

The Divine Zodiac - A Window into God's Mind or Simply Humanity's Greatest Work of Art?

by Ray Grasse



Zodiac clock

Source: [Hermann Traub](#), [Pixabay](#).

When I first became involved with astrology, a number of things intrigued and even startled me about this discipline. One of those was the fact that it even was accurate at all and said things about my life the astrologers I spoke to couldn't possibly have known.

But over time, the one feature of astrology that came to fascinate me most of all, as much for aesthetic as for philosophical reasons, was the zodiac itself.

At first glance, it seemed like a simple enough system, at least if I went by what the newspapers said. It suggested that there were twelve basic personality types. Simple enough; nothing terribly mind-blowing about that.

But the more I learned about the zodiac over the ensuing decades, the more I came to see intricacies in this model that went far beyond any simple categorizing of personality types. Within that twelvefold pattern were overlapping layers of meaning and patterns of interrelationship that struck me as surprisingly complex. I've likened it in some ways to coming across one of those rare old watches that seems simple on its surface, but when you open it up, you discover a complex network of gears and springs that tells you not only the time of day, but lunar phases, Greenwich Mean Time, yearly calendars, and the positions of the planets (what the clockmaking trade calls the "planetarium function"). For me, looking into the zodiac felt much like that.

In fact, the complexity of the zodiac was such that I couldn't help but think that no human mind could have conceived it. It wasn't simply complex; it was transcendently beautiful in its own way. If this were simply the result of random ideas and beliefs cobbled together over the centuries by random astrologers in different countries, it wouldn't have had that internal intricacy and perfection of interrelated parts, I thought. It all led me to ponder a question that I still think about:

Was the zodiac invented or discovered?

That is, was it simply a human concoction, like the English language or a Beethoven symphony, but with no universal validity? Or was it indeed a genuine archetypal pattern that humans simply *uncovered*, and which existed in some state or form before humans came along, therefore offering us a window onto something universal?

I'd like to suggest that we can think of the zodiac as a bit of both: a human construct, but one that incorporates something profoundly significant beyond any purely human contribution. Understanding it is a cosmic detective story, I came to believe, one that takes us even further into the hidden depths of consciousness.

Looking behind the Clockface

The twelvefold zodiac that we know today, with all of its associations and complexities, didn't appear fully formed all at once. Whatever the ultimate source or nature of the zodiac, humanity's *understanding* of it developed over centuries, even millennia. It's not my purpose here to chronicle that entire history, which rightly deserves a book in itself, so I'll say just a few words about it.

Some believe that the zodiac's roots extend back into the dimmest reaches of prehistory, based on scattered clues that have been uncovered over the last century. One of those involves indications that zodiacal signs like Taurus may well appear on the walls of prehistoric caves like those in Lascaux, France (dating back roughly 19,000 years); these show bull-type images positioned along with star patterns that resemble the Pleiades star cluster. So certain signs may have roots that go back many thousands of years earlier than generally believed.¹

But our full-blown twelvefold zodiac seems to have arisen in Mesopotamia between roughly 3200 BCE and 500 BCE. Although there are many constellations scattered throughout the entire sky, with many myths assigned to virtually all of them, the early astronomers and astrologers of the Middle East began to focus attention on those constellations grouped along the ecliptic—the path through the sky traced by the Sun, Moon, and planets in their yearly movements.

Over time, that basic zodiac was modified by countries like Greece, Egypt, Persia, India, and finally Europe, having split along the way into two parallel zodiacs, one sidereal (star-based), the other more seasonal ("tropical"), while simultaneously acquiring the wide range of associations many assume have always been part and parcel of the zodiac.

Here I'd like to look at a few of those associations, consider how these fit together in our modern understanding of the zodiac, and from there see what this implies.

The Twelvefold Zodiac

Perhaps the most important fact about the zodiac is the one we most take for granted: *its twelvefold nature*. After all, why not divide the circle into eight sections? Or sixteen? Or twenty-four? As you'll see, this one fact underlies virtually all the subsequent layers of meanings we'll be looking at here and makes them possible in ways that other numerical divisions of the circle don't allow, at least not in the same way.²

What I find intriguing is how there seems to be an orderly sequence or narrative to this sequence, as if those twelve signs were telling a *story*, from simple to complex—a story that doesn't impress quite as dramatically when approached from the reverse direction. In my book *When the Stars Align*, I touch on a teaching by the mystic Shelly Trimmer as to how the zodiac expresses a mystical unfoldment of consciousness from the simple awareness of Aries all the way through to the complexities of Aquarius and Pisces. But I also remember when my first astrology teacher, Maureen Cleary, addressed this progression in her own decidedly psychological way, which I would paraphrase roughly like this:

Aries is like the birth of a child, a primal awakening of raw awareness, comparable to the first shoots of life emerging out of the ground during springtime. In Taurus, that awareness starts to grow and blossom further, with an expanding sense of the tangible world it sees around itself, along with a feeling of possessiveness about those things and people—a shift from "me!" to mine!" In Gemini, the earliest glimmers of mind and thinking start to appear, while in Cancer, the child is becoming increasingly aware of itself as part of a family and starts awakening emotionally. In Leo, the soul is starting to discover its own creativity, as well as ego, but also begins to feel the first inklings of romantic love. In Virgo, the soul is becoming more discriminating about itself, its appearance, its choice of friends and associations, and possibly entering into the work or service phase of its life.

In Libra, it is now opening up to the possibility of committed partnerships and bonding with others. In Scorpio, that bonding and relationship instinct takes the critical step of physical intimacy and sexuality, while also becoming more aware of death, birth, and the transitory nature of things. With Sagittarius, the person begins to move beyond sexuality and personal desires into philosophizing and a broader expansion of horizons. In Capricorn, that perspective comes to include a sense of status in the world and a desire to forge a reputation and lasting achievements. In Aquarius, a far broader awareness of community beyond oneself enters in, and with it, the importance of contributing something of value to the world. Finally, in Pisces one's attention turns to ultimates, and the mysteries of spirituality and God.

The Elements

While there are twelve zodiacal signs, these boil down to four basic kinds, commonly referred to as the elements: Earth, Water, Fire, and Air.



The four elements

Source: Water: [rony_michaud](#); Fire: [Hans](#); Air: [Enrique](#); Earth: [John Mounsey](#), all via [Pixabay](#), CC0 Creative Commons

Earth is practical and more oriented towards material and functional values; Water is more emotional and experiences life more through its feelings; Fire is about energy, assertiveness, courage, and primal self-awareness. Air is more involved with mind, mental experiencing, and social interactions.

There are three Fire signs, existing at 120-degree angles to one another: Aries, Leo, and Sagittarius. There are three Earth signs: Taurus, Virgo, and Capricorn; three Water signs: Cancer, Scorpio, and Pisces; and three Air signs: Gemini, Libra, and Aquarius.

These elements have varying types of relationships with each other. Signs of one element relate more harmoniously with certain

other elements, while being more likely to clash with others. For instance, Earth signs get along well with other Earth signs, as well as Water signs, but experience more friction with Fire and Air signs. Air signs get along with other Air signs, as well as with Fire signs, but not so easily with Water and Earth signs.

The Modes

In contrast with the four elements, the three zodiacal modes of Cardinal, Fixed and Mutable relate to three *types of action*, and to how individuals of varying elements move into and through the world. Cardinal signs tend to initiate things: they're restless, they forge ahead into experience. Fixed signs are more likely to consolidate their status, and are more focused or even stubborn in temperament. Mutable signs are more flexible and adaptable and less focused than either fixed or cardinal signs.

When you couple these three modes with the four elements, you begin to glimpse much of what comprises the unique character of each sign. For example, when Earth is in its cardinal or initiating mode (Capricorn), it expresses itself as worldly ambition, planning in practical ways, and looking beyond the present. In its fixed mode (Taurus), Earth expresses itself more in terms of shoring up resources and maintaining security. In its mutable mode (Virgo), Earth expresses itself by adapting itself to situations and people, as well as to intelligently discriminating the various phenomena it perceives. In all three of those modes, it's the same element, but manifesting in uniquely different ways and with uniquely different aims.

The Polarity Principle

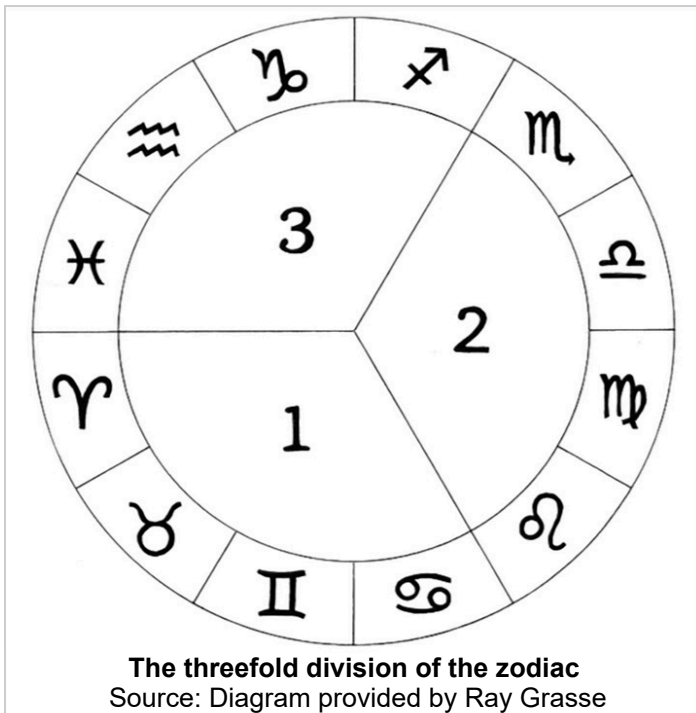
As we have already seen, each sign has its own unique identity, yet that identity is bound up with the sign directly opposite it.

An example I've used in previous books is that of the old comedy team of Laurel and Hardy. While Laurel had his own distinct personality, it can't really be seen as separate from that of his partner, and vice versa. There is an identity and a chemistry within that partnership that's distinctly different from what each of those figures represents solely on his own.

That holds true for each sign and its opposite as well. For example, Taurus is often related to the principle of personal wealth, while its opposite sign, Scorpio, is related to the principle of other people's wealth. Together, the two might be considered as dual expressions of the common principle of *resources*, as well as *security*. Likewise, Gemini and Sagittarius are very different in many ways, yet together express the common principle of *communication*, and of *knowledge*. Although Leo and Aquarius harbor many distinct meanings of their own, both express the principles of *pleasure* and *creativity*, in the one case more personal, in the other, more collectively.

In short, there is a linkage of meaning between opposite signs that exists above and beyond any sign's role within the zodiac's twelvefold narrative or its relationship to other elements and modes. Some have even suggested we should think of the zodiac as actually being composed not of twelve signs but six, fanning out into dual expressions.

The Threefold Division of the Zodiac



Like a pie, the zodiac can be sliced up into three broad sections such that its first four signs—Aries, Taurus, Gemini, and Cancer—constitute the first third. Leo, Virgo, Libra, and Scorpio constitute the second third, while the last four signs—Sagittarius, Capricorn, Aquarius, and Pisces—represent the last third.

As I touched on in chapter 20, these three sections represent increasingly broad avenues of expression for each of the elements. Hence, while all the Air signs represent the faculty of mind, and mental forms of experience generally, Gemini is the most personal form, whereas Libra is more interpersonal, and Aquarius the most global and transpersonal of them all. In the same way, all of the four elements broaden out in their expression the further they move away from the earlier stages of the zodiac.

The Gender of the Signs

The ancient Pythagoreans believed that numbers possessed qualities of gender, that is, a positive or negative polarity. As such, the number 1 is masculine in nature, 2 is feminine, 3 is masculine, and so on into infinity.

By the same token, the signs of the zodiac can also be seen as possessing gender, with each possessing either masculine or feminine qualities. The alternating signs of Aries, Gemini, Leo, Libra, Sagittarius, and Aquarius are considered masculine or positive in nature; Taurus, Cancer, Virgo, Scorpio, Capricorn and Pisces are all feminine or negative. Of course, one shouldn't think of positive or negative here in terms of good or bad, but rather like the positive or negative poles of a magnet or battery. Masculine or positive signs are simply more extraverted and outwardly directed in nature, while feminine or negative signs are more inwardly focused.

The Human Body as a Zodiacal Map

Astrologers have long related the various signs of the zodiac to various parts of the body. Nor is this done in some haphazard way, so that Aries relates to one part of the body while Taurus relates to a completely unconnected part: there is a specific and regular order to how these all fit together, all the way from the head down to the feet.

The head relates to Aries; the throat to Taurus; the shoulders and arms to Gemini; the chest and breasts to Cancer; the heart

and upper back to Leo; the stomach and abdomen to Virgo; the kidneys and lower back to Libra; the genitals and anus to Scorpio; the hips and thighs to Sagittarius; the knees to Capricorn, the ankles to Aquarius; and the feet to Pisces.

There is deep symbolism at work here. In their respective functions, all of those body parts embody the meanings of their corresponding signs to a remarkable degree, in a way that's clearly not arbitrary or random. In addition, how those body parts interrelate likewise says something about how the respective zodiacal energies interact. Just as the zodiac tells a certain story in its sequencing, the body tells what might be thought of as a biological story in its zodiacal symbolism. There is an exquisite holism in how these parts work together.

The Chakric Wheel

To my mind, perhaps the most striking layer of meaning contained within the zodiac—and one that's been a key feature of this book—is the uncanny way it relates to the esoteric model of the chakras. Indeed, the correlation is so precise that it's the one feature, more than any other, that led me to believe the zodiac is not simply a random product of the human imagination but instead expresses a set of eternal truths.

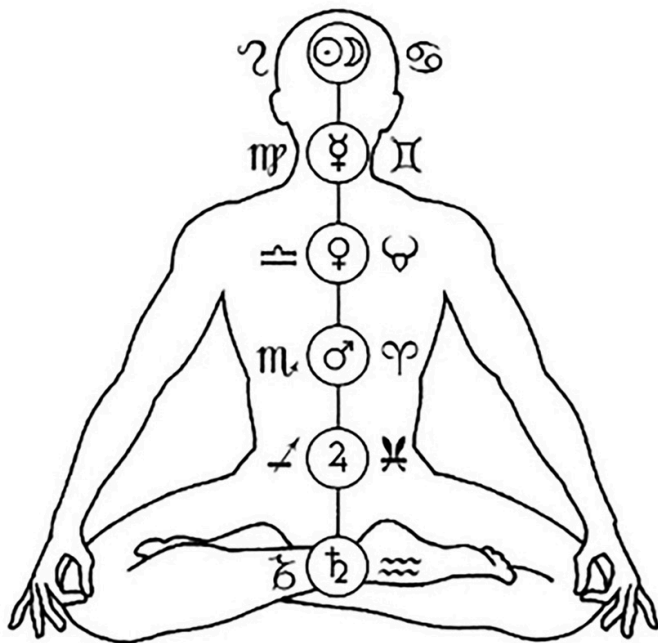
As we've seen, simply spin the zodiac around so that Leo and Cancer appear at the top, and line up the traditional planetary rulers along the middle of this wheel, and you find an astonishingly precise correspondence with what yogic mystics have described in connection with the chakras. Each chakra has its central, balanced expression, represented by the visible planets, as well as its masculine and feminine expressions off to the sides, these relating to the zodiacal signs. (More traditionally-minded astrologers will notice here the similarity of this arrangement to the *thema mundi*, considered to be a cosmic template of existence, the birth chart of the world itself.)

According to this cross-pollination of systems, we see that the zodiac represents a map of archetypal psychology, with the signs being associated with the various levels of consciousness along the spine. This correspondence further helps us to understand the notion of co-rulerships, and why certain traditional planets are linked to two different signs, rather than just one.

Whereas the Sun only rules Leo and the Moon only governs Cancer, Mercury traditionally rules both Gemini and Virgo; Venus rules both Taurus and Libra; Mars, both Aries and Scorpio; Jupiter, both Pisces and Sagittarius; and Saturn, both Capricorn and Aquarius.



The human body relating to the zodiac
Source: Diagram provided by Ray Grasse



The chakras and the zodiac
Source: Diagram provided by Ray Grasse

Why should that be? The chakric model offers us a possible explanation, with the unique layout of its different centers.

Putting It All Together

These are just a few of the meaningful patterns associated with the zodiac, and there are still others, like decans, hemispheres, and lunar mansions. As I mentioned at the outset, all of these aspects of the zodiac overlap onto one another and create a multidimensional tapestry of meanings that interweave like systems of the human body—arteries, nerves, organs, the lymphatic network, the muscles, the skin—all working together organically to create a seamless whole.

In fact, so interrelated are these various layers and features that the meaning of any one sign is integrally tied into all these intermeshing layers and patterns. In other words, dig down deep enough into any one sign, and you automatically start tugging on all of these other threads. To illustrate that point, let's take one sign and examine it more closely—in this case, Aries.

- One of the most significant associations with Aries is specifically due to its position within the zodiac, as the perceived first of twelve signs; therefore this sign represents new beginnings and the early stages of all endeavors.
- Elementally, Aries is composed of Fire, which tells us a great deal about its fiery nature and its pioneering but famously hot-tempered tendencies.
- We also see some of its initiating nature in the fact that its mode is Cardinal, an orientation heavily focused upon doing, and on forging ahead into future undertakings.
- In terms of dividing up the entire zodiac into thirds, Aries represents the very first of the three fire signs, and therefore expresses the adventurous impulses of that element at their most personal and self-oriented.
- In terms of gender, Aries is an intrinsically masculine or extraverted sign; hence it is more focused on activity in the outer world than on the inner domain of feelings and reflectivity.
- Aries acquires some of its character through its position as a counterbalance to Libra at the other end of the zodiac. Whereas Libra is more passive and diplomatic, Aries is more assertive and decisive. When these two are viewed together, however, we realize that both signs relate to the broader principle of *relationship*, and the me/other dynamic in general. Aries represents the pure impulsive expression of self and Libra represents the mirror of “other” whereby self comes to know itself better—a point that isn’t nearly as clear when examining Aries solely by itself.
- In terms of its symbolic position within the body, Aries relates to the head—the part of the body that governs the entire body via the brain. Thus this sign is the proverbial commander-in-chief, the four-star general of the zodiacal armed forces, as it were. This part of the body, and of the zodiac, is most identified with the “me!” part of the personality; if future scientists determined they could preserve only one part of your body, you would no doubt choose the head, because that’s where the bulk of your awareness is focused. (Or would you say your feet, or your arms? Not very likely.) Likewise, Aries is the part of the zodiac that relates most to your basic identity, your conventional self and personality. Like the human head, it also holds the greatest concentration of awareness out of the entire twelvefold system.
- Aries relates to the third chakra, which has to do with basic drives, desire nature, and assertiveness. This chakric level concerns the emergence of the ego at its most primal and rudimentary; it’s the awareness of “me” versus “the other.” At its core, this chakra represents the warrior principle, with Aries representing the more masculine and extraverted side of that energy, in contrast with Scorpio (which, like Aries, is traditionally ruled by Mars), represents the more feminine, inwardly-focused side of that chakra.

In short, the meaning of Aries, like that of any sign, is really a combination of *all* these factors and layers. Take any one of those away, and you lose something of the sign’s symbolic nuances.

Conclusion

As I hope has become apparent, there is an extraordinary design and elegance to how all these parts fit together. So was all of this invented, or was it discovered? To my mind, there are only so many ways to explain this multilayered construction.

One is to suggest that indeed the zodiac was consciously invented: it was all part of an intentional plan by a cabal of esoteric geniuses, working either independently or in collaboration, who rolled it out over many generations and across various cultural borders to its present stage.

Much more likely to my mind is the possibility that while the zodiac was created by human hands over time, its assorted ideas issued out of a divine intuition, a spiritual wisdom, in much the same way that our greatest myths—like the *Mahabharata*, the *Iliad*, and the *Odyssey*—arose from the minds of spiritual geniuses. I’m reminded here of Carl Jung’s suggestion that astrology represents a repository of humanity’s psychological knowledge projected onto the heavens, almost like a giant rorschach ink blot. But it’s a rorschachian projection that taps into universal truths, drawing upon a body of divine wisdom that far transcends any one person or culture, much as the Biblical story of the garden transcends Jewish culture, or the *Iliad* and *Odyssey* transcend Greek culture. In turn, those truths may well tell us something important about consciousness itself.

Furthermore, our understanding of the zodiac was shaped and verified over time *empirically*, by means of the efforts of astrologers testing these ideas out over centuries of time. After all, there have been countless conceptual tributaries feeding into this evolving body of astrological knowledge through the millennia.

WHEN THE STARS ALIGN

reflections on astrology, life, death
and other mysteries



*"Ray Grasse is one of the hidden geniuses of
contemporary spirituality."*

Richard Smoley, author *Inner Christianity, Introduction to the Occult*

RAY GRASSE

When the Stars Align, by Ray Grasse
This book can be purchased at [amazon.com](https://www.amazon.com)

Why did some of those ideas and techniques stick, while others fell by the wayside? The likely answer is that the ideas and associations that really worked were retained, while those that didn't were discarded. In the end, it's left us with a possible skeleton key into the mind of God.

But even if one doesn't accept that the zodiac holds some greater metaphysical importance, we're then entitled to pose another, very different question:

Could it be that the zodiac represents humanity's greatest work of art?