

Zodiac

(Astronomy & Astrology)

zodiac, in astronomy and astrology, a belt around the heavens extending 9° on either side of the ecliptic, the plane of Earth's orbit and of the Sun's apparent annual path. The orbits of the Moon and of the principal planets also lie entirely within the zodiac. The 12 astrological signs of the zodiac are each considered to occupy $1/12$ (or 30°) of its great circle. These signs no longer correspond to the astronomical constellations in which the Sun actually appears. The constellations are irregular in size and shape, and the Sun regularly passes through one constellation (Ophiuchus) that is not considered a member of the zodiac.

Because most of the constellations

through which the ecliptic passes represent animals, the ancient Greeks called its zone zōdiakos kyklos, "circle of animals," or ta zōdia, "the little animals." The size and number of zodiacal constellations varied in antiquity and became fixed only with the development of mathematical astronomy. The list below gives the constellations of the zodiac, with the dates of the Sun's passage through them in the era when their boundaries were fixed. These dates are still used for the astrological signs, though precession of the equinoxes has shifted the constellations eastward; e.g., on January 1 the direction of the sun is now in Sagittarius instead of Capricornus. The history of the symbols is unknown; they seem to appear first in Greek manuscripts of the late Middle Ages.



Aries (Ram): March 21–April 19

♉ Taurus (Bull) : April 20–May 20

♊ Gemini (Twins) : May 21–June 21

♋ Cancer (Crab) : June 22–July 22

♌ Leo (Lion) : July 23–August 22

♍ Virgo (Virgin) : August 23–
September 22

♎ Libra (Balance) : September 23–
October 23

♏ Scorpius (Scorpion) : October 24–
November 21

♐ Sagittarius (Archer) : November
22–December 21

♑ Capricornus (Goat) : December 22–
January 19

 Aquarius (Water Bearer) : January 20–February 18

 Pisces (Fish) : February 19–March 20

Sagittarius

constellation and astrological sign Sagittarius, (Latin: "Archer") in astronomy, zodiacal constellation in the southern sky lying between Capricornus and Scorpius, at about 19 hours right ascension and 25° south declination. The centre of the Milky Way Galaxy lies in the radio source Sagittarius A*. Near the western border of Sagittarius is the winter solstice, the southernmost point reached by the Sun in its apparent annual journey among the stars. This constellation also contains the Lagoon and Trifid nebulas. The brightest star is Kaus Australis (from the Arabic for "bow" and the Latin for "southern,"

respectively; it is also called Epsilon Sagittarii), with a magnitude of 1.9. Many of the stars are arranged in the prominent asterism called the Teapot.

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In astrology, Sagittarius is the ninth sign of the zodiac, considered as governing the period from about November 22 to about December 21. It is represented either by a centaur shooting a bow and arrow or by an arrow drawn across a bow. The identification of Sagittarius as a mounted archer was made by the Babylonians as early as the 11th century BCE.

asterism

astronomy

asterism, a pattern of stars that is not a constellation. An asterism can be part of a constellation, such as the Big Dipper, which is in the constellation Ursa Major, and

can even span across constellations, such as the Summer Triangle, which is formed by the three bright stars Deneb, Altair, and Vega. Asterisms are not restricted to stars that can be seen with the naked eye; many are best observed with binoculars or a small telescope.

Scorpius

constellation and astrological sign

Scorpius, (Latin: "Scorpion") also called Scorpio, in astronomy, zodiacal constellation lying in the southern sky between Libra and Sagittarius, at about 16 hours 30 minutes right ascension and 30° south declination. Its brightest star, Antares (Alpha Scorpii), the 15th brightest star in the sky, has a magnitude of 1.1. Its name comes from the Greek for "rival of Ares" (i.e., rival of the planet Mars) and was probably given because of

the star's red colour and brightness. The brightest X-ray source in the sky, Scorpius X-1, is found in this constellation.

In astrology, Scorpius (or Scorpio) is the eighth sign of the zodiac, considered as governing the period from about October 24 to about November 21. Its representation as a scorpion is related to the Greek legend of the scorpion that stung Orion to death (said to be why Orion sets as Scorpius rises in the sky). Another Greek myth relates that a scorpion caused the horses of the Sun to bolt when they were being driven for a day by the inexperienced youth Phaeton.

Cancer

constellation and astrological sign

Cancer, (Latin: "Crab") in astronomy, zodiacal constellation lying in the northern sky between

Leo and Gemini, at about 8 hours 25 minutes right ascension and 20° north declination. It contains the well-known star cluster called Praesepe, or the Beehive. Its brightest star, Al Tarf (Arabic for "the end" [of one of the crab's legs]), also called Beta Cancrī, is quite dim, with a magnitude of 3.6.

In astrology, Cancer is the fourth sign of the zodiac, considered as governing the period from about June 22 to about July 22. Its representation as a crab (or lobster or crayfish) is related to the crab in Greek mythology that pinched Heracles while he was fighting the Lernaean hydra. Crushed by Heracles, the crab was rewarded by Heracles' enemy, Hera, by being placed in the heavens.

Aquarius

astronomy and astrology

Aquarius, (Latin: "Water Bearer") in astronomy, zodiacal constellation lying in the southern sky between Capricornus and Pisces, at about 22 hours right ascension and 10° south declination. It lacks striking features, the brightest star, Sadalmelik (Arabic for "the lucky stars of the king"), being of magnitude 3.0.

In astrology, Aquarius is the 11th sign of the zodiac, considered as governing the period from about January 20 to about February 18. Its representation as a man pouring a stream of water out of a jug came about, it has been suggested, because in ancient times the rising of Aquarius coincided in the Middle East with a period of floods and rain.

Pisces
constellation and astrological sign

Pisces, (Latin: "Fishes") in astronomy, zodiacal constellation in the northern sky between Aries and Aquarius, at about 1 hour right ascension and 15° north declination. The vernal equinox, the point where the Sun's annual apparent path takes it north of the celestial equator and from which celestial longitude and right ascension are measured, lies in Pisces. The constellation contains only faint stars without any striking grouping; the brightest star, Eta Piscium, has a magnitude of 3.6.

In astrology, Pisces is the 12th sign of the zodiac, considered as governing the period from about February 19 to about March 20. Its representation as two fish tied together is usually related to the Greek myth of Aphrodite and Eros, who jumped into a river to escape the monster Typhon and changed into

fish, or, alternatively, the two fish that carried them to safety.

Libra

constellation and astrological sign

Libra, (Latin: "Balance") in astronomy, zodiacal constellation in the southern sky lying between Scorpius and Virgo, at about 15 hours 30 minutes right ascension and 15° south declination. Its stars are faint; the brightest star, Zubeneschamali (Arabic for "northern claw," as it was earlier regarded as part of Scorpius; also called Beta Librae), has a magnitude of 2.6.

In astrology, Libra is the seventh sign of the zodiac, considered as governing the period from about September 22 to about October 23. It is represented by a woman (sometimes identified with Astraea, the Roman goddess of justice),

holding a balance scale or by the balance alone.

occultism

occultism, various theories and practices involving a belief in and knowledge or use of supernatural forces or beings. Such beliefs and practices—principally magical or divinatory—have occurred in all human societies throughout recorded history, with considerable variations both in their nature and in the attitude of societies toward them. In the West the term occultism has acquired intellectually and morally pejorative overtones that do not obtain in other societies where the practices and beliefs concerned do not run counter to the prevailing worldview.

Occult practices centre on the presumed ability of the

practitioner to manipulate natural laws for personal benefit or on behalf of another; such practices tend to be regarded as evil only when they also involve the breaking of moral laws. Some anthropologists have argued that it is not possible to make a clear-cut distinction between magic—a principal component of occultism—and religion, and this may well be true of the religious systems of some nonliterate societies. The argument does not hold, however, for any of the major religions, which regard both natural and moral law as immutable.

The Western tradition of occultism, as popularly conceived, is of an ancient "secret philosophy" underlying all occult practices. This secret philosophy derives ultimately from Hellenistic magic and alchemy on the one hand and from Jewish mysticism on the other. The principal Hellenistic source is

the Corpus Hermeticum, the texts associated with Hermes Trismegistos, which are concerned with astrology and other occult sciences and with spiritual regeneration.

The Jewish element is supplied by the Kabbala (the doctrine of a secret mystical interpretation of the Torah), which had been familiar to scholars in Europe since the Middle Ages and which was linked with the Hermetic texts during the Renaissance. The resulting Hermetic-Kabbalistic tradition, known as Hermetism, incorporated both theory and magical practice, with the latter presented as natural, and thus good, magic, in contrast to the evil magic of sorcery or witchcraft.

Alchemy was also absorbed into the body of Hermetism, and this link was strengthened in the early 17th

century with the appearance of Rosicrucianism, an alleged secret brotherhood that utilized alchemical symbolism and taught secret wisdom to its followers, creating a spiritual alchemy that survived the rise of empirical science and enabled Hermetism to pass unscathed into the period of the Enlightenment.

During the 18th century the tradition was taken up by esoterically inclined Freemasons who could not find an occult philosophy within Freemasonry. These enthusiasts persisted, both as individual students of Hermetism and, in continental Europe, as groups of occult practitioners, into the 19th century, when the growth of religious skepticism led to an increased rejection of orthodox religion by the educated and a consequent search for salvation by other means—including

occultism.

But those interested turned to new forms of occultism rather than to the Hermetic tradition: on the one hand to spiritualism, the practice of alleged regular communication between the living and the spirits of the dead through a living "medium," and on the other hand to theosophy, a blend of Western occultism and Eastern mysticism that proved to be a most effective propagator of occultism but whose influence had declined markedly by the late 20th century.

Indeed, despite the 19th-century revival, occult ideas have failed to gain acceptance in academic circles, although they have occasionally influenced the work of major artists, such as the poet William Butler Yeats and the painter Wassily Kandinsky, and occultism in Europe and North

America seems destined to remain
the province of popular culture.