

## How to diagnose and treat an illness using astrology

Extracted from Joseph Blagrave, *Blagrave's Astrological Practice of Physick* (London, 1671), pp. 28-40

Designed for those who “who have never formerly read or studied any whit in this Science” (p. 20)

Abridged, and lightly edited for accessibility

To be read in conjunction with the file “Astrological medicine, figures.”

There are five numbered sections; section 5 is optional for Europe in the Making students

Michael Bycroft, June 2019

### 1. Concerning the astrological way of giving judgement by a sign of 12 houses.

Although what is already written, I have known by good experience to hold true by many examples, it being for the most part the method of my daily practice. Yet for the benefit and better satisfaction of practitioners, and others, well-willers thereunto, especially such who desire further inspection into this art, I shall in the next place shew how in an astrological way judgement may be given by a figure of 12 houses. For I must confess that in such infirmities, which are natural from the birth, and likewise some chronick griefs, which have been of long continuance, and likewise such infirmities, wherein there is any suspicion of witchcraft, cannot so exactly be discovered by the Sun or Moon afflicted, as by a sign of twelve houses for the ascendant sixth, eighth, and twelfth houses with their Lords.

In the first place you must erect your figure; either for the time of decumbiture, or for the time of any strong fit (if any be) or upon the receipt of the Urine, or time of the first visitation of the Patient, and you must be sure for to frame, and vary your ascendant, that it together with its Lord may exactly personate the Sick. Secondly you must in order set down the Cusp of every House. Thirdly you must set down the Characters of the Planets in every House, which for to do, and likewise how to frame the ascendant, I shall briefly declare. But before you can proceed herein, you must perfectly know the

**Commented [BM1]:** The first of several references in the extract to “experience” and “practice”, which Blagrave says is the basis for the instructions he gives here.

**Commented [BM2]:** ‘grief’ = illness

**Commented [BM3]:** Blagrave describes two methods or ‘ways’ of doing astrological medicine in his book. The simpler method uses the sun and the moon only; Blagrave described this in the preceding section. He is now going to describe the second method, which is more complicated than the first but which is ‘the most assured and exactest way’ (p. 20).

**Commented [BM4]:** These are technical terms that will be explained later on.

**Commented [BM5]:** “time of decumbiture” = time at which the patient was first laid up in bed as a result of their illness

**Commented [BM6]:** “The time...of the receipt of the Urin” = the time at which the physician received the first sample of urine from the patient. Examining the patient’s urine was a standard early modern medical test. Like the blood test today, the urine test was a routine procedure that could guide the diagnosis of many illnesses.

**Commented [BM7]:** All this will be explained later on, as will the other obscure terms in this paragraph.

Characters of the seven Planets, and twelve signs, and the five Aspects of the Planets [the Lords of the signs are also useful to know – all of this is in **Figures 1 to 5** in the file “Astrological medicine, figures”].

It will also be necessary to understand the use of an Ephemeris or Almanack, which setteth forth the daily motions of the planets. And for the better informing of young Students herein, I shall for example set down in order, for the month of October, 1667, the form as usually is printed, and shew the use thereof until the tenth day of the said month [**Figure 6**]; which will be enough whereby to understand, not only the rest of that month, but also every other month throughout the year, provided alwayes that your Almanack must be such a one which setteth forth the daily motions of the planets, whose Title page to every month is as followeth.

## 2. Concerning the use of the Ephemeris

The first Column on the left shews the days of the month, the second column sheweth the week dayes, the next column sheweth the daily motion of *Saturn*, the sign next beneath his character sheweth what sign he is in, and the numbers next beneath that sheweth how far *Saturn* is entered into the sign for every day, the first number is for degrees, the second minutes, and so forwards for every planet accordingly: *Example, ħ Saturn* the first day is 25 deg. 35 min. in the sign *Capricorn*: the second day he is 25 deg. 36 min. in *Capricorn*: the third day he is 25 deg. 37 min. in *Capricorn*: the fourth day he is 25 deg 39 min. in *Capricorn* and so forward

**Commented [BM8]:** Here Blaggrave means “degrees” in the modern sense, ie. a measure of the size of an angle, whereby there are 360 degrees in a circle. Each of these degrees is divided into sixty “minutes”. So “25 degrees and 35 minutes” is about 25.5 degrees.

## 3. How to erect a Scheme or Figure according unto any time given

[Blaggrave proceeds to illustrate his method with this example:]

A friend of mine being very ill took his bed, *October* the 10th 1667, at a quarter past one o’clock in the afternoon, according unto which time I did erect a figure as followeth. Having by an Almanack found out that page intituled *The daily Motions of the Planets*, as is before expressed for the Month of *October* [**Figure 6**], you must seek for the 10th day of the said moneth, and move forward in a strait line, untill you come unto the sixth column, and under the Characters over head thus expressed ☉ there you shall find the number 27,

which sheweth that the Sun is gotten into the sign *Libra* 27 deg. upon the tenth day aforesaid.

[Next Blagrave is going to explain how to place the signs and planets in the houses. But what's a "house"? See **Figures 7 and 8** for an explanation.]

With this number 27 you must enter the Table of Houses, which you shall find at the end of the Almanack, and seek out the page, where it is written *Sol* in *Libra* [**Figure 9**]. And in the column under "Gradus" the signs going down in a strait line, there you shall find the number 27. And in the column next adjoining on the left hand under the title of "time from noon" moving downward unto the same line where is the number 27 before mentioned, there you shall find the numbers thus printed, viz. 13, 40, 12, but the number 12 being but seconds you may leave out and so take only the two first numbers 13, 40. Then you must add to that number the time of the day, when the sick first took his bed, being a quarter past one o'clock in the afternoon, as for example:

Time from noon: 13 hours, 40 mins

The time when the sick took his bed: 1 hour, 15 mins

Total: 14 hours, 55 mins

Now had the Sick took his bed at one a clock at night, then its called the thirteenth hour, for in Astrology, we begin to account both the days and hours from noon. The numbers before mentioned being added together make 14:55.

This number you must find out under the Title of time from noon, or the nearest unto it being 14:54:04 [**Figure 10**], which wanteth but one minute from which sum, or place, you must move forward in the same time, and under every column belonging unto each house, you shall find both the sign over head and the number beneath, which is the sign and number you must set down upon the Cusp of every House in the figure as followeth: For the cusp of the tenth House *Scorpio* 16. For the eleventh house *Sagitary* 1:56. For the twelfth house *Sagitary* 17:14. For the first house, called the ascendant, *Capricorn* 10:6. For the second house *Aquarius* 27:26. For the third house *Aries* 20:4.

Now these first six houses being finished, the other six, whose signs are opposite are of the same numbers. What signs are opposite unto each other I have already declared [**Figure 2**]. *Example*: Over against the sign *Scorpio* 16:00, being the cusp of the tenth house, is *Taurus* 16:00, the cusp of the fourth house; and over against *Sagitary* 1:56 being the cusp of the eleventh house is *Gemini* 1:50, the cusp of the fifth house; and so on, as appeareth by the figure [**Figure 10**].

The next thing material is to set the planets in those figures, and houses, which for to do you must by the Almanack find out the page before mentioned, for the month of *October* [**Figure 6**]. And from the tenth day moving in a right line, you shall in each column find the numbers of degrees and minutes according as each planet hath gotten into each sign. *Example*: The first number is 25 *deg.* 49 *min.* and *Saturn* is over the head of *Capricorn*, which argueth that *Saturn* is so many degrees and minutes entered into *Capricorn*, which degrees and minutes you must set in the first house, as by the Figure appeareth [**Figure 11**].

In the next column is 0 *deg.* 47 *min.* and *Jupiter* is over the head of *Taurus*, which sheweth that *Jupiter* is forty seven minutes in *Taurus*, which number with the character of *Jupiter* must be set in the third house. [And so on for the other columns].

In the second-to-last column is 8 *deg.* 31 *min.* and *Luna* is over the head of *Sagitary*, which argueth that the *Moon* was at noon so far entered the Sign *Sagitary*, but in regard it was above an hour after noon when the Sick took his bed, there must be half a degree, which is 30 minutes added unto the *Moons* motion, for by reason of her quick moving, she getteth one degree in two hours, wherefore we must set the *Moon* in nine degrees *Sagitary*. You must do the like in all other figures: Had he took his bed at midnight you must have added six degrees, and then the *Moon* would have been fourteen degrees thirty one minutes entred *Sagitary*.

Now having set the signs on the cusps of every house, and the Planets in those signs as by the figure appeareth: I shall in the next place shew how to give judgement thereupon, and so thereby discover the grief as followeth.

#### 4. How to give Judgement by the Figure of twelve Houses.

The general way, especially in acute griefs, is to give judgment by the *Moon* being in any of the twelve signs and by the infirmities afflicted, as I have already declared. And this being an acute grief, judgment must be given accordingly, yet notwithstanding I shall by this figure set forth his natural infirmities or griefs, and so instruct the Learner how to give judgement in any other chronick griefs by the signs on the ascendant, sixth house and their Lords afflicted. For some lasting and obscure griefs cannot be discovered by the *Sun* and *Moon* afflicted.

In the first place you must observe whether the ascendant, which is the first house, or the sixth house or their Lords be any way afflicted by the malevolent planets *Saturn*, *Mars*, *Mercury*, or the *Sun*, for sometimes the *Sun* may and will afflict more, especially if the grief lieth about the heart, or in the arteries, or vital spirits.

In the next place it will be necessary to know whether the grief be natural, or whether it came by Witchcraft or Sorcery. Now if you find the Lord of the twelfth house in the ascendant or if the Lord of the twelfth being in the sixth, or Lord of the sixth in the twelfth, or if the Lord of the ascendant be combust, that is, when the *Sun* is not above eight degrees thirty minutes distant from him, or if one planet be Lord of the ascendant and twelfth house, and an infortune, then you may conclude that the grief is more than natural, more especially where there is any just suspicion thereof, which may be somewhat deferred by heeding well the nature of their distempers, as I have shewed elsewhere: But in this Figure I find no such thing; wherefore I did conclude, the grief was natural; occasioned by his own disorder of body: as shall be shewed in order.

Sometimes I have known the ascendant, the sixth house, or their Lords have been afflicted by the Lord of the twelfth house and yet the sickness was not from Witchcraft, notwithstanding those suspected evils; for if *Jupiter* and *Venus*, or the *Sun*, do cast their friendly aspects unto the afflicted Planet or Cusp of the House aforesaid, that then the grief came by some disorder of body. Also, if that Lord of the ascendant be in the twelfth, or in the sixth, the grief is natural. For from the twelfth house, we give judgment of self-undoing so well as otherwise. But any rational experienced practitioner may easily distinguish, the natural diseases, from the unnatural, by heeding well the manner of their distempers, as aforesaid. And generally I find that those who are taken in this snare of Witchcraft, that at the time of any strong fit, or when

**Commented [BM9]:** Blagrave discussed this simple method in an earlier section of the book not reproduced here.

**Commented [BM10]:** "this" = the illness of Blagrave's friend mentioned earlier.

**Commented [BM11]:** These terms will be explained soon.

**Commented [BM12]:** Any item on the astrological chart (a house, a sign, or a planet) can be "afflicted" by a planet. This is where the aspects (see Figures 4 and 5) come in. To be afflicted by a planet is to be related by the planet by opposition, by conjunction, or by the square aspect. These are the "malevolent" aspects; the other aspects (sextile and trine) are benevolent.

**Commented [BM13]:** Later in the passage, Blagrave defines "infortune" as the Lord or Lady of the fourth, sixth, eighth, or twelfth houses. This is puzzling, since it means that the Lord of the twelfth house will \*always\* be an infortune.

they are more than usually tormented, that then the ascendant together with its Lord doth exactly **personate** the sick; and at that very time, the Lord of the twelfth house doth one way or other afflict, either the ascendant, or its Lord; or that an infortune Lord of the ascendant and twelfth house, which may so happen, when the proper ascendant is intercepted in the first house, as I have oft times experimented.

I shall now proceed to give judgment upon the decumbiture figure before mentioned,

and in the *First place*, describe the person of the sick.

*Secondly*, by rules discover, whether the sick shall live or die, if live, how long time before recovery.

*Thirdly*, I shall by rules set forth, what the grief is, and from what came.

*Fourthly*, How and which way he was recovered.

The man's person is described by the ascendant *Capricorn*, and *Saturn* his being therein who is Lord thereof, viz. one of a middle stature, full and well set, of a dark or swartish complexion, sad brown hair, **as you may find more at large in this book**.

Signes of recovery, was first **Saturn Lord of the ascendant**, being his significator is strong as being **in his own house**, and is more strong than *Mars* who is the **afflicting Planet**. Secondly the *Moon* doth **separate from Mars**, and apply first unto *Venus* and from thence to the *Sun* and *Jupiter*, all fortunes. Thirdly, the *Sun* is increasing in light. Fourthly neither the *Moon*, or *Saturn* are combust; Planets are said to be combust, when they are elongated no more than eight *deg.* thirty *min* from the *Sun*. Fifthly, she is not in that part of the Zodiack called *via combusta*, which is from the middle of *Libra* to the midst of *Scorpio*. Lastly, *Venus* **Lady of the fourth house**, which usually sheweth the end of all things of this nature, was in **friendly aspect to the Moon**, at the time of decumbiture; all which are arguments of recovery.

The time when followeth, First, the angles of the figure are part fixt, and part common. Secondly, the *Moon* was in a **common sign** which argueth, that the grief was not perfectly, acute, nor yet chronick, but between both and so it proved, for upon the last critical day the feaver left him, at which time the *Moon* came to the place, she was in at the decumbiture viz. unto the ninth *deg* of *Sagittarius*: yet notwithstanding, at the last critical time he had a very strong

**Commented [BM14]:** This term will be explained later.

**Commented [BM15]:** Elsewhere in the book Blagrave associates each planet with a different physical appearance.

**Commented [BM16]:** Why is Saturn the Lord of the ascendant, ie. the first house? Not because Saturn is in the ascendant, though that it is indeed where it is. Instead it's because Capricorn is in the ascendant, and Capricorn is ruled over by Saturn. (See Figure 11).

**Commented [BM17]:** Saturn is "in its own house" in the sense that Saturn is in the same house as a sign (Capricorn) that it rules over. (Figure 11)

**Commented [BM18]:** Why does Blagrave say that Mars is an "afflicting" planet. Probably because a) it is one of the malevolent planets, and b) it is in the square aspect with respect to the moon (Figure 11).

**Commented [BM19]:** "Separate" and "apply" are technical terms that are related to the angles between two planets.

**Commented [BM20]:** The sign in the fourth house is Taurus (Figure 11), and the planet that rules over Taurus is Venus (Figure 4).

**Commented [BM21]:** Venus is in the tenth house and the moon in the twelfth house (Figure 10). So they are separated by two houses, or 60 degrees, which is a friendly aspect.

**Commented [BM22]:** The signs can be grouped in various ways, and one grouping is "common" as opposed to "cardinal" or "static" signs. The moon is in Sagittarius (Figure 11), which is a common sign.

fit, the *Moon* being then in square to *Mars*; but *Venus* fortune and Lady of the fourth house, being in friendly aspect to the *Moon*, and she together with *Saturn* being both more strong than *Mars*, who was the afflicting Planet, put an end to this sickness at the time aforesaid.

The next thing considerable, is to discover the grief, and from what cause; and likewise, what infirmities she was naturally subject unto from the birth: Now concerning the present acute grief, I found the *Moon* being in the sign *Sagitary*, was the platick square of *Mars* afflicted, for between the sign *Virgo*, the place where *Mars* is, and the sign *Sagitary*, the place where the *Moon* is, containeth ninety *deg.* which number maketh a square. Had the *Moon* been but one degree in the sign *Sagitary* yet that would have been a platick square, for if we consider the moity of each Orb, there will be ten *deg.* allotted, at which time and distance, the influence of those Planets doth operate, both before and after any aspect. Now to know what the present distemper was, by reason it was an acute grief; you must find out the place in this book entituled, the *Moon* in *Sagitary*, of *Mars* oppressed, which argueth a high and strong fever with the flux, or lask and cholerick passions; the pulses few and taint heating slowly, his blood over heated. The bright Star of the Harp: and the Star called the Swans-bill, both of the nature of *Mars* and *Jupiter*, in the ascendant, made the fever the more violent. The cause of this sickness was from inordinate exercise, surfeiting, or too much repletion, as you may find more at large at the place aforesaid.

The way of recovery was by application antipathetical unto *Mars* the afflicting planet by reason that *Venus* was more strong in essential dignities, as being in her house. Now in regard that *Mars* is by nature hot and dry, I made choice of such herbs and other remedies, which were cold and moist; wherefore I advised that such decoctions, syrups, or cordials, which were administred should be cooling and cleansing, also glisters the like, ever remembring as in this, so in all other cures, to fortifie the heart and vital spirits with herbs under the dominion of the *Sun*: Would the Patient have been perswaded to let blood, the fever would without question, have left him, upon the second critical time, the *Moon* meeting then with the friendly aspect of *Venus* a fortune and strong.

*Note*, That as we give judgement by the *Sun* and *Moon* afflicted, in acute and chronick griefs, so by the same rules you may give judgement by the Lord of the ascendant or sixth house afflicted,

*Example*, In the last figure, *Mercury* being Lord of the sixth house, and in the sign *Libra*, is in platick square to *Saturn*, and conjunction of the *Sun*, who is

**Commented [BM23]:** Here Blagrave draws on the notion of “imperfect” as opposed to “perfect” aspects. In Figure 11, Mars and the Moon are separated by three houses, so they are in a square aspect. But they are not separated by exactly 90 degrees, since Mars is at 8 degrees, 35 minutes, whereas the moon is at 9 minutes. They would have a perfect aspect if, for example, they were both at 9 minutes in their respective houses. In the text Blagrave is saying that planets influence each-other even when their aspect is not perfect, as long as they deviate from a perfect aspect by no more than 10 degrees.

**Commented [BM24]:** This is a reference to the humoral theory of medicine, according to which all disease is due to an imbalance of the four humours, which were yellow bile, black bile, phlegm, and blood. Each of these humours was associated with two of the four qualities, which were hot, cold, wet and dry. Blood was wet and hot, for example. Balances could be corrected by herbs with the right mix of qualities.

**Commented [BM25]:** This seems to be a mistake. Figure 11 shows that mercury is in the 9<sup>th</sup> house and Saturn in the 1<sup>st</sup>, so they are separated by four houses, not three.

**Commented [BM26]:** The sun is not shown on Figure 10, but according to Figure 6 it is indeed in the same house as Mercury, ie. Libra.

much of the nature of *Mars*, only the *Sun* striketh more upon the vital spirits. Now according unto the rule in giving judgement by the *Moon* afflicted in the sign *Libra*, it sheweth a feverish distemper and blood over heated, occasioned from surfeiting.

The next thing considerable is to know, what infirmities naturally he was subject unto from the birth. In this question judgement must be given from the ascendant, sixth house, and their Lords afflicted; first the ascendant is no way afflicted, save onely by the presence of *Saturn*, who is Lord thereof. Now in this question *Saturn* is not accounted an enemy, notwithstanding he is naturally evil, as being in his own house, and Lord of the sick man's person, for according unto the old saying, the devil will not hurt his own. Also the sixth house is no way afflicted, wherefore we have only *Mercury* Lord of the sixth considerable herein, and he I find is in *Libra* in platick conjunction of *Venus* Lady of the fourth. Now any planet, although he be naturally a fortune may afflict as well as the infortunes, which are the Lord or Lady of the fourth, sixth, eighth, or twelfth houses; for every planet must do his Office to know what the grief is. You must take notice of the sign, where *Mercury* Lord of the sixth house is, *ie.* in *Libra*, and what parts of the body is signified thereby, also what griefs or infirmities are under the dominion of *Venus*. First under the sign *Libra* is reins, and loyns, and under *Venus* is also the reins together with back, belly and members of generation and passages of urine: To my knowledge he hath for many years past been oft-times perplexed with difficulty of making water, and with pains in his reins, back, and belly.

What I have written I presume will be sufficient to instruct the learner, but practice and experience will be the only means to inlarge the practitioners judgement herein, for 'tis impossible for any man to write, be he never so curious and exact in any art, but that somewhat may be added unto it.

## 5. Observations concerning the ascendant

That which I have found by daily practice and experience, is carefully so to erect your figure (either for the time of decumbiture, or the time of any strong fit, or when the Patient was more than ordinarily sick or afflicted, or for the time when the urine is brought, or when you go to visit the patient) that the Ascendant together with its Lord may exactly personate the Sick, for if neither the ascendant nor the Lord thereof doth agree in shape, complexion, and hair with the body of the Sick, you cannot safely give judgement by a figure of

**Commented [BM27]:** Here Blagrove is referring to a later section in his text, where he shows how to derive the cause of an illness from the afflicting planet. The text is as follows:

"The Moon in Libra of Mars oppressed.

Those who take their bed, the Moon being in  $\underline{\text{L}}$  of  $\sigma$  oppressed, will be subject unto an inflammation all over the body, also feavourish, unapt to sleep, their Pulses high, troubled with wind and plenitude of blood, many times they have the stone or gravel in the kidneys or great heat therein: The cause is from surfeiting or disorder in diet, also plenitude of blood."

This diagnosis holds when the Moon is in Libra and afflicted by Mars. This is not the case in Figure 10, where \*Mercury\* is in Libra and is afflicted by the \*Sun\*. \*Blagrove\* is extrapolating his rule to new cases.

**Commented [BM28]:** As per Figure 2.

**Commented [BM29]:** This section explains the mysterious references, earlier in the extract, to the need to "personate" the patient.



twelve houses, especially in many infirmities, as I have often experienced; for the first, fourth, sixth, eighth, and twelfth houses will be especially concerned therein; wherefore if you fail in the first foundation, the whole building must needs be obstructed and out of order.

*Example,* In the decumbiture figure before mentioned, had I erected the figure, but for one hour sooner, *Sagitary* would have ascended, whereof *Jupiter* is Lord, and then the person of the sick must have been described accordingly. Now *Jupiter* signifies a man of an upright and tall stature, complexion ruddy, face oval, full, and fleshy, and a kind of a bourn brown hair. Also the sign *Sagitary* represents a man much after the same shape and likeness, by which it appears what a vast difference it might produce by takeing a wrong ascendant, both in regard of the personal shape, and likewise in the discovery of the grief of the sick. Whereas it appears by taking the true ascendant, that it doth not only dilineate his person, as is before expressed, but doth exactly discover his present distemper, and natural infirmities.

For let the time of decumbiture or the time for receipt of the urine, or the time of any strong fit be brought, and the Artist never so curious by enquiry, except by chance, he shall not get the true ascendant, for many reasons may be objected to the contrary: First clocks may fail, and so sick persons will hold out longer than others before complaint, and the urine may by the messenger be hastened, or retarded, you see one hour maketh a mighty alteration.

I shall quote another Example, Suppose a Man or Woman, who is under the dominion of *Sol* Lord of *Leo*, should fall sick, which represents one of a large stature, fat, full, and fleshy, complexion sanguine, and yellowish hair. Now perhaps when the urine is brought, or through mistakes of clocks or time, *Gemini* should ascend, whereof *Mercury* is Lord, what a mighty difference could this produce: For the planet *Mercury* represents one of an upright and tall stature, spare body, long face and nose, of a dark swarthy complexion, and sad hair: Also the sign *Gemini* signifies a tall body, a dark and obscure complexion, and sad or black hair.

I could instance many more, wherefore advise all practitioners in this art so to vary their ascendant, that it together with its Lord or planet posited in the ascendant may exactly personate the Sick, without which no true judgment can be given especially in many chronick griefs or infirmities, and in case of Witchcraft and Sorcery.