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## [Steven Birchfield](#)

is a thoughtful and articulate astrologer, who has investigated the ancient sources of the cosmic science. He has developed a comprehensive understanding of the traditional bases of astrology and has put his knowledge into a series of articles that we will be presenting on Astrology on the Web over coming months.

An astrologer with over 30 years experience in astrological practice and social services, Steven is now studying for his PhD and a diploma in Mediæval Astrology. He tells us he has resided in Africa,

## Hellenistic Astrology

### The Living Signs

#### part 2: A Quality of 'Life' – Seeing and Perception

*Steven Birchfield, an astrologer and philosopher, has been writing a series for us on Hellenistic Astrology, the underlying basis of our system. This section continues his fascinating exploration of the Living Signs, especially with regard to the aspects and the concept of signs "casting a glance" at one another.*

Aspects were the sense of sight to the *zoidia*. In fact the word "aspect" comes from the Greek word "to look". The different types of glances the *zoidia* have towards each other are the same in all respects that a person would make. Psychologically we make a distinction between things that we see (which is a passive action) and things that we perceive or behold (when something "catches your eye" and we consciously receive an impression). Similarly, the *zoidia* made distinctions in how they looked or saw ahead in the order of the Zodiac while they perceived those following them. In Medieval astrology seeing ahead became known as 'sinister' and perceiving behind as 'dexter'.

Curtis Manwaring gives a simple and precise explanation of this aspect of 'seeing'. [See figure 1]

*"What determines the signs seeing and perceiving is the angle between the signs. The angles must be perfect divisions of a circle until 7 rays (one representing each of the visible planets) are fulfilled, and it also must be divisible by 30 degrees with no remainder (because a whole zoidion sees or*



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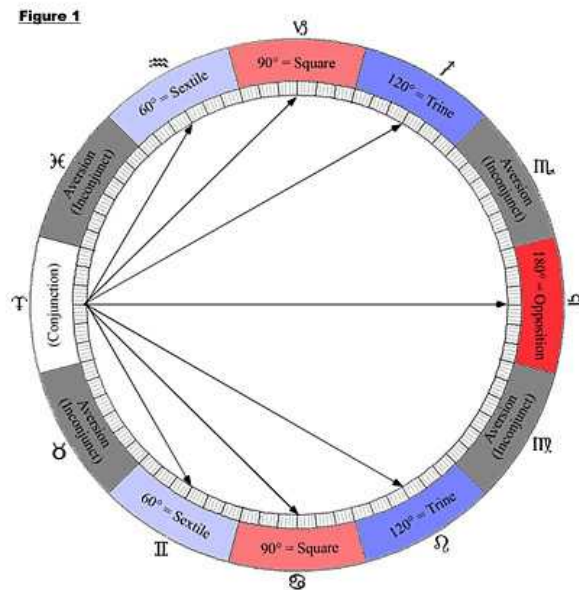
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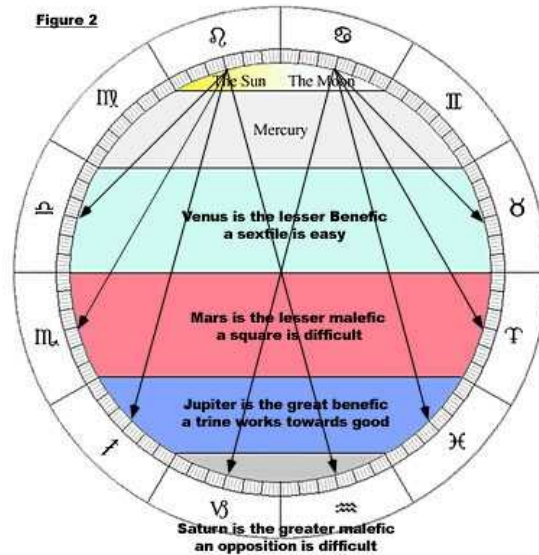
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*perceives, not a part of it). First we divide the zodiac circle into 2 equal portions. We get half a circle or 180 degrees. This represents the opposition and first ray. Then we divide it into 3 equal portions and we get a trine, which is 120 degrees. This forms the 2nd and 3rd rays because the sign looks forward and perceives behind. Then we divide it into 4 equal portions and we get 90 degrees each, which each forms a square ray. Since the opposition is already accounted for, we have the addition of the 4th and 5th rays 90 degrees forward and backward in the order of the signs. When we divide by 5 we get 72 degrees, but it is not divisible by 30, so it is not an aspect. When we divide by 6 we get the hexagon (or sextile) of six equal portions of 60 degrees. Since the 2 trines and opposition have been accounted for, we have the 6th and 7th rays, both ahead and behind in the order of the signs." [5]*



The relative strength of this 'seeing' aspect, or the strength of the relationship, was also based on a simple relationship of familiarity. From Leo to Capricorn was the 'diurnal' half, as the Sun is the diurnal sect Lord and from Cancer to Aquarius was 'nocturnal' because the Moon was the nocturnal sect Lord. Leo looked forward to Libra and Cancer perceived Taurus. The aspect, being made through three signs, was a sextile ray of the benefic nature of the common ruler to Libra and Taurus: Venus. So the sextile was profitable. The look forward from Leo to Scorpio was similar in nature to the Moon's perception back to Aries: a square, which was of the nature of Mars, the ruler of Scorpio and Aries—difficult. The ray forward from Leo to Sagittarius and from the Moon to Pisces were similar and of the nature of Jupiter, a trine and very beneficial. And finally the ray from Leo to Aquarius was the same as the ray from the Moon to Capricorn, an opposition and of the nature of Saturn. [See figure 2]



Of course there is an order and geometry to the Greek concept. Ibn-Ezra in his *Book of Reasons*, gives us a unique perspective as to the harmonics involved in the Hellenistic model—but it was not necessarily just the geometry that decided it or made the rules by which it applied. It was not just an applied science that determined how the aspects were formed, but also a quality of life through 'familiar' relationships, which the mathematical concept supports and gives testimony to.

What a *zoidion* sees or perceives, just like with us, is dependent upon its position in respect to the other *zoidia*. When we look straight ahead at an object, what happens? You see that object, but the things which are immediately on either side fall out of perspective. Extreme cases of this are called "tunnel vision". As I am writing this I am looking straight ahead at my screen and that is where my attention is focused. I have a coffee cup standing on my desk next to my screen, but although it's in my field of vision it falls out of perspective. In order to 'perceive' that cup I have to shift my eyes and attention. If Aries looks at Libra then the immediate *zoidia* on either side of Libra fall out of our perspective. The object of focus is Libra, the opposition, while the *zoidia* Scorpio and Virgo, are no longer in the field of perception. These two *zoidia* then were in "aversion" to Aries, or what we know as inconjunct. Likewise again looking straight ahead from Aries, our vision does not cover a full 180 degrees or what we call peripheral vision, and neither could the *zoidia*. They could not see or perceive those *zoidia* that were immediately beside them. So Aries could not see or perceive Taurus or Pisces, or what we call the semi-sextile.

*"The two signs, which are each side of the one (sign) in question and their opposites, viz. the second and twelfth and the sixth and eighth are not in aspect and are known as inconjunct."* [6]

*"The signs that have no aspect between them nor [are they of the same element] nature are four – the 2nd, the 6th, the 8th and the 12th. The weakest among them are the 6th and the 12th."* [7] *Some of the signs have enmity by aspect yet friendship in another way, either because they have the same ascension [time], or same strength, or by ecliptical position."* [8]

*"The position of the zoidia unconnected to one another has the numerical interval from 2, 6, 8, 12, and the zoidia taken in such intervals are also called averse to one another. And so the stars found in these zoidia become inharmonious. And sometimes they bring about hostile conditions, sometimes separations and banishments when such a condition has befallen*

*all, whether by parents to children, by brothers, by man and wife, by fellowship, or by slaves and masters, and all resembling these."* [9]

### Good Vision Made Better

Being able to see each other by aspect, the perception of the *zoidia* could be strengthened through also having a sense of familiarity with others. This kind of 'looking' or 'perceiving' was based on being equal distances from the two solstice signs of Cancer and Capricorn. They could see and perceive each other because of equal authority, based on the fact that they are the same height with respect to the celestial equator and because their diurnal arcs [10] were equal in length. [See figure 3]

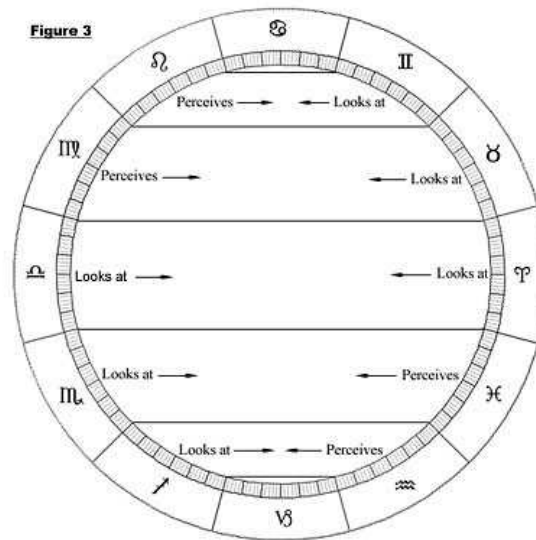


Table 1 [11]

| Sign        | ♈    | ♉    | ♊    | ♋    | ♌    | ♍    | ♎    | ♏    | ♐    | ♑    | ♒    | ♓    |
|-------------|------|------|------|------|------|------|------|------|------|------|------|------|
| Diurnal Arc | 180° | 200° | 212° | 216° | 212° | 200° | 180° | 160° | 148° | 144° | 148° | 160° |

By examining Table 1 and looking at figure 3, we can see that Gemini and Leo are first, equally placed above the celestial equator. And in the table we see that Gemini has a diurnal arc of 212° and Leo also has 212°. Ptolemy tells us that,

*"Any two signs, equally distant from either tropical sign, are equal to each other in power; because the Sun, when present in one, makes day and night, and the divisions of time, respectively equal in duration to those which he produces when present in the other. Such signs are also said to behold each other, as well for the foregoing reasons, as because each of them rises from one and the same part of the horizon, and sets in one and the same part."*

[12]

Abu Ma'shar gives us a little different perspective by also telling us that while Gemini and Leo are equal in power, Gemini obeys Leo.

*"It may be said of the signs that are direct and oblique in rising that one of them obeys another in the other way; for example, that Gemini obeys (sees) Leo, Taurus Virgo, Pisces Scorpio, and Aquarius Sagittarius. [13] ... As for Aries obeying Libra, and Capricorn, Cancer, even if one of the two obeys its companion, neither pair of them indicates agreement and friendship because of their being in opposition to each other."* [14]

Abu Ma'shar gives us those *zoidia* that are of short ascension (direct) as obeying those of long (oblique) ascension. [15] Paulus is very precise also in distinguishing those *zoidia* that

are just 'seeing' and those that 'perceive'. You probably notice that Paulus' relationships of 'seeing' and 'perceiving' are reversed in the lower half of the zodiac. It is most likely that this 'seeing/perceiving' relationship represents the true realities of the hemispheres. In our northern hemisphere Pisces is of short or direct ascension, however if you are in the southern hemisphere Pisces is of long or oblique ascension. Thus Pisces 'perceives' or commands and Scorpio (short ascension in the southern hemisphere) 'sees' or obeys.

I think too, that perhaps the terms 'command' and 'obey' are a little misleading. In the military you have a clear 'command and obey' relationship. However here we have more of a business relationship or partnership. In a large company you may have several department heads or in a law firm you may have senior partners. These heads are on equal authority but there is a co-operation that exists because they are working towards a common goal for the company. In the company I work for in the ship industry, we have heads of engineering, heads of design, heads of specifications and heads of production etc. It is not unusual that the head of engineering needs the principle drawings from the design department head. In order to produce a ship on time, the formers' need becomes a 'command' that the latter 'yields' to in order for a harmonious functioning in the company. Both have 'equal' authority but there is this sense of need and yielding. And this is the relationship that the *zoidia* that see and perceive have to each other. In successful close personal relationships there exists this same familiarity.

### The Strengthening of an Aspect

Paulus describes the effects of such a relationship by saying,

*"The zoidia which see one another contribute to sympathy and friendship and goodwill . . . They harmonise also for every association and things resembling these."* <sup>[16]</sup>

Now if most of you are like me, while enjoying and appreciating perhaps, the more 'romanticist' symbolism in this, I like to see the practical application. It is the practical application that brings us to the heart of the whole purpose in the concept of the 'living signs' and that is perfecting the function of the planets that may be positioned there.

Going back to Paulus, he gives a clearer purpose for this familiarity between *zoidia* when he states,

*"And while (on the one hand) the side of a triangle [the trine aspect] is harmonious and harmless, that of the square (on the other hand) makes the result of the final outcome discordant and irregular. The hexagon [the sextile aspect], if found in zoidia which hear or see one another [I'll come to the 'hearing' zoidia further in this essay], has the power of a triangle, but when in other zoidia [is only] half [as powerful]."* <sup>[17]</sup>

Basically what we have in this statement is the idea that the familiar relationship the *zoidia* have to each other could significantly strengthen the effect of the aspects between the planets posited there. The sextile between Gemini and Leo was greatly increased in strength as compared to the sextile between Leo and Libra. In fact the relation between Leo and Libra half reduced the sextiles efficiency. This is quite similar in fact, to the result of a harmonious work environment on the job being conducive to higher productivity.

As an example, if you had the Moon posited at 12° Leo and the Sun was at 15° Gemini, the Moon is applying a sextile aspect to the Sun. In this case, however, the Moon would appear to have some difficulty in functioning, as in the domicile of the Sun she is lacking

any essential dignity. You would have the same results if you invited a total stranger off the street to run your household and family and take care of your financial affairs while you took the week away from home. In order for her to regain some dignity here she would need to be received by the lord of this domicile. She is, by the sextile aspect from the Sun to some degree, although the sextile is the weakest of the favourable aspects and the Sun is also without appreciable dignity in Gemini. Applying the aforesaid 'familiarity' between the *zoidia*, there is already a stronger mutual friendship and the sextile is made into the strength of a Trine. There is less demand on the planets themselves to be dignified. Since the Sun is in Gemini, the yielding partner, then the Moon is receiving considerably more support in her position, thus the *zoidia* themselves contribute to the planets effectiveness.

Ptolemy gives us another example of how *zoidia* that see and obey can increase the effectiveness of the planets. In chapter 14 of the third book in Tetrabiblos, he is discussing the number of modes of a prorogation [a primary direction] and tells us that certain degrees are anærectic (destroyers) to significators. These are degrees for example that the malefics may cast their rays (aspects) to and to which the significator may be directed. He says,

*"But in the prorogation made into succeeding signs, the places of the malefics, Saturn and Mars, are anærectic, whether meeting the prorogator bodily, or by emission of rays in quartile, from either side, or in opposition;"*

The trine and sextile aspect could cause problems but were not usually deadly except in one situation, namely when the malefic was in a sign that "sees and obeys" the sign where his ray fell.

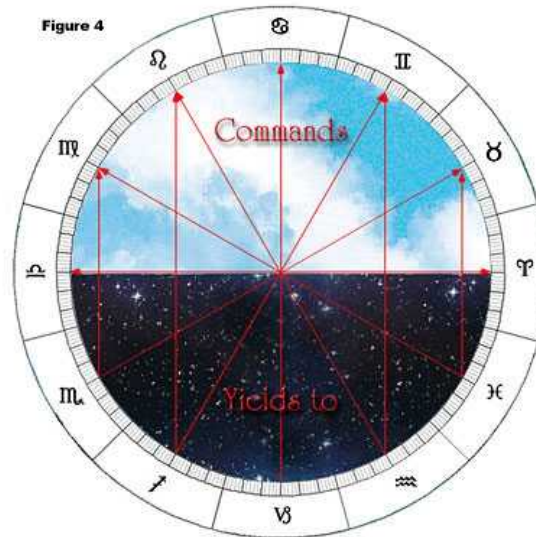
*"They are sometimes anærectic by sextile ray, if in a sign of equal power, obeying or beholding the sign of the prorogator."*

In this particular case then the effectiveness of these *zoidia* works contrary to the good of an individual. The effectiveness is then indiscriminate to the planets and what they signify will be increased in efficacy whether for good or ill.

So one attribute or characteristic of the 'living' *zoidia* is that they have sight. Let's move on and see if we can discover others.

#### **A Quality of 'Life' – Hearing**

Sight is by far the most used sense perception we have and the one we rely on the most. However, as those who are sight-impaired can tell you, hearing is a sense perception that we undervalue. Hearing becomes especially important when we lose our ability to see. The *zoidia* also have this ability to *hear* each other. [Figure 4]



"Similarly, one must come to an understanding of the hexagonal hearing and seeing zoidia by means of ascensions, thusly. For example, Pisces looks at Taurus. For the second zone, the ascensions of 6 zoidia from Pisces becomes 160, and from Taurus to Libra 200. Pisces becomes less than Taurus and hears it. And the ascensions of the 2 zoidia amount to 360." [18]

"The commanding zoidia have this order: Taurus commands Pisces and Pisces obeys it, Gemini commands Aquarius, Cancer Capricorn, Leo Sagittarius, Virgo Scorpio." [19]

These zoidia have an unequal but cooperative relationship with each other. Valens calls them 'hearing and seeing zoidia' and they are equally distant from the equinoctial zoidia. This relationship is also based on the diurnal arc of the zoidia.

| Zoidia      | ♈    | ♉    | ♊    | ♋    | ♌    | ♍    | ♎    | ♏    | ♐    | ♑    | ♒    | ♓    |
|-------------|------|------|------|------|------|------|------|------|------|------|------|------|
| Diurnal Arc | 180° | 200° | 212° | 216° | 212° | 200° | 180° | 160° | 148° | 144° | 148° | 160° |

#### The Zoidia 'seeing' AND 'hearing'

Once again if we look at the table of diurnal arcs we see for example that Taurus has a diurnal arc of 200° and Pisces has one of 160°. Together they equal 360°, the complete circumference of the zodiac. This is a little different relationship than we saw previously where both zoidia had equal authority. We also have the sense of sight here, as these zoidia also have a relation by aspect, only here we have a stronger sense of authority and compliance. In our previous example was also compliance but it was based on a common purpose and good will. In this case it isn't just a question of good will but of service. If we digress to my previous analogy in the business place, here we have the department head and his subordinate. A department head isn't a head unless he has a body under him, and that is those who perform the task required so he can be free to do the things that only he can do. It's called delegating responsibility. In order for the department head to effectively do his job he needs a complimentary staff: together they get the job done. As any good leader knows, in this kind of relationship familiarity can easily breed contempt, so there is a certain respectful distance between the two. I liked very much the way Curtis Manwaring describes this relationship.

"It may also be that if a planet-pair is on this commanding-obeying axis, then the commanding planet may represent the subject matter and the obeying planet, the outcome." [20]

As with the *zoidia* that 'see and perceive', these that 'see and hear' also produce effective results. The sextile between Taurus and Pisces and Virgo and Scorpio are especially benefited from this relationship as Paulus told us, "if found in *zoidia* which hear or see one another." So here as above, the same rule applies and these sextiles take on the characteristics of a trine.

If you'll study closely the table of diurnal arcs, you'll notice that Pisces is not the only 'complementary' *zoidion* to Taurus, so is Scorpio. This presents us with some very interesting insights into the nature of oppositions, which I will discuss later. Following is a table that I've made to represent these relationships.

Table 2

|              |                |        |        |        |        |        |        |        |        |        |
|--------------|----------------|--------|--------|--------|--------|--------|--------|--------|--------|--------|
| Sign Pairs   | ♈ - ♉          | ♈ - ♊  | ♈ - ♋  | ♈ - ♌  | ♈ - ♍  | ♈ - ♎  | ♈ - ♏  | ♈ - ♐  | ♈ - ♑  | ♈ - ♒  |
| Relationship | On equal terms | orders | orders | orders | orders | orders | orders | orders | orders | orders |
|              |                | obeys  | obeys  | obeys  | obeys  | obeys  | obeys  | obeys  | obeys  | obeys  |

This is the end of part two of *The Living Signs*. Click here to read part three of [The Living Signs](#).

▶ [Click here for Steven Birchfield's excellent Introduction to [Hellenistic Astrology](#)]

Footnotes & References:

[5] "The Secrets of the Lost Horoscope . X-Files" — Chapter 5 'Aspects and Seeing', an [e-book](#) from Curtis Manwaring — available from his site Zodiac-X-Files

[6] ¶1373 of Al-Biruni's "The Book of Instruction in the Elements of the Art of Astrology" — Translation by R. Ramsay Wright 1934 – – Published by Ascella

[7] This is because the 6th and 12th are "in Decline" or cadent, while the 2nd and 8th are post-ascensional or successive. —SB

[8] Chapter III of Ibn-Ezra's — "The Beginning of Wisdom" — Translated by Meira B. Epstein — an ARHAT publication © 1998

[9] Chapter 11 of Paulus' *Introductory Matters, "Late Classical Astrology: Paulus Alexandrinus and Olympiodorus with the Scholia from Later Commentators"* — Translation by Dorian Greenbaum — ARHAT Publications.

[10] The diurnal arc is the number of degrees required for 6 signs to rise based on their degrees of RA over the Meridian. In simpler terms this is the amount of degrees that one sign requires to traverse the sky during the daytime, to rise and then set. —SB

[11] The table is based on the Babylonian table A of ascensions for the signs. I could have used the actual ascensional degrees for today but the relationship is identical and for the purpose of this demonstration, simpler to use the nice round numbers the Babylonians used. The following is their table of ascensions for the signs. —SB

|        |          |          |          |          |          |          |
|--------|----------|----------|----------|----------|----------|----------|
| 360° = | ♈<br>20° | ♉<br>24° | ♊<br>28° | ♋<br>32° | ♌<br>36° | ♍<br>40° |
|        | ♉        | ♈        | ♊        | ♋        | ♌        | ♍        |

[12] Chapter XVIII BkI of Ptolemy's "Tetrabiblos"—J.M. Ashmand Translator — Astrology Classics Publishing © 2002

[13] In Abu Ma'shar's original text the pairs are listed wrong as he pairs Taurus and Cancer, Virgo and Capricorn, and Scorpio and Capricorn. These combinations however do not accomplish his description of "the length of daylight of one of the two is equal to the length of night of the other." — Chapter 1,



94, *"The Abbreviation of the Introduction to Astrology"* — Edited and translated by Charles Burnett — ARHAT Publications © 1997

[14] Chapter 1: 94 and 95 in Abu Ma'shars' — *"The Abbreviation of the Introduction to Astrology"* — Edited and translated by Charles Burnett — ARHAT Publications © 1997

[15] Signs that are 'direct' rise at an angle to the horizon that is nearer to a vertical 90°. The 30 degrees of longitude of these signs require 30+ degrees of equator to rise across the horizon and take more than 2hrs to rise and so they are termed 'signs of long ascension'. Signs that are 'oblique', some authors called these 'crooked', rise at an angle that is more slanted. This slant ensures that the whole sign rises before 30° of the equator has passed the horizon and is why they were called 'signs of short ascension'.

[16] Chapter 8 of Paulus' *Introductory Matters, "Late Classical Astrology: Paulus Alexandrinus and Olympiodorus with the Scholia from Later Commentators"* — Translation by Dorian Greenbaum — ARHAT Publications.

[17] Chapter 10 of Paulus' *Introductory Matters, "Late Classical Astrology: Paulus Alexandrinus and Olympiodorus with the Scholia from Later Commentators"* — Translation by Dorian Greenbaum — ARHAT Publications.

[18] Bk I ch.7 — *"The Anthology"* of Vettius Valens, Translated by Robert Schmidt and published by Golden Hind Press.

[19] Chapter 9 of Paulus' *Introductory Matters, "Late Classical Astrology: Paulus Alexandrinus and Olympiodorus with the Scholia from Later Commentators"* — Translation by Dorian Greenbaum — ARHAT Publications

[20] *"The Secrets of the Lost Horoscope . X-Files"* — Chapter 5 'Aspects and Seeing', an [e-book](#) from Curtis Manwaring — available from his site Zodiac-X-Files



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