

Thaddaeus Hagecius (Tadeáš Hájek z Hájku, alias Nemicus) (1525-1600), *Aphorismorum metoposopicorum libellus unus* [One Booklet of Metoposcopic Aphorisms], Prague 1562

The Latin text is available [here](#)

Introduction

‘Wisdom shines on the face of the judicious person’: this biblical proverb appears on the frontispiece of what is probably the first published book on metoposcopy, i.e. the physiognomic interpretation of the forehead, *One Booklet of Metoposcopic Aphorisms* by the astronomer and royal physician Thaddaeus Hagecius. The proverb is here daringly interpreted as a metoposcopic principle: not as a general indication that a judicious person is guided by wisdom (as biblical translations usually suggest),¹ but in the sense that wisdom is literally visible on the face of prudent people. Indeed the male figure on the frontispiece displays astrological signs matching the main lines on the forehead: the planet Jove corresponds to the second line from the top of the forehead, and can provide an indication about a person’s prudence. Further vignettes included in this slim volume allow the reader to interpret the connections between the appearance of certain lines on the forehead (which might be continuous or broken, straight, oblique or curved), astrological influences, and specific characters and personality traits. The booklet,

which is dedicated to the Emperor Ferdinand I, presents physiognomics as a branch of philosophical investigation: text and images are combined to provide a coherent overview of metoposcopy. It is possible that Hagecius had been inspired by the metoposcopic work of Girolamo Cardano (1501-1576), whom he had met in Milan. Hagecius, who was in direct contact with Tycho Brahe (1546-1601), also wrote on heliocentrism and the study of comets.



Petrus Codicillus (brother of Jakub Codicillus), *On a Terrible and Wonderful Comet* (1577)

He took part in the debate on the comet of 1577, recording his daily observations: he ultimately suggested that the comet should not be viewed simply as a sign of impending misfortune (*Descriptio cometae qui apparuit Anno Domini MDLXXII*, Prague 1578). For Hagecius, natural observation and divination can coexist and complement each other. Metoposcopy is rooted in mainstream philosophical traditions (he repeatedly quotes from Aristotle), as well as in the Bible, which assures believers that God has placed an array of signs in the world, waiting to be read. Therefore, it is not a new discipline, but it is in need of proper organisation. This is what Hagecius sets out to offer to his readers. His work became a classic, often quoted in later metoposcopic literature.²



Excudebat Georgius Melantrichus ab Auentino.

ANNO 1562.
Dedit Dno M. Jacobo Codicillo
à Tulechova, amico suo rha-
uisimo Thaddaeus dth

This copy, from the National Library of the Czech Republic, contains a handwritten dedication to Thaddaeus' friend Jakub Codicillus of Tulechov, physician and owner of a substantial library.

¹ In the translation of the King James Bible (Proverbs 17:24): ‘Wisdom is before him that hath understanding’.

² E.g. Samuel Fuchs, *Metoposcopia & Ophthalmoscopia*, Strasbourg 1615, and Richard Saunders, *Physiognomie, and Chiromancie, Metoposcopia* [...], London 1653.



Dedicatory letter to the Emperor Ferdinand I

[Bif-Bii^r] In order to renew this discipline as much as I can, I have already collected for about ten years these metoscopic paradigms through the diligent observation of many notable cases, and I wrote in the form of aphorisms some general principles, adding to these also those that are scattered in Aristotle and others, about the form and shape of the forehead and of the eyebrows. Indeed I don't see another way of building up this discipline other than through the diligent observation of multiple examples. Furthermore I added a number of images of the forehead with its lines, and I inserted brief explanations of the occurrences of each.

But now perhaps someone may object, and denigrate this creation of ours, more amply than is appropriate, as something new, uncertain, neither authentic nor so frequently used by the ancients and by the people of our age, since no explicit writings on it are extant, and there is no trace of it. We reply to this: we gladly acknowledge that this first attempt of ours which we offer is new and certainly limited, and that it is ours and produced by us. For the rest, I believe that no-one can justly criticise that novelty, and that it can't be ascribed to a fault, unless by those who desire to hold human minds captive, which are by nature free, within the inventions devised by others, and believe that they [i.e. the minds] cannot generate anything further out of themselves, as if they were exhausted of all power and rendered sterile. But we hope that for those who seek to bring back the mind to its original freedom, to the contemplation of this very wise structure of the human being, this novelty won't be cause of reprimand, but of praise and especially of admiration. After the acumen of the mind will have remained in it [i.e. freedom] for some time, it [i.e. freedom] will stimulate the mind to achieve a more diligent investigation just as we see happened with the ancients through practice in the first invention of the disciplines. And so we will dismiss those who will have wanted to expose novelty as some crime, neither will we get angry at them on that account.

Even if antiquity brings esteem, and novelty arouses prejudice, nevertheless I will consider this [i.e. novelty] a reason for esteem rather than reproach. This is a paradigm of a new discipline rather than itself a discipline, indeed I don't profess it; and yet I don't claim that this is my own invention, as if it had no prior existence at all, but I offer a new first attempt at that ancient and almost entirely extinguished discipline, and that attempt is initially feeble and inadequate just as all other disciplines were feeble when they were first invented; but this, too, will be able to augment greatly day by day, just like those, through study and practice. Indeed it will be easier for others to add to things already invented and thought, correct what was said less appropriately and achieve a definite and improved order.

With regard to the exactness of this discipline, one needs to consider that it is a discipline akin to medicine and astrology. Even if both of them are more learned than this discipline of ours, and are founded on a firm methodology, nevertheless they are related to it in that they deal with those things that ordinarily happen. The constitution, the habits, fortune and misfortune, can be known in a way that somehow does not lack clarity, and we have several signs of events that are certain, and the day brings many things to light. [...]

[Biii^v-Ci^r] On the shape and the form of the forehead

Metoscopy is the art of making predictions based on the forehead, which in Greek is indeed μέτωπον, in Latin *frons*, and σκοπεῖν, rendered as *speculari*, almost as if one would say that it is the inspection of the forehead. The forehead is that part of the face which is between the upper, front part of the head and the eyes. The forehead discloses sadness, cheerfulness, kindness, sternness, whence the proverb: un wrinkle and contract the forehead. Aristotle maintained that the forehead is the seat of shame and honor because of the proximity to the power of imagination, which is placed, together with common sense, in the anterior part of the

brain, that is the prow of the head, with the power of whose strength sad or happy things, proper and unseemly things are immediately brought to the judgment of reason, and are judged by it. Hence we say that those who have a rubbed forehead have no shame at all.³

The forehead is almost like a tower, and fortress of all the nerves that descend from the brain to create sensation. The sensitive nerves of the five exterior senses assemble in its cavity. Thanks to these nerves a judgment is made in the seat of reason, drawing from all objects of sensation. The skin of the forehead is united with a certain fleshy and fine substance, which is underneath it, just as the palms of the hands and the soles of the feet unite with the tendon. The forehead is kept separate from the bones underneath by the membrane periosteum, and is the only one which is made up of two mobile layers of skin and is ultimately completely mobile, so that it certainly moves voluntarily.⁴ [...]

Those who have a very big forehead are sluggish – see the oxen.

Those who have a forehead sufficiently big, fleshy and smooth, are steady, and of good disposition.

A big forehead is always accompanied by thickness of the flesh, while a small one is accompanied by subtlety.

Those who have a small forehead are indocile – see the pigs.

Those who have a round, flesh forehead are silly and dull – see the donkeys. [...]

[Ciii^r-Civ^r] **On the lines of the forehead**

There isn't a definite number of horizontal lines on the forehead in individual human beings. Indeed some have more, some have fewer lines, yet generally it hasn't happened to me so far to see fewer than three in anyone. The top one, close to the coronal suture,⁵ corresponds to Saturn, the second to Jove, the third to Mars. We establish this by way of a certain similitude between that greater world and the smaller world, and we discover that it is true by observing many people. Straight above each eyebrow is sometimes observed the presence of a line: to the right, it is assigned to the Sun; and to the left, to the Moon. But those that are between the eyebrows are assigned to Mercury. Those between the eyelids and at the base of the nose correspond to Venus. But when several lines follow one another in order, each of them is attributed to an individual planet, according to the order of the planets in the upper world, apart from the fact that between the eyebrows they are always assigned to Mercury, as you can see in the following image.

Lines that are well positioned and lucky are considered those which are either on the right-hand side, or are only slightly curved, continuous, clear, uninterrupted, unbroken, not wrinkly nor bearing a mark like an obelisk,⁶ and not crossing one another. On the other hand, lines that are badly positioned and unfortunate are those that are too twisted, curved, and as it were drooping, torn, wrinkly, bearing the mark of a small ring, a little round lump, and like an obelisk, and those which cross each other.



³ 'Perfricta frons': literally to have a rubbed forehead, it is proverbially used to say that somebody is impudent.

⁴ In this section on the anatomy of the forehead, Hagecius cites abundantly from Galen's *De usu partium*, Book 11, in the compressed version of *Epitomes omnium Galeni operum*, ed. Andres Laguna (Venice 1548), pp. 437-8. Cf. also *De usu partium* (Paris 1528), p. 343.

⁵ This refers to the point where frontal and parietal bones meet.

⁶ Literally, a mark in the shape of a skewer, also resembling a cross.