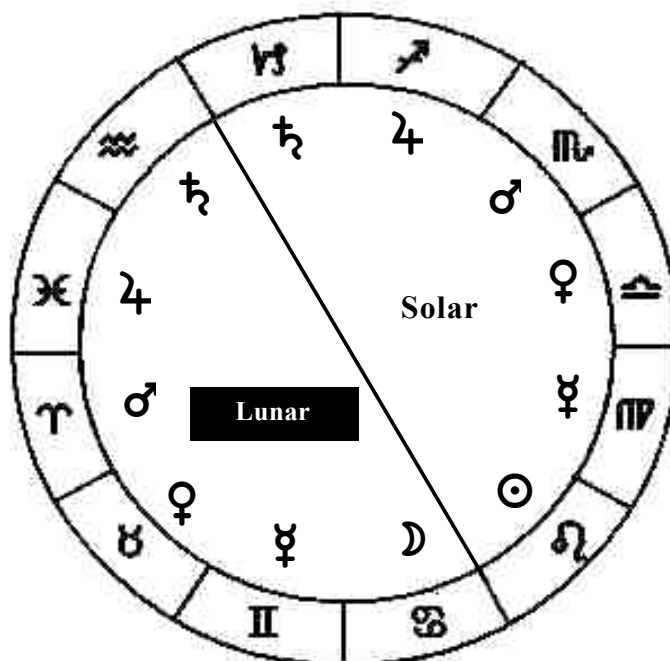


## MARS AND MYTH : A Case for Old Rulerships

The Australis '97 Congress theme, "An Ancient Art in a Modern World" was designed to incorporate two themes : those of medieval and mythical astrology. These two streams, although superficially so different from one another, form the cornerstones of our modern astrology. Both contain the wisdom of Antiquity, and in truth, we could not operate effectively in astrology today without either. Medieval astrology gave us the order of the twelve signs, the house systems, the essential dignitaries, and all the technical equipment found in an astrologer's kit-bag, whilst mythology provided a psychological blueprint by which we identify archetypes in order to understand ourselves and those around us.

The two need not be mutually exclusive. Planetary rulership of signs is an example which can demonstrate how these two unlikely bed-fellows can work together harmoniously. The planet Mars is a deliberate choice in subject matter, given the debate over its continued rulership of Scorpio. The split in Mars' rulership stands as a unique example, as it is distinct from the two outer planets who have also had to share their rulership thrones. Whilst classified with Jupiter and Saturn as a superior planet outside the influence of the earth's orbit, Mars is still considered to be a personal planet, that is, one which we can work with on a conscious level, unlike the two other superior planets. We may not always feel comfortable owning our Mars, or be particularly proud of our Martian behaviour at times, but at least we recognise it as *ours*, and this is not always the case with Jupiter and Saturn.

To add to the difficulty of determining who owns what, we have the discovery of Pluto. Pluto has a 248-year cycle ; so far we have witnessed only one quarter of this cycle, and have experienced its unfoldment through just five of the twelve zodiac signs. The past 67 years has been trying for astrologers, as they include this new planet in the horoscope, and then attempt to define its essence in terms of astrological interpretation. The subject of rulership is a tricky one, as opinions often differ over the value and practical use of Ptolemy's rulership system in today's astrology.



See Figure 1: Solar and Lunar Signs

Ptolemy was a Greco-Egyptian mathematician, geographer and astronomer, born around 120 AD, who detailed in his book *Tetrabiblos* an explanation of sign rulership based on the Sun's seasons. Ptolemy reasoned that the Sun should rule one of the two signs Cancer or Leo, as the summer sun was at its most northerly position at this time, and therefore, most productive of heat and warmth. Ptolemy assigned Leo to the sun because Leo is masculine like the Sun. That left the Moon - the next major body after the Sun - to rule Cancer because the Moon and Cancer are both feminine and nocturnal.

The planet Saturn - called by the ancients 'the sun of the night' - occupied the highest known orbit, farthest from the Sun and the Moon. By nature Saturn was cold and opposite in quality to the Sun. Ptolemy therefore gave Saturn government over the signs directly opposite the warm signs Leo and Cancer; that is Aquarius and Capricorn. Ptolemy then drew a line between Cancer and Leo to divide the zodiac circle into two equal parts. The signs along the semi-circle from Leo through to Capricorn were "solar" or day signs. Those on the semi-circle from Aquarius through to Cancer were "lunar" or night signs. Ptolemy paired each of the five known planets with one lunar sign and one solar sign, and he took the planets in order of their distance from the sun. By this method, Ptolemy produced a neat, orderly system that appeared to reflect a divine plan - unless new planets were discovered, that is.

On 13th March 1781, Ptolemy's system began to unravel with the discovery of the planet Uranus. The sign of Aquarius, previously the lunar sign of Saturn, was allotted to the newcomer. Sixty five years later, Neptune was discovered on 24th September, 1846, and the next consecutive lunar sign, Pisces left Jupiter and became the sign ruled by this new planet.

Another 67 years and Pluto was observed and classified as a planet on 18th February 1930. When Pluto was discovered the precedent of handing over the nocturnal signs to new planets would have meant Pluto was given rulership over Aries, the lunar sign of Mars, but many astrologers saw Aries as typically Martian, and therefore it could not possibly be separated from that planet. This left Scorpio, Mars' solar sign, and its yin expression of Mars, to be seconded to Pluto. This decision birthed the concept of dual rulership: that together, Jupiter and Neptune co-ruled of Pisces, Saturn and Uranus, were the co-rulers of Aquarius, and jointly Mars and Pluto were to rule Scorpio together. However, applying this co-rulership became so complicated that it was more convenient to ignore the old rulers and simply go with the new.

### ***Why use rulerships in today's astrology?***

\*2\* Rulership is extraordinarily important and the relationship between a planet and its sign is one of the major keys by which we elicit concrete, practical information from the horoscope. To explore this we need to look at one of the rules of medieval astrology :

**The good or bad signified by a house emanates from the ruler of that house**

\*2\* Medieval astrology maintains :

**Point One** : There is an intimate relationship between a sign and its ruling planet.

**Point Two** : At the same time, there is also a relationship between a planet and a sign which is temporal. The sign represents the beginning of the affair and the planet rules the outcome.

**Point Three** : The planet that rules a sign is a kind of extension of the sign itself.

**Point Four** : A sign's activity is determined and understood by the planet which rules that sign.

\*2\* The nature of the sign is conditioned not only by its quality according to element, but also by the nature of the planet which rules that sign. So the hot nature of Mars rules Aries and Scorpio, but in two entirely different ways as Aries is a cardinal fire sign, whilst Scorpio is a fixed water sign. In Aries, Mars' influence is going to be forthright, outward, aimed, extroverted, in other words Mars will express its nature through the qualities of Fire, whilst Scorpio is more likely to explore Mars' essence through acts of a defensive, introspective, or protective nature. As a water sign, Scorpio is disinclined to initiate trouble but once involved in conflict it will fight to the death.

### ***Is there a difference between Medieval and Modern interpretations of Mars?***

\*3\* **Mars** according to Al-Biruni in the 9th Century C.E. is '*confused opinions, ignorant, rash, evil conduct, licentious, bold, quarrelsome, unsteady, untrustworthy, violent, shameless, unchaste but quickly repentant, a deceiver, cheerful, bright, friendly and pleasant-faced*'.

### ***And the Modern interpretation of Mars?***

\*4\* '*One simple definition of Mars is that it (Mars) is the fighting principle for the Sun, and in a sense the fighting principle for all the inner planets which lie within its orbit. The necessity for a fighting principle is obvious, since there is a world out there, where we will meet conflict or challenge to one's individuality, one's values, and even one's physical and psychological survival*'.

And again :

\*5\* '*Mars can be naturally cruel as nature is cruel, but it is not malevolent... Blind aggression and crude insensitivity may be an inherent attribute of Mars, but it takes a special kind of wounding to produce the manipulative cruelty which may be the darkest expression of a thwarted, unconscious Mars. But if Mars is castrated and subjected to powerlessness, then it can become very poisonous indeed*'.

### ***Mars and Myth***

The following myths tell stories of these Martian attributes which Liz Greene mentions in her book. Some of the wounds are physical, but some indicate deep emotional wounding which creates bitterness and rage, often instigating an act of revenge against those who are perceived to have caused the wounding.

Medieval Mars is acknowledged as a planet of aggression, strife, and violence, and often the acts of aggression are rash, impulsive and savage. These reactions can be likened to the negative qualities of the sign of Aries, who as a cardinal fire, acts first and then, after the holocaust, contemplates the damage with amazement and wonders at its own capacity to destroy.

But the greatest impact of Mars is often more insidious, more hidden and ultimately, far more destructive, than the Arian show of outward aggression. They are drawn from psychological or emotional wounds, which thrive in a moist, dark place, and are nurtured by feelings of pain, betrayal and powerlessness. Now we enter the realm of Scorpio.

### ***BABYLONIAN MYTH : A POWER-HUNGRY MARS***

The Babylonian priests studied the movement of the heavens from watchtower observatories called ziggurats (cosmic mountains) at around 5000 BC. By constant observation they noticed that five of the stars were wanderers. The Babylonians called the planets 'wild goats' as opposed to the tame and tethered variety, and saw them as interpreters of the gods' will, as their movements could predict future events.

The ancients attempted to combine their legends with the 'wanderers' of the sky, and each god is adapted to suit the geographical, political, economical and philosophical beliefs of the people. Ishtar, the goddess of fertility dwelt on Venus ; Marduk, chief of the gods, dwelt on Jupiter ; Ninurta, an aging chillier version of Marduk, lived on the remote and flickering Saturn. ; Nabu, the fox, lived on Mercury ; and Nergal, the malevolent god of war, lived on the red planet Mars.

The story of **Nergal** and the circumstances of his marriage with the Underworld goddess, Ereshkigal, the Queen of Souls is a excellent example of Mars and its rulerships. Nergal was the Babylonian god of war and disease. Originally he lived above the ground with the other gods, causing havoc and destruction in his role as the god of all things feared : pestilence, fire, battle and the desert. In other words, he is a deified version of Mars, according to medieval interpretation. At the beginning of this myth Ereshkigal (who becomes his wife) lives alone in the Land of No Return and is the keeper of the Tablets of Wisdom, the recorded laws of Existence. Ereshkigal is both beautiful and passionate, and ancient songs describe her enticing men to join her on her Couch of Pleasures, but she is said to have terrible, life-freezing eyes, 'Death Eyes', and she will turn these terrible eyes on any who cross her.

***At this point Mars' two signs are separated and easily distinguished from one another. Nergal represents the Arian side of Mars' influence, a cardinal, masculine fire sign. Ereshkigal represents the Scorpionic side of Mars, a fixed, feminine water sign. It is only later in the story that we see the signs' evolve and become enmeshed so that they no longer appear unrelated, or clearly definable by their initial nature.***

According to myth, the most powerful gods, the Annunaki, planned a great feast in heaven. All the deities of the Annunaki were invited, but Ereshkigal, fearing that her absence would cause chaos in the Underworld, declined the invitation and sent her

ambassador instead. On his arrival at the feast, all the gods rose as one to pay homage to the great Queen.

All that is, except one. A rash young warrior, Nergal, a god of death, who believed himself to be as powerful as the goddess of the Dead. The other gods were stunned and embarrassed by his rudeness, and when Ereshkigal heard of Nergal's insolence respect, he was summoned to the Underworld to account for his behaviour. One of the gods, Ea, was an old adversary of Ereshkigal's and he warned Nergal to refuse all food, drink or sexual invitation from the powerful goddess. However, on meeting Ereshkigal the young god was captivated by her beauty, and ignoring the warnings, lay with Ereshkigal on her Couch of Pleasures for six days and six nights.

***In true Arian fashion, Nergal disregards advice from his elder. He has always been victorious on the battlefield and believes he will get the better of this goddess. Perhaps Nergal feels there is an alliance between them as, by his actions on Earth, he supplies Ereshkigal with her eternal subjects. Nergal is Yang energy ; active, resourceful, challenge-orientated. This time his adversary is Scorpionic and she displays all the talents of Yin. Instead of demonstrating her power through battle, she seduces and conquers him with her yielding body. Mars can go into battle or into bed, and Nergal's intimacy with Ereshkigal is his undoing. As a male, this is his greatest sexual adventure ever, but there is a dreadful price he must pay for his pleasure.***

After a week in the goddess' company Nergal feels an urge to return to earth, and begging for his release, he promises her that he will return once he has tidied up his affairs. Once more above ground, he began to think of all the mischief-making he would miss when he resided permanently in the Underworld. He also began to wonder if his virility would erode once he returned to Ereshkigal's loving arms. When he didn't return, Ereshkigal's patience began to run out and she sent a messenger to earth, with a decree that Nergal belonged to her, and he was commanded to accompany the messenger back to the Underworld. This time Nergal was really terrified he may never escape Ereshkigal, and once more he sought Ea's help.

***Ereshkigal wants what is now rightfully hers. Her demand for his return is a show of her absolute power over him. He has become her possession. The fear of physical or psychological emasculation is strong for Mars, it is the deprivation of masculine vigour, or in other words, impotence. Power is a great aphrodisiac, but only if you are the one with it!***

***Nergal ponders if Ereshkigal will betray him. And does he want to be a woman's sexual toy? Nergal's power lies in his ability to kill, or to instill fear, so how can he be powerful in a land where all Her souls are already dead? Fear instead of desire begins to consume him and he seeks advice this time, willing to listen and do as he is told.***

Ea provides Nergal with fourteen fearsome warrior demons, gives him false tokens, and instructs him to make a sword from several magical trees, so that he might defeat

the guards who protect the seven portals of the Underworld and slay Ereshkigal with the magic sword. Thus, secretly armed, Nergal follows the messenger back into the Land of Souls. At each gate he gives a false token, overpowers the guards and leaves behind two demons on guard at each of the portals so that he is not challenged when he makes his escape. However, when he reaches his lover, he falls once more under her spell and instead of murdering her as he originally planned, he hesitates, and begins to wonder if he cannot have the best of both worlds.

*The two signs of Mars are now in conflict within Nergal. In aspect, the sign of Aries is quincunx the sign of Scorpio; there is always going to be discomfort between these two signs ruled by Mars. They are not going to want to join forces, they would prefer instead to work alone as separate entities, as they share nothing in common. Not element, nor modality, nor gender - their only link is through the planet which governs them both.*

*However, for Aries and Scorpio in quincunx aspect, their incompatibility goes beyond mere discomfort, and becomes a constant power struggle, as this is the very nature of Mars. Perhaps we can look to another planet and its signs by rulership to underline this point. Venus' rulership signs, Taurus and Libra, are also quincunx by aspect, but by its very nature, Venus looks towards compromise and reconciliation to help ease the discomfort between these two signs. We may be asked to give up Taurus (personal wealth) in order to accommodate Libra (harmony), or visa versa, but we often do not feel the anguish of this choice as we believe we have made it willingly and in the nobility of Love. For this reason, the quincunx appears to cause less overt friction between these two signs ruled by Venus. The dilemma still exists of course, as most 'romantic novels' revolve around issues of money/values and Taurean concerns verses 'true love' and the idealised merging of two wills to one blissful union.*

*This is not the case for Mars. Mars is an assertion of will, an "I want, therefore I will have". Each rulership sign is given the opportunity to ride into battle on Mars' behalf, and both want to bring home the prize for Mars, but their methods are entirely different. Neither Aries nor Scorpio is a sign which will back down, and this can only add to the struggle between them.*

*Through Aries, Mars urges Nergal on to victory. If he kills Ereshkigal, the other gods will know he is a great warrior, and he will claim her kingdom as his prize. He is not prepared to give up the good life, he wants to continue waging war and making trouble for the mortals on earth. However, she is very beautiful, no other woman has satisfied him as she has, and he would like to rekindle her passion. Mars' other sign Scorpio urges Nergal to devise another plan, one in which he can crush her spirit without taking her life. His dilemma lies in whether he can separate power from passion, by forcing her to submit to his will without totally destroying either or both of them. He sees the solution to his 'quincunx' is through marriage to his enemy.*

Nergal grabs Ereshkigal by her hair, holds the magic sword to her throat, and threatens to decapitate her unless she agrees to marry him. To emphasize his hold over her, Nergal makes a list of demands to Ereshkigal. He demands that she hand over to him keeping the Tablets of Destiny, and insists he take the title of Master of the Underworld, with the goddess taking the lesser role as his dutiful consort. Ereshkigal knows she is defeated and she agrees to all his terms. The final poem tells us that she wept bitterly at her abdication and that he kissed her and wiped away her tears. From that time forward, Nergal held court in his dual role as King of the Underworld, and also as god of War and Disease.

*The Babylonians believed that each planet was the dwelling place of one of their gods. This 'planet-to-god' relationship was not chosen randomly, but demonstrated a clever fusion of observation of the night sky, with their beliefs surrounding each respective deity. The Babylonians called Mars the Star of Death, it was Nergal's home, and the planet's closely observed characteristics corresponded with their belief of Nergal's capabilities as a god. One might speculate, but perhaps his marriage to Ereshkigal, the Goddess of Souls, gave the Babylonians a myth which 'brought together' the acceptance of sudden and violent death with the concept of transportation (and transformation) to another dimension, the Land of Souls.*

**Point One : There is an intimate relationship between a sign and its ruling planet.**

Nergal's story demonstrates not only Mars' characteristics, but also the link or 'intimate relationship' between a sign and its ruling planet. Without Aries and Scorpio, the story of the Babylonian Mars cannot unfold - one relies on the other to manifest the true expression of Mars. The marriage of these two powerful entities, Nergal and Ereshkigal, can be seen as an analogy of the symbolic joining of two signs in conflict, one masculine, one feminine, under the rulership of the one planet - Mars.

### **GREEK MYTH - A MISUNDERSTOOD MARS**

Our legacy of Greek myths starts with Homer. This blind poet, born around 700 B.C., wrote two epics, the *Iliad* and the *Odyssey*, from legend, some of it recorded in the Mycenaean Age, 500 years before the books were written. Homer 'humanises' the gods, giving them characteristics and behaviour patterns with which mere mortals can identify. Hesiod was another poet who was a contemporary of Homer. He wrote two major works, *Theogony* and *Works and Days*. In *Theogony* Hesiod attempts a systematic account of the genealogy of the gods, and this record of the Birth of the Gods provided a basis for much later mythology.

Our interest lies in **Ares**, the Greek god of war. Ares is the Greek equivalent to the Babylonian god of war, Nergal. Similar in trait to his Babylonian cousin, Ares is considered a very unpopular god. Homer mentions Ares in the *Iliad* as he supports the Trojans in their battle against the Greeks. Homer describes Ares as a thug, three hundred feet tall, hairy, brutish, but invincible in battle. He is depicted as stupid and clumsy, but he has the light of the Berserker in his eyes.

There are conflicting opinions as to Ares' origins. In one version Zeus reluctantly accepts him as his son, but is embarrassed by this awkward, bumbling offspring. Zeus favours his illegitimate sons, and even prefers his daughter Athene to his rash, hot-headed son. Another myth claims that, while Zeus fathered Ares, he refuses to acknowledge him as his heir, as Ares' birth took place during the first three hundred years when Hera and Zeus' marriage was not considered sacred. Another version claims Ares has no father, and is product of his mother's rage, when Hera is humiliated by Zeus' attachment to his daughter. Regardless of the details, one aspect is consistent. Ares is rejected and denied paternal guidance from his father. He does not feature strongly in the Greek myths which is surprising, as the Greeks were famous for their love of strong, brave men. Other battles between father and son are vividly described, and the ingredients for conflict and a battle for supremacy are certainly present, but the Greeks are mysteriously silent on the relationship between Zeus and Ares.

Of the little we know of Ares, we are told that Ares takes after his mother Hera, both in looks and in temperament. Ares is dark, like his mother, is given to outbursts of rage and illogical acts (and thereby judged as emotional and irrational). Ares must have felt powerless before Zeus, frustrated that he could not dazzle his father with his courage and bravery, as Zeus always favoured the calculated logic of Athene. Athene defeats her half-brother on several occasions on the battlefield, and this must surely be a further blow to Ares' male pride. Zeus however, is not consistent in his favouritism, as he also encourages and protects Hercules, one of his mortal offspring. Hercules is in many ways similar to Ares. Like Ares, Hercules is courageous, fearless, strong and brave, all of which impresses Zeus, yet these same personality traits in Ares provoke feelings of loathing and distrust in Zeus.

***The circumstances of Ares' family history give us some insight into his connection to the planet Mars. In Ares' instance, it is as though Mars' two rulership signs are at war within him. The Yang expression of Mars is his Arian desire to impress his father with acts of daring and courage, which others see as rash and impulsive behaviour. Outwardly he seeks encouragement and comradeship from his father. Inwardly he feels wounded, betrayed, and bitterly disappointed by his father's attitude towards him. His Scorpio feels betrayed and defensive. This is the dark murky place where his rages and violence are spawned.***

***Point Three : The planet that rules the sign is an extension of the sign itself.***

In the same way as Mars is an extension of Aries and Scorpio, Ares is an extension (or physical embodiment) of his father, Zeus and his mother, Hera. These are the two great energies of Yin and Yang, Goddess and God. Hera can be seen as fixed feminine water (Scorpio), familiar with the cyclic pattern of the seasons and the rhythm of humankind's birth, death and rebirth. Images of Hera appear before her devout subjects, a sceptre in one hand, a pomegranate in the other, so they understand that Hera rules in death - as she did in life. Each year Hera bathes in the Spring of Kanathos to renew her youth and beauty. Her rituals of fertility are cloaked in feminine mystique, and her power is ancient and absolute - that is, until the arrival of Zeus. Zeus displays the qualities of cardinal masculine fire (Aries), forthright,

outward, and aimed at achieving success through physical expression. He is virile, courageous and uncomplicated, so ideally it should be a marriage made in heaven.

However, together they cannot attain perfect Oneness, they pull away from each other, as neither will compromise nor try to understand the other. Their separation is the strained marriage of ideologies and the offspring they produce (Ares) has much the same difficulty as the quincunx aspect between the two signs ruled by Mars. This is yet another theological 'marriage of convenience', similar to Nergal's marriage to Ereshkigal, only this time it has evolved a little and we see its results through the children of such a complex union - Ares, the god of war.

If we are going to comment on Ares' family history, then a brief outline of his genealogy is interesting from the point of view of Mars rulership over Scorpio.

### **ARES' BIRTHRIGHT**

Ares' bloodline is a compound of Scorpionic images, from the emasculation of Uranus, engineered by the original 'Earth Mother', to the metamorphose of his daughter Harmonia into a giant snake by Zeus.

**URANUS - Ares' great grandfather** - violent, sadistic, repressive, paranoid - he pushes his unwanted children back into their mother's womb.

**CRONOS - Ares' grandfather** - encouraged by his mother, he castrates his own father, thereby rendering him impotent, and takes his father's place, as his mother's lover. Swallows his offspring at birth, so that he cannot be overthrown.

**ZEUS - Ares' father** - overthrows his father, swallows his first wife Metis to prevent her giving birth to a child greater than he, deserts his second wife, Themis, and finally seduces and marries Hera. Fears he too will be overthrown, plots to prevent this happening (Thetis' marriage to a mortal). Sexually promiscuous, he spends his time pursuing goddesses, nymphs and mortal women.

**HEPHAESTUS - Ares' brother** - rejected by his mother Hera for his ugliness, Hephaestus is raised in secrecy and returns to affect revenge on Hera by trapping her in a magical golden chair. Is given Aphrodite's hand in marriage when he releases her from the Golden Chair.

**APHRODITE - Ares' sister-in-law and lover** - married to Ares' brother Hephaestus. Lover of Ares and mother to Ares' three children.

**The Twins PHOBOS (Panic) and DEIMOS (Fear) - Ares' children by Aphrodite** - the brothers were intensely loyal to their father and were constant 'satellites' of Ares, often driving his chariot into battle and acting as his bodyguards.

**HARMONIA - Ares' daughter by Aphrodite** - Harmonia marries the mortal Cadmus and is given the Necklace of Harmonia by her uncle Hephaestus at her wedding. The necklace is cursed and it brings misery and disaster to all who possess it. Remember Harmonia's mother is also her aunt as Aphrodite is Hephaestus' wife, and the cursed necklace is Hephaestus' revenge on his wife's illegitimate daughter. Harmonia's four daughters suffer dreadfully at the hand of different deities. Hera, Ares' mother, destroys two of the sisters, whilst another is punished by Artemis and the last driven mad by Dionysos.

**SEMELE - Ares' granddaughter and Zeus' lover** - Part mortal, part divine, she is the mother of Dionysos, Zeus' chosen heir. Murdered by Hera, Ares' mother.

We could call this family the world's first dysfunctional family. No wonder it's called Greek tragedy.

\*2\* *Robert Zoller , Tape 5 ; Sign Rulerships & Subdivisions ; correspondence course in Medieval Astrology*

\*3\* *"The Book of Instruction in the Elements of the Art of Astrology", a book by Al-Biruni, c. 1029 A.D.*

\*4\* *Liz Greene in "Inner Planets", Page 177.*

\*5\* *Liz Greene in "Inner Planets", Page 189.*

COPYRIGHT : JOY USHER , EXERPT FROM ARTICLE PUBLISHED IN AUSTRALIS '97