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ASPECTS & GATES

THE 2ND/8TH HOUSE AXIS

Each of the signs, as it revolves, receives the influence of Heaven and to Heaven imparts its own. The nature of the position prevails, exercises jurisdiction within its province, and subjects to its own the character of the signs as they pass by, which now are enriched with distinction of every kind, and now bear the penalty of a barren abode.

Manilius, (c. 10 AD) *Astronomica*, II v.860

One way in which modern astrology often fails to utilise the full potential of house signification is in reducing them all to the same strength and efficacy; ignoring the fact that location within the sphere impacts upon the prominence and force (or inhibition and weakness) of planetary expression. In our eagerness to avoid the negative-undertones of words like ‘malefic’, ‘unfortunate’ and ‘destructive’ we must be wary of not inverting this essential influence of the houses, or of limiting their value by being prejudiced towards everything having a constructive, creative or superficially positive interpretation. The 8th house remains the house of death, loss and grief, no matter how pleasantly we wrap that up in digestible phrases such as ‘personal-transformation’.

The ancients placed great emphasis upon whether a house was describing an active and augmenting area of heaven, or one that induced recession and decline. The use of the terms cardinal, succedent and cadent reflect this, and offer rich descriptions to illustrate whether who or what is being symbolised is healthy or ailing, near or far, powerful and vibrant, or impoverished and

insecure.¹ These qualities are often woefully understated in popular modern texts, whilst astrologers practicing with traditional methods use them constantly in determining the outcome of a conflict or lawsuit, finding lost objects or missing persons, discovering the course of a relationship or illness, or the potential of a job offer. Sometimes, the entire interpretation of the chart can hinge mainly upon this one consideration. Although the description of the realm of life in which a planet is operating is obviously a very significant element of house interpretation, we shouldn't deny the extent to which the houses can also empower a planet; or indeed castrate it when the area is a 'barren abode'.

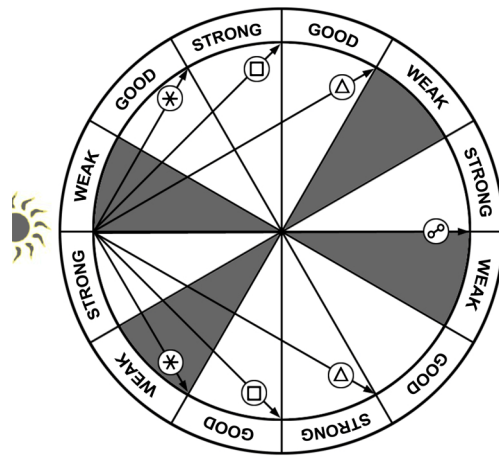
Astrologers, even in striving to offer a positive resolution to any problem, must first take account of reality; including the reality of failure, the need for withdrawal, and the disheartening experience of loss. The ancient perspective portrayed the houses in terms of powerful = good; weak = bad, though their vision was never as simplistic as that of those who interpret this viewpoint out of context. No one could suggest that ancient philosophies lacked a healthy respect for retreat and decline, or failed to recognise its rightful place in the broader balance of life, but most of us would agree that it's a more comfortable position to be strong, active and in control, than to be ineffectual, infirm or impotent.

Where traditional texts speak of houses that are bad, weak, barren, destructive or evil, they describe the areas where there is a lack of dynamic planetary expression; the planets' ability to exercise their influence being impeded according to the degree of 'destructiveness'. This naturally symbolises the areas in life where we are unable to effectively control our environment. We may become the victim of circumstance or inherit the consequences of our own past actions. Sometimes tragedy may occur for no apparent reason, or hindrances that we might otherwise shrug off appear (through our weakened sense of control) more intimidating and overwhelming. A psychological insight is useful, and often essential to find the best

1. The concept of being cardinal/angular, succedent or cadent is explored further in Chapter 6.

way to navigate through these difficult periods, but it cannot transmute a situation which is riddled with loss into one that is potentially full of gain and happiness, without the processing of the loss. Destruction, and the experience of alienation, exist, no matter how hard we twist the symbolism around or look beyond the scope of the present. In any full cycle of life there will always be the joy of creativity and attraction, many periods of pleasure and success interspersed with sadness and grief, separation, and the closure of physical death. Without negative astrological terminology in our symbolic expression, we would be working with a very weak and incomplete vocabulary.

One factor that largely determined the ancient recognition of house 'empowerment' is the aspectual relationship between the cusps of the houses and the ascendant. Since the ascendant represents the entry of light, and therefore life and vitality, the aspect (view) that each house has of the ascendant determines both the quantity and quality of 'life-energy' imbued into that area of heaven, determining an essential focus of meaning that has filtered through to the evolution of modern interpretations. The 7th house, for example, is a powerful house where planets are capable of exerting a strong and dynamic influence because it directly faces the ascendant by opposition and has easy access to its light. In facing it 'head-on', any planet in this area has a forceful resonance of energy. By opposition we need not expect this to be a comfortable energy (consider the unease you can feel when someone is speaking to you with their eyes locked directly into yours), but it is intense and emotive because of the very direct confrontation with the ascendant, the pivotal point in the cosmic scheme. When planets here relate their signification to other people in our lives, either through projection or direct experience, we can expect their influence upon us to be passionate and dramatic, and in some way characterised by the extremities of love or hatred. The 7th house therefore signifies the people who are brought into a close and intimate relationship which surpasses that of common acquaintance and in some way sees us identifying ourselves as a half within the whole. The term 'significant other' is generally applied because it relates as much to adversaries as lovers or partners.



The same is true of the 10th and 4th houses, which access the ascendant by a forceful square aspect. Their essence is *power* and *strength* of influence: that of the 10th being manifest and observable; that of the 4th being deep-rooted and fundamental. The 9th and 5th houses are favourable and have positive associations because they are aspected to the ascendant by harmonious trines. The aspectual relationship has allowed these houses to acquire less traumatic significations than would have otherwise been the case. The 9th house is cadent, but generally considered to be less weakening than other cadent houses because of this, and in recognition of its location in the upper realms of the chart. The 5th house is reputedly one of the most pleasant areas of the chart, despite being tucked away ‘under the earth’. The 11th and 3rd houses are similarly considered beneficial because they are linked to the ascendant by the sextile aspect; the 11th much more so than the 3rd, due to its elevated position. The benefits of the 3rd house are diminished by the fact that it is under the earth and cadent.

However, the 2nd, 8th, 6th and 12th houses are linked to the ascendant by aspects that are traditionally considered too weak and ineffective to be conducive of support: the inconjunct and semi-sextile. The inhibited access to the light of the ascendant means that all of these houses are regarded as ‘dark’ areas, symbolically denoting a

lack of vital energy. Other factors must be considered, but within the fundamental meaning of these houses there is an underlying principle of subdued self-expression.

The Second/Eighth House Axis

Failure to discriminate between the strength of planetary influences as they traverse the various regions of the chart, can lead to modern variations of house meaning that are popularly believed to recognise and extend from originating astrology philosophy, but actually disregard it.

With the 8th house, this becomes of particular concern when it is said to describe the sex life, or the potential for pregnancy. Such an idea arises from the view that the area is one which deals with personal transformation at a most profound level – since it is the house of death, then by extension it must suggest a rebirth and the process that leads to such a birth too. But death, at whatever level it occurs – be it physical, material, spiritual or emotional – is the process of loss that operates within the larger perspective of personal transformation which the chart as a whole relates to. It has cycles and stages of its own, being preceded by weakness and succeeded by grief. Only after an appropriate period of mourning and readjustment can creative energies re-emerge to foster the growth of new life. Pregnancy, therefore, belongs to the fertile area of the 5th house, and never to the 8th, because this is an area that captures the essence of ‘loss of creativity’. The idea of astrologers electing a good time to enjoy sexual activities by strengthening the influence of the 8th house could be amusing; were it not for the abusive violations and experiences of fear and anguish related to sex that may fall within its domain.

Another dubious notion is the belief that a chart where the emphasis falls upon the 8th house represents a good time to apply for a loan or enter into a financial arrangement with another person. This idea is based upon the rulership of the 8th house over ‘other people’s money’, since it is the 2nd house from the 7th. Astrologers who apply this logic often forget that the 8th house is the area where

our loss can become another's gain. In horary charts drawn to locate lost or stolen property, for example, the significator in the 7th house shows it has fallen into another person's hands; in the 8th they have turned it into a financial asset. It is good to have 'friendly' 8th house influences in such charts, but in matters concerning our own financial matters it is most important to see that the 2nd house is supportive and free from affliction.²

Traditionally the second house is representative of our own substance and profit whilst the 8th indicates an area of decline. The origin of this can again be traced to the cycle of nature and the Sun's interaction with the Earth. It is worth noting that originally the 8th house was known as 'the *beginning* of death', because from its cusp the heavenly sphere falls towards the descendant. The area is an entirely unfortunate one – it has no effective access to the light of the ascendant and its diurnal motion is one of decline.

The lack of any strong aspect from the ascendant to the 2nd house also gave this house an unfortunate reputation in early astrology. Like the 8th, classical astrologers knew it by such ominous names as the 'Gate of Hades', 'Gate of Hell', or 'Portal of Pluto', a tradition arising from the ancient Mesopotamians and Egyptians who placed the rulership of the direction north under the 'Guardians of the Gates'. Manilius gave little detailed description of the influence of the 8th-2nd house axis, except to show that it was unfortunate and affected by 'underworld' symbolism:

"Suspended, the former [*8th house*] faces downward, the latter [*2nd house*] on its back, they either fear destruction at the hands of the neighbouring cardinal or will fall if cheated of its support. With justice are they held to be the dread abodes of Typhon, whom savage Earth brought forth when she gave birth to war against heaven."³

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2. To protect against the potential for damage through association with the 8th house and its ruler, traditional rules dictate this to be one area where we should be careful to ensure that there is effective reception from the 8th-ruler in any aspect it makes with the ruler of the 1st or 2nd.

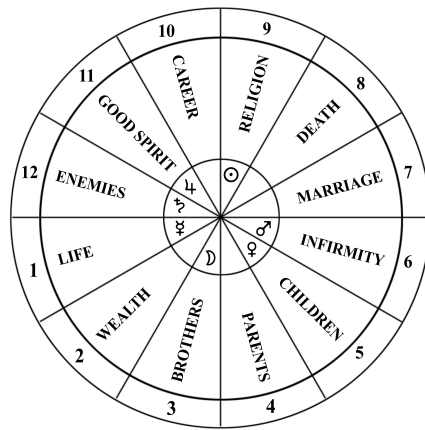
The text of the 4th century astrologer Firmicus Maternus gives a better insight into the origin of the 2nd house's association with wealth. He sees it as a house of 'increase'; yet whilst he recommends that it should be known primarily as 'the house of hope'⁴ he also mentions that it is called the 'Gate of Hell', which he assumes is due to the lack of access to the light of the ascendant:

"This house shows increase in personal hopes and material possessions. But it is a passive house and not aspected to the ascendant. Therefore it is called the Gate of Hell, because it is not in any way aspected to the ascendant."⁵

Significantly however, Firmicus also includes older Greek terminology, which informs us that the 8th house was known as *Epicataphora*, which means 'falling down into the Underworld'. The 2nd house was known as *Anaphora*, 'rising up from the Underworld', illustrating that although both were regarded as portals to the underworld and incorporated darker elements in their symbolism, there was an important distinction – the 8th was the portal of entry, the 2nd of release.

A further clue to the symbolism of the 2nd house lies in the ancient myth of Ishtar's descent into the underworld. It was impossible to enter the underworld unless completely naked, so her journey involved the removal of all her garments and jewels upon entry, these being returned to her possession upon release. The myth reflects the cyclical process of loss and increase which is symbolic of death and rebirth. The following extract from *World Mythology* by Donna Rosenberg is her own introduction to the myth which seems appropriate here. Her book is written about mythology, not astrology, so offers an independent viewpoint to consider. It is especially significant if one considers that there is an ancient association between Saturn (the traditional planet of death) and the 4th house; and the

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3. *Astronomica* 2.876. Typhon was a feared god of the Underworld.
 4. *Matheseos Libri VIII* II.XX.2
 5. *Ibid* II.XIX.3



The chart wheel shows some of the main spheres of activity associated with the houses by Firmicus and his contemporaries. It includes the planets which were considered to have ‘proper residence’ in each place, and which Firmicus referred to in the manner “this is the house of Venus”, etc.

House	Firmicus’ Name	Greek Name	Loose Translation
1	Ascendant	Anatole	Eastern rising
2	Gate of Hell	Anafora	Rising up from the underworld
3	Dea	Thea	Goddess
4	Imum Caelum	Ypogeon	Lowest heaven
5	Bona Fortuna	Agatha Tyche	Good luck
6	Mala Fortuna	Cace Tyche	Bad luck
7	Descendant	Dysis	Western setting
8	[Gate of Hell]	Epicataphora	Casting down into the underworld
9	Deus	Theos	God
10	Medium Caelum	Mesuranima	Highest heaven
11	Bonus Daemon	Agathos Daemon	Good spirit
12	Malus Daemon	Cacos Daemon	Bad spirit

Moon and the 3rd house (the 3rd house was known as ‘Dea’ meaning *Goddess* to classical astrologers because it was ‘the house of the Moon’):

“In early agricultural societies, productive soil was of major importance, and the entire community was earth-oriented. Ancient farming peoples observed that plants and people were born, grew to maturity, and died, and that others were born again, often the following spring. This fact became the central focus of religion. Death was an accepted part of the life cycle, for it was followed

by rebirth or new life. The people worshipped the Great Goddess to insure the fertility of their fields and themselves so that their community would survive.

Hades was not only the god of the dead, from which new life would emerge, but he was also known as the god of wealth. (His other name, Pluto, was derived from 'Ploutos' which means wealth.) The dead earth revived each spring to burst forth with new plant life; in addition, the earth contained the metals (copper and tin) from which bronze was made."⁶

From this passage it can be seen that the association of the 2nd house with wealth and material increase arose as a development of its underworld connection. It also makes sense that the ancients called the 3rd house 'Dea' meaning Goddess, because it was the Earth Goddess who continued the process begun by Hades and returned fertility to the Earth.

At an early stage the whole area surrounding the lower midheaven was one that related to the hidden process of renewal, the seed germinating beneath the ground, and the foetal embryo of returning fertility which celebrated its appearance at the ascendant. Within this process the 2nd house, being the portal of release, acquired a symbolic representation of the return of hope and physical and spiritual increase. It was seen as a house of expectation of benefit, as opposed to the 8th house being an area holding only fearful anticipation of loss. Over time this led to a more defined association with wealth, resources, material possessions, and all that assists our survival, with its general condition reflecting whether these are in meagre supply or abundance.

6. *World Mythology: An Anthology of the Great Myths and Epics*, (Harrap, London, 1986); p.15.

2nd House Associations Through History

- Manilius:** Unfortunate. The abode of Typhon.
- Others:** Livelihood; profit; inheritance; estate; fortune; (classical) business; gain. Intercourse with women.
- Firmicus:** Increase in personal hopes and material possessions. Expectation of inheritance and wealth. Passive and debilitated because it does not aspect the ascendant. 'Gate of Hell' (Anaphora).
- Al-Biruni:** Nutriment; livelihood; assistants. Profession of children. (10th from 5th)
- Lilly:** Estate, fortune, substance, wealth and poverty. Moveable goods.
- Modern:** Financial matters and possessions. Resources which support the physical body. Income. Feelings.

8th House Associations Through History

- Manilius:** Unfortunate. The abode of Typhon.
- Others** Death and its nature; trial; penalty; loss; weakness. (classical):
- Firmicus:** The kind of death. No planet other than the Moon rejoices in this house and then only in nocturnal charts. Debilitated and passive because it does not aspect the ascendant. Called 'Gate of Hell' (Epicataphora).
- Al-Biruni:** Death; murder, poison. Inheritance. Wife's property (2nd from 7th). Expenditure; poverty.
- Lilly:** Death; wills; partner's money. Fear and anguish of mind.
- Modern:** Income, taxes, legacies; shared feelings, sex, birth and death. Big business. Insurance. Crime.