

# Uranus, Neptune and Pluto:

## An investigation into the sources of their symbolism

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### Introduction

The purpose of this paper is to ascertain the methods used to evaluate and classify Uranus, Neptune and Pluto, in astrological terms, and to discover whether those original findings have been modified or changed with experience and later study. It will be demonstrated that the symbolism currently in use remains materially the same as those first tentative steps, and that that symbolism was drawn largely from one ideology.

Tracing symbolic derivation is complex and convoluted: account needs to be taken of the various contributory threads accreted by cultural, philosophic and social considerations. In relation to the seven "traditional" planets,<sup>1</sup> researchers have had to use limited and fragmentary sources because of their antiquity. With the trans-Saturnian planets<sup>2</sup> of Uranus, Neptune and Pluto, however, investigations are facilitated by their recent discoveries and by the large volume of published material that is available.

With this abundance of material focused upon Uranus, Neptune and Pluto, and the high number of astrologers who implement these planets, it suggests that their symbolism is certain and established. The latter is true in that the majority of astrologers accept the symbolism of these planets as substantially definitive. There are also those who employ them in a limited way, and fewer still who do not use them at all. The latter two groups have become larger with the increasing popularity and application of astrological systems predating astrology's fall from favour<sup>3</sup> during and subsequent to the Age of Enlightenment (1650 - 1800). By the time, of Pluto's discovery in 1930, there

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<sup>1</sup> Saturn, Jupiter, Mars, Sun, Venus, Mercury, Moon; also styled the Ptolemaic planets, referring to Claudius Ptolemy, c. 2<sup>nd</sup> century AD.

<sup>2</sup> So called because their orbits lie beyond that of Saturn.

<sup>3</sup> These are often referred to, in chronological order, as "Hellenistic", "Medieval" and "Traditional". All form part of the Western Predictive Tradition.

were similar divergences of opinion, although there is little astrological literature from those who did not hold to the use of the new planets.

## The Discoveries

William Herschel discovered the planet he named “Georgium Sidus” in 1781, which also became known as “Herschel” or “Herschel’s planet”.<sup>4</sup> Following suggestions by Bode and John Couch Adams, the name “Uranus” was accepted only in 1850. In 1846 Urbain Leverrier announced Neptune’s discovery, but joint credit has since been given to Adams. Clyde Tombaugh at the Lowell Observatory discovered Pluto in 1930. For a time, astrologers styled this planet Lowell-Pluto to distinguish it from the hypothetical Pluto (Wemyss-Pluto)<sup>5</sup>. Uranus is the only one of these that can be seen with the naked eye.<sup>6</sup>

## Naming of the New Discoveries

Uranus and Neptune were named in accordance with the tradition of naming planets according to classical pantheons. Uranus, or Ouranos, the Greek god of the heavens and father of Cronos. Neptune was a lesser god of the Roman pantheon who absorbed the legend of Poseidon, son of Cronos. Pluto, however, was named following a number of suggestions, including “Constance” from Percy Lowell’s wife, and “Vulcan”. The name came from an 11-year-old girl in Oxfordshire (England) and it has been said that Pluto was her favourite Disney character.

The fact that astronomers had named these planets, naturally without any reference to astrological symbolism, did not deter astrologers. Having brushed aside all objections in the cause of synchronicity, they proceeded to draw upon the myths associated with these gods for their symbolism. In the early days following Pluto’s discovery, some resisted its name:

*“Unfortunately astronomers have given it the unsuitable name of Pluto, a name which had already been given to a different hypothetical planet (ruling Cancer). To avoid confusion it is necessary in astrological circles to refer to the original Pluto as*

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<sup>4</sup> He named it Georgium Sidus after his patron King George III. Some called it the Georgian planet, for example, orsdale, *CP*, p.57.

<sup>5</sup> Discussed later.

<sup>6</sup> Even at maximum visibility, Uranus is at the extreme of visibility for the naked eye.

*Wemyss-Pluto*<sup>7</sup> and to the Lowell planets as *Lowell-Pluto*.<sup>8</sup>

## Sources

Some of the published material relating to these planets is examined and compared to the accounts of their symbolism presently accepted by astrologers. This is done to identify similarities, or otherwise, between the published findings of the earlier astrological authors and those of more recent years. In so doing, the impact made by early observations of the “influences” of the trans-Saturnians on current thought can be approximated, and any changes made by later observers noted.

While research of the private papers of published astrologers would prove fruitful in discovering the development of their opinions, it was their published works that had impact on the astrological community at large, particularly students. Those students carried forward and transmitted those ideas. It is not assumed that all astrologers agreed with these published accounts, but such accounts would impress upon their readers and thus affect later practice.

The sources used for this paper include works published soon after the discoveries of these planets, the most important (and the least prolific) being those that followed the discovery of Uranus. As the first incidence of a new member of the solar system, it provides an insight into how that impacted on astrological authors. Since the existing astrological symbolism had been developed over millennia, 18<sup>th</sup> century astrologers were faced with finding a way of addressing a blank sheet. Methods of ascribing symbolism to Uranus will be compared to those used for Neptune and Pluto.

The writings of authors of the late 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> centuries are explored to find development of early opinions following a century of experience of Uranus. Those authors known to have been influential through to the middle years of the 20<sup>th</sup> century are highlighted because this period marked a renaissance for astrology. A growing number of students were attracted to it and books of instruction proliferated. As will be shown, the symbolism of Uranus and Neptune was becoming established and the possibility of more planets being discovered was anticipated. This material, then, will demonstrate the method that would be applied later to Pluto.

Modern sources include works recommended for students by some of the

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<sup>7</sup> Maurice Wemyss, astrologer and postulator of many trans-Neptunian planets.

<sup>8</sup> Leo, AS.

major schools of astrology. These were not chosen because the symbolism they promote is universally accepted, but because of the numbers of students who are, or have been, exposed to it through these schools. (Many of these works are addressed specifically to students who have little or no previous knowledge of astrology.) Such students will, necessarily and understandably, present fewer challenges to the accepted body of knowledge precisely because they have no information with which to compare what they are being taught. From this it is deduced that the symbolism promoted in those published works will have had, and will continue to have, a wide influence on astrological practice.

Certain almanacs and magazines are also referred to because within their pages might be found less formal discussions and airings of views. Their more frequent publishing also provides an interesting monitor of the way opinions were developing, at least, in print.