

Uranus – Up, Up and Away.....

Late on a spring evening in 1781 in a small garden in Bath it seems unlikely that the German musician and astronomer, William Herschel, could have had any idea what he had set in motion as he tracked what he thought was a comet across the skies with his telescope.¹



Sir William Herschel by Lemuel Francis Abbott, 1785
(National Portrait Gallery)

It subsequently became clear that the object he had spotted was not a comet but a planet – and a planet whose time had come.

In the 235 years since its discovery Uranus has come to symbolise revolution and sudden change on a transpersonal scale and, by its very nature and the manner of its discovery, this is understandable. Almost in an instant the size of the known solar system was doubled - Saturn is 1,400 kilometres from the sun while Uranus is twice that distance.

Uranus is unusual in its physical characteristics since it is tilted at 98° to its axis so that it orbits the sun almost horizontally rather than vertically. It was also the first planet to be discovered using a scientific instrument rather than the naked eye and the timing of its discovery lies almost halfway between

the Declaration of Independence by the USA in 1776 and the overthrow of the French monarchy in 1789.

Uranus - odd one out again - is the only planet named after a Greek god rather than a Roman god.

Uranus is visible not only through a telescope but can also be observed around one sixth of the time with the naked eye as a dim light - Herschel's discovery was not the first *sighting* of the planet but it was the first time that it was *identified* as a planet.

The orbit of Uranus around the sun takes 84 years and this is now around the average lifespan in the developed world - Uranus flickers in and out of our view as someone at the age of 84 might flicker between worlds - both reviewing their life on earth and contemplating what death might bring.

Herschel originally proposed to name the planet "George's Star" in honour of King George III - something which was understandably unpopular in the newly independent USA and elsewhere.

An alternative was proposed by Johann Bode although his suggestion - Uranus - was not formally accepted in Britain until 1850. Bode's logic was that, just as Saturn was the mythological father of Jupiter so Uranus, being the father of Saturn, should be the name of the new planet. As Saturn is the next planet out from Jupiter in the solar system so Uranus is the next planet out from Saturn - a sort of planetary family tree.

Uranus, in Greek mythology, was the god of the sky and married to Gaia - mother earth.

For thousands of years human beings had operated in what might be considered a two dimensional world - land and water – dimensions which had been explored extensively although not completely. However, the appointment of a mythological god of the skies could not have come at a more appropriate time as attention was now turning to exploration of the air.

The first unmanned balloon flights took place in 1783 – just a couple of years after the discovery of Uranus. Travelling in the air may be considered by some to be a different *form* of travel and therefore subject to the natural rulership of Mercury or Jupiter according to distance of the journey.

However, viewed in an historical context these first journeys through the air must have appeared truly magical to the eighteenth century observer and of a different order to anything which had preceded it.

As events unfolded over the next two hundred years humanity's fascination with air travel continued and produced, eventually, aeroplanes and space rockets. The astrological charts for the important initial stages in the journeys made by these vehicles are linked by the remarkable closeness of aspects between Uranus and other key planets as well as the references which many of these charts show to each other. In this context discussions about whether we should allow five degrees or ten degrees for an aspect are redundant for everything is in tight aspect with two degrees being the maximum orb.

So, one of Uranus's roles was to herald the conquering of the skies as we shall see. In a sense, this is an upset of the established order just as much as a political revolution.

We know that Uranus was discovered between 10 and 11 pm. on 13 March 1781.² While we can't get a chart for the exact moment we are fortunate that the Scorpio ascendant is a sign of long ascension so that there is only eleven degrees of movement in the hour. A chart for 10.30 p.m. is only five degrees out at the most and, more likely, perhaps two or three degrees.

Perhaps the first thing to note is that Uranus occupies pride of place in the evening skies. All the other planets except Neptune - as yet undiscovered and always invisible to the naked eye - are below the horizon.

We don't have a time of birth for Herschel but, taking a midday chart for his date of birth (15 November 1738, Hanover, Germany),³ we find Mercury at 13°48' Scorpio. This is just one degree away from the Moon's position when Uranus was discovered at 14° 59' Scorpio where it lies close to the ascendant at 11°43' Scorpio - it could be even closer if the actual moment of discovery was a little after 10.30 p.m.

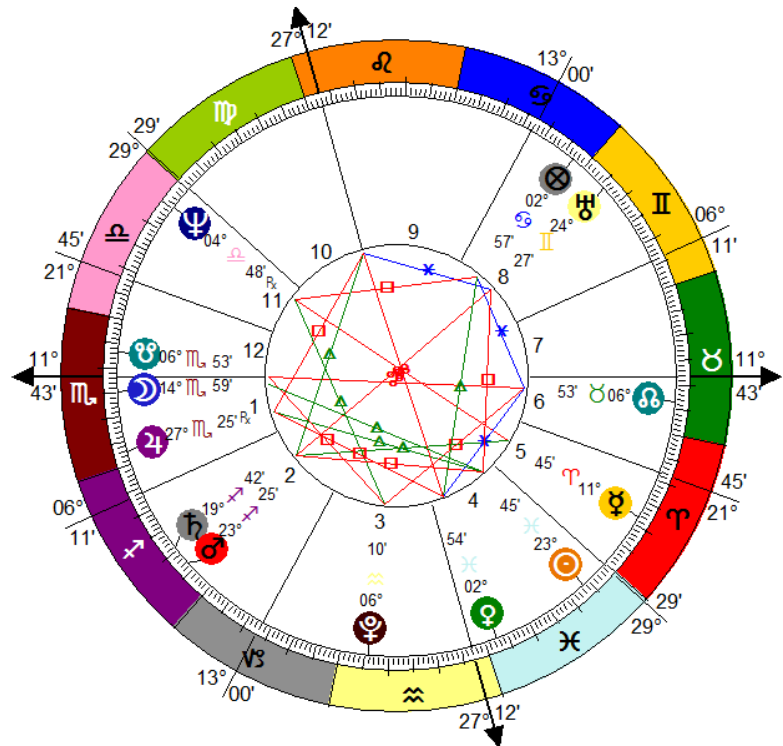
A tight T-square is formed between the Sun, Uranus and Mars in mutable signs - the widest of the three aspects is only 1°02' – and the tension between the planets seems to herald the discovery which is being made. Herschel's natal sun at 23° Scorpio lies within one degree of a trine to the Sun, a quincunx to Mars and a semi-sextile to Saturn in the Discovery chart.

Uranus was discovered during Herschel's search for double stars - a systematic search had commenced in October 1779 - just a few months after his Directed Solar Arc had appropriately conjoined Uranus.

On 13 March 1781 it was not even clear just what had been discovered and the paper which Herschel presented to the Royal Society with his findings was even entitled "Account of a Comet" with no reference to a new planet. It was the Astronomer Royal, Nevil Makselyne, to whom Herschel reported his findings who suggested that the new body might be a planet.

Ten days after Uranus was discovered Mercury went retrograde and anyone who has observed the lack of clarity during such periods may readily imagine the uncertain atmosphere in which Herschel wrote up his findings. Mercury went direct again on 16th. April and, when the paper was presented to the Royal Society on 26th. April, it was at 11° Aries - exactly the same degree as it was on the evening Uranus was discovered and as neat a piece of astrological symmetry as you could wish to find.

Two years later the balloon flights in 1783 established several landmark (or, rather, airborne) moments in the history of flight.



Discovery of Uranus
10.30 p.m. LMT, 13 March 1781,
Bath, England, 51N23, 002W22



A replica of the telescope which William Herschel used to observe Uranus. Credit: Wikipedia Commons

Small hot air balloons made of paper had been in use for hundreds of years in China and elsewhere.

The modern era of hot air ballooning using much larger balloons is generally considered to have been inaugurated by the first public display on 4th. June 1783 using a balloon constructed by the Montgolfier brothers, Joseph-Michel and Jacques-Etienne.

I have been unable to track down an exact time of launch but we do know that “people began gathering late in the morning”⁴ at the public square in Annonay in Southeastern France so I have tentatively set the chart for 1.45 p.m. which places Neptune on the Ascendant and the Mercury-Uranus conjunction (separating by $1^{\circ}26'$) on the Midheaven.

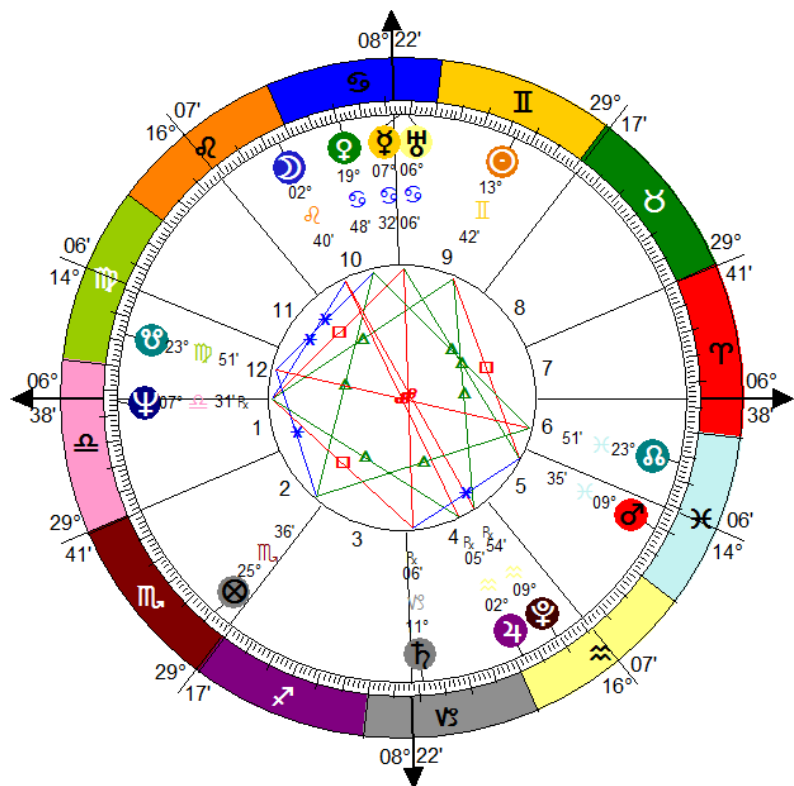
Saturn is also square to Neptune although four degrees away from the exact aspect and five degrees away from an exact

opposition to Uranus.

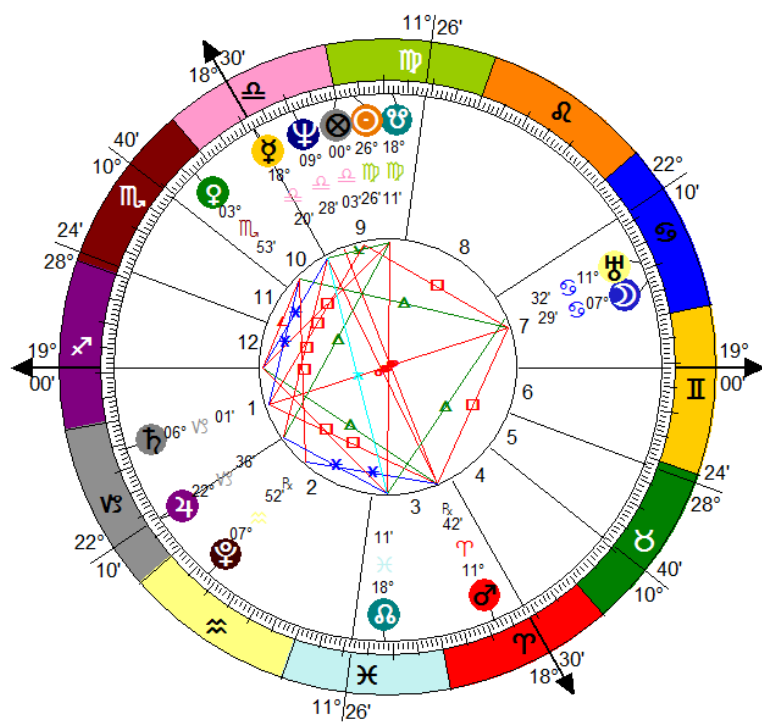
As ballooning fever took hold in the second half of 1783 this T-Square between Saturn, Neptune and Uranus intensified as a new era in human history began.

The first balloon flight carrying live passengers was made on 19th. September 1783 in a balloon resplendent with decorations of the Sun and the signs of the zodiac although the passengers on this occasion were not human but consisted of a sheep, a rooster and a duck. It was not a long flight, lasting some eight minutes and covering a distance of four kilometres while rising to a height of five hundred metres.

The ascending degree of $19^{\circ}00'$ Sagittarius takes us back to the discovery chart where Saturn is at $19^{\circ}42'$ Sagittarius while Mercury, the natural ruler of transport is exactly conjunct the Midheaven.



First Unmanned Untethered Flight
1.45 p.m. LMT, 4 June 1783,
Annonay, France. 48N52, 002E20



"Animals in Flight"
1.15 p.m. LMT⁵ 19 September 1783
Versailles, France, 48°N48',002°E08'

The position of the Moon at 7° Cancer marks the position of Uranus in the chart for the first unmanned flight on 4th. June 1783 while the square of Mars and Uranus for this airborne version of Noah's Ark seems wonderfully descriptive - Mars shows the heat of the balloon's interior and in Aries represents a "first" while the square from Uranus testifies to the unusual nature of the crew.

Significantly, Mars is at 11° Aries linking us back to the same place as Mercury in the Discovery chart.

It was a day of mixed fortunes for the passengers – after the flight "the sheep was [found to be] feeding quietly in its cage, the duck did not seem to have received any hurt, but the cock had its head

broke."⁶

The first manned flight took off on the morning of 13th. October 1783 when a tethered balloon was launched from the yard of Etienne Montgolfier's home in Paris in front of thirty people.

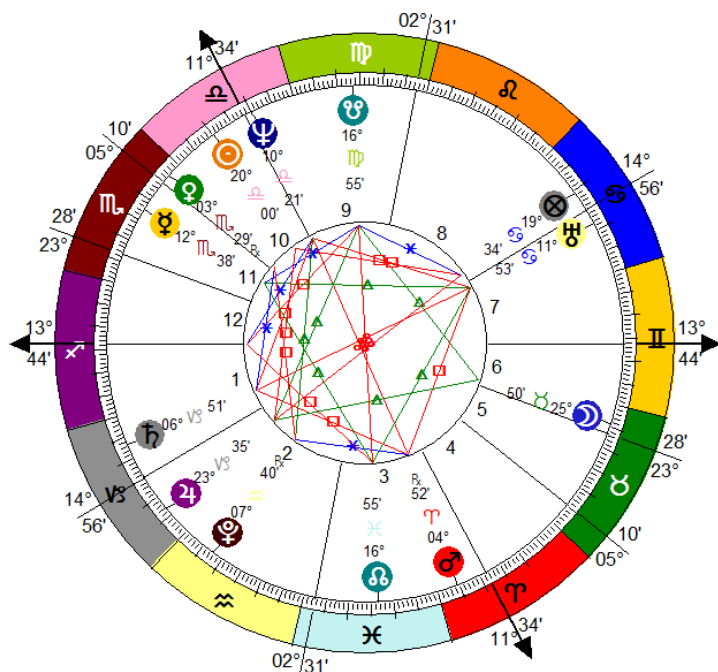
There had apparently been a number of people willing to take part in this experiment – especially after the king had given an assurance that the sheep which had flown the previous month would be properly looked after in the Royal Menagerie!⁷

The flight itself lasted ten minutes and the balloon travelled a distance of two kilometres reaching a height of around 500 metres – similar to the untethered flight with the animal cargo the previous month.

There is some discrepancy regarding the exact date of this flight with a number of sources quoting 15th. October rather than 13th. October. However, the news



The first balloon flight with passengers (a sheep, a duck and a rooster) on 19 September 1783. Credit 2001, National Air and space Museum, Smithsonian Institution.



First Manned Flight (Tethered)
11.15 a.m. LMT, 13 October 1783
Paris, France, 002E20, 48N52

the Moon in the Discovery of Uranus chart and the natal Mercury of William Herschel

Uranus, meanwhile, by 13th. October 1783, has moved to the twelfth degree of Cancer - opposite the degree which Saturn occupied on 4th. June 1783 - and remains in a tight square with Neptune. During these four months Saturn has turned retrograde and drifted back to 6° Capricorn so that the T-Square is still not at its most exact.

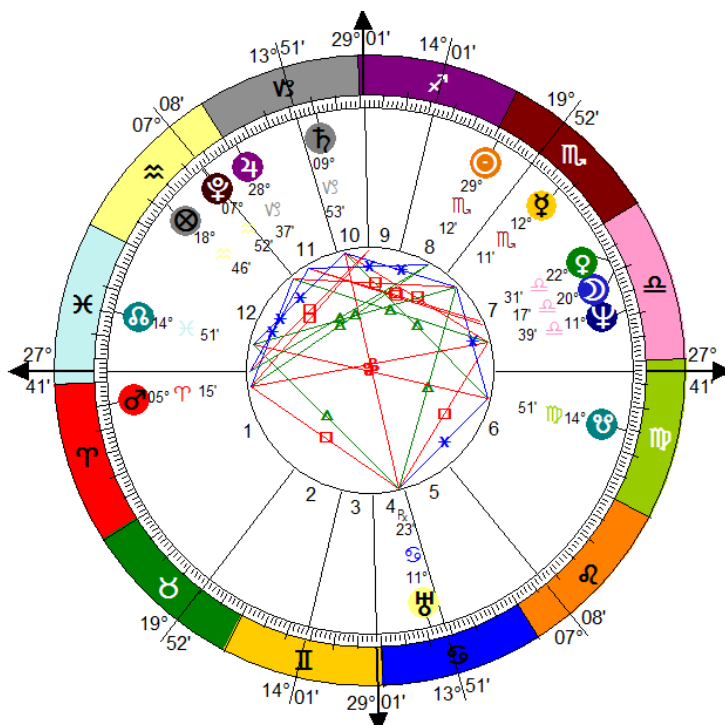
The first manned flight in an untethered balloon took place on 21st. November 1783 with an ascendant of 27°41' Pisces and, just a couple of minutes later, what

seems to have reached England via a letter from an unnamed source in Paris and the date on this letter is given as 13th. October in all but one of the newspapers in which it appeared.

I have not been able to find any more accurate time for the flight than "this morning"⁸ and have set a chart for 11 15 a.m. with Neptune on the Midheaven and the Descendant at 13° Gemini conjunct the position of the Sun at the time of the first unmanned flight on 4 June 1783.

Regardless of the exact time of the flight on 13th. October the important connections to the family of charts in this instance lie in the positions of the planets rather than the angles.

In particular, Mercury lies in the thirteenth degree of Scorpio between



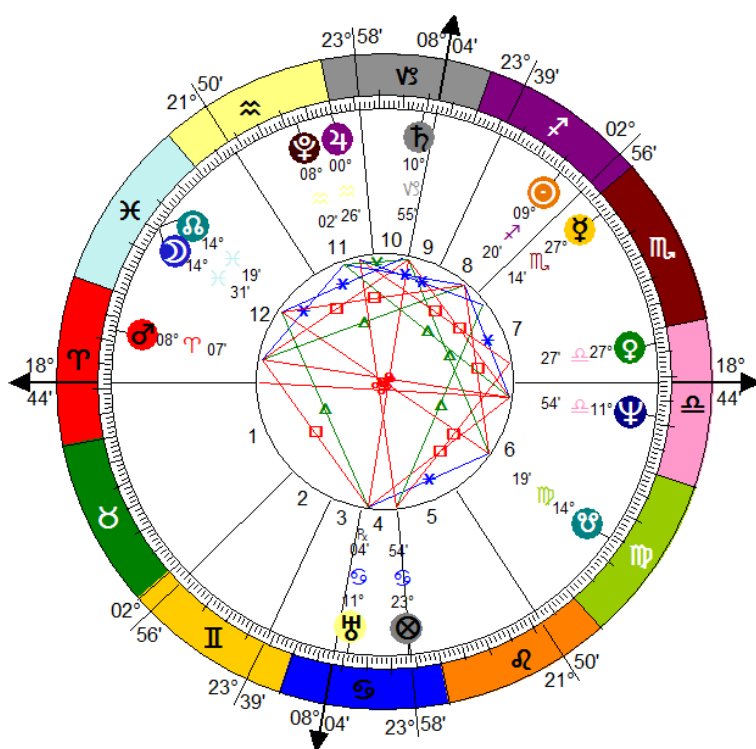
First Manned Balloon Flight - Untethered
1.54 p.m. LMT,¹⁰ 21 November 1783
Paris, France, 48°N52',002°E20'

could be more appropriate to usher in the new era of air travel, than that the first degree of the zodiac coming over the horizon.

Mercury, as on the day of the first tethered flight in October, is again at 12° Scorpio having been retrograde in the intervening weeks – a curious echo of its cycle of motion at the date Uranus was discovered as described above.

The two aviators were travelling in another balloon designed by the Montgolfier brothers and included Pilatres de Roziers who had launched the balloon carrying the animals in September as well as participating in the tethered flight in October. The flight lasted just over twenty minutes and landed a league and half away from where it took off (approximately nine kilometres) – the signatories to the statement describing the flight included the American ambassador to France, Benjamin Franklin.⁹

A sense of the importance of the event is given by the newspaper account which refers to the balloon travelling “a vast length of way in the third region of the air” and the fact that “The Duke of Chartres willing to celebrate the day on which the human race first travelled in the air, and returned to give an account of their journey, has resolved to erect a pyramid upon the spot where the ball alighted and thereon to inscribe the names of Montgolfier, who constructed the airy vehicle, together with those of the two bold travellers, who dared to take a journey to the third region of air.”¹¹



First Manned Hydrogen Balloon
1.45 p.m. LMT,¹³ 1 December 1783
Paris, France, 002E20, 48N52

Only three months earlier when the first small, unmanned hydrogen balloon landed in the village of Gonesse near Paris it had been destroyed by terrified local residents wielding pitchforks and knives.¹²

The first manned Hydrogen balloon flight represents a different order from the manned flights which had preceded it using hot air balloons. This flight lasted around two hours and covered a distance of 36 kilometres.

In the chart for the launch Mercury, the traditional planet of travel and a key planet in three of the hot air balloon flights, is now reduced to a bit player. Its only major aspect is a sextile to Jupiter which has now

changed sign and soared, untethered, into Aquarius - the big planets have taken over.

Saturn, furthest known planet until two years earlier is opposed by Uranus the new - and literal - god of the skies with the aspect only 0° 9' away from exact opposition.

Perhaps even more interestingly, given its association in modern astrology with gases, Neptune is now within one degree of a perfect square with Uranus – the new method of powering air travel is shown.

Mars, the ruler of the crew, is in an exact sextile (bar 0°5') with Pluto and, although a hot air balloon is hardly an immediate connection with the ruler of the underworld, it seems to sum up the global transformation (Pluto) which began with this flight.

Finally, the Moon is exactly conjunct the North Node describing the way to the future - it is almost a finger pointing at the moon showing that man will land there one day – while lying exactly trine at 14° Pisces to 14° Scorpio, an important area of the zodiac in the charts previously described.

There is a further link from this chart for the flight of the first hydrogen balloon to the moment when Uranus was discovered - the progressed moon from that chart is now at 22° Sagittarius contacting the big T-Square in the same Chart.



Contemporary illustration of the first flight by a hydrogen balloon, December 1, 1783.

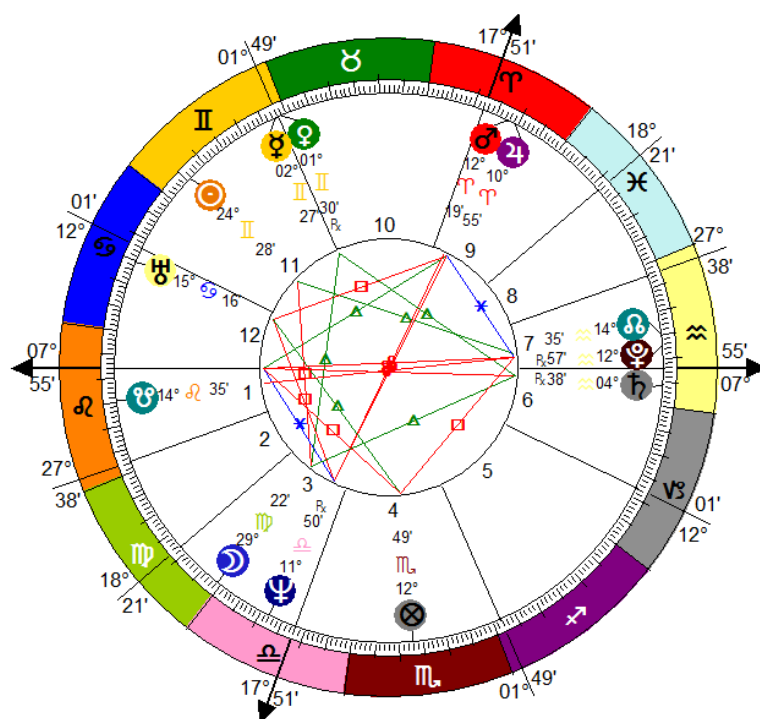
Close aspects of Uranus in Charts for its Discovery and First Balloon Flights							
Date	Event	♅	♄	♂	♁	♂	♁
13/3/1781	Discovery of Uranus	24°27' ♊		23°25' ♊		23°45' ♊	
4/6/1783	First unmanned Flight	6°06' ♋	7°31' ♋		6°11' ♋		7°31' ♋
19/9/1783	"3 Animal" Flight	11°32' ♋		11°42' ♋			
13/10/1783	First Manned Flight – Tethered	11°53' ♋	12°38' ♋				10°21' ♋
21/11/1783	First manned Untethered	11°23' ♋	12°11' ♋		9°53' ♋		10°21' ♋
1/12/1783	First hydrogen balloon (manned)	11°04' ♋			10°55' ♋		11°54' ♋

Meanwhile, Mercury, whose only aspect in the chart for the first manned Hydrogen flight is a sextile to Jupiter mentioned above is at 27°14' Scorpio - just 0°8' away from the position of Jupiter in the Discovery chart - it is as though little Mercury acts as a link between Jupiter in the two charts. In the first chart Jupiter makes its presence felt in the first house and in the second it is the ruler of the ninth house of long journeys where Sagittarius is on the cusp.

The achievement of Pilatres de Rozier as the first man to travel in the air was eclipsed less than two years later when he became the first fatality of air travel. Attempting to cross the English Channel on 15th. June 1785 he took off with his companion, Pierre Romain, from Boulogne but the balloon ran into difficulties shortly afterwards and crashed, killing both crew members.

There are some discouraging factors in the chart of the crash shown below - the time of take-off is variously given as 7 a.m. or 7.15 a.m. but the portents are the same – the Moon in last degree of a sign (Virgo), South Node in the first house and Pluto is conjunct the North Node suggesting a sad end to the venture.

Pluto also lies exactly sextile to a very public conjunction of Mars and Jupiter which are both within one degree of 11° Aries – a zodiac location which has figured prominently in the charts discussed to date and which is prominent in this chart as well.



Pilatres de Roziers Crash
7.30 a.m. LMT,¹⁴ 15 June 1785
Boulogne-sur-Mer, France, 001E37, 50N43

A Mars-Jupiter conjunction in fiery Aries is exactly opposed by Neptune in airy Libra (which seems to be the generic planetary symbol for the newly discovered balloon in all these charts). This is a line up which clearly shows the balloon overheating - with all three planets close to the MC/IC axis it seems trouble was inevitable.

This is the only chart in which the nearest Uranus aspect is greater than 2° – and it is an “ending chart” rather than a “beginning chart.” Even so, by squaring the opposition of Neptune to Mars and Jupiter with a closest aspect of a square of 2°57' to Mars the configurations speaks eloquently and tragically of the crash.

Despite the popular astrological notion that squares and oppositions are bad news – and that is evident in this crash chart - it was also these hard aspects formed by three planets in a T-square

in cardinal signs in the early 1780's - Uranus in Cancer, Saturn in Capricorn and Neptune in Libra – which seem to have provided the energy for the breakthroughs enabling humankind to travel in air for the first time and the new astrological symbol for describing them.

The three planets concerned also represented a kind of continuum of astrological symbolism in terms of past present and future – Saturn the traditional planet which had been observed for centuries, Neptune the planet of the future whose discovery was not to be made for another 70 years and which came to symbolise the gas in balloons come together in the present as Uranus is discovered in 1781.

For all the excitement of the 1780's it would take another 120 years – one and a half Uranus cycles – until human beings broke the next major frontier of air travel. On a winter's morning above a beach in North Carolina Orville Wright left the ground in the Kitty Hawk and became the first person to fly an aeroplane.

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References

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