



ASTROLOGY IS BASED ON THE BELIEF THAT THE MOVEMENT OF THE STARS AND OTHER CELESTIAL BODIES AFFECTS OUR LIVES HERE ON EARTH



THE ORIGINS OF ASTROLOGY DATE BACK TO AROUND 2000 B.C.E. AND CAN BE TRACED TO ANCIENT EGYPT, ANCIENT GREECE, AND ANCIENT CHINA



ASTROLOGY

FROM **SUN SIGNS** TO **MOON SIGNS**, YOUR GUIDE TO **ASTROLOGY**

101

A
CRASH COURSE
IN
ASTROLOGY



YOUR SUN SIGN IS THE PATTERN OF YOUR OVERALL PERSONALITY AND REPRESENTS YOUR EGO



KATHLEEN SEARS

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ASTROLOGY 101
FROM **SUN SIGNS TO MOON SIGNS,**
YOUR GUIDE TO **ASTROLOGY**

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INTRODUCTION

Dating back to the ancient Egyptians, astrology has been a source of prophecy and lore for thousands of years. This venerable system is based on the idea that the positions of the stars, planets, and other heavenly bodies have a profound impact on events here on Earth. The month and day of your birth is linked inextricably to the movements of worlds millions of miles away.

In ages past, astrologers were widely consulted for their readings of the zodiac. In the Middle Ages, kings and emperors employed court astrologers, whose charge it was to cast horoscopes for their royal patrons. During the Renaissance, astrologers continued to flourish even as much astrological lore was incorporated into the new science of astronomy. But even today, tens of thousands of people believe in astrology and follow with interest their horoscopes in the newspapers and online.

In this book you'll find both the history and lore of astrology. You'll learn the signs of the planets and how to interpret them. You'll hear about famous astrologers and their predictions for the future—from the ancient Roman writer Ptolemy to Elizabeth I's court magician John Dee. You'll see the profound cultural impact of astrology, in literature, art, and music. You'll follow its long, slow decline in the face of modern science and its revival as an important part of the New Age movement today. And you'll learn the practical aspects of astrology: how to read a birth chart, how to cast a horoscope, and how to find what the stars say about your future in love, in money, and much more.

So prepare for a breathtaking journey that encompasses the past, present, and future. Let's begin *Astrology 101*.

CHAPTER 1

THE STORY OF

ASTROLOGY

From the time we learned to walk upright, humans looked at the heavens above them and wondered.

What were the bright points of light that shone in the night sky? Were they fires burning far away in the vast darkness? Were they gods? Were they something else unknown?

In today's well-lit, urban-based world, it's hard to realize just what the night sky looked like to our ancestors. Today, when we look up in the darkness, we see a few stars and planets. If we live in rural areas we can see more. Perhaps, with the aid of a simple telescope, we can make out the dim luminosity of the Milky Way and a few of the most distant planets such as Jupiter and Saturn. But imagine living in a world almost without light at night, where the only source of illumination came from a few campfires. The cosmos, filled with starlight, must have seemed a mighty wonder, beyond the grasp of humans, solid and immovable as the earth beneath them.

And yet . . . as these people watched, they realized that the stars were *not* immovable. They rose and fell in a rhythm that could be tracked and predicted. At certain times and in certain seasons the same groups of stars appeared in the same place. Among this fixity, though, some stars appeared to move in a different fashion. The ancient Greeks, more than three thousand years ago, called them

planetes, or “wandering stars.” These were the planets, of which the ancients knew only those that could be seen with the naked eye: Mercury, Venus, Mars, Jupiter, and Saturn.

As the centuries came and went, people charted the movement of these planets. They believed that celestial cycles could only be the work of gods, and since the gods controlled the fate of men and women it was only natural to believe that the planets and stars influenced human affairs as well. The planets were given the names of gods. The Romans called the red planet Mars, the god of war. The brightest star in the sky they named Venus, for the goddess of love (a serious misnomer, it turns out, since Venus, as shown by modern observation and space probes, is a thoroughly nasty place).

This evolution of human understanding of the skies forms the cradle of astrology, a theory that stretches from the ancient world down to our own day.

ASTROLOGY'S BEGINNINGS

From Babylon to Ancient Greece

The birth of astrology depended on three things: imagination, observation, and mathematics. The first two were common enough in the ancient world. The third developed gradually.

About 2000 B.C.E. in the city-state of Babylon in Mesopotamia, priests were becoming adept at reading the future in a variety of ways: through watching the flight of birds, in the entrails of sacrificed animals, and in the movement of the stars and other heavenly bodies. By the seventeenth century B.C.E., they had compiled elaborate tables charting these movements—the first astrological documents of which we know.

The Venus Tablet

The Venus Tablet of Ammisaduqa refers to a tablet recording observations about the movement of the planet Venus. It was written in cuneiform, the writing style of early Mesopotamia, and was probably compiled around the seventeenth century B.C.E. It was evidently a document of some importance, since a number of copies of it still exist (albeit often in fragmentary form). The object of observing Venus was evidently to

make predictions about the reign of various kings, including Ammisaduqa, for whom the tablet is named.

During the next thousand years, astrological predictions continued to be refined, and by the eighth century B.C.E., the libraries in Babylon contained more than 7,000 astrological portents that priests could consult. These were known as the *Enuma Anu Enlil*. The Babylonians had a considerable advantage over other contemporary civilizations in compiling this material because their understanding of mathematics was the most advanced in the ancient world. By 500 B.C.E. they had invented the zodiac.

The Hermetic Tradition

Babylonian zodiacal lore made its way to Egypt where it mixed and assimilated Egyptian mystical and religious traditions. By the sixth and seventh centuries B.C.E., these had also become intermingled with Greek beliefs. Among the most important products of this mixing was the creation of what became known as the Hermetic tradition. The Greek god Hermes, the messenger of the gods, also had features of a number of other gods, including the Egyptian god Thoth. Through a process that is not very clear, he became known as *trismegistos*, which means that three adjectives, some of which were associated with Thoth, were applied to him. Finally he was called Hermes Trismegistus, which we might translate as Hermes the Thrice-Renowned. A large body of writings grew up in association with him, known as *Hermetic* writings. These included a number of important astrological documents that incorporated and integrated Greek, Babylonian, and Egyptian astrological findings.

Hellenistic Astrology

By the second century B.C.E., most of the elements we associate with astrology were in place.

- The horoscope, or birth-chart, gave a picture of the state of the stars at the time of a child's birth.
- The Sun, Moon, and known planets were set against the circle of the zodiac.
- There was a notion of certain zodiacal signs being *ascendant*—that is, rising over the horizon at the moment of birth.

CLASSICAL AND MEDIIEVAL ASTROLOGERS

Refining the Art

The earliest notable astrologer of the Classical world was Claudius Ptolemy (90–168), also noted for his contributions to mathematics and astronomy. In fact, his system of an Earth-centered astronomy was not overturned for 1,300 years.

His chief astrological work is the *Tetrabiblos*, probably written in the Egyptian city of Alexandria, then one of the chief centers of learning in the Western world. It's very possible that Ptolemy had access to the collection of books and manuscripts maintained in the great library there, a library said to have been founded by Alexander himself. In any case, the *Tetrabiblos* draws on Babylonian and Egyptian traditions as well as Greek philosophy. Ptolemy joined astrology to medical practices, arguing that certain medicinal herbs improved their effectiveness if they were gathered during particular phases of the Moon.

Ptolemy divides the zodiac into houses, each of which is concerned with an aspect of life. In the chapters that deal with these he has a good deal to say about marriage, the quality of life, and what he regards as “diseases of the soul”: greed, extravagance, stupidity, and so forth.

Manilius

Among the most important Roman astrologers was Marcus Manilius (first century). Very little is known about him; his

astrological theories are contained in a long poem, of which we may not have the complete version. In the poem he denotes the signs of the zodiac:

*First Aries shining in his golden fleece
Wonders to see the back of Taurus rise,
Taurus who calls, with lowered head, the Twins,
Whom Cancer follows; Leo follows him,
Then Virgo; Libra next, day equaling night,
Draws on the Scorpion with its blazing star,
Whose tail the Half-horse aims at with his bow,
Ever about to loose his arrow swift.
Then comes the narrow curve of Capricorn,
And after him Aquarius pours from his urn
Waters the following Fishes greedily use,
Which Aries touches, last of all the signs.*

He also links the various signs to Roman gods: Aries to Minerva; Taurus to Venus; Gemini to Apollo; and so on.

Astrology was widely popular in the Roman world, since it was philosophically linked to Stoicism, the dominant Roman world outlook. The Stoics tended to argue that the world was governed by specific and knowable laws. From this standpoint, Manilius's line, "The fates rule the world, all things are established by settled law," was congenial to them.

The Middle Ages

The spread of Christianity in Western Europe presented problems for astrologers, since many leading Christians denounced astrology as a leftover of paganism. St. Augustine writes with regret that he continued in his youth to consult "those imposters called astrologers" but later stopped the practice after converting to

Christianity. Although many medieval schools list astrology on their curricula, they apparently used the word interchangeably with astronomy.

Nonetheless, astrology was deeply rooted in popular and literary culture. When Geoffrey Chaucer (c. 1343–1400) was beginning his famous poem *The Canterbury Tales*, he wrote “and the young Sun hath in the Ram his half course run.” His readers would surely have known what he was talking about.

The Très Riche Heures

In the fifteenth century, manuscript illuminators known as the Limburg Brothers, created a book of prayers to be spoken at the canonical hours. This beautiful work was commissioned by the Duke Berry and is known as *Très Riche Heures du Duc de Berry*. Many of its pages include zodiacal signs, although they were not used by the work to create astrological fortune telling. Rather, they are associated with the various months covered by the book.

It seems clear that despite the Church’s opposition, people in the Middle Ages continued to consult horoscopes cast for them by professional astrologers, whose profession often included other forms of magical practices.

RENAISSANCE ASTROLOGERS

The Flowering of Astrology

The Renaissance is the name historians give to the revival of art and learning in Europe during the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries. It also saw a growth of astrology as a respectable—even elevated—profession, as can be seen in the lives of two of the greatest astrologers: Michel Nostradamus and John Dee.

Nostradamus

Michel Nostradamus (1503–1566) was born in Provence, France. In his youth he traveled widely, and at some point he began to cast horoscopes for those who requested them. As his reputation spread, the demand for horoscopes increased, and he took on assistants to help him. This presented challenges; Nostradamus's penmanship was poor at the best of times, and his assistants had to interpret his scribbles as best they could.

In 1555 Nostradamus published the first version of his *Prophecies*. This was a book containing collections of quatrains (four-line verses) grouped in sets of 100 (called centuries). Nostradamus continued to add to the prophecies, and by the time the last version of the book was published in 1568, there were a total of 942 quatrains (it's not entirely clear if all these were written by Nostradamus himself, but for purposes of argument, most people accept them as such).

Many of the quatrains are astrologically based; that is, they link future events to astrological influences.

*(I:16) A scythe joined with a pond in Sagittarius
at his highest ascendant*

*Plagues, famine, death from military hands;
the century approaches its renewal.*

*(I:28) Tobruk will fear the barbarian fleet for a time,
then much later the Western fleet*

Cattle, people, possessions, all will be quite lost.

What a deadly combat in Tarsus and Libra.

The problem lies in interpreting these and similar verses. Nostradamus is a master of ambiguity, with the not-surprising result that over the centuries his *Prophecies* have been seen as predictors of everything from world wars to the events of 9/11.

Fake Nostradamuses

A century after Nostradamus's death, the philosopher Thomas Hobbes warned that many of the prophecies that circulated under his name were forgeries, written well after his death. Even today it's not hard to find people conveniently rewriting the prophecies to suit their already formed conclusions.

John Dee (1527–c. 1608)

Dee was among the most well-known men of his century: a scientific thinker whose reputation as an astronomer and mathematician spread throughout Europe; a mystic, astrologer, and

wizard; and an advisor to the court of Elizabeth I and the queen's personal astrologer, responsible for drawing her horoscope.

Dee attended Trinity College in Cambridge (he was, in fact, a founding fellow of the school). He gained a strong scientific reputation, but sometime around then he also became known as someone who dabbled in astrological matters.

It was a difficult time in which to cast horoscopes for public figures. England had undergone an ecclesiastical reformation until Henry VIII, who, breaking from the Catholic Church, established the Church of England. This was reversed by Henry's daughter Mary, who returned the country to Catholicism and vigorously persecuted Protestants and anyone else she perceived as politically dangerous. Dee was arrested in 1555, charged with casting horoscopes for Mary and for the Princess Elizabeth, Mary's half-sister. The horoscopes, it must be presumed, predicted events not favorable to Mary. Dee succeeded in wriggling his way out of the charges, but he remained cautious during the rest of Mary's reign.

Dee prospered under Elizabeth, who came to the throne upon Mary's death in 1558. He became her official advisor on scientific questions as well as the court astrologer. In this capacity, he plunged deeper into mysticism, including astrology. He traveled extensively on the continent, but his absence from the court left him financially wanting. He died in poverty and relative obscurity about 1608.

MODERN ASTROLOGERS

Reading the Stars Today

Although after the Renaissance astrology's reputation began once again to decline, it experienced a revival in the nineteenth century with the advent of Spiritualism through people such as Madame Blavatsky (1831–1891). Spiritualism was a widespread and complex movement that involved many people, including scientists such as Alfred Russel Wallace and literary figures such as Arthur Conan Doyle. One of the changes that took place in astrology about this time is that it became simpler, in an attempt to make it more widely popular.

In the late twentieth century the growth of the New Age movement helped increase the audience for astrologers and their work. This also led to a re-evaluation of certain astrological concepts and a debate between “modern astrology” and “traditional astrology.”

Some Differences Between Modern and Traditional Astrology

- Traditional astrology focuses on prediction; modern astrology is a tool for self-actualization.
- Modern astrology takes into account the nine planets of the solar system; traditional astrology relied on the seven planets that can be seen with the naked eye.