

FIVE FIRST STEPS IN TRADITIONAL ASTROLOGY

By Demetra George

One of the new waves of contemporary astrology is the discovery of the wisdom of the ancients. Over the last two decades, many of the primary source texts for the western astrological tradition, dating to the early centuries CE, have been translated from ancient Greek, Arabic and Latin. This is the first time in over two thousand years that the astrology community has had the opportunity to purvey the doctrines and techniques of the Hellenistic, Arabic, Medieval and Renaissance eras that have given rise to our current practice of the art. Starting in 1993 with a small group of astrologers who studied the texts and began to reconstruct the system, their enthusiasm has been contagious. Now more and more students and practitioners are wondering what the excitement is about, and if there is anything in the old texts that may be of value for modern times.

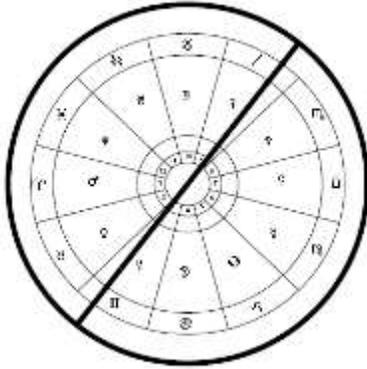
This article is part of the introduction for the forthcoming book *Traditional Astrology for Yourself*. It is written in the style of the classic *Astrology for Yourself* and designed as a hands-on workbook. The book's aim is to guide the modern astrologer towards utilizing the principles of ancient astrology in order to build a more solid foundation for the interpretation of the natal chart.

If you have a background in modern astrology, there are several conceptual and methodological shifts that are necessary before you can approach the traditional methods of viewing and interpreting charts. This might seem disconcerting at first, as it calls into question some of the most basic givens that inform your astrological practice. You are not being asked to reject what you already know and have found valuable, but simply to temporarily shelve these perspectives as you explore traditional techniques. Otherwise, you will most likely encounter ongoing confusion and an inability to proceed and master the system. At the conclusion of your studies, you can then make an informed decision as to how you want to continue.

Step One: Suspend Use of the Twelve-Letter Alphabet

The basic components of astrological symbolism are planets, zodiacal signs and houses. From the beginning of the astrological tradition, planets had special correspondences with certain signs and certain houses considered more conducive and beneficial to the expression of the planets' essential natures. We will discuss the specifics of these associations in later chapters that cover the various zodiacal-sign rulership systems and the planetary joys of the houses.

However, the planet/sign and planet/house correspondences of traditional astrology differ from the modern twelve-letter alphabet system popularized during the second half of the 20th century. The twelve-letter alphabet teaches that the meanings of a particular planet, sign and house are derived from the same principle, such as Mars, Aries and the 1st house, and are thus interchangeable in interpretation. The same holds true for Venus, Taurus and the 2nd house; Mercury, Gemini and the 3rd house; etc. From the traditional standpoint, while Mars is associated with Aries as its lord, there is no basis for its association with the first house, nor is there any particular correspondence between Aries and the 1st house. This operating principle is especially evident and problematical in the many cookbook-style interpretation guides that present the same interpretation of a planet—for example, Mars—in either Gemini or in the 3rd house. A traditional astrologer would have completely different criteria for delineating the meaning of Mars in a sign and in a house, and would not equate Gemini with the 3rd house.



Twelve-Letter Alphabet

Step Two: Use Only the Seven Visible Planets

Evidence for divination by astrology goes back to the second millennium BCE when cuneiform texts identified the seven visible planetary bodies: Sun, Moon, Mercury, Venus, Mars, Jupiter and Saturn. These were the only planets known to ancient peoples, as Uranus, Neptune, Pluto and the asteroids would not be discovered until after the invention of the telescope in the 17th century. Thus the systems of traditional astrology over a 4,000-year period, as practiced by Babylonian, Hellenistic, Arabic, Indian, Medieval and Renaissance astrologers, were developed and refined based solely upon these seven visible planets. The North and South Nodes of the Moon as well as Lots (Arabic parts) were also a part of the symbol systems of traditional astrology, but the outer planets and asteroids were not.

You should certainly continue to include the outer planets and the asteroids in your chart analysis (as I do), but you will learn to view them differently than you view the inner planets. And you will learn how to extract much more information about the chart from the seven visible planets. [Diagram – 2 chart, one with only 7 visible planets; other with outers and asteroids.]

Matia von Trapp
Natal Chart [2]
Jan 25 1965, Wed
11:52 pm CET -1:00
Norrna, Austria
82°30'12" 016°E 07'
Eccentricity
Tropical
Whole Sign
True Anale



Matia von Trapp
Natal Chart [4]
Jan 25 1965, Wed
11:52 pm CET -1:00
Norrna, Austria
82°30'12" 016°E 07'
Eccentricity
Tropical
Whole Sign
True Anale

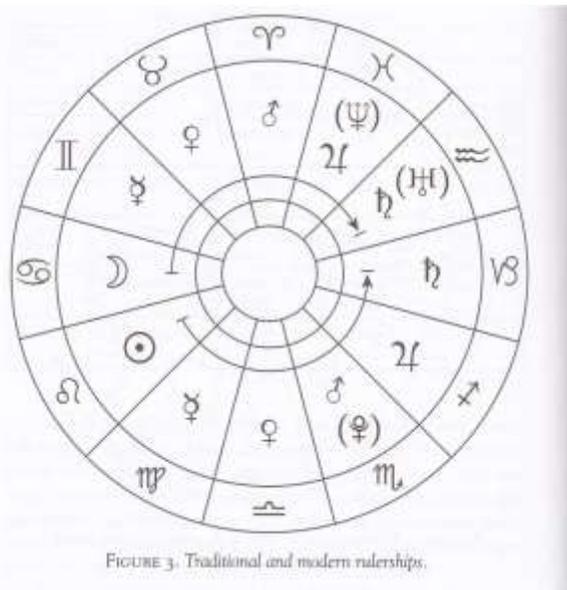


Step Three: Use Traditional Rulerships

Most astrologers are aware of planetary rulerships, whereby each of the planets is said to rule a sign; for example, the Sun rules Leo. The ancient terminology states that each planet is the lord of a particular

sign, and when it happens to be located in that sign in a particular chart, it is thought to possess certain powers. There is general agreement between traditional and modern thought that the Sun rules Leo, the Moon rules Cancer, Mercury is the ruler of Gemini and Virgo, and Venus is the ruler of Taurus and Libra. But then the traditional and modern systems begin to diverge. When the modern planets Uranus, Neptune and Pluto were discovered, they were given as rulers to the signs of Aquarius, Pisces and Scorpio respectively, displacing the ancient rulers of Saturn, Jupiter and Mars. The rationale for the traditional system of rulerships was based upon a geometrical substructure depicted by the *thema mundi*, the symbolic chart of the creation of the world, rather than upon a principle of affinities between planet and sign. The *thema mundi* will be discussed in the chapter on zodiacal signs.

When practicing traditional astrology, it is necessary to use the traditional rulers of the signs as indicated in the diagram below. In particular, use Saturn as a ruler for Aquarius as well as for Capricorn, Jupiter as the ruler of Pisces as well as for Sagittarius, and Mars as the ruler of Scorpio as well as for Aries. This is especially important when determining which planet is the ruler of a particular house in order to interpret the meaning of that house in an individual chart. For example, if someone was to ask about the topic of relationships—signified by the 7th house—and that house is occupied by the sign Pisces, you would look to the planet Jupiter rather than to Neptune to make your judgment. [Circle diagram of rulerships]



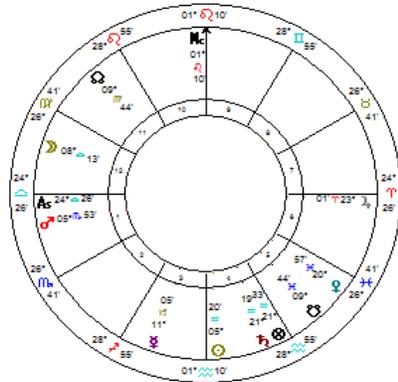
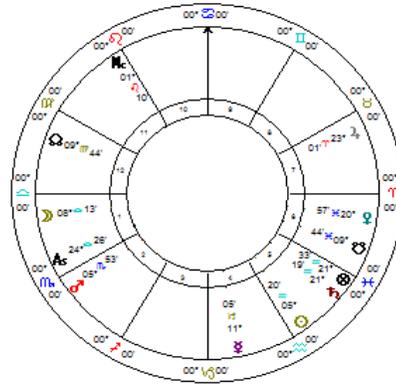
Step Four: Use Whole-Sign Houses

For the first 700 years of horoscopic astrology during the Hellenistic and Arabic eras, the house system of choice was whole-sign houses, where signs and houses are coincident. Each house contains all 30 degrees of one—and only one—sign. This differs from the quadrant house systems used in modern astrology, such as Placidus, Porphyry, Regiomontanus and Koch, where houses are of unequal size and can contain a varying amount of degrees of one, two or even three different signs. Ancient astrologers were aware of and discussed other house systems such as Porphyry and equal houses, but used these sparingly and only for specialized inquiries. In whole-sign houses, all of the degrees of the rising sign occupy the first house, and all planets in that sign are read as first house planets regardless of their degree. (Even if a planet is at 3 degrees of a sign and the rising sign is 28 degrees of the same sign, the planet is still read as a 1st-house planet). The Ascendant degree is a point floating somewhere in the first house. While it still marks the horizon, designating which degrees of your rising are above the horizon

and which are below the horizon, it does not divide the 1st house from the 12th house. The sign following the rising sign occupies the entirety of the 2nd house, and all planets in that sign are considered 2nd-house planets, etc.

The house positions of planets will remain the same in some charts, but in most other charts, their house position will differ. Some planets will occupy different houses in a whole-sign house system as compared to a quadrant house system. When reconsidering one's own chart in whole-sign houses, this different perspective can initially cause an identity crisis for many astrologers, but you are asked to reflect upon and consider the changes as you work through the process. As you look at the example chart, note which planets change house position. [Diagram same chart in WS and Porphyry]

Bottom Left
Maria von Trapp
Natal Chart (3)
 Jan 25 1905, Wed
 11:50 pm CET -1:00
 Vienna, Austria
 48°N13' 016"E20'
Geocentric
Tropical
Porphyry
True Node



True Node
Whole Signs
Tropical
Geocentric
 48°N13' 016"E20'
 Vienna, Austria
 Jan 25 1905, Wed
Natal Chart (2)
Maria von Trapp
 Upper Right

Step Five: Planetary Condition

While the first four steps mentioned above are primarily shifts of techniques, this fifth step entails a major conceptual shift. In the modern approach, all of the planets in a particular chart are considered equal in their capacity to bring about their matters; they simply do so in different ways depending upon their sign, house and aspects. Interpretation involves blending together the various combinations of keywords.

However in the traditional approach, some planets are better able than others to manifest their significations in stable, consistent, long-lasting and beneficial ways for the individual. Prior to interpreting the meaning of a planet in a particular chart, the astrologer must first determine its condition. This was based upon a number of different criteria such as a planet's sect, zodiacal-sign rulerships, its phase relationship to the Sun and its aspects. These factors were thought to influence the planet's capacity to bring about positive outcomes for the individual.

Ancient astrologers taught that the better a planet's condition, the more support a planet has and the better a job it can do. Vettius Valens wrote in the 2nd century:

The benefic stars which are appropriately and favorably situated bring about their proper effects according to their own nature and the nature of their sign, with the aspects and conjunctions of each star being blended. If however they are unfavorably situated, they are indicative of reversals.

In the same way even the malefic stars, when they are operative in appropriate places in their own sect, are bestowers of good and indicative of the greatest positions and success; when they are inoperative, they bring about disasters and accusations. (Anthology 1.1 Riley translation)

A paraphrase of this paragraph might read that if the benefic planets are in good condition, they bring about their own significations in accordance with the sign that they occupy, but if in poor condition, they bring about reversals. In a similar way, the malefic planets when in favorable condition bring forth good outcomes, great position, and success, but in poor condition bring about disasters and accusations.

So if a traditional astrologer wanted to interpret how the planet Mars located in the 2nd house might be expected to operate in terms of the person's ability to generate financial resources to support the livelihood, Mars would first be subject to an exhaustive analysis based upon its sect, four kinds of sign rulerships (domicile, exaltation, trigon, bound), its phase relationship to the Sun (speed, visibility, direction, heliacal rise/set) and its aspects from benefic and malefic planets. If the condition of Mars was determined to be good, the astrologer could then build the interpretation upon stable and fortunate money matters. However if the condition was judged to be bad, the reading would take the track of challenges and conflict in generating resources and in the stability of finances, as well as possible ways to compensate.

Look at the example chart of Maria von Trapp, heroine of *The Sound of Music*. If one were to inquire about the topic of wealth, a traditional astrologer would begin to make the judgment in the following manner. The second house signifies money. It is occupied by the sign of Scorpio whose ruler is Mars. Because Mars is located in its own sign of rulership, the primary indication is good for wealth. Since Mars also rules Aries, which is located in the 7th house, part of the wealth comes from the marriage. Maria was an orphan who married a wealthy baron, and her husband was a high-ranking military officer (Mars). Here is an example of Valens teaching where a malefic planet (Mars) in good condition brings about great position for Maria as a baroness. Note that using Pluto as ruler of Scorpio would not yield the same clear determination. A full analysis would factor in a number of other variables, but this simplified version will suffice for now.

Part One of *Traditional Astrology for Yourself* will be a thorough examination of planetary condition as a preliminary to interpretation, which will then be covered in Part Two. You will not only learn how to determine if a planet is strong or weak overall in its ability to do good for the individual, but also in which particular ways it is strong or weak. In the process you will learn how ancient astrologers thought about sect, zodiacal signs, houses, aspects and phases.

Some of this material will give you the rationale for many astrological doctrines you have been taught as givens and provide a better foundation for any kind of astrology you do. Other parts of this material may challenge your previous ways of thinking and interpretation and put you in a position to reevaluate or defend your former beliefs. In any case, how you think about and practice astrology will be stimulated and expanded, which will inevitably produce a deepening and some sort renaissance. ☘

Demetra George, PMAFA, M.A., looks to classical antiquity for inspiration in her pioneering work in mythic archetypal astrology, ancient Hellenistic techniques and history, and translations from Greek of primary source texts. She is the author of *Astrology for Yourself*, *Asteroid Goddesses*, *Mysteries of the Dark Moon*, *Finding Our Way Through the Dark* and *Astrology and the Authentic Self*. She lives in Oregon, lectures internationally, and leads pilgrimages to the sacred sites in Greece, Egypt and India. She offers personal astrological consultations and mentors individual students in all levels of astrological education. If you want to be informed as to the publication details of *Traditional Astrology for Yourself*, visit www.demetrageorge.com and sign up for her newsletter.