

Bounds, Terms or Limits?

by Douglas Noblehorse

In your study of astrology over the years (particularly if you've done any reading on horary astrology) you may have come across the related phrases, "*the Terms according to the Egyptians*", "*the Terms according to Ptolemy*" or even "*the Terms according to the Chaldeans*". More than likely you've been presented with differing, and sometimes conflicting, explanations every time you encounter the subject.

What exactly are Terms? How are they related to Bounds? And what about Limits? How are they used - and do they have any practical application in today's astrological world? Providing yet more answers to these questions is the subject of discussion in this article, where I'll attempt to get at the real meaning and usage of this little known and under-utilized form of planetary dignity and interaction. Along the way I'll perhaps challenge the way you might think about astrological concepts that are taken for granted.

The origin of Terms is unknown to us, lost to history as we currently understand it. In his *Tetrabiblos*, Ptolemy refers to the Chaldean system of Terms or Bounds¹, so we can infer that the Chaldean (aka Babylonian) astrologers used a system of Terms or Bounds in their earlier practice of omen or electional astrology.



By Ptolemy's time (the early 100s CE) an alternate system of Bounds had been developed by the Hellenistic Greeks, which he called "*the Terms According to the Egyptians*", Egyptians

referring to the Hellenistic Greeks, whose center of learning was Alexandria in Egypt, hence the designation Egyptian. This terminology continued down through the Medieval period of astrology into modern times (creating much confusion and misunderstanding) largely due to the *Tetrabiblos* being not only one of the few astrological texts to survive from Hellenistic times, but also to it being widely translated into Arabic, and from there into medieval (and eventually modern) European languages.

Ptolemy seemed not to have cared much for either Chaldean or Egyptian system, and formulated his own system of Bounds, "*the Terms According to Ptolemy*". James Holden, in his book *The History of Horoscopic Astrology*, maintains that Ptolemy apparently didn't really like any of the systems, as he didn't use or discuss them much. In fact Holden says, Ptolemy was not a practicing astrologer, being outside of the Hellenistic mainstream of astrological practice and thought².

However, since the *Tetrabiblos* survived into the Medieval period, *the Terms According to Ptolemy* became the standard, becoming a part of horary astrology as it was developed by the Arabs, and later William Lilly.

The usage of Terms in natal astrology (as formulated by the Hellenistic Greeks who did not practice horary astrology) fell into disuse, and in modern times, Terms are little known or understood outside of horary astrology. Even their true spiritual meanings and applications have been obscured, partly due to Ptolemy's empirical Aristotelian approach to astrology that dominated subsequent astrological thought - and partly due to the Medieval and Renaissance emphasis on weighting schemes of planets found solely in their own rulerships (i.e. domicile rulers 5, exaltation rulers 4, triplicity/trigon rulers 3, terms/bounds 2, face 1). This emphasis all but disregarded the overall understanding of an astrological point's subtle inter-relationships with its rulers.

In modern times, I suppose it's up to each

individual astrologer as to which system to use - perhaps influenced by their particular philosophical leanings. I would conjecture that event-oriented, empirical astrologers would gravitate towards Ptolemy's Terms, while humanistic, psychological and/or spiritual astrologers would favor *the Terms According to the Egyptians*. That would be a research study best left for another time and another article at this point. For this article and in my astrological study, I use *the Terms According to the Egyptians*, as defined by Project Hindsight. (See figure 1)

Robert Hand has said he prefers the word Bounds as it is more accurate in its description³, although Limits is just as descriptive. For the purposes of this discussion, I'll use Bounds, as I defer to Hand's judgment in this matter. He feels the English definition and understanding of the word Terms has changed too much since the Hellenistic Greeks such as Ptolemy used it.

In fact, a cursory consulting of the Latin roots of the word terms shows that it means "bounds" or "limits" - and that our modern linking of term or terms with the "concept of time" (*i.e. term limits*) dates from around 1200-1300, as does our modern definition of terms having to do with demands or requirements (*i.e. terms of engagement*)⁴.

Robert Schmidt and Project Hindsight has delved deeper into the Hellenistic definition of Terms/Bounds/Limits in an attempt to more clearly understand the Hellenistic Greek perception of

this concept. He maintains that the Greek word "horion", used for "bound", means "standard"⁵.

J. Lee Lehman, Ph.D. in her book *Essential Dignities* (Copyright 1992, 1995) says that Bounds "are described in virtually all classical sources as being 'of the body.'" And even other sources indicate that the Hellenistic Greeks viewed the Bounds as describing the basic spiritual principle of the Universe (as described by the Trigon, or Triplicity ruler⁶) made manifest in, or bound into, the flesh, or matter. Thus the idea or concept of being bound, or limited arises.

Many Medieval scholars thought of bound rulers as imparting physical appearance - Deborah Houlding says that this was Lilly's principal use of Bound rulers.⁷

And so, Bounds are no different from Terms or Limits. But what exactly are they? All three titles refer to the same planetary essential dignity, although Bounds differ from the other dignities (domicile, exaltation and triplicity/trigon) in that they are irregular in length, and only utilize the five classical planets Mercury, Venus, Mars, Jupiter and Saturn, leaving out the Sun and Moon (See figure 1). I would think that this is because the Sun and Moon are described by Hellenistic astrological thought as "one's all"⁸ - in other words, one's spirit, whereas the planets Mercury through Saturn describe mundane, material and physical earthly conditions. Thus the Bounds only utilize these planets.

Finding the Bound ruler

Figure 1 - Terms According to the Egyptians

♈	♃	6	♀	12	♃	20	♂	25	♃
♉	♀	8	♃	14	♃	22	♃	27	♂
♊	♃	6	♃	12	♀	17	♂	24	♃
♋	♂	7	♀	13	♃	19	♃	26	♃
♌	♃	6	♀	11	♃	18	♃	24	♂
♍	♃	7	♀	17	♃	21	♂	28	♃
♎	♃	6	♃	14	♃	21	♀	28	♂
♏	♂	7	♀	11	♃	19	♃	24	♃
♐	♃	12	♀	17	♃	21	♃	26	♂
♑	♃	7	♃	14	♀	22	♃	26	♂
♒	♃	7	♀	13	♃	20	♂	25	♃
♓	♀	12	♃	16	♃	19	♂	28	♃

of a particular astrological point is relatively easy, although not quite as easy as determining Domicile, Exaltation or Trigon/Triplicity rulers. For instance, suppose you were looking for the Bound ruler of an astrological planet or point at 19 degrees Pisces 55 minutes. Referring to the table in Figure 1, you find the line for Pisces, and run across to the right until you find the numerical range that includes 19 Pisces 55. The planet listed in this range is the Bound ruler. For Pisces, the numerical range for our point begins at 19 degrees Pisces 0 minutes 01 seconds and runs until 28 degrees Pisces. Between these two values is Mars, so Mars is the Bound ruler of our point at 19 Pisces 55. To save space, I haven't listed the beginning of each sign as 0 degrees, nor have I listed the ending of each sign as 30 degrees, which is implicitly understood.

So how do you use Bound rulers? Along with Domicile rulers (termed planetary dispositors these days), Exaltation and Trigon/Triplicity rulers, Bound rulers offer deeper perceptions of and understandings into planetary positions and other astrological points.

While the Trigon ruler of an astrological point (especially the Light of the Day, defined as the luminary – Sun or Moon – which is in sect) describes the original pure spiritual impulse of that point, the Bound ruler describes the actual manifestation or experience of that point on our material plane of existence.

In effect, Trigon rulers describe the theory or pure impulse (the Universe's spirit) of an astrological point, whereas Bound rulers describe the actual manifestation (or the Mundane letter) of that point. For instance, let's take my Ascendant degree as an example. It's

Figure 2 - Trigon Rulers (Day, Night, Common)

♈	☉	♃	♃
♉	♀	♄	♂
♊	♃	♀	♃
♋	♀	♂	♄
♌	☉	♃	♃
♍	♀	♄	♂
♎	♃	♀	♃
♏	♀	♂	♄
♐	♃	♃	♃
♑	♀	♄	♂
♒	♃	♀	♃
♓	♀	♂	♄

at 6 degrees Cancer 39 minutes - so the Trigon ruler, which describes the Universal ideal of my Ascendant is Venus (my light of the day is the Sun) (see figure 2). Venus in my chart is in Pisces (exalted) and in the tenth house conjunct my Midheaven. I can infer that the Universe's ideal for my Ascendant is therefore strongly Piscean in nature - in other words expressing my Cancer nurturing qualities through my Venusian artistic impulses, preferably in a public or professional arena. That's the intent. What's the reality? For that we look to the Bound ruler. Looking back at Figure 1, we see that Mars rules the region from 0 Cancer to 7 Cancer, so Mars is the Bound ruler of my Ascendant. My Mars is in Taurus, which is in detriment - and in some house systems it's in the 12th house, which further undermines the strength of Mars.

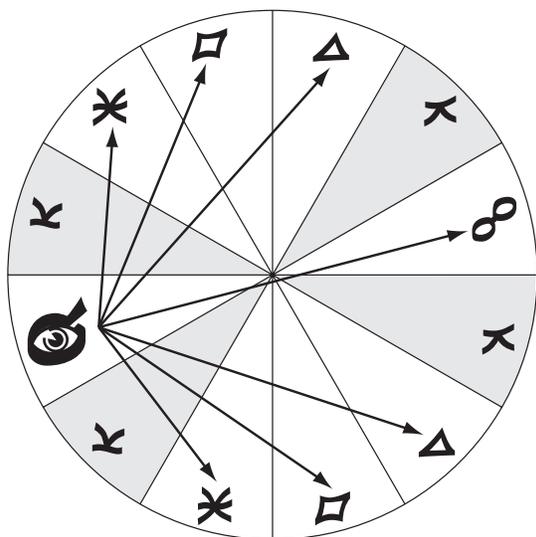
So while the Universe intends for me to express myself through professional artistic endeavors, the mundane reality of a weakened Mars damages and sidetracks those efforts. Growing up, I studied piano for fourteen years beginning at age four and was on track to attend a music college in Chicago after graduating high school - with the intent of establishing a professional career in Classical music. However, at the age of 17 these plans were derailed by a willful dispute with my father (the Mars in Taurus is Domicile ruler of my Sun in Aries) - and I ended up taking a completely different path in life.

Curt Manwaring explores the idea of happiness as it relates to the fulfillment of (or lack thereof) life expectations on his webpage at www.astrology-x-files.com/x-files/trigons-happiness.html. In brief, he says that looking at the aspects between the Bound ruler of the Light of the Day (Sun if born with the Sun above the horizon, the Moon if born with the

Sun below the horizon) and its Trigon ruler shows how well life expectations mesh with life experience. Harmonious aspects between these two rulers reveal expectations largely in accord with the experiences of one's life. Challenging aspects reveal a more problematical resolution of expectations with experience. And disjunct aspects reveal a fundamental disconnect between expectation and experience, allowing for the real potential of unhappiness.

So, by comparing and synthesizing the inter-relationships of any astrological point or planet, its Trigon ruler and its Bound ruler by aspect, sign, house and even humanistic phase one can gain a deeper, layered understanding of how that point expresses in a chart.

Hellenistic astrologers used the Whole Sign house system, and viewed aspects as "platick" in nature, meaning that an astrological point aspects another point entirely by sign, with a special pointed emphasis placed on those points in aspect by a three-degree orb. Little distinction is made between trines and sextiles on one hand, and squares and oppositions on the other. Trines and sextiles are more favorable of course, but squares still imply strong connections (by Cardinal, Fixed or Mutable modes) as do oppositions (masculine or feminine genders), although opposition aspects are considered by some Hellenistic astrologers as the most difficult connected aspects.



The aspects most feared are those points that do not aspect at all (besides the conjunction, which was in a definition category all its own) - the disjunct aspects known in modern times as the inconjunct and the quincunx. Astrological points in this relationship share nothing in common - not element, nor mode, nor gender. In effect, planets and/or points that are inconjunct or quincunx cannot relate to one another at all - with some special exceptions.

However, there are special relationships between signs in four different categories - which could possibly bring together two signs that were disjunct, whether inconjunct or quincunx. The **Seeing/Perceiving (SP)** category, made up of signs equidistant from the Cancer/Capricorn axis

Figure 3 - Special Sign Relationships

	SP	CO	LE	ER
♈	^L ♉		♌	♏
♉	^L ♈	^C ♏	♉	♎
♊	^L ♋	^C ♎	♈	♍
♋		^C ♍	♊	♌
♌	^P ♊	^C ♌	♋	♏
♍	^P ♋	^C ♏	♊	♉
♎	^P ♌		♉	♈
♏	^P ♍	^O ♈	♈	♋
♐	^P ♎	^O ♋	♋	♏
♑		^O ♏	♎	♊
♒	^L ♐	^O ♊	♍	♉
♓	^L ♑	^O ♏	♌	♈

contains no disjunct pairings, and neither does the **Commanding/Obeing (CO)** category, made up of signs equidistant from the Aries/Libra axis. However, the **Equally Rising (ER)** category does. Here we find that Aries and Pisces enjoy equal rising times, and thus although they are inconjunct by aspect, they can still perceive each other through this special relationship. Likewise, Gemini and Capricorn are equally rising, as are Cancer and Sagittarius, and Virgo and Libra. The final category is **Like Engirding (LE)**, which is simply those signs that share a common Domicile ruler. Here we

find the quincunx pairing of Aries and Scorpio, and Taurus and Libra. The inconjunct Cancer and Leo are considered Like Engirding, because the domicile rulers are the Sun and Moon, considered the fundamental pairing of the Lights.

It is my opinion that Bound rulers (and Trigon rulers as well) serve a much more important role than simply supplying rulership points in Horary astrology, as practiced by our medieval ancestors.

The Hellenistic astrologers did not practice horary astrology, primarily focusing on mundane and natal astrology. So it follows that Bound and Trigon rulers were understood and interpreted in light of these two approaches.

In fact, Robert Schmidt and others are demonstrating through Project Hindsight the complex interrelationship between the four different rulerships for any given point in a horoscope. It is this complex relationship between a point in the chart and its rulers (or lords) that contributes to and reveals the deeper underlying and inner meanings and expression of that point.

Specifically, the Bound ruler reveals the actual material experience of an astrological point on this plane of existence. The Trigon ruler shows the ideal experience of that point, and the relationship between the two rulers shows the tension and duality between the *theory* of an astrological point and its actual *experience*.

The rulerships for the Light of the Day in a natal chart are of paramount importance in understanding a native's expectation and experience of his or her life - and when two charts are involved synaestrically, the very foundations of the relationship between the natives begin to become apparent. I'll explore some examples in Part 2 of this article.

Footnotes:

- (1) <http://www.geocities.com/astrologysources/classicalgreece/tetrabiblos/tetrabiblosbooki.htm#side20>
- (2) James Holden; *The History of Horoscopic Astrology*; 1996, First Printing, paperback version; p.33, p.49
- (3) From a lecture he gave at ISAR 2005 in Chicago.
- (4) <http://www.etymonline.com>
- (5) See Curt Manwaring's discussion of bounds as an indication of an "expectation for the whole of one's life"; <http://www.astrology-x-files.com/x-files/trigons-happiness.html>
- (6) The Greek word for triplicity (or trigon) is "stoichion", which according to Aristotle describes "basic elements or principles of things, the stuff from which everything else is made". See <http://www.bcadresearch.com/glossary.html>
- (7) <http://www.skyscript.co.uk/dig3.html>
- (8) <http://www.astrology-x-files.com/x-files/trigons-happiness.html>