

Hellenistic Time Lords
An Introduction to Timing by Planetary Periods and Ascensional Times of the Signs
By Demetra George

Hellenistic astrology is the astrology that was practiced circa 150 BCE- 600 CE in the ancient Mediterranean, and it is the direct ancestor of all subsequent systems of Western astrology. With the recent translations of the original source texts by Robert Schmidt, we are discovering that the ancient astrologers used many different timing procedures that have been lost to modern usage. One relatively simple, but widely used technique that does not involve transits, progressions or solar arc directions is timing by planetary periods and ascensional times of the signs in order to arrive at a set of target dates in which the significations of a planet or house or aspect are likely to occur. But before we discuss this procedure, let us take a brief digression into the question of why Hellenistic astrology has been relatively unknown, except to those who could read ancient languages, until the last ten years.

For about 700 years, (circa 150 BCE-600 CE) the original system of Hellenistic astrology was written in the Greek, the literary language of the ancient world by a wide range of practitioners from Syria, Egypt, Mesopotamia, Africa, Asia Minor, Greece and Rome. With the fall of the Western Roman Empire to the Germanic tribes in the 5th century CE, knowledge of the Greek language was lost in Western Europe, and no one was able to read the texts. In addition, with the advent of Christianity, laws and injunctions were passed to forbid the practice of astrology. Hence the practice of horoscopic astrology disappeared in the West. However, some works of the Hellenistic astrologers were translated into Persian, Arabic, and Sanskrit circa 300 -1200 CE where the system survived as adaptations to its various host cultures. It made its way to Moorish Spain where it was rediscovered in the 12th century by Western Europeans, translated to Latin, and readapted once again to the Medieval and Classical Renaissance traditions.

What happened to the original Greek texts is that they lay scattered and buried in monastic libraries and private collections until 1900-1950 when a group of European scholars, headed by Franz Cumont, collected the manuscripts, edited them, and put them into a 12-volume series called the *Catalog of Greek Astrological Codices (CCAG)*. But no one had translated these works from ancient Greek (except Ptolemy's *Tetrabiblos*), until Robert Schmidt of Project Hindsight took on this task in 1993. Now for the first time since their composition in the early centuries CE, astrologers have available in English translation a representative sampling of the original astrology that is the foundation of all subsequent western astrological systems and which influenced the development of Vedic astrology as well. It is with excitement that we can now rediscover our roots and our heritage, and learn about an integrated sophisticated system that was based upon an inherent logic and philosophical underpinnings.

Hellenistic astrology was essentially a predictive system whose inquiry was to determine what events would occur in the life of an individual, when would they occur, and how beneficial or detrimental they would be to the overall well being of that person. Once the condition and meaning of every planet in the natal chart had been thoroughly determined,

a number of various timing procedures were then employed to forecast when the events signified by the planets would come about. According to both Ptolemy (c 160 CE) and Rhetorius (c 620 CE), a procedure called *circumambulations* was the first one used to demarcate the general overall character of broad periods in a person's life. Each period was governed by a different planet, called a time lord, and the effects in the life during that period corresponded qualitatively to the condition and meaning of that planet in the natal chart. This procedure is similar conceptually, but different technically, to the Vedic *dasha* lords. Other techniques such as zodiacal aphesis, decennials, quarters, profections, periods and ascensions, and solar returns were then used to investigate particular years or topics, but their indications were subject to the determination of the time lords established by circumambulations and could not contradict them. Transits were near the bottom of this hierarchy of techniques and were used within the context of determinations of beneficial or difficult periods that had been established by various time lords.

While many of these procedures are elaborate, **periods and ascensions**, at least in their most basic form, are relatively straightforward and simple to explain and use. These two timing techniques were central to many different inquiries made by Hellenistic astrologers in order to determine when certain planets or planetary configurations would become “busy” and thus produce their events, as well as being used in calculations of longevity. This activation can occur at the completion of the planet's minor period, at the completion of the ascensional time of the sign it occupies, or at the sum of its minor period and ascensional time, as well as various other combinations involving the planet's domicile lord.

Each planet was assigned a certain number of years that constituted its natural period of rulership. The effects associated with each planet, as indicated in the natal chart, come about at the completion of its period. There exist three sets of periods for each planet – its minor (or least) years, its greater years, and its mean years.

	Moon	Mercury	Venus	Sun	Mars	Jupiter	Saturn
Minor	25	20	8	19	15	12	30
Mean	66.5	48	45	69.5	40.5	45.5	43.3
Great	108	76	82	120	66	79	57

The minor years of the five visible planets known to the ancients are derived from their synodic return cycles relative to the Sun, i.e., the time it takes for a planet to conjunct the Sun at approximately the same degree of the zodiac. The Sun's minor period is based upon the 19-year metonic eclipse cycle when an eclipse reoccurs at the same degree of the zodiac, and the Moon's minor period is the interval of time it takes for its phases to occur on the same days of the year. The greater periods of the planets come from the total number of degrees allocated to each planet in the system of bounds (in Latin called “terms”); and the mean periods are an average of these two. (1)

The ascensional time of a sign is the amount of time that it takes for a sign to fully ascend over the horizon, as measured by the number of equatorial degrees that rise over the eastern horizon during the same time. While it takes two hours for thirty degrees to

ascend over the horizon, because of the obliquity of the ecliptic, it takes more or less than two hours for different thirty-degree intervals of the ecliptic to ascend over the horizon. This interval of time is also dependent upon geographical latitude. The ascensional time is then converted to degrees, and in Hellenistic timing methods, one degree of time is equated to one year of life. (2)

It was the astronomer Hypsicles circa 150 BCE in Alexandria who, in his work *Anaphorikos*, applied the Babylonian method of arithmetic progression so that the ascensional (rising) times of the signs could be computed by numerical methods for the latitude of Alexandria. This is the very same time period as the astrological textbook of Nechepso and Petosiris is dated and corresponds to the emergence of Hellenistic astrology as a unique system, replete with an ascendant degree and house divisions. Ascensional times were widely used as a timing system by the early astrologers. Ptolemy, about 300 years later, developed more precise calculations for the ascensional times of the signs using trigonometric methods.

Let us now combine these two methods to see how a Hellenistic astrologer might time an event. In Hellenistic astrology a number of “universal techniques” give broad general statements about the life as a whole. One of these is the Domicile Lord of the Ascendant which signifies to what extent the individual will be successful in terms of the accomplishment of the life goal. Thus, by looking to the planet that rules the Ascendant (i.e., its domicile lord), times of potential success may be indicated:

- At the completion of its minor period.
- At the completion of the minor period of its own domicile lord.
- At the completion of the ascension of the sign it occupies.
- At the sum of the planet’s minor period and ascensional time of its sign
- At the sum of any two or three of these above times.

We will use the chart of Jacqueline Kennedy Onassis as an example. In her chart, Mars is the domicile lord of her Scorpio Ascendant, and Mars is placed in Virgo and occupies the 11th house. Mercury (ruler of Virgo) is the domicile lord of Mars, and it is from Mercury that Mars receives its resources. The chart is cast in the whole sign house system, which was the house system of choice for Hellenistic astrologers. [July 28, 1929, 2:30 pm, Southampton, NY]

In looking to the ascensional times of the signs at her birth latitude of 41 degrees North, we find the following:

Latitude	AR-PI	TA-AQ	GE-CAP	CA-SA	LE-SC	VI-LI
41N	17 45	21 28	28 30	35 52	38 21	38 04

The target dates for the activation of Mars in Virgo are:

1. The minor period for Mars is 15 years.
2. The minor period for Mercury is 20 years.

3. The ascensional time for Virgo at latitude 41 degrees is 38 degrees 04 minutes, equates to 38 years.
4. The ascensional time for Scorpio at latitude 41 degrees is 38 degrees 21 minutes, equates to 38 years.
5. The sum of the minor period of Mars (15) and the ascensional time of Virgo (38) is 53 years.

Minor period of Mars: In 1944 Jackie was 15 years old, and she entered into the exclusive Miss Porter's, a Connecticut boarding school where she was the star pupil in her literature class. A classmate's memoirs recorded, "No other student soared so high in the higher realms of literature" (3). Mars' domicile lord Mercury provided her with the intellectual resources for literary recognition.

Ascensional time of Virgo: Jackie was 37 years old in December, 1966 when the Gallup poll announced that, for the fifth consecutive year, she was the most admired woman in the world. That same month she sued William Manchester, attempting to censor his interviews with her for his forthcoming biography, *Death of President*. Aware of the huge damage the quarrel was having on both her and Bobby Kennedy's public image, she settled and was proclaimed the winner, but as a result her popularity with the American public had dropped by thirty-three percent. "What she saw as a courageous defense of her rights in the face of betrayal of confidentiality, the American public perceived as an arrogant abuse of power and an attempt to stifle their cherished right of freedom of speech" (4). This is an apt perception for the dual activation of both her ascending sign Scorpio and the ascension of Virgo in which Mars is placed. Once again, Mercury in the 10th house, as the domicile lord of Mars brings forth recognition, albeit it this time negative, within a context of books, speech, contestation and dispute. (Mercury was not only the scribe, but also the presiding deity of the gymnastic contests in ancient Greece).

Sum of minor period and ascensional time: When Jackie was 53 years old in 1982, she was promoted to full editor at Doubleday Publishers. This was perhaps her major accomplishment as an individual in her own right based upon her own unique talents, rather than the byproducts resulting from her position as wife of a powerful man. Here is another period of success in the literary realm wherein Mercury once again gave her recognition in the literary field.

Now, turning to an **activation of an aspect between two planets** (and the Hellenistic astrologers considered aspects by whole sign, not degree), one target date is at the sum of their minor periods. The Mars Saturn square was thought to be a most malefic aspect, and Jackie had Mars in Virgo square Saturn in Sagittarius.

Looking first to Saturn on its own, the ascensional time of Sagittarius is 35 degrees equivalent to her 35th year. Jackie was 34 years old at the beginning of her 35th year. This year begins with the suicide of a dear friend, Phil Graham; followed the premature birth and death of a child; the assassination of her husband; financial panic; loss of home and identity as First Lady; and extended grief. Note that Saturn occupies the second house of

money, called the Gate of Hades, and rules the fourth house of home. A second target date is the sum of the minor years of Saturn and the ascensional time of Sagittarius – 30 + 35 = 65th year when she was 64 years old and this marks the year of her death.

Now, turning to the aspect itself, the sum of the minor periods of Mars and Saturn – 15 + 30 = 45. The following events occurred when Jackie was 45 years old: the failed suicide attempt of her step-daughter Christina who was bitterly hostile to her; the suicide of her husband Ari's first wife Christina; the death of Onassis himself followed by the NY Times announcement that he was planning to divorce her; tough negotiations that lead to a 26 million dollar settlement followed by the discovery of his will four weeks later and ensuing eighteen month probate battle. Thus we can see the difficult events that manifested in Jackie's life when this configuration became activated.

Timing by planetary periods and ascensional times is a simple, but extremely powerful technique that can give information about the events that occur in a person's life as derived solely from the natal chart itself. There are many dizzying variations and elaborations of this method as described by Vettius Valens in *The Anthology*, but this brief article serves as simple introduction. Classes in beginning and intermediate Hellenistic astrology is currently being taught at Kepler College by Demetra George under the supervision of Robert Schmidt. For more information on translations, monographs and taped courses about Hellenistic astrology from Project Hindsight, visit their website at www.ProjectHindsight.com or email them at info@ProjectHindsight.com.

Endnotes

1. For a fuller discussion on the derivation of the periods of the planets see Robert Hand's introduction in Vettius Valens *Anthology II*, translated by Robert Schmidt, Berkeley Springs, WV: The Golden Hind Press, 1994, pp. v-vii.
2. For a more detailed explanation of ascensional times, see Robert Schmidt's introduction, Valens 7, *Introduction*, xiii)
3. Bradford, Sarah. *America's Queen: The Life of Jacqueline Kennedy Onassis* (NY: Penguin books, 2000), p. 28.
4. Bradford, p. 319.