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Puzzling Out the Zodiacal Disk of Brindisi

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A quick overview to all known monuments representing the zodiacal ring dating to the period between the 2nd c. BCE and the 4th c. CE reveals constants which lead to the presumption that the representations of the zodiac obey certain rules.[1] That being said, some of these monuments reveal unusual arrangements of the zodiacal signs within the ring.[2] Here, unusual implies a set out that does not follow the standard astronomical orientation representing the annual course of the sun through the zodiacal constellations in either a clockwise or anti-clockwise order.

The terracotta disk, kept in the Museo Archeologico F. Ribezzo in Brindisi,[3] figures among the objects presenting the constellations with such decorative and iconographic exceptions.

My goal is twofold. Firstly, to propose a new dating of the object based mainly on essentially iconographic criteria. Secondly, to analyze the inconsistencies figuring on the relief of the Brindisi disk in order to establish the main reasons that brought the commissioners to break away from the usual iconography and orientation of the signs and, above all, to understand whether the changes made to the iconographic syntagma relate to specific cultic or religious needs.

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See Gury, 1994b. For a catalogue of representations of the zodiac, see Gundel, 1992.

2 Beside the disk we can add to the list of exception a zodiac lamp from Petra, Hammond, 2002; the Nabatean zodiac of Khirbet et-Tannur, McKenzie, Reyes, 2013, esp. 206–219; the astrological board of Caesarea Maritima, Ovadiah, Mucznik, 1996, and a relief from Daskyleion, Schwertheim, Schwertheim, 2018.

3 Marinazzo, 2004, p. 50.

1. The Terracotta Disk

The terracotta disk, measuring 35 cm in diameter and 12 mm thick, was found on a burial site in Brindisi, Corso Roma in 1909.[4] It remains a mystery whether the artefact belonged to the grave goods or whether it decorated the outside of the grave, as could be suggested by certain tomb representations on Italiote vases-painting[5] such as a red-figure hydria (Fig. 1, 350-340 BCE), preserved in the Musée du Cinquantenaire in Brussels[6], the main scene of which depicts a visit to the tomb. The funerary monument, represented by a column on a pedestal and decorated with a band, is surmounted by a circular object that could suggest a disk. Unfortunately, no further details are available concerning the astral representation of Brindisi, thus it is an object out of context that the lack of data contributes to render enigmatic, especially since, to date, it remains one of a kind. To ascertain both its function and the interpretation of the scene depicted, all the various symbols decorating it as well as the two figures standing in the chariot need to be identified with certainty.

The central medallion (fig. 2) is divided into two registers. The upper register shows a quadriga with its four horses abreast, the bridle of the horse on the left being held by a naked Hermes, positioned frontally, wearing his winged petasos and holding his caduceus in his left hand. The quadriga is driven by a small winged Eros positioned to the left, holding the reins in his left hand and a whip in his right. To his right, standing in the chariot are two figures, one of which is a female with a long spear in her right hand, the other is a male holding a long scepter (a thyrsus topped with a pinecone) in his right hand and an unidentified object in his left. The couple has been identified as Dionysus and either Ariadne or Semele, standing in a hieratic position.[7] To the left of the chariot figures the thunderbolt of Jupiter. The upper part of the medallion includes four five-rayed stars, in between which figure the radiating bust of Helios and that of Selene, surmounted by a moon crescent open to top and the two bonnets (*piloi*) of the Dioscuri, each surmounted by a four-rayed star. Just above the couple in the quadriga figure three circular objects that cannot be identified with certitude, but which have been linked to the cattails of the Moirai.[8] They consist of a kind of globe topped by three

4 Sciarra, 1967, p. 83. It has been the subject of several studies, see Kerényi, 1930 and 1933; Wuilleumier, 1939, p. 542-548; Boyancé, 1942; Kerényi, 1963; Koller, 1971; Vermaseren, 1976, p. 48-54; Gury, 1994a. To date neither the iconographic features nor the unusual order of the signs have been analysed, the main focus having always been the problems relating to the date of the artefact, see *infra*.

5 Sciarra, 1967, p. 302, nn. 4-5. The fair state of preservation, even though the central medallion bears a slight crack, suggests that it was probably inside a tomb.

6 Red figure hydria (350-340 BCE) attributed to the Bryn-Mawr group P123, Brussels, Musée du Cinquantenaire, nº inv. R287.

7 One other identification appears possible: Dionysus and Persephone. The presence of a winged Eros could suggest Ariadne. Nevertheless, the funerary symbolism of the disk seems to corroborate the identification of the female character as Semele, see *infra* and Boyancé, 1942.

8 Boyancé, 1942, p. 193, n. 2. *Contra* this interpretation, see Gury, 1994a, p. 487. See also Brendel, 1977, p. 60, pl. XVIII. Brendel mentions an iconographical parallel found on the altar of P. Acilius Felix in Rome, representing Dea Syria. The goddess is holding a globular object that terminates in a small round knob. On the disk, the arrangement of two of these enigmatic globes, one next to the

irregular shapes. Two Atlantes, positioned on either side, support the medallion, which could symbolically correspond to the upper hemisphere of the celestial vault. The lower register shows a series of twelve symbolic items, from left to right: a wheel, a torch with a cross, a horn of plenty, a rhyton placed horizontally, two pairs of cymbals, a torch, a basket, a long sickle, a staircase, a snake and a trident.

A non-compartmentalized zodiacal ring surrounds the medallion. The constellations are set out at almost regular intervals on a bare background in a clockwise manner. Cancer figures at noon and can thus be identified as the beginning of the cycle.[9] The arrangement does not follow the normal order as Gemini and Taurus have been permuted. The compositional principles of some zodiacal images are very peculiar, for example Pisces is represented as a ram-headed fishtailed hybrid while Sagittarius displays a pisciform tail. Based on these peculiarities, my analysis will attempt to grasp the motivations likely to have pushed the craftsman to include such an odd type of zodiacal composition in order to assess whether both a more accurate dating and a symbolic function can be determined for the artefact.

2. A Chronological Enigma

One of the main problems that hinders the study of zodiacal monuments remains their absolute and relative dating. Few documents can be dated with certainty and precision. The difficulty is due to the fact that many objects are out of context. The Brindisi disk provides a good example of these chronological problems and how they can be overcome.

In 1930, Karl Kerény suggested that the object dated back to the 1st c. BCE given the absence of the zodiacal sign for Libra.[10] However, it can be argued that even though Libra appears in Roman astrological sources in the 1st c. BCE,[11] this does not make its inclusion systematic and obligatory in all illustrations thereafter. Proof being that at least four examples exist depicting the sign in its usual form as the claws of Scorpio,[12] which confirms that the craftsman, even after Varro, kept the memory of the pre-eminence of Scorpio. The absence of Libra can only be considered as a criterion of antiquity if other details figuring in the illustration provide converging dating elements.

In his 1939 article devoted to the Tarentum disks, Pierre Wuilleumier shifted the dating to the 3rd c. BCE. He compared the Brindisi zodiac with other « *dischi fittili* » found in

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sun, the other to the moon, represents a detail that speaks in favour of the Moirai, for, as Plutarch wrote: "Of the three Moirai, Atropos, enthroned around the sun, grants the principle of generation; Clotho, moving around the moon, joins and mingles; and the last one, Lachesis, contributes to the task around earth, for which she partakes the most in chance", Plut., *Concerning the Face which Appears in the Orb of the Moon*, 945E (trad. H. Cherniss, Loeb).

9 See *infra*.

10 Kerény, 1933, p. 78.

11 Le Boeuffle, 1977, p. 171. Varro, *Ling.*, 7.14 : "[They are called] signs because they signify something, like Libra which indicates the equinox" *Signa quod aliquid significent, ut libra aequinoctium* (trad. pers., ed. CUF).

12 The Kugel globe (2nd c. BCE, Künzl, 1998); the Mainz globe (2nd c. CE, Cuvigny, 2004); the Little Metropolis of Athens (2nd c. BCE or 2nd c. CE ? Palagia, 2009); a carnelian intaglio in the Thorvaldsens Museum, Copenhague, no inv. I736 (1st c. BCE?), Fossing, 1929, no 1623.

the same region, but which were smaller and lacking an astral-like decoration.[13] He also based his argument on the similarities noted between the hairstyles of the couple in the chariot and those of several Tarantine statuettes.[14] Finally, Françoise Gury[15] estimated the dating of the disk to the Imperial period in the 3rd c. CE, essentially basing her theory on stylistic comparisons such as the form of the quadriga, the busts of Helios and Selene and the frontality of the central couple, which together form a clear indication pointing towards an Imperial production. My study will follow identical approaches by crossing visual and material sources, in order to suggest a new dating.

From an iconographic point of view, five elements can be exploited: the quadriga, the shape of the constellations of Scorpio, Libra and Sagittarius as well as the *piloi* of the Dioscuri.

The chariot in which the couple is standing was depicted so as to render all its constituent elements as apparent as possible. The horses are grouped by pairs with the pair in the background held close to the chariot while the one in the foreground is positioned slightly further forward. A triangular shaped element is visible around the necks of two of the horses, which must be breast straps that are linked, either directly or indirectly, to the yoke to help to distribute the pressure around the horse's neck and shoulders. The body of the chariot is rectangular with a curved profile.[16] The specific arrangement thus enables the chariot and its occupants to be clearly depicted in a frontal view, combined with the profile image of a quadriga as well as an illustration of the wooden axle showing the two four-spoked wheels. The Brindisi chariot appears to be very similar to the Roman Imperial period ceremonial chariots with their rounded sidings.[17] Such type of ceremonial chariot was sometimes large enough to accommodate up to three people and possibly had an open platform at the rear for the driver.[18]

The principles of composition chosen to represent Sagittarius, Scorpio and Libra differ from the known repertoire, which could help in dating the artefact.

Sagittarius is represented using some unique features. It is portrayed as a hybrid creature, with equine forelegs and an anguiform fishtail that can be linked to the ichthyocentaur.[19] The creature is holding a drawn bow ready to shoot an arrow towards the following constellation represented by the damaged illustration of Capricorn. One of the earliest appearances of a similar hybrid in art dates back to the Hellenistic period figuring on a sarcophagus from Anapa (3rd c. BCE)[20] and on the frieze of the Pergamon altar (180-170 BCE) where the god

13 Wuilleumier, 1939, p. 542–548.

14 *Ibid*., p. 548, n. 4 et 5.

15 Gury, 1994a.

16 On the shape of wheeled vehicles in Italy before the Roman Empire, see Crouwel, 2012.

17 Guidetti, 2022.

18 Crouwel, 2012, p. 24.

19 The Greek term ἰχθυοκένταυρος only appears in the writings of the Byzantine grammar Johannes Tzetzes (12th c.), see *Scholia in Lycophronem*, 34, 7b. Its presence in Latin literature is attested during the 1st c. BCE, see Hyg., *Fab.*, 197, and the 4th c. CE, see Claud., *Epithalamium of Honorius and Maria*, 10.144-148 : "The dread monster uprose from the abyss […] hoofs of cloven horn grown round with bristles sprang from where his fishy tail joined his man's body" (trad. M. Platnauer, Loeb).

20 Lattimore, 1976, p. 32, n. 81.

Triton is represented as a winged ichthyocentaur.[21] Nonetheless, the equine variant of the sea triton was not very popular in Hellenistic Greece.[22] It was prominently adopted in the Italian peninsula,[23] where it appeared to spread as of the 2nd c. BCE, although it was already visible as of the first half of the 4th c. BCE, as witnessed by Italiote vase-paintings.[24] This type of iconography was more frequently found during the Roman period, particularly for the decoration of 2nd and 3rd c. CE sarcophagi.[25] The enigmatic presence of the fishtail on the disk could reinforce the chthonic value of the image.[26] In fact, ichthyocentauri, like other fantastic beings belonging to the marine thiasos, play the role of psychopomps in Roman funerary art.[27] This particular role could explain the unique iconography of the zodiacal constellation of Sagittarius, which was modified to match the message conveyed by the media on which it appears. The only difference on the Roman sarcophagi is the absence of human weapons, which are very rarely represented in the hands of these hybrids.[28]

Scorpio, which faces Sagittarius, has very long open claws, a small body and a long tail that ends in a crescent moon shape, opening upwards. In the 4th c. CE, Servius described the existence of two "schools" of thought regarding the zodiac, the Chaldean one, with eleven signs, and the Egyptian one, which included twelve: "The Egyptians say that the signs are twelve, the Chaldeans eleven: Scorpio and Libra form a single sign, since the claws of Scorpio constitute Libra.[29]"

Based on this passage, several studies refer to the disk as representing an eleven-sign zodiac. However, I do not share this general opinion, as even though the Aratean tradition did not mention Libra, the constellation was still designated by a distinct name: *Chèlai*, "the Claws.[30]" This lexical detail underlines the fact that Scorpio was not intended to be considered as a sole constellation, but as two different ones. If this were not the case it would be unnecessary to add a semantic bipartition to define it. Thus, it is not systematically correct to speak of the existence of a zodiac with 11 signs, as *de facto* they are twelve.

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21 Brizzi, 2008.

22 Shepard, 1940, p. 80.

23 Dressler, 1893; Camporeale, 1958.

24 Tübingen, nº inv. Univ. 5790, see Boardman, 1986, p. 192, pl. 33.1.

25 Icard-Gianolio, 1997, nos 29, 30a, 30b, 32c, 33.

26 See *supra*.

27 The symbolic meaning of marine beings in Roman funerary art has been the subject of a long-lasting debate since the studies of the French scholar Franz Cumont. A summary thereof can be found in Balty, Balty (eds), 2015, p. LXVIII-LXXIV. Regarding the role of marine creatures in charge of transporting the soul of the dead to the "Great Beyond", see Rumpf, 1939. On the hybridisation of animal and/or human forms for the representation of certain super-human figures, see Aston, 2011, esp. 55-89.

28 On Roman sarcophagi, the marine centaurs hold the clypeus with the portrait of the deceased, see Icard-Gianolio, 1997, nos 31, 83. On the particular iconography of Sagittarius, see Spadini, 2023.

29 Servius, *Commentary on the Georgics*, 1.33: *Aegyptii duodecim esse adserunt signa, Chaldei vero undecim : nam scorpium et libram unum signum accipiunt, chelae enim scorpii libram faciunt* (trad. pers., éd. G. Thilo).

30 Geminos is one of the first Greek authors to use the word Ζυγός, see Geminos, *Introduction to the Phenomena*, 1.2.3.

The iconography equally supports this claim as can be seen in the frieze that decorates the upper part of the Little Metropolis in Athens portraying the body of Scorpio as well as the Claws, which are represented as a separate element from the body of the octopod.[31] Libra did not obtain its independence until the Roman period, during the 1st c. BCE.[32] It seems likely that the gradual disappearance of the Claws in favor of the definitive adoption of the Scales coincides with the reign of Augustus.[33] A group of intaglios contemporary with the emperor underlines the appearance of the sign in the Roman zodiac.[34] Indeed, a scorpion holding a two-plate scale in its claws (fig. 3) figures on these engraved gemstones. A similar iconographic construction, which was probably an intermediate step in the transformation of the sign, is found on the ceiling of the temple of Bel in Palmyra (fig. 4, 42-37 BCE) as attested to by a drawing. Scorpio is depicted with very long claws framing a frontal view of a naked man, standing with a scale in his hands.[35] However, it is important to stress that this may be the case for visual representations, but both sign names–Claws and Scales–remained in use for a long time and could have coexisted in these images. Already in Babylonia during the 7th c. BCE, the Scales were identified as a constellation named "Horn of the Scorpion".[36] The transmission of these names and the dominance of the Scales is more complex and may have involved multiple stages, including periods of continuous variability. For instance, the Dendara Zodiac features the Scales as early as 50 BCE,[37] suggesting possible influence from Egypt into roman territory during the Augustan period.[38] Yet, Ptolemy (2nd c. CE), in the

31 The dating of the frieze is still debated. Carl Weickert dated it to the 3rd c. BCE, Karl Robert to the 2nd c. BCE, Robert, 1889, while Olga Palagia suggests the first half of the 2nd c. CE, Palagia, 2009, p. 233-234. *Contra* O. Palagia, Erika Simon offers the 1st c. BCE, Simon, 2011. A similar representation of the claws can be found on an intaglio dated around the end of the 2nd c. BCE preserved in Copenhagen, Thorvaldsens Museum, nº inv. I736, Fossing, 1929, nº 1623.

32 It is important to note that the constellation was already known as the Scales (*zibānītu*) in Mesopotamia. The Latin name *Libra* first appeared in the 1st c. BCE. The Latin character of the constellation is emphasized by the expression used by the astronomer Hyginus. Hyg., *Astr*., 2.26 : *Nostri libram dixerunt* (ed. CUF).

33 See *infra*.

34 Yellow jasper, Wien, Kunsthistorisches Museum, nº inv. IX B 1226, 2nd c. CE, Vollenweider, 1979, p. 472, nº 7, pl. 133 ; Yellow-orange stone, New York, American Numismatic Society, nº inv. 0000.999.35116, CBd-1919. These intaglios can be related to a passage from Virgil's *Georgics*, Verg., *G.*, 1.23–35 : "For you even now the blazing Scorpion draws in his arms *bracchia contrahit*, and has left more than a due portion of the heaven!" (trans. H. Rushton Fairclough, Loeb).

35 Seyrig, 1933. The sculptor of the Atlas Farnese (90-120 CE) makes a similar compromise, with Libra placed between the claws of Scorpio. The same iconography appears on a sardonyx preserved in the Getty Museum (1st c. BCE), Malibu, J.P. Getty Museum, nº inv. 84.AN.1.39, Spier, 1992, p. 82-83, nº 184.

36 *Qaran zuqaqīpi*, "Horn of the Scorpion", see for instance Rochberg 1998, p. 56. It should be noted that the true meaning of "Horn of the Scorpion" remains unclear. The interpretation as a reference to the Claws, *i.e.* Libra, is a modern assumption.

37 Paris, Musée du Louvre, nº inv. D 38. On the astronomical ceiling of Dendara, see Cauville 2022.

38 Le Boeuffle, 1977, p. 170. Against the hypothesis of an Egyptian influence, see Stern, 1953, p. 194-197.

Tetrabiblos, still refers to the constellation as *Chelai*,[39] a name also used by later astronomers like Hephaestion (5th c. CE).[40]

Similar iconography to that of Brindisi is found on the representation of the constellation on the Mainz globe (mid 2nd c. CE)[41] and on the Kugel globe (2nd c. BCE).[42] In both cases, the arthropod has long claws and a globular tail.

It remains to be proven that the Scale is really missing on the disk as, even though it is difficult to see, it appears to be held in the right hand of Virgo.[43] On a closer look (fig. 5) a two-plated item[44] is clearly visible. The fact that Libra's constellation follows Virgo's in the zodiacal order played a role in this merger. The same iconography only appears twice on zodiacal monuments of the 2nd and 3rd c. CE.[45] The said figure, Virgo with a balance, is linked to the personification of Justice, one of the allegories associated with the constellation.[46] In fact, in the different Greek and Roman sources, the Iustitia-Virgo always opens the sections referring to the constellation.[47] Thus, the sign becomes, so to speak, the goddess of Justice although, in truth, its catasterism only considers the Virgo-Dike due worthy of a position

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39 Ptolem., *Tetr*. 1.9.8: "Of those in the Claws of the Scorpion" Τῶν δὲ Χηλῶν τοῦ Σκορπίου (trad. F.E. Robbins, Loeb).

40 Heph. 1.1.123: "The Scale which is the Claws of the Scorpion" ὁ Ζυγὸς ὃς ἐστι Χηλαὶ τοῦ Σκορπίου (trad. pers., ed. Pingree, Teubner).

41 Künzl, 1998, p. 103. He suggests that Libra is represented by two small circles that follow the claws.

42 Cuvigny, 2004. The dating is based mainly on the fact that the globe was sold on the antiquities market together with a large bowl and a small vase attributed to the 2nd c. BCE although certain iconographic elements, such as the throne on which Andromeda is sitting, seems to point towards a later date.

43 The scale as one of Virgo's characteristics is not found in Greek sources. It is mentioned in a passage of Germanicus. German., *Arat.*, frg. 4.152: "The Scales are not at odds with the goddess, *spicifera Virgo*, who holds them" (trans. from A. Le Boeuffle, CUF). In addition to this passage, a reference to a Celestial Virgo in the act of weighing with a scale is found in an inscription from Britain, *RIB* 1791: "The Celestial Virgo rides upon the Lion *Leoni Virgo caelestis* […] she weighs life and laws *lance vitam et iura pensitans*." The Latin word *lanx* would refer to the plates of a scale. According to the comments referring to the inscription, which dates to 197-217 CE, there is a dedication to the wife of the emperor Septimus Severus, Julia Domna, behind the zodiacal constellation, see Mundle, 1961. Beyond this aspect, the reference to weighing underlines the presence of Libra as an attribute of Virgo.

44 Françoise Gury already noticed this detail but strangely ignored it as a dating element, Gury, 1994a, p. 492.

45 Mithraic relief, Archeological Museum, Zagreb, 2nd-3th c. CE, Gundel, 1992, nº 66; Mosaic of Münster, Landesmuseum, Bonn, first half of the 3th c. CE, Gundel, 1992, nº 84.

46 One of the first authors to link Virgo to Dike was Aratos, in the 4th c. BCE. Aratus, *Phaen*., 97–105: "But another tale is current among humans, how of old she dwelt on earth and met men and women, but mingling with them took her seat, immortal though she was. Her men called Justice […]" (trans. G.R. Meir, Loeb). Similarly, Eratosth., *Cat.*, 9: "Hesiod tells us that she is the daughter of Zeus and Themis and that she is called Dike. Aratos, taking up Hesiod's account, says that in the past, although she was immortal, she lived on earth among humans, and that the latter called her Dike" (trans. from A. Zucker, CUF).

47 German., *Arat.*, 98-138.

among the stars[48], all other associations projected for the constellation are simply mentioned but deprived of any in-depth mythographic discussion. The said creation of the Virgo-Libra motif results from the Augustan political propaganda, used to reinforce the link between the zodiacal sign and the return of the golden age that the emperor had metaphorically recently constituted with the initiation of the Principate.[49] Here, the presence of the constellation portrayed in this form plays an important role. A nicolo preserved in Vienna (fig. 6) dated to the third quarter of the 1st c. BCE,[50] presents a female figure standing in profile facing left, holding an ear of wheat in her right hand and a scale in her left, standing above a protome of Taurus to the right and Aries to the left. Such astral context allows the female figure to be identified as Virgo; therefore, a *terminus post quem* can be established regarding the production of the Brindisi disk as the Augustan age.

Finally, the reference to the Dioscuri through one of their attributes, the starry *piloi*, also plays a role. This type of iconography was notably witnessed at the end of the Hellenistic period and an interesting representation, similar to that of the disk, can be seen engraved on a red carnelian preserved in Munich.[51] The intaglio shows the two *piloi* surmounted by a six-rayed star with a winged caduceus set between them (fig. 7). The same scheme also appears on a Hellenistic seal from the city of Uruk from the 1st c. BCE where the two caps with a small star set between them are again present.[52]

In addition to these iconographic considerations, a final element is worthy of interest: As explained hereabove, the lower register displays a set of symbolic objects which also decorate a series of small terracotta disks, the so-called "*dischi fittili*", produced in the region of Taranto and Brindisi towards the 3rd and 2nd c. BCE.[53] Although their function is still subject to debate, the concentration of such symbols–likely attributes referring to specific deities– is not enough to claim that the Brindisi zodiac can be related to the Taranto production.[54] Given that no other decorative elements can be dated to the same period, their presence appears to be explained by the need to add an archaizing aspect to the overall iconography.

Thus, the iconographic elements seem to establish a chronological framework in which the creation of the zodiacal disk can be inserted. It covers the third quarter of the 1st c. BCE and stretches to the end of the 2nd c. CE. Analysis of the zodiac from a structural point of view as well as its symbolic value could help to clarify the dating.

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48 Aratus, *Phaen.*, 133-136: "[…] then verily did Justice loathe that race of men and fly heavenward and took up that abode, where even now in the nighttime the Maiden is seen of men […]" (trans. G.R. Meir, Loeb).

49 Bellandi, Berti, Ciappi, 2001, p. 25.

50 Wien, Kunsthistorisches Museum, nº inv. IX B 637, *AGDS* Wien II, 1979, p. 123, nº 1072, pl. 79. On this series of intaglios, see Weiss, 1994.

51 *AGDS* I.2, 1970, p. 45, nº 805, pl. 92.

52 This specific iconography appears towards the end of the Hellenistic period. It is already attested on a bronze ship's spur from the first half of the 2nd c. BCE, see *LIMC*, 2009, p. 191.

53 For a study of this kind of production, see Cumont, 1917; McDaniel, 1924; Müller, 1980; D'Ercole, 1990; Falcone, 2010.

54 See Gury, 1994a, p. 490 : "[…] tous les disques n'en sont pas contemporains pour cela. La vie d'un symbole peut être longue."

3. The Structure of the Zodiacal Image on the Disk

The image of the zodiac, representing the twelve constellations that mark the sun's path through the year, appeared at the end of the Hellenistic period, towards the middle of the 2nd c. BCE.[55] The set out of this motif whether in a circular, elliptical, frieze or arch presentation, follows general compositional principles.[56] Dissection of the elements forming the zodiacal image can explain how it was pictured on the different monuments and according to which principles. The global examination of all extant monuments reveals guidelines which seem to imply that the representations of the zodiac obey certain rules which would not have shown up if these monuments had been considered independently. By firstly considering the macrostructure, then the zodiac ring itself, followed by the microstructure and finally the organization of the individual constellations within it, I will attempt to understand the variations that characterize the Brindisi disk.

The zodiacal ring of the latter follows a non-compartmentalized structure, *i.e.* there are no separations placed between the different constellations. This factor seems to be common to early representations of the zodiac[57] as witnessed on a green agate in the Musée d'Histoire de l'Art in Geneva (1st c. BCE),[58] on a garnet in the British Museum (1st c. BCE),[59] as well as on the ceiling of the Bel temple in Palmyra (42-37 BCE). The non-compartmentalized ring underlines the fact that the division of the ecliptic into 30° sections did not initially figure in art, thus, illustrating a "zodiac of constellations", not a "zodiac of signs". In fact, there is a difference between the definition of a zodiacal constellation and that of a zodiacal sign. The former refers to the actual place occupied by a group of stars in the celestial sky, while the latter refers to the 30° section occupied by the same constellation in the ecliptic.[60] Nevertheless, the absence of separations cannot be considered as a discriminatory factor for dating zodiacal monuments. In fact, even if it appears to be more frequent on the earlier ones, there are also examples of a much later date, such as a Mithraic relief preserved in London,[61] the base of a 2nd and 3rd c. CE marble column from Tunisi,[62] and the Column of Igel

55 Spadini, 2023, p. 101-102. However, the mathematical concept of the uniform zodiac appears around 430-420 BCE, see Steele, 2018.

56 Gury, 1993 and 1994b, Spadini 2024. For a general introduction to the representations of the zodiacal image, see Gundel, 1992. For the arabic world, Caiozzo, 2003.

57 *Contra* Gury, 1994b, p. 495 that claims that no circular representations of the zodiacal ring are known of before the beginning of the Roman Empire.

58 Genève, Musée d'Art et d'Histoire, n° inv. 20506, Vollenweider, 1984, p. 178, n° 228. See Spadini, 2021.

59 London, British Museum, n° inv. 1895,0621.5, Walters, 1926, n° 1168.

60 The sun's yearly motion with respect to the fixed stars was divided into 360 degrees. These 360 degrees were further divided into twelve equal segments of 30 and named metonymically for constellations of fixed stars close to them, but not necessarily exactly 30 degrees in extent, which had earlier served as points or reference for positions. The concept of the zodiac developed circa 430-420 BCE in Babylonia, see, Steele, 2018.

61 London, Museum of London, n° inv. A16933.

62 Tunis, Bardo National Museum, n° inv. 3501.

(250 CE)[63], all of which show the same organization. Indeed, the absence of compartmenting characterizes the 2nd and early 1st c. BCE production. Thereafter, Imperial period illustrations clearly distinguished each sign, setting each in its own section of the zodiacal ring, thus clearing representing the 30 degrees occupied by each sign in the ecliptic.

The order of the signs forms one of the elements structuring the zodiacal ring. On the Brindisi disk they are placed in a clockwise order, which is not as frequent as the anti-clockwise one.[64] The sign playing the major role in the organization of the zodiacal illustration is the one beginning the year. The Brindisi disk shows Cancer at noon, heading the cycle with Taurus and Leo looking towards it. This 'game of gazes' is a *unicum*. Thanks to this set out, the axis of symmetry is placed in the upper part of the ring with the central couple, Dionysus and Ariane/Semele, relating to Cancer, *i.e.* the summer solstice, when the sun is at its apogee while opposite figures the winter solstice, *i.e.* Capricorn, of which only two little legs remain visible. On either side of this summer-winter axis figure the equinoxes: to the left, Aries, the spring equinox, to the right Scorpion/Libra, the autumn equinox. The pre-eminence of Cancer probably indicates that it is the first sign of the year, a notion clearly represented here. Moreover, the crab's shell appears to have a crescent moon engraved in relief opening upwards.[65] The asterism not only emphasizes the fact that the sign is in the house of the Moon, but also refers to the tradition of the *Thema Mundi*,[66] the "birth chart of the world". At the time of the creation of the world, the moon was in Cancer, which corresponds to the Ascendant.[67] Thus, the first place in the zodiacal ring is occupied by this constellation, which in relation to the "world theme" also makes this tropical sign an initial sign.

The two Atlantes also contribute to the structure of the whole. They are set on either side of the central scene and the horizontal diameter that cuts the disk into two themes passes just above their heads. The axis thus obtained makes it possible to distinguish the upper theme, with the daytime constellations, from the lower theme, with the nighttime constellations. The presence of the two *piloi* of the Dioscuri, one placed to the left of the bust of Helios and the other to the left of that of Selene, reinforces the separation between day and night. The twins, conceived by superfetation,[68] were not totally identical as Pollux was immortal being the son of Zeus, while Castor, the son of Tyndareus, was a simple mortal. Thus, when Castor was struck dead in the fight against Idas and Lynceus, Pollux asked Zeus to grant him the same fate as his brother. The god, faced with such brotherly love, accepted to grant half of Pollux's immortality

63 Igel, Mausoleum of the Secundinii, *in loco*, see Scheid, 2003.

64 The choice of orientation does not seem to play an essential role in the organisation of the zodiacal space. For example, at El-Salamûni in Upper Egypt, at the same period, the decoration of the tombs presents either a clockwise or an anti-clockwise order, see Venit, 2015. In fact, the anti-clockwise direction reflects the astronomical reality as, through the course of a year, the circular path of the sun seems to visit the zodiacal signs from East (right) to West (left).

65 It is interesting to note that the tail of the scorpion also ends in a crescent moon. Perhaps in order to harmonize the iconography illustrating both animals with a carapace.

66 On the *Thema Mundi*, see Bezza, 1999; Raffaelli, 2001, p. 141-146.

67 The Ascendant is the rising sign visible on the eastern horizon at a given moment, in the present case at the time of the birth of the cosmos.

68 Their mother Leda is said to have had intercourse on the same night with her husband Tyndare as well as Zeus, see Dasen, 2005, p. 106-107.

to Castor,[69] thus, both attained a hybrid form of astral immortality. This story explains how the Dioscuri became the symbols of the two celestial hemispheres: the diurnal one that is linked to the abode of the living, and the nocturnal one linked to the world of the dead.[70]

The iconography of the constellations partially follows certain canonical features such as Aries, running to the right, with its head turned backwards;[71] Gemini represented by two naked male figures facing each other with their legs spread,[72] the left leg of the figure on the outside crossing over the right leg of his companion, whom he embraces while raising his other arm, the latter is bending his left elbow, his right arm abandoned; Cancer is a crab with a rounded carapace, three pairs of legs and eyes made up of four little lines; Virgo is a woman, in a three-quarter view to the left with her face in profile, she is wearing a long garment, belted above the hips and a veil over her head, her arms are at her sides and she is holding Libra in her right hand.

For the other constellations, the iconographical scheme sometimes stray from the norm, appearing in unusual positions or new forms that are more rarely used.[73] In the present study only the most important aspects will be taken into account. Firstly, Taurus represented with a long tail, almost lying down with its gaze turned towards Cancer. Then Leo shown in a position resembling "a cat when he is clawing" with small lines underlining the presence of a mane and its tail set down low.[74] Next, Aquarius represented without a vase in the form of a naked figure who seems to be a man, raising his right hand above his head with his left arm at his side. And finally, Pisces represented in the form of a hybrid creature, turned to the left, with two little forelegs stretched out in front of him.

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69 *Ibid*. 106. See Hyg., *Fab.*, 80.

70 For the funerary symbolism of the Dioscuri, see Cumont, 1942, p. 35-103, spec. 60-64. On the Dioscuri as a symbol of the hemispheres, see Philo of Alexandria, *De Decalogo*, 56; Sextus Empiricus, *Against Astrologer*, 9. 37, Gem., *Introduction to the Phaenomena*, 5.54; Man., *Astr.*, 3.240; *CCAG* V.2, 132, l. 5. Only Germanicus opposes this association, German., *Arat*., 540-542: "Here are the Twins, who never went down to the bottom of Tartarus, but, signs always very pleasant to the sailors, remain in the sky" (trans. D.B. Gain).

71 This position is very frequent, it constitutes one of the principles of composition of the zodiacal image of the constellation. It is also found in literary sources, see Man., *Astr.*, 1.264: *Respicit admirans auversum surgere Taurum* (ed. Loeb).

72 The fact that the representation lacks any attribute that can link them to one of the astral myths related to the constellation is normal. The catasterism of the Dioscuri who have become the sign of Gemini in heaven does not appear to be represented in the images on the zodiacal monuments, it appears on two occasions only, see Gundel, 1992, n°s 50 (relief of Khirbet et-Tannur, 100-150 CE) and 73 (Mithraic relief from Split, 3rd c. CE).

73 For Scorpio, Sagittarius and Libra, see *supra*.

74 The fact that Leo is facing Cancer corresponds to the description given by the Aratean tradition. This is rarely shown on monuments, see Huxley, 1985, p. 136.

Taurus represented as a bull lying down rarely appears on zodiacal monuments and has only been seen on two occasions as such.[75] The same applies to the lion clawing.[76] In both cases, the iconographic choice appears to attempt to harmonize the behavior of the two quadrupeds neighboring Cancer on the disk. As mentioned, Aquarius is shown without his characteristic attribute, which is also a rare choice made for in this type of representation and, in such cases, the vase is generally replaced by another item.[77] Pisces is represented as a hybrid aquatic creature with the head of a quadruped and a forked fishtail.[78] The small circles depicting fur permit the head to be recognized as that of a ram; the same iconographical information appears for Aries. Contrary to what may be thought, here the craftsman did not want to represent Capricorn instead of Pisces and did not intend to reverse the zodiacal order of the ring, thus, even though it is damaged, the sign that follows Sagittarius showing two little forelegs and the remains of a tail is supposed to be Capricorn. The new pictorial features used for Pisces form a *unicum*.[79] They could have been dictated by the fascination for hybrid creatures, strongly present in southern Italy from the 8th c. BCE onwards and linked to an orientalist influence.[80] This "love for hybrids" is demonstrated by the increase of the number of representations of monstrous compound creatures both in the glyptic and ceramic productions.[81]

The peculiarities highlighted in the typology of the signs are probably dictated by the desire to harmonize the whole. Thus, all the hybrid signs are pisciform, while the singular position of two of the quadrupeds (Taurus and Leo) serves to represent them with similar animal behavior, as if they were heralding the beginning of the cycle, represented by Cancer. The same concern for harmony is shared by Virgo and Aquarius where the former is lowering her right arm while the latter is raising it, almost as if to create a chiasma effect.

4. Zodiacal Disorder and the Meaning of the Disk

The disk presents an unusual order of the zodiacal signs as the positions of Gemini and Taurus have been permuted. Thus, what could the main reason for this change be?

It is difficult to give a straightforward answer, but a possible way would be to link the representation of the constellation of Gemini with the central decoration of the medallion.

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75 Sarcophagus of Petemenophis, Paris, Musée du Louvre, nº inv. E13048, 116 CE, Gundel, 1992, nº 43; Artemis Ephesia of Leptis Magna, Tripolis, Archeological Museum, nº inv. 150, 117-138 CE, Gundel, 1992, nº 228.

76 Atlas Farnese, Naples, Museo Archeologico Nazionale, nº inv. 6374, 90-150 CE, Gundel, 1992, nº 8.

77 Mosaic of Münster, Bonn, LVR-Landesmuseum, 250 CE, Gundel, 1992, nº 84, *Aquarius* holds a vegetal branch. On the zodiacal tombs at El-Salamûni, the sign holds a papyrus rod, Gundel, 1992, nºs 113-114, 117.

78 Only one different variant for *Pisces* is known so far. A *pínax* in Lyon shows three fishes placed around a sort of round knot, Lyon, Musée des Beaux-Arts, nº inv. G. 1318, 1st c. CE (?), Gay, 2007.

79 In Mesopotamian art *Pisces* appears as a swallow and a fish joined together by their tails with a V-shaped ribbon, see Wallenfells, 1993, p. 287.

80 On the notion of "the orientalising phenomenon", see Coulié, 2013, p. 105-107 (with bibliography); Croissant, 2010.

81 See for example, Giovanelli, 2012; Neri, 2013.

Indeed, the constellation is very close to one of the two starry *piloi*, represented to the left of the bust of Helios. Therefore, Gemini could be related to one of their astral myths, probably that of the Dioscuri. Beyond this purely functional aspect a symbolic hypothesis can be followed, which could link the new set out to a representation of the astral journey of the souls of the deceased.

In the center of the medallion, the chariot points towards the constellation of Scorpio.[82] A comparison with the philosophical reflections on this constellation as a gateway to the afterlife may furnish additional clues explaining the apparent change in the zodiacal order.[83] The soul's journey normally takes it through the constellation of Capricorn, the gateway to heaven, while Cancer is the gateway through which souls descend to earth. The first mention of such astral path is attributed to the philosopher Numenius,[84] during the 2nd c. CE, and adopted by Porphyry in his *On the Cave of the Nymphs*, in the 4th c. CE.[85] However, a second version exists that is probably even older, attributed to Varro (1st c. BCE) by Servius (4th c. CE) going back to the philosopher Heraclides of Pontus (390-310 BCE),[86] in which the gateway giving souls access to the sky is located in the constellation of Scorpio:

> "However, Varro reports having read that a certain divine power relieved a certain Empedocles of Syracuse of his mortal appearance and that among other things he saw three gates and three paths: one at the sign of Scorpio, which was the path by which Heracles is said to have ascended to heaven, a second at the boundaries between Leo and Cancer, a third between Aquarius and Pisces."[87]

Regarding the gateway in Scorpio, the presence of Heracles enhances the image of the journey to the afterlife. An astral myth links the hero to the etiology of the Milky Way which

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82 This iconographical detail has already been noted by Boyancé, 1942, p. 204-207.

83 On how to understand the afterlife during Roman times, see King, 2020, p. xix-xxv. Cumont, 1942, is still valid but should be read with precaution.

84 Numenius, fgt. 35 (ed. des Places) : "[Numenius] says that the sky is the Sphere of the Fixed, that there are two chasms in it, Capricorn and Cancer, the latter being the chasm of descent into genesis, the former that of ascent […]" οὐρανὸν μὲν τὴν ἀπλανῆ λέγων καὶ ἐν ταύτῃ δύο χάσματα, τὸν αἰγόκερων καὶ τὸν καρκίνον, τοῦτον μὲν καθόδου χάσμα τῆς εἰς γένεσιν, ἀνόδου δὲ ἐκεῖνον […] (pers. trans.).

85 Porph., *De antr. nymph.*, 21-23. For an introduction on the history of the astral journey, see Pérez-Jiménez, 1993; Hübner, 2006; Parodo, 2015.

86 For an analysis of the three gates, see Reiche, 1993; Hübner, 2006, p. 9-15; Kupreeva, 2009. Heraclides is said to have been the author of a treatise on the soul entitled Περὶ τῶν ἐν τοῦ Ἅιδου ἢ περὶ ψυχῆς.

87 Servius, *Commentary on the Georgics*, 1.34 = Varro, *Sat. Men.*, fr. 557-561 (ed. Bücheler, Cèbe) : *Varro tamen ait se legisse Empedotimo cuidam Syracusano a quadam potestate divina mortalem aspectum detersum, eumque inter cetera tres portas vidisse tresque vias : unam ad signum scorpionis, qua Hercules ad deos isse diceretur* ; *alteram per limitem, qui est inter leonem et cancrum ; tertiam esse inter aquarium et pisces* (pers. trans., ed. G. Thilo). For a commentary on this passage, see Gottschalk, 1980, p. 100-105.

is one of the places where the souls of heroes abide.[88] Eratosthenes, who passed on the founding story, describes it as follows:

> "It is one of the apparent circles, to which the name of Milky Way is attributed. For, it was not possible for the sons of Zeus to share in the honors of heaven unless one of them had suckled the breast of Hera. That is why, it is said, Hermes brought Heracles to her at birth and had him suckled. When she realized this, Hera pushed him away, and thus, from the surplus that flowed out, the Milky way was born."[89]

Milk plays a central role not only in the genesis of the astral path[90] but also as the essential liquid used to cleanse the souls before their ascent. Its absorption is the ultimate condition enabling the astral apotheosis. A fragment still attributed to Heraclides and quoted by John Philoponus (6th c. CE) clearly underlines this aspect: "The soul does not ascend to the heaven of the earthly world without having sucked the milk of Hera, if it does not obtain the providence of the goddess herself from whom this milk has flowed.[91]" The motivation behind the connection between the constellation of Scorpio and the gateway to the afterlife lies in the fact that it is part of the path crossed by the Milky Way.[92] In a nutshell, the doctrine of the three gateways was borne from a synthesis made of the etiological account of Eratosthenes, where the discourse around acceptance as a member of the Olympian family is reduced to an eschatological sense and placed in a logic relating to the astral journey.

Varro's excerpt describes the function of the first path leading souls to the sky but does not mention the other two. According to Hans Benedikt Gottschalk, Heraclides is interpreting the myth of Er in Plato's *Republic* (X 614c).[93] In his opinion, the second path led souls to sublunar Hades, *i.e.* to earth, thus in reincarnation, while the third brought souls that deserved neither punishment nor deification to a part of the sky other than the Milky Way. This exegesis renders the unusual order of the constellations on the disk comprehensible. This variant appears to have been dictated by the desire to illustrate the three gateways mentioned in the text.

The diagram described by Heraclides of Pontus follows a precise symmetry built around the Leo-Aquarius axis. The permutation of the constellations does not result from a mistake made by the craftsman,[94] but allowed Leo to face Aquarius, the two constellations thus forming an imaginary triangle, the vertex of which is Scorpion, the gateway allowing souls

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88 Heraclides Ponticus, frg. 52 Schutrumpf : "In fact, this great personage [scil. Empedotimus] says that the Milky Way is the path leading souls on their journey through Hades, which is in the sky", φησὶ γὰρ ἐκεῖνος ὁδὸν εἶναι ψυχῶν τὸ γάλα τῶν Ἅιδην τὸν ἐν οὐρανῷ διαπορευομένων (pers. trans.).

89 Eratosth., *Cat*, 34 (trans. from A. Zucker, CUF).

90 On Hera offering her breast to Heracles, see Pirenne-Delforge, Pironti, 2016 and 2023.

91 John Philoponus, *In Aristotelis Meteorologica*, 1.8.117.13-19 : ὡς οὐκ ἀνεισιν ἀπὸ τοῦ κόσμου ψυχὴ μὴ σπῶσα τοῦ Ἡραίου γάλακτος, ὃ ἐστιν εἰ μὴ τύχῃ τῆς ἐν τῷ γάλακτι τούτῳ κεχυμένης προνοίας αὐτῆς τῆς θεοῦ (trad. pers., ed. Hayduck).

92 Hyg., *Astr.*, 4.7: "[…] It sections the Centaur's knees from the rest of its body and binds the end of the Scorpion's tail […]" (trad. M. Grant), see also, Man., *Astr.*, 1.684-698.

93 Gottschalk, 1980, p. 99.

94 See also Gury, 1994b, p. 486: "Leur organisation cependant semble procéder d'une réflexion concertée et, si nous n'en percevons pas toutes les intentions, au moins pouvons-nous écarter l'hypothèse selon laquelle les anomalies relevées seraient le fruit du hasard […]".

to reach their final destination in the Milky Way. Then, in correspondence with the path taking souls back to earth, between Leo and Cancer, figures three elements that adopt this idea: the symbolic representation of the Moirai, establishing the destiny of each individual.[95] On the path taking the 'intermediary' souls to another part of the sky figure symbols linked to chthonian deities.

The doctrine of the three celestial gateways is thus iconographically duplicated by the tripartition of the disk itself, which is divided, as mentioned earlier, between an upper hemisphere enclosing diurnal signs, a lower one enclosing nocturnal signs, plus Scorpio playing the role of the *limes* between the two.

During the Republican period an iconographic scheme was already known representing the catasterism of Heracles. A denarius struck by L. Farsuleius Mensor (fig. 8),[96] dated between 75 and 70 BCE, shows on its obverse, the bust of Libertas, draped and wearing a diadem and on its reverse, a warrior holding a spear and reining in a biga, his right hand helping a togate figure into the chariot. In front of the latter, beneath the horses' legs figures a small scorpion forming an iconography that could refer to the apotheosis of Romulus. The warrior can be interpreted as the god Mars, taking Romulus, the *togatus*, to the sky through the gateway of Scorpio.[97] In this case the Brindisi disk could represent the promoter of the image of the astral apotheosis in Italy during Imperial times. It underlines how the privilege of the celestial apotheosis is no longer limited to mythical figures, such a Romulus or Hercules, but becomes part of the private decoration of the Romans, while also being reserved for Imperial art.[98] This thematic was present in later funerary monuments of senatorial families. A well-known case is that of the Mausoleum-Tower of the Secundinii (250 CE), known as the Column of Igel.[99] On one of the four faces of the monument figures the representation of the apotheosis of Heracles in a chariot drawn by four horses. The divinized hero is greeted by a helmeted deity, Athena, holding out her hand, around which the zodiacal circle is set out. Even on this monument, the chariot is heading towards the constellation of Scorpio. The funerary context of the column testifies to the desire to symbolically show the ascent of the souls of the deceased to heaven, with reference to the image of Heracles' passage through the Scorpio gateway.[100]

The rich and complex iconography of the zodiacal disk suggests that it was specially commissioned for a funerary occasion. By linking the representations of a mythological

95 For an analysis of this role on Roman sarcophagi, see Dasen, 2011.

96 *RRC* 392.1a.

97 Yarrow, 2018. On the apotheosis of Romulus, see Gosling, 2002, Ver Eecke, 2008. Ovid gave a vivid description of the episode, Ov., *Met.*, 14.805-828.

98 See for example the decoration of the southern apsis of the temple of Hercules in Sabratha (185-190 CE). In the centre, the emperor Marcus Aurelius is carried up to heaven by the eagle of Jupiter. Around the central scene is represented the zodiacal ring, see Caputo, Ghedini, 1984, p. 69-97.

99 Gundel, 1972, nº 51; Vermaseren, 1976, p. 59.

100 For an interpretation of the column, see Scheid, 2003, for the link between zodiac and sarcophagi, see Parodo, 2015.

space, Dionysus taking his mother to heaven,[101] to the zodiac and to the evocation of the astral journey, the soul of the deceased obtains the right to enter the world of the afterlife.

The similarities resulting from the iconographic and symbolic analysis make it possible to date the Brindisi disk around the end of the 1st c. or the beginning of the 2nd c. CE. The intellectual and religious context in southern Italy during this span of time seems to support this interpretation. It is interesting to underline a growing philosophical train of thought around the destiny of the human soul, especially present in the passage of Cicero entitled *The Dream of Scipio* (54 BCE). The educated Roman upper-class must have been familiar with such kinds of texts that aim to understand and translate into Latin the idea of the soul found in Plato. Other than the disk of Brindisi, a trace of this interest is clearly visible towards the end of the 1st c. CE in the so-called Orion mosaic preserved and recently found in Pompei.[102] Here the scene shows a big scorpion with a butterfly winged torso of a male figure[103] with a sword around his body emerging from it. The head of the male figure has been burned by a winged Eros, holding a torch. Based on the textual evidence analyzed above, we again find ourselves once facing a new iconographic version of the theme of the destiny of the soul after death. The mosaic testifies to the taste for these philosophical reflections in southern Italy as of the 1st c. CE, representing a type of artistic production in which the enigmatic zodiac of Brindisi can be placed.

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101 This myth is well known. Dionysus brought his mortal mother up from Hades and made her immortal, Diod. Sic. 4.25.4: "[…] for the myths relate that Dionysus brought up his mother Semelê from Hades, and that, sharing with her his own immortality, he changed her name to Thyonê" (trad. C.H. Oldfather, Loeb). See also, Paus., 2.31.2; Apollod., *Bibl.*, 3.5.3. Boyancé, 1942, p. 203; Bérard, 1974, p. 23.

102 The mosaic was found in 2018 in the Regio V.2, A12. See Osanna, 2019, p. 101.

103 The butterfly wings are a clear reference to Psyche. Sydney H. Aufrère queried the identification as Orion proposed by Massimo Osanna. I support Osanna's hypothesis, especially since the male figure in the mosaic has no pupils, thus referring to Orion's blindness which is part of his astral myth as a punishment for the rape of Merope, the daughter of King Oenopion.

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Fig. 1. Red figure hydria. 350-340 BCE. Attributed to the Bryn-Mawr group P123. Brussels, Musée du Cinquantenaire. N° inv. R287. © Brussels, Musée du Cinquantenaire.



Fig. 2. Zodiacal Disk of Brindisi. End of the 1st c. CE beginning of the 2nd c. CE. 35 cm diam. Museo Archeologico F. Ribezzo. Su concessione del MiC – Soprintendenza Archeologia Belle arti e Paesaggio per le provincie di Brindisi e Lecce.



Fig. 3. Stone, yellow to orange. 10 x 11 mm. New York, American Numismatic Society. N° inv. 0000.999.35116. CBd-1919. CC BY-NC 4.0.



Fig. 4. Detail. Zodiac of the Temple of Bel, Palmyra. 42-37 BCE. Now lost.
Photo: © M. Ossendrijver.



Fig. 5. Detail. Zodiacal Disk of Brindisi. Virgo holding scales.



Fig. 6. Nicolo. Third quarter of 1st c. BCE. 12,3 x 8,6 x 2,6 mm. Wien, Kunsthistorisches Museum. N° inv. IX B 637. Scan from AGDS Wien II (1979), 123, n° 1072, pl. 79.



Fig. 7. Denarius. 75 BCE. New York, American Numismatic Society.
N° inv. 1944.100.2009. Public Domain Mark.



Fig. 8. Red-orange carnelian. 16,3 x 13,0 x 4,0 mm. München, Staatliche Münzsammlung.
N° inv. Scan from AGDS I.2 (1970), 45, n° 805, pl. 92.

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