wrote several books, among others Astrologi (1965), which is considered to have been among the most influential astrology books on the market when astrology became mainstream in the late 1960s and onwards. Also, a Danish translation of Louis de Wohl’s Astrologi (1951) circulated throughout the 1950s and 1960s.

An important shift took place on the Danish astrology scene in the mid-1950s: “Fru Stella”, alias Irene Christensen, began to publish the monthly magazine Stjernerne (The Stars) in 1956 and two years later founded the first astrology school in Denmark, the I.C. Institute – an abbreviation for Irene Christensen as well as for a significant point in a chart. Both the magazine and the school still exist. Irene Christensen was not affiliated with any esoteric movements, and both her magazine and the school became pivotal in the development of Danish astrology as an “existential” and – by self-definition – non-religious discipline.

In 1969, Gilbert Tjørnnum, who was teaching at the I.C. Institute, published the book Astrologi. Horoskopets opstilling (Astrology: Chart Calculation), which had earlier appeared as a series in the magazine Stjernerne. The book gave a very didactic and simple instruction in chart calculation, so that anybody could now calculate a chart simply by following the steps of the book. In 1974, the school introduced a diploma exam in chart calculation and interpretation. Among the techniques to be mastered was the German astrologer Heinrich Kündig’s method of rectification. This method was considered the best by the teachers at the I.C. Institute, and since most Danish astrologers were taught here, Kündig’s method of rectification (according to which the “astrological birth” can only take place at certain mathematically appropriate times) has become one of the characteristic traits of Danish astrology.

Another important figure in Danish astrology is the Hungarian Ferenc Szöllösi who had fled to Denmark in 1956. He had an immense number of clients and in 1969 created the first evening school classes in astrology, i.e., classes that are subsidised by the ministry of education and open for all. It may seem odd that the state would support such classes financially, but astrology was classified as a hobby along with sewing or painting and therefore entered the evening school curriculum almost without protests. Later others followed in his steps and during the 1970s, the evening school programme became instrumental in disseminating astrology as a legitimate occupation and hobby among the Danish population. In 1970, Szöllösi also published the popular