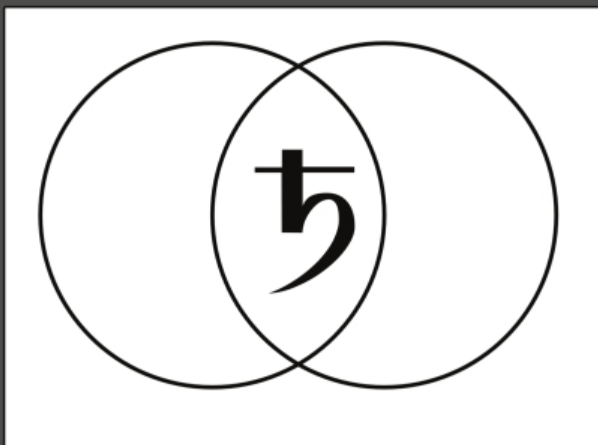


# Saturn Through the Ages

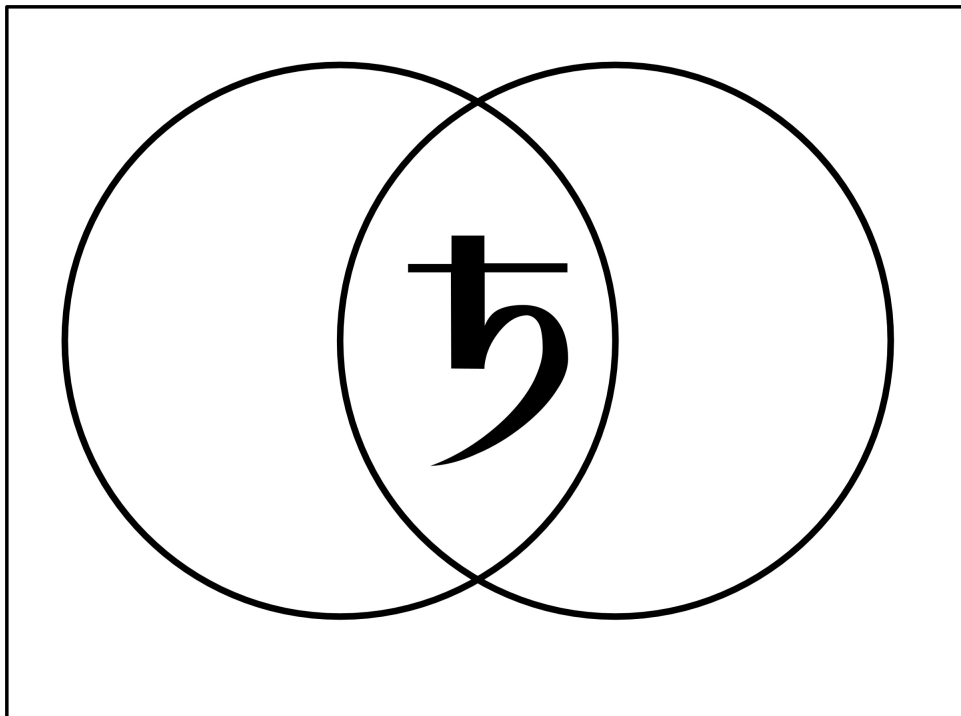
*Between Time and Eternity*



**Charles Obert**

**Almuten Press**

**Saturn**  
**Through the Ages:**  
*Between Time and Eternity*



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## Introduction

Many astrologers have their favorite planets, the ones they resonate to the most, the ones they find the most interesting. Typically it is a planet that is particularly strong or prominent in their own chart.

Mine is Saturn.

My rising sign is Capricorn. The ruling planet, Saturn, is exalted in Libra in my tenth house by whole sign, aspecting the Ascendant by a tight square. In traditional astrology the ruler of the Ascendant represents the person. In traditional astrology, I am Saturn. I have written more about Saturn than all of the other six traditional planets put together.

### Purpose

The purpose of this book is to recover the full traditional meaning of Saturn, and to recover a living context within which that full traditional meaning makes living sense. The meaning of Saturn relies on its context.

**The pivotal meaning of Saturn, that which everything else hinges on, comes from it being the outermost planet, on the border between the worlds of time and eternity. That is the key to the full riches of Saturn's meanings, and I want to recover that meaning and context in this book.**

Part One explores the full meaning of the planet Saturn through history. Part Two gives a living context for that meaning to make sense in our modern world. Part Three explores and develops some specific aspects of Saturn's meaning.

## Introduction

### Outline

**Part One: Historical Survey.** The purpose of the first section, the historical survey, is to document the different meanings attributed to Saturn throughout the history of Western astrology. You will find that through all of the traditional writers, from Vettius Valens in the second century to William Lilly in the seventeenth century, the meanings attributed to Saturn stay quite remarkably consistent.

It is not until the modern era, especially from the early twentieth century and later, that we see significant changes in the meanings attributed to Saturn. The differences in meaning of Saturn go together with a significant shift in overall worldview, the assumptions we make when we look out at the world and make judgments. I have a chapter in part one where I sketch out the significant changes in worldview in the modern era.

In the modern astrology section I include critiques of the assumptions that our modern world makes when we look out at the cosmos, assumptions that are invisible to us since they are the water we swim in. The purpose of the critiques of the modern astrologers is to bring to awareness and make explicit the assumptions they make about the world, and the implications of those assumptions. I examine the actual words the astrologers wrote, and interpret them in their normal meanings. I also highlight the strengths and significant contributions that modern astrology makes, as I think we can benefit by combining the strengths of both modern and traditional astrology, and use each one's strengths to balance and complement the other's weak points.

**Part Two: The Eternal Law.** This section is the core and pivot of the entire book. For the traditional meaning of Saturn to make sense you need to have a supporting worldview, a way of thinking, that supports its meaning. The purpose of the second section is to provide that context and support.

The traditional meanings of Saturn are based on the assumption that there is an eternal order and pattern to the cosmos - not something

## Introduction

that we humans have created and projected out from our minds, but an order that is part of the cosmos itself, both within our minds and in the underlying structure of the universe as a whole. Saturn's full meaning includes an eternal moral law integrated into the underlying structure of the cosmos.

In this section I look back to the fundamentals of the Platonic tradition to argue that there is such an eternal order, and that it is still alive and meaningful in our modern world. In our modern world there are still very good living reasons for thinking in terms of an eternal law in both the scientific sense and the moral and ethical sense.

So, while Part One is the historical survey, Part Two provides the frame of reference for the traditional meanings of Saturn to still make sense by laying out the philosophical and ethical underpinnings of Saturn's meaning.

**Part Three: Essays on Saturn Themes.** In the third section are essays on Saturn related themes that I think need to be revisited in the context of our modern popular culture. I am concentrating on the difficult or negative aspects of Saturn and human existence that we would just as soon not have to deal with in our modern world. This is in contrast to the common modern approach to heavily emphasize viewing Saturn, and everything else in astrology, in a positive light. I embrace these difficult dimensions of Saturn - suffering, aging, death, the problem of human evil - and argue that they are part of the full human experience, and that our lives are richer when we acknowledge and embrace them.

**Note:** Those of you who are familiar with my online blog may have seen articles which I wrote on the topic of Saturn's symbolism being feminine. Those essays are not included in this book. That topic will be addressed in a separate book in the future.



## **Avraham Ibn-Ezra, The Beginning of Wisdom**

Avraham Ibn-Ezra ben Meir (c 1089-1164) was born in Spain in the middle ages and moved to Israel in the latter part of his life. Ibn-Ezra was Jewish and his writings are in Hebrew. The astrology writings of Ibn-Ezra are in the same general tradition as the Arabic astrologers, which all have their roots in the original Greek tradition.

Saturn is cold and dry and his nature is evil and harmful. He indicates destruction, and ruin, and death, and grief, and mourning and weeping and crying, and ancient things.

His share of the human spirit is the power of thought.

Note the recurring theme of Saturn as thought, as depth, as wisdom, as profundity. I think this is related to the relation of Saturn and Mercury that Valens talked about, with both having connections with thought. This also relates to the connection of Saturn and the Law.

...in general all old people, and farmers, and builders, and tanners, and those who clean lavatories, slaves, the inferior, robbers, ditch and grave diggers, and undertakers. In his share of places of the earth are the caves and wells, and pits, and prisons, and every dark and uninhabited place, and the cemeteries.

Saturn is connected with old age, with people who work with earth, lowly trades in general, and trades connected to death. We also see places connected to death, or confinement, or underground, or hidden, or dark.

His nature is cold and dry, and his flavor is the astringent and everything that has disagreeable taste and smell.

This is Saturn as cold and dry rather than cold and wet. The cold and wet qualities of Saturn seem to be emphasized less in later texts,

## Avraham Ibn-Ezra, The Beginning of Wisdom

probably because of the systematizing of the four humors or temperaments. Associations that did not fit in with the humors tend to be emphasized less or to be dropped.

In his share of the human nature is the contemplation, little talk, astuteness, isolation from people, controlling them and winning and levying taxes, and getting angry, keeping one's word, deep thought, knowledge of secrets and the worship of God, inferior people, contrariness, fear, worry, coveting, and in general habitually lying with little usefulness and much ruin.

Again we see the mix of contradictory attributions - profundity, quietness, hidden knowledge or worship, but also deceit, lying, hiding the truth. Both themes are associated with Saturn from the earliest texts.

Saturn indicates tilling the land, building, mining metals, seeking hidden treasures, digging and examining things of the dead, and everything that lasts for many years.

This is Saturn associated with earth, with long duration, and the dead.

He indicates fathers and grandfathers, the deceased, crying and separation, wandering, poverty, humiliation, distant bad roads where danger lurks and he has no success in all undertaking.

Saturn as an old and slow moving planet is associated with fathers and grandfathers. The other attributions are related to bad fortune that puts one in lowly conditions.

## Saturn and Pluto

Introducing the 3 modern planets, Uranus, Neptune and Pluto, to the system of astrology, did much more than just adding 3 new members to the family. It also drastically changed the meanings of the traditional 7 planets.

The outer planets have taken some of their meanings away from the traditional Sacred Seven planets. In the process, the meanings of the traditional seven have become less rich and complex, thinned down, less multi-dimensional. Part of this thinning down of meaning comes from a modern tendency to want to streamline and conceptualize the meanings of the planets. You often see that each planet is given a single core keyword or concept as a way to grasp its meaning. This is done even by some teachers of traditional astrology.

In the older texts the meanings of the planets are broader, more concrete, and much, much messier - I'm tempted to call them anecdotal. For instance, instead of modern astrology saying that Saturn signifies where you have fear, a traditional text would list how Saturn is associated with graveyards, dark places, underground, the skin, the bones and teeth, old people, diseases like arthritis, the color black, winter, and so on. The meaning of Saturn is given as a set of concrete associations or specific contextual meaning, and you have to feel your way into how these different items all fit together. Starting with concepts rather than concrete associations tends to thin out the process and the meaning.

In addition to becoming more abstract and one-dimensional, some of the meanings originally associated with the traditional planets were transferred to the modern outer planets, which in turn led to a loss of richness of meaning.

To illustrate this, I want to look at how many of the meanings now associated with Pluto were originally associated with Saturn.

## Saturn and Pluto

First, let's list some of the common concepts and keywords that are associated with Pluto.

- death
- transformation
- a compulsive pressure to change
- destroying old forms so that new forms can be born
- a need to let go of old things
- pressure
- a process of transformation over time - sheer passage of time is part of the Plutonian pressure

**Every one of those meanings was originally associated with Saturn.** Let us consider that further.

Saturn is death. The figure of death, a very old person or a skeleton, in a loose black hooded robe, carrying a scythe for the harvest, is a symbol of Saturn. Saturn is skeleton, bones, teeth. Saturn is old people. The scythe is part of the symbolism of death as a harvest.

Saturn is Kronos, Father Time, representing the limitations and structure of a life within material reality and over time. Saturn is the effects of time.

In older texts Saturn is associated with places underground, with death, and with the realm of death, the underworld, which is precisely how we think of Pluto, lord of death and the underworld.

Saturn transits are notorious for applying pressure for change. It is a tester, and any structure that is poorly built or is past its pull date will be destroyed and transformed. Think about your Saturn return! It is precisely that sort of pressure to change that we now associate with Pluto.

## Saturn and Pluto

There is also a sort of ruthless pressure of honesty with Saturn transits. You can't get away with any pretense or sham, and you are stripped down to the core essentials and tried. It illuminates your weak points, your vulnerabilities, and that is where you are driven to change. If you work with the change it can be gradual growth. If you resist or ignore the change it can be abrupt, cataclysmic. Things break under the relentless pressure of Saturn.

**Now take that previous paragraph and re-read it, substituting Pluto for Saturn. You would not need to change a single word.**

I want to look at another way that the modern meaning of Saturn has been simplified and made one-dimensional, to provide a contrast or foil to the outer planets. In modern astrology Saturn is often associated with the status quo, with existing structures, and with resisting change.

However, Saturn also signifies the process of change over time. Saturn is indeed old structures and old patterns - and yet, being time, Saturn is also the pressure for change, that which breaks down old patterns to make way for the new. Saturn is the bones, and the pressure of age that breaks bones. Saturn is also the decaying process. In older texts Saturn is associated with things that are rotting.

Modern astrology often sets up a dichotomy, with Saturn on the one side as the status quo, resisting change, and the outer planets as the forces for change and revolution. We saw that explicitly stated in some of the modern astrologers we looked at. It is a false dichotomy, and it comes from a thinned out, one sided interpretation of the meaning of Saturn.

In modern astrology a Saturn-Pluto aspect might be interpreted as Saturn being the forces resisting change, and Pluto being the forces of irresistible transformation. It is one against the other. This sets up a good-evil dualism where Saturn is the Bad Guy standing in the way of change, while the modern outer planets Uranus through Pluto are the Good Guys, the forces for the new, for revolution and enlightenment.

## Saturn and Pluto

Part of the effect of Saturn is precisely the applying of pressure on something that needs to experience change. By separating that dimension of meaning from Saturn we have split a complex process into opposing, less complex opposite forces. We have set up a false dichotomy.

Change is a very complex and mixed process, and keeping the complexity of the traditional meaning of Saturn helps us realize that. Change is not always positive or desirable and along with a seemingly positive change much can be lost or destroyed. It helps us here to remember that life does not come in the form of a straight line march of growth and evolution. It has peaks and valleys, ups and downs, things which survive and things which fall apart.

The traditional meaning of Saturn embodies much of the complexity of the meaning of time and change. Think of the scythe again, symbol of the harvest, of separating the wheat from the chaff. This is a process of weeding and of testing, keeping the valuable and discarding what is worthless. That scythe is one of the key symbols of Saturn as the forces of change and of growth through change, for often what is harvested there is a change of awareness.

It is worth the time to reclaim more of the richness and complexity of the traditional meaning of the Sacred Seven planets. They are, and always will be, the core of our astrology.