

## The burning question: how does combustion work in natal Astrology?

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Combustion is often overlooked by present-day Astrology and not taken into account in chart interpretation; however it is an important factor in delineation and should not be ignored. The traditional concept of combustion has proved to be not only valid, but also crucial for a complete understanding of an astrological chart. Combustion can be more than a simple “debility”, and if properly delineated it can give precise and accurate information. It shows the areas of the native’s life which are likely to be overwhelmed by circumstances, thrusting him or her into fame or infamy. In this article we will explore the interpretation of combustion in nativities adding some developments drawn from our professional experience.

### Understanding combustion and its effects

#### What is Combustion?

Combustion (and its satellite concepts of Under the Sun’s Beams and Cazimi) is directly related to a planet’s proximity to the Sun. When a planet is moving to a position near the Sun its light is gradually obfuscated by the King of the Heavens. As it moves into the Sun’s light the planet is increasingly more difficult to observe and eventually becomes invisible; this is the astronomical basis of combustion.

Generally speaking, a planet is combust when it is too close to the Sun, but the astrological tradition has more definite rules for this concept. So when a planet is at a distance of  $17^{\circ}$  from the Sun it is said to be under the Sun’s beams; its visibility is reduced. When it draws even nearer to the Sun, by  $8^{\circ}$  or less, it is termed combust, or burned, it is then impossible to observe and as the planet’s light becomes obscured so too do its astrological effects. When the planet enters its extreme proximity, within less than  $17'$  of the Sun, it is called Cazimi, or in the Heart of the Sun. This is a special position where the power of the planet is greatly increased.

Summarizing: a planet is combust when it is less than  $8^{\circ}$  from the Sun and more than  $17'$  from exact conjunction <sup>(1)</sup>.

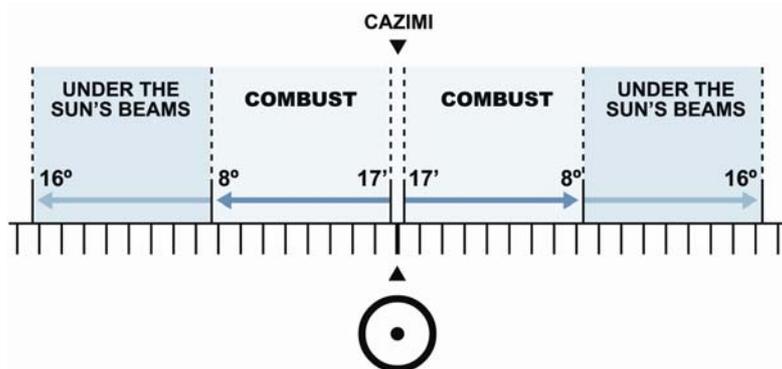


Diagram 1 – Under the Sun’s Beams, Combustion and Cazimi

Thus the concept of combustion derives from a crucial, but often underestimated, astrological fact: the importance of the Sun in the chart. <sup>(2)</sup> The Sun's power and signification cannot be overstated in this matter. First of all, the Sun separates day from night and therefore forms the basis of Sect; the Sun's movement marks the seasons of the year and generates the Zodiac itself; its position in the Zodiac determines the planetary rulership of the signs, and its position in the scheme of the heavens defines the natures and attributes of the planets, (superior and inferior <sup>(3)</sup>, masculine and feminine <sup>(4)</sup>, oriental and occidental <sup>(5)</sup>).

Crucial to an understanding of combustion is the fact that the Sun also determines the amount of light carried by the planets: the further away a planet is from the Sun, the more sunlight it reflects. When this occurs it is said that the planet is increasing in light. <sup>(6)</sup> As light (visibility) is the basis of a planet's power, the more light it carries, the more power it has. When a planet is approaching the Sun (or the Sun is approaching it, in the case of the superior planets) the planet's light becomes secondary to that of the Sun, and as the planet decreases in light it loses power. At this point, the consequences of combustion come into effect, because when a planet is so placed it cannot be seen by an observer on Earth.

### What is the effect of Combustion?

To discover the effect of combustion, we must refer to the Tradition where this principle was incorporated into the interpretative system. Research into the major Arabic and later European authorities reveals that combustion is considered to be an impediment, debilitating the planet and thus affecting its power to act.

These are some examples:

*"The combust [planet] is like a captive, imprisoned, slandered and with no power"  
 "When [a planet] is combust in his house or in the house of his exaltation it is like a man imprisoned in his home by his lord or king"  
 "When [a planet] is with the Sun its strength is feeble and its meaning diminishes"*

*The Centiloquy of "Bethem" (10<sup>th</sup> Century AD)*

*"The 53<sup>rd</sup> Consideration is, whether the significator be under the Sun beams, for then he will be of small efficacy in anything as aforesaid; Yet the Malevolents will be something more strong in evil than the Benevolents in good."*

*The 146 Considerations of Guido Bonatus (13<sup>th</sup> Century AD)*

*"The significator of the Querent combust, shows him or her in great fear, and overpowered by great person"*

*Christian Astrology, William Lilly (1647)*

Combustion is thus identified with an extreme loss of power. In terms of importance, this affliction is considered to be similar to that of the zodiacal debilities of exile and fall, being in a cadent house, or afflicted by the infortunes (which generally refers to the squares and oppositions of Mars and Saturn). We can observe this in the work of Zahel, <sup>(7)</sup> or later in the work of Bonatti. <sup>(8)</sup> When these authors list the main debilities of the planets, under the Sun's beams (often used as a synonym for combustion) is ranked in third place; cadent positions and retrograde motion taking first and second places respectively. However, when referring to the debilities of the Moon, combustion is listed first.

Combustion can also acquire particular functions. For instance, concerning the issue of longevity, Ali Ben Ragel<sup>(9)</sup> states: *"When the Alcocodem<sup>(10)</sup> is combust and so close to the Sun that [it] cannot be seen, it loses all its years; when it is in this state it gives no more than days or hours or things that have no name<sup>(11)</sup>".* Here we have a clear example of the idea that combustion removes

the planet's ability to act. In the same book, on the subject of marriage, Ben Ragel says: "*When Venus is found under the rays of the Sun [it] signifies the native will marry a sickly woman and that his marriages will be done secretly and in hiding*". In this passage are found two distinct concepts: on the one hand the author says that combustion diminishes the quality (or strength) of the planet, in this case the wife, and that it equates to weakness and sickness; on the other hand he associates combustion with hidden actions – no doubt a direct consequence of the invisibility of the planet during that time.

Combustion is also crucial when using the planets as signifiers of people with whom the native has a relationship, such as parents, children, partners and so on. It either reduces the planet's ability to represent them, or it signifies some kind of misfortune that characterizes them.

Thus we can enumerate the effects of combustion:

- it removes meaning from the planet;
- it diminishes the planet's power to do good or evil;
- it weakens the planet's expression;
- it signifies death, imprisonment, sickness, weakness and fear;
- it removes the planet's ability to represent certain people in the native's life, or signifies that those same people are ill-conditioned, weak or sick;
- it implies hidden activities.

Summarizing then, combustion disables and disempowers any planet unfortunate enough to be so affected. It can disable physically, emotionally and mentally, and the Sun's great force of light robs the planet of its own power through obliteration.

### **Interpreting combustion**

Once the importance of combustion is acknowledged, it must be properly integrated into chart delineation. How can this be done? First of all it must be realized that there are several levels to the delineation of combustion; each succeeding level takes the interpretation of this principle from the general to the increasingly specific.

#### **Interpreting the combust planet only by its natural signification**

This is the most basic level and the most widely used in modern natal Astrology. The interpretation of combust planets (if it is ever taken in account) is commonly based on their universal meaning, that is, by way of their natural signification. For instance, Mercury is related to the intellect; if Mercury is combust, so the intellect is somehow affected, and similarly, combust Mars is interpreted as some kind of "weakened" action.

*Although this interpretation is correct, it is nevertheless incomplete and imprecise, for it is based upon generalizations derived from the universal meaning of the planets, and ignores the particulars of the chart.*

#### **Interpreting the combust planet by its natural and accidental signification**

A more comprehensive understanding of combustion can be drawn from the planet's particular role in the horoscope, that is, from its accidental signification.

*This approach does not exclude the natural signification of the planet, but emphasizes its position and the houses it rules which is more appropriate for a detailed delineation. However, there is still more that needs to be considered.*

#### **Interpreting the combust planet and the Sun by their natural and accidental significations**

In our practice we have found that we can extend these concepts. The following suggestions are a development of the Traditional position from which a deeper understanding of combustion has made important contributions to our delineations.

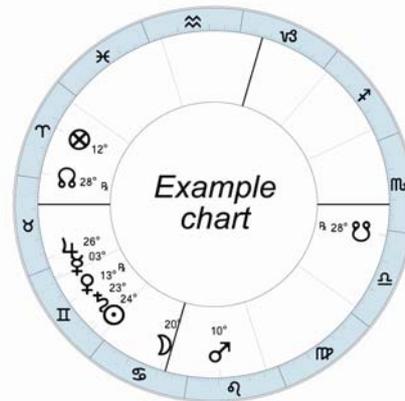
The key to a more complete delineation of combustion rests on the house ruled by the Sun. When this factor is integrated, it offers valuable clues to the exact conditions imposed on the combust planet. These conditions will relate to the matters signified by the house the Sun rules.

**Our proposal for delineating combustion in a natal chart can be summarized in the following principles:**

- 1) A combust planet is a “conditioned” planet and this conditioning is caused by the Sun;
- 2) This conditioning affects all that the combust planet represents in the horoscope in generic and specific terms;
- 3) The nature of the conditioning is described by the Sun’s natural rulerships and by the matters of the house which it rules;
- 4) This conditioning manifests primarily in those matters associated with the house in which the combustion occurs.

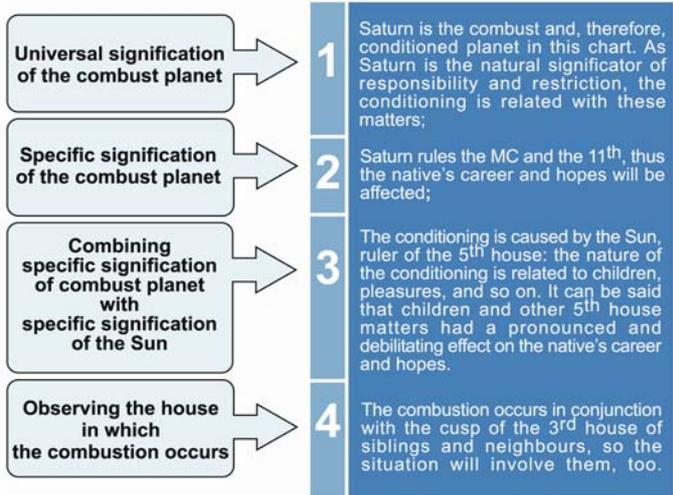
In practical terms this means that the matters of the house ruled by the Sun (that house having Leo on its cusp) dominate the matters of the house or houses ruled by the combust planet. The universal signification of the combust planet can also be taken into account although to a lesser degree. The house position of the combustion indicates which areas of life will be affected by it. So, the Sun’s significations over-rule those of the combust planet, and that over-ruling will occur in those areas of life associated with the house location of the combustion. This becomes more evident in the native’s life, of course, when the combustion occurs in an angle, or when the planets involved (the Sun or the combust planet) rule one of the angles in the chart. The following diagram shows a step by step application of these principles:

**A STEP BY STEP EXAMPLE**



**Diagram 2 – Step by Step Example**

This is the chart of King John III of Portugal. <sup>(12)</sup> He had ten children, but none of them survived him, presenting a serious problem of succession and threatening the kingdom’s independence. The lack of direct heirs to the throne caused enormous strife and concern, and in line of succession, the king’s brothers were constantly involved in those difficulties. One of them eventually succeeded to the throne, but only for a short period, and even so could not guarantee the country’s independence from Spain.



## Applying combustion: some examples

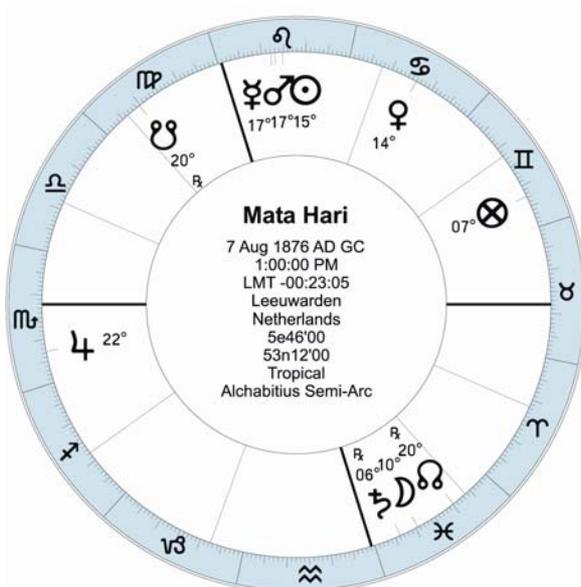
Applying the information provided by combustion to chart interpretation is relatively simple if these principles are clearly understood. The use of natural and specific significations of the combust planet *and* of the Sun offer several layers of information about the combust situation.

**Note:** The complete delineation is not presented here for lack of space, but it must be emphasized that combustion is a complement to the general principles of chart delineation.

Some practical examples will demonstrate the application of these principles in delineation.

### Example 1 - Mata Hari<sup>(13)</sup>

- Sun in Leo in the 9<sup>th</sup> house of his joy, ruler of the MC
- Sun burns Mars (ruler of Asc Scorpio) and Mercury (ruler of 8<sup>th</sup>, 11<sup>th</sup>)



Mata Hari (born Margaretha Geertruida Zelle, in Leeuwarden, Netherlands), was married at 18 years of age to a man of 40, and theirs was a violent and unhappy marriage. Later she decided to leave him and moved from their home in Java to Europe and there began her career as a belly-dancer. To add more mystique to her act she adopted the exotic name of Mata Hari (a Malayan term meaning the Sun; literally: “the eyes of dawn”). After a short and adventurous life which included dancing, espionage and occasional prostitution, she was executed by a French firing squad, accused of spying for the Germans.

Mata Hari has a double combustion involving Mars and Mercury; Mars rules her Ascendant, signifying the native herself. These matters are subsumed by the Sun, ruler of the MC of success, status and occupation. So, the combustion expresses like this: she (ruler of the Ascendant) was totally controlled by her professional activities (MC), which were

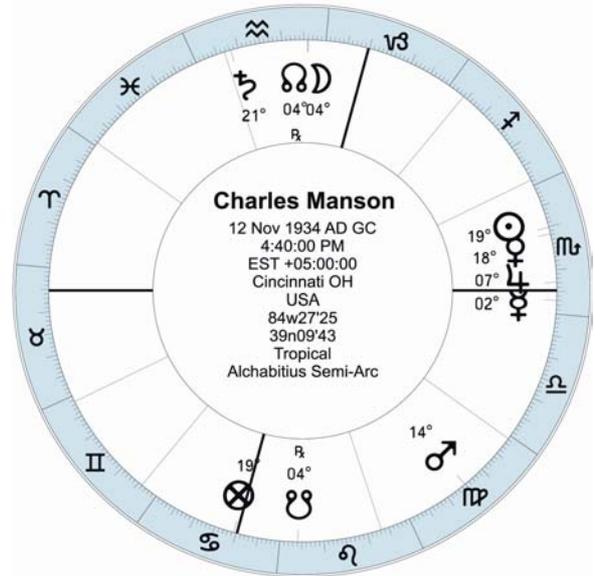
directly related to foreign issues and travel (9<sup>th</sup> house), in that her life was defined and overwhelmed by these matters.

Her whole life was marked by her glamorous public image, both for good and ill. The combustion occurs in the 9<sup>th</sup> house of foreign countries and voyages and, although she was European, she lived most of her life in foreign countries and became an icon of the Orient. It is significant that her true name remains almost unknown while her “oriental” name became her trademark. It is interesting to note that her stage name was associated with the Sun, which plays such an important part in this chart. (The consequences of Mercury’s combustion are not so evident because it does not rule an angle in this chart and it would require a deeper study of her life to understand its effects.)

**Example 2 - Charles Manson** <sup>(14)</sup>

- Sun in Scorpio in the 7<sup>th</sup>, ruler of the 5<sup>th</sup>
- Sun burns detrimented Venus (ruler of Asc Taurus)
- Jupiter ruler of the 9<sup>th</sup> is under the Sun's beams

Although imprisoned since 1971, Manson is still regarded as a role model by some neo-Nazis, "skinheads" and Satanists. Suffering from severe psychosis, he became a cult-leader and is still considered by his followers to be a divine being. Typically, his cult promoted sex and drugs for all and Mansons' religious beliefs derived from his peculiar interpretation of the Bible. His group murdered actress Sharon Tate, the 8-month pregnant wife of film director Roman Polanski, for which Manson was condemned to life in prison. He never admitted his participation in this crime, and after his imprisonment his mental state deteriorated still further.



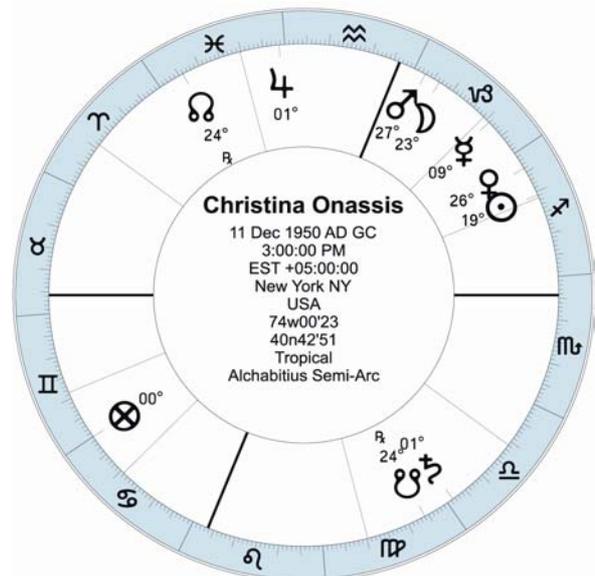
In this chart combust Venus, ruler of the Ascendant, is in the 7<sup>th</sup>. It is extremely debilitated, not only by combustion, but also by being in exile in Scorpio and receiving a square from Saturn. The Sun rules the 5<sup>th</sup>, so it is heavily conditioned by pleasure and self-indulgence. Venus, the combust planet, is in detriment, thus manifestation occurs through vices: addiction to drugs and sexual excesses, which are expressions of a distorted and corrupt Venus. The combustion occurs in the 7<sup>th</sup> house: he had affairs with most of the women in his group.

It is interesting to note that Jupiter is strongly angular in the 7<sup>th</sup> house, thus bringing to relationships the matters of the houses he rules: the 8<sup>th</sup> of death, the 9<sup>th</sup> of religion and the 12<sup>th</sup> of imprisonment. All of these themes are very descriptive of Manson's life.

**Example 3 - Christina Onassis** <sup>(15)</sup>

- Sun in Sagittarius in the 8<sup>th</sup> house, ruler of the 4<sup>th</sup>
- Sun burns Venus (ruler of Asc Taurus and 6<sup>th</sup> house)

Christina became the world's richest woman at the age of 25 when she inherited her father's immense fortune. However, in spite of her fabulous wealth, she was extremely unhappy. One of her main sorrows was one of self-image: she had a serious weight problem which she could never overcome. She died at the age of 38 with an acute pulmonary edema.



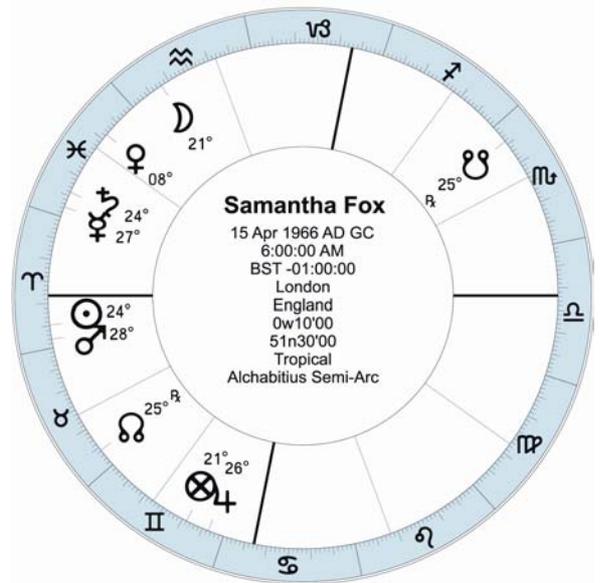
The Sun – natural significator of the father and ruler of the 4<sup>th</sup> house of the father – combusts Venus, ruler of the Ascendant, Christina. The native was strongly conditioned by her father, Aristotle Onassis. The combustion occurs in the 8<sup>th</sup> house, so it was expressed through issues of

death, inheritances and difficult emotional states such as fear and anguish. It is also interesting to note that Venus also rules the 6<sup>th</sup> house of illness and Christina had a poor health - she had an eating disorder (an illness of Venus) - the combustion of the ruler of the Ascendant is representative of weak health.

**Example 4 - Samantha Fox** <sup>(16)</sup>

- Sun exalted in Aries in the 1<sup>st</sup>, ruler of the 5<sup>th</sup> (pleasures)
- Sun burns Mars (ruler of the Asc and the 8<sup>th</sup>)

Samantha was only 16 years old when she began her career as a topless model in *The Sun* newspaper. The reason for her success has to do not only with her physical characteristics, but also with her character, otherwise she would be just one more topless model. As her photographed image became widely known, she began dreaming of a career as a singer. She had a hit with her record *Touch Me*, and by her 21<sup>st</sup> birthday she had decided to leave "Page Three".



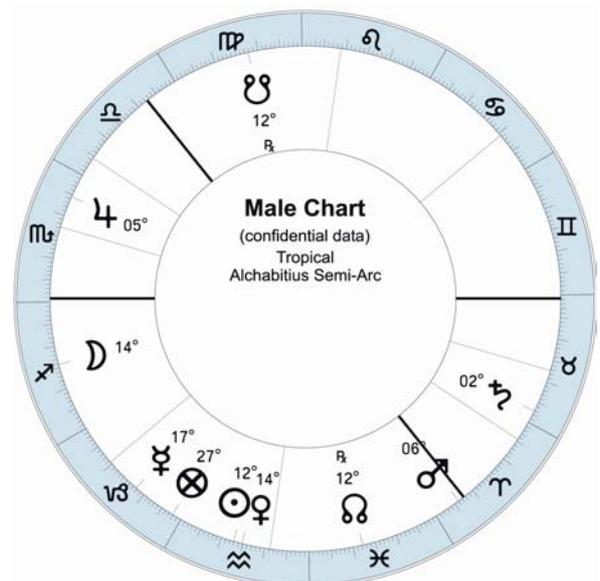
Here combustion occurs in the 1<sup>st</sup> house and combust Mars rules the Ascendant, therefore being directly related to her image. The Sun rules the 5<sup>th</sup> house of pleasure and venereal activities, because the 5<sup>th</sup> is the joy of Venus. These 5<sup>th</sup> house matters (her artistic career, both in modelling and music) dominated her life: she will always be remembered as the glamorous girl of "Page Three".

As both planets are dignified (the Sun is exalted and Mars is in rulership) the conditioning brought about by combustion is not negative in itself. Nevertheless, both the Sun and Mars are hot and dry planets, thus adding a strong choleric note to her temperament.

**Example 5 – Male client** <sup>(17)</sup>

- Sun in fall in Aquarius in the 2<sup>nd</sup> house, ruler of the 9th
- Sun burns Venus, ruler of the Desc, MC and 6<sup>th</sup> house

Although born in Finland, this man spent his early years in Egypt because his mother worked at the embassy in Cairo. Throughout his adolescence he worked as a tourist guide while studying ancient Egyptian language and culture. After finishing at university he achieved a student grant to an English university for further studies. Being always on the move, he could never develop steady and enduring relationships, neither with relatives nor with partners. His studies still require him to travel constantly and so they determine the major turning-points of his life.



The Sun rules the 9<sup>th</sup> house of voyages, foreign countries and education. Combust Venus rules the MC of career and the 7<sup>th</sup> house of relationships. Therefore, his career and his relationships are conditioned by studies and travelling. Furthermore, as combustion occurs in the 2<sup>nd</sup> house of money, its effects are manifested largely through his financial

status: he never has a great deal of money, but private tutoring (9<sup>th</sup> house) enables him to support himself.

In all the charts we can see how the Sun is subduing the combust planets through the matters of the house he rules. This adds useful information and unfolds new connections in chart delineation. We hope our suggestions and examples will contribute to restoring combustion to its proper place within the astrological system.

#### **Combustion and the new planets: some considerations**

As stated above, combustion derives from the invisibility of the planet when too close to the Sun. It is then a matter of whether the planet is visible in the sky or not. This works well with the traditional planets, but the new planets are problematic in this regard, the main reason being that they are not visible in the first place. So, a question can be posed: can a planet that is not visible (to the naked eye) be obscured by the Sun?

The non-visibility of the new planets is a matter that requires deep consideration, for if Astrology is based on the visibility of the planets, how do we deal with something whose light cannot be seen from Earth? Such a discussion is outside of the scope of this article, yet we think it important to be mentioned in the context of this article.

*For further discussion on this matter we recommend Sue Ward's excellent paper "Uranus, Neptune and Pluto: an investigation into the sources of their symbolism", 2003 (available through her website: [www.sue-ward.co.uk](http://www.sue-ward.co.uk)).*

## Footnotes

<sup>(1)</sup> Some authors, particularly the Arabs, present slightly different definitions of these concepts: for most of them the planet is combust when it is less than 12° from the Sun; it is said to be coming under the Sun's beams when it is less than 15° and to be Cazimi when in the same zodiacal degree as the Sun. Some of these older authors also seem to use the term under the Sun's beams as equivalent to combustion.

<sup>(2)</sup> Many delineations overlook the non-aspectual relationships of the planets to the Sun, which includes not only combustion, but also occidentality and orientality, almugea, increasing in light, and so on. These relationships remind us of the Sun's key role in this ancient ordering of the skies represented in the Ptolemaic model. Those who criticise this model as conferring only a minor role on the Sun should note that the above-mentioned relationships demonstrate the essential role of the Sun without which Astrology ceases to exist.

<sup>(3)</sup> The superior planets are Mars, Jupiter and Saturn; they are the slowest and are placed above the Sun in the spheres of the Heavens; their effects are thus more lasting. The inferior planets are Venus, Mercury and the Moon; they are the fastest and are placed below the Sun; their effects are quick and seldom lasting.

<sup>(4)</sup> The masculine planets are Mars, Jupiter and Saturn, which are placed above the Sun's sphere in the scheme of the Heavens. The feminine planets are Venus and the Moon, placed below the Sun. Mercury is also below the Sun, but it has a common gender.

<sup>(5)</sup> Orientality and occidentality are concepts directly related to the planet's position regarding the Sun. The most common definition states that a planet is oriental when it rises before the Sun and occidental when it sets after the Sun. The superior, masculine planets are better placed when oriental, while the inferior, feminine planets are better when occidental (Mercury, when alone, is considered as feminine in this respect).

<sup>(6)</sup> Traditionally, Astrology has to do with light and sight. The whole basis of the astrological system derives from direct observation of the sky, therefore, the amount of light carried by a planet, the way that light was seen (dimmer or brighter) and its colour were determinative in interpretation. Although not always made clear, these ideas form the cornerstone of the astrological system.

<sup>(7)</sup> Zahel, *Sobre las interrogaciones* [On Interrogations], in Demetrio Santos' *Textos Astrológicos*, Ediciones Teorema, Spain, 1985.

<sup>(8)</sup> Guido Bonatti, 146 Considerations, in *The Astrologer's Guide*, London, 1886.

<sup>(9)</sup> Ali ben Ragel, *El Libro Conplido en los Iudizios de las Estrellas* [The Complete Book on the Judgment of the Stars], Ediciones Indigo S.A., Barcelona, 1997.

<sup>(10)</sup> Alcocoden is the planet representing the 'giver of years'. The years 'given' by the Alcocoden are an estimated longevity for the native.

<sup>(11)</sup> Meaning very small amounts of time.

<sup>(12)</sup> Dom João III – Source: official documents quoted in Braga, Paulo Drumond, *D. João III*, Lisbon, Hugin, 2002. Rodden Rating: B

<sup>(13)</sup> Mata Hari – Source: Birth Register (in Astrodatbank). Rodden Rating: AA

<sup>(14)</sup> Charles Manson – Source: Birth Certificate quoted in *Contemporary American Horoscopes* (in Astrodatbank). Rodden Rating: AA

<sup>(15)</sup> Christina Onassis – Source: Hospital Records (in Astrodatbank). Rodden Rating: AA

<sup>(16)</sup> Samantha Fox – Source: personal statement (in Astrodatbank). Rodden Rating: A

<sup>(17)</sup> Male Chart – Source: birth certificate and family records given by the client. Rodden Rating: AA