

IN MEMORIAM
HELENA AVELAR DE CARVALHO
(17.IX.1964–9.III.2021)

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Helena died unexpectedly on 7 March, 2021, at home in Lisbon. She was expecting the first proofs of her book, *An Astrologer at Work in Late Medieval France: The Notebooks of S. Belle*, which was the culmination of the research that she had been doing on astrology in pre-modern times. She had established herself as a leading authority in the theory and practice of traditional astrology – the kind of astrology whose basic rules and techniques had been established in Ancient Greece, and which passed through various streams in Greek, Sanskrit, Persian, Arabic, Latin and the European vernaculars, as far as the present day. Her earlier work, largely written and conducted in conjunction with her partner, Luís Ribeiro, focused on the practice of contemporary traditional astrology: among these are the *Tratado das Esferas* (English edition: *On the Heavenly Spheres*) which went through various editions from 2007 onwards, and helped to educate a generation of traditional astrologers. But then Helena turned to the academic life and, having completed a degree in history and a master's degree in medieval history in the Nova University in Lisbon, in October 2014 she embarked on PhD work at the Warburg Institute, University of London, under my supervision.

Her master's degree – *Vir Sapiens Dominabitur Astris. Astrological knowledge and practices in the Portuguese Medieval Court (King João I to King Afonso V)* – already showed her ability to tackle the historical questions of the validity of astrology and its role in society. For her thesis she wanted to study in depth a manuscript she had discovered in Lisbon (MS Lisbon, Arquivo Nacional da Torre do Tombo, *Manuscritos da Livraria*, 1711) which contained astrological tables from 1468 to 1480, excerpts from Latin translation of Arabic astrological works and a collection of

forty-six horoscopes, mostly of kings and noblemen from fifteenth-century France, Burgundy and Bourbon. It turned out that another manuscript written by the same hand, and overlapping in its contents, was extant in the Bibliothèque nationale de France (MS Paris, BnF, nouvelles acquisitions latines 398); this manuscript revealed the name of the astrologer: S. Belle. So she examined both manuscripts, and interpreted the contents in detail. The thesis eventually became the book which she did not quite live long enough to see.

Helena was known for her generosity towards her friends, her empathy with animals, her encouragement of other scholars, and her initiative in arranging conferences, workshops and classes. She had plans for several projects – including one on astrological geography, and (with Luís Ribeiro) the Astra project for the study of the history of western astrological doctrines, techniques, and practices from Antiquity to the early modern period; during 2020 over 50 podcasts were published of interviews with historians of astrology and related subjects (<http://theastraproject.org/adastra/>). Had she lived she could have accomplished so much! *Nunc ad astra redit*: she returns to her home among the stars.