

Zodiacs and Calendars – Controversy about Guidance from the Heavens

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In the third century BCE (before the current era), Hecateus of Abdera visited Thebes, including the remains of what we now call the Ramesseum, built nearly a thousand years before the historian's visit. Hecateus described the temple thoroughly, including this passage: "There, too, a gold circle was to be seen, three hundred and sixty-five cubits long and one cubit high." A cubit is the very portable measure of elbow to outstretched fingers. The Egyptians had standard measures for the cubit and every workman had a close approximation in his body. Hecateus explained: "Images for each day of the year were set out around this circle, one for every cubit: the rising and setting of the stars were recorded for each day, together with the signs with which those astral movements furnished the Egyptian astrologers." I have seen in Egypt the clay dolls used to represent each of the days in ancient temples. Each day was a demi-god with a unique job relating to the changing seasons of the year, beginning with the spring equinox, the tipping point of short days into long days; each day had a different balance of hours of light and dark, centering on the two days where the light and dark are equal, the equinoxes. The Egyptians loved tipping points, the sense of scales, for example, the weighing one's deeds against the qualities of one's heart just after death.

Many features of that temple were last described by Hecateus. Now, as Shelley wrote about the great king Ramses (Oxymandias in Greek, thus the name of Shelley's poem), "Round the decay/Of that colossal Wreck, boundless and bare/ The lone and level sands stretch far away."

Two systems of time had been etched in stone, treated as a single measure of the rhythms of the year. One measured the procession of the days – each with

its cubit in the temple – beginning the year at the spring equinox. The other system of time measured the occurrence of the stars, often in heliacal rising. Let me explain the heliacal phenomenon. All through the night, stars rise from the East. Then a thin band of orange heralds the coming Sun. You perhaps see a much beloved star rise, Sirius or the Pleiades, just before the sky brightens with the Sun's light. It's a brief moment of recognition before the twinkling star fades into the sky-brightness of the day. You look forward to see it increasingly clearly in the next days because they rise a little earlier than the Sun each day. Viewing heliacal rising is best done in the desert with clear skies and a broad horizon.

Though the connection between these two systems of time seemed reliable enough to carve into stone, they in fact diverge ... slowly. In the 360-degree system given us by Zoroaster (which, adding five holy days, gives us the 365 of the year), the stars and seasonal days separate by one degree every 72 years. One really doesn't notice that in one's lifetime, nor even in a few generations. But over the decades, the stone calendar in the Ramesseum becomes unreliable. There are accounts of the dismay that this divergence caused the ancients who felt a disturbance to the regularity of the seasons as revealed in the stars.

Once we know we have two systems of time, we can appraise the different qualities that we gain from either one. We can call one the zodiac, which Zarathustra (also named Zoroaster and Zaratas – a story for another day) felt as living beings in the heavens, twelve of them, with thirty qualities of life-force (Zoë the root of zodiac) each. 12×30 gives us the 360 that we use both for time (our twelve-fold clock-face comes from that understanding) and space (the 360 degrees of a circle). Zoroaster gave names to these living beings, such as the Bull, with its central star Aldebaran as the Eye of the Bull, what I have come to call the Star of Life and Abundance. Indeed, the map of the heavens was hinged on the main star of the Bull – Aldebaran – and of the Scorpion – Antares, Heart of the Scorpion, what I have come to call the Star of Death and Resurrection – both in the centers of those living beings, and exactly 180 degrees apart. This system is

the sidereal system, from “sidus,” star – thus the star-based system, finding in the stars great living beings.

We can call the other system of time a seasonal calendar, based on the phenomena of longest day (summer solstice), shortest day (winter solstice), and equal day-light days (spring and autumn equinoxes), where the Earth’s horizon is the frame of reference and not the stars. To an agricultural community, knowing where one is in the seasons of the year is all-important. One can even think of this as a weather calendar, but perhaps most simply as a day-length calendar. It is also called the tropical system, from tropos, turning. “To everything, turn, turn, turn, there is a season.” (Remember the song by the Byrds?) At the StarHouse in Boulder, Colorado, we celebrate the light-phenomena of equinoxes and solstices.¹ As Rudolf Steiner recommended, “Celebrate the seasons!”

The trouble has been that some people have tried to hold on to the stone carvings observed by Hecateus that links the two systems of time. Some of the day-length calendar people have tried to say that the stars still exist as they were once seen. They have kept the names of the constellations, so that one can now hear, “The Eye of the Bull? Oh, that’s now in the Twins, you know, Gemini. The Twins, you ask? Oh, they’re now in the Crab.” When you point to a planet visible near the Heart of the Scorpion, they say, “That planet is in Sagittarius.”

As I recommend in *Star Wisdom & Rudolf Steiner*, it’s fine to have names of the seasonal months – that is, from March 21 to April 21, and so on – but they should be season-based names, just as all indigenous peoples have had, what modern science calls phenology, noticing the regular changes of natural phenomena. Names such as Month-When-Frost-Settles-On-The-Waters or Month-When-Kangaroo-Apple-Ripens or Month-Beginning-With-Return-of-the-Shearwaters would elicit immediate nods of understanding from those who live

¹ www.TheStarHouse.org.

in that area. Of course, Month-of-Shortest-Days would define the relation to day-length that is the foundation for this system of time.²

When Ptolemy described the heavens in the second century, the great beings of the heavens – the Ram, Bull, Twins, Crab, etc. – coordinated with the seasonal calendar such that the first day of spring – vernal equinox, in the northern hemisphere – occurred near the first degree of the Ram (Aries). He described this, and his work disappeared, then was picked up by the Muslim intellectuals, then found its way into Europe of the Middle Ages, who relied on Ptolemy’s observation that the first day of spring occurred at the first degree of the Ram – because Ptolemy said so. Was this a mistaken reading of Ptolemy? Did Ptolemy really mean that what he observed in the second century should be true forever?

The divergence is now around 25 degrees, nearly a whole sign of 30 degrees. At one degree every 72 years, it takes 2160 years to move an entire sign. In a few thousand years, it will become very strange – when we start hearing that the Bull visible in the sky is “really” in the Lion and the Scorpion is “really” in the Water Bearer (Aquarius).

I will share my conclusions, and then get into some of the more technical difficulties as they have arisen recently in our midst. When I attended the United Astrology Conference (UAC, the largest of the international conferences that occurs every four years) in New Orleans in May 2012, one of the sub-themes amongst the tropical astrologers was “Regulus is now moving into Virgo.” As I normally practice sidereal astrology, based on what is often termed the “fixed” stars – Aldebaran, Antares, etc. – this caught me by surprise. Regulus – the Heart of the Lion, the King/Queen Star – sidereally at five degrees of Leo – doesn’t

² Elizabeth Vreede, for many years head of the Astronomical Section at Dornach, wrote, “We ought indeed to have two expressions, one for the twelvefold division of the year’s cycle, the signs, and one for the configurations of stars visible in the sky, the real constellations of the zodiac.” *Anthroposophy and Astrology* (Great Barrington: Anthroposophic Press, 2001, initially 1928), 106.

move in relation to the other constellations! But to those who identify the day-length calendar as their home, practically and spiritually, the fixed stars move; day-length is their home, its regular rhythms fixed and stable. Others feel more at home in the shining beings of light with whom they meditate in the heavens, finding pictures arise in their imagination from observing these great beings – in other words, in the tradition of Zarathustra. You have to choose: Do I find myself, my soul, my home, in the regularity of the seasons unfolding – in day-length? Or do I find myself, my soul, my home in the great beings of the heavens? In one's own life-time these are correlated, changing the tiniest bit. But over time – over your personal lifetimes and in any historical research, including in one's reliance on the life of Christ and the Mystery of Golgotha for inspiration and support – one has to choose. Do you find the generative power of creation starting with the Earth and moving out into the heavens? Or do you find the generative power of creation starting with the heavens and coming into earthly life?³

You can choose both systems for different purposes, and some do pick on the tropical system as a hint to personality dynamics while relying on the sidereal understanding of the starry heavens for soul guidance. But controversies have now arisen about the “right” system, and that does tend to polarize all listeners. Unfortunately it turns many people away from the heavens altogether. If you would like to skip the controversy, go to the last section on naked eye astronomy.

Enter Dr. Adrian Anderson

³ In truth, everything moves, including the “fixed” stars in much slower “proper motion” around the Galactic Centre. The question is, what is more the stable home base and what the passing phenomena? It becomes a question of orientation – to what do you orient as your home? Steiner pictured this in “The Portal of Initiation,” scene II, when Johannes becomes profoundly dis-oriented: “And now [the process of coming to know himself] robs me of myself. I alter with the hours of the day, and change myself to night.” He spirals into vertigo and horror because he has lost his bearings. The fundamental question of this paper: What gives you (your Self, your Soul) your bearings? *The Four Mystery Plays* (London: Rudolf Steiner Press, 1982).

Adrian Anderson's book *Living the Spiritual Year* was such a godsend, speaking with great depth of understanding of the breathing of the whole earth in relation to the seasons. I have used it intensively in my work, and am most grateful for it. It seems particularly important for the southern hemisphere – for the understanding of those “down under” as to right relations with the archangelic powers that come at different times of year, and for the education of the northern hemisphere about the contribution of the southern hemisphere to the health of the whole planet.

Recently Dr. Anderson has published two e-books that claim that the tropical system of time is the only right way to understand astrology. These books are *The Origin & Nature of the Tropical Zodiac: The Zodiac Signs: What they are & who created them* and the book *Rudolf Steiner, the Tropical Zodiac, and the Zodiac Ages*.

I've shared my conclusions above – you have to educate yourself about this, as it's important! The issue concerns where you might find the resonance necessary for your own soul development. I would like to address certain claims in Anderson's writing so that his certainty in these matters is tempered by a wider view. They center on three questions:

- Is Robert Powell wrong?
- Did Steiner prefer the tropical system of time?
- How do I find the heavens?

Is Robert Powell wrong?

Robert Powell has written extensively about the zodiac, including *The History of the Zodiac*, which is a revision of his Ph.D. thesis at the Polish Academy of Sciences. More recently he wrote *The Astrological Revolution* about these issues, as well as a research paper, “The Bible of Astrology,” about Ptolemy's *Tetrabiblos*

written in the second century.⁴ Adrian Anderson criticizes “the incorrect writings of Powell” as an example of the wrong-headed siderealists by quoting a paper from the venerable tropical astrologer Robert Hand. Here is Hand’s comment: “On page 10 of *The Zodiac: A Historical Survey* by Robert Powell the author cites a passage from Neugebauer's *HAMA* [*History of Ancient Mathematical Astronomy*] as evidence for the Anonymous being a siderealist. Unfortunately the passage in question is one in which Neugebauer is dating this author and another author named Cleomedes to the 4th century by showing that their values for star positions are derived from correcting Ptolemy's positions using his precessional constant! One wonders how much of the evidence for the sidereal zodiac among the Greeks comes from similarly questionable research.”⁵ That’s the critique from Hand. However, Powell’s booklet, *The Zodiac: A Historical Survey*, is older (published 1984), rarer (Amazon lists its current price at \$677.28), and briefer (32 pages) in comparison to his more recent works, *History of the Zodiac* (2006, 224 pages), *The Astrological Revolution* (2010, 254 pages), and various other pieces, including the recent excellent paper, “The Bible of Astrology.” Robert Hand’s comments were based on Powell’s less complete and older work, and Adrian Anderson has not kept up to date with the more thorough explanations. I recommended to both of them that they speak about the proper use of the Neugebauer material, but alas that didn’t happen before these latest publications.

I have carefully studied Powell’s research and writing, and chosen for most of my astrological work a direct connection with the stars. Indeed, in a recent article for *International Astrologer*, I presented a study of the discoverers of the planet Neptune. I found that all of the people most intimately involved with

⁴ The full title is *The Astrological Revolution: Unveiling the Science of the Stars as a Science of Reincarnation and Karma*, by Robert Powell and Kevin Dann (Great Barrington, MA: SteinerBooks, 2010). The recent paper, “The Bible of Astrology,” can be found in the Research section at www.StarWisdom.org.

⁵ <http://cura.free.fr/quinq/01hand.html> and Anderson’s *The Origin and Nature of the Tropical Zodiac*.

its discovery had at birth (the promise of a life) and at death (the legacy of a life) a strong connection between Neptune in the sky and one of the Royal Stars of Persia (which include Aldebaran, Antares, Regulus, and two others).⁶ In a study of Rudolf Steiner's birth, the centers of the fixed signs become very important, especially the axis between Aldebaran and Antares. During his life, whenever Jupiter crossed Antares, completing a four-sided square in his birth chart, astonishing break-throughs occurred in anthroposophy.⁷

I do find it interesting that Robert Hand's article, on which Adrian Anderson relies in order to reject Powell, ends like this: "The tropical-sidereal controversy ... was not a problem with which the ancients were seriously concerned. Given the limits of their computational accuracy, both systems would have given them the same results [as I explained, the two systems were nearly identical during the years of Ptolemy and the early astrologers]. This is a question that we have to solve for ourselves. An appeal to history will not work."

If we take Hand's advice, we must look elsewhere than to old quotes of ancient astrologers. However, you may wish to understand the roots of human consciousness in relation to the heavens by figuring out what was said – and more importantly, what was meant – by whom. Reference to the works cited makes a good beginning in that quest.

Did Rudolf Steiner favor one system of time over another?

Adrian Anderson admits that Steiner understood the equal-size astrological signs as they actually existed in the heavens, that is, sidereally. Steiner traced the course of the spring equinox through them over time. For example, on January 19, 1915, Steiner stated, "... the time interval needed for the Sun to progress from

⁶ This paper cannot be a study of the Royal Stars. More about that can be found at David Tresemer with Robert Schiappacasse, *Star Wisdom & Rudolf Steiner: A Life Seen Through the Oracle of the Solar Cross* (SteinerBooks, 2007) and at www.StarWisdom.org. The Neptune article appears in *International Astrologer of the International Society for Astrological Research*, August 2012, 74-80

⁷ I wrote about these Jupiter transits in a paper for the *Journal of Anthroposophy in Australia*, and in various papers at the annual *Journal for Star Wisdom* (SteinerBooks, various years).

one constellation in the zodiac to the next is approximately 2,160 years, and this is important.”⁸ That’s 72 years per degree, 2160 years per sign, and 25,920 years to go full around in the precession of the equinoxes due to the Earth’s slow wobble on its axis.

Steiner also gave indications for bio-dynamic farmers that they relate to the presence of the stars as residences of living beings. Maria Thun interpreted this as following the constellations, which she viewed not of equal size.⁹ Others, including the bio-dynamic calendar writer Brian Keats and the weather researcher Dennis Klocek, interpreted this as following the original sidereal signs (that is, the Eye of the Bull is still at the center of the Bull as one can observe), equal-sized, taking on the ancient Zarathustrian/Babylonian understanding of the heavens. The difference between Thun’s sidereal unequal constellations and Keats’ equal signs is really only a few degrees here and there, and they are both sidereal, star-oriented.

Adrian Anderson, however, says that Steiner preferred the tropical system for understanding human personalities, and that therefore Steiner was a tropical astrologer. He bases this on Steiner’s comparison of the two albino children that came up in the question-answer period of the Curative Education course on July 5, 1924. Here was the scene: A question arose about two albino children. Elizabeth Vreede was attending and quickly drew up two charts in the main method available at the time, which was tropical. Steiner looked at the charts and spoke about them. The comments have far more to do with iron sulphide (about which he spoke on February 2 without reference to astrology), and the connection between Uranus and Neptune. The relationships between planets occur whether the approach is tropical or sidereal.

⁸ *The Destinies of Individuals and of Nations*, 1987, p. 70. There are many small issues involving an understanding of exactly what Steiner meant by his star references. This one is clear. However, the analysis of the ages deserves a larger study beyond the scope of this paper.

⁹ The differences are not great – see Robert Powell’s note on the boundaries of the zodiac in the Research section of www.StarWisdom.org.

We can make a few observations. First, Steiner did not state a preference for tropical or sidereal in personality work, mostly because he made so little use of actual horoscopes. Second, the tropical mode for planetary positions was the only one known at the time – Elizabeth Vreede may have cast a tropical horoscope, because those planetary positions (ephemerides) were all that were available at that time. That dominance in the West was not altered until Cyril Fagan’s work in the 1950s.¹⁰ But look at Vreede’s writings in *Anthroposophy and Astrology* and you will see that she emphasized the stars in the heavens where they actually lie – the phenomena themselves. She saw the primal harmony of the human being with Aries beginning on March 21 (northern hemisphere) destroyed when the two systems diverged: “It *had* to be destroyed through the Christ impulse that had bound the cosmic forces to the earth ... new forces were released. A short time after his earthly life Christ appeared under the symbol of a fish [vernal point in the Fishes (Pisces)], while formerly he was venerated as the good shepherd bearing the lamb, indeed, as himself the Lamb of God [vernal point in the Ram (Aries)].”¹¹ Thus the Turning Point of Time was indeed a turning point in relation to the heavens as well, a meeting of 0 Aries and the equinox, which then diverged, releasing new energies.

Both Powell and Anderson go into great detail in books already mentioned, but the overwhelming sense I get is that the evidence from Steiner is sketchy, marginal, indirect, and emphasizing the importance of the great beings of the zodiac and of the hierarchies. Steiner made many references to the divine beings of the heavens.¹² However, very little has to do with individuals. He could have cast horoscopes for dozens of the people he spoke about, but he did not. It has been left to us to unravel the “indications” to make them practical.

¹⁰ The blockbuster was *Zodiacs: Old and New* (Los Angeles, CA: Llewellyn Foundation for Astrological Research, 1950) and was substantiated with much more research in *Astrological Origins* (St. Paul, MN: Llewellyn, 1971). Fagan was President of the Irish Astrological Society in Dublin.

¹¹ Elizabeth Vreede, *Anthroposophy and Astrology*, 105.

¹² Rick Bobbette collected these, and it added up to three volumes!

How Do I Find the Heavens? Naked Eye Astronomy

Rather than become distracted by the conceptual controversies – which requires many more pages and footnotes – make a relationship with the actual stars in the heavens, those twinkling wonders that show themselves when you have left the city’s glow. Don’t let telescopes lure you into their greater detail because they obscure more than they reveal. And don’t let tropical astrology confuse you that the Heart of the Lion is not in the Lion anymore, but rather has begun to penetrate the Virgin. Simply find a star and begin to contemplate it. Gaze at the star with warm interest. You don’t even need to know its name, though if you discover a relationship with it, you might be interested later to learn some of its background, its resumé, so to speak. Beyond all the conceptual controversy, it comes down to this: Can you have a relationship with what Ramses set in stone and Hecateus admired – with the different beings who represent the days of the year (one of which is special to you as it’s your birthday)¹³ and with the stars that offer themselves in the sky for your warm interest? Can you find in one or both an inner sense of reverence and devotion to the divine beings of creation?

¹³ At www.StarWisdom.org, under “Your Solar Cross,” we have given a recommendation on how to celebrate your birthday.