

The Mysteries in Hellenistic astrology

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This article was inspired by the lectures presented by Robert Schmidt during the VII Astrological Conclave in Cumberland, July 2007.

Robert Schmidt together with Robert Hand and Robert Zoller created the memorable project Hindsight. In the beginning of 1990 they began the translation to English of Greek and Latin astrological sources. The translation was an essential tool in order that the current astrologers could recover and recall the great Art and the nobility of the ancient astrology.

It's impossible to discuss Hellenistic Astrology disregarding some important philosophical concepts. The Greeks were really great philosophers, and they had a quite complex insight on the cosmos and human existence.

Sometimes it's difficult to understand their way of thinking, but if we can leave aside our analytic mind in just like we relinquished the Cartesian view upon becoming astrologers and began to believe more in the symbolic than in the cold way of measuring things, we will be able to envision the true meaning of the Greek's way of thinking.

We will see some quite unusual and at times weird concepts: there are many clues in Hellenistic astrology devised to force you into thinking. Hence, be prepared for unsettling ideas.

Some of them, according to Robert Schmidt information, are related to esoteric aspects that are being revealed through recently discovered ancient Tablets containing very new ways of dealing with the meaning of houses. One of these Tablets ends with the following words:

"He, Trasyllus, describes how Trimegistus said"

The Mystery of the Houses

The houses are divided in angular houses, succedents and cadents from the angle. The first ones are called “pivots” by the Greeks and they work like hinges around which everything revolves.

The succedent houses are those through which you enter a cadent, a house between worlds. Their function is to support the house before them. The cadent house, on the other hand has the function of destroying the previous house, and is used like a bridge to the next one.

Where the division of houses came from? The Greeks were the first to describe the Hōroskopos, the exact point of the Ascendant and this happened in the second century BC when Hypsicles of Alexandria discovered the mathematical method for calculating it. At this time appeared the first chart with the respective horoskopos. Vettius Valens, in his Anthology written in the 2nd century AC, used whole signs and also topic division based in Porphyry.

The Hōroskopos is the point from where the other houses are described. For the Greeks, however, any point can be used as Hōroskopos. The chart can depart from a LOT (the Fortune Lot, the Spirit Lot, the Eros Lot, etc) or even another house can become a Hōroskopos, a point of departure, the first house to analyze the others under a specific subject. For example, if the issue is a financial problem, we can depart from the Lot of Fortune or from the Second House.

The detailed description of this virtuosity in the Hellenist astrology is well described in the introduction by Robert Hand to the Book II of Vettius Valens Anthology

In spite of the determination of the exact position of the Hōroskopos, the Greeks always used whole signs instead of dynamic houses.

Let's assume the Ascendant to be at 22° of Cancer. The first house initiates in the beginning of Cancer and goes as far as its last degree. A planet at 29° of Cancer would be considered in the first house.

But we haven't discussed any mysteries yet...we just described some astrological Hellenist statements so far.

We know the terrestrial houses are 12 and that they have a meaning, according to their aspects relative to the Ascendant.

The Eight topic houses system coexisted with the current 12 houses system at that time.

The Greeks had two works for life:

“Zoo”: the physical existence and “Bios”, the life you live, the livelihood.

And you live your life in Places that the Greeks named Topos or Houses as we name them nowadays.

The "Hōroskopos" is the first house and represents "Zoo", the physical life. This life is supported by the activity of the Second House. The issue in the Second House is the Bios.

Now we will see the explanation of life in a different way, though.

According to new material being translated, the life we live is shared by the 12th, the 10th and the 8th houses.

This is really weird because what kind of life you can live in the 8th house, the place of death if your life is restricted to the body?

In the 10th house, it is understandable because in there is the life you live without restriction in your adulthood.

And the 12th house? A cadent house, "apoclima", between worlds?! You are not alive yet, this is prior to your body existence! How can we understand such a weird statement? I invite you to empty your mind and listen carefully.

The 12th house has a meaning of preparation: at the same time it's the apoclima, a decline, a turn backwards from the first, it's the house where you choose your Bios, where you're not living your life, but choosing the one that you'll have to live.

Greek astrology was not re-encarnationist but used a lot of Plato's theory, and Plato believed in reincarnation.

According to this theory, after the 12th we have the birth of the body, the First House.

As soon we live the three houses after the 12th and go directly to the end of the Second House, which supports the First, we find the abyss of the Third House. It is an initiation and we have to jump over it. At this moment we don't go to the Third, but to the 9th house: it's the death of our childhood: the 9th is the 8th of the Third.

The first return of Saturn occurs at this time and it is a good-bye to the first youth, in order to enter the adulthood. This event occurs at about thirty years of age: we reach our maturity.

In the 9th, a cadent house, we prepare for our prime, we get subsidies, guides and learning to achieve the acts in the life. We reach the 10th house, the Praxis, prepared to act in public life, having children included, matter of the 10th for the Greeks.

The 11th house is the patronage, the friends and institutions that support our public life and position.

Additional 30 years are spent in the 9th, 10th and 11th houses. It is the period between the 30 and 60 years of age.

Once you lived the 11th house it's time for your second initiation: - you'll have to jump to the 6th House, the illnesses of the body, which will prepare you for death, which will happen in the 7th House. Indeed, the setting place makes opposition to the Ascendant.

The next thirty years of the native life will revolve around this new theme: the destruction of life.

Back to our initial theme: what kind of activity can we have in the 8th house, also called "lethargy" and when our body is supposed to be dead?

In this house we have to drink the water of forgetfulness, to forget the life we lived and our Bios. This is the activity of the 8th: to forget.

So, the 12th House is a preparation of the Bios. We get a Zoo, a body, and we begin to live our life going straight to the end of the Second House, where our first thirty years of life are spent.

After this rite of passage that occurs - not by coincidence at the same time we have the first Saturn's return - there is a jump from youth to adulthood, where we will live the next thirty years of our life, in the prime of our adulthood and living the good houses, the 9th, 10th and 11th. Next, we have the second Saturn's return, another jump, this time to a worse place, the illness of the 6th House which will prepare us for death.

Let's suppose someone lived more than 90 years. This person would jump to the 8th of the 8th: i.e. from the 8th house to the Third (a between- worlds house), cadent, preparing for the 4th, the Hades, and after to the 5th, the fame after death.

In the Hellenistic texts, action is Praxis, and Praxis is the matter of the 10th house, but also of the Third, because Praxis means practice but also means to transverse spaces and to travel, matters of the Third: the travel to Hades.

From another side, siblings are matter of the Third, but the ruler of the Third, Mercury, is the same ruler of the 12th in the Thema Mundi [iii], Mercury, what means that brothers and sisters are those who came for the same purposes and with the same agenda. Our brothers are those who came from the same symbolical womb.

The Third House, between worlds in the Thema Mundi, is represented by the double sign of Virgo [ii], disposed by Mercury, who is Psycho pomp.

What does the soul have to do in the Third house? It's suppose to travel to the underworld, to the Hades.

The 4th house is Nemesis' house, the reward, the justice, the place where the soul will be weighed. The Fourth House has its own Lot, the Lot of Nemesis or Justice, based on the relationship between the Lot of Fortune and Saturn.

Nemesis becomes a contributing cause of fate coming from underground sources.

In the underworld house the soul will be weighed and evaluated until it reaches the 5th house and again, jump to the 12th, where a new beginning will be prepared.

In the 12th House, after the soul passes by the place of the Necessity it is ready to live another life and another Bios. Hermes said that the Bios was supported by the second house and for the Praxis, i.e. the 10th House, but besides this, for the Third House that is a place of travel and dreams.

The Greeks had a very consistent way of seeing the houses.

We notice that they went clockwise and counterclockwise, and the use of derivative houses was a rule. Besides this, each house could be used as the "horoskopos" for the matter it represented.

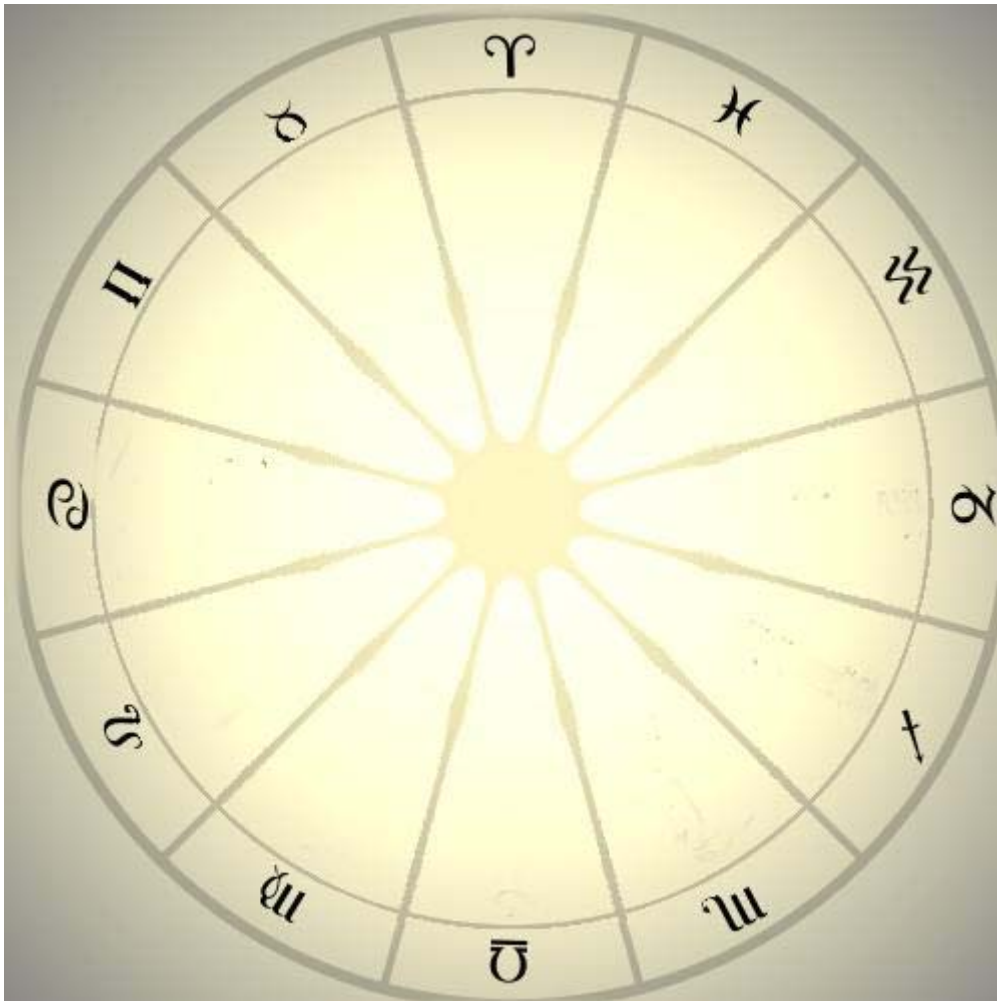
So, if the Fourth House has to do with Hades, the place where the soul is weighed, it has to do with both parents as well, and the First House is the 10th of the Fourth: we are the result of our parent's action. A house has many meanings, as we can see.

In the Thema Mundi, our next topic, we will see that the Fourth House has to do with Saturn and Nemesis, because the Fourth House is Libra in the Thema Mundi, where Saturn exalts.

The 5th house is the posthumous fame, good or bad, and what will happen to our body or ashes after death. At the same time, the 5th house has to do with the legacy from the parents.

The meaning of the houses is mixed and it's important to consider everything was said, not discarding the news just because they are news. The ideas are very consistent, and for sure they demanded a lot of dedication from the ancient sages of Greece, trying to figure out the human destiny facing the large cycles and initiations of the life that we end with death, at least regarding with our Zoo and present Bios.

The Thema Mundi



We took a first tour of the underlying philosophy in the Hellenistic astrology. We went through a place where the meaning of the houses is virtual, and each of them can represent the most varied things, including the journey of the soul to the earth and in the underworld.

To better explain the philosophical issue and the underlying Mystery of the astrological houses, we will use the Thema Mundi, a hypothetical chart on the birth of the world.

Such a chart is very ancient and it was first used in Persia, with the story of the first man of the world, sung in poems for the great Firdausi's Shahnama (900AC to 100DC), who wrote his poetic work unifying the Persian history in one single language. This book is based in the story of the Creation of the World according with Zaratustra (6th century BC). Keyumars, the first man, is named Gayomard in the sacred Zoroastrian text, the Avesta.

Gayomard should have the Thema Mundi as his birth chart, having been born in a moment when all the planets were exalted. According to the myth, he was 30 years old when he died.

The Greeks had contact with astrology as it was practiced by Babylonians and Persians, using the same Thema Mundi to construct their own philosophical and astrological understanding.

As we can see the Thema has the Rising sign in Cancer and the MC in Aries, which seems coherent, since Cancer is the universal symbol of the generation. The choice was not random. In the origins of the Persian civilization, astronomers realized that in Cancer's place in the sky, instead of constellations and stars there was a vast black hole, without stars. For some scholars, the round and big shape of this hole resembled a large crab or a turtle, from which the idea of the Crab would come. Also the word "to cut" in Arcadian has some similarity to crab, and "cut" should mean the division between two sides of the sky, coinciding with the summer solstice in Cancer.

The MC in Aries is quite appropriate, also, as the MC is where we develop our actions to be seen in the world. The 7th House, that has the signification of Death for opposing to the Ascendant, shows the sign of Capricorn and the IC, Hades or underworld, is represented by Libra.

The Greeks explained the exaltations of the planets through geometrical drawings. The trigons and hexagons drawn by the houses regarding the Rising Sign of the Thema Mundi were regions where planets had their exaltations. Likewise, the houses considered good for the Zoo had benefic planets in exaltation.

So, the 9th, the 10th and the 11th Houses are considered good places because they "look" so to the horoskopos.

In the Rising Sign of the Thema Mundi, Cancer, Jupiter, the most benefic planet has exaltation. In the 9th in the Thema Mundi where we have the sign of Fishes, which makes a trigon with the ASC. we have the exaltation of Venus, the second bigger benefic.

The Fifth House, in the Thema Mundi, is Scorpio and it has no planet in exaltation in this sign. Though it makes a trigon with the ASC, Scorpio is the fall of the Moon, regent of the Rising Sign in the Thema Mundi. Nothing can have exaltation in the fall of the "horoskopos"'s regent.

The two planets that exalt in Pisces and in Cancer have to do with the Zoo, the maintenance of life.

The 10th house is also beneficial to the Ascendant because it's a place where the Bios works in the world and completes itself: in the Thema Mundi, we have the sign of Aries, where the Sun exalts linking the action with visibility and fame.

If the Sun exalts in the 10th, the other luminary, the Moon, exalts in the 11th, making a hexagon with the Ascendant. In the Thema Mundi we have the Sign of Taurus, giving support to the 10th house and making a sextile with the ASC.

In order of importance, after the first "pivot", i.e. after the First House, we have the 10th house and after the Seventh, Finally we have the 4th House.

The 7th house is an important house since it is in a "pivot", but it is not good for the native. As a matter of fact, it makes an opposition to the native, the ASC and, because of this, Mars has his exaltation there, in the sign of Capricorn of the Thema Mundi: it is the house from where injury comes.

The 7th house, however, is a house not as bad as the 4th House, the Hades, the worse of the "pivot" houses, so the exaltation of the biggest malefic, Saturn, is in the 4th of the Thema Mundi, Libra, where "Bios" and Zoo are still destroyed. Saturn and Libra weigh the souls in the house of Nemesis, the distribution of the justice.

To Mercury is given the exaltation in Virgo, the Third House, since it's a house that makes a sextile with the ASC (using the hexagonal figure)

The third house is the least bad of the cadent houses, and is named the Goddess's house.

The 9th is the best of the cadent houses, named the House of God.

With these considerations we hope to have given a small idea of the astrological Greek philosophy. There are more articles to come up on this subject._

[ii] see Thema Mundi

[iii] see Thema Mundi