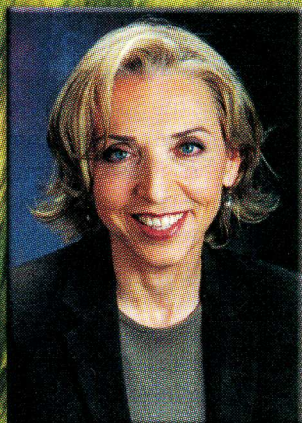


# Virgo, Sexuality, and the Sacred Prostitute

by Catherine Auman

Stephanie Stone is petite and vivacious and in her early fifties; she works out of her home in California's San Fernando Valley, offering sensual massage. Her workroom is decorated with Balinese carvings, a statue of Kwan-yin, and Tibetan paintings of couples in ecstatic embrace. As a certified massage therapist, Stephanie has learned to use her hands expertly, and her work requires touching and healing all parts of the body. She considers herself a sexual healer and is profoundly committed to her work: helping clients to open themselves to a greater freedom of sexual expression. Stephanie Stone was the first person I met who identifies herself as a "sacred prostitute."

As an astrologer, I have always felt that the usual definitions of Virgo sexuality lacked something important, although I didn't know what. When I began to research the sacred prostitute, I started to see another aspect of the nature of Virgo: sexuality in the service of the divine. It appeared to me that the sacred prostitute archetype could shed light on the very nature of Virgo itself and that this information might help us to better understand Virgo, wherever or however it appears in a chart. The interpretation of even a single planet or an angle in Virgo can benefit from a consideration of this archetype, and we will see an example of this later in this article. I will also give a brief history of sacred prostitution, describing its place in the ancient world; then I'll present some contemporary women whose charts show a Virgo emphasis and who carry on this tradition of sacred prostitution today. I will also discuss the charts of three of my clients who were confused about their life paths and their sexuality; I will suggest that their lives embody the sacred prostitute archetype that is all but lost to modern culture. It is hoped that we astrologers can expand our understanding of Virgo and thus be of more help to our clients and ourselves.





## Virgo and the Sacred Prostitute

### Sacred Sexuality

It may be hard for the Western mind to link the words "sacred" and "prostitute" together; the Judeo-Christian tradition deems sexuality to be profane, the antithesis of spirit. Yet, in the times of the Great Goddess worship, sexuality was revered and held sacred. We find evidence of sacred prostitution throughout the ancient world, as early as the Gilgamesh epic of 7000 B.C.E. Herodotus, a Greek historian from the 3rd century B.C.E., wrote that

women of the land ... sit in the temple of love and have intercourse with some stranger ... the men pass and make their choice. It matters not what be the sum of money; the women will never refuse, for that were a sin, the money being by this act made sacred. After their intercourse she has made herself holy in the sight of the goddess....<sup>1</sup>

Sacred prostitution took place in the early civilizations of Sumer, Babylonia, Egypt, Lebanon, and Rome, and it is mentioned in the code of Hammurabi. It also seems to have been common in Europe and the Middle East before the rise of Judaism, Christianity, and Islam. In fact, sacred prostitutes not only existed — they flourished as important members of society:

The sacred prostitutes were many in number. According to Strabo, at the temples of Aphrodite in Eryx and Corinth there were above a thousand, while at each of the two Comanas about six thousand were in residence. They were accorded social status and were educated. In some cases, they remained politically and legally equal to men.<sup>2</sup>

The Golden Age of goddess worship, when sacred prostitution was widespread, occurred during the Age of Taurus, a sign whose polarity is Scorpio; these two signs are most commonly associated with sexuality. As a planetary archetype, Venus is the ruler of Taurus, and as a goddess Venus is physically beautiful and sexually appealing. She

is the goddess of earthly love — sexual and sensual. The Great Goddess was the bringer of all that is alive; she was responsible for the fruitfulness of the Earth. Through her came new life, and sexuality was one of the mysteries of creation. Sexuality was revered and worshipped in a way we find hard to fathom today. In the goddess temples, the sacred prostitutes were her priestesses. Their bodies were available to share the blessings of the goddess with strangers who were hungry for love and connection. In this way, sexual love was shown to be divine and of the goddess — not separate from divinity. Hesiod, an 8th-century B.C.E. poet, wrote that

the sensual magic of the sacred whores "mellowed the behavior of men".... She is the bringer of sexual joy and the vessel by which the raw animal instincts are transformed into love and love-making.<sup>3</sup>

These women were known in ancient languages as the *nu-gig*, or "the undefiled ... the pure or spotless."<sup>4</sup> This seems to be particularly of the nature of Virgo: that a woman known for her beauty and sexuality would be considered pure. The priestess regarded herself as an incarnation of the holy spirit as she made love with the men who came to pay homage to the goddess. She was a teacher of the mysteries, of the healing and restorative power of sexual energy.

In the worship of the goddess, as we have seen, sex was brought openly and with reverence to the very altar of the goddess. In her temple, men and women came to find life and all that it had to offer in sensual pleasure and delight ... [then] with the change in cultural values and the institutionalization of monotheism and patriarchy, the individual came [instead] to the house of the Lord to prepare for death....<sup>5</sup>

When the patriarchal religions of Judaism, Christianity, and Islam came to the fore in the Ages of Aries and Pisces, they destroyed nearly all remnants of goddess worship along with the worship

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of the feminine. The feminine joys of the body and sexuality were replaced by a higher valuation of the mind and rational thought. Prostitution was debased and made profane; its practice became illegal, and its practitioners were ridiculed and shunned.

Under the new tradition, woman became Eve, the embodiment of sensuous seduction, the reason for man's downfall ... no longer seen as a gift of the divine, women's sensuality was debased and exploited.<sup>6</sup>

### Modern Servants of the Goddess

Stephanie Stone proudly considers her work to be in the great tradition of the sacred prostitute, teaching the holiness of sex. She works primarily with men who want to learn to delay their ejaculation for a longer period of time. This can be therapeutic, in cases of premature ejaculation, or instructive, when she is helping a man and his partner learn how to experience greater levels of pleasure and ecstasy. Stephanie has written a manual explaining these techniques, which is available on her active Web site, and she is at work on a second book for women. In her chart, we see three planets in Virgo, including the Sun, clustered around the IC (see **Chart 1**, opposite). Here is a woman whose basic nature is defined in a Virgoan way — in this case, as a self-described sacred prostitute serving the goddess principle.

The second woman I have met who identifies herself as a sacred prostitute is Elle. Tall, blonde, and strikingly beautiful, she downplays her looks by dressing in a faded denim jacket and jeans. Men find out about her through the sex ads in the local newspapers or by accessing her Web site. On the surface, her work may look like ordinary prostitution — except



for the context in which she holds it. Elle considers the sexual intercourse she has with men to be holy, and she often instructs them in techniques for achieving greater bliss and sensual pleasure. She has studied Tantra, an ancient Hindu philosophy which teaches that sex can be a path to God or to higher consciousness. Elle sometimes assists Tantric groups and seminars by serving as a model in demonstrations of sacred sexuality.

The only Virgo in Elle's chart (not shown) is her Ascendant, the point where a person manifests the self and meets the world — in Elle's case, as a sacred prostitute. Elle has chosen to express her spirituality in the world through what she regards as sacred sex; she shows how someone might resonate to this archetype without the preponderance of Virgo evident in the other example charts. Individuals who have "only" Venus, Mars, another single planet, or an angle in Virgo might gain a deeper understanding of themselves if they are introduced to this ancient yet contemporary archetype.

Elle referred me to the book, *Women of the Light: The New Sexual Healers*, which is entirely about modern sacred prostitutes.<sup>7</sup> I corresponded with Betty Dodson, one of the women featured in this book. Betty is the author of *Sex for One: The Joy of Selfloving*. She is an artist who renders realistic but sensitive line drawings of erotic subjects, and she is also a workshop

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leader with a Ph.D. in human sexuality. Now in her seventies, she was ahead of her time at the forefront of the sexual revolution in the 1960s. She has stated:

Yes, I'm a whore, a sacred prostitute, an ancient temple priestess who serves the goddess of love.... Today I believe sex energy is not only the life force, but also the source of all creativity. Each orgasm is a precious moment of joy. As we awaken our bodies through the senses, we awaken our minds to the knowledge that all living things are connected — on Earth and throughout the vast universe.<sup>8</sup>

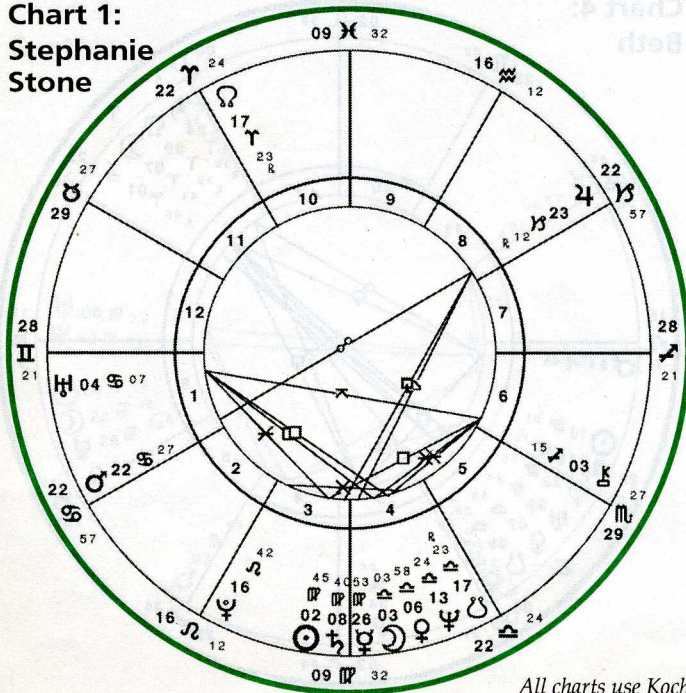
*To say that  
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simply means that she  
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she cannot be possessed.*

In Betty Dodson's chart, the Sun and Neptune closely conjoin the Virgo Ascendant (see Chart 2, below). With this strong Virgo emphasis in her natal horoscope, we see a self-described sacred prostitute walking a spiritual path in which sex serves the divine.

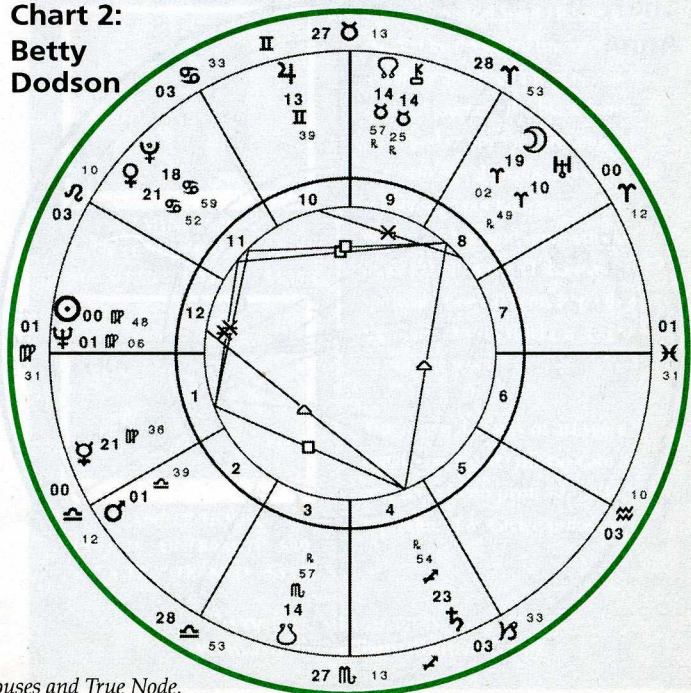
These charts reveal a theme that warrants further attention. Traditional astrology has shown us images of Virgo as a prudish old-maid schoolteacher, contrasted with a licentious, "profane" prostitute, downtrodden and victimized. The common idea of Virgo is that of a virgin, a sexless person; however, the original meaning of the word "virgin" has been lost. In Latin, *virgo* simply means "unmarried," and *virgo intacta* refers to a lack of sexual experience.<sup>9</sup> To say that Virgo is "virginal" simply means that she belongs to no man, that she cannot be possessed. Her sexual acts are not used to obtain possessions, security, or power. She does not need a man to give her a sense of identity; rather, she finds her identity within herself and her reflection of the goddess. And a major attribute of the goddess was divine sexuality. Hence, a woman could make love with a man for the mutual upliftment of both parties, not from a desire to possess or to be dependent.

At a conference I attended, astrologer Stephen Arroyo said: "After all, Virgo is an earth sign." Earth signs are sensual, grounded, of the body. The difference for

**Chart 1:  
Stephanie  
Stone**



**Chart 2:  
Betty  
Dodson**



All charts use Koch houses and True Node.



# Virgo and the Sacred Prostitute

Virgo is that sex must serve a higher purpose. As Virgo sifts the wheat, separating the chaff from the life-giving grain, so it sifts its human relationships to be nurturing. Virgo sexuality must be dedicated to something higher than itself. It must be for the sacred — honoring the goddess principle. We have lost the image of the strong woman, standing proud in her sexuality, who uses sex to serve the divine by sharing its bounty with others, teaching them through her bliss and ecstasy. When this image is lost to us as a culture, many people lose their definition of themselves; this hurts us all by limiting our perceptions of our sexuality and its higher purpose.

## Virgo Healing

"Anna" (not her real name) approached me for an astrology reading. Notice the Virgo stellium in her 12th house and her Virgo Ascendant (see Chart 3, below). After some initial chart delineation, I tentatively asked this woman whether she had ever heard of the archetype of the sacred prostitute. When she said no, I asked her whether she was interested in hearing about it. After my careful explanation, she became excited: "That's me! My boyfriend

*To many people,  
sex and spirituality  
are irreconcilable.*

has always told me I am a natural Tantra teacher, and I didn't know what that meant. This is me — this is so exciting!" She went away beaming, and every time I saw her after that, she hugged me and expressed her gratitude for introducing her to this archetype and this potential life path.

"Beth" came to me confused and perhaps left the session even more so. She has the body of a centerfold and works as a stripper, but when I met her, she was studying meditation at an ashram in India. She was looking for a meaningful life path and felt lost; she considered her sex work foreign to her true self. Also, she was having no luck at all with finding a boyfriend, despite her beautiful face and body. With her permission, I carefully presented information about the archetype of the sacred prostitute and asked her whether she thought it had any relevance to her life. I suggested that her search for truth in India and her work in exotic dance clubs were not as unrelated

as she might believe. With her Christian background, it was hard for her to accept that her sexuality might be as holy as her meditation; she had disowned and devalued these aspects of her life and had no social or religious context to help her to love this part of herself. Her Virgo stellium in the 1st and 2nd houses shows the potential for Virgo sexuality to boldly and courageously express itself in a sexual arena (see Chart 4, below). But Beth had difficulty accepting this because society does not consider stripping to be an exalted form of sexual expression, and her religious background further condemns sexuality.

"Cynthia" has a six-planet Virgo stellium embracing the Ascendant in her natal horoscope (see Chart 5, opposite). Again, we see a person whose very nature is to express the Virgo principles of service, purity, and "virginity." This woman didn't have her first sexual experience until she was 31, even though she is conventionally very pretty. Since that time, she has been extensively studying Tantra and exploring her sexuality and spirituality. When I explained the concept of the sacred prostitute to her, she was very interested and receptive but unsure how this concept might be integrated into her life. Her sexuality is still unbalanced: She swings from the extremes of one-night stands and two-week affairs to long periods of celibacy.

Chart 3:  
Anna

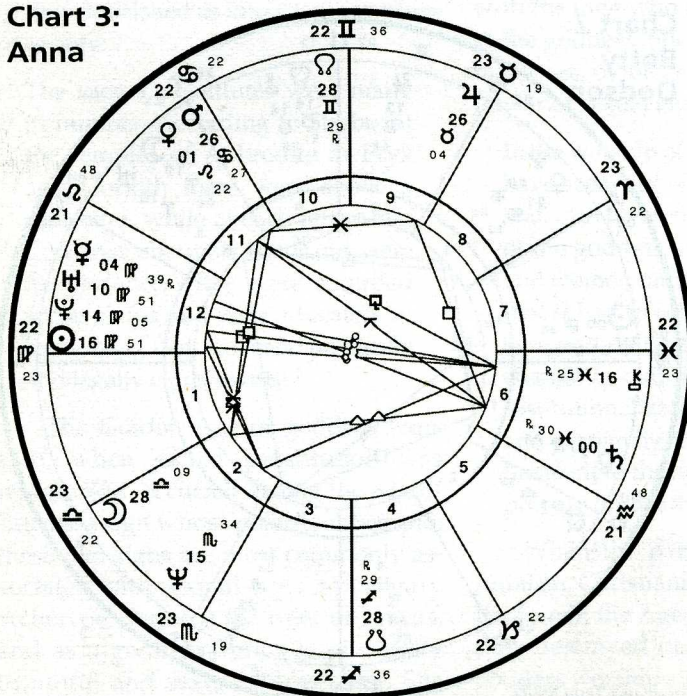
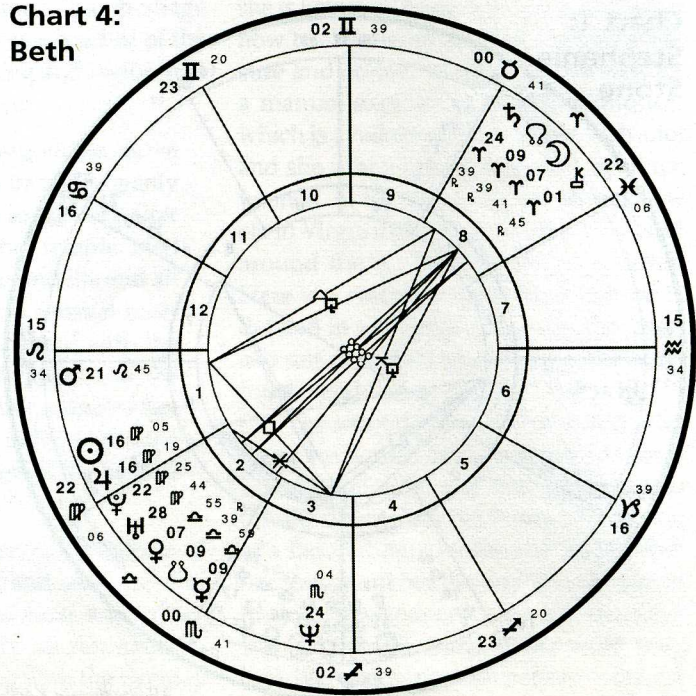


Chart 4:  
Beth





All of these women have struggled with their sexuality and their definition of themselves in a culture that does not offer them a model. Stephanie Stone's work is illegal and must be conducted under threat of arrest. Betty Dodson's work has been applauded by many but ridiculed by the mainstream. To many people, sex and spirituality are irreconcilable; these people cannot step outside the contemporary culture's vilification of those who attempt to practice the two together. Perhaps astrologers can help their clients to see that there are ancient archetypal ways of being that are valid and alive, even if these exist outside the cultural norms.

I believe that, as astrologers, we must be careful how we present this material to our clients — if we choose to do so. I would advise the same caution that we use with any potentially upsetting material. The most important consideration is to provide for our clients an atmosphere that is not judgmental of any of their life choices as long as no one, including themselves, is being hurt.

The Great Goddess, in her bounty, bestows life, love, and bliss, including sexual pleasure. This image has survived all attempts to tarnish it, even though it has needed to go underground to do so. Virgo embodies this image of sacred sexuality, and I believe that all of us will become stronger by reclaiming it. The sign Virgo often comes across as "weak," to

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astrologers and non-astrologers alike, but it has much to teach us about ourselves and about sexuality in a broader context. The archetype of the sacred prostitute is one of sexual strength and healing, not at all the sexually crippled image of Virgo that some of us may have. Virgo is not the split between the Madonna and the Whore; Virgo is the integration of the Madonna and the Whore. We all have Virgo somewhere in our charts, so a deeper understanding of this sign can help us to integrate the many and varied facets of ourselves.

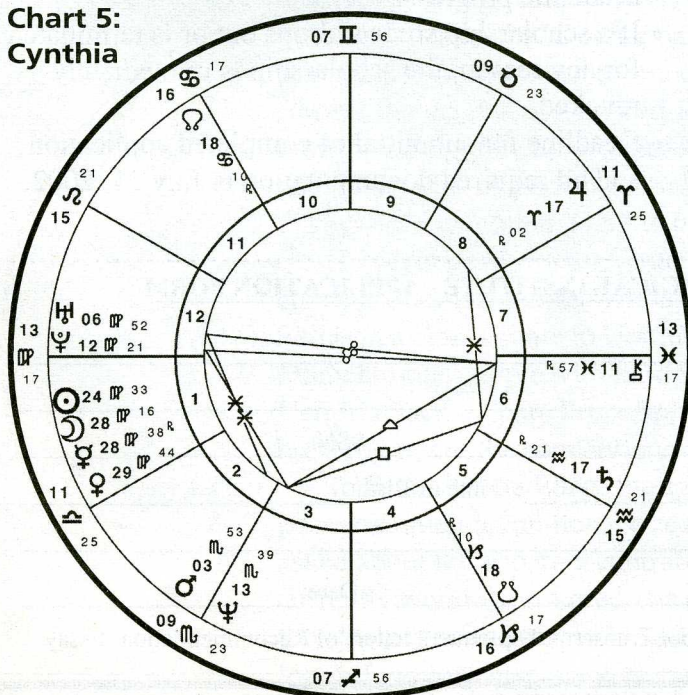
#### Chart Data and Sources

**Stephanie Stone**, August 26, 1949; 12:20 a.m. PST; Pasadena, CA (34°N09', 118°W09'); AA: Birth certificate.

**Betty Dodson**, August 24, 1929; 6:00 a.m. CST; Wichita, KS (37°N42', 97°W20'); A: From Dr. Dodson herself.

**Elle, "Anna," "Beth," and "Cynthia,"** birth data are confidential, but all sources are AA: Birth records.

**Chart 5:  
Cynthia**



#### References and Notes

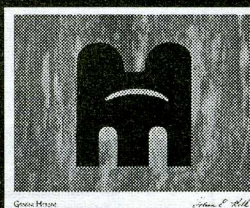
1. M. Esther Harding, *Woman's Mysteries: Ancient and Modern*, New York: Harper Colophon Books, 1971, p. 159.
2. Nancy Qualls-Corbett, *The Sacred Prostitute: Eternal Aspect of the Feminine*, Toronto, Canada: Inner City Books, 1988, p. 37.
3. *Ibid.*, p. 34.
4. Merlin Stone, *When God Was a Woman*, New York: The Dial Press, 1976, p. 158.
5. Qualls-Corbett, *The Sacred Prostitute*, p. 43.
6. *Ibid.*
7. Kenneth Ray Stubbs, Ph.D. (ed.), *Women of the Light: The New Sexual Healers*, Larkspur, CA: Secret Garden, 1997.
8. *Ibid.*, pp. 122, 144.
9. Qualls-Corbett, *The Sacred Prostitute*, p. 58.

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The original works of art were created using acrylic on canvas and have been professionally reproduced as Giclee prints.

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