



Magical Choices. Geomancy as a Strategy in the Politics and Everyday Life of Augustus, Elector of Saxony (1526-1586)

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The main focus of the following text is the question of how geomancy worked as a tool of policy advice in Europe in the Early Modern Age. In concrete terms, the text deals with the question of the extent to which the consultation of geomancy influenced political everyday business at the Electoral Saxon court in the late 16th century. Here, the focus is particularly on the ruler himself – namely, Augustus, Elector of Saxony, who ruled Electoral Saxony from 1553 to 1586 and turned toward geomancy predominantly during the 1570s and 80s. Through adopting a focus on geomancy, my project explores this tool of early modern policy advice

which has previously tended to be neglected by researchers, although it was doubtlessly a remarkable phenomenon.¹ Of course, basically, it is already clear, in the Early Modern Age in Europe, divination was employed to optimize the actions of princes. In this context, one must first of all refer to the relatively well-researched significance of astrology as a means of policy advice.² Accordingly, astrologers were present at almost every European court from the mid-15th to the mid-17th centuries.³ Thus, one might say that geomancy was simply another element in this already well-known field of divinatory policy advice, but such a consideration would be too narrow, as geomancy as a divinatory practice provided possibilities which were clearly different from those of astrology! What this actually meant and to what degree political everyday business at the Electoral Saxon court in

¹ So, for instance: Skinner, Stephen: *Geomancy in Theory and Practice*, Singapore 2011, p. 33.

² E.g.: Bauer, Barbara: *Die Rolle des Hofastrologen und Hofmathematicus als fürstlicher Berater*, in: August Buck (Ed.): *Höfischer Humanismus*, Weinheim 1989, p. 93-117; Brosseder, Claudia: *Im Bann der Sterne*. Caspar Peucer, Philipp Melnachthon und andere Wittenberger Astrologen, Berlin 2004, especially p. 27-79. For the Middle Ages see also: Reinle, Christine: *Geheimwissenschaften und Politik. Mantik, Magie und Astrologie an den Höfen Kaiser Friedrichs III. und Pfalzgraf Friedrichs des Siegreichen*, in: Franz Fuchs (Ed.): *König, Fürsten und Reich im 15. Jahrhundert*, Köln, Weimar, Wien 2009, p. 319-348; Prangerl, Daniel C.: *Sterndeutung als naturwissenschaftliche Methode der Politikberatung. Astronomie und Astrologie am Hof Kaiser Friedrichs III. (1440-1493)*, in: *Archiv für Kulturgeschichte* 92 (2010), p. 309-328; Carey, Hilary M.: *Courting Disaster. Astrology at the English Court and University in the Later Middle Ages*, Macmillan: Houndmills Basingstoke and London 1992.

³ Brosseder, Claudia: [art.] *Astrologie*, in: *Enzyklopädie der Neuzeit*, Bd. 1, Stuttgart 2005, col. 724-729, here col. 727.

the late 16th century was permeated by this technique will be explored in detail in the following. I will proceed by four steps: first, a – necessarily – brief explanation of essential methods of geomancy in the 16th century will be provided. As the second step, I will present a short overview of my sources, and then, in the third step, demonstrate in which fields of political-administrative action and about which of Augustus, Elector of Saxony's political decisions geomancy was consulted. Thus, our focus is on the question of how geomancy was employed to optimize a ruler's actions. By a fourth and final step the presented material must then be summarised by four observations.

1.) Techniques of geomancy in the 16th century

Similar to astrology, geomancy also assumes that heavenly bodies influence the earthly world, the bodies of humans and thus, after all, also the human spirit. One would thus – as is the basic idea – be able to read and predict future developments by observing the stars in their regular course. The difficulty, however, was in decoding these cosmic messages. The reading techniques of astrology were relatively complex. The geomantic approach simplified things because it was usually possible to avoid calculating the exact chronological and spatial constellations of the stars. Instead, one let the cosmos, so to speak, work in and by itself, from which one might then glean a coded message. In most cases, this message consisted of a geomantic figure composed of 16 (or sometimes

only 15) individual signs. (Fig. 1)⁴

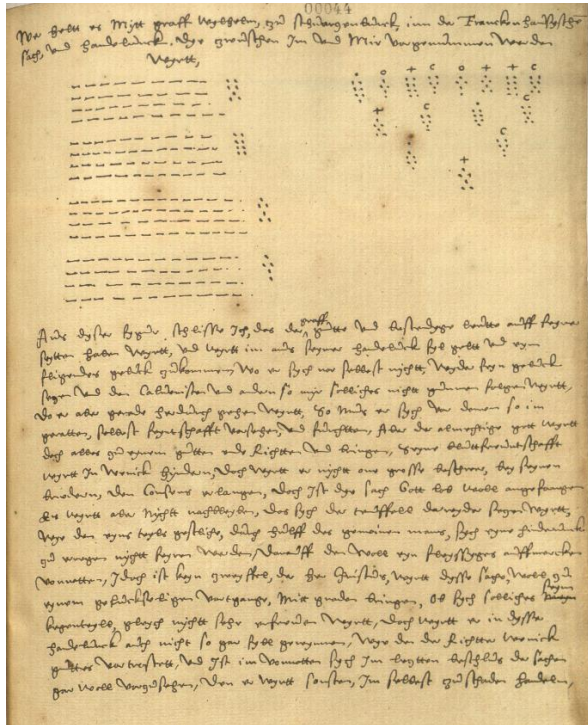


Fig. 1: One of Augustus Elector's geomantic inquiries. SLUB, Mscr. Dresd. K 19, fol. 44a. With kind permission of the Saxon State and University Library Dresden.

4 On the basic concept of geomantic techniques see: SLUB Mscr. Dresd. N 131m/1, fol. 11b-13a. For descriptions of (the same) geomantic techniques in the Islamic tradition, see e.g.: Burnett, Charles: Geomancy in the Islamic World an Western Europe, in: Zhouyi Studies (Western Version), 7 (2001), no. 1, p. 176-180; Savage-Smith, Emilie / Smith, Marion B: Islamic Geomancy and a Thirteenth-Century Divinatory Device, Undena Publications: Malibu, CA 1980, p. 11-14; Binsbergen, Wim van: The astrological origin of Islamic geomancy, 1996-2004, online source, see URL: http://www.shikanda.net/ancient_models/BINGHAMTON%201996.pdf, (last Nov. 30, 2014), p. 5-10.

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Each sign in the geomantic figure consisted of four lines, with one or two dots for each. There are sixteen different possible combinations of these constellations of dots so, accordingly, there are 16 geomantic signs, each of which has its own name and specific field of meaning, which for the actual inquiries was always also co-determined by its position within the geomantic figure. (Fig. 2)

The 16 geomantic signs

















	Fortuna major Greater fortune		Fortuna minor Lesser fortune		Caput draconis Dragon's head		Cauda Draconis Dragon's tail
	Puer Boy		Puella Girl		Tristitia Sadness		Laetitia Joy
	Conjunctio Conjunction		Carcer Prison		Albus White		Rubeus Red
	Amissio Loss		Acquisitio Winning		Populus People		Via The way

Fig. 2: The 16 Geomantic signs.

The creation of such a figure arose via a comparably simple method. Initially, the so-called Four Mothers were created as the basis for all the other signs. For this purpose, an individual concentrated on a question and drew four lines on a sheet of paper or similar material, if preferred, and applied an undetermined number of dots to each line, taking care to avoid purposefully applying a certain number of dots. The easiest way to achieve this was by using a comparably high number

of dots. These dots were then added up, line by line, with an odd number making one dot and an even number two. In this way, four lines containing one or two dots produced the first geomantic sign. (Fig. 3)

The creation of the first sign (the first mother)

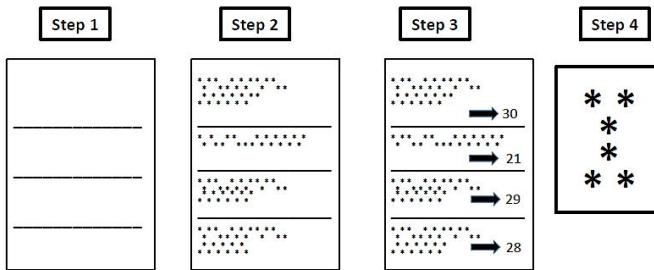


Fig. 3: The creation of the first sign (the first mother).

This process was repeated four times to produce the Four Mothers. (Fig. 4) In this process, the individual signs of the geomantic figure run from right to left, due to the fact that geomancy in Christian Europe was based on the Arabic tradition and so had adopted not only the concept of the signs but also their arrangement which, according to Arabic writing, ran from right to left.

Now, as a next step, the next four signs are derived from our Four Mothers – the Four Daughters. For this, the uppermost line of the Four Mothers, read from right to left and top-down,

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form the 5th sign, the second line forms the 6th sign, and so on. (Fig. 5) The 9th-12th signs – the so-called Granddaughters – are produced by applying another technique. For now, two each of the existing 8 signs are added up, line by line, and that is 1 and 2, 3 and 4, 5 and 6, as well as 7 and 8. Uneven results are again marked by one dot, and even ones by two dots. (Fig. 6) Then, two pairs of Granddaughters are added up to form Two Witnesses – signs No. 13 and 14. (Fig. 7) These two pairs of Two Witnesses are also added up to obtain sign No. 15, the so-called Judge. (Fig. 8) Sometimes one also inserts a 16th sign, called the Chief Justice or Chairman, which is the result of adding the Judge and the First Mother. (Fig. 9) These 15 or 16 signs together form a geomantic figure which, if correctly interpreted, is supposed to provide an answer to the initially-asked question.

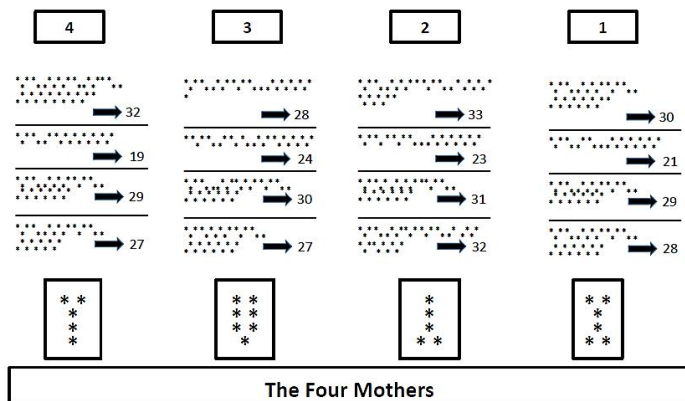


Fig. 4: The creation of the four mothers.

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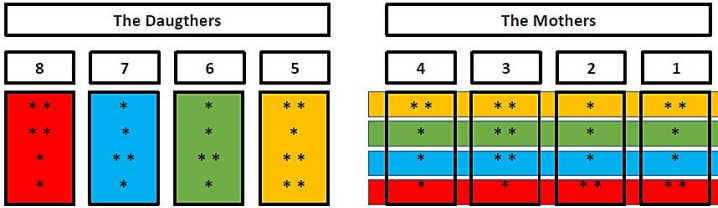


Fig. 5: The creation of the four daughters.

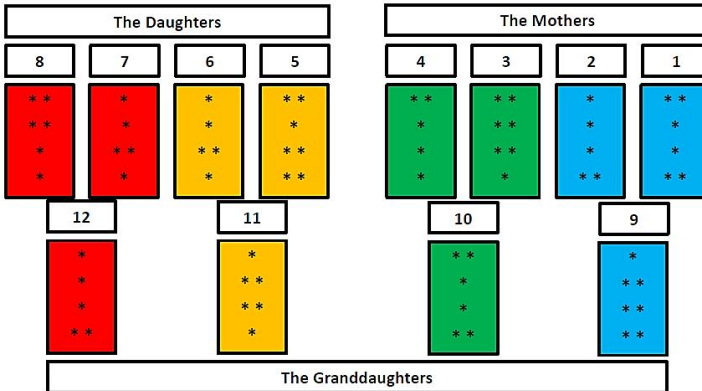


Fig. 6: The creation of the four granddaughters.

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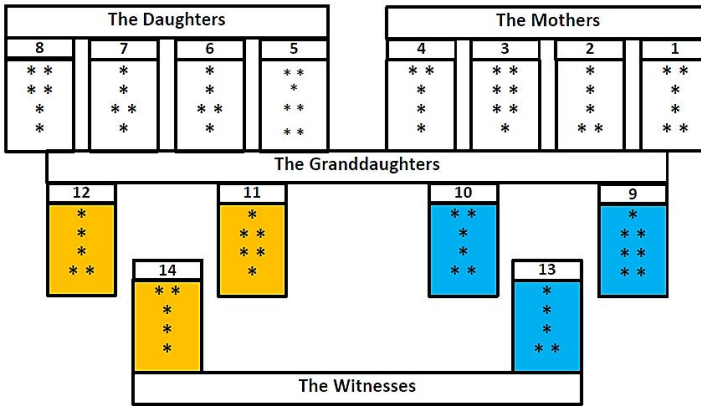


Fig. 7: The creation of the two witnesses.

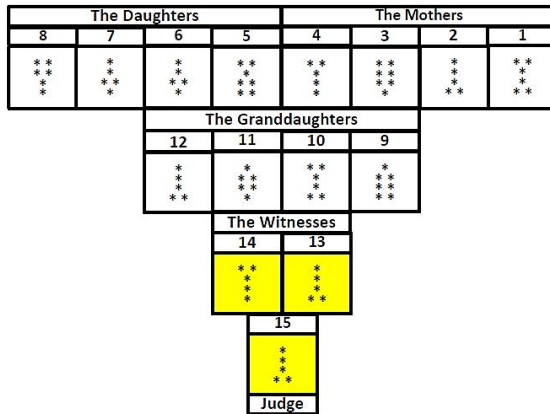


Fig. 8: The creation of the judge.

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The Daughters				The Mothers			
8	7	6	5	4	3	2	1
** ** **	* ** *	* ** **	** ** **	** ** **	** ** **	* ** **	** ** **
The Granddaughters							
12	11	10	9				
** ** **	* ** *	** ** **	* ** **				
The Witnesses							
14	13						
** ** *	* ** **						
Judge				Chairman			
15				16			
* ** ** *				* * * *			

Fig. 9: The creation of the chairman.

In the 16th century, we find indications of many more or less complex methods for interpreting these figures. For example, signs No. 1 to 12 could be attributed to the 12 Houses of the horoscope, to which the astrology tradition attributes certain topical fields – such as family, marriage or professional career. Thus, according to this method, after the attribution to the Houses, one had only to interpret the geomantic sign in the House to which the initially-asked question belonged. As aids to interpretation, we find special reference books, where the meaning of the 16 geomantic signs in the different Houses was written. To interpret the signs in the 12 Houses, some instructions considered which zodiac sign and which planet had to be attributed to which House at the time when the question was asked.⁵ Here, it becomes obvious how

⁵ For instance: SLUB, Mscr. Dresd. N 90, fol. 7a-26a; SLUB, Mscr.

much one followed the horoscope method. However, the application of these astrological aspects was comparatively easy as, in the 16th century, there even existed printed lists where, day by day, the appropriate zodiac signs and planet constellations were pre-calculated.⁶ However, apart from these rather astrology-oriented interpretation methods, we also find instructions where suddenly one speaks of 16 Houses with their appropriate fields of meaning,⁷ in which case the connection to the horoscope was dropped. Certainly, what made this model attractive was the fact that all 16 signs were employed and there was no need to establish the basic astrological data for that day.

For other methods, the signs of the Judge and the two Witnesses were of crucial significance. To interpret these, one turned to reference books, and sometimes also short lists that gave the basic meaning of all kinds of triangular constellations of the Judge and Witnesses.⁸ Ideally, this reading tech-

Dresd. N 13. One can find a practical example of such a 'geomantic horoscope' with 12 houses in: SLUB Mscr. Dresd. K 19, fol. 51a.

6 An example of a printed list with the time of sunrise can be found in: *Geomantia. Künstlicher vnd rechtschaffener gebrauch der alten kleynen Geomancey (...)* Getruckt bey Peter Jordan, Mainz 1534, fol. A_va.; in form of a manuscript see also in: SLUB, Mscr. C 495.

7 There is a very simple explanation of the 15 houses in: SLUB, Mscr. Dresd. N 90, fol. 1a-2b; 3a-6a.

8 For a fragment of such a list, see: SLUB, Mscr. Dresden, K 19, fol. 111a-116a. For a list containing the basic meanings of the geomantic symbols, see: SLUB, Mscr. Dresden, K 19, fol. 131a,b. Some examples shall illustrate these basic meanings:

- (1) Glad = Laetitia, Fortuna minor, Amissio, Puella, Rubeus, Cauda Draconis, Via ↔ Hopeless = Tristia, Fortuna major, Acquisitio, Carcer, Coniunctio, Albus, Caput Draconis, Populus.

nique was used for less complex questions. If, for example, the question was whether a certain person was discreet or not, for an answer one looked first at the sign of the Judge. If, according to special lists, the Judge was considered discreet, one could be entirely reassured that it was safe to tell this person a secret. If, on the other hand, in the Judge there was a sign which was considered gossipy, one was better advised not to mention the matter. If the information given by the Judge was unclear, for example because the sign showed the characteristics of being both discreet and dishonest, and thus one could not tell whether this person was trustworthy, one could additionally reach back to the meaning of the Two Witnesses and, if still in doubt, also to the Chairman and his meaning.⁹

Another simplification were geomantic cross-tabulations. There, by determining two geomantic signs – such as the Judge and the Witness to the Left, or those geomantic signs

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- (2) Kindly = *Acquisitio*, *Fortuna major*, *Laetitia*, *Puella*, *Albus*, *Caput Draconis*, *Conjunctio*, *Populus* ↔ Angry = *Amissio*, *Fortuna minor*, *Tristitia*, *Puer*, *Rubeus*, *Cauda Draconis*, *Carcer*, *Via*.
 - (3) Honest = *Acquisitio*, *Laetitia*, *Puella*, *Albus*, *Caput Draconis*, *Populus*, *Fortuna major*, *Fortuna minor*, *Conjunctio*, *Carcer* ↔ dishonest = *Amissio*, *Tristitia*, *Puer*, *Rubeus*, *Cauda Draconis*, *Via*.
 - (4) Discreet = *Acquisitio*, *Fortuna major*, *Tristitia*, *Puella*, *Albus*, *Caput Draconis*, *Via*, *Carcer*, *Conjunctio* ↔ Gossipy = *Amissio*, *Fortuna minor*, *Laetitia*, *Puer*, *Rubeus*, *Cauda Draconis*, *Populus*.
 - (5) Guilty = *Tristitia*, *Amissio*, *Rubeus*, *Fortuna minor*, *Populus*, *Carver*, *Puer*, *Cauda Draconis* ↔ Innocent = *Laetitia*, *Acquisitio*, *Albus*, *Fortuna Major*, *Via*, *Conjunctio*, *Puella*, *Caput Draconis*.

9 See, for example: SLUB, Mscr. Dresd. K 19, fol. 131a, b.

that were attributed to the ascendant and descendent of the day – one could simply look for the respective signs on the x- and y-axis of the tabulation and then read the answer to the question from their intersection. Mostly this kind of cross-tabulation following a yes-no pattern, but such tabulations also catered for several other alternatives; for example, peace or war, loyal or disloyal, educated or uneducated, good luck or bad luck, and so on.¹⁰

This brief sketch of the technique of geomantic inquiries must suffice here. Taken together, it must be emphasized that geomancy allowed the rapid production of results, mostly without requiring qualification. By using these various methods, one could answer a variety of complex and less complex questions within a short span of time. However, for the time being, I must mention two points to qualify this. Firstly, I am not yet familiar with every method, as I have so far only worked through part of the material. Hopefully, this situation will improve in the near future. Secondly, in view of the concrete practice of inquiry, it should be noted that usually only the question, the geomantic figure and the answer were recorded. The sources I have been investigating omit to mention the steps for proceeding from the geomantic figure to the answer. This is unsurprising, as the interpretation method would be obvious to the inquirer and so its process was not worth recording in writing. For us, however, this poses a challenge in identifying how the actual interpretation practice was applied in the respective case.

¹⁰ E.g.: SLUB Mscr. Dresd. N 5; SLUB Mscr. Dresd. N 7; SLUB Mscr. Dresd. N 8c; SLUB Mscr. Dresd. N 8f; SLUB Mscr. Dresd. N 10.

2.) The geomantic manuscripts of Dresden

The Dresden State and University Library holds a remarkable stock of about 50 geomantic manuscripts, that were collected, written and ordered by Augustus, Elector of Saxony, who dealt with geomancy predominantly in the 1570s and 80s.¹¹

Typically, the manuscripts can be organized into four categories, which partly relates to what has been said so far. **Firstly**, in Dresden, we find scripts on the methodical and spiritual foundations of geomancy. These tend to be compilations of older texts in German – such as by Hugo of Santallus – with more recent additions whose origins tend to be unclear at present. Apart from the basic texts, **secondly**, there are the already-mentioned reference books, in which the range of meanings of the 16 geomantic signs is explained. These are also in German. To facilitate the use of such aids, often, the margins contained bookmarks that took one directly to the sign that one was seeking or to the appropriate House.

Thirdly, among the stocks in Dresden we find compilations of the already-presented geomantic tabulations for a great variety of groups of questions. These tend to be magnificent manuscripts, obviously produced for an exclusive circle of buyers within the contemporary book market. The size and variety of the trade in such magnificent manuscripts has

¹¹ These manuscripts form part of the Elector of Saxony's personal collection of mathematical, astronomical and hermetic manuscripts and books. For further details about this collection, see: Gluch, Sibylle: Die mathematisch-astronomisch-astrologische Spezialbibliothek des Kurfürsten August von Sachsen, in: Sudhoffs Archiv 95 (2011), p. 48-65.

not yet been established, but, occasionally, the sources in Dresden contain indications towards Nuremberg. Not least due to the regular purchase of astrological and astronomical instruments and manuscripts, we may suppose that Dresden had very close contact with Nuremberg,¹² which must therefore be considered a transshipment point not only for astrological but also for geomantic aids, but this is an area for future research.

Finally, as the **fourth** and last group of texts in Dresden, the Elector's inquiry books must be mentioned, on which I focus my research project. Some of these manuscripts were later bound into compilations, in which thousands of concrete questions as well as their appropriate, geomantically-determined answers are recorded.¹³ Doubtlessly, this material is particularly striking, not only providing an extraordinarily detailed insight into the actual way in which geomancy was used, but also enabling the reader to explore the significance of geomancy for the Saxon Elector's immediate practice of rule.

¹² See: Gluch: Die mathematisch-astronomisch-astrologische Spezialbibliothek (see note 11). Actually, there are in the collection even single manuscripts from Nuremberg: SLUB Mscr. Dresd. N 46b; SLUB Mscr. Dresd. N 55b.

¹³ E.g. SLUB Mscr. Dresd. K 19; SLUB Mscr. Dresd. K 20; SLUB Mscr. Dresd. KA 847-849; SLUB Mscr. Dresd. K 87; SLUB Mscr. Dresd. 338.

3.) The fields in which geomancy was applied at the Saxon court under Elector Augustus

Most of all, during the latter part of his rule, Elector Augustus dealt intensively with geomancy. At that time, his decision-making and thus parts of his home and foreign policy were considerably influenced by the use of geomancy. If one tries to systematise the flood of material in Dresden, three fields of application can be distinguished.

3a.) Assessment of information

Geomancy was – firstly – used to check information. The assessment of the newspapers and newsletters that reached Dresden are particularly important here. At that time, newspapers and newsletters were mostly hand-written messages about the current developments at other courts of the early modern age, involving marriages, deaths, wars, peace agreements and the like.¹⁴ However, one could never be sure that this information was accurate, as rather spurious messages were definitely also transmitted. Accordingly, in the newspapers of the late 1570s, we repeatedly find announcements of the imminent marriage of the English queen, Elizabeth I., who,

¹⁴ On this type of handwritten newspaper, see: Keller, Katrin: Die Fuggerzeitungen. Ein Literaturbericht, in: Jahrbuch für Kommunikationsgeschichte 2012, p. 186-204; Bauer, Oswald: Zeitungen vor der Zeitung. Die Fuggerzeitungen (1568-1605) und das frühmoderne Nachrichtensystem, Berlin 2011.

of course, remained unmarried¹⁵ and, in 1576, there were several reports of the Spanish king, Phillip II's death, who did not die until 1598.¹⁶ Of course, people tried to avoid being fooled by these false reports. Knowledge was power – back then as well as today – and so reliable information was important. In Dresden, to be on the safe side, one counted on geomancy. Thus, under Elector Augustus, incoming newspapers and news were systematically assessed with the help of geomancy.

What developed in the course of this assessment is an interesting collection of geomantic-based comments on newspapers and newsletters from all over Europe, which is doubtlessly also of interest to the history of the media. A short example shall illustrate how such an assessment occurred. In early February 1577, a newspaper compiled by Christoff Haller¹⁷ in Turin reached Dresden. It was copied into the

15 SLUB, Mscr. Dresd. KA 847, Nr. 31, 152.

16 E.g. SLUB, Mscr. Dresd. K 338, fol. 20b: „*Jst der kunnick zu Hispanien thott wye dye zeytunck lautten? Aus dyser Radyx zall [26] Judycire Jch, weyll solliche eyne czall so gut vnd bestendyck auch geluckselick Jst, welliche auch Jn kranckeytten, gesuntheytt, vnd vor sych selbest langes lebenn anczeygett, Es sey der kunnick von Hispanien noch bey guter gesuntheytt vnd frologen leben, Gott erhalte J K M ihrem landen vnd frummen vnderthanen czu throst, vnd Jhren feynden czu eyner Rutten, vyll lange Jar*“. But the answer was false according to another inquiry. SLUB, Mscr. Dresd. K 20 [without paging], Sept. 30, 1576: „*Jst der kunnick von hispanien thott?*“.

17 Haller, a Nuremberg merchant, wrote newspapers for various courts of the Holy Roman Empire of the German Nation. See, e.g., the reference to his handwritten newspapers for Albrecht, Duke of Bavaria (1528/55-1579) in: Hundt, Wiguleus: Bayrisches Stammbuch, 3. Teil, in: M. Frh. von Freyberg (Hg.): Sammlung historischer Schriften und Urkunden, Bd. 3, Stuttgart / Tübingen 1830, p. 159-797, here p. 413.

current copy book for the period from January to May 1577, which was kept for the purpose of geomantic assessment. After duplication, the newspaper was complemented by a catalogue of 18 questions.¹⁸ For example, one wanted to find out if it was true that the Ottomans were preparing for a new war; another asked if the Huguenots in France had really collected 200,000 Crowns to hire mercenaries in Germany; and yet another targeted the question of whether Otto of Lüneburg the Younger had gone to Basle to study Calvinism and whether, in the meantime, he had become a Calvinist. Furthermore, the Elector wanted to know if it was true that 1,200,000 uncoined Silver and Gold Crowns were being withheld from the King of Spain in Nice.

The results of the geomantic survey were recorded in the order in which the questions were asked. The so-called inquiries produced the result that the Ottomans were really preparing for a new war; that the Huguenots were eager to hire mercenaries but lacked the necessary 200,000 Crowns; that Otto of Lüneburg the Younger had gone to Basle, and that one must also fear that he would become a Calvinist; and that the Spanish gold and silver were still in Nice. Thus, the list went on, newspaper after newspaper.

This routine geomantic assessment of the newspapers shows clearly how much geomancy was a matter of course at the Elector's Saxon court. Apart from the sheer mass of assessed information, this is also underlined by the fact that, clearly, a scribe assessed the newspapers and then informed Elector

¹⁸ This and the following paragraph see in: SLUB Mscr. Dresd. K21, fol. 75a-78a.

Augustus of the results, so geomancy was already being employed as a kind of administrative tool. It should be understood, therefore, not as an exotic marginal phenomenon of everyday politics, but as a common technique.

3b.) The proactive collection of information

The second field of the employment of geomancy confirms that, apart from assessing incoming information, the Elector used geomancy to a considerable extent to collect news about current political developments or people in his environment. Therefore, apart from assessing the veracity of information, secondly, geomancy served proactively to collect it. For this purpose, the Elector systematically created lists and collections.

For example, concerning questions of foreign policy for 1579 to 1580, we find three topically organized volumes in clean copy of his geomantic inquiries and their appropriate answers.¹⁹ In succession, the Spanish-Dutch war, the French religious wars and the troubles with the Ottoman Empire are explored. The questions centred on the odds of a Spanish Armada to the English coast and Queen Elizabeth I's plans regarding political alliances. Augustus dealt with the advance of the Russian Tsars in Eastern Europe, with the significance of the Tatars as mercenaries and with Sweden's policy of expansion in the Baltic. The focus was on the spread of Calvinism in Europe, the Emperor's health in Vienna and the

¹⁹ SLUB Mscr. Dresd. KA 847-849.

chances of the Elector Saxon councillors in the negotiations about the administration of Magdeburg.

This systematic questioning and subsequent production of a topically-organised, clean copy not only demonstrates a comprehensive interest in the current political situation and its further development but also that geomantically-collected information was not only of situational interest, as the collection of answers created was intended to be used as an aid for the assessment of the long-term political situation.

A similarly purposeful collecting of information becomes obvious from the 'assessment' of the civil servants, which was carried out personally by the Elector,²⁰ who created long lists of names of those whom he believed to be relevant, from the kitchen administrator and scribe via the court justices and privy council up to the Chancellor of the princely government. As well as their names, the list also outlined their essential characteristics, through the help of geomancy. Here, we might even pointedly speak of geomantically-produced personal files.

At present, it remains unclear how often and how systematically such checks were repeated, particularly whether, when it came to important positions of the princely administration whom the Elector assessed at regular intervals, he could still rely on the loyalty and solidarity of his civil servants. For example, in 1576, he asked via geomancy whether Leipzig's Chief of Justice, Leader of the Privy Council and Head of the District of Thuringia, Erich Volkmar von Berlepsch, was "against him

20 SLUB Mscr. Dresd. N 37, fol. 20a-24a.

and hostile towards him”.²¹ The answer was unfavorable, for he gained an insight that, “in his heart”, Berlepsch “hated his guts” because he had not achieved all he had hoped for from the Elector. This depressing news about one of the closest confidants of the Prince was only softened by the additional remark that this hostility would do little harm to the Elector. As a consequence, Berlepsch was not relieved of office, but, from then on, the Elector no longer entrusted him with special diplomatic missions. Thus, Erich Volkmar von Berlepsch, who had previously negotiated on behalf of the Elector at a number of Imperial Diets and at several European courts, remained at his country estate and was never again called to Dresden.

3c.) Concrete decision-making

Apart from the assessment and collection of information, finally, the Elector employed geomancy to assist with concrete decision-making. If, previously, it had rather been about extending and securing the foundations for possible decision-making, geomancy-based decision-making resulted in immediate action. What this meant in reality can be easily illustrated by one example.

In 1576, the Elector made a geomantic inquiry concerning whether or not it was essential that he attended the Imperial Diet in Regensburg in person.²² The Imperial Diet was that assembly of the estates of the Holy Roman Empire of the

²¹ This and the following paragraph: SLUB Mscr. Drsd. K 338, fol. 19a.

²² This and the following paragraph: SLUB Mscr. Dresd. K 338, fol. 12b, 13a, 14b, 15b.

German Nation where the German princes and imperial cities, together with the Emperor, had to decide about matters relating to the Empire. Thus, doubtlessly, the Imperial Diet was a crucial political event in the Old Empire. However, in 1576, the Elector was simply reluctant to make the weary journey to Regensburg. Thus, in January 1576, after the summons to the Imperial Diet had arrived in Dresden, he inquired by way of geomancy if he could not stay at home and instead send some of his councillors to the Imperial Assembly. The answer he received was clear: if he stayed away, he would be certain to suffer the Emperor's disfavor, so his personal attendance was unavoidable. This time, however, Augustus did not give up so easily. At first, he assessed if it would make a difference if the Saxon diplomat, Tam von Sebottendorff, who was already at the Imperial Court, were to request an audience and convey the Elector's apologies for his absence. Yet again, the answer to the second inquiry was negative.

Augustus' great reluctance to travel to Regensburg is illustrated by the fact that, finally, he made a third inquiry concerning the question of the necessity of his attending the Imperial Diet. Yet again, the sign he received indicated "sadness", from which the Elector concluded that he must go to Regensburg, like it or not, even if the journey, as he noted in his geomantic script book, "would result in more than only little harm for his body and wealth ... For the body due to the great effort, the excessive conviviality and thus the insufficient diet ... For his wealth" because on the journey and then in Regensburg he would have to make "many unnecessary expenses", and even though this would achieve nothing with regard to the matters that interested him.

Doubtless, this series of inquiries sheds extraordinary light on the reasons for Imperial-political acting, although this is only secondary to our context here. Rather, it is of crucial significance that this series of inquiries shows how quite concrete decisions were taken in the light of geomancy, decisions which had immediate consequences for the political-administrative everyday business. This insight is confirmed by a number of Augustus's decisions which were made in this way. For example, based on geomancy, he decided about new mining projects or well drilling at his hunting lodge at Augustusburg; he asked if failed crops were to be expected and if thus food should be stored for the people, and which kind of grain should be grown in the princely outworks. His attempts to unite the Lutheran camp in Europe (the Formula of Concorde) and the negotiations about the administration of Magdeburg at the Imperial Court are accompanied by numerous geomantic inquiries concerning the prospects of the chosen negotiation strategies. Even the Elector's frequent hunting prospects were assessed in advance by way of geomancy. This list could be continued.

On the whole, in view of the connection between rule and divination, however, it must be emphasized that geomancy never replaced administrative measures as a decision-making tool. Rather, the Elector made use of geomancy predominantly with regard to contingency problems: in other words, where only the future could tell which decision had been the right one, or if the prince had to rely on the loyalty and competence of others in his decision-making.²³ Thus, one made use of ge-

²³ On this special understanding of decision-making, see also: Krischer, André: *Das Problem des Entscheidens in systematischer und historischer*

omancy **on the one hand** where administrative procedures had not yet replaced personal decision-making by the ruler, such as the question of whether to attend the Imperial Diet, discussed above. **On the other hand**, the prince made use of geomancy in the context of administrative procedures, particularly when the final decision was his.

To elucidate this point further, under the Elector's Saxon administration in the 16th century, the actual administrative procedures were not usually carried out by the prince in person but by the princely authorities, who also undertook all decision-making. Only the final decision, if even that, was made by the prince. In these cases, the Elector did not decide the topic as such but only had the ability to choose whether or not to follow the advice he had been given. If he turned to geomancy for such decisions, he did not use it topically to assess the suggestion and base his decision on this. Instead, he made an inquiry as to whether or not he could trust his councillors' advice. Such inquiries, which aimed to increase the procedural certainty and success monitoring on the basis of geomancy, point to a fundamentally different field of perceived uncertainty: the problem of not knowing the future combined with the issue of trust. Here, the uncertainty concerning future developments was already accepted to a certain degree. However, at least one tried to ensure, by way of geomancy, that those who were considerably shaping the

Perspektive, in: Stollberg-Rinlinger, Barbara / Krischer, André (Ed.): Herstellung und Darstellung von Entscheidungen. Verfahren, Verwalten und Verhandeln in der Vormoderne, Berlin 2010, p. 35-64, here 35f.; Stollberg-Rinlinger, Barbara: Um das Leben würfeln. Losentscheidungen, Kriegsrecht und inszenierte Willkür in der Frühen Neuzeit, in: Historische Anthropologie 22 (2014), p. 182-209, especially p. 186-188.

future behaved loyally or that the applied methods did really work.

4.) Conclusion

To conclude, I will summarize my results so far by making four observations and further contextualise these, hopefully fruitfully, to add to the debate.

1. It must be generally emphasized that geomancy in the West in the 16th and early 17th centuries was an outspokenly uncomplicated and thus easily accessible divination technique. It was not only comparably easy to produce the geomantic figures needed for divination, but their interpretation was also made far easier through the help of the appropriate aids. This is also reflected precisely in the reference books preserved in the Dresden collection, where one can read the meaning of the produced geomantic figures as well as the predictions derived from them. The language of these reference books shows little evidence of geomantic coding or symbolic charging, so it was possible to learn and apply the methods of geomancy without being taught by third parties.

Due to the simplicity of the technique, geomancy, apart from astrology, could be performed without the assistance of highly-paid experts. It was, so to speak, a 'do-it-yourself' technique and so the ideal method for making private and secret inquiries, which was of interest particularly in the field of political decision-making. Finally,

the easy, quick production of answers by way of geomancy made possible geomantic mass inquiries. However, all of this means that geomancy as a means of policy advice provided structurally different possibilities compared with astrology. Thus, through geomancy, not only another variation but a new dimension of divination-supported practice of rule can be grasped since, as well as astrology, geomancy was also perfectly suited for political everyday business.

2. In this way, a specific constellation of the connection between rule and divination becomes obvious. Basically, of course, the example I analyzed confirms the significance of divination techniques as an element of political prognostics, as has been emphasized in the context of the research program at the IKGF.

Beyond this, however, the sources from Dresden also show that, when it comes to the connection between rule and divination, not only divination-supported policy advice by experts but also methods of divination-supported self-help must be taken into consideration. In this context, one should also discuss whether specific fields of employment and divination practices of expert-based or self-practiced divination can be identified in the field of political prognostics. To my knowledge, this area has hardly been systematically considered to date. This is not the place to deliver such a systematic analysis but, as a first element of a comparative consideration, for the example of Dresden, we may emphasize that, obviously there, geomancy had a specific function for the optimisation of rule in the context of an increasingly procedural

practice of rule.

At the same time, this specific function provides an approach for explaining the observed selective use of geomancy, for it came to the fore exactly where the practice of rule could not be outsourced to administrative procedures and the prince was forced to decide himself or rely on suggestions by third parties or on the functioning of procedures for his decision-making.

3. Through the analyzed practices of inquiry, a specific way of understanding fate and future becomes obvious. For, although we must state that geomancy, like all other divination techniques, was based on the idea of a pre-determined and thus experienceable future and, thus connected, with pre-determined fate, here, the glimpse into the future not only illuminated the future but also helped one to adjust one's own actions to suit the conditions of future developments. Through the help of geomantic inquiries, one was able, due to having an exact knowledge of the future, to make correct, sound decisions in the present. The idea of a pre-determined, fixed future as well as of the possibility, by way of geomancy, of making appropriate decisions in the respective presence enabled the inquirer, so to speak, to co-decide his fate and his future.

4. There remains the question of how typical the methods presented here were, after all. In the current research, for the time being, we do not find any indications of comparable cases of geomantic practice at other princely courts of the Empire or in Europe. In my opinion, however, this suggests less that the evidence from Dresden is an exception but that, at present, systematic research for relevant material is lacking. Basically, the huge number and also variety of the Dresden manuscripts suggest that geomancy as a technique of policy advice was practiced not only at the court in Dresden but that the sources from there belonged to a complex tradition of knowledge and application.

This is underlined by the fact that, doubtless, geomancy was not only employed in the field of policy advice. After all, the need for correct decision-making was not restricted to the prince but was indeed widespread. How widespread it was is shown by the existence of the many lot-books where, by way of a comparably simple geomantic key, answers to a handful of standard questions could be found.

Thus, there are many indications that geomancy was an important tool for the provision of everyday information and as a strategy for decision-making practice. The details of its significance will have to be clarified through future research. I hope that the initial results presented here intimate that this will prove an exciting and rewarding enterprise.