

HAS YOUR SUN SIGN JUST CHANGED? January 14, 2011

By Michael Erlewine (Michael@Erlewine.net)

The 13th Zodiac Sign! And You are Not the Sun Sign You Thought You Were

Every ten or fifteen years there is a news alert to the effect that astrology as we know it has changed and we no longer are what we once were or thought we were. Our Sun Sign has changed to the one immediately prior to it or even worse suddenly there is a new Zodiac intruder in the form of a 13th Zodiac sign with the weird name "Ophiuchus" and who wants to be born in a Sun Sign with a name like that?

These news blasts almost return as reliably as a comet and each time they make news for a day or so. We can almost predict when this news comet will return to the headlines. Should you be worried?

I don't think so. For one, the moment and place in the heavens where Earth was at your birth has not changed. In fact, nothing has changed but someone's view of all this. Are we allowed to look at an elephant from different views? Yes we are, and some of those views might not even be all that elegant. We have the same problem here. Let's look at these two claims, the first that your Sun Sign at birth has somehow slid back to the sign before it. In other words I am a Gemini Sun Sign and not a Cancer Sun Sign. And the second claim is that there is actually a 13th (lucky number?) Sun Sign to be wedged into the zodiac pie, making each sign in the circle have less width. Move over everyone!

Your Sun Sign Has Changed

Let's start with the claim that your Sun Sign has changed. Popular astrology (like the kind you find in the newspapers) is called Tropical Astrology and uses the Tropical Zodiac. It is true that zero degrees of the Tropical Zodiac sign Aries has gradually shifted backward a tiny bit each year against the backdrop of the actual constellations in the sky. This effect is called precession. The length of time required for the Earth to swing its axis in a full circle backward through the zodiac is a period of about 25,800 yrs. It therefore takes a little over 2,000 years to precess or move backward through one entire Sun Sign. This is the basis for the "Great Ages." We are now near the end of the Age of Pisces which began around the time of Christ and near the beginning of the Age of Aquarius. This is not news at least to astrologers and New-Age folks.

Should you be very afraid? I don't think so. You are what you are what you are... already. Nothing can change that. What we have here are two different opinions on just where against the backdrop of the constellations we want to start measuring. If you are fond of the summer and winter solstice (I am) and the spring and autumn equinox then you are good to go. In other words, if we start the Zodiac cycle from the spring equinox and call that the beginning of Aries, then the Sun Sign you have always used (using newspaper astrology) is correct. What you read about in the newspaper astrology column is you. Relax.

However, if you subscribe to what is called Sidereal Astrology, then it gets more complicated. Sidereal Astrology attempts to adjust for that small backward shift in the heavens by the earth's plane (the Ecliptic) due to a very slow wobble on its axis and keep the zodiac signs pinned to

the actual constellations.

The problem with Sidereal Astrology is that you have to declare exactly where that non-shifting point in the constellations which marks the zero point of the Sun Sign Aries actually is. And sidereal astrologers don't agree on where that point is, and I am being polite. There are literally dozens of inspired astrologers out there (most of them are from India) who claim to know exactly where that point is and most of them differ with one another. It is true that they make sure that the beginning of the Sidereal Zodiac (zero Aries point) actually starts in the constellation Aries, but where that point is something they differ over and find their differences. And they are often vocal about it.

What Are We to Think?

Either with the Tropical Zodiac or the Sidereal Zodiac we are talking about a circle of 360-degrees. Everyone agrees on that. Where they disagree is this: Are the meaning of the signs tied to the Earth in its relation to its orbit and its center the Sun? Or are the meaning of the signs tied to the backdrop of constellations in the heavens from which the zodiac gets its name? Are we near or far? Good question.

For myself, I like "near" and Tropical Astrology and I feel that the Solstices and Equinoxes are more meaningful to me (my personal choice) than to try and figure out where in the background constellations to start measuring the zero degree point of the sign Aries. I have no idea where to start.

However I am somewhat expert in knowing about all the matter that is out there beyond our solar system, matter like the Center of the Galaxy, the Center of the Local Supergalaxy, and other important centers. So I am comfortable looking at both Tropical and Sidereal Astrology but I connect the meaning of the signs to the Tropical Zodiac and consider that meaning to be movable with the earth rather than fixed to the stars. But astrologers differ on this point. You can have your own opinion, but it will take some work on your part to figure it out.

I don't want to spoil your fun, so I should probably keep my mouth shut at this point, but I won't. For myself, I don't consider Sun Sign astrology all that interesting or important. When I do an astrological reading for someone, I don't even look at their Sun Sign but rather I look at other factors like the large-scale aspect patterns among the planets, and so on. Also I could point out that when I tell you my Sun Sign is "Cancer," this really means that Earth was in the sign Capricorn at the time. Remember, from Earth at my birth the sun appeared to be in the zodiac sign Cancer in the sky, which means that actually the earth I was on was in the direction of the Tropical Zodiac sign Capricorn. Go figure.

The 13th Zodiac Sign

Whoa... is this an unlucky sign or what? As to the 13th Zodiac sign, the twelve signs of the zodiac were originally based on what constellations the earth passed through on its yearly orbit around the Sun in the orbital plane which is called the Ecliptic. And these twelve signs were selected because all twelve of them were close to the orbital plane the earth moved through and for no other reason. Now it so happens that the constellation Ophiuchus also crosses the earth's plane and path, but it was ignored because the constellation Scorpio is also near the Ecliptic but on the exact other side of that plane. Using "Scorpio" and not "Ophiuchus" was a choice someone made a long time ago as there was not enough room in a 12-fold zodiac for both of them because they were about equal in width.

Trying to squeeze Ophiuchus into the zodiac does not make sense to me because it is not somehow staggered along the ecliptic plane in a line but rather is opposite Scorpio. If we want to be fair, we should also include the Constellation Cetus (The Whale) because it actually is closer to the Ecliptic (Earth's path) than is Aries. And the constellation Auriga is also right next to the Ecliptic. So if you want to have 13 zodiac signs, you might as well have 15 zodiac signs to be fair.

You can divide the zodiac pie into as many wedge pieces as you want and everyone will get a smaller slice, but there will be more zodiac signs. Things are complicated enough in life as it is. We can safely let this news comet pass and be surprised again some other year that our Sun Sign has changed.

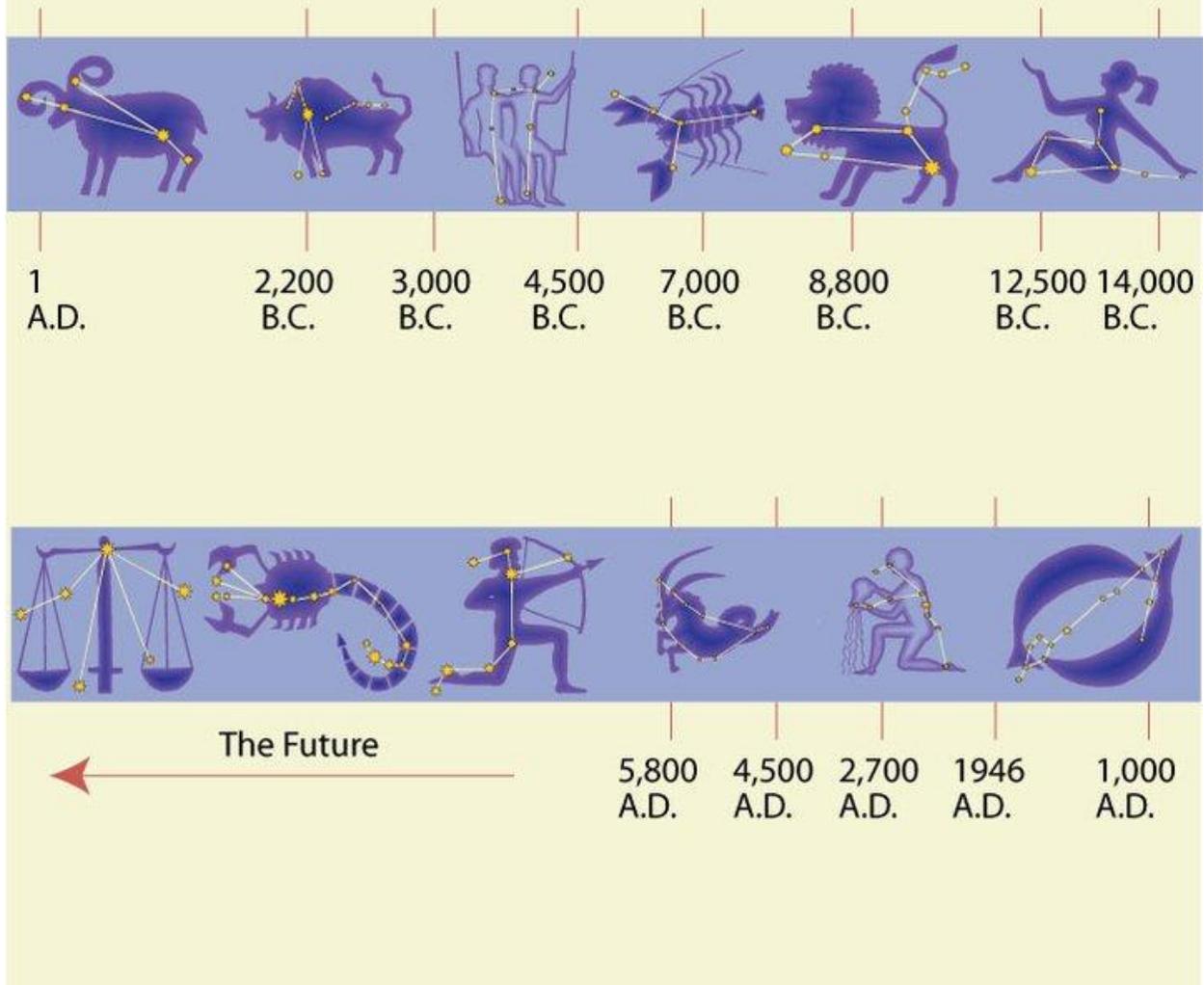
For those that have read this far and are still awake, here is a sleeping pill for you:

Technical Stuff

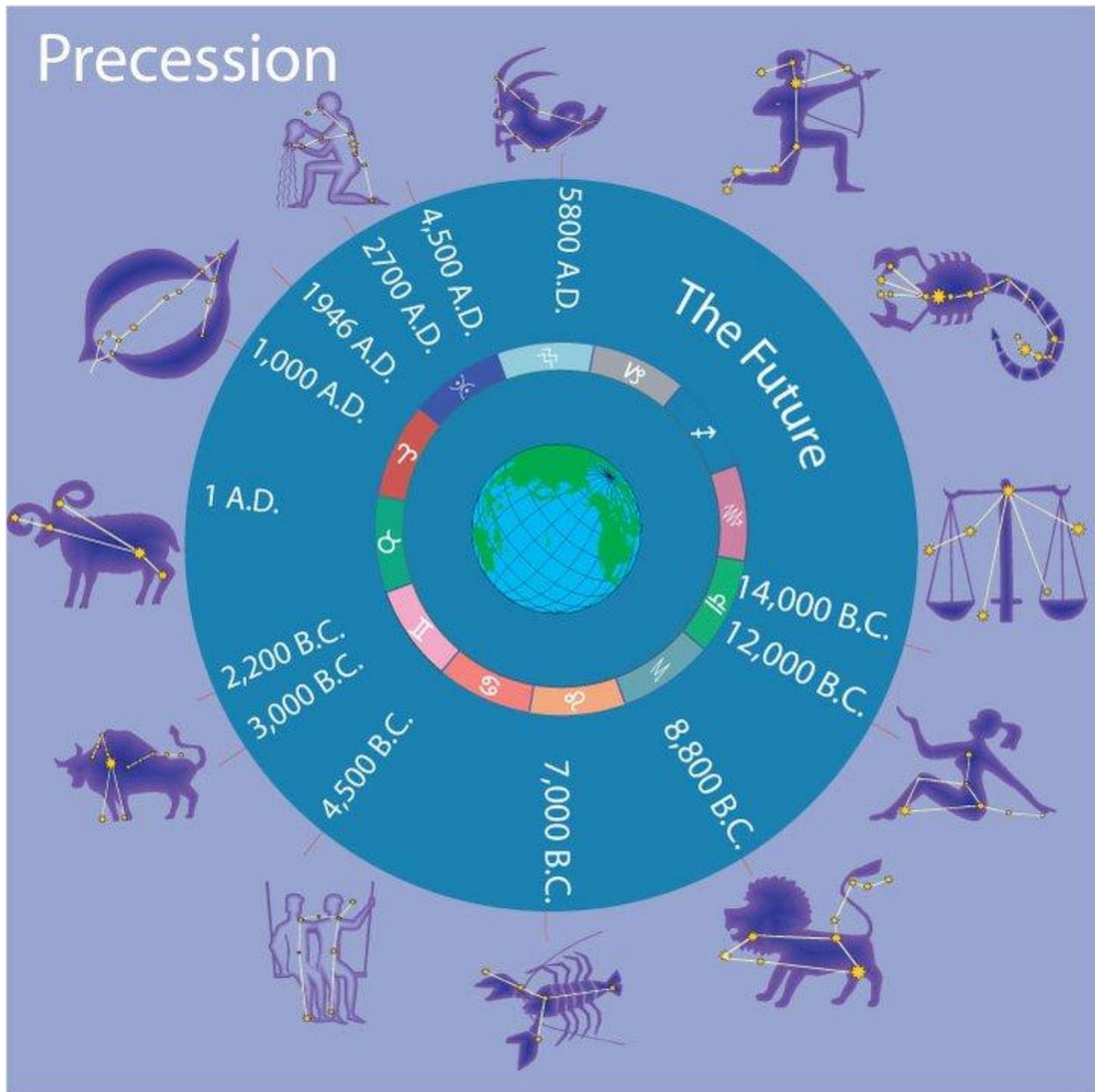
Sidereal Zodiac: One of several zodiacs used by various astrologers, both ancient and modern, which is fixed with reference to the stars. Conversion from the Tropical Zodiac to a Sidereal Zodiac is normally specified by giving the longitude of the Vernal Point in terms of the Sidereal Zodiac, or (equivalently) the value of the Ayanamsha for a specific date. Western sidereal astrologers use the value of the SVP (Synetic Vernal Point) specified by Fagan and Allen, which defines the mean longitude of the Vernal Point of the epoch BY1950.0 to be exactly $335^{\circ}57'28.64''$, which is equivalent to stating that its Ayanamsha is $24^{\circ}02'31.36''$. The Fagan-Allen determination leads to a Zodiac which is identical to that used by ancient astrologers (Egyptian, Babylonian, Persian, Arabian, Magi). Its use has been established to within 0.1° for the period BC786-AD500, and to within less than 5° as early as BC2767. All ancient astrologers used the same Sidereal Zodiac, but its universality diminished from the time of Claudius Ptolemy (about 75AD) until its re-discovery by Cyril Fagan in our century. Modern {Hindu Astrology}, which is clearly derived from Greek sources after the Alexandrian conquests which followed his rise to power in BC336, and reflect much of the work of Ptolemy, uses one of a set of Ayanamshas, which yield coordinate systems some of which are only approximately fixed with reference to the stars. And so on....

Michael

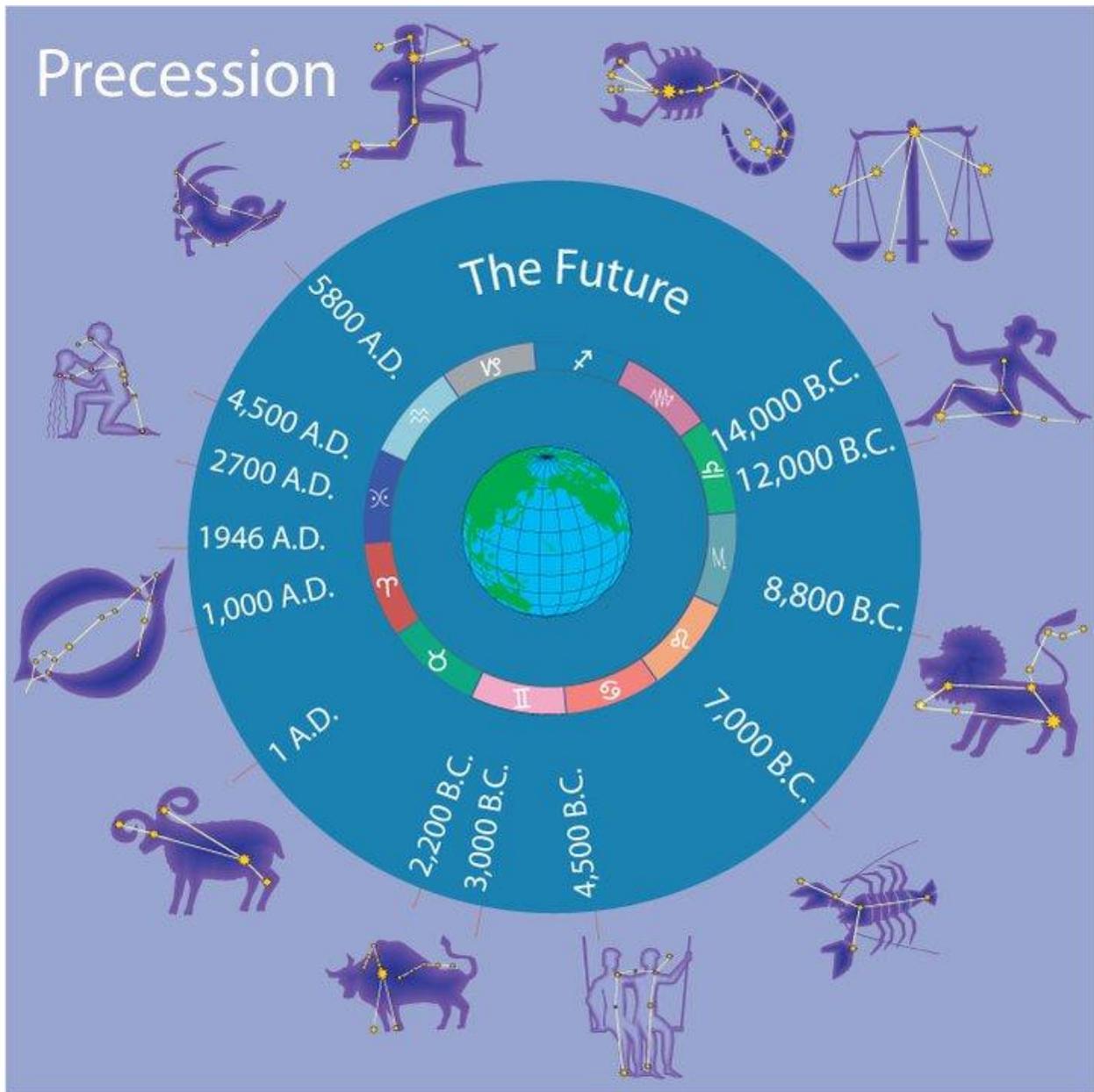
Precession



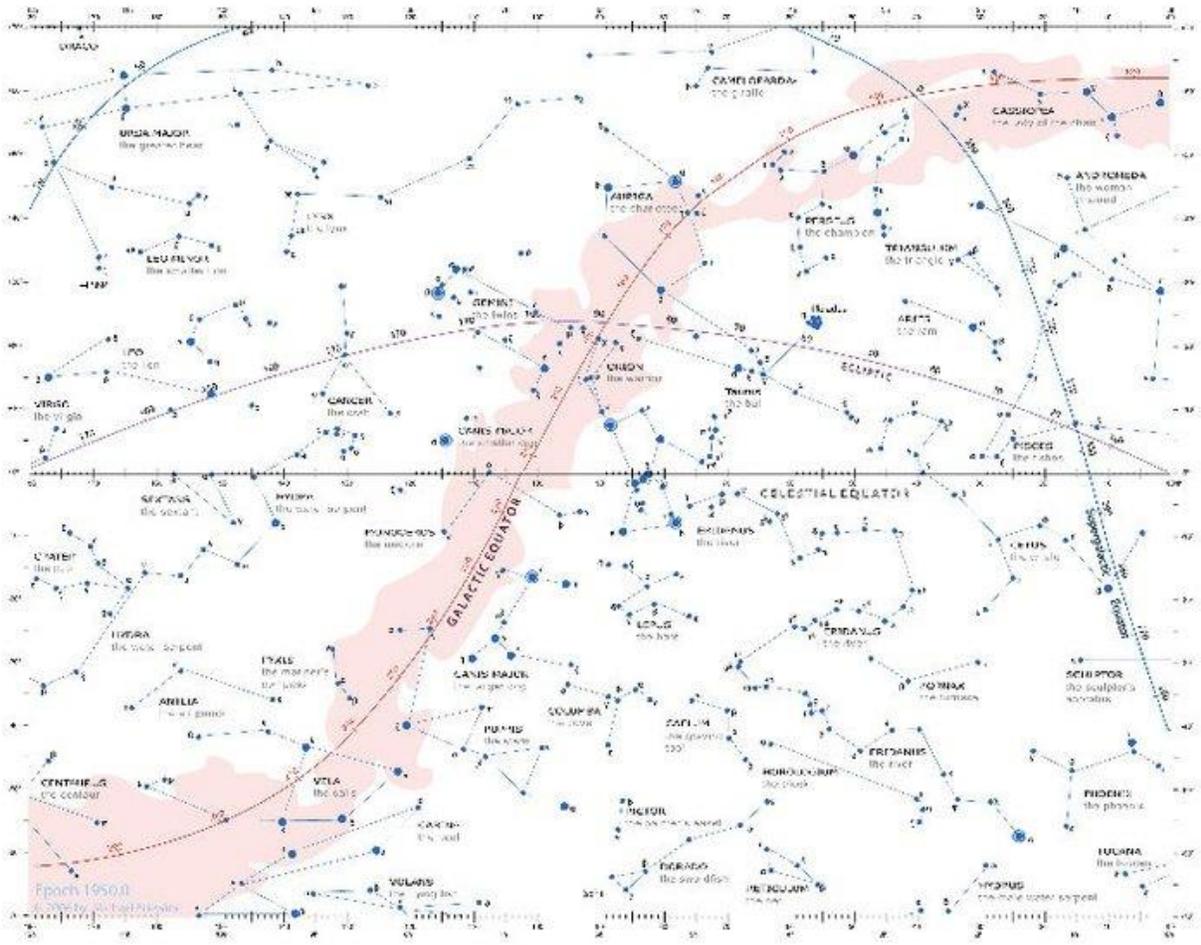
This linear diagram shows where the Zero Aries Point (fiducial) will be for various dates against the constellations for the Tropical Zodiac.



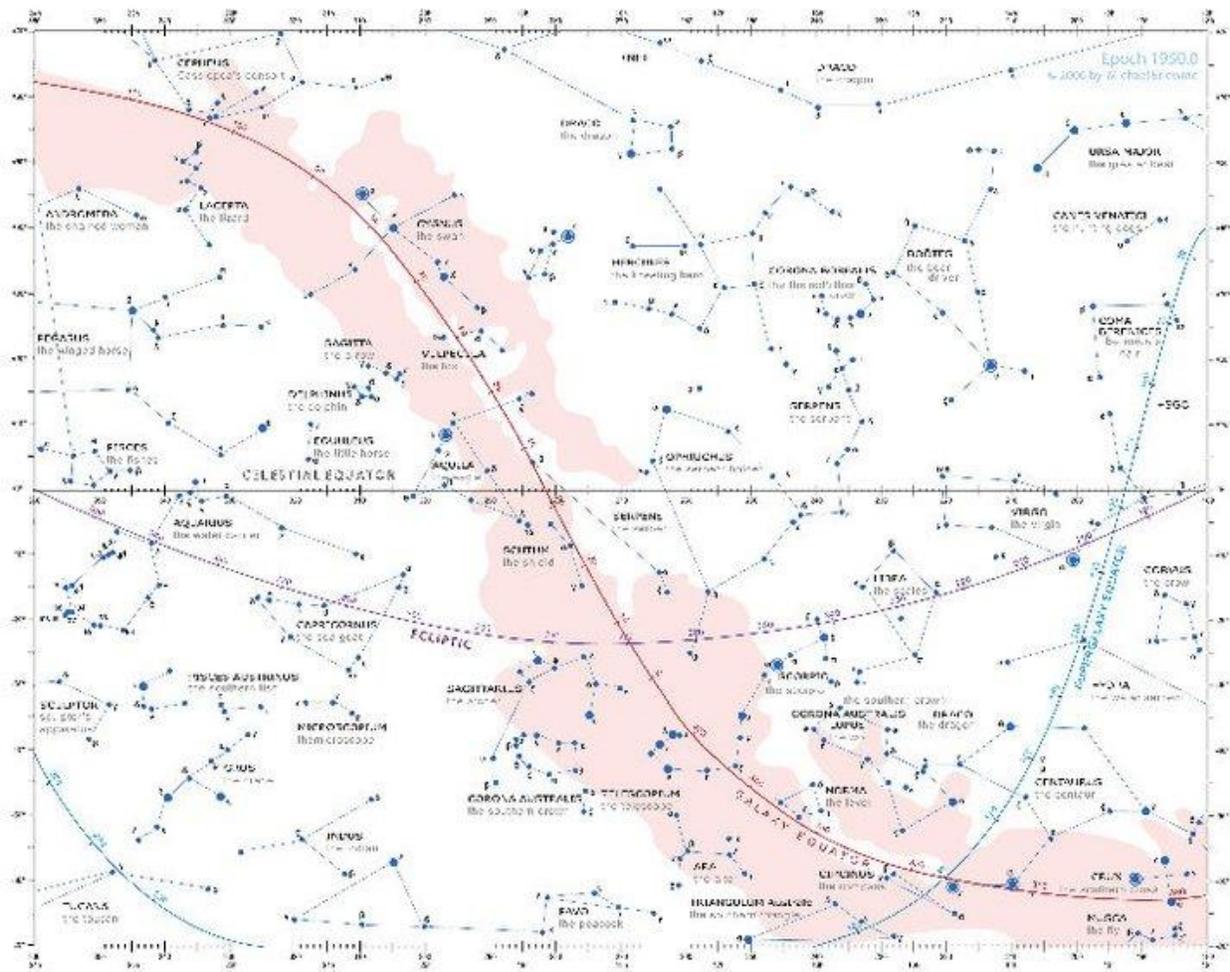
Here is a circular diagram shows with the constellation Aries on the left of the wheel for various dates against the constellations for the Tropical Zodiac. The dates within the circle marks where the Zero Aries Point will be in the Tropical Zodiac for the date listed.



Here is a circular diagram shows with the constellation Pisces on the left of the wheel for various dates against the constellations for the Tropical Zodiac. The dates within the circle marks where the Zero Aries Point will be in the Tropical Zodiac for the date listed.



Here is a star map I made. The zodiac or ecliptic is the curved line above the straight line. Notice on the right side, above the straight horizontal line the constellation Cetus (The whale) come closer to the ecliptic than does Aries. In fairness, the zodiac should then read "Aries, Cetus, Gemini, Cancer, etc."



Here is a star map I made. The zodiac or ecliptic is the curved line below the straight line. Notice in the middle that the constellation Ophiuchus crosses the ecliptic, which is why someone is saying it should be the 13th Zodiac Sign.