Astrology in the Contemporary Period in Finland

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Horoscopes and Popular Astrology

A discussion of the role played by astrology in modern Finnish society is made difficult because of the lack of scholarly research on the topic. At the time of writing (2014), nobody had systematically investigated this issue, and thus the data for this discussion have been summarised from anecdotal evidence collected from the field as well as from studies dealing with the Finnish religious or spiritual environment in general. Thus, we lack information, for example, of the extent to which people buy astrological literature or to what degree professional astrologers are consulted by individuals and corporations before they make important decisions. As in other Western countries, all the above can be found in modern Finnish society, but all we can say is that the number of people who seem to seriously believe in the predictive power of astrology appears to be relatively small (see Tikkanen 2007: 10–13).

In a survey conducted by the Church Research Institute in Finland in 1996, 10% of the respondents said that they believed in astrology, while 87% thought astrology was totally unconvincing (Heino 1997: 360, 364). A more recent study, conducted by the Research Institute in 2004, confirms these results (9% strongly believe in astrology, 84% strongly disbelieve in it) and indicates that at least during the last decade, the Finnish attitudes towards astrology have not changed in any noteworthy way (unpublished survey data generously provided by Kimmo Ketola).

The data above suggest that Finns tend to believe in astrology to a lesser extent than people in many other Western countries. This result can, however, be at least partly explained by the fact that the questions that the participants in these surveys were asked highlighted the belief in the accuracy of the information gained through astrology. Even professional astrologers today seldom argue that they can provide totally accurate information. Instead they point out that astrology works by providing a map that can be used as an aid for life management (see Hätönen 2007). Indeed, in a more informal net-based survey organised by the magazine City in 2001, as many as 41% of women and 14% of men claimed to believe in astrology. Most of the participants of this survey were urban and well-educated young people (See <http://www.city.fi/...
artikkeli/Huuhaa+Suomi/370/>). On the other hand, the Finnish belief environment is both rather secularised and monolithic, as it is organised in an Evangelical-Lutheran Christian framework. This environment does not encourage people to adopt beliefs and practices that are considered “superstitious” or “foolish” by many. This might be an additional factor explaining the low interest in astrology in Finland, as indicated in the surveys.

Astrology is a complex of beliefs and practices that can adopt various forms and can be integrated into very different belief systems. This means that few if any religious groups and institutions construct their activities solely on the basis of astrology. It is not possible here to discuss all the various religious communities in Finland that to a more limited extent use astrology in their teachings and practices. Instead, I will discuss the profiles and programmes of the two registered astrological societies in Finland. Suomen astrologinen seura (The Astrological Association of Finland <http://www.saunalahti.fi/astrolo2/eindex.htm>) provides a more general forum for those interested in astrology, while Suomen ammattiastrologit (The Association for Professional Astrologers in Finland <http://www.ammattiastrologit.net/> ) defines itself as an information forum as well as a provider of astrological services, and as an interest organisation for professional astrologers.

The Astrological Association of Finland (SAS)

The Astrological Association of Finland (SAS) was founded in 1964 in Helsinki. Independently of this association, another astrological association was founded in the city of Tampere in 1982. While these two associations are officially independent from each other, they do co-operate and seem to co-ordinate their activities to the extent that I treat them here together under the label of the Helsinki based association. In addition to Helsinki and Tampere, The Astrological Association has organised group activity also in Turku and Pori. As mentioned above, the main object of the association is to spread information about astrology for the general public and to function as a discussion and debate forum for all those interested in astrology. At the end of 2004, it had around 520 registered members, a number that has remained on the same level at least for the last decade or so (see also Heino 1997: 366).

According to its webpage, the association operates by organising public lectures and discussions about once a month. These include events for reading astrological charts. In addition, it administrates an e-mail discussion group called Linnunrata (The Milky Way) and organises study-groups for particular topics. Every summer a weekend seminar is organised by the association. In