

Understanding the Twelve Zodiac Signs

Benebell Wen

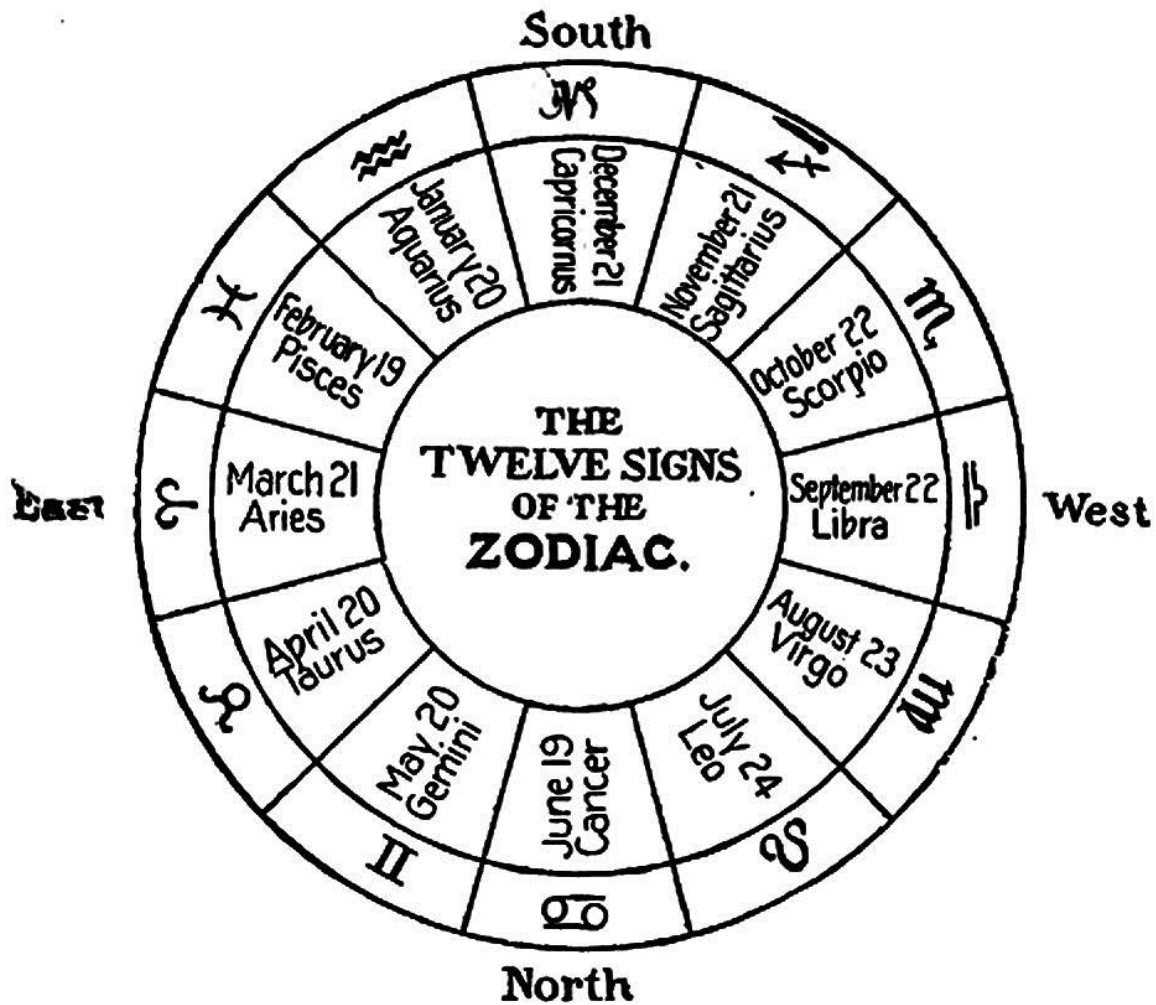


Image from Comte C. de Saint-Germain's *Practical Astrology* (1901)

The earliest recording of the twelve zodiac signs is dated to around 700 BC and found in Babylonian astronomy. The path of the sun in the heavens as observed from a geocentric point of view was subdivided into twelve equal coordinate zones. The first Babylonian calendar was keyed to the twelve signs, with the positioning of the sun during the vernal equinox marking the first sign, or Aries (known historically as the First Point of Aries).

In the Babylonian star catalogs, the twelve signs were assigned names, which have become the predecessors of the names we ascribe to the twelve zodiac signs today. See the table on the subsequent page.

<i>Babylonian Name</i>	<i>Modern Name</i>	<i>Babylonian Name</i>	<i>Modern Name</i>
Agrarian Worker	Aries	The Scales	Libra
Steer of Heaven	Taurus	The Scorpion	Scorpio
The Great Twins	Gemini	The Soldier	Sagittarius
The Crayfish	Cancer	The Goat Fish ²	Capricorn
The Lion	Leo	The Great One	Aquarius
The Furrow ¹	Virgo	Tail of the Swallow	Pisces

Note 1 (for Virgo). “The Furrow” is a reference to the goddess Shala's symbolic ear of corn. Shala is the Sumerian goddess of the grains, of abundant harvests, agriculture, and of compassion and health.

Note 2 (for Capricorn). “The Goat Fish” is a reference to the Sumerian god Enki, a patron deity of the grafts, trades, water, commerce, and intelligence. The god Enki was represented by a goat-fish chimera.

Assuming the “as above, so below” philosophy, holding that what happens in the heavens above us denotes what happens here on earth among us, the twelve zodiac signs have come to represent characteristic modes of expression and influences over the houses and celestial bodies. It is through the sign that you interpret a given house or planet in astrology.

The twelve zodiac signs and their modes of expression as we understand them today are noted in this section, which will help round out your understanding and interpretation of your birth chart. The previous section “Understanding Your Twelve Houses” gave you a reference for what each 30° section of your birth chart stands for. How that area of life is impacted will be determined by the governing zodiac sign, which you can locate and read more about here. What corresponds with the zodiac signs as noted herein will be how the house in your birth chart is ruled and how that area of your life will manifest for you. Like “Understanding Your Twelve Houses,” this section is for reference only, to provide a resource for understanding the twelve zodiac signs and how to interpret them for yourself.



Aries

I AM		PLANETARY RULERSHIP	
		Day-Night Rulership:	Sun (Day) Jupiter (Night)
<i>Element:</i>	Fire	<i>Single Ruler (Traditional):</i>	Mars
<i>Modality:</i>	Cardinal	<i>Single Ruler (Modern):</i>	Mars
<i>Binary:</i>	Masculine	<i>Polarity (Dynamic Opposite):</i>	Libra
Mar 21 – Apr 19			

Expression and Influences: Involving initiations, new beginnings; plants the first seed; exerts strong personal willpower, possessing a strong sense of identity, confident, aggressive, assertive, seeking glory; native is ambitious, determined, and takes the initiative when it comes to this area of life; short fuse or bad temper; can have a short attention span when it comes to this area of life.

Characteristic Traits: Headstrong, bold, decisive, born to lead, shows great initiative, need for conquest, enterprising, intrepid, passionate, arrogant, stubborn, impulsive, can be difficult to work with, egotistical.

Strongest Dignities: Natal Sun in Aries; Mars in Aries; Pluto in Aries; in House 1, 5, or 9; also strong in House 3, 7, or 11. These are areas where Aries exerts a more constructive influence.

Weakest Dignities: Natal Venus in Aries; Saturn in Aries; in House 4, 8, or 12. These are areas where Aries may exert a more challenging influence.

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Taurus

I HAVE		PLANETARY RULERSHIP	
		<i>Day-Night Rulership:</i>	Venus (Day) Moon (Night)
<i>Element:</i>	Earth	<i>Single Ruler (Traditional):</i>	Venus
<i>Modality:</i>	Fixed		Venus
<i>Binary:</i>	Feminine	<i>Single Ruler (Modern):</i>	Venus
Apr 20 – May 20		<i>Polarity (Dynamic Opposite):</i>	Scorpio

Expression and Influences: Material acquisitions; power to build strong foundations; involving land, nature, the earth, or estates; motivated by material desires; seeks control over land and earth; traditional; conservative and risk averse; practical; assets, money, commerce, or trade oriented; ambitious; high-achieving but cautious.

Characteristic Traits: Seeks security and stability; practical; powerful; independent; stubborn; forceful; sensual; a natural eye for beauty, and the arts and culture; loyal, but possessive, can be lazy or self-indulgent; frugal.

Strongest Dignities: Natal Moon in Taurus; Venus in Taurus; in House 2, 6, or 10; also strong in House 4, 8, or 12. These are areas where Taurus exerts a more constructive influence.

Weakest Dignities: Natal Mars in Taurus; Uranus in Taurus; Pluto in Taurus; in House 3, 7, or 11. These are areas where Taurus may exert a more challenging influence.

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Gemini

I THINK		PLANETARY RULERSHIP	
		Day-Night Rulership:	Saturn (Day)
<i>Element:</i>	Air		Mercury (Night)
<i>Modality:</i>	Mutable	<i>Single Ruler (Traditional):</i>	Mercury
<i>Binary:</i>	Masculine	<i>Single Ruler (Modern):</i>	Mercury
May 21 – Jun 20		<i>Polarity (Dynamic Opposite):</i>	Sagittarius

Expression and Influences: Expressive, flexible and adaptable; involving siblings, twins, or multiple personalities or multiple approaches; multiples; changeable; many changes and shifts will be experienced in the corresponding area of life; fluctuating; situations involving this area of life are unpredictable, changeable, and ever shifting; short distance travels will be productive for this area of life; expressive and communicative; cerebral; many initiations few completions.

Characteristic Traits: Unpredictable, adaptable to changes, versatile, multi-talented, persuasive, witty, intellectual, conversational, can be capricious, too many ideas and not enough execution; volatile, changeable; lacks focus; gives a strong first impression but no follow-through; frenetic energy; indecisive; curios and inquisitive.

Strongest Dignities: Natal Mercury in Gemini; in House 3, 7, or 11; also strong in House 1, 5, or 9. These are areas where Gemini exerts a more constructive influence.

Weakest Dignities: Natal Jupiter in Gemini; in House 2, 6, or 10. These are areas where Gemini may exert a more challenging influence.

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Cancer

I FEEL		PLANETARY RULERSHIP	
		Day-Night Rulership:	Venus (Day) Mars (Night)
Element:	Water	Single Ruler (Traditional):	Moon
Modality:	Cardinal		Single Ruler (Modern):
Binary:	Feminine	Polarity (Dynamic Opposite):	Capricorn
Jun 21 – Jul 22			

Expression and Influences: Constructive use of intuition and sentimentality in corresponding area of life; where one can be more intuitive; motivated by home and family; emotional; private; relating to ancestry, heritage, or lineage; hidden treasures; self-preservationist; where one seeks spiritual understanding or meaning.

Characteristic Traits: Complicated individual; fundamentally conservative, home-loving; intuitive; loving; protective over one’s personal space and loved ones; tough outer shell to break; moody, timid, pessimistic; emotionally sensitive; empathic.

Strongest Dignities: Natal Moon in Cancer; Jupiter in Cancer; Neptune in Cancer; in House 4, 8, or 12; also strong in House 2, 6, or 10. These are areas where Cancer exerts a more constructive influence.

Weakest Dignities: Natal Mars in Cancer; Saturn in Cancer; in House 1, 5, or 9. These are areas where Cancer may exert a more challenging influence.

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Leo

I WILL		PLANETARY RULERSHIP	
		Day-Night Rulership:	Sun (Day) Jupiter (Night)
<i>Element:</i>	Fire	<i>Single Ruler (Traditional):</i>	Sun
<i>Modality:</i>	Fixed	<i>Single Ruler (Modern):</i>	Sun
<i>Binary:</i>	Masculine	<i>Polarity (Dynamic Opposite):</i>	Aquarius
Jul 23 – Dec 21			

Expression and Influences: Glory-seeking; leadership; nobility; seeking happiness and romance; creativity; a lot of pride for achievements in the corresponding area of life; bold and courageous; seeking attention; where one tends to dominate, where one tends to shine.

Characteristic Traits: A powerful leader; big-hearted and magnanimous; needs to be the center of attention; seeks fame and glory; optimistic; strong in performing arts; action-oriented; self-confident, can become overly proud of self; vanity; intense.

Strongest Dignities: Natal Sun in Leo; Neptune in Leo; in House 1, 5, or 9; also strong in House 3, 7, or 11. These are areas where Leo exerts a more constructive influence.

Weakest Dignities: Natal Saturn in Leo; Uranus in Leo; in House 4, 8, or 12. These are areas where Leo may exert a more challenging influence.

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Virgo

I ANALYZE		PLANETARY RULERSHIP	
Element:	Earth	Single Ruler (Traditional):	Mercury
Modality:	Mutable	Single Ruler (Modern):	Mercury
Binary:	Feminine	Polarity (Dynamic Opposite):	Pisces
Aug 23 – Sep 22			

Expression and Influences: Strives for perfectionism; relating to health or healing; servitudes; where one is restricted; obstacles; emotionally unavailable; holding oneself back due to being risk averse; fear of vulnerability; hermit-like or introverted tendencies in that area of life; where one tends to be more suppressed.

Characteristic Traits: Highly intelligent and meticulous; discriminating tastes; detail-oriented; analytical; highly critical of self and of others; reliable; health-conscious; down-to-earth; fussy, fastidious; sensitive; finicky; judgmental, conservative; difficult to please.

Strongest Dignities: Natal Mercury in Virgo; in House 2, 6, or 10; also strong in House 4, 8, or 12. These are areas where Virgo exerts a more constructive influence.

Weakest Dignities: Natal Venus in Virgo; Jupiter in Virgo; Neptune in Virgo; Pluto in Virgo; in House 3, 7, or 11. These are areas where Virgo may exert a more challenging influence.

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Libra

I BALANCE		PLANETARY RULERSHIP	
		<i>Day-Night Rulership:</i>	Saturn (Day) Mercury (Night)
<i>Element:</i>	Air	<i>Single Ruler (Traditional):</i>	Venus
<i>Modality:</i>	Cardinal	<i>Single Ruler (Modern):</i>	Venus
<i>Binary:</i>	Masculine	<i>Polarity (Dynamic Opposite):</i>	Aries
Sep 23 – Oct 22			

Expression and Influences: Seeking balance and harmony in corresponding area of life; multi-talented and knowledgeable when it comes to that area of life; values arts and culture; seeking diplomacy; partnerships, contracts, legal issues; social associations; tendency to be indecisive in this area of life.

Characteristic Traits: Diplomatic, fair, just; sociable, romantic, charming; tactful, even-handed; can be over-compromising; tries too hard to appease all; innately attractive; can be superficial, unreliable, or indecisive; self-indulgent; good counselor, good at giving advice; impartial opinions; has difficulty saying “no.”

Strongest Dignities: Natal Venus in Libra; Saturn in Libra; in House 3, 7, or 11; also strong in House 1, 5, or 9. These are areas where Libra exerts a more constructive influence.

Weakest Dignities: Natal Sun in Libra; Mars in Libra; Pluto in Libra; in House 2, 6, or 10. These are areas where Libra may exert a more challenging influence.

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Scorpio

I DESIRE		PLANETARY RULERSHIP	
		Day-Night Rulership:	Venus (Day) Mars (Night)
<i>Element:</i>	Water	<i>Single Ruler (Traditional):</i>	Mars
<i>Modality:</i>	Fixed		<i>Single Ruler (Modern):</i>
<i>Binary:</i>	Feminine	<i>Polarity (Dynamic Opposite):</i>	
Oct 23 – Nov 21		Taurus	

Expression and Influences: High-achieving toward this area of life; intense; many secrets; concealing true identities; the esoteric and the occult; sensual; seeking power; risk-taking; passionate; physical external crises and transformations incurred in this area; legacies; desirous; high ambitions; some arrogance; may go through one major, emotional shift in corresponding area of life.

Characteristic Traits: Intense, strong-willed, fearless, determined, poised, demanding, penetrating perception, possesses the power to confront; gets attention for accomplishments; sensitive and passionate; intuitive, secretive, can be resentful of others; destructive, overly dramatic, vengeful.

Strongest Dignities: Natal Mars in Scorpio; Uranus in Scorpio; Pluto in Scorpio; in House 4, 8, or 12; also strong in House 2, 6, or 10. These are areas where Scorpio exerts a more constructive influence.

Weakest Dignities: Natal Moon in Scorpio; Venus in Scorpio; in House 1, 5, or 9. These are areas where Scorpio may exert a more challenging influence.

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Sagittarius

I SEE		PLANETARY RULERSHIP	
		Day-Night Rulership:	Sun (Day)
<i>Element:</i>	Fire		Jupiter (Night)
<i>Modality:</i>	Mutable	<i>Single Ruler (Traditional):</i>	Jupiter
<i>Binary:</i>	Masculine	<i>Single Ruler (Modern):</i>	Jupiter
Nov 22 – Dec 21		<i>Polarity (Dynamic Opposite):</i>	Gemini

Expression and Influences: Seeking expansion, diversity of experiences, and broadening personal horizons; active imagination; hunter-mentality; hunter-prey dynamics; ambitious; risk-taking in this area of life; spiritual; seeking higher ideals; faith; long-distance travels bring fruition; foreign lands; pilgrimage or inner spiritual journey for self-knowledge in corresponding area of life.

Characteristic Traits: Intellectual, idealistic, witty, free-spirited, has a bright and optimistic outlook; can be careless and tactless; adventurous, goal-seeking, enthusiastic; can be reckless and unrestrained toward others; arrogant; overly confident with self; too much restlessness; non-committal; inconsistent; dislikes boundaries; philosophical, generous, and giving.

Strongest Dignities: Natal Jupiter in Sagittarius; in House 1, 5, or 9; also strong in House 3, 7, or 11; also strong in House 1, 5, or 9. These are areas where Sagittarius exerts a more constructive influence.

Weakest Dignities: Natal Mercury in Sagittarius; in House 4, 8, or 12. These are areas where Sagittarius may exert a more challenging influence.

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Capricorn

I USE		PLANETARY RULERSHIP	
		<i>Day-Night Rulership:</i>	Venus (Day) Moon (Night)
<i>Element:</i>	Earth	<i>Single Ruler (Traditional):</i>	Saturn
<i>Modality:</i>	Cardinal		<i>Single Ruler (Modern):</i>
<i>Binary:</i>	Feminine	<i>Polarity (Dynamic Opposite):</i>	Cancer
Dec 22 – Jan 19			

Expression and Influences: Seeking to scale new heights; proud of accomplishments; seeking glory; seeking to transcend past and be better than the previous; aiming high; seeking higher social status, power, or public esteem in corresponding area of life; seeking advancements in that area of life; where one is more ambitious and represents the themes of one's life goals.

Characteristic Traits: High achieving, goal-oriented, results-oriented, pragmatic, disciplined, stable, conservative, modest, prudent, can be callous and pessimistic; stubborn, introverted, self-centered, detached, moody; inability to express the self; seeks achievement rather than self-knowledge; rigid in values and ideologies; can be materialistic; may lack imagination or creativity; always steadfast, reliable, and trustworthy.

Strongest Dignities: Natal Mars in Capricorn; Saturn in Capricorn; in House 2, 6, or 10; also strong in House 4, 8, or 12. These are areas where Capricorn exerts a more constructive influence.

Weakest Dignities: Natal Moon in Capricorn; Jupiter in Capricorn; Neptune in Capricorn; in House 3, 7, or 11. These are areas where Capricorn may exert a more challenging influence.

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Aquarius

I KNOW		PLANETARY RULERSHIP	
<i>Element:</i>	Air	<i>Single Ruler (Traditional):</i>	Saturn
<i>Modality:</i>	Fixed	<i>Single Ruler (Modern):</i>	Uranus
<i>Binary:</i>	Masculine	<i>Polarity (Dynamic Opposite):</i>	Leo
Jan 20 – Feb 18			

Expression and Influences: Humanitarian, devotional, spiritual; eccentric and unconventional; marching to beat of own drum; where one seeks to contribute to the greater good; where one seeks change and progress; involving collective or group endeavors.

Characteristic Traits: Highly intelligent, amicable, friendly, humanitarian, innovative, possesses a lot of ingenuity, progressive, group-conscious; strong and attractive, forceful, possesses tremendous personal power; popular, intelligent, unpredictable, rebellious, eccentric, aloof, emotionally superficially or unavailable; can be an extremist when incited; stubborn; energies of Higher Thought.

Strongest Dignities: Natal Saturn in Aquarius; Uranus in Aquarius; in House 3, 7, or 11; also strong in House 1, 5, or 9. These are areas where Aquarius exerts a more constructive influence.

Weakest Dignities: Natal Sun in Aquarius; Neptune in Aquarius; in House 2, 6, or 10. These are areas where Aquarius may exert a more challenging influence.

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Pisces

I BELIEVE		PLANETARY RULERSHIP	
		Day-Night Rulership:	Venus (Day) Mars (Night)
Element:	Water	Single Ruler (Traditional):	Jupiter
Modality:	Mutable	Single Ruler (Modern):	Neptune
Binary:	Feminine	Polarity (Dynamic Opposite):	Virgo
Feb 19 – Mar 20			

Expression and Influences: Difficulties and challenges as pertaining to emotions felt toward corresponding area of life; fluctuations; indecisiveness; self-sacrificing, passive, and too yielding in corresponding area of life; crises, revelations, and epiphanies to be experienced in that area of life; karmic lesson for this life path is to gain self-knowledge and reveal the hidden self in this area.

Characteristic Traits: Sensitive, self-sacrificing, intuitive, values human relations, creative, possesses a vivid imagination; may swing between planes of reality and spiritualism; mysterious, sensual, romantic, emotional; great at conceptual or abstract thought; compassionate, empathic; sensitive, yielding to others; an escapist and idealist; can be lazy or weak-willed (gets hurt easily; gets demoralized easily), overly sensitive, hyper-sensitive to criticism, impractical.

Strongest Dignities: Natal Jupiter in Pisces; Neptune in Pisces; Pluto in Pisces; in House 4, 8, or 12; also strong in House 2, 6, or 10. These are areas where Pisces exerts a more constructive influence.

Weakest Dignities: Natal Mercury in Pisces; in House 1, 5, or 9. These are areas where Pisces may exert a more challenging influence.

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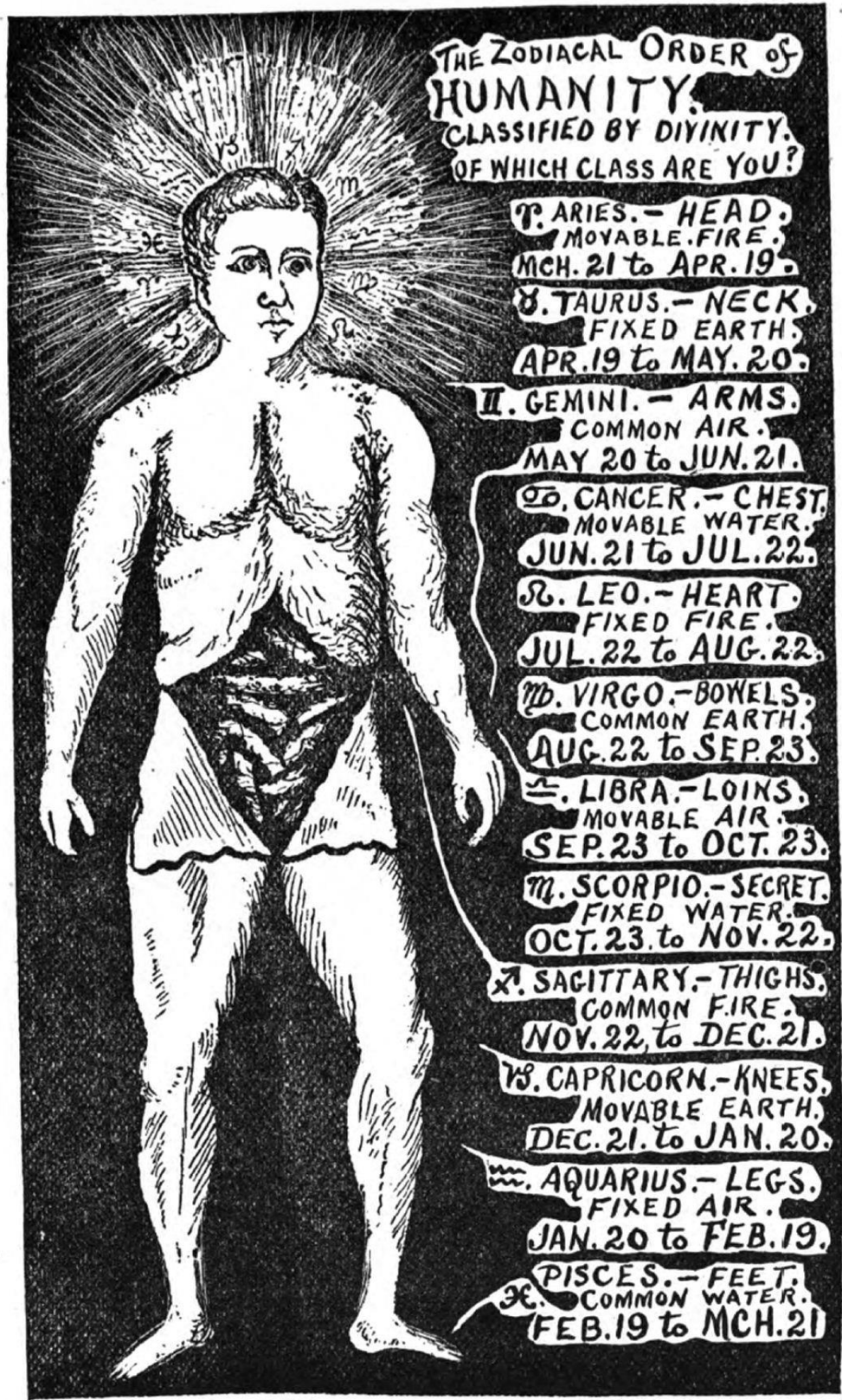


Image from Carl Webber's *Astrology in a Nutshell* (1902)



Anatomical Man by the Limbourg Brothers (1411-1416)