

Ophiuchus - the 13th Sign of the Zodiac?

by Dieter Koch

One must never equate Sun signs with fixed star constellations.

Every few years we hear the same old news from critics of astrology, mostly astronomers and physicists who know nothing about astrology.



They argue that the signs of the zodiac used by astrologers do not correspond to the actual constellations of stars on the sky. They say that the real star constellations have been shifting relative to the astrological signs by nearly one month in the course of the last 2000 years. They explain this with the so-called precession of the equinoxes.

In addition, they claim that astrologers suppress a 13th constellation, the Serpent Bearer (Ophiuchus), despite the fact that the Sun passes each year through this constellation.

These statements are true in a certain sense. But they are **based on naïve and incorrect assumptions about the essence and history of astrology**, and therefore they miss the target. Those who argue against astrology that way may well understand a bit about astronomy. But they are incompetent regarding astrology and have not done their homework. They speak in the media about something they have never studied.

Ptolemy was fully aware of precession



Already in the second century C.E. the [astrologer and astronomer Ptolemy](#) was fully aware of precession and the issues mentioned above. He knew that the equinoctial points were slowly shifting in relations to the star constellations – by about 1° in the course of a human life span of 72 years (Ptolemy, *Almagest* VII.2.f). Still, he decided to give up star constellations and to let the zodiac begin with 0° Aries at the spring equinoctial point (Ptolemy, *Tetrabiblos* 1.10f). Why? He did this in the opinions that the actual constellations of fixed stars were not relevant for astrology, that the sun signs should be fixed at the cardinal points of the Sun's annual path. Aries begins at the spring equinox, Cancer at the summer solstice, Libra at the autumn equinox and Capricorn at the winter solstice.

Ptolemy's decision was only logical because astrologers had always considered sun signs to be related to the seasons. In ancient Mesopotamia around 2000 B.C.E. the appearance of the Libra stars immediately before sunrise in fitting symbolism indicated the autumn equinox (as documented by cuneiform text *Mul.apin* I iii 1-2). 1000 years later, when this rule did not work anymore due to the shifting of the equinoxes by precession, the beginning of autumn was redefined as the entry of the Sun into Libra.

Sun signs vers. fixed star constellations

Modern astrology has remained true to this old tradition. It does not consider constellations of the fixed stars, but divides the zodiac in correspondence to the cardinal points of the seasons. **The actual star constellations in the sky are astrologically irrelevant. One must never equate Sun signs (signs of the zodiac) with fixed star constellations.** Fixed star constellations are configurations of stars visible in the sky, sun signs however cannot be seen in the sky. They are mathematical divisions of the annual path of the Sun in the sky, of precisely 30° size for each of the 12 parts.

If astronomers claim that astrology cannot be true because it does not use the actual star constellations, they claim this in the mistaken belief that astrologers have forgotten where the fixed star constellations are. **In fact, every astrologer knows they are different from the astrological zodiac signs.** The historical truth few are concerned with lies in the fact that the fixed star constellations received their

names from the seasons and from the annual rhythm of the Sun's movement, not the other way around. Where the constellations are found nowadays in the sky is simply irrelevant. The astrologer is only interested in the sun signs, based on the seasons.

Now what about Ophiuchus, the Serpent Bearer? Because this is also – only – a fixed star constellation, it has no astrological relevance. The Sun passes through it nowadays between 29 november and 17 december, which falls into the astrological sign of Sagittarius.

