

Proposal to encode Geomantic Figures

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1 Introduction

Unicode currently contains characters encoded for several combinatorial divinatory systems including those of the 太玄經 *Tài Xuán Jīng* (87 characters in the *Tai Xuan Jing Symbols* block), the 易經 *Yì Jīng* or *I Ching* (64 characters in the *Yijing Hexagram Symbols* block), and the 八卦 *Bā Guà* (2+4+8 characters in the *Miscellaneous Symbols* block). It does not yet contain figures for the geomantic tradition, which have been used in many places around the world.

Geomancy is the name under which this form of divination is referred to in English.* These geomantic symbols are used in the علم الرمل *ilm al-raml* of Arabic and Persian sources, the Sikidy of the Malagasy, the Gara of the Sara,[1] and the Ifá of the Yoruba—where they are used in pairs, and the production and interpretation of the symbols differs significantly.[2] This list is not exhaustive.

*“Geomancy” here should not be confused with “geomancy” in the Chinese tradition (i.e. Feng Shui), which is of a different form and not related to the systems discussed here.

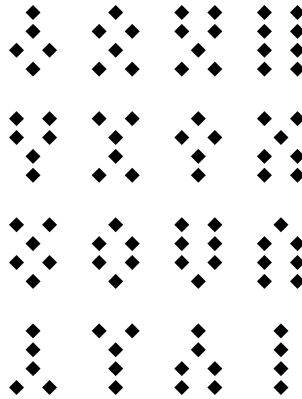


Figure 1: The sixteen geomantic figures, in a dotted style.

There are sixteen geomantic symbols. Each consists of four markers of parity (even or odd) stacked one atop the other.[†] In the Arabic/European traditions the correspondence is that odd parity is represented by a single dot and even parity by two dots. In Ifá and related systems the correspondence is the opposite.[2, p. 8] In handwritten sources the two dots are often drawn instead as a horizontal line, and sometimes the single dot is presented as a vertical line (see Figure 2). In printed sources the marks are most commonly presented as separate dots, and this is invariably the case in European texts. There are also

[†]The symbols are always arranged vertically in traditional divinatory sources. The only places I know of that use a horizontal presentation are some 19th-century editions of “Napoleon’s Oraculum”, where the oracle is presented as a parlor game. See Figure 20.

“occulted” variations of the symbols which obscure the underlying construction, which will be presented below; these variations are purely stylistic and do not require separate encoding.

2 Suitability for inclusion

These symbols are characters according to the definition in the Glossary. As far as I could find, they do not appear in the Archive of Notices of Non-Approval, nor in the Unicode Pipeline Table.

These symbols appear in many pre-computer documents describing the divinatory practice—both handwritten and printed—, and they are distinct from the symbols used for other forms of divination.[‡] Therefore, it would be useful to encode these characters for the transcription of existing works, and to enable textual search of such characters.

[‡]An isomorphism can be described between the Tai Xuan Jing Symbols and the geomantic figures, but the geomantic figures are always distinct in form from them, and can be written with many unusual variants which would never be used for the TXJ characters.

It would also benefit current practitioners of these systems of divination (“geomancers”) if they were able to use the symbols online; below I have collected evidence of people representing these symbols through combinations of other encoded symbols, with various degrees of success.

3 Evidence of use

3.1 In running text

Figures 2, 3, 4, 5 and 6 show evidence of use of these figures in running text. These examples were obtained with only a couple of hours’ search, so with dedicated work many more examples would be able to be sourced.

3.2 In tables or aside from text

It is easy to find examples of the use of these symbols adjacent to text discussing them, or in tables or diagrams. See figures 7, 8. This method is often used in printed books, where due to the lack of pre-cast figures, symbols were also assembled out of asterisks (Figure 9), the letter ‘o’ (Figure 10), or simply replaced by numeric representations (Figure 11).

3.3 In art or on objects

In figures 12 and 13 are depictions of geomantic symbols on objects. Figure 14 shows a figure in a work of Islamic art, alongside its description.

4 Evidence of want

I have recently collected two examples from Twitter of users using alternate characters to represent geomantic figures in online text; see Figure 15. On other websites asterisks have been (attempted) to be used to construct the figures (Figure 16). In most cases, website authors must currently fall back to using images as a substitute.

5 Character properties

These characters should have the same basic properties as already-encoded divinatory characters:

- General Category: Other Symbol
- Canonical Combining Class: 0
- BIDI: Other Neutral
- Bidi Mirrored: N

Directionality In the production of a geomantic ('shield') chart the figures are "read" in a right-to-left order (Figure 2 also shows a full chart written in linearized form in a single right-to-left line with Hebrew text). In Ifá the characters are always used in pairs, which are "read" in right-to-left order (the name of the right figure coming before the name of the left figure). The Ifá pairs are also constructed in right-to-left order in Ifá, but they are "written" during a divination by moving across both characters: the first row on both is entered before the second row of both, etc.[2, p. 41] Despite this preference for a right-to-left ordering, I think that to impose this ordering strictly would only serve to confuse users of Latin scripts, and they should be considered to be standalone figures the same as other divinatory symbols which match the ordering of the surrounding text. European practitioners do not have any concept that the figures would be read right-to-left when placed in linear sequence.

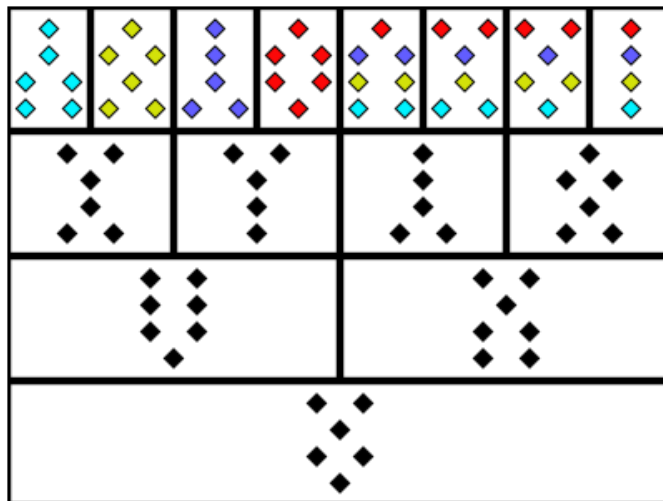


Figure 17: A geomantic 'shield' chart with colour-coding to show how the four 'mothers' (top-right) are read in a right-to-left order to produce the 'daughters' (top-left).

Naming I would suggest using the Latin names for the characters as these have been stable for a long time and are still currently used by practitioners. Using names from Arabic or other non-Latin scripts would face the usual issues of transliteration, and the names used in Ifá differ according to school and region.

Ordering There is no standard ordering for the geomantic figures. In European geomancy none is used. In Ifá divination an ordering is used, but there are at least two different systems, and possibly as many as twenty-one.[2, p. 48] Thus, I suggest a “mathematical” structural arrangement where they are ordered according to their binary value, where two dots is treated as 0 and one as 1 (assuming the least-significant bit at the bottom).[§]

[§]Note that this parity correspondence matches the Arabic/European traditions but is the opposite of the Ifá-related traditions; I have chosen this version as it may also facilitate easy programmatic manipulation of the figures, as the bit-wise exclusive-or (XOR) operation based upon the parity is used in the production of a full geomantic reading — see the chart on the previous page. This combining operation is not used in Ifá.

According to the proceeding arguments, the following data for the characters is given, assuming that the characters will begin at U+1CEE0 within the new Miscellaneous Symbols Supplement block:

```
1CEE0;GEOMANTIC FIGURE POPULUS;So;0;ON; ; ; ;N; ; ; ;
1CEE1;GEOMANTIC FIGURE TRISTITIA;So;0;ON; ; ; ;N; ; ; ;
1CEE2;GEOMANTIC FIGURE ALBUS;So;0;ON; ; ; ;N; ; ; ;
1CEE3;GEOMANTIC FIGURE FORTUNA MAJOR;So;0;ON; ; ; ;N; ; ; ;
1CEE4;GEOMANTIC FIGURE RUBEUS;So;0;ON; ; ; ;N; ; ; ;
1CEE5;GEOMANTIC FIGURE ACQUISITIO;So;0;ON; ; ; ;N; ; ; ;
1CEE6;GEOMANTIC FIGURE CONJUNCTIO;So;0;ON; ; ; ;N; ; ; ;
1CEE7;GEOMANTIC FIGURE CAPUT DRACONIS;So;0;ON; ; ; ;N; ; ; ;
1CEE8;GEOMANTIC FIGURE LAETITIA;So;0;ON; ; ; ;N; ; ; ;
1CEE9;GEOMANTIC FIGURE CARCER;So;0;ON; ; ; ;N; ; ; ;
1CEEA;GEOMANTIC FIGURE AMISSIO;So;0;ON; ; ; ;N; ; ; ;
1CEEB;GEOMANTIC FIGURE PUELLA;So;0;ON; ; ; ;N; ; ; ;
1CEEC;GEOMANTIC FIGURE FORTUNA MINOR;So;0;ON; ; ; ;N; ; ; ;
1CEED;GEOMANTIC FIGURE PUER;So;0;ON; ; ; ;N; ; ; ;
1EEEE;GEOMANTIC FIGURE CAUDA DRACONIS;So;0;ON; ; ; ;N; ; ; ;
1CEEF;GEOMANTIC FIGURE VIA;So;0;ON; ; ; ;N; ; ; ;
```

6 Form of the characters

In Table 1, I include as representative glyphs examples of the figures as shown in “Alphabet of the Genii” (ALPHGENI . TTF), a freeware font created in 2000 by one “FuzzyPeg”,[3] as well as the freeware[¶] font “NI Occult Symbols” (NIOCS__ . TTF) produced by the Nu Isis Working Group.[4] Both of these fonts are encoded in a “Wingdings” style where letters and punctuation are replaced with the special characters.

Finally, I include a font that I created for this proposal named “Geomantic” which contains glyphs which are encoded at the codepoints suggested above. The glyphs in this table are presented in the codepoint order as suggested above.

Forms of the figures other than those shown in the images referenced so far are also used; Agrippa in particular presents some interesting graphical variations on the characters (Figure 18). Later examples which are based on Agrippa’s versions show further differences (Figure 19). Fonts may therefore make different choices about how the geomantic figures should be presented.



Four ways to write Puer: dots (common in printed or European sources), dots and strokes (seen in Arabic and Persian sources, e.g. Figure 3), strokes (see Figure 2), and joined strokes (seen in [2]).

[¶]And I quote: “All these TrueType fonts are freeware; they may be redistributed provided no charge is made and the information in the font headers is left intact; they may be used in any document commercial or otherwise without payment. These fonts are provided “as is” and no warranty or claim of usefulness for any particular purpose is made or should be understood. Nu Isis Working group and the individual creators of these fonts accept no responsibility for any consequences soever including but not limited to loss of data damage to computer hardware demonic possession entrapment in the Tunnels being torn limb from limb by Choronzon the return of the Great Old Ones or the immanentization of the Eschaton arising out of the use abuse misuse or disuse of these fonts in any way shape or form. Your co-operation is appreciated.”

Name	Genii	Nu Isis	Geomantic
Populus	⋮	⋮	⋮
Tristitia	⋮	⋮	⋮
Albus	⋮	⋮	⋮
Fortuna Major	⋮	⋮	⋮
Rubeus	⋮	⋮	⋮
Acquisitio	⋮	⋮	⋮
Conjunctio	⋮	⋮	⋮
Caput Draconis	⋮	⋮	⋮
Laetitia	⋮	⋮	⋮
Carcer	⋮	⋮	⋮
Amissio	⋮	⋮	⋮
Puella	⋮	⋮	⋮
Fortuna Minor	⋮	⋮	⋮
Puer	⋮	⋮	⋮
Cauda Draconis	⋮	⋮	⋮
Via	⋮	⋮	⋮

Table 1: Example glyphs as given by the AlphabetGenii and NI Occult Symbols fonts, alongside proposed representative glyphs.

7 Existing characters

As noted in the footnote on page 2 some of the existing Tai Xuan Jing Symbols could be used as substitutes for the geomantic figures, but as a whole they are not suitable for this purpose.

Confusable characters could include much of the Braille block (depending on the font), as most of the characters are similar to two different Braille patterns. Some examples are shown in Table 2.

References

1. SMITH, Marion B. The Nature of Islamic Geomancy with a Critique of a Structuralist's Approach. *Studia Islamica*. 1979, no. 49, p. 5. ISSN 05855292. Available from DOI: [10.2307/1595314](https://doi.org/10.2307/1595314).
2. BASCOM, William. *Ifa Divination: Communication between gods and men in West Africa*. London: Indiana University Press, 1969. Available also from: <https://archive.org/details/ifadivinationcom0000basc>.
3. FUZZYPEG. *Alphabets Magical* [online]. [visited on 2001-04-06]. Available from: <https://web.archive.org/web/20010406105501/http://www.geocities.com/SoHo/Lofts/2763/witchy/alphabets.html>.
4. NU ISIS WORKING GROUP. *Magical Scripts and other fonts to download* [online]. [visited on 2008-12-19]. Available from: https://web.archive.org/web/20081219211820/http://www.geocities.com/nu_isis/fonts.html.

Codepoint	Glyph	Name	Geomantic Name	Figure
U+2847	⠄	BRaille PATTERN DOTS-1237	Via	⠄
U+28B8	⠄	BRaille PATTERN DOTS-4568	Via	⠄
U+28C7	⠄	BRaille PATTERN DOTS-12378	Cauda Draconis	⠄
U+28F8	⠄	BRaille PATTERN DOTS-45678	Cauda Draconis	⠄
U+2867	⠄	BRaille PATTERN DOTS-12367	Puer	⠄
U+28BC	⠄	BRaille PATTERN DOTS-34568	Puer	⠄
U+28E7	⠄	BRaille PATTERN DOTS-123678	Fortuna Minor	⠄
U+28FC	⠄	BRaille PATTERN DOTS-345678	Fortuna Minor	⠄
⋮	⋮	⋮	⋮	⋮
U+287F	⠄	BRaille PATTERN DOTS-1234567	Tristitia	⠄
U+28BF	⠄	BRaille PATTERN DOTS-1234568	Tristitia	⠄
U+28FF	⠄	BRaille PATTERN DOTS-1234567	Populus	⠄
U+205E	⋮	VERTICAL FOUR DOTS	Via	⋮
U+1D2F0	≡	MAYAN NUMERAL SIXTEEN	Laetitia	⋮
U+1F070	☐	DOMINO TILE VERTICAL-06-01	Laetitia	⋮
U+1F08E	☐	DOMINO TILE VERTICAL-06-01	Tristitia	⋮

Table 2: Some potential confusables.

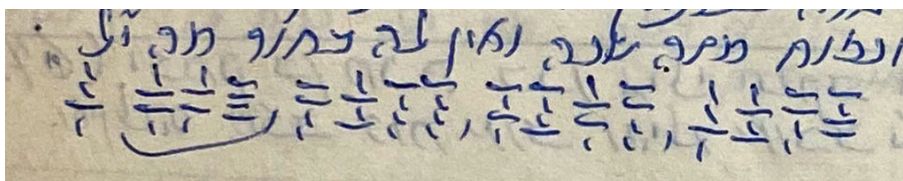
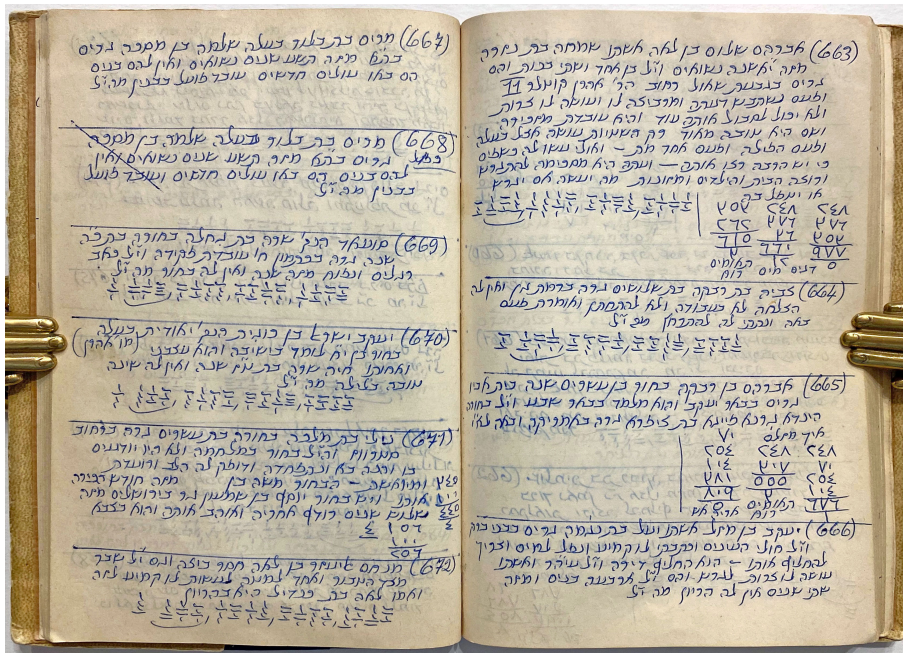


Figure 2: This manuscript by Rabbi Yitzchak Kaduri (dated 1973) includes records of geomantic divinations below many entries. Image from @incunabula on Twitter, used with permission.

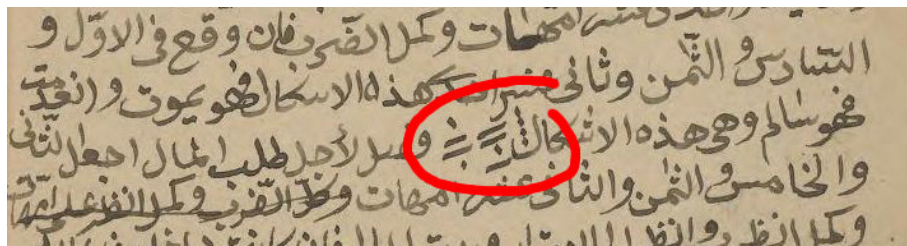
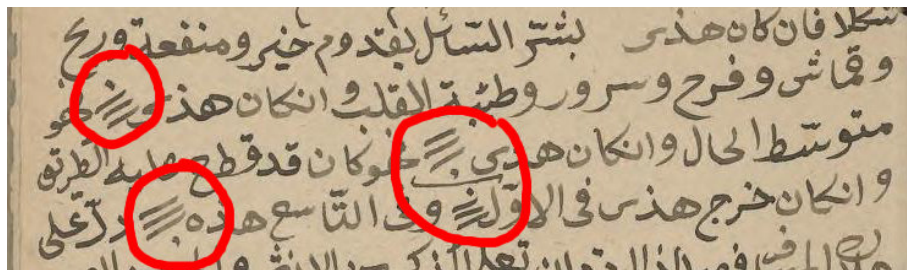
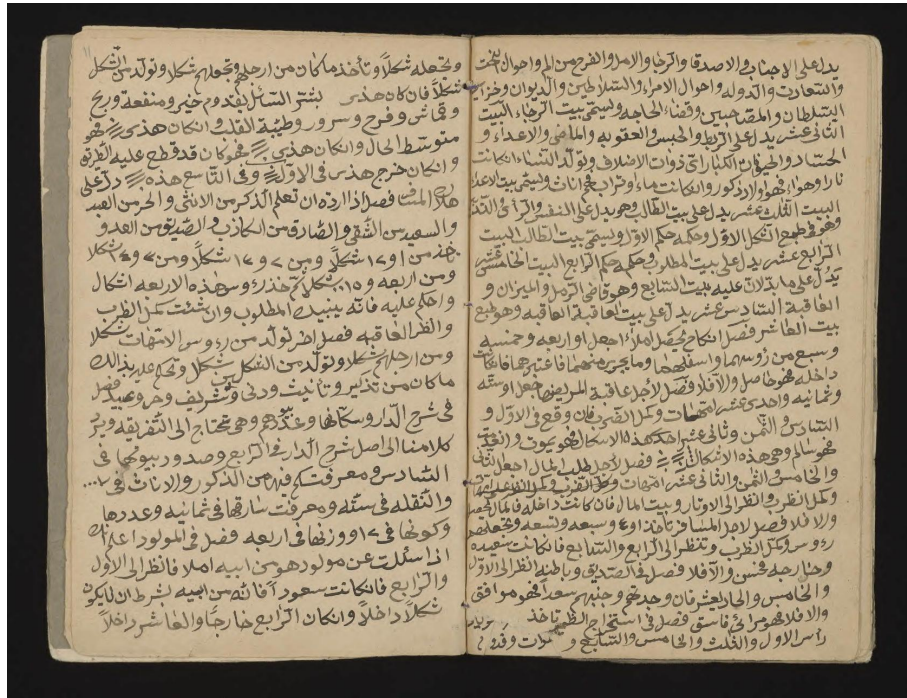


Figure 3: Page from the *Kitāb al-nujūm* (Book of Stars), published some time between 1700–1800. Image from the Library of Congress.

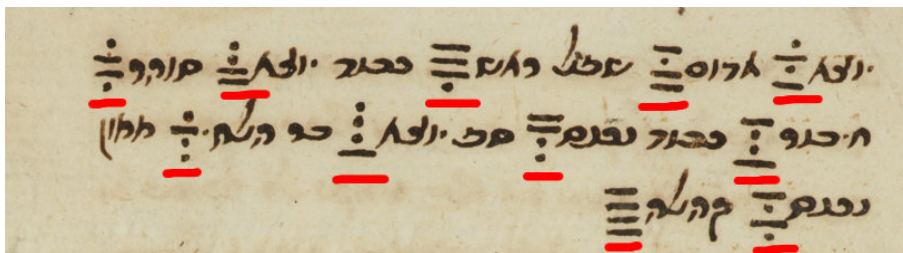
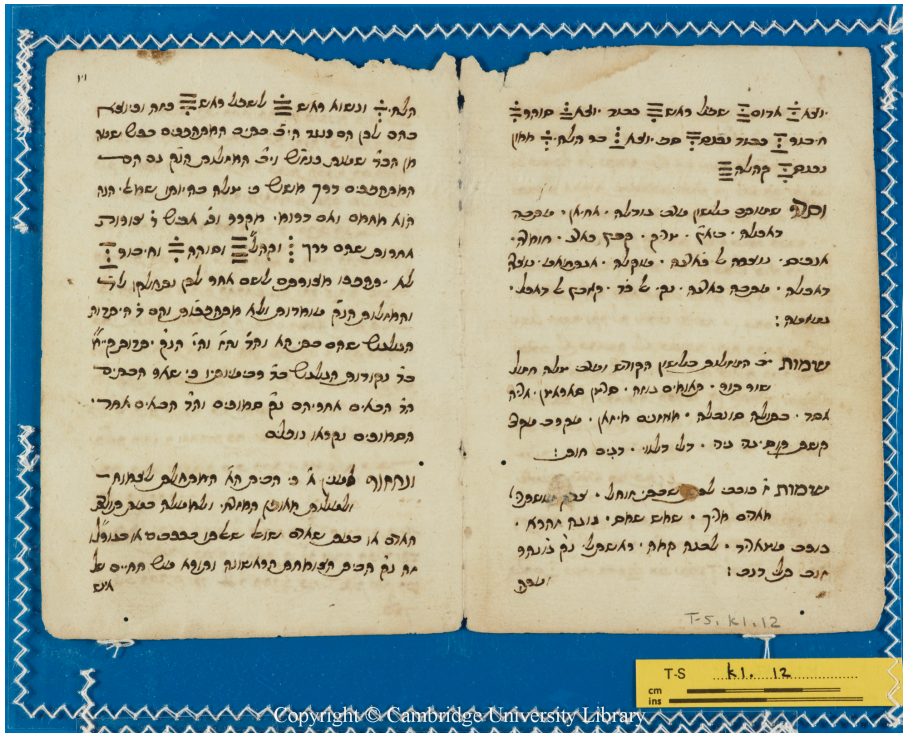


Figure 4: Manuscript T-S K1.12 from the Cairo Genizah shows geomantic figures in running text (Hebrew & Judæo-Arabic). Image from Cambridge University Library.



Figure 5: Pages from Kitāb-i Surkhāb dar 'ilm-i ramī (Persian, 1528), showing figures in running text and a table. Image from Internet Archive.

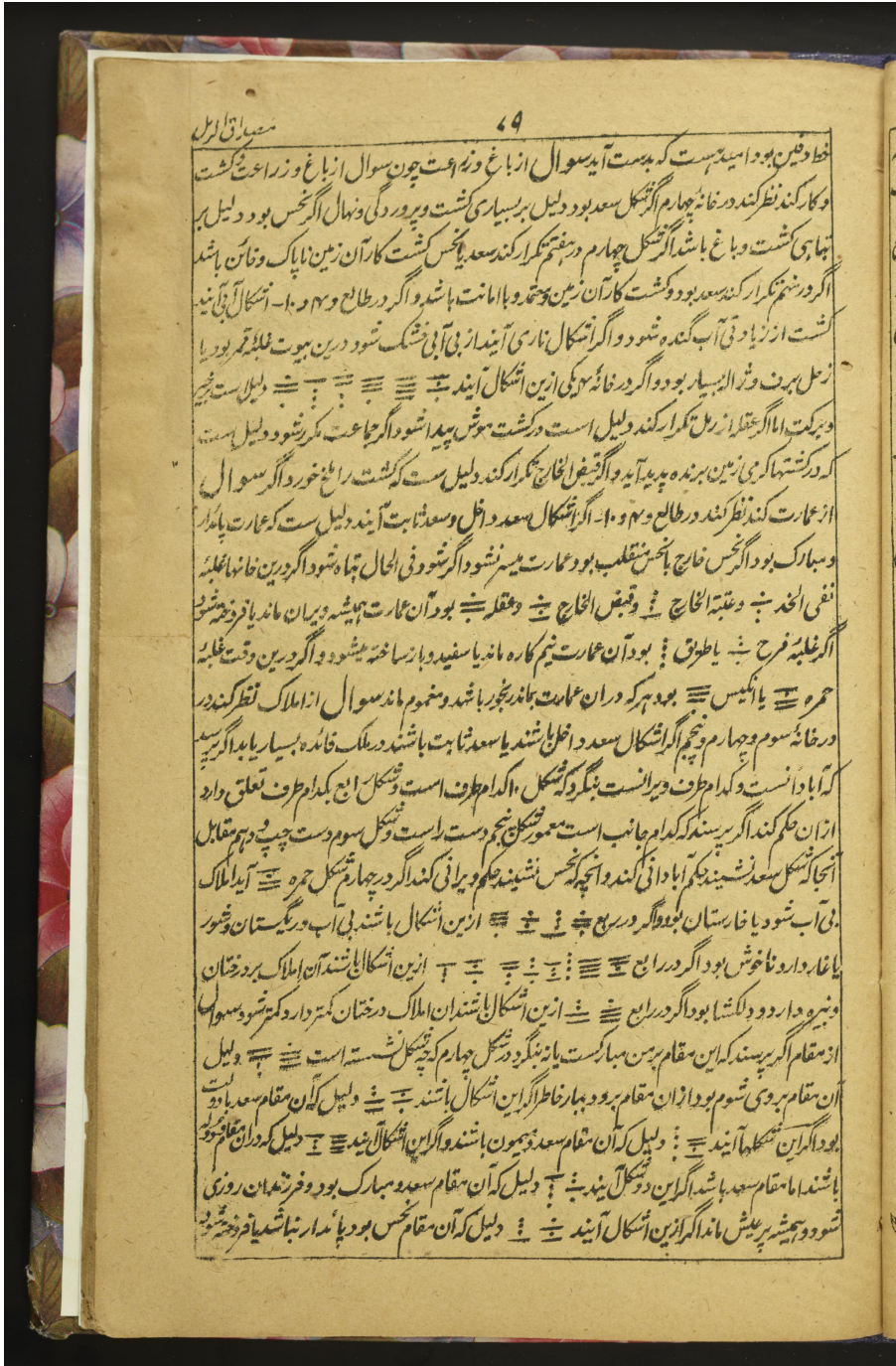


Figure 6: A page from *Miṣdāq al-raml* (Persian, 1886) showing geomantic figures in running text. Image from the [Library of Congress](#).

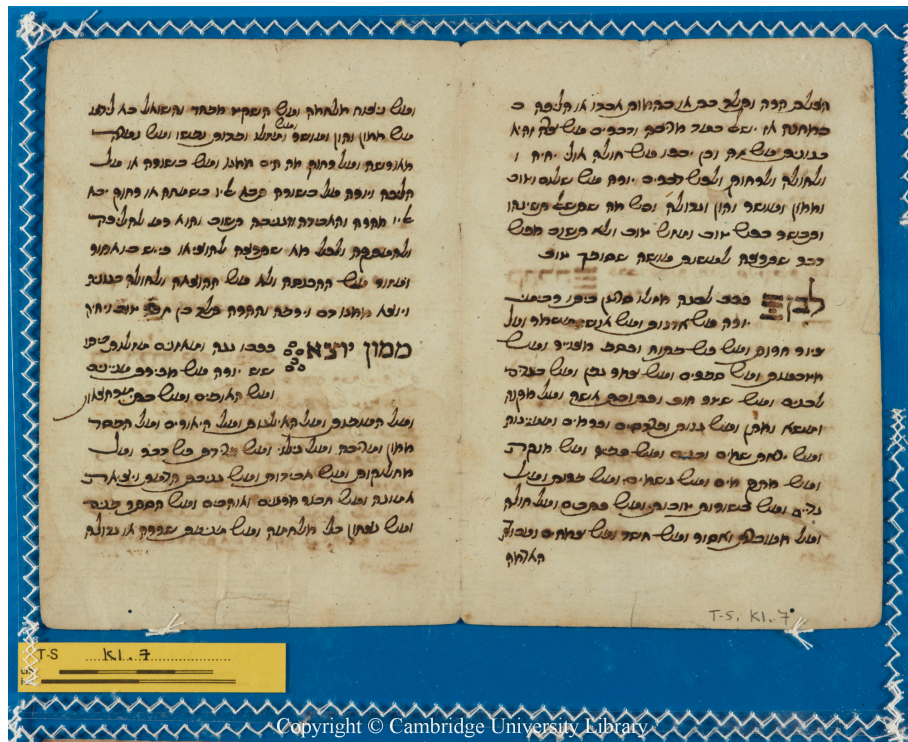
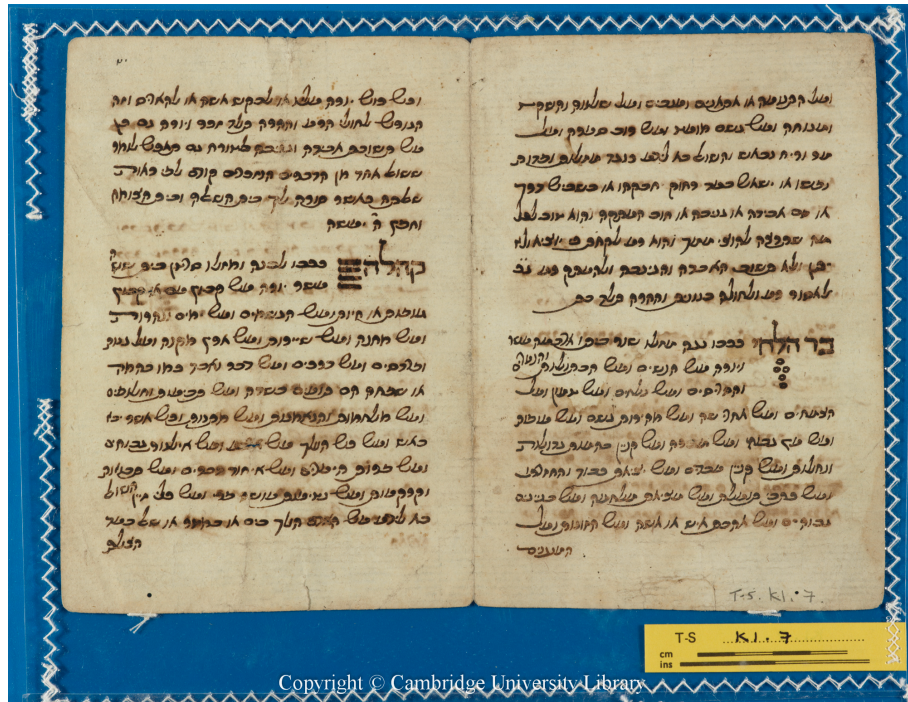
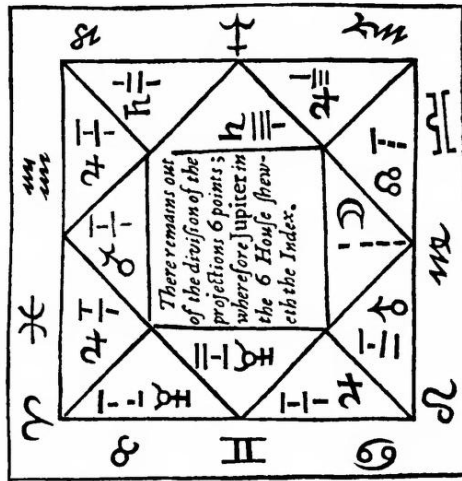


Figure 7: Manuscript T-S K1.7 from the Cairo Genizah shows figures in two different styles, 'dotted' and 'stroked', adjacent to text discussing them (Hebrew). Image from Cambridge University Library.

9 of Geomancie.

and this you shall divide by twelve: and that which remaineth project from the Ascendent by the feveral Houles, and upon which Houle there falleth a final unity, that Figure giveth you a competent Judgement of the thing questied; and this together with the significations of the Judgements aforesaid. But if on either part they shall be equal, or ambiguous, then the Index alone shall certifie you of the thing questied. The Example of this Figure is here placed.



It remaineth now, that we declare, of what thing and to what Houle a Question doth appertain. Then, what every Figure doth shew or signifie concerning all Questions in every Houle.

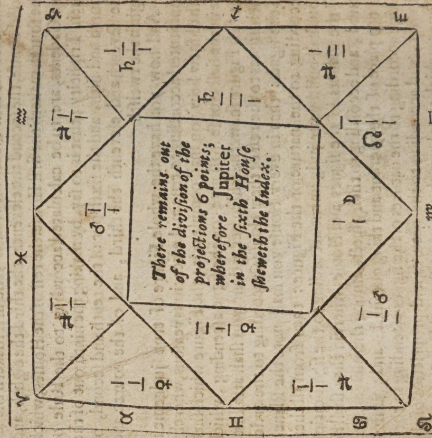
First therefore we shall handle the significations of the Houles; which are these.

The first Houle sheweth the person of the Querent, as often

(a)



8 Henry Cornelius Agrippa finde out the Index in the subsequent Figure, which is thus: that you number all the points which are contained in the lines of the projections, and this you shall divide by ewelve: and that which remaineth project from the Ascendent by the feveral Houles, and upon which Houle there falleth a final unity, that Figure giveth you a competent Judgement of the thing questied; and this together with the significations of the Judgements aforesaid. But if on either part they shall be equal, or ambiguous, then the Index alone shall certifie you of the thing questied. The Example of this Figure is here placed,



It remaineth now, that we declare, of what thing and to what houle a Question doth appertain. Then, what every Figure doth shew or signifie concerning all Questions in every Houle.

First

(b)

Figure 8: The same diagram from two different editions of Robert Turner's translation of Agrippa's fourth book of *De Occulta Philosophia* (1655 & 1665). Here the geomantic figures are presented on an equal standing to the alchemical-planetary and zodiac symbols. (The later edition has an error in the lunar figure.)

G E O M A N C Y E

gnitez & prééminences : & montre à former les tes-
moings & le iuge, il fault en apres enseigner le nom
que portent lesdictes figures, & le nombre d'icelles.
Parquoy conuient entendre qu'avecques toute la pei-
ne & trauail que i'ay sceu mettre à leuer, chercher,
tourner & virer de toutes pars les poincts & lignes, ie
n'en ay peu onques trouuer ny inuenter en tout &
par tout que seize, dont les noms s'ensuiuent.

<i>Rubens</i> <i>Rouge</i> * * * * * * *	<i>Albus</i> <i>Blanc</i> * * * * * * *	<i>Caput draconis</i> <i>Teste de dragon</i> * * * * *	<i>Cauda draconis</i> <i>Queuë de dragon</i> * * * * *
<i>Fortuna maior</i> <i>Fortune maieure</i> * * * * * *	<i>Fortuna minor</i> <i>Fortune mineure</i> * * * * * *	<i>Aquisitio</i> <i>Gaing</i> * * * * * *	<i>Amisio</i> <i>Perte</i> * * * * * *
<i>Latitia</i> <i>Ioye</i> * * * * * * *	<i>Tristitia</i> <i>Tristeffe</i> * * * * * * *	<i>Puer</i> <i>Enfant</i> * * * * *	<i>Puella</i> <i>Fille</i> * * * * *
<i>Coniunctio</i> <i>Coniunçtion</i> * * * * * * * *	<i>Via</i> <i>Chemin</i> * * * * * * *	<i>Populus</i> <i>Peuple</i> * * * * * * * *	<i>Carcer</i> <i>Prison</i> * * * * * *

De la nature

Figure 9: Geomantic figures assembled out of asterisks, *La geomance du Seigneur Christofe de Cattan, gentilhomme Geneuoys* (French, 1558). Image from [Internet Archive](#).

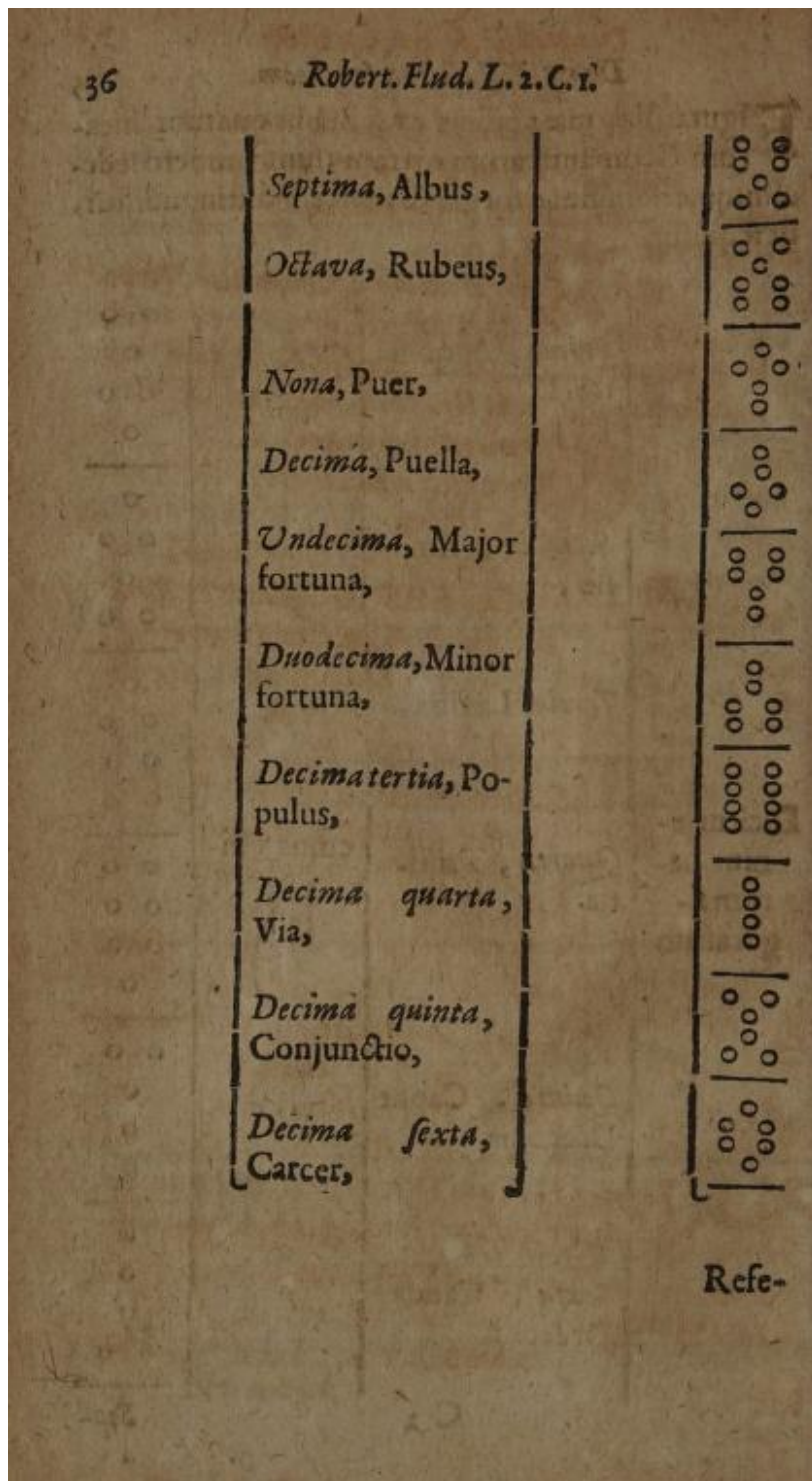


Figure 10: Geomantic figures assembled out of the letter 'o', second edition of Robert Fludd's *Fasciculus Geomanticus* (Latin, 1687). Image from [Internet Archive](#).

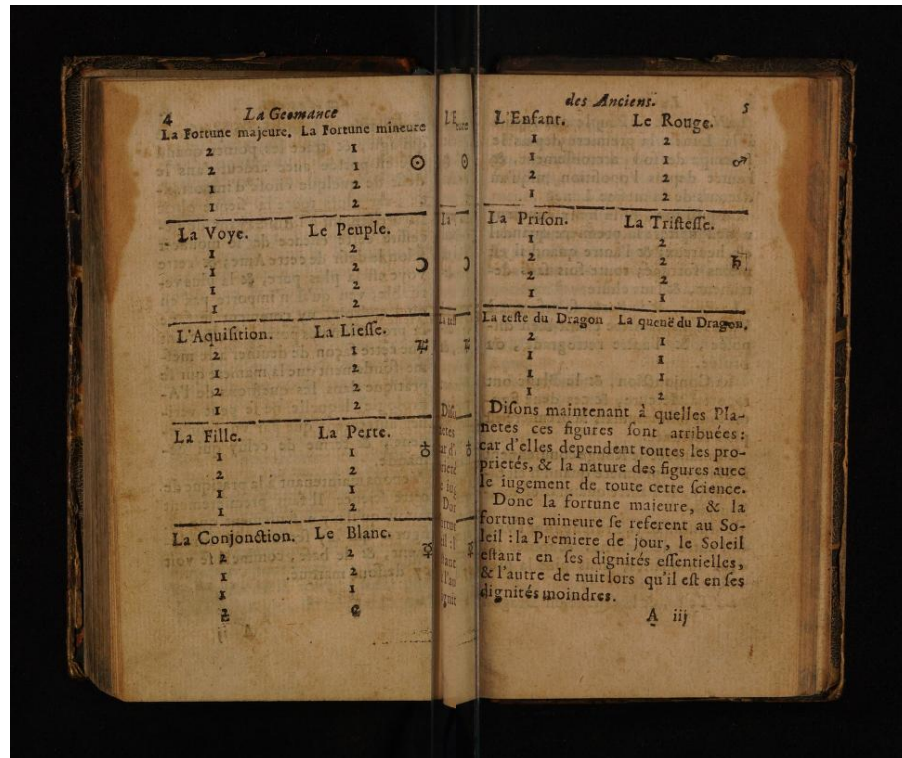


Figure 11: Numbers used to represent geomantic figures, *La geomancie et nomancie des anciens* (French, 1704). Image from [Internet Archive](#).



Figure 12: Geomantic figures on a board from EKPA divination school, Benin. Image © 2017 Carsten ten Brink, used under [CC BY-NC-SA](#).

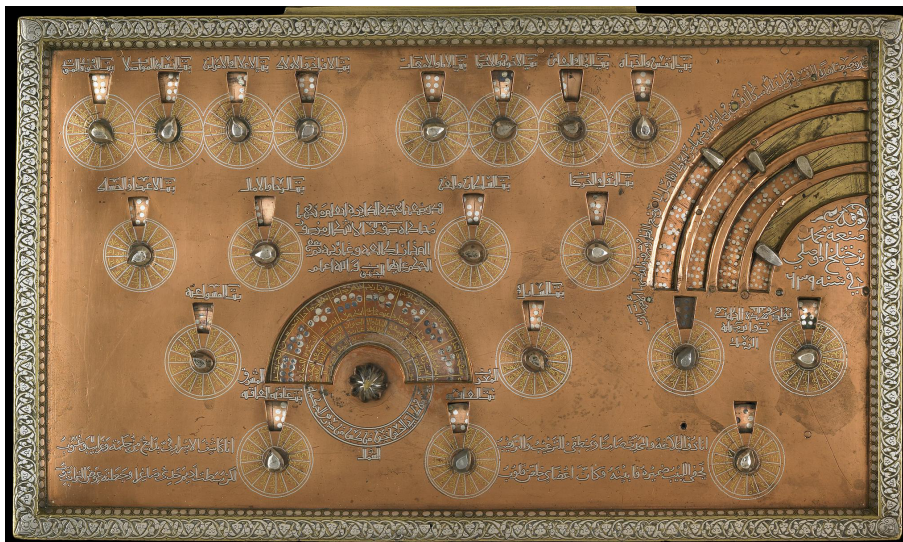


Figure 13: Divinatorial device made in Syria (1241–2). Image © The Trustees of the British Museum, used under [CC BY](https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/).



Figure 14: A geomantic figure (Amissio) in the Kitāb al-Bulhān (Book of Wonders, c. 1390). Image from [Internet Archive](#).



Dr. auraturatus (he:him)
@gldrdragon

Me, giving the geomantic figures nicknames

V.

Cad ...|

Him ...|

Her •|•

Cap |•••

Mimi ••||

Carey •|•

Max ||••

Amy •|•

Connie |••|

Ace |•|

Letty •|||

Ruby |•||

Al ||•|

Trish |||•

Pops ||||

Figure	Name	Triplicity	Planet	Sign	Sign	Planet (p
:	Fortuna	Fire	Sun R	Tau	G.C	54, 1591)
::	Minor	Fire	Sun R	Tau	Leo	ERROR
∴	Amissio	Fire	Mar R	Libra	Vir	Mars R/ Sun R
∴	Rubeus	Fire	Mar D	Gem	Scor	---
:	Cauda	Fire	Caput Dr	Sgr	Aqu	Caput Dr
∴	Draconis	Air	Ven R	Vir	Vir	Mer R
∴	Conjunctio	Air	Mar R	Ari	Ari	---
:	Puer	Air	Jup R	Tau	Sgr	Jupiter R
∴	Laetitia	Air	Jup D	Ari	Pis	Jupiter D
∴	Acquisitio	Water	Ven D	Lib	Lib	Venus D, R
:	Puella	Water	Moon D	Cap	Tau	Moon D
∴	Populus	Water	Moon R	Leo	Cor	Moon R
:	Via	Water	Ven D	Cor	Pis	Mer D
∴	Albus white	Earth	Caput: D	Vir	Gem	Caput Draconis
:	Draconis	Earth	Sun D	Aqu	Ari	Sun D
∴	Fortuna Major	Earth	Sat D	Pis	Aqu	Saturn D
∴	Carcer	Earth	Sat R	Scor	Cap	Saturn R
∴	Tristitia	Earth	Sat R	Scor	Cap	Saturn R

(a) Twitter user @gldrdragon uses U+2022 BULLET and U+007C VERTICAL LINE to construct geomantic figures.

(b) Twitter user @edwardW2 uses Unicode characters from the Mathematical Operators block to approximate geomantic figures.

Figure 15: People trying to work around the lack of geomantic figures in Unicode.

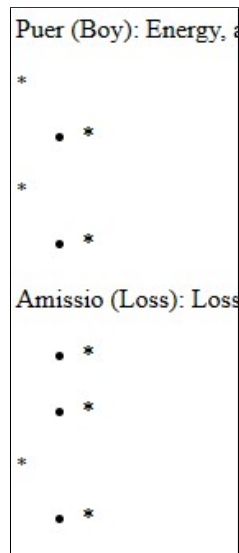
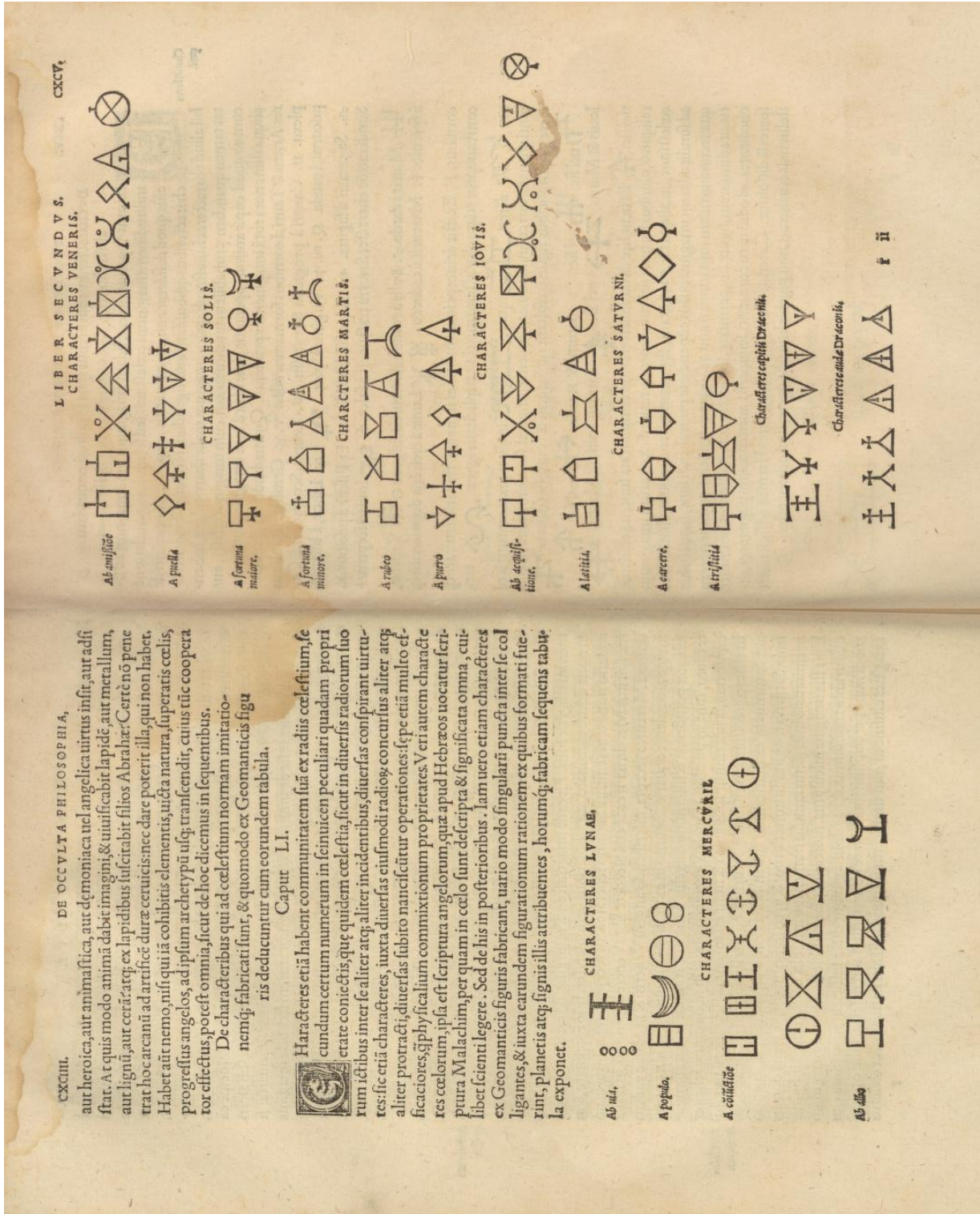


Figure 16: A website author [valiantly attempts](#) to use U+002A ASTERISK to construct their figures, but they are thwarted by their website publishing software, which turns some lines into bulleted lists.



(a)

(b)

Figure 18: Variations on the geomantic figures, from Agrippa's *De Occulta Philosophia* book 3 (published 1533).



















































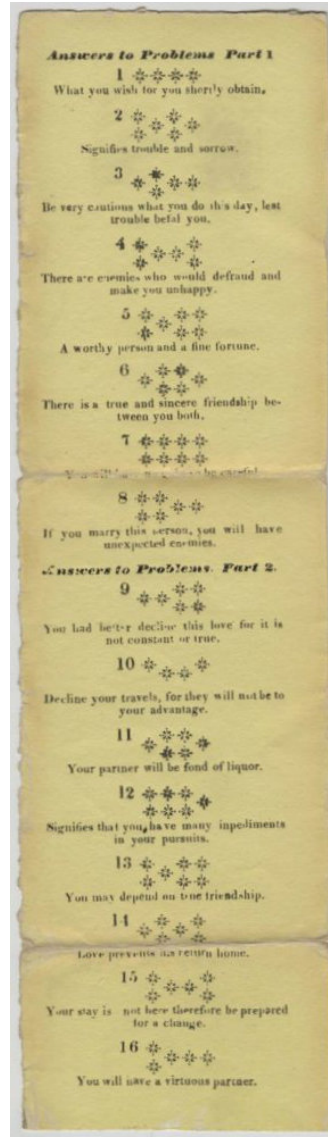
Geomantic Characters.				Planets
 	<i>Via</i>	   	<i>Populus</i>	
           	<i>Conjunctio</i>	     	<i>Albus</i>	
           	<i>Amisio</i>	        	<i>Puella</i>	
           	<i>Fortuna Major</i>	        	<i>Fortuna Minor</i>	
           	<i>Rebus</i>	        	<i>Puer</i>	
           	<i>Aquisitio</i>	    	<i>Labina</i>	
           	<i>Carcer</i>	       	<i>Tristitia</i>	
            	<i>Caput Dragonis</i>			
            	<i>Cauda Dragonis</i>			

Figure 19: Variations on the geomantic figures, from Francis Barrett's *The Magus, or Celestial Intelligencer* (published 1801).



(a)



(b)

Figure 20: Cards and instructions from *The Oraculum, or Futurity's Mirror* (c. 1825), showing rare horizontal presentation of figures. Images from [the Rosenbach of the Free Library of Philadelphia](#).