

The Houses in Traditional Astrology

by Sue Ward



In an article about house significations it is not enough simply to list them; the foundation needs to be understood first. I shall attempt to explain this basis from a Traditional perspective and from my study and research of Traditional and ancient sources. In this, I consider the poetic descriptions of the houses by Marcus Manilius ('Astronomica', 1st century AD, Loeb) to be second to none.

To begin, it needs to be said that whatever we now consider astrology's purpose to be, in order to use its symbolism properly we have to acknowledge and absorb its origins. I realise, of course, that this has its drawbacks since we can follow the derivation back only so far, but it has become very clear that astrology, as we understand it, forms a part of an ancient desire to understand our universe. It appears to be humanity's attempt to obtain knowledge of the Will of God, or the Divine Plan. There is, naturally, far more to it than that and the briefest glimpse at that body of knowledge known as the Hermetics bears this out. In this search is implied a desire to find order in, what might otherwise seem to be, the chaos of human existence.

This order was constructed from an understanding and experience of life that we seem no longer to have, and means that we have to work harder to grasp it. It grew out of a holistic philosophy that our current astrological community is trying to recover. That philosophy was entirely based upon and derived from the knowledge of Divine existence. However secular our age becomes, we would do well not to forget that it is from that single point that astrological symbolism has developed. Even if we wanted to change that (and I am aware that some astrologers have wanted to), we could not because it is too deeply ingrained. Astrology is the sacred language of Divination, that is, a way to understand the Divine Mind and a way to make connection with that Mind. Since its symbolism is so profound, it seems perilous to meddle with it if we do not understand this fundamental philosophy. Whether or

not it is necessary to hold to these principles is debatable, but we must acknowledge them at least.

From the foregoing, and before entering the subject of the houses proper, we need first to look at a common misconception and one that has brought about misunderstanding and confusion. This is the system of the “consignification” of signs with houses. Here we see the first sign of Aries lined up with the 1st house; the second sign of Taurus with the 2nd house and so on around the circle. From this, Modern astrology has extrapolated the notion that Mars must, therefore, rule the 1st house, Venus the 2nd, etc. because those planets rule those signs. This causes still further problems when we come to the signs which have been given one of the “new” planets as ruler: Scorpio and Pluto, Aquarius and Uranus, and Pisces and Neptune. So, we then have Pluto gaining rulership of the 8th house absorbing signification from the 8th, for example, death. From the same error we see the 8th house associated with sexual activity because Scorpio rules the sexual organs and is the eighth sign. We can see the same occurring with the other two new planets. There is a knot of reasons for this misunderstanding of the houses, but its explanation does not fall within the scope of this article. What I will demonstrate is that the houses obtain their signification from the Sun’s apparent orbit around the Earth, and need to be understood from that point of view. It is also necessary to understand that the Luminaries are central to all structure, signification and rulerships.

So that we can appreciate what is going on here, we need also to understand what the Tropical Zodiac is. To simplify, then, we know that the Zodiac is an artificial measuring device, developed and instituted when the effect known as Precession was recognised. This makes it sound as though it was a straightforward matter and that everyone concurred, which is not the case, but this explanation will serve our purposes here. The Zodiac is a calendrical device used to measure the Sun’s apparent journey around the heavens. Applied to the Northern Hemisphere, the Sun’s position in any one of the signs expressed its “temperature” and thus, the season. Each sign is given a “nature”: hot and dry, cold and dry, hot and moist, cold and moist; these temperatures, temperaments or humours tally with the natures of the elements. Thus, Fire is hot and dry, Earth is cold and dry, Air is hot and moist, and Water is cold and moist. Additionally, we have four groups of three signs each corresponding with the seasons, as I explain below.

The Sun’s essential nature is hot and dry, but we know from everyday experience that this changes throughout the year. The zodiacal system explains those changes through the natures of the signs, so that when the Sun is in Aries, Taurus or Gemini it is springtime and the Sun’s nature becomes hot and moist. This is because Spring is a time of great fertility and growth, and heat and moisture correspond with that. When the Sun is in Cancer, Leo or Virgo it is summertime and, as we would expect, the Sun’s fundamental nature, hot and dry, is reinforced. Moving on to Autumn, when the Sun is in Libra, Scorpio or Sagittarius, its nature becomes cold and dry – notice that this is the opposite of the temperature attributed to the Spring – when fertility ceases. In Winter, the Sun is in Capricorn, Aquarius or Pisces and assumes a cold and moist nature. (The Moon has its own “seasonal” nature through its four phases, expressing similar temperature changes).

Consignification derives from an attempt to order the Universe and is connected with the instituting of the Tropical Zodiac. It is applied to the human body, so that Aries associates with the head, as does the 1st House; Taurus associates with the neck and throat, as does the 2nd House. This continues through to the 12th House, Pisces and the feet. Added to this ordering of the signs and houses are the planets, but in quite the reverse order. Saturn is associated with the 1st House, Jupiter with the 2nd, Mars with the 3rd, the Sun with the 4th, Venus with the 5th, Mercury with the 6th and the Moon with the 7th and so on, of course excluding the new planets. This is known as the Chaldean order of the planets and refers to distance from the Earth, plainly having little to do with the order of the signs.

To complete this picture, we need to look at another connection of planets to houses, that of the 'joys'. Each planet is said to joy in a certain house (and sign, by the way), Saturn is held to joy in the 12th, where it can do most mischief; Jupiter has its joy in the 11th; Mars has its joy in the 6th; the Sun joys in the 9th; Venus joys in the 5th; Mercury joys in the 1st, and the Moon joys in the 3rd. Again, we can see little correspondence with the natural order of the signs; for example, Saturn has no special association with Pisces, but joys in the 12th.

So, there is one argument for saying that the signs and houses correspond, but as with everything in astrological judgement, one argument is not enough. The signs and houses do not correspond in the way described by Modern astrology, but correspond through the Sun's apparent path. It is essential to recognise this at least: the Sun is representative of God, in this sense the Sun created, or caused, the houses and the tropical Zodiac. The signs do not control the Sun, they describe something of its action and nature.

For anyone using the Modern system of house ordering, I only suggest that they recognise that there is no foundation for it. As with any other academic discipline, it is important that we are aware of derivation and development even if we disagree with it. This is important because once we remove these assignments (Mars as the natural ruler of the 1st house, Venus the 2nd, etc.), we are less likely to choose the wrong significator in any of our chart judgements, whether horary, natal or election. Examples of incorrect signification would be Venus for money (because it is said to be the natural ruler of the 2nd house), Jupiter for foreign matters or long journeys (because it is said to be the natural ruler of the 9th house). Perhaps this is the source of the arguments over which house rules the mother and which the father: if we allow a feminine sign, Cancer, to rule a house which is itself ruled by a feminine planet, the Moon, then we can see immediately where the uncertainty lies. The signs do not, indeed cannot, rule houses, so we do not need to feel uncomfortable about the fact that the 4th house signifies the father and the 10th house the mother. The Moon has no "natural" connection with the fourth, anymore than Saturn has with the 10th. Those significations are incorrect and, clearly, can lead to incorrect judgements or interpretations.

In the first place, an understanding of how the houses are derived will assist us in our efforts to extend their signification. There is a very nice analogy which helps here, which may or may not be definitive, but certainly improves our grasp of house fundamentals. It is that of the Sun God whose passage through the heavens is recorded in the mythology of a variety of cultures. While it is obvious that the Ascendant is the position of sunrise, the Midheaven of noon, the Descendant of sunset, and the IC, midnight, it might not be so obvious that this is, in fact, the order that the houses follow – a clockwise direction.

The Sun's journey is cyclical, so we cannot really say where the journey begins or ends, but we can start at sunrise, thus at the Ascendant, because it is easier, (it will become obvious that the beginning and ending belongs to the IC). The point here is of birth, or rebirth, in the same way as any baby is born. The Sun now begins its climb through the 12th house, known as an unfortunate house, the shadows of the morning dusk. Here lies sorrow and isolation, *all too fruitful of bane* according to Manilius. Here the baby is at its most vulnerable. The arduous climb of the eastern semicircle continues into the 11th, where the Midheaven comes into view and the strength of youth pushes it on; the ascent is almost complete and success and glory almost achieved. Hence the 11th house's association with hope and ambition. At its zenith, when there are no shadows and all is revealed, the Earth basks as the Sun reaches its pinnacle and associates with attainment and publicity.

From this point, the Sun begins its fall through the western semicircle towards the Descendant and sunset. The 9th house, called the house of the Sun God, became the house of God and religion. The shadows lengthen in the 8th house, another unfortunate house – one of the *dread abodes of Typhon* (Manilius). Death begins in the 8th, being completed in the 7th where the Sun's rays are lost beneath the horizon, *the portal of sombre Pluto controlling the end of life and death's firmly bolted door*. Manilius further associates the 7th with matters to do with the end of the day and marriage. Now begins the journey through the Underworld, the journey towards new life.

The unfortunate 6th is displaying the vulnerability that was shown in the 12th and which Manilius describes as signifying *the warfare waged by the unseen weapons of disease*. The 5th house is more fortunate as this dark part of the journey draws to a close: *not yet does it feel the weight of the world [in the 4th], but already aspires to that honour*. The 4th was known as the end of death because it marks the end of the descent and the beginning of the climb back to the day: *it controls the foundations of things*. So we see the connection with the paternal line, the earth and buildings. The Sun climbs though the 3rd house of the Goddess and the 2nd – that other *abode of Typhon* – in anticipation, to begin the cycle again.

For our purposes here, it is unimportant which myth is applied, the point is to demonstrate that house signification is derived in this solar order. Pick up any ancient authority and you will find similar principles. Even with this simplistic explanation, the quote I use from Manilius becomes clearer.

One looks out from the rising heavens as they are born into the world and has the first view of the Earth from the level horizon; the second faces it from the opposite edge of the sky, the point from which the starry sphere retires and hurtles headlong into Tartarus; the third marks the zenith of high heaven, where wearied Phoebus halts with panting steeds and rests the day and determines the mid-point of shadows; the fourth occupies the nadir, and has the glory of forming the foundation of the sphere; in it the stars complete their descent and commence their return,... (Manilius)

The houses, we say, deal with all of life's eventualities, not some of them, but all of them. It is also true, though, that the planets remain the most important contributors and can sometimes be used without reference to the houses, that is, by virtue of their natural rulerships. The houses form the stage on which the play is enacted, where the signs form

the scenery and backdrop, the planets being our players. While there are many books and articles purporting to provide lists of house rulerships, there are still matters to be found that are not mentioned in those lists. When this happens astrologers often resort to personal opinion as to where a particular matter should be placed. The meaning of the houses, though, as with everything else in the traditional system, should not rely on the fallibility of opinion. We should, by the right understanding of the scheme, be able to **extend** the rulerships as they stand to include the matters for which we have no definitive reference.

To extend the accepted traditional rulerships does not mean to bend or break the rules of signification. For example, simply because you treat your pet dog like a baby, does not make it your baby, it belongs to the 6th House of small animals. It is not a 5th House matter which deals with, among other things, pregnancy, you did not give birth to it. How you feel about that 6th House matter might well be shown by other factors.

The following list is intended as a guide to house correspondences, and an aid to understanding their fundamental qualities.

1st House

The querent in any question. The querent's or native's body. To a certain extent, their physical description. Anyone with whom the querent identifies or represents in the matter, for example, in a question such as, Will my local team win the competition? The 1st house would represent the team. It is an angular house and the house of life. It is the joy of Mercury because of its association with the head, brain and tongue.

2nd House

The querent's resources, that is, their money and their moveable possessions. From this house information is obtained relating to the potential wealth or poverty of the querent. It is a succedent house.

3rd House

The querent's brothers and sisters, neighbours, relatives. Communications of all sorts, including rumours. Short distance travel, this is defined as a journey which can be completed within one or two days at most. Journeys to foreign countries are a matter for the 9th house, regardless of how long the trip takes. The car is a means of travel, not the journey itself and so does not belong here. Education does not belong to this house which has more to do with the 9th. It is a cadent house and the house of the Goddess. For that reason and because of its moveability, the Moon has its joy here.

4th House

The end of all things, often termed "the end of the matter", and also the grave. The source of all things, therefore the father of the querent or native. The land, mining, agriculture and other resources of the earth. Immoveable possessions, such as houses and buildings. It is an angular house anciently termed the end of death and beginning of life.

5th House

The querent's or native's children and pregnancy. Pleasure, sport, hobbies, gaming, all activities done for pleasure. Agents and ambassadors. As the 2nd house from the 4th, it rules the moveable possessions of the father. It is a succedent house and the joy of Venus.

6th House

The querent's or native's illnesses, employees, tenants. It is often said that this is the house of service, however, it has more to do with servitude and toil. It represents small animals, up to the size of a goat. It is a cadent house and the joy of the unfortunate Mars.

7th House

The opposite house to the Ascendant, it rules the partner (business or marriage) and contracts or deals. It is *not* the house of "the unknown other". Anyone shown by this house has to be in some kind of relationship with the native or querent, even if that is by way of their delivering the milk. People recognised as enemies and the thief. In its opposition to the Ascendant, the body, it poses a threat to the querent or native and so is connected with war and death, as explained earlier. Contests and therefore the opponent, including legal battles.

8th House

Death. The partner's money or moveable possessions (the 2nd house from the 7th). Danger and fear. Unexpected inheritance. Money that might be owed to you. It is a succedent house.

9th House

Long distance travel. Foreign countries and all foreign matters. Knowledge. It was anciently the House of the Sun God and so rules religion, clergymen and the church. Dreams and visions of all kinds. See 10th house representations below, regarding lawyers. It is a cadent house and the joy of the Sun.

10th House

The querent's daily occupation (exercitation), whether professional or not. Success, honour, status, achievement. Any person in authority over the querent or native. The king or queen belongs to this house or any national leader. As the opposite house to the 4th, it rules the mother. Lilly gives lawyers to this house, but on pages 403 to 404 and page 630 of *Christian Astrology* he attributes them to the 9th, this latter is usually followed. (The Foundation Course of the Academy of Traditional Astrology deals with the reasons for the 9th being used.) It is an angular house.

11th House

A resource of the 10th (2nd from the 10th), it shows the resources of the person in command. Ambition, hopes and wishes, assistance, comfort and relief. Trust, praise and friends. It is a succedent house and the joy of Jupiter.

12th House

Unknown enemies (that is, usually people who the native or querent considers to be friends), witches, slaves, captives, prisons. Monasteries. It signifies large animals, over the size of a goat. It is a cadent house and the joy of Saturn.

Although this list is by no means complete, when added to the preceding explanations the astrologer should be able to expand it. If all else fails, he or she will know where the matter **does not** belong. It is impossible to overemphasise the importance of a good understanding of basic symbolism, everything depends upon it. How can we expect to forge that connection with Divinity or understand the Divine Mind if we can't speak the language?

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