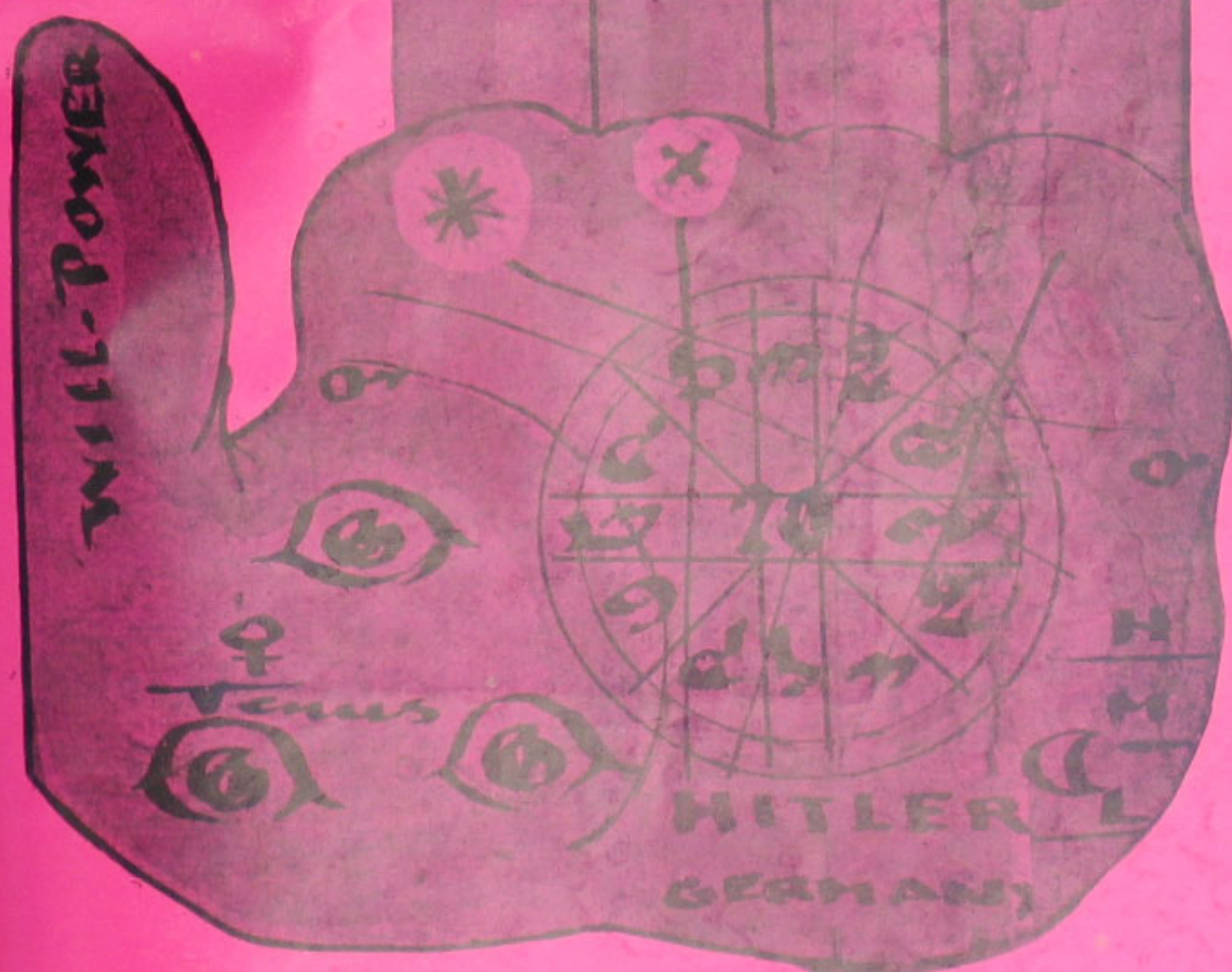


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INSIDE: FORTUNE TELLERS ● MOON POETRY
THE CHARCOAL CHILDREN ● MOVIE FASHIONS

THE RESPECTABLE OCCULT

By A.A. Maytree

A week before Apollo 11 blasted off for the moon, success for the mission was predicted one of Thailand's leading astrologers.

Uranus, representing secrets of the universe, declared the astrologer, would appear in Virgo at landing time, indicating that the secrets of the moon would be opened.

To Western tourists in Thailand, it is all part of an exotic, mysterious East, peopled with inscrutable Orientals, possessing occult and ancient knowledge, long since vanished in the West.

For the Thai people, however, fortune tellers and palmists are part of the fabric of their everyday life.

The Kingdom of Siam, officially called Thailand since 1949, has many types of fortune tellers.

Every weekend, in front of the Ministry of Justice building in downtown Bangkok, you can see 10-15 respectably odd people sitting on their small blankets and awaiting business.

Surrounded by symbols of the zodiac and hand charts, they read palms, chart lucky stars, cast horoscopes, and reveal love-lives with a shuffle of the cards.

There are palmists, astrologers, card readers, face readers, and crystal - ball gazers within the realm. There are even fortune tellers that predict the future from a meditative trance like Edgar Cayce, America's "sleeping prophet."

Thai palmists, or "maw duu," charge anything from 20-150 baht (\$1.00-\$7.50 U.S.) for a reading

of your lines. Prices soar in the big cities like Bangkok and Chiang Mai, drop down in small villages outside these metropolitan centers.

The price largely depends on the palmist's reputation and the thoroughness of the reading. There are Chinese, Thai and Indian palmists with a sprinkling of Burmese.

By delicate, faint lines, inked in with a ballpoint pen the palmist can assure you that you will never die in a plane, car or train accident; a triangle near your thumb is a sure sign of clairvoyant powers; another line spins out a tale of great wealth in the next month. It's tempting to believe!

To most Westerners, card readers conjure up visions of gypsies and crystal balls, but Thai card readers are disappointing and rather plain in comparison with Western stereotypes.

Cards are only used to predict the immediate future, your fate during the next week or two. Before shuffling the deck, you make a wish and concentrate on the cards. This mental effort affects the cards through the hand that shuffles them.

The face cards are laid out in a "mystical cross" representing various people in your life. Numbers represent major and minor influences, wealth, mistresses, ambition, hate, travels etc.

You become the Jack of Diamonds, the Queen of Hearts, the knave of spades. There's nothing occult about the plain 52 card poker deck used by Thai astrologers and card readers

- - -most of them have "Made in America" on the ace.

Prices vary widely. You can shuffle cards for fifteen minutes in a small changwad and still pay only two baht (10c), but 20 baht is about average.

Besides palmists and card readers, Bangkok has a few crystal ball readers in its sister city of Thon Buri; they're hard to find and hard on the wallet too. The Chinese community in Thailand specializes in facial analysis and character reading, through the scrutiny of a person's forehead, jaws, nose, eyes and walk. From this, they tell you what kind of a character you are and predict your future.

Called "ngou heng" in Chinese, these two Fukienese words give a clue to the origin of this type of fortune telling.

But it's the astrologer who is the most popular fortune teller in the kingdom, especially among the educated elite. Many persons in Thailand equate astrology with the science of astronomy and the discipline of statistics.

In days gone by, the Royal Court has astrologers who served the kingdom in an official capacity. Today they have temporarily lost their official position within the State, and are gone from the limelight.

Kings themselves have been famous astrologers. King Rama I, the first king of the Chakri Dynasty, which still rules today, predicted, with the aid of astrology, the change in government which

occurred in 1932 making Thailand a constitutional monarchy - - and he did it 150 years before the event.

The Father of Astrology in Thailand is King Monkut, Rama IV (1851-1868), popularly known in the West through the motion picture "The King and I." He was an extremely educated man, having studied Western sciences, history and languages, but he was also an excellent astrologist.

During World War II, astrology reputedly played a role behind the scenes, to help pick the right moment for a military move, the timing of a public pronouncement, and the best officer for this or that position.

Many Thais carry a small wallet chart of the zodiac with the major planets and stars in their lives indicated on it. Below this is listed the hour, day, date and year of their birth - - - important factors in casting a horoscope.

This horoscope shows the relative positions of the sun, moon, and stars from each other, from the earth, and from that specific part of the earth they were born in.

Since the earliest Thais came from southern China down into the peninsula, most Thai astrologers use the lunar, not solar, calendar like their Chinese neighbors to the north.

Most Thais are Buddhists, so a person's year of birth is expressed in Buddhist Era (B.E.) Foreigners must add 543 to their year of birth A.D. to catch up with the Thai system. In Thailand, 1970 is 2513 (B.E.)

This makes the calculation of a "larang" (non-Thai) horoscope extremely complicated and few astrologers speak English. A typical horoscope costs 30 baht (\$1.50) and is good for several months or a year. Life horoscopes are difficult to cast and considered untrustworthy by good astrologers.

Often astrologers will use cards to confirm opinions gained by astrological calculations, sort of a double-check on the reading. But card reading in itself is snubbed by astrologers as less scientific and valuable in predicting the future.

Astrologers are forbidden by the government to make predictions about the fate of the King, the State, or the government itself - - at least publicly. Predictions of disaster, earthquakes, plagues, etc., are also forbidden because panic would spread among the many believers in astrology in the kingdom. Occasionally however, politicians of rival parties will use a reading of the stars and the "divine science," to predict disaster for their opponents.

Although belief in fortune telling waxes and wanes like the moon, believers abound and make it a lucrative business, even for the uneducated.

Dubious seers are multiplying overnight and many fakers, amateurs, and quick-baht artists with a winning smile are getting on the bandwagon.

Recently, the "Bangkok World" called on the police to stop roving Indian fortune tellers from following diners into hotel restaurants to read their fortune while they ate. The paper blasted them as "fakers" and "pests." But not all of them are like that.

On the other end of the spectrum, a group of Bangkok fortune tellers are determined to raise their craft to the respectability of a science.

They are the members of the quarter-century old Astrologer's Association of Thailand, whose headquarters are in a rambling rented yellow building in the Banglampoo section of the city.

Members of the Association scorn the roving Indian fakers because their astrological calculations are rarely based on a scientific formula or statistics.

The assistant editor of the Association's monthly magazine, who writes under the pen name of "P. Akarat," explained recently, "They work on a system of psychology - what does this person want to hear? Then they tell you what you want to hear."

The Association for its part issues little white and orange I.D. cards to its 500-600 member astrologists, palmists and numerologists. Few of the roving fortune tellers bother to pay the 48 baht yearly membership fee of the Association.



This fee entitles members to take beginning and advanced courses in astrology, palmistry and numerology. These classes are taught by the members of the governing committee of 15. Members elect a new president each year.

There is also a correspondence course in astrology and palmistry for members who can't attend the regular 44 hours at the headquarters.

Members tend to set up shop at home, in their own neighborhood, and serve a regular clientele. They don't display flashy signs and occult come-ons and many even work "doctor's hours" and hand out name cards like typical Thai businessmen.

One spokesman for the Association said a good astrologist or palmist in Bangkok with a good percentage of successful predictions

can earn 2500 baht or more (\$125) per month.

One fairly reputable astrologist in Thon Buri, an old betel-nut chewing lady whose father was a royal court astrologer when she was a little girl, has a constant stream of visitors seeking her advice. Men dressed in white shirt and tie and women wearing chic suits and Max Factor makeup show up regularly at her small house on the klong.

She receives them bare-breasted, with a gracious warm smile, sitting in a corner on her bedroom floor and works her stiff fingers across a green chalk slate scribbling figures till it all becomes clear.

Then she looks up, chuckles, spits out the betel juice and tells you your fate. At 30 baht a person, she could make several hundred baht a day, and even more if she were greedy or unscrupulous. But she

isn't, and you go away feeling you've met some sort of a quaint, astrological saint.

Astrologists and palmists like her command respect in Thai society and high ranking persons in government, military and business circles seek their advice.

Their salaries compare quite favorably with pay scales for other professions of a more "scientific" nature. A teacher in the Thai educational system, with an M.A. in his field, earns less than the fortune teller. For charisma counts as much as education in the field of the occult.

The Association has standing committees researching areas of astrology, palmistry, numerology, and even clairvoyance. But ESP, psychokinesis, ghosts, telepathy, communication with the dead, and

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THE RESPECTABLE OCCULT (continued from Page 11)

other subjects are not part of their concern and they are unaware of research done by such psychic research centers as Duke University.

Many Thais speak skeptically of fortune tellers but there is a measure hedging in their attitude. Astrology for them is an "insurance policy." Perhaps the seer is right. Fear of the unknown, and daily worries force them to seek advice and comfort in horoscopes. Right or wrong, it's nice to speak to someone who is sure he has the answers. Still, most predictions of the future are pretty vague and ambiguous, casting doubt on their value and their validity.

For Akara and other members of the Association, there's a reason for this. A horoscope is not a rigid prediction of an inescapable fate but simply a "life map" which sketches in broad strokes the direction the person is going and the opportunities and dangers he will meet along that road.

You can alter your horoscope and your fate by the foreknowledge of these dangers and opportunities. But you have to act in a way that will neutralize these risks by preventive action.

If you ask what sort of accuracy an astrologer should have, Akara answers with a disarming example: "Astrology is like medicine. A percentage of patients die, a percentage lives; even your best doctor can't cure all his patients, nor diagnose infallibly every time. The science of medicine is not yet perfected. Neither is the science of astrology. I think 80 per cent success is very good and acceptable."

Akara places the percentage of those who believe in astrology in Thailand at about 90 per cent.

"They say they don't believe in it," he declares with a grin, "but when the paper comes the first thing they do is sneak a peek at the daily horoscope. Even if they don't come to us, they cast their own horoscopes. Believe me, when they are worried, or in trouble, they look to astrology for help."

How often Thais visit fortune tellers depends on things like age, education status, etc.,

Akara says: "It's like seeing a doctor. You go to the doctor when you're sick, when you need help. If you're not sick you don't have to visit a hospital. It is the same with an astrologer— you should go as often as the need arises, as often as you need help."

All types of people do go regularly: school teachers, army generals, politicians, businessmen,

rice farmers, star-crossed lovers, housewives.

Interestingly enough, Thai women visit fortune tellers for the same reason that American women write Anne Landers. The problems of love, marriage and family concern them most. Unlike the men, women in Thailand can't drink or go out on the town when troubles bother them. It is socially unacceptable. But they can visit a sympathetic fortune teller, often a woman, and pour out their troubles to her.

Thai men want advice about their jobs, chances of advancement, relations with their boss, the possibilities of success or failure in a new business venture, or just a good lottery number.

Young kids come looking for advice on love affairs, possible marriage spouses, and the results of their entrance examination to Chulalongkorn University.

From October 1967 to October 1968 Akara wrote a column. People flooded him with problems about nagging wives, debts, bad luck, delinquent kids and upcoming trips; they included their hour, day, date, month and year of birth and Akara cast their horoscope and let them know if their luck was about to change. The column was a great success but the volume of mail and the work of casting a horoscope coupled with the necessity to write in a language not native to him, caused him to discontinue it.

He received letters from places as far away as the United States, Canada, England and Austria, as well as closer places like Japan.

But answering enquiries from other countries creates unexpected difficulties.

Despite these problems, Akara tells that even though no detailed horoscope can be given without knowledge of the local customs, the principal outlines will be valid for anyone anywhere born under a given set of stars at a given moment.

The old astrologers in Thailand are not happy with the "new breed" astrologers. Akara seeks scientific verification for his predictions. He also combines old symbols to make modern predictions.

For example, he combines the symbol of Saturn (wood) with the symbol of Mars (power) and when both symbols occur under the sign of water, he comes up with "motorboat."

In striving for an astrology based on reason and statistics, Akara is trying to make astrology more precise and accurate. Older astrologers are content to say, for example, that a new job is in the future for the client. But Akara wants to be more specific; the new job will be in private business, not in the government, will be with an import-export company, and the client will be dealing in silks.

"If we're lazy," he says, leaning back in his chair, "we will never move ahead, we will stay where we are for years, for eternity. That is not good."

The relationship between the occult science and the State religion of Buddhism professed by 93 per cent of the people, is ill-defined on the popular level.

Buddhism officially frowns on spirit worship, ghosts, witchcraft and other extreme manifestations of the occult.

Astrology is also suspected by strict monks. Buddhist scriptures record the Lord Buddha's advice to his disciples, "Let him abstain from sloth, deceit, frivolity, sport, lechery, adornment. Let him not work the spells of the Atharva Veda, nor interpret dreams and omens, nor practice astrology. Let not my disciples make predictions from the cries of birds."

While Buddha acknowledged the existence of paranormal phenomena, he did not regard them as having positive value and discouraged their use.

The BRAHMAJALA SUTTA gives an even more detailed list of the numerous arts of magic, fortune telling and palmistry which should be shunned by a Buddhist monk.

But despite these words of warning, interpretations differ. Consequently hundreds of monks do study, practice and believe in the arts of astrology, palmistry and spirit-healing, and make predictions about the future for the laity.

Many high-ranking monks in the Buddhist hierarchy are famous astrologers and palmists.

Traditional Thai beliefs about the cosmos are derived from ancient Indian sources and taken primarily from the Cambodians. Among them is the important belief that mankind is constantly influenced by forces which emanate from the stars and planets and which can produce either prosperity or havoc.

It is necessary, therefore, that individuals and especially the State act in harmony with these astral forces. Individuals should follow the signs offered by astrology, keep an eye on lucky and unlucky days, and observe many other rules.

In modern Thai society this harmony between the individual and the cosmos is still sought through the use of astrology.

In Thailand, the timing for many important occasions—housewarmings, marriages and cremations—is rarely set without consulting an astrologer or a monk who will make lunar calculations to ensure an auspicious date.

Calendars are full of lucky and unlucky dates. Tuesdays in November, March and July are unlucky for starting an important undertaking. But the thirteenth, fourteenth and fifteenth of every lunar month

are lucky or auspicious. Most religious ceremonies are held on the eighth and fifteenth days of the waxing moon, the day of the full moon, or the eighth and fifteenth days of the waning moon.

Lucky and unlucky days are not actually part of Buddhist teachings but the monks in small villages are often asked to predict good days for marriages, etc., by their people who retain many animistic beliefs. The monks turn to astrology to supply the demand.

Street vendors sell lucky medals to hang around their neck. Inside a little case on a chain is an image of Buddha or a famous holy man.

The medals protect the wearer from all sorts of misfortune, from bullets to poverty. For 5,000 baht you can get a medal that will protect you from going broke—if you can afford it.

Everyone wants a genuine "Luang Poh Tuod" medal. It reputedly stops bullets and knives with its power. It's the best insurance money can buy, and the price—a mere 50,000 baht. One man offered the owner of a "Luang Poh Tuod" medal a new Mercedes sedan for it but was refused.

A student at Chulalongkorn U. told me the story of a young man who owned a "Luang Poh Tuod" medal and was attacked in a restaurant by his enemy. The man pulled a gun and emptied the barrel on the youth from a distance of three meters. The boy came out unscratched. The student said he was an eye witness to the incident. From that day on he has been looking for a "Luang Poh Tuod" medal too.

Take a look at the door to your room next time you sign into a Hotel in Bangkok. The six white dots painted in a pyramid protect the room from evil spirits of the nights. Mothers put gold and silver rings around the ankles of their babies to protect them from spirits.

In small rural villages an atmosphere and feeling for the occult is still possible, undisturbed by modern skepticism. Animistic beliefs are overlaid with a thin patina of Buddhism and hexes, witches, incantations, and ghouls abound.

Many people still practice spirit worship in Thailand and Laos. Ghosts and guardian spirits are a real part of the psychological landscape. Spirits watch over gardens, rice-fields and wats. The Rice goddess receives offering when the seedbed is prepared and when the harvest is due.

In the central region of Thailand a small spirit dwelling is fixed

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It's to be found in the sense of the mythological, the spiritual and the extra-sensory world beyond, a sense that has never disappeared in the East.

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61 Writer Harte.
63 Harbinger.
65 Beard.
67 Academic
gown.
69 —dry wash.
70 Piano.
71 Lamb: Dial.
73 Viewers with
trained eyes.
74 Integument.
76 That is: Lat.:
2 words.
79 Brainstorm.
80 King and
Jones.
82 Italian resorts.
84 Animal-like.
86 Actor James.
88 Kind of sport.
93 "Beagle"
passenger.
95 Expression.
96 Cotton storage.
97 "Only —:"
Song: 2 words.
99 Foils.
101 Political
double talk:
2 words.
104 Even.
106 Old ones, old
style.
107 High
mountain,
Italian style.
108 First family
member.
109 Engage.
110 Girl's name.
111 King —
113 The last of
Tyre.
114 — A:
College.
115 Buttle

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Answer to Last Week's Puzzle

MAURENCE SCAR ADLER
 MATHANASIA TORO NALIVE
 INTERESTING INCIDENTALS
 AGE COUSO MENTS LAW PIPE
 WORK MEANS SUGGESTED IRON
 AND DANCES LADY STARTY
 ANDER DAMPERS LADY STARTY
 RES CAR CAMERAS DISTAL
 REBATES BEN ROIS RES
 MURDER THOR KNAVE MISS
 HORRID AVERAGE
 LAURE ANDRE ANET LACES
 HER RYAN MAG RESOLUTE
 MURDER DANCER DOG MOLT
 GREEN DENARES CAICUNA
 ANICE BUS DANCES RIL
 SING PHILIPS GRIMB BART
 SIMI MAN LADY AGED FOR
 SINGARHIES REPARATIVE
 CALAM BLESS OPERATIVE IS
 ANSIE NEED MING TAYLER