

Heavenly Discourses AHAN 7024 MACAA

Notes on the Horoscope – the astrologers map of the heavens

Bernadette Brady

The Horoscope – the astrologer's map

In the face of the diversity of definitions of astrology, there are, however, two recurring themes within the practice of astrology. One of these themes is celestial fate that of the perceived link between the order of the nature of celestial mechanics and the fate or determinism within life. The second theme is that the astrologer will use a map, a horoscope, to provide them with a unique view of the individual in time and space. It is this map, based on the Newtonian mechanics of the solar system, which is for astrologers the actual instrument of fate in their lives. As the astrologer accepts his or her natal horoscope as a reflection of their identity and the journey of their life, they also accept the mechanical and mathematical rigour of the order of the heavens that it places into their lives.

The horoscope's features and construction

A natal horoscope is constructed for the place and time of an individual's birth in order to create a map of the orientation of the planets and zodiac to the local horizon. The zodiac used is generally not associated with the actual physical constellations but instead is mathematically derived. For example, one of the major zodiacs used is known as the tropical zodiac and is based on twelve equal divisions of the band of the ecliptic (the sun's apparent path through the sky) starting from the point on the equator of the location of the sun at the spring equinox (usually 21st March).¹ The planets are located in the map by their position in this mathematical zodiac at the time of the person's birth. In this way the horoscope displays both the mathematical zodiac and the planets' orientation to the individual who is located in the centre of the map with the eastern horizon aligned on the left (see *figure 1*). Additional notation is generally added, such as the planets' angular relationships to each other, known as aspects. The 360° of space around the individual is also divided into twelve sections which are known as the houses. Each of these houses represents an area of the individual's life and are numbered 1 to 12 commencing from below the eastern horizon and moving in an anti-clockwise direction.²

¹ Fred Gettings, *Dictionary of astrology* (London, UK Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1985), pp.107,294,341.

² Margaret E. Hone, *The Modern Text-Book of Astrology*, 5th edn (London: L N Fowler & Co. Ltd, [1951] 1973), pp. 99-143.

Since the horoscope is constructed for an exact time and location, and reflects the resulting complexities of planets, aspects and houses, any given horoscope is generally held to be unique for an individual. In this way the horoscope provides the astrologer with a distinctive map which establishes that person's originality in the world.

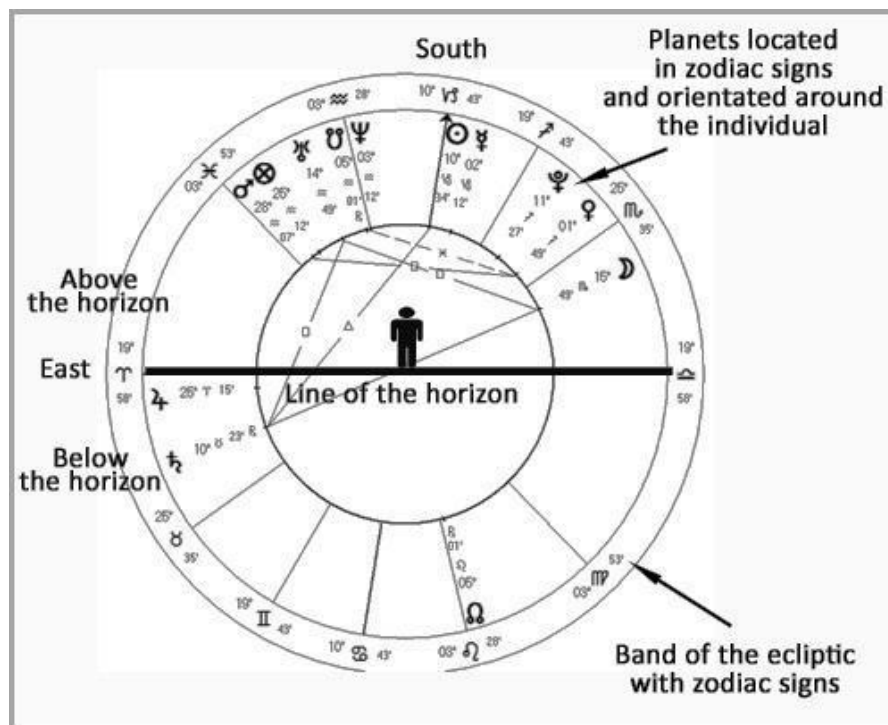


Figure 1- The astrologer's horoscope. This is a circular horoscope using a tropical zodiac and is constructed for 1st January 2000 for New York, New York, at noon and thus the sun (☉) is at the culminating position above and to the south of the individual. As with the astrolabe, the individual is located standing on the horizon line in the centre of the horoscope. East is to the left of the individual and in this northern hemisphere horoscope south is at the top of the map.

The horoscope as a medieval symbolic map

Francesca Rochberg notes that the first horoscopes came from Mesopotamia and they were list maps, a text-based description of the sky, with the earliest known being dated from 410 B.C.E.³ Johannes Thomann points out that the tradition of the horoscope as a written list perpetuated well into the Hellenistic period.⁴ He suggests, however, that the horoscope as a diagram or representation in a map format rather than text remained scarce in the West until the arrival of Arabic influences in the twelfth century. His argument is that the horoscope as a drawn diagram was of Chinese origin and moved into the Islamic world and hence to the

³ Francesca Rochberg, *Babylonian Horoscopes* (Philadelphia: American Philosophical Society, 1998), p.3.

⁴ J Thomann, 'Square horoscope diagrams in Middle Eastern astrology and Chinese cosmological diagrams: were these designs transmitted through the Silk Road?', in *The journey of maps and images on the silk road*, ed. by P; Kaplony A Leiden Forêt (Leiden: Brill, 2008), pp. 97-117 (p.98).

West via the trade routes of the Silk Road.⁵ In this time the horoscope was represented as a square rather than a circle (see *figure 2*). Robert Hand commented that the horoscope drifted into its circular format by the seventeenth century, as evidenced in the work of William Lilly, cited earlier in this chapter, but was firmly established in the nineteenth century by the English astrologer Zadkiel, the pseudonym of Richard James Morrison (1795–1874).⁶ Nevertheless once the horoscope as a map or diagram was established by the twelfth century within the astrological tradition, whether it was represented as a square diagram or in its later nineteenth-century circular version, it has maintained its central position within the practice of astrology.

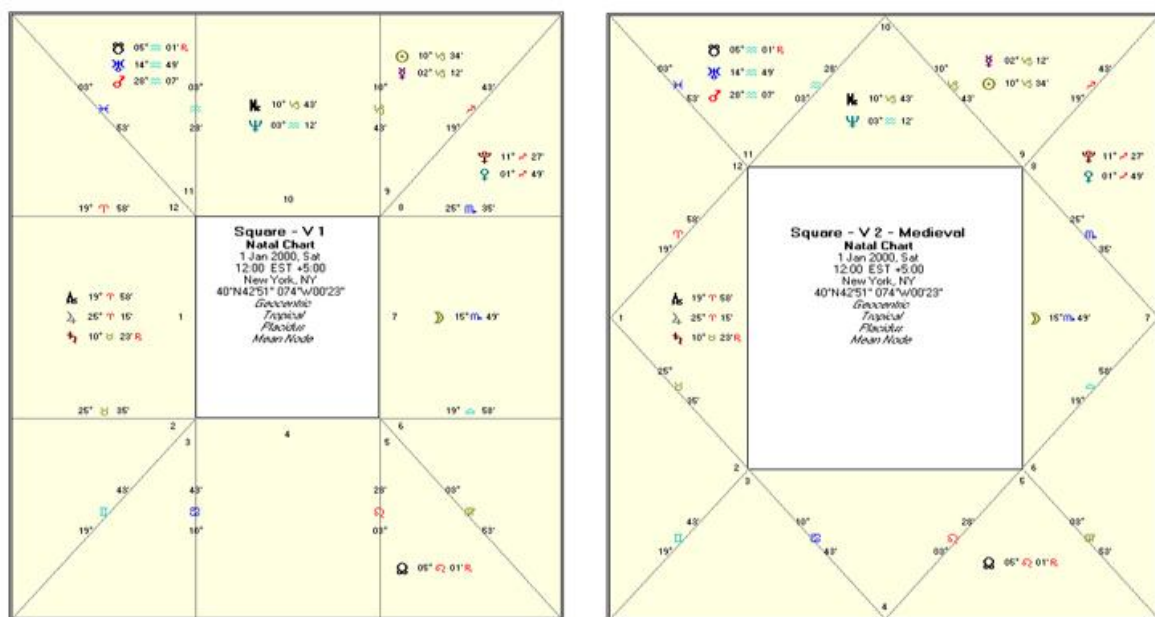


Figure 2 – The two different version of a square horoscope. This is the same horoscope as given in *figure 1*, constructed for the 1st January 2000 for New York, New York, at noon. The map on the left tends to be used in astrology based in India while that on the right is often seen in medieval European manuscripts. There are also other forms of square horoscopes.

Throughout its long history the horoscope has sustained the same sky orientation as the astrolabe, the scientific instrument ‘which has been in the hands of scholars since antiquity’.⁷ As Sara Schechner Genuth comments seldom were astronomers pictured without an astrolabe, making it a ‘badge of the profession’.⁸ The astrolabe placed the user visually at its centre, facing south with east on their left. This is a rational orientation for the northern

⁵ *Square horoscope diagrams in Middle Eastern astrology and Chinese cosmological diagrams: were these designs transmitted through the Silk Road?*, pp.107-113.

⁶ Robert Hand in reply to my question at his lecture at the ‘Astrologies’ conference, Bath, UK, 24–25 July 2010.

⁷ Roderick S. Webster, Marjorie Webster, and Sara Schechner Genuth, *Western astrolabes* (Chicago, Ill. ; [Great Britain]: Adler Planetarium & Astronomy Museum, 1998), p.2.

⁸ *Western astrolabes*, p.2.

hemisphere: if one's place of location is north of 23⁰ of northern latitude, the ecliptic is located to the south of the observer. Thus with east to one's left the culminating planets in the south will be shown high on the astrolabe. The heavens are thus seen to move from left (east) to right (west) in the movement that is now defined as clockwise motion.

This similarity of orientation between the astrologer's horoscope and the astrolabe was probably due to their close association, for the astrolabe, a time-finder, was used to construct horoscopes, a time-marker.⁹ Additionally, the link between the horoscope viewed as a map and the astrolabe, used to help plot the sky, was strengthened by fact that both were introduced into Europe at the same time.¹⁰ Such close rapport between the instrument for examining at the sky and the horoscope suggested a view of the horoscope as a simplified map of the heavens and therefore open to be read with the same factual veracity of its kindred instrument, the astrolabe. This supposition has opened contemporary astrologers to accusations of ignorance as their horoscopes do not reflect the modern knowledge of the heliocentric solar system. Richard Dawkins made this assumption about the horoscope when he wrote in the *Independent on Sunday* on 31 December 1995:

My birthday (26 March) is listed in the papers as Aries but this is the sun sign which somebody with my birthday would have had when Ptolemy codified all that stuff. Because of the processional shift....my sun sign is in fact (if you can call it that) Pisces. If astrologers were doing something that had any connection with reality, this presumably ought to make a difference. Since they aren't, it doesn't...¹¹

Dawkins has assumed that astrologers are seeking perfection in modern celestial cartography. If this was the case then he would be justified in his accusation of ignorance. However, the notion that the veracity of a map should be measured by its factual representation is in fact an eighteenth-century construct. As Matthew Edney states, 'The later eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries constitute a period of profound significance for modern Western cartography. From this period dates the widespread acceptance that cartography is an empirical, objective and unproblematic science concerned only with the presentation of geographic information.'¹² Gunner Broberg points out that in this way the idea of the map became the bedrock of science, a symbol of unchangeable and fixed truth, a rock on which to stand, that which was fixed and known about the world.¹³ David Woodward comments that when nineteenth century scholars turned their attention to medieval maps they completely

⁹ Silke Ackermann, 'The Astrological Scales on the National Maritime Museum Astrolabes', in *Astrolabes at Greenwich*, ed. by Kristen Lippincott (Oxford, UK: Oxford University Press 2005), pp. 73-89 (p.73).

¹⁰ Koenraad van Cleempoel, 'Representations of Astrolabes in Western Art', in *Astrolabes at Greenwich*, ed. by Kristen Lippincott (Oxford, UK: Oxford University Press 2005), pp. 99-111 (p.99).

¹¹ Richard Dawkins, 'The Real Romance in the Stars', *The Independent on Sunday*, (31 December 1995), p.p.2.

¹² Matthew Edney, 'Mathematical Cosmography and the Social Ideology of British Cartography, 1780-1820', *Imago Mundi*, 46 (1994), 101-116 (p.101).

¹³ Gunnar Broberg, 'The Broken Circle', in *The Quantifying spirit in the 18th century*, ed. by J. L. Heilbron Tore Frängsmyr, Robin E. Rider (Berkeley, Los Angeles, Oxford: University of California Press, 1990), pp. 45-72 (p.55).

misunderstood these older maps. With their anachronistic approach they considered that the medieval knowledge of the world was simplistic as it appeared ill-informed, believing in a flat world and assuming that Jerusalem was located in the centre.¹⁴

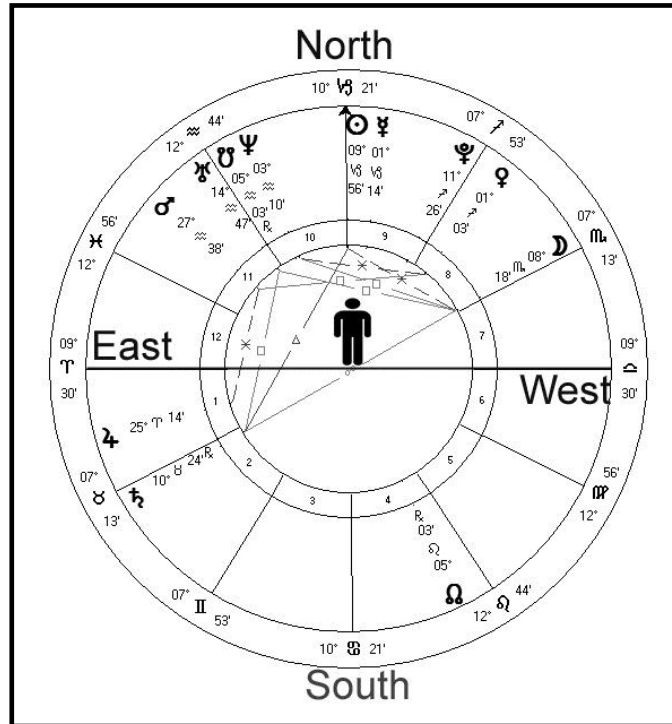


Figure 3 - The astrologer's horoscope for the southern hemisphere showing the houses numbered 1 to 12. This is the same date as used for the horoscope in figure 1, 1st January 2000, but now set for noon in Sydney, Australia at a latitude of 33° 52' South. The sun (☉) is culminating above the individual but now this is in the north. The actual movement of the planets across the sky when facing north is that they will rise to the right of the individual and set to the left, moving in an anti-clockwise direction. However in a southern hemisphere horoscope this is ignored and the north south axis is also reversed.

The horoscope is also a medieval map. Evidence of its minimal connection to celestial cartography can be found in the events of the late eighteenth — and early nineteenth — century when European astrologers began to cast horoscopes for southern hemisphere locations. By this time the astrolabe had been overtaken by the clock and had fallen into disuse, thus astrologers relied on sets of printed tables to orientate the zodiac around an individual. However, to create a horoscope for a birth in the southern hemisphere, a different methodology was required, for not only did the final result need to be reversed but the astrologer needed to add an extra twelve hours to the calculations in order to correctly use the tables.¹⁵ Nevertheless even though astrologers made these adjustments to compensate for

¹⁴ David Woodward, 'Reality, Symbolism, Time and Space in Medieval World Maps', *Annals of the Association of American Geographers*, Vol. 75 (1985), 510-521 (p.510).

¹⁵ See Alan Leo, *Casting the Horoscope* (London: Modern Astrology, 1908), p.41.

their southern latitudes, they ignored the inverted nature of the southern hemisphere sky — the sun moving in an anti-clockwise direction and culminating in the north. In spite of these obvious differences the astrologers continued to place east to the left of their horoscopes and the point of culmination of the planets (which was now north) above the head of the individual (see *figure 3*). Thus they ignored the conventions of the four compass points and the normal orientation of maps. This disregard for the actual sky challenges the very idea that the horoscope is intended to be a factual piece of celestial cartography and supports instead the idea that the astrologer was more concerned with representing in their horoscopes a symbolic relationship between the individual and the heavens.

The idea of a map as a symbolic diagram was, as previously cited, a feature of many medieval maps. A medieval map could be concerned as much with philosophy and theology as with geography, and represent all of these positions within a single diagram. Woodward argues that the *mappaemundi* of the medieval period were ‘primarily to provide a visual narrative of Christian history cast in a geographical framework’.¹⁶ In discussing the philosophy of map-making from the medieval period Evelyn Edson states ‘... world maps were philosophical rather than practical, providing a cosmic overview rather than information for some mundane journey.’¹⁷ Edson points out that these maps were a mixture of metaphor, history, spiritual realms, and physical places arranged in a manner to help the individual undertake a lifelong spiritual pilgrimage physically or mentally.¹⁸ Given that the basic components of the horoscope and its orientation to the sky has not changed since it was first introduced into Europe in the twelfth century, and continues to maintain its apparent disregard for a true representation of the sky, it is logical to conclude that the horoscope has more in common with the spiritual and metaphorical themes to which Edson referred than the accuracy of contemporary cartography assumed by Dawkins. Indeed Patrick Curry argues for the idea of the horoscope as a symbolic map when discussing how astrologers read horoscopes, and comments that ‘surely a horoscope is a symbolic map of someone’s psyche a soul-map.’¹⁹

How astrologers read horoscopes

An astrologer, as cited by Claudius Ptolemy in the first century, will read an individual’s horoscope by analysing the combinations of planet, house, zodiac sign and aspects and endeavours to make the implications of these combinations relevant for the individual’s life.²⁰ This aim has changed little since the time of Ptolemy. However, the nature of the information

¹⁶ Woodward, 'Reality, Symbolism, Time and Space in Medieval World Maps', 510-521 (p.519).

¹⁷ Evelyn Edson and Emilie Savage-Smith, 'An Astrologer's Map: a Relic of Late Antiquity', *Imago Mundi*, 52 (2000), 7-29 (p.21).

¹⁸ Evelyn Edson, *The World Map 1300 - 1492, the Persistence of Tradition and Transformation* (Baltimore: John Hopkins University Press, 2007), pp.14-15.

¹⁹ Roy Willis and Patrick Curry, *Astrology science and culture, pulling down the moon* (New York Berg, 2004), p.62.

²⁰ Claudius Ptolemy, *The Tetrabiblos* (Mokelumne Hill, USA: Health Research, 1969), p.6.

the astrologer pursues when reading a horoscope is subject to the astrologer's personal expectations of a horoscope, as well as their own views on fate. Such information can include any of the following: information about past lives; their spiritual life and soul journey; their mundane daily life; psychological complexes; personality and/or character issues; or life-style choices and health.²¹ Additionally astrologers may also use the horoscope to clarify knowledge of the future, using it to construct a personal calendar of future encounters with events or symbols. Based on the geometry of the horoscope the astrologer will apply mathematical techniques to either move the natal planets forward through time or to move the zodiac in its orientation to the individual, working with real time or with symbolic time.²² This is one of the deterministic features of a horoscope and as such will eventually produce a fixed list of dates which the astrologer considers to be inevitable and non-negotiable. The astrologer's approach to this personal life calendar and their idea of times and dates which emerge out of the mechanical but potentially symbolic horoscope is a direct reflection of the astrologer's views about the use and nature of astrology and thus the attributes of the actual horoscope itself. Shoshanah Feher noted that some astrologers will use the horoscope as a spiritual map while others will prefer to use it as an aid to foreseeing the future in some manner.²³

An astrologer will read a horoscope with varying levels of skill based jointly in their knowledge of astrological technique and their ability to untangle the possible different themes implied by Curry's notion of 'soul-map' cited early. Darrelyn Gunzburg also makes this point when she states that for the astrologer 'reading a chart is more than reading each planetary algorithm as a reductionist exercise. It consists of seeing what the astrologers believe are the alternate possibilities contained within the horoscope.'²⁴ It is the need to find a pathway through these 'alternative possibilities' that has led some astrologers to believe that the act of reading a horoscope is a ritual act. In 2006 John Wadsworth conducted a study of astrologers who practiced in Glastonbury, UK, and he asked whether the act of reading a horoscope placed the astrologer into 'a liminal ritual space, which might allow for a "different perspective", ' to be seen.²⁵ He points out that his results were unclear primarily due to the difficulties he encountered in attempting to define what astrologers considered constituted was a ritual. However, he did find that all the astrologers engaged in a '*non-astrological*, [act] insofar as being beyond any consensual hermeneutic approach', and that this was described

²¹ See Nicholas Campion, 'Prophecy, Cosmology and the New Age Movement. The Extent and Nature of Contemporary Belief in Astrology', (Bath Spa University College, 2004), p.12.

²² Martin Gansten, *Primary Directions, Astrology's Old Master Technique* (Bournemouth, UK: Wessex Astrologer, 2009), pp.1-2; Sepharial, *Directional Astrology* (London: William Rider & Son, Limited, [1915] 1921), pp.115-116.

²³ Shoshanah Feher, 'Who Holds the Cards? Women and New Age Astrology', in *Perspectives on the New Age*, ed. by James R Lewis and Gordon Melton (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1992), pp. 179 - 188 (p.180).

²⁴ Darrelyn Gunzburg, 'How Do Astrologers Read Charts', in *Astrologies, Plurality and Diversity*, ed. by Nicholas Campion and Liz Greene (University of Wales, Trinity Saint David, Lampeter, UK: Sophia Centre Press, 2011), pp. 181-200 (p.197).

²⁵ John Wadsworth, 'The Astrological Ritual: A Phenomenological Study of Astrological Practice in Glastonbury', *Correlation*, 24 (2007), 34-56 (p.37).

by different astrologers as intuition, participation with the 'muse of astrology', clairvoyance, or simply the feeling of 'connection' with something larger than the self.²⁶ Gunzburg, independently investigating a similar question, used a global collection of professional astrologers. She also discovered a 'non-astrological' act connected with reading a horoscope. However, Gunzburg equated this act not with ritual but with creativity. She drew comparisons between what astrologers experienced in reading a horoscope and those of an artist in the creative act. Gunzburg argues that astrologers undertook what G.A. Kelly labelled 'loose construing', the mental state which allowed the artist to withhold judgement while being flooded with options and possibilities which then slowly emerged into one particular theme or pattern.²⁷

Nevertheless, independent of whether astrologers conduct rituals or move into a state of loose construing when reading a horoscope, the findings of Wadsworth and later Gunzburg show that for contemporary astrologers the horoscope was not a factual map which produces one single option. Indeed as I have argued elsewhere, what an astrologer seeks to read from a horoscope will, as already stated, depend on the different attributes they assign to a horoscope, for example whether they consider that the soul is or is not reflected in the horoscope.²⁸ However, independent of what astrologers seek to read from a horoscope, the actual astrologer's map of the heavens is an apparent universal feature of all astrologers and astrologies.

²⁶ 'The Astrological Ritual: A Phenomenological Study of Astrological Practice in Glastonbury', 34-56 (p.p.50).

²⁷ Gunzburg, *How Do Astrologers Read Charts*, p.p.186.

²⁸ See Bernadette Brady, 'Theories of fate among present-day astrologers ', (University of Wales Trinity Saint David, 2012).

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