

Planetary Declination

- The Second Paragraph

Perhaps you've noticed at times that certain aspects in a chart or by transit are seemingly much more powerful than others for no apparent reason. The answer is in understanding Declination, and I find it amazing how few astrologers know anything about them.

As I was first learning Astrology from my teacher, Robert Ball, back in the early 1970's in Coral Gables, Florida, I learned to look up the planetary positions in the Zodiac as we all have. I looked at my ephemeris and noted the positions of the sun, moon, mercury and all the rest. Robert Ball always had us using the "Simplified Scientific Ephemeris" by The Rosicrucian Fellowship. They're printed mostly in the ten year sized books. Not very space efficient, but complete, and that's what we used. I didn't question it at the time.

One day I asked why we seemed to be using only half of the book. The Longitude of the planets is located on the left side page and the Declinations are located on the right side page. Even the Latitudes were located on the right side page in the older editions! The Longitude of the planets is the position in the Zodiac as we commonly think of them. Robert focused on me with those clear blue eyes and a smile on his face as he lit up another Camel non-filter cigarette and said, "Think of the Longitudes, on the left side, as the first paragraph of the story. It's the main headline. The Declinations and Latitudes are like the second and third paragraphs of the story. You'll get to that in time." That satisfied me then, but I soon wanted more information, as Robert knew so well, being the curious Gemini that I am.

The years passed and with it my knowledge of astrology and its more socially respectable sister, astronomy grew. I'd always had an interest in astronomy. Having grown up in a small seaside village in Canada, the night sky was clear and the many stars were bright. The vault of heaven called to me and I longed to understand.

At some point, I began to look more closely at star maps of the summer and winter sky and I observed that there seemed to be two basic coordinate systems being used. One was Celestial Longitude and Latitude and the other was Right Ascension and Declination. It's these two coordinate systems that we, as astrologers, must begin to appreciate in order to understand the significance of Declination, our subject of this article, and to begin to understand the language of our more respected sister-science, astronomy.

Let's think firstly, about the coordinate system that we astrologers take more for granted, Celestial Longitude & Latitude. The "equator" or centerline of this system, if you will, is what we call the "ecliptic". The ecliptic is defined as the "apparent path of the Sun" through the sky from the Earth's point of view. This line through the stars is a constant and regular one because the orbit of the Earth around the Sun is regular from year to year, century to century. The ancients noticed that the Sun's regular path and the planets general motion was in the same band of stars that were recognized as the constellations we today know as the Zodiac. There are many constellations other than the ones we

astrologers are familiar with, however the Zodiac was decided upon as being significant because the Sun, and the Planets in general, moved through this band of stars. We divide this circle, as we do all circles, into 360 degrees and sub-divide the whole circle into the twelve familiar “Signs” of 30 degrees each. These degrees around the circle of the Zodiac are the degrees of Longitude. Latitude is the distance north or south of the “ecliptic”. Got it? The Latitude of the Planets is not something we usually discuss, partly because the variation in planetary Latitude isn’t that much as compared to the variation we find with Declination. It’s an advanced topic to be elaborated upon at some future time. The Sun ALWAYS has a Latitude of 0 degrees. The Sun is always on the ecliptic because the Sun’s movement is what defines the ecliptic.

The “Signs” of the Zodiac are distinguished from the “Constellations” of the Zodiac because of the shifting of the position of the “Vernal” equinox, which is what, we who use the Tropical system use to define the beginning of Aires. That’s another very interesting discussion. It makes clear the astrological “Ages” and why we are “entering the Age of Aquarius”. It is this fact that distinguishes what Tropical astrologers do from what Sidereal astrologers do (Hindu or Vedic astrologers use the Sidereal system).

We now come to the discussion of the other coordinate system, Right Ascension & Declination. This system is used commonly by astronomers, surveyors and navigators (at sea and on land). There’s nothing complicated about it once it’s clear that it’s just a different way to look at the sky and map it. It’s a more Earth-centered perspective, as I’m sure you’ll begin to see for yourself.

If we imagine the equator of the Earth projected out into space in all directions infinitely, that line through the stars and constellations is called the “Celestial Equator”. This line in the stars and constellations is called the line of “Right Ascension”. It is commonly divided into either degrees or hours and minutes. Both are used although astronomers commonly use the hours and minutes method. This circle intersects the Zodiac (the ecliptic) at the Vernal equinox (0 degrees Aries) and at the Autumnal equinox (0 degrees Libra). Right Ascension is at an angle to the ecliptic because the Earth is tilted to the Sun, which is why we experience seasons here. So this line is at its maximum separation from the ecliptic on the summer and winter Solstices (0 degrees Cancer/Capricorn). Declination is the distance north or south of this line of Right Ascension. Got it?

With this in mind, the Sun’s Declination will change through the year in a regular and an anticipated way (that’s an interesting discussion in itself!). It’s Declination will be 0 degrees only at the “Equinoxes” or 0 degrees Aries/Libra. The Sun reaches it’s maximum Declination at the Solstices or 0 degrees Cancer/Capricorn. Its maximum Declination is 23 degrees 27’ (north in the summer and south in the winter). On the computer printouts, the Declination is identified as being north as a (+), and as being south as a (-). The maximum Declination of the Sun is very important because it defines the “normal” road of the planets, and when a planet is beyond this Declination, it’s called “out of bounds”.

Ok, now we've defined the two major coordinate systems that are important for us to consider and we now have an idea of what Declination is....right? Let's start to put it together so we can use it in our work as astrologers.

We can have two planets conjunct in a chart and have very different Declinations. When we do, they would look like they are in very different places in the sky, yet most astrologers don't distinguish this difference. It's like saying Manhattan, NY has a Longitude of 73W59' and Washington, DC has a Longitude of 77W02' so they are conjunct! They're only 3 degrees 03' apart....isn't that conjunct? Well, Manhattan, NY also has a Latitude (like Declination, but don't mix them up like this. This is just an example!) of 40N46' and Washington, DC has a Latitude of 38N53'. They are close, but they aren't conjunct.

When we have two planets that are conjunct AND have a Declination of within one degree, we call them "Parallel" and in the sky, they would in fact look like they are very close or even on top of each other if the degrees of Longitude and Declination are exact. When the sun & moon have the same degrees of Longitude and Declination we have a solar eclipse. This is why we have a new moon each month but we don't always have a solar eclipse. It has to do with Declination. It's more complex than that, but it gives you the idea.

Now planets can be parallel but not conjunct and in very different parts of the Zodiac with no other significant aspect between them at all. This is where most astrologers miss the boat altogether, because we treat the parallel aspect like a powerful conjunction that can have physical consequences, even involving the health. When the Declination of two planets are the same degree but one is north and the other is south, they are called "Contra-Parallel". It is said to be similar to the opposition, however I haven't noticed this in my own work. I leave that for your own observations.

As you can see, checking the Declinations of the planets is almost as important as knowing their zodiacal positions. It reveals aspects between planets that usually go completely unnoticed. In a conjunction, as an example, the Declinations of the two planets involved reveal the relative strength of that conjunction. If the Declination difference is greater than one degree, then the conjunction is operating at more of a psychological level. That doesn't mean that there won't be physical manifestations, just that its origin is more psychological. Many conditions are psychosomatic in nature. When you have this same conjunction and the Declination is within one degree, then you will have physical manifestations with all of the psychological ramifications that this will imply. Think of Declination as an intensity meter.

Now let's turn our attention to this thing called "out of bounds". This occurs when a planets Declination has gone beyond 23 degrees 27' either north or south. When a planet does this, it becomes a bit of a "wild card". The planet will show up as much more powerful than normal. If the planet is located in the natal chart, then this function and associated area within the individual will be extra-ordinary and very strong and pronounced. If the planet is "in bounds" in the natal but progresses "out of bounds", then

that ability and area of the persons life will become much more powerful and heightened. Watch this also during transit periods when a planet goes out of bounds. These times can be “trigger points”.

To illustrate this point, I’d like to bring our attention to a very significant date in American history. I’m referring to Tuesday, September 11th, 2001. This date is not likely to be easily forgotten by the current generation and is marked astrologically by not only a Saturn Pluto opposition which had not occurred previously since 1965, but also by a strong Mars “out of bounds”.

Mars went “out of bounds” on Sunday, April 15th, 2001 and remains “out of bounds” until Saturday, October 20th, 2001. On “infamous” Tuesday, Mars was 26 degrees 48’ south Declination. This is usually written 26S48’. The “Red Planet” attained a maximum Declination of 27S02’ between August 24th and August 26th, 2001. It would be interesting to know what Osama bin Laden was up to during that period! Mars will again be “out of bounds” from Sunday, May 5th, 2002 until Sunday, June 23rd, 2002 attaining a maximum Declination of 24N25’. Not that much is written about this matter however this writer feels that the more extreme the Declination, the more extreme the planetary manifestations tend to be. Observe this phenomena for yourselves and perhaps we can add to the literature about this area in a meaningful way.

The following table gives the “out of bounds” periods for Mars from 1980 through 2019 with the maximum Declination it reaches within each period. I’ve noted the periods when Mars has reached a similar maximum as this period we have been in with a * symbol for your considerations.

Mars “Out of Bounds”

Date “out of bounds”	Date “in bounds”	Max Decl.
11/01/1980	12/14/1980	24S30’
07/04/81	08/07/81	23N56’
10/06/82	11/25/82	24S51’
06/12/83	07/21/83	24N07’
08/26/84	11/04/84	25S35’
05/20/85	07/03/85	24N18’
03/26/86	10/07/86	28S43’
04/26/87	06/16/87	24N31’
02/16/88	03/08/88	23S38’
03/29/89	05/29/89	24N49’
01/18/1990	02/15/1990	23S49’
02/08/91	05/10/91	25N22’
12/26/91	01/27/92	24S00’
09/17/92	09/27/92	23N28’
12/06/92	04/15/93	27N01’
12/03/93	01/08/94	23N40’
11/10/95	12/22/95	24S24’
07/13/96	08/14/96	23N52’
10/16/97	12/02/97	24S41’
06/20/98	07/27/98	24N03’
09/15/99	11/13/99	25S13’
05/28/2000	07/09/2000	24N13’
04/15/01	10/20/01	27S02’
05/05/02	06/22/02	24N25’
03/01/03	03/20/03’	23S34’
04/09/04	06/04/04	24N41’
01/28/05	02/23/05	23S45’
03/06/06	05/17/06	25N06’
01/04/07	02/03/07	23S56’
10/04/07	04/25/08	26N59’
12/11/08	01/15/09	24S06’
08/22/09	09/09/09	23N34’
02/13/2010	03/15/2010	23N50’
11/19/10	12/28/10	24S18’
07/24/11	08/21/11	23N47’
10/26/12	12/09/12	24S33’
06/29/13	08/02/13	23N58’
09/28/14	11/21/14	24S57’
06/06/15	07/16/15	24N09’
08/08/16	10/30/16	25S55’
05/14/17	06/29/17	24N20’
03/17/18	04/07/18	23S33’
07/07/18	09/24/18	26S30’
04/20/19	06/12/19	24N34’

What I discovered in researching for this article is that the next time that Mars is at a similar declination to what it has been this year will be in the year 2033! Mars goes “out of bounds” on 04/03/2033 and attains a maximum declination between 07/20/2033 and 07/24/2033 of 28S38’ and comes back “in bounds” again on 10/13/2033. I invite those interested to do more research in this area and for all of us to start being more aware of declinations in our work in general.

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