

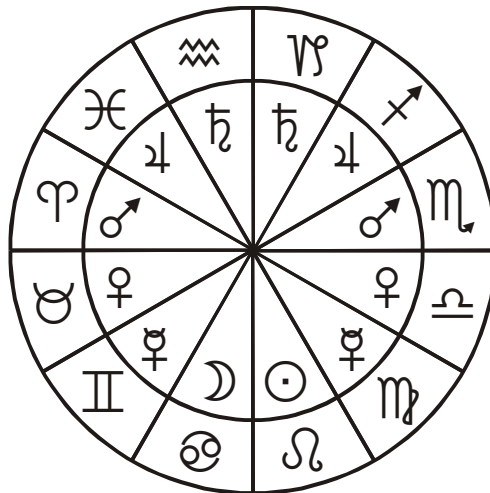
## Essential Dignity

Essential dignity is a way of evaluating the innate level of development or refinement of each planet in the chart. Planets that have a lot of essential dignity are generally stronger, show more positive effects, are better integrated into the personality, and function more freely in their domains. Some modern astrologers give little credence to the rulerships, just as they fail to regard any planet as innately malefic or benefic. In surveying the history of astrology, this is evidently a great error. The rulerships are a seminal principle in astrology, and one on which a large proportion of interpretive work was based for thousands of years before the common era.

### *Sign Rulerships*

The first consideration in assessing the essential dignity of a planet is to observe whether it is in a sign that it rules. Each planet rules two signs, except the sun and moon, which rule only one each. When planets are in the signs they rule, the expression of their energy is easy and has relatively free reign. You should imagine that the planets are literal rulers of their respective signs, which constitute their kingdoms. Rulers within their own kingdoms have the benefit of their own resources to execute their desires, provide for their protection, and distribute to other regions. Rulers in foreign lands are necessarily more vulnerable and subject to interference. This will become an important operative principle when we discuss dispositorship below.

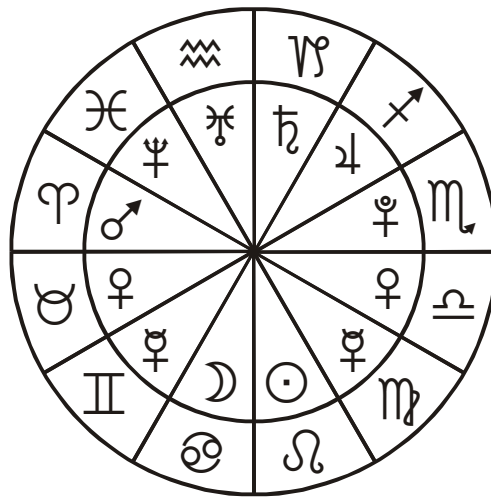
Planetary rulership of the signs falls within a pattern that is often little appreciated by modern astrologers. That pattern is illustrated in the following diagram:



The sun and moon rule Leo and Cancer respectively. The remaining planets are arrayed outward on either side in order of the time they take to progress through the zodiac. So swift Mercury rules Virgo and Gemini, Venus rules Libra and Taurus, Mars rules Scorpio and Aries, Jupiter rules Pisces and Sagittarius, and Saturn rules Aquarius and Capricorn. Without belaboring the point, several additional astrological principles can be deduced from this figure. For example, Saturn, the planet of death and darkness naturally rules the

signs opposed to the two lights, the Sun and Moon. Hence, part of Saturn's malefic character comes from this opposition to the principle of light that gives life and liberty. In addition, where Mars is strong, Venus is weak, and vice versa, and the same is true of Jupiter and Mercury.

One thing worth noticing is that the "new" planets Uranus, Neptune, and Pluto are not found in this diagram, although modern astrology does assign them rulership of signs. By doing so, modern astrologers have thrown the pattern into a mass of confusion that the ancient astrologers would have found extremely displeasing. It is my contention that the outer planets do have a place in astrology, but that it is not as sign rulers. However, for the benefit of those who might like to pursue the question further, here is another diagram showing the modern rulerships:



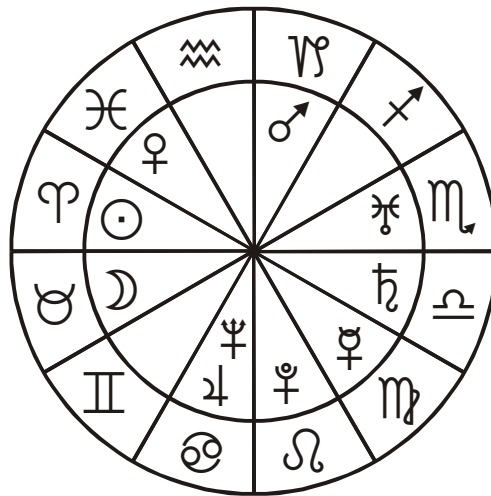
Planets in signs opposite to those they rule are said to be in detriment. The departments of life that they signify therefore are correspondingly considered weak, constrained, or difficult in some essential way.

### *Exaltation*

Planets in their own signs are strongest and have the most freedom of action, but they do not always manifest their *best* qualities. Mars is an innately harsh, sometimes cruel ruler, so given free reign in his own signs, he is likely to show some of the excesses for which he is well known. Planets in their signs of exaltation are strong, but they are also refined to an extent that mere rulership does not confer. Mars in Capricorn has some of its harsh notes "rounded off." Since Capricorn is an earth sign ruled by Saturn, Mars here is directed into more constructive, focused, and durable aims. It becomes responsible rather than wanton or capricious. Planets in their signs of exaltation often indicate a strong motivation for refinement of the qualities they denote, and may even confer a sense of purpose or mission which is further denoted by the house placement and other factors.

The principle behind the exaltations is not as clear as that behind the rulership schema. In some older sources, exaltations were only considered to occur in particular degrees of

signs, and there is no apparent order to the assignments. Robert Zoller suggests that the exaltations were based on sacred numerology, although his rationale is somewhat unclear.<sup>1</sup> The renaissance astrologer Porphyry, in his commentary on the *Tetrabiblos* of Ptolemy gives a more convincing rationale based on *sect*, a kind of accidental dignity that will be covered in some detail below. *Diurnal* planets, the Sun, Jupiter and Saturn, have their exaltation in signs to which they are in trine, while *Nocturnal* planets the Moon, Venus and Mars, have their exaltations in signs to which they are sextile. The one planet of mixed sect, Mercury, has his exaltation in his own sign. This explanation raises other questions (why, for example, is the Sun exalted in Aries rather than Sagittarius?), but is quite satisfactory from the perspective of basic astrological principles. Below is a diagram showing the exaltations of the planets:



Needless to say, the exaltations of the “new” planets are doubtful. Not only is there the oddity of Neptune sharing an exaltation with Jupiter, but the new exaltations do not follow the organizing principle correctly perceived by Porphyry. Uranus and Pluto are, in fact, in square aspect to their supposed signs of “rulership.”<sup>2</sup>

Planets in signs opposite to those in which they are exalted are said to be in fall. Planets in fall express themselves in *unrefined*, base ways. Mars in Cancer shows itself in sullen moodiness, passive aggression, and repressed anger that can sometimes emerge explosively.

<sup>1</sup> *The Lost Key to Prediction: The Arabic Parts in Astrology*, Robert Zoller, Inner Traditions, 1980.

<sup>2</sup> Gemini would be a better choice for Uranus and Scorpio for Neptune. Pluto then would have to be exalted in his own sign, Scorpio, since all the trines and sextiles of Scorpio are already filled. But Mars has no basis for exaltation in Capricorn unless he is considered to rule Scorpio, nor Saturn in Libra unless he is considered to rule Aquarius, nor Jupiter in Cancer unless he is considered to rule Pisces – hence we see some of the confusion introduced when we disturb the original system of rulerships without understanding its implications fully.

## *Triplicity*

Planets are also said to have rulership over elemental domains or triplicities, but these rulerships depend partly on a variety of accidental dignity called *sect*. What this means in practical terms is that the rulerships depend on whether the chart is a daytime chart or a nighttime chart. There are also what are called *participating* triplicity rulers. These gain dignity during the day or night when in the triplicity they rule. During the day, the Sun rules the fire triplicity, so he gets extra dignity if he is in any fire sign by day. During the night, the fire triplicity is ruled by Jupiter, so he receives more dignity if he is in a fire sign and the sun is below the horizon. A planet in its triplicity is said to indicate luck in the areas of life it signifies. Here is a table showing the triplicity rulerships by day and by night:

	Fire	Air	Earth	Water
Day	☉	♁	♀	♁
Night	♃	♁	♄	♄
Participating	♂	♃	♁	♂

This principle can lead to some apparent conflicts with the preceding types of dignity. For example, Mars is said to rule the water triplicity by day and by night, but he is in fall in the water sign Cancer. Venus is in fall in Virgo, but gets dignity here in a daytime chart because she rules the earth triplicity. This should not be taken as a contradictory indication. Compared with rulership and exaltation, triplicity is a relatively minor form of dignity that compensates but little for a condition like fall or detriment.

## *Terms*

Dignity by term has dropped entirely out of the repertoire of most modern astrologers, but it is considered quite important by the ancient, medieval and Renaissance writers. The terms are unequal divisions of each sign, which are assigned planetary “sub-rulers.” These are similar to the decanates or *faces*, except that there are five subdivisions in each sign instead of three. Terms are probably the most difficult form of essential dignity to make use of, simply because they do not have much of an underlying plan, as do sign rulerships, exaltations, or triplicity rulerships.

A few general observations can be made. The Sun and Moon do not have terms assigned to them. Each of the remaining five planets has only one term in each sign. In general (but not always), the first term of each sign is given to the planet ruling or exalted in that sign. Terms toward the end of each sign are more likely to be given to the malefic planets, Mars and Saturn.

Again, there will be some sense of conflict between the dignities already discussed and dignity by terms. For example, even in Gemini, where Jupiter is in detriment, Jupiter rules the term placed in the seventh through fourteenth degree of that sign. Again, it's

best not to see this as a contradiction, but as a modification of the major types of essential dignity. Jupiter is in detriment in the entire sign Gemini, but it is a little less so in the seventh through fourteenth degrees. However, the place to really look for term effects is with planets that otherwise have no essential dignity, but are in their own terms. Here, we may see some otherwise unexpected competency or refinement of character we might not otherwise expect. The table below gives the planetary rulerships of the terms by sign:

♈	0-5 ♃	6-13 ♀	14-20 ♁	21-25 ♂	26-29 ♆
♉	0-7 ♀	8-14 ♁	15-21 ♃	22-25 ♆	26-29 ♂
♊	0-6 ♁	7-13 ♃	14-20 ♀	21-24 ♆	25-29 ♂
♋	0-5 ♂	6-12 ♃	13-19 ♁	20-26 ♀	27-29 ♆
♌	0-5 ♆	6-12 ♁	13-18 ♀	19-24 ♃	25-29 ♂
♍	0-6 ♁	7-12 ♀	13-17 ♃	18-23 ♆	24-29 ♂
♎	0-5 ♆	6-10 ♀	11-18 ♃	19-23 ♁	24-29 ♂
♏	0-5 ♂	6-13 ♃	14-20 ♀	21-26 ♁	27-29 ♆
♐	0-7 ♃	8-13 ♀	14-18 ♁	19-24 ♆	25-29 ♂
♑	0-5 ♀	6-11 ♁	12-18 ♃	19-24 ♂	25-29 ♆
♒	0-5 ♆	6-11 ♁	12-21 ♀	22-24 ♃	25-29 ♂
♓	0-7 ♀	8-13 ♃	14-19 ♁	20-25 ♂	26-29 ♆

## Faces

The weakest kind of essential dignity is dignity by face. Faces are also called “decans.” Each sign has three faces or decans of 10 degrees, which are given to a planetary ruler. Faces and terms obviously overlap, but they do not have any obvious relationship to one another. All the faces from the first degree of Aries to the last degree of Pisces are assigned a planetary ruler in the “Chaldean order.” The sequence begins with Mars in the first face of Aries, then proceeds to the Sun, Venus, Mercury, the Moon, Saturn, Jupiter, and back to Mars. This order is also the order of the Sephiroth on the Tree of Life, from the top down. The following table should make this clear:

	0-9°	10-19°	20-29°
♈	♂	☉	♀
♉	♀	☽	♃
♊	♃	♂	☉
♋	♀	♀	☽
♌	♃	♃	♂
♍	☉	♀	♀
♎	☽	♃	♃
♏	♂	☉	♀
♐	♀	☽	♃
♑	♃	♂	☉
♒	♀	♀	☽
♓	♃	♃	♂

Faces are barely considered dignities by the medieval and ancient writers who used them. It is usually felt that a planet in its own face indicates that the native will have some concern or anxiety about the departments of life denoted by the planet. The planet is highlighted in a sense, but it's unclear whether this emphasis is good or bad. The usual method of making a determination is to look at the over-all dignity of the planet. Otherwise ill-dignified planets in their own faces will indicate some insecurity or anxiety, while well-dignified planets in their own terms will reflect a more productive concern with the areas of life denoted by the planet.

An additional comment is in order concerning the faces. In the Golden Dawn system of Tarot, the minor arcana are assigned to the faces so that each has a planetary correspondence, but also a sign correspondence. The sign correspondences are given so that the first decan of each sign corresponds to itself, the second to the next sign in triplicity in zodiacal order, and the third to the last sign in triplicity. For example, the first decan of Sagittarius belongs to Sagittarius, the second to Aries, and the third to Leo. This

way of assigning sub-signs is of unknown provenance (it may come from the Indian astrological tradition of harmonic charts), but it does not seem to be used in the ancient Western sources. Crowley blends these two distinct systems together in his delineation of the minor arcana, so that they are read as planets *in* signs. This way of reading the decans may be useful for Tarot, but it has nothing to do with how they are used in astrology.

### *Point Systems and Almutens*

In order to synthesize judgments about a planet's essential dignity, ancient and medieval astrologers devised a point system as summarized in the table below.

Positive indications	Negative indications
Own sign: 5 points	detriment: -5 points
Exaltation: 4 points	fall : -4 points
Own triplicity: 3 points	
Own terms 2 points	
Own face: 1 point	

Interpretation of the number of points given to each planet should be done cautiously. In theory, one should be able to determine which planets have the most and the least dignity, giving an indication of which departments of life and character potentials will prosper or suffer. It should be remembered, however, that essential dignities primarily indicate essences that may or may not have a means of expression or may be modified in other ways by other indications. One should not fall into the error of mistaking quantitative and qualitative judgments. There is a quantitative scale of dignity that the point system accurately captures, but there is also a qualitative dimension that can not be ignored.

One interesting way of using this point system was developed by the Arab astrologers in the medieval period. They first calculated the dignity of each planet in each degree of the zodiac according to the five kinds of essential dignity. The planet most dignified in each degree was called the *almuten* of that degree. The almuten usually turns out to be the ruler of the sign in which the degree is placed, but due to the way signs, exaltations, terms and faces overlap, creates some counter-intuitive results. For example, in some degrees of Pisces by both day and night, Mars has more essential dignity than Jupiter, which is the ruler of Pisces. This is because in some degrees, Mars rules the triplicity, terms and face, while Jupiter only rules the sign itself.

Almutens were used to determine the rulers of houses, among other things. For example, if the ascendant were to fall in the 20<sup>th</sup> degree of Pisces, Mars would be considered the ruler of the first house, rather than Jupiter. This system was popular with Western astrologers up until the 1600s, when it began to fall out of favor. I have not used almutens much in my own work, but I think they are worth considering. Where the almuten is different from the sign ruler, it should be possible to compare and contrast significations to determine which is more generally accurate. Therefore, in the interests of research, I present in the table below the almutens for each degree of the zodiac by day and night. In cases where more than one planet has equal dignity, these are considered "co-almutens."

Sign	♈		♉		♊		♋		♌		♍	
	D	N	D	N	D	N	D	N	D	N	D	N
0	♂	♂	♀	♀	♀	♀	☾	☾	☉	☉	♀	♀
1	♂	♂	♀	♀	♀	♀	☾	☾	☉	☉	♀	♀
2	♂	♂	♀	♀	♀	♀	☾	☾	☉	☉	♀	♀
3	♂	♂	♀	♀	♀	♀	☾	☾	☉	☉	♀	♀
4	♂	♂	♀	♀	♀	♀	☾	☾	☉	☉	♀	♀
5	♂	♂	♀	♀	♀	♀	☾	☾	☉	☉	♀	♀
6	♂	♂	♀	♀	♀	♀	♁	☾	☉	☉	♀	♀
7	♂	♂	♀	♀	♀	♀	♁	☾	☉	☉	♀	♀
8	♂	♂	♀	☾	♀	♀	♁	☾	☉	☉	♀	♀
9	♂	♂	♀	☾	♀	♀	♁	☾	☉	☉	♀	♀
10	♂☉	♂	♀	☾	♀	♀	♁	☾	☉	☉	♀	♀
11	♂☉	♂	♀	☾	♀	♀	♁	☾	☉	☉	♀	♀
12	♂☉	♂	♀	☾	♀	♀	♁	☾	☉	☉	♀	♀
13	♂☉	♂	♀	☾	♀	♀	☾	☾	☉	☉	♀	♀
14	♂☉	♂	♀	☾	♀	♀	☾	☾	☉	☉	♀	♀
15	♂☉	♂	♀	☾	♀	♀	☾	☾	☉	☉	♀	♀
16	♂☉	♂	♀	☾	♀	♀	☾	☾	☉	☉	♀	♀
17	♂☉	♂	♀	☾	♀	♀	☾	☾	☉	☉	♀	♀
18	♂☉	♂	♀	☾	♀	♀	☾	☾	☉	☉	♀	♀
19	♂☉	♂	♀	☾	♀	♀	☾	☾	☉	♁	♀	♀
20	♂	♂	♀	☾	♀	♀	☾	☾	☉	♁☉	♀	♀
21	♂	♂	♀	☾	♀♁	♀	☾	☾	☉	♁☉	♀	♀
22	♂	♂	♀	☾	♀♁	♀	☾	☾	☉	♁☉	♀	♀
23	♂	♂	♀	☾	♀♁	♀	☾	☾	☉	♁☉	♀	♀
24	♂	♂	♀	☾	♀♁	♀	☾	☾	☉	♁☉	♀	♀
25	♂	♂	♀	☾	♀	♀	☾	☾	☉	♂	♀	♀
26	♂	♂	♀	☾	♀	♀	☾	☾	☉	♂	♀	♀
27	♂	♂	♀	☾	♀	♀	☾	☾	☉	♂	♀	♀
28	♂	♂	♀	☾	♀	♀	☾	☾	☉	♂	♀	♀
29	♂	♂	♀	☾	♀	♀	☾	☾	☉	♂	♀	♀



Sign	♈		♉		♊		♋		♌		♍	
	D	N	D	N	D	N	D	N	D	N	D	N
0	♌	♌	♂	♂	♎	♎	♌	♌	♌	♌	♀	♀
1	♌	♌	♂	♂	♎	♎	♌	♌	♌	♌	♀	♀
2	♌	♌	♂	♂	♎	♎	♌	♌	♌	♌	♀	♀
3	♌	♌	♂	♂	♎	♎	♌	♌	♌	♌	♀	♀
4	♌	♌	♂	♂	♎	♎	♌	♌	♌	♌	♀	♀
5	♌	♌	♂	♂	♎	♎	♌	♌	♌	♌	♀	♀
6	♀♌	♀	♂	♂	♎	♎	♌	♌	♌	♌♀	♀	♀
7	♀♌	♀	♂	♂	♎	♎	♌	♌	♌	♌♀	♀	♀
8	♀♌	♀	♂	♂	♎	♎	♌	♌	♌	♌♀	♎♀	♎
9	♀♌	♀	♂	♂	♎	♎	♌	♌	♌	♌♀	♎♀	♎
10	♌	♀	♂	♂	♎	♎	♌	♌	♌	♀	♎	♎
11	♌	♀♌♎	♂	♂	♎	♎	♌	♌	♌	♀	♎	♎
12	♌	♀♌♎	♂	♂	♎	♎	♌	♌	♌	♌	♎	♎
13	♌	♀♌♎	♂	♂	♎	♎	♌	♌	♌	♌	♎	♎
14	♌	♀♌♎	♂	♂	♎	♎	♌	♌	♌	♌	♀	♎
15	♌	♀♌♎	♂	♂	♎	♎	♌	♌	♌	♌	♀	♎
16	♌	♀♌♎	♂	♂	♎	♎	♌	♌	♌	♌	♀	♎
17	♌	♀♌♎	♂	♂	♎	♎	♌	♌	♌	♌	♀	♎
18	♌	♀♌♎	♂	♂	♎	♎	♌	♌	♌	♌	♀	♎
19	♌	♀♌♀	♂	♂	♎	♎	♌	♌	♌	♌	♀	♎
20	♌	♀♀	♂	♂	♎	♎	♌	♌	♌	♌	♀	♂
21	♌	♀♀	♂	♂	♎	♎	♌	♌	♌	♌	♀	♂
22	♌	♀♀	♂	♂	♎	♎	♌	♌	♌♎	♌♎	♀	♂
23	♌	♀♀	♂	♂	♎	♎	♌	♌	♌♎	♌♎	♀	♂
24	♌	♀	♂	♂	♎	♎	♌	♌	♌♎	♌♎	♀	♂
25	♌	♀	♂	♂	♎♂	♎	♌	♌	♌	♌	♀	♂
26	♌	♀	♂	♂	♎♂	♎	♌	♌	♌	♌	♀	♎
27	♌	♀	♂	♂	♎♂	♎	♌	♌	♌	♌	♀	♎
28	♌	♀	♂	♂	♎♂	♎	♌	♌	♌	♌	♀	♎
29	♌	♀	♂	♂	♎♂	♎	♌	♌	♌	♌	♀	♎

I should note that this table is my own creation and differs from other available tables. I found this necessary after examining other tables and finding errors or departures from the table of points printed above. For example, some tables did not deduct points for fall or detriment, or else used an abbreviated form of the triplicity rulerships in which the participating rulers were not counted. I believe my table is the most accurate and complete; however, if a different point system were used, the results might be different.

### *Peregrine planets*

A planet is said to be peregrine when it has no essential dignity whatsoever. If we look at the literal meaning of the word “peregrine,” the indication is that the planet is like a traveler in a foreign country who doesn’t know the language or customs and has no social connections. The peregrine condition is sometimes considered with the accidental dignities because some authors consider a planet to only be peregrine if it makes no aspects to other planets and does not fall in mutual reception with another planet. However, a planet with no essential dignity is usually considered to give mixed or mediocre indications at best. Mutual reception improves the picture *accidentally*, but can not remove the problem of having no essential dignity. Aspects may also improve the picture, but again, a weak or debilitated planet may not be able to make use of aspects & the *essential* difficulty remains.<sup>3</sup> So peregrine planets are usually considered to be afflicted, even when other factors mitigate this affliction.

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<sup>3</sup> For example, consider the adage “give a man a fish, and he’ll eat for a day; teach a man to fish, and he’ll eat for a lifetime.” If the fishless man has no fingers or doesn’t live near a sufficiently large body of water, teaching him to fish may amount more to mockery than kindness.