



THE ORIGINS OF THE HOUSE DIVISION DEBATE IN ANCIENT ASTROLOGY

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THE ASTROLOGY PODCAST, EPISODE 227

<http://theastrologypodcast.com/2019/10/28/origins-of-the-house-division-debate-in-ancient-astrology/>



Questions About House Division

- There are many different forms of house division today.
 - How did this come to be the case?
 - We can understand the issue better by seeing how it started.
- Which systems were used in antiquity?
 - Were some more popular than others?
 - How did ancient astrologers reconcile different approaches?
- Result of some recent debates on this topic:
 - Ep. 54 of The Astrology Podcast w/ Deborah Houlding in Nov. 2015.
 - Robert Schmidt audio recording in June 2016.
 - Resulted in chapter 11 of my 2017 book, *Hellenistic Astrology*.
 - This lecture originally presented at NORWAC 2017 and UAC 2018.



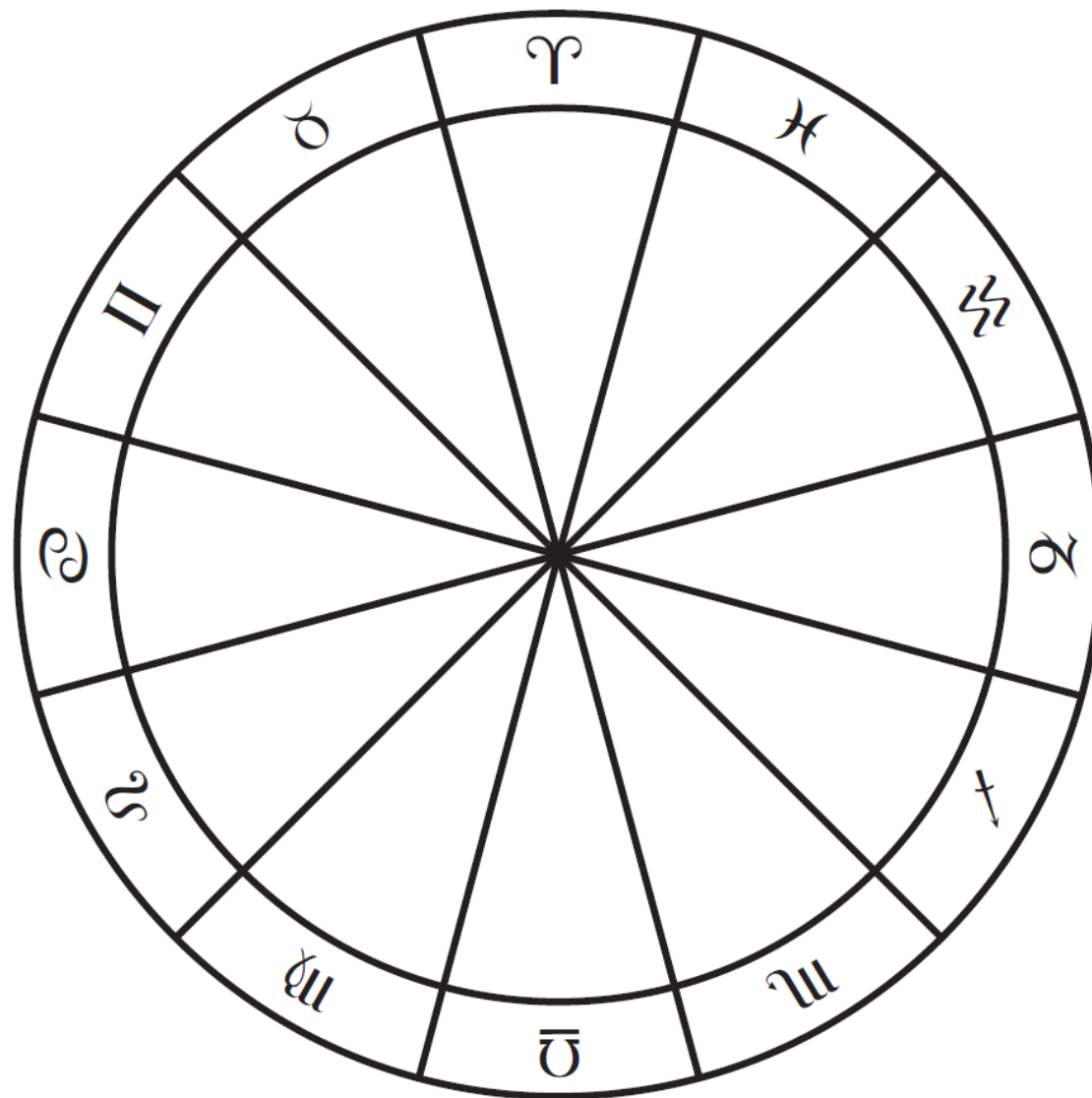
The Origins of Western Astrology

- Most of the techniques that we associate with western astrology originated about 2000 years ago.
- During the Hellenistic era (c. 100 BCE).
- Introduction of the fourfold system:
 1. Planets
 2. Signs of the zodiac
 3. Aspects
 4. Twelve houses
- Part synthesis of earlier traditions, part new innovation.

A satellite map of the Mesopotamian region, showing the Tigris and Euphrates river systems and the surrounding desert landscape. The word "MESOPOTAMIA" is overlaid in white capital letters. The map shows the Tigris River flowing from the north towards the south, and the Euphrates River flowing from the west towards the east. The land is a mix of brown and tan, indicating arid conditions, with some green patches representing vegetation. The word "MESOPOTAMIA" is centered in the image in a white, serif, all-caps font.

MESOPOTAMIA

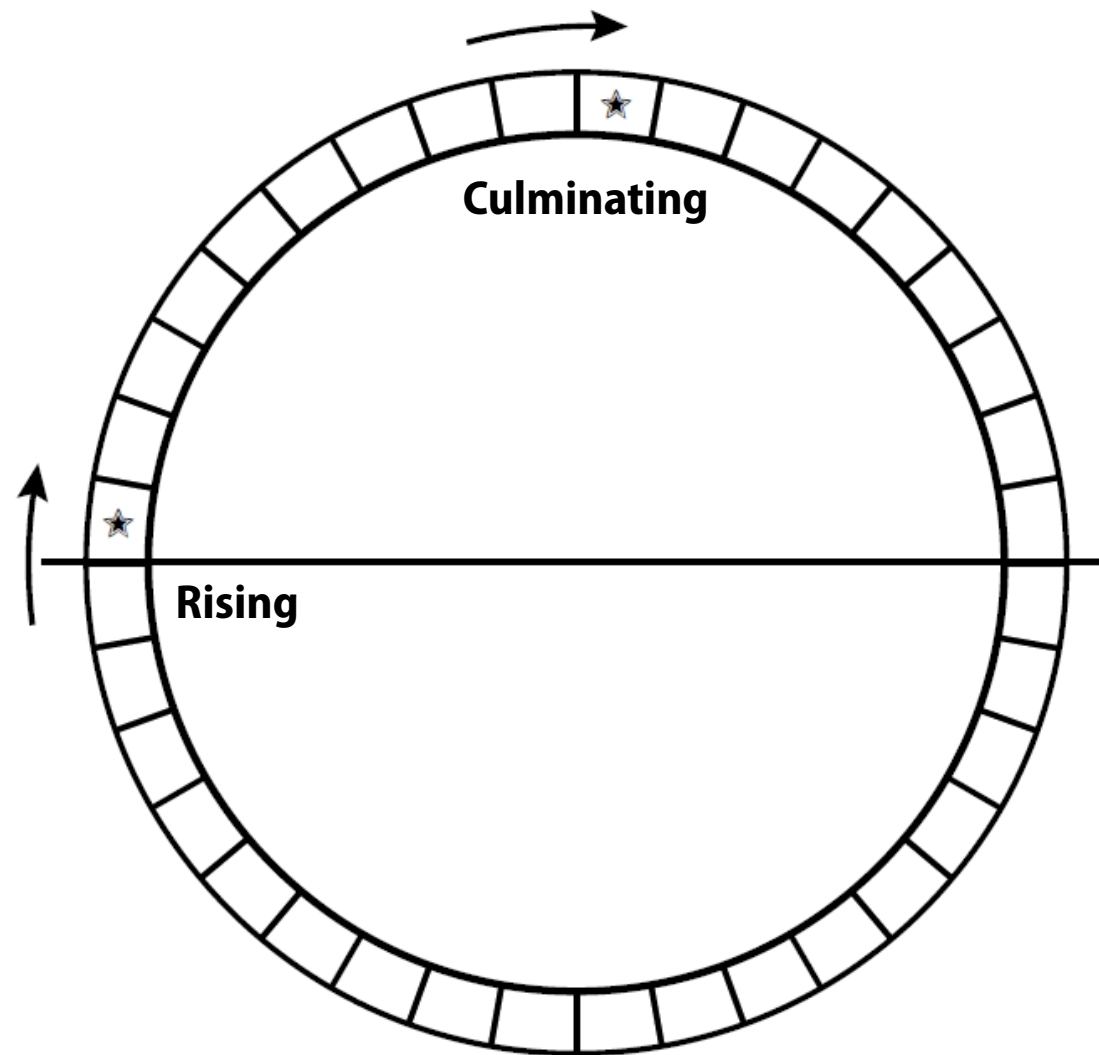
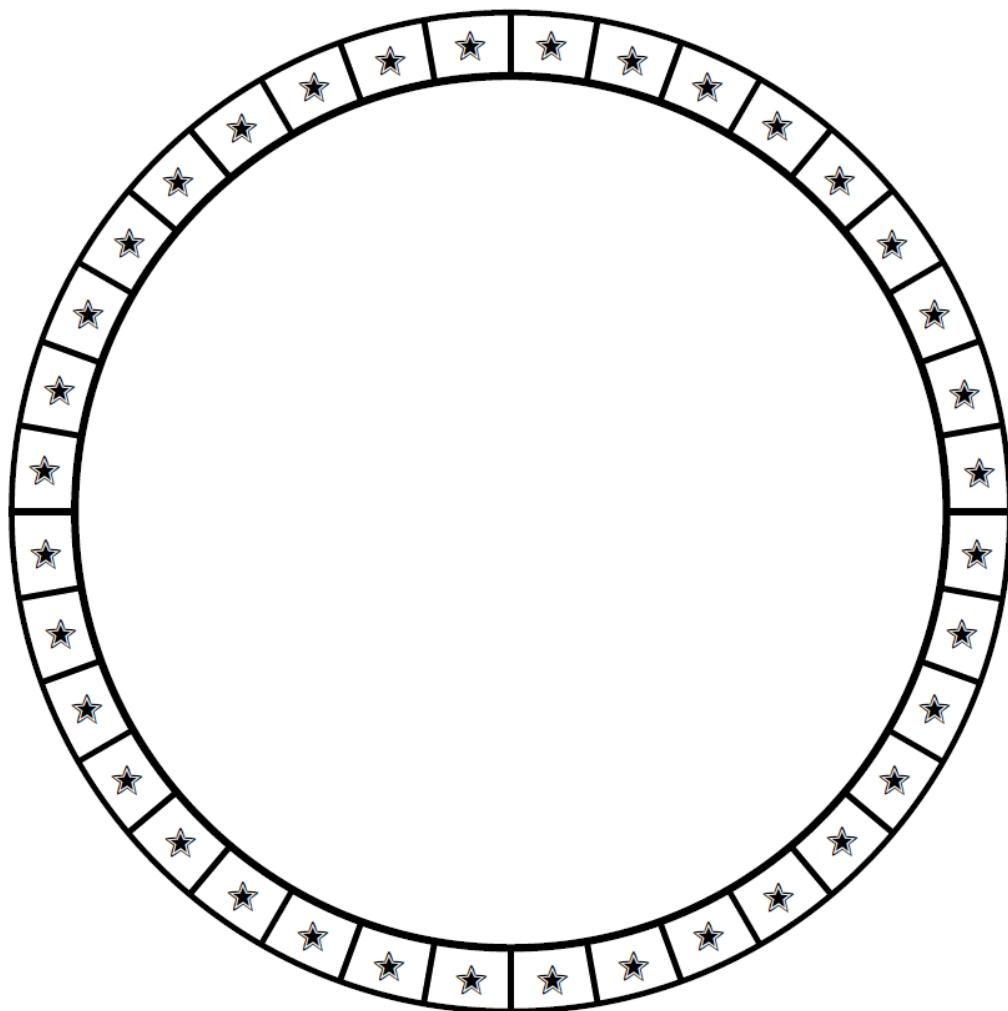
The Twelve Sign Zodiac





EGYPT

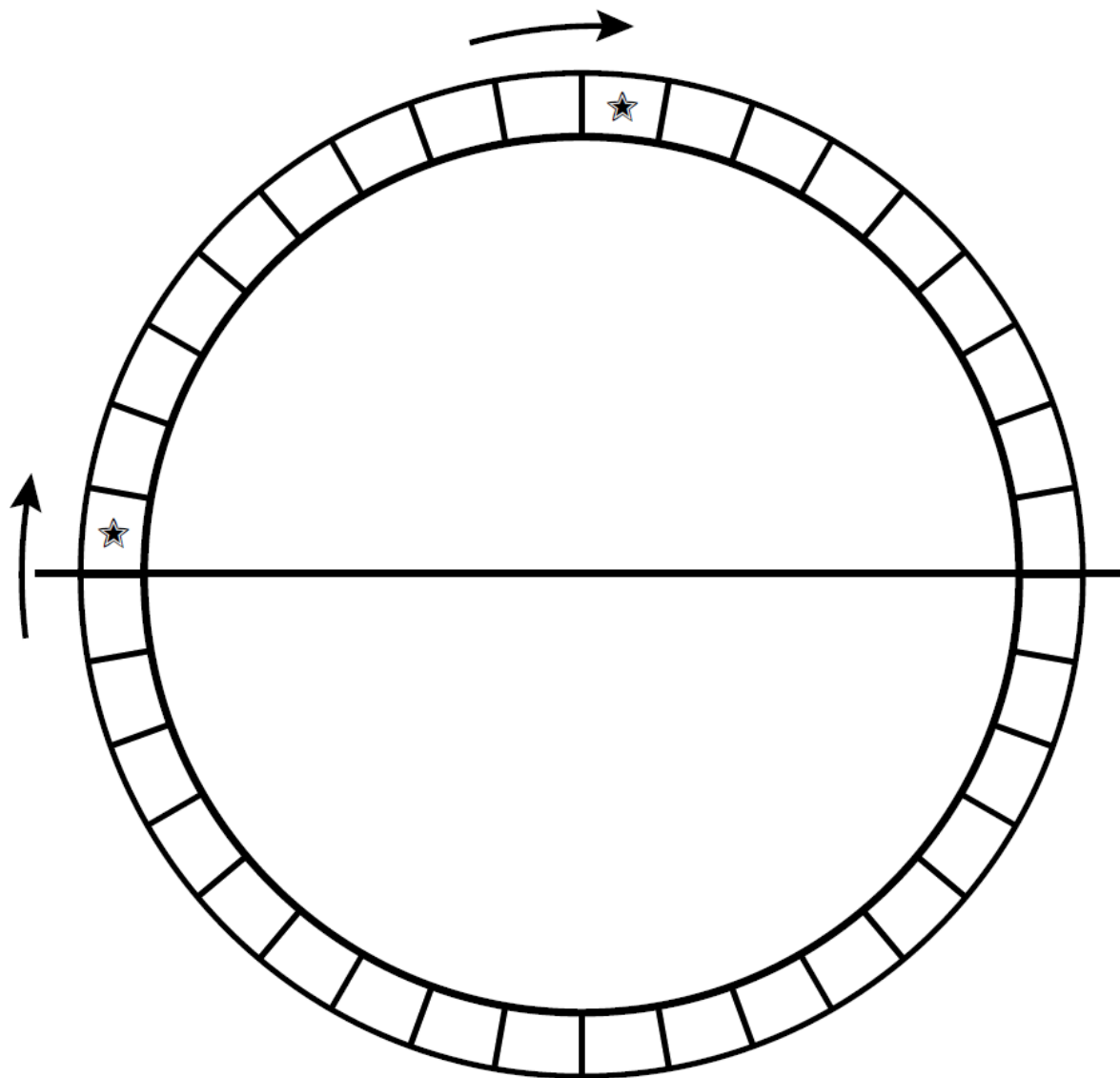
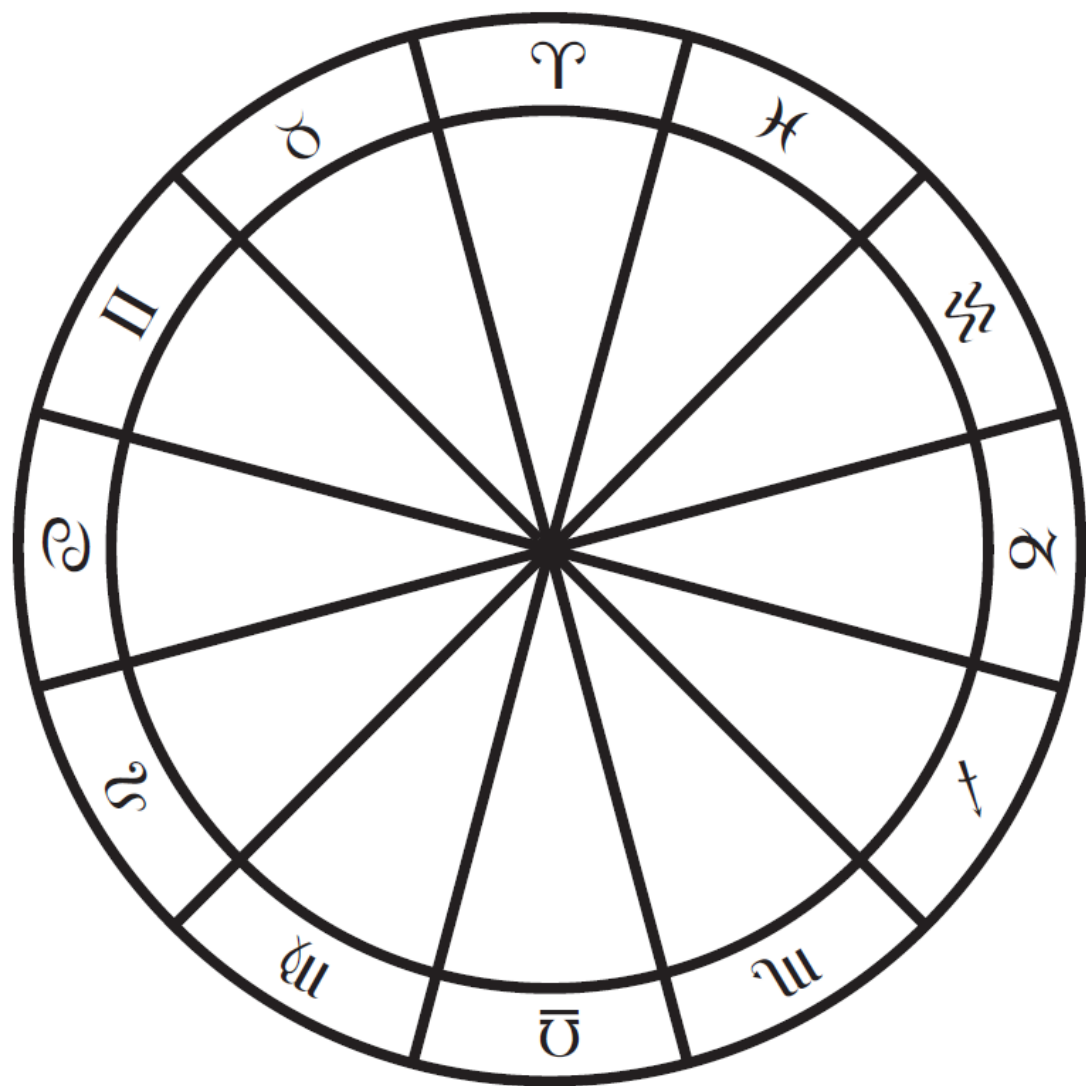
The 36 Decans

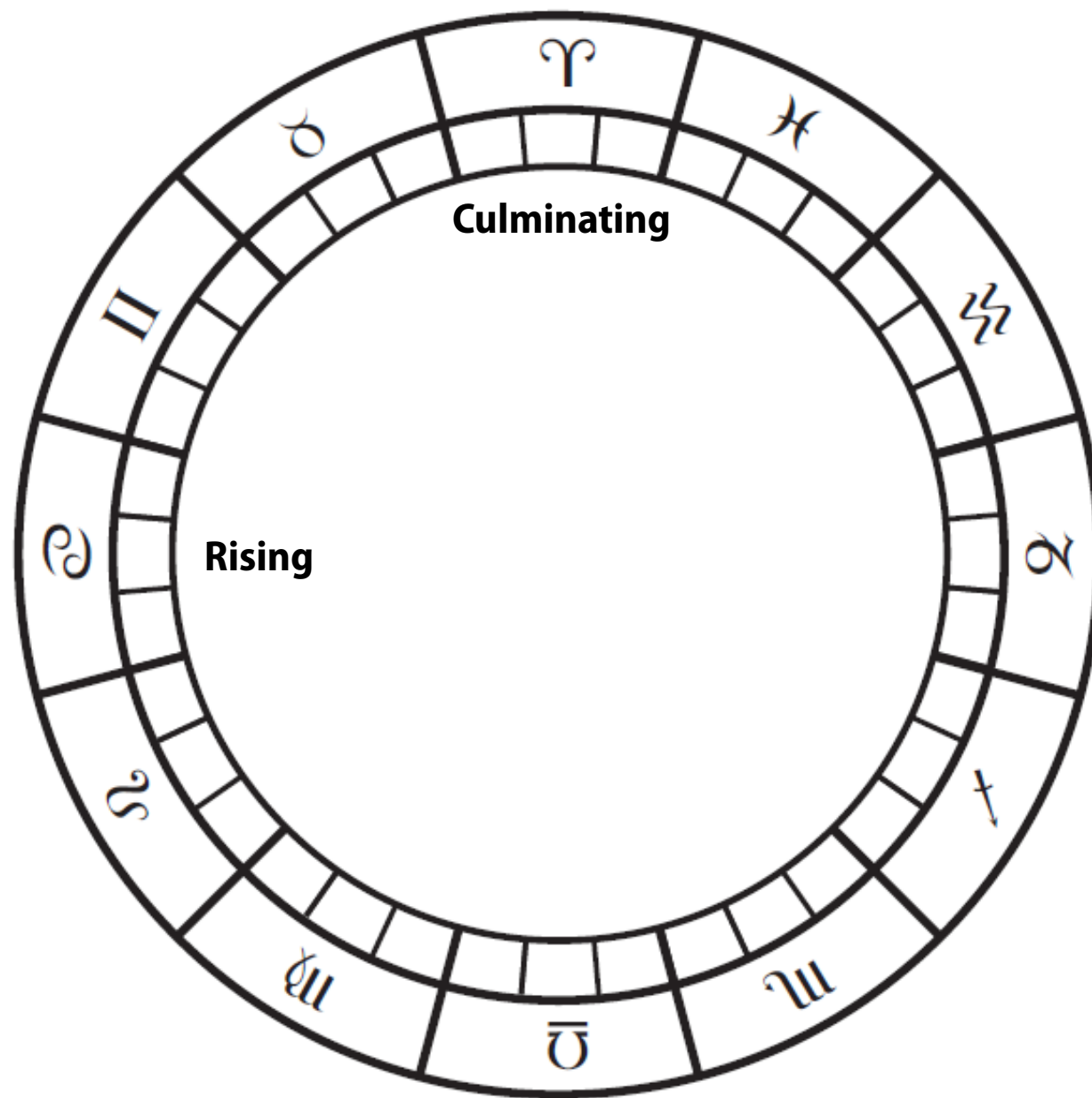


Conquests of Alexander the Great (4th Century BCE)



Source: <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/File:MacedonEmpire.jpg>







Defining the Different Approaches to House Division

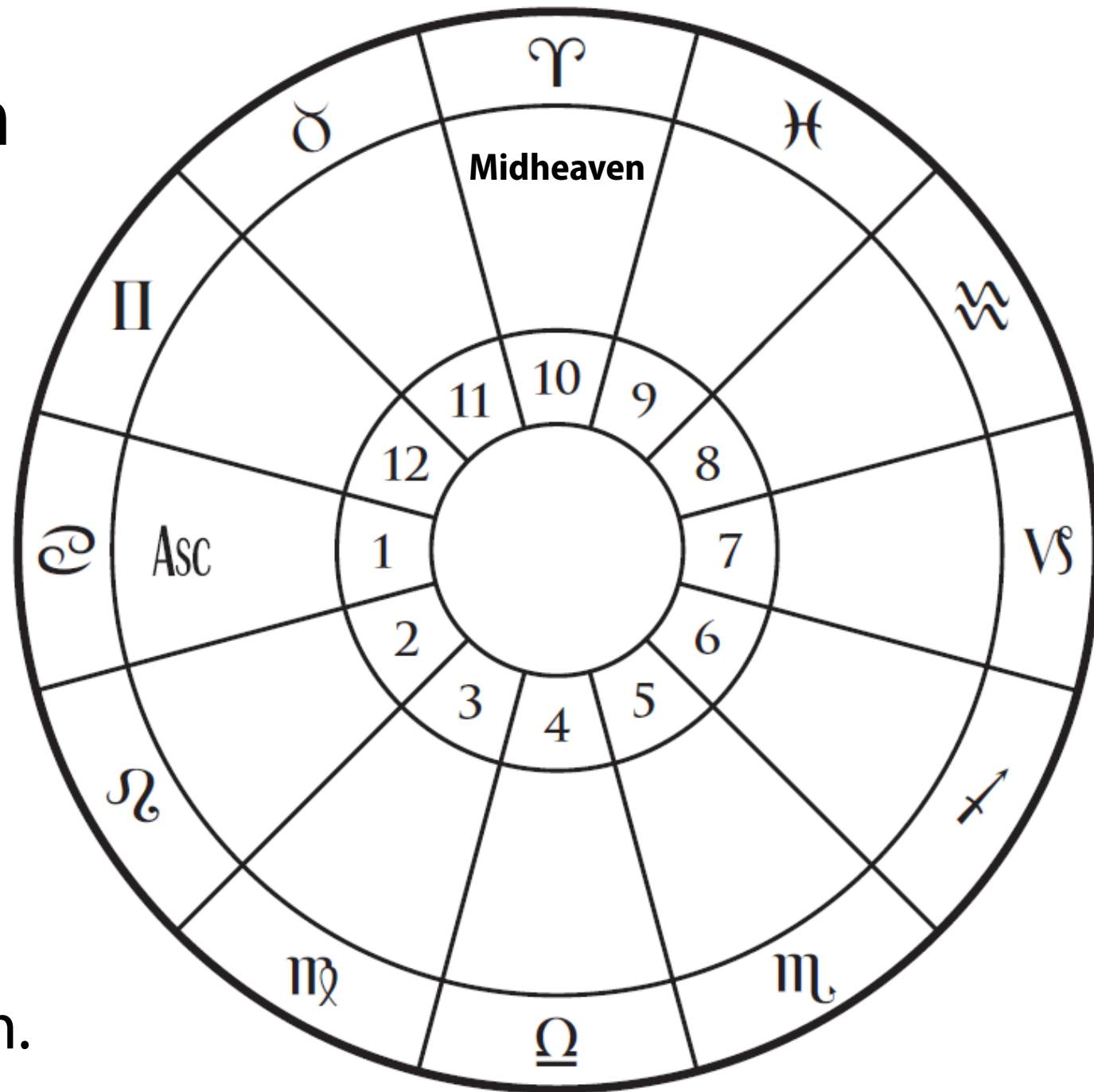


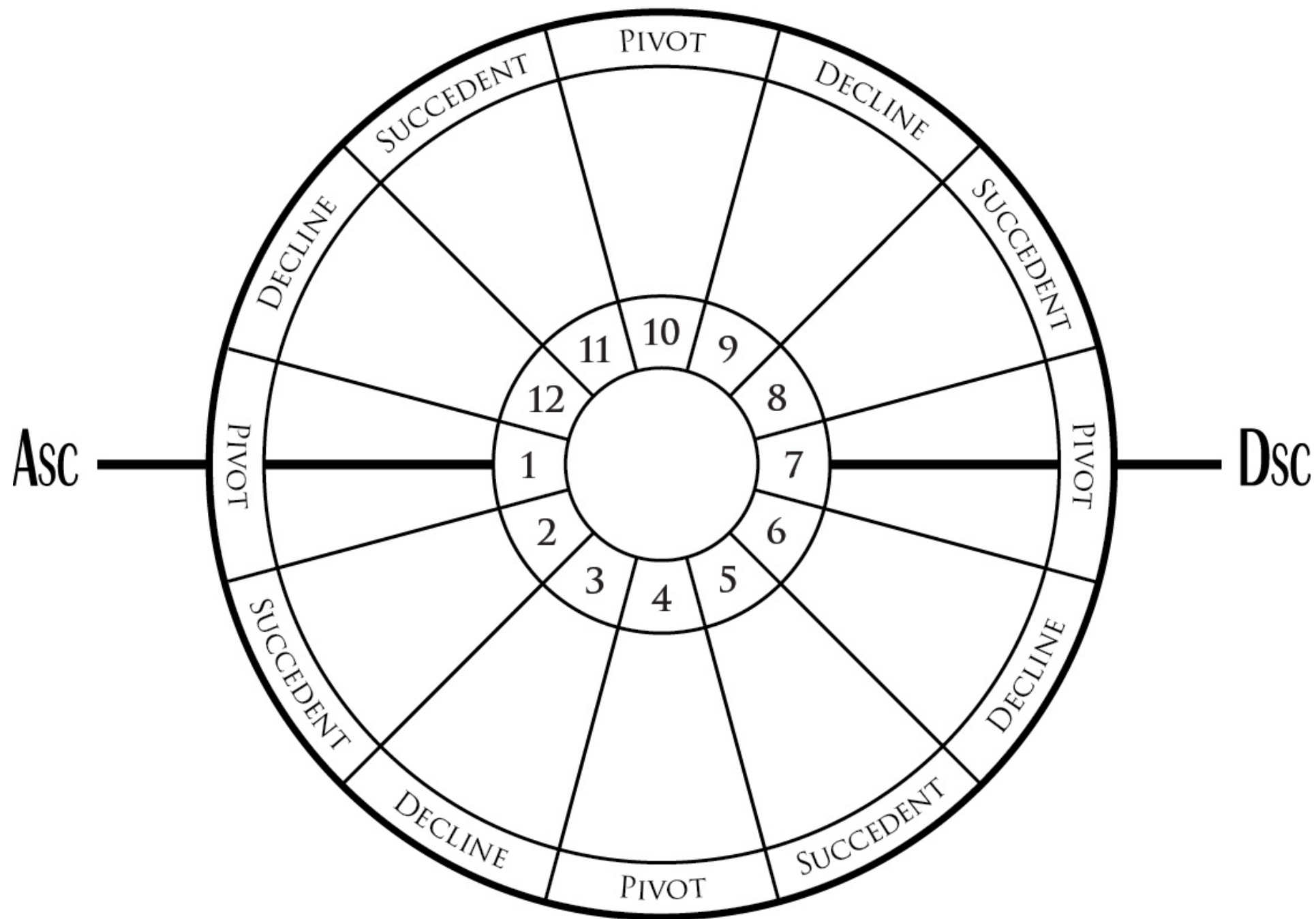
The Three Forms of House Division

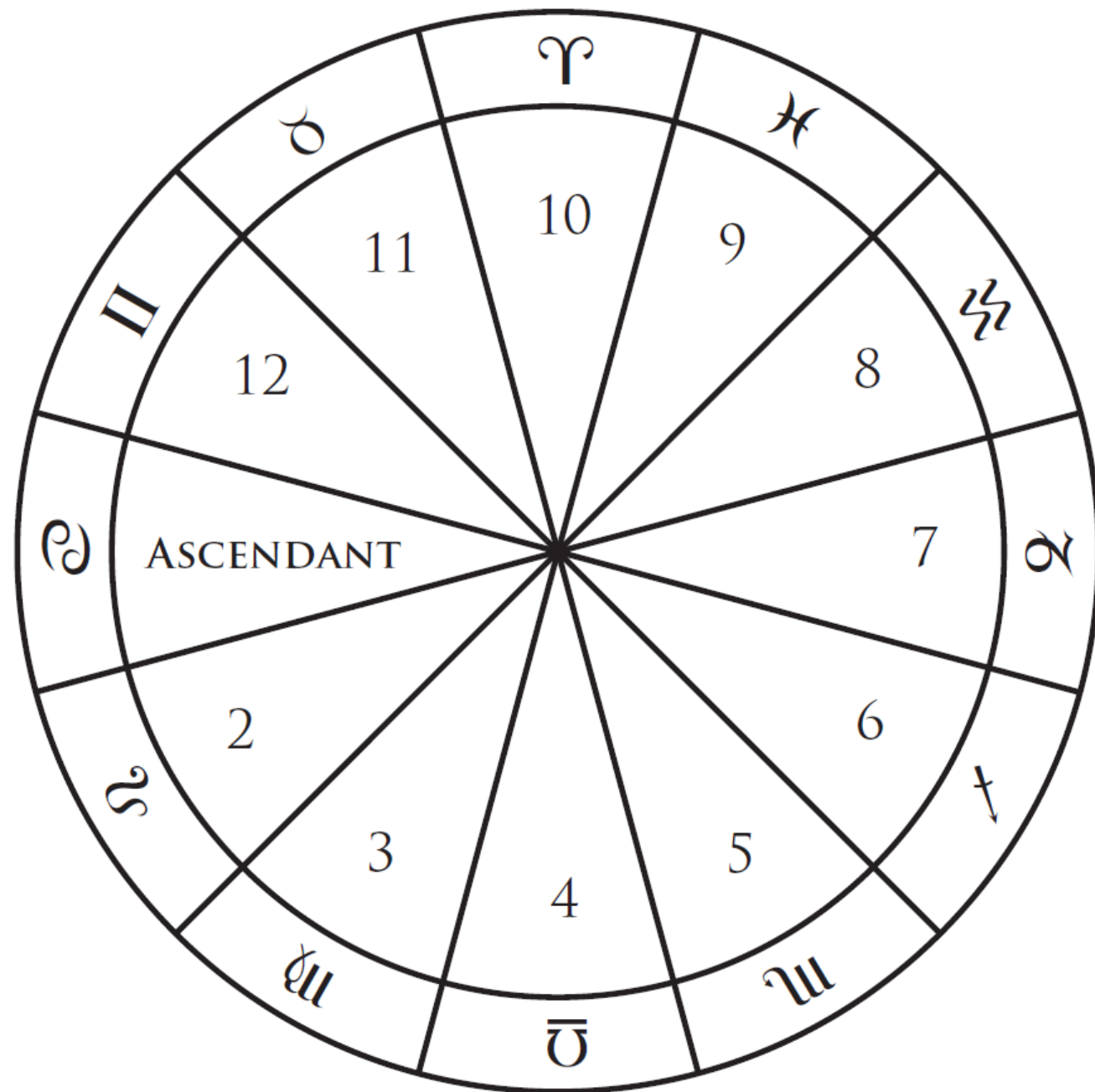
- There are three main forms of house division:
 1. **Whole sign houses**
 2. **Equal houses**
 3. **Quadrant houses**
 - Porphyry
 - Placidus
 - Regiomontanus
 - Koch
 - Etc.
- Three different ways of defining the “Midheaven.”

Whole Sign House System

- Degree of the zodiac rising over eastern horizon marks or designates the rising sign.
- Rising sign becomes 1st house.
- Regardless of how early or late ASC degree is in sign.
- Midheaven is always the tenth sign in zodiacal order.
- The sign itself **is** the Midheaven.

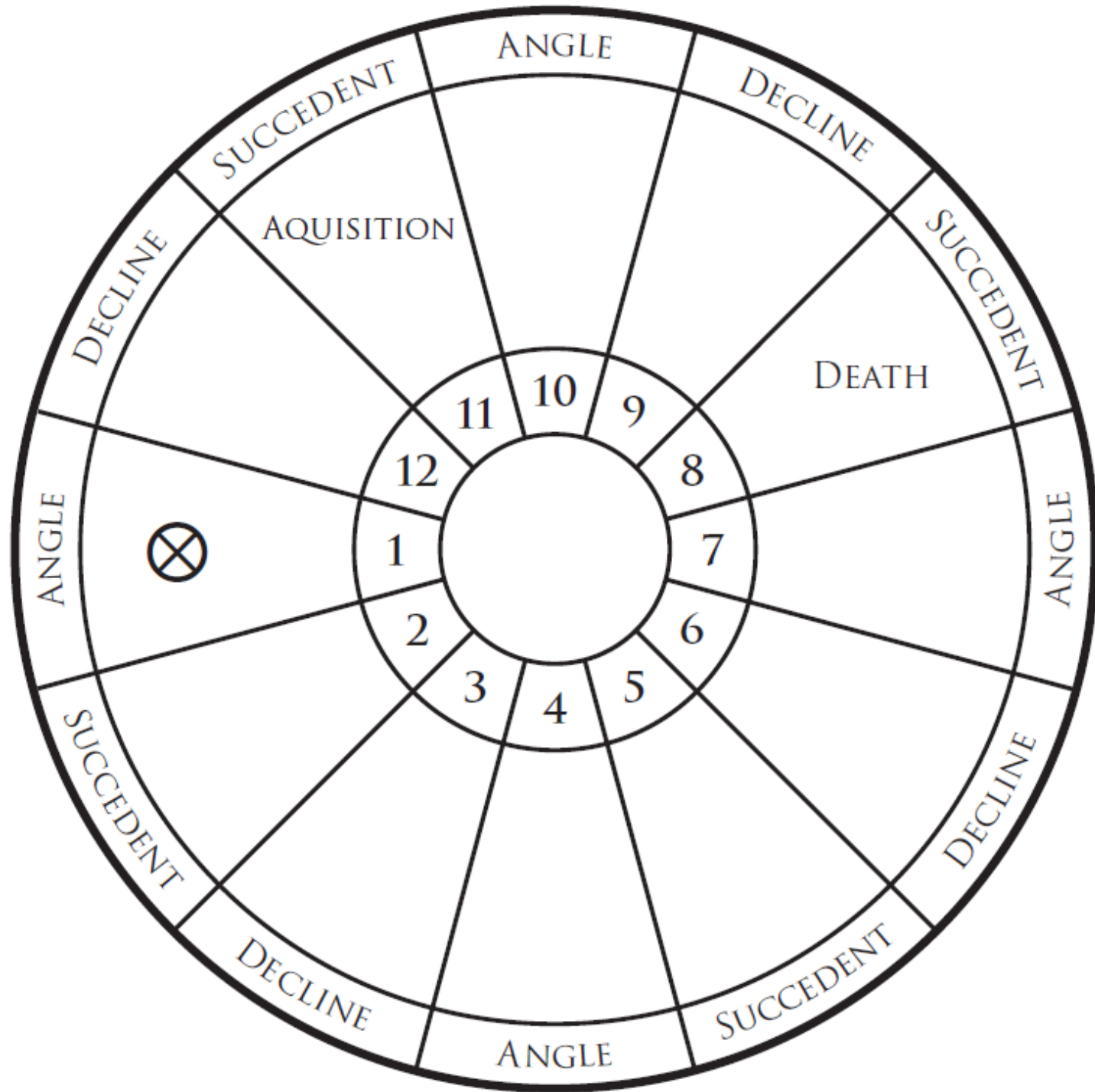






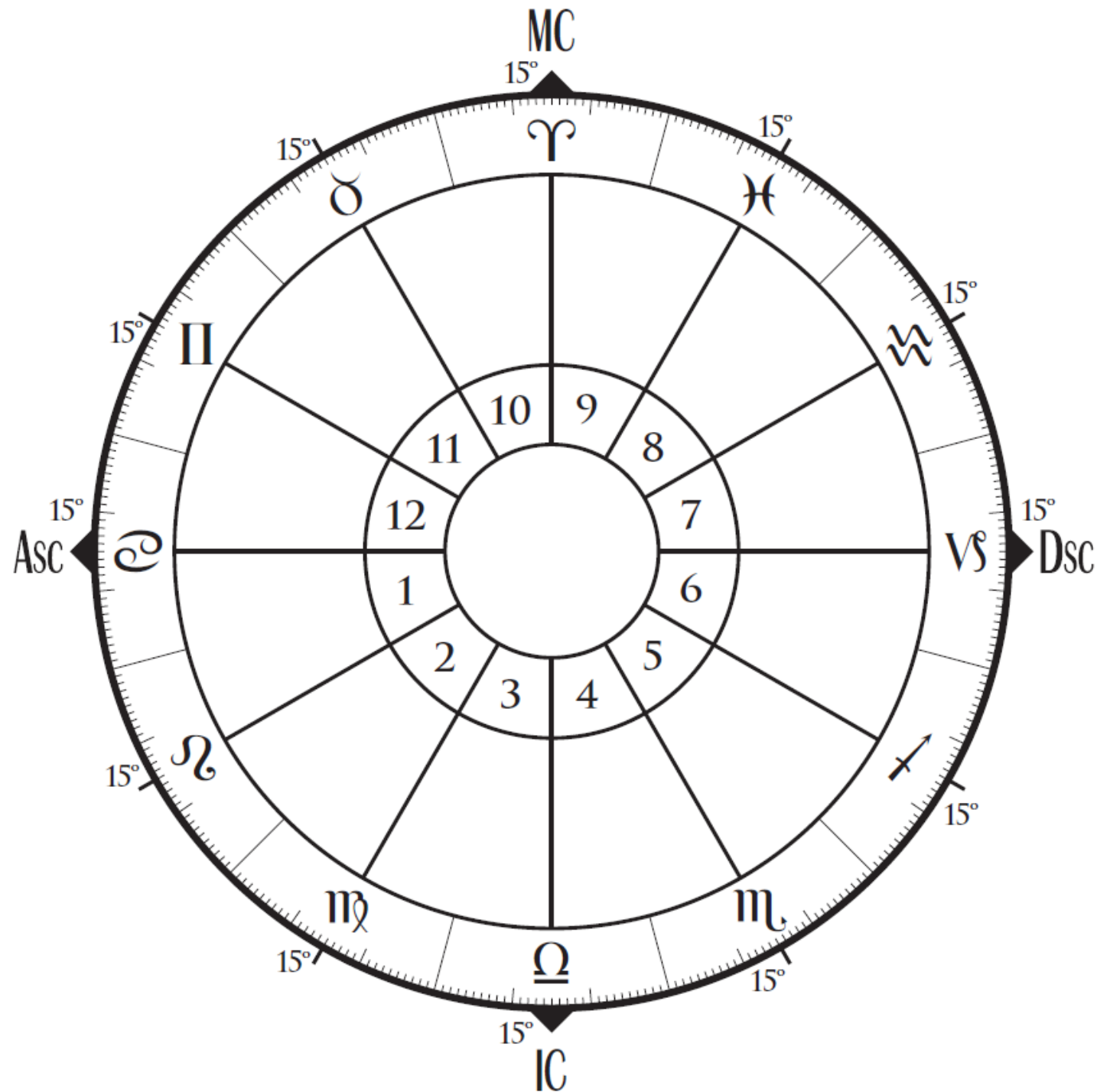
The Use of Lots

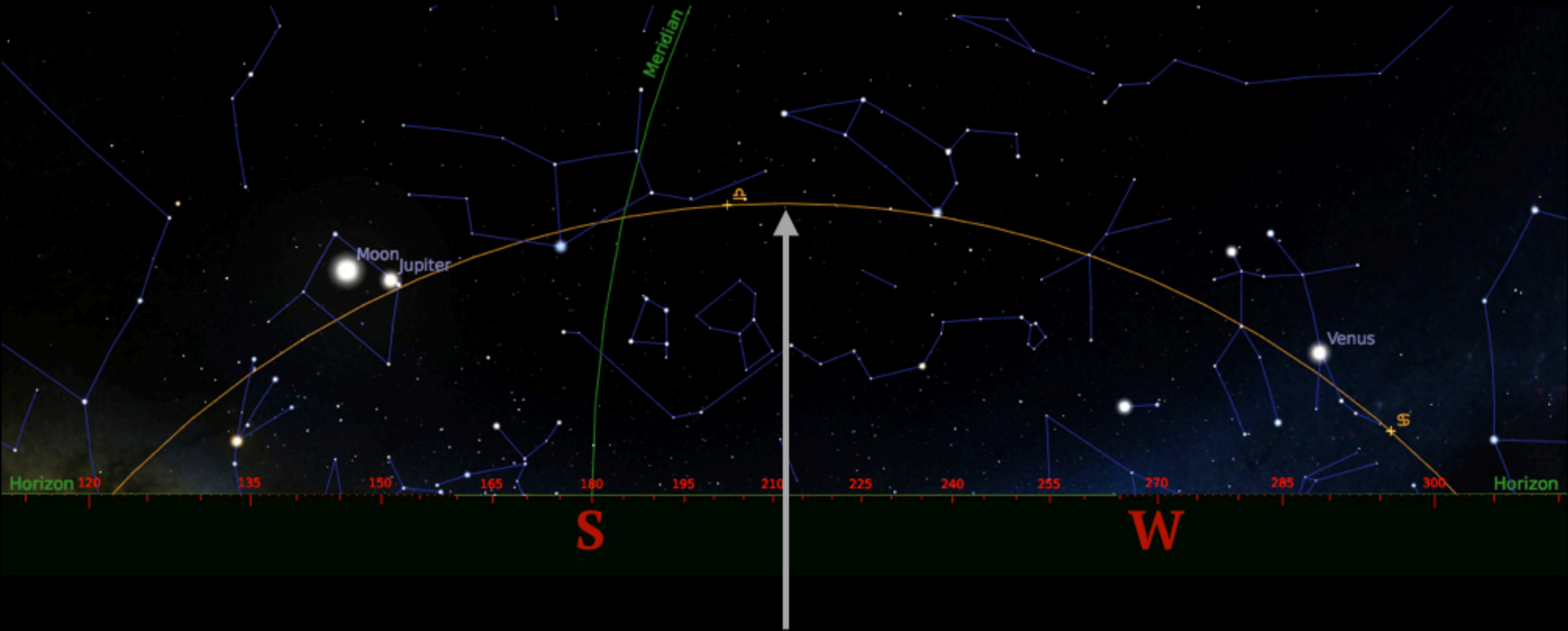
- Lots were also used to assign topics to signs in Hellenistic.
- Derived houses from the sign of the Lot of Fortune.
- Similar to how the Ascendant marks the entire sign that becomes the 1st house in WSH.
- Part of a broader conceptual approach to “marking” signs.



Equal House System

- Degree of the ASC becomes starting point of first house.
- Houses measured out from ASC in 30-degree increments.
- Midheaven is always 90 degrees from the ASC.
- Midheaven is the nonagesimal.
- Nonagesimal is the highest point of the zodiac.

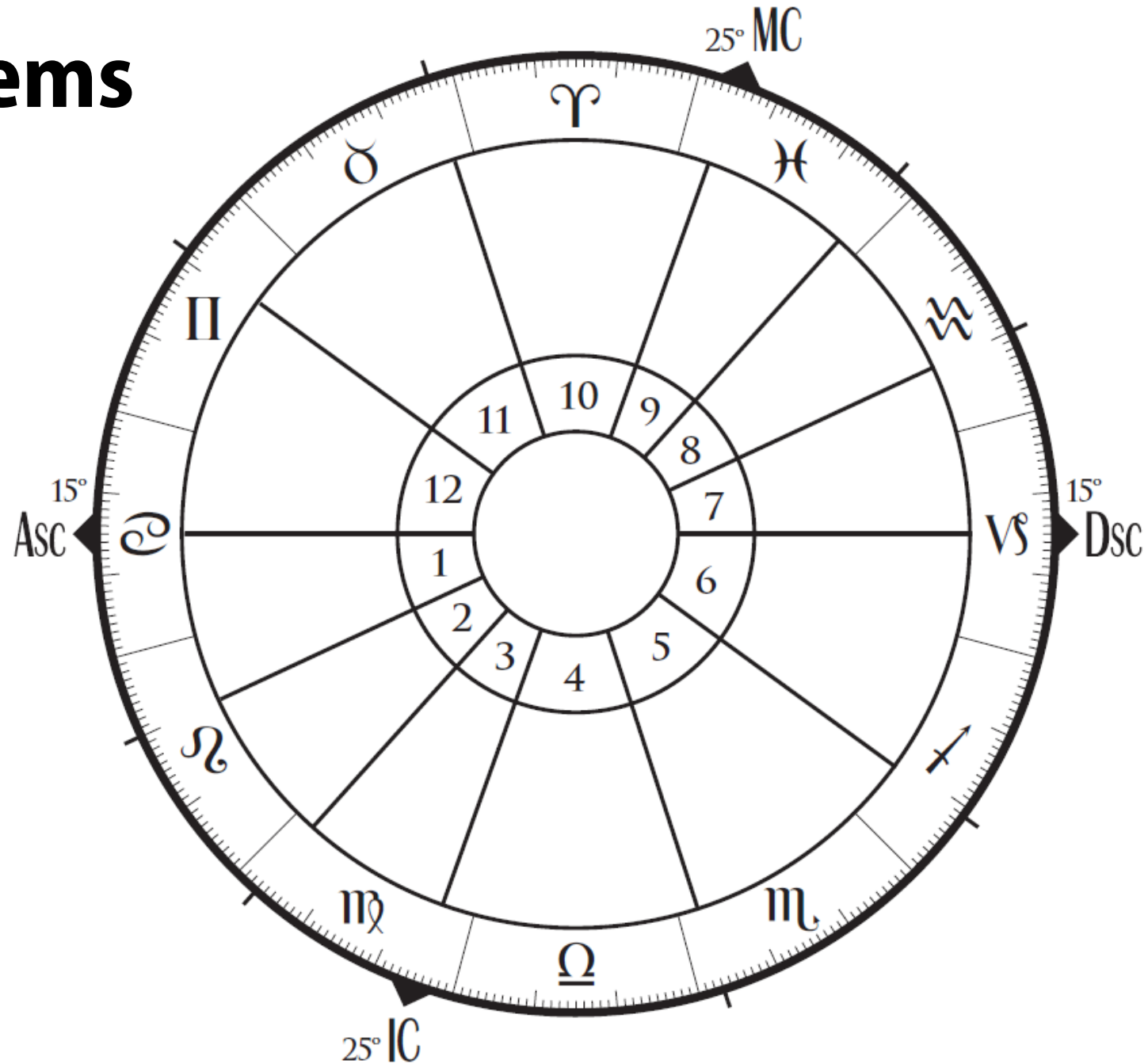




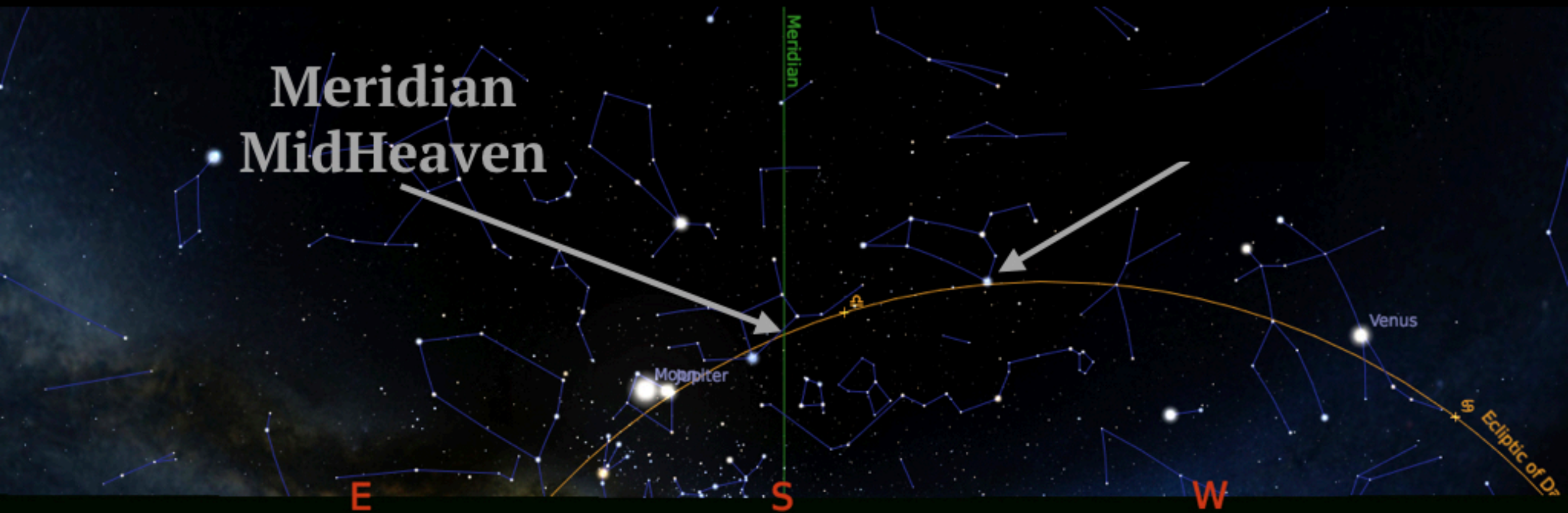
Nonagesimal = Equal House Midheaven

Quadrant House Systems

- Degree of the ASC becomes starting point of first house.
- Degree of the Midheaven is the local meridian.
- Meridian = north-south line.
- Planets reach highest point in sky when passing meridian.
- Distance between angles in all four quadrants is trisected.

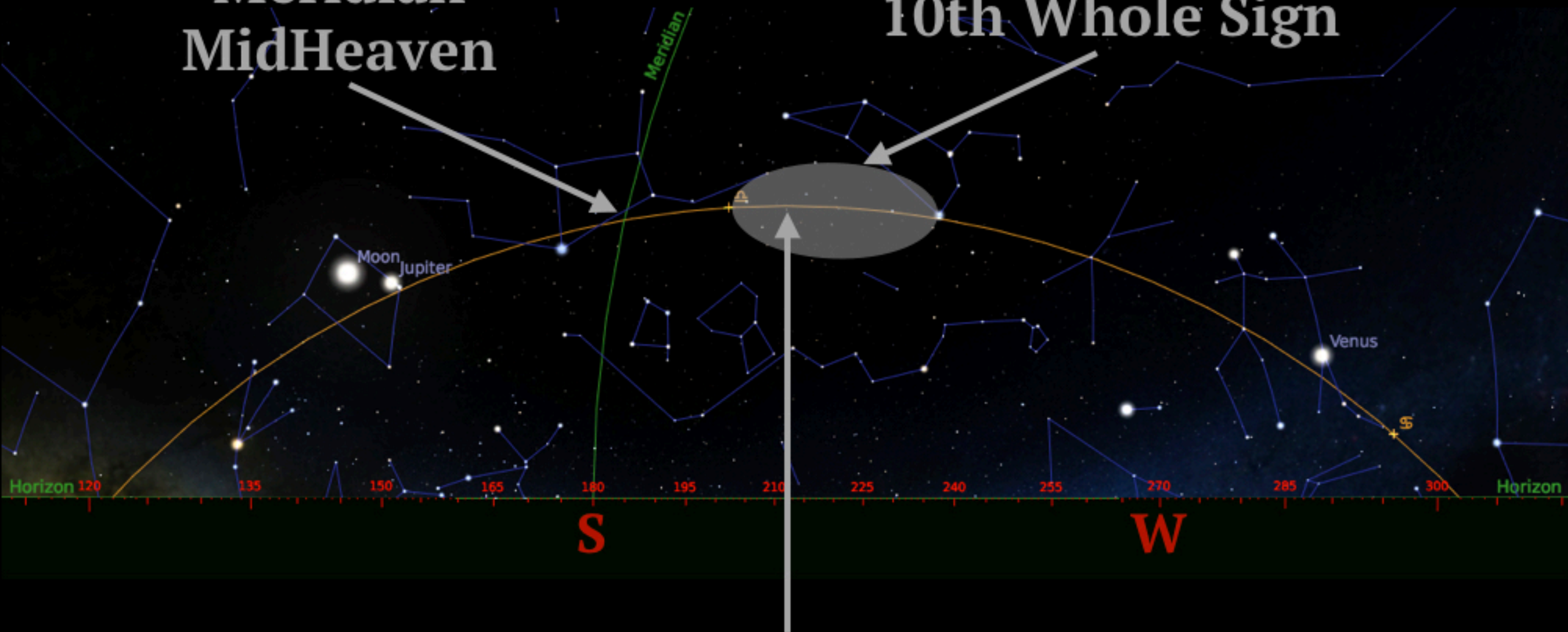


Meridian MidHeaven

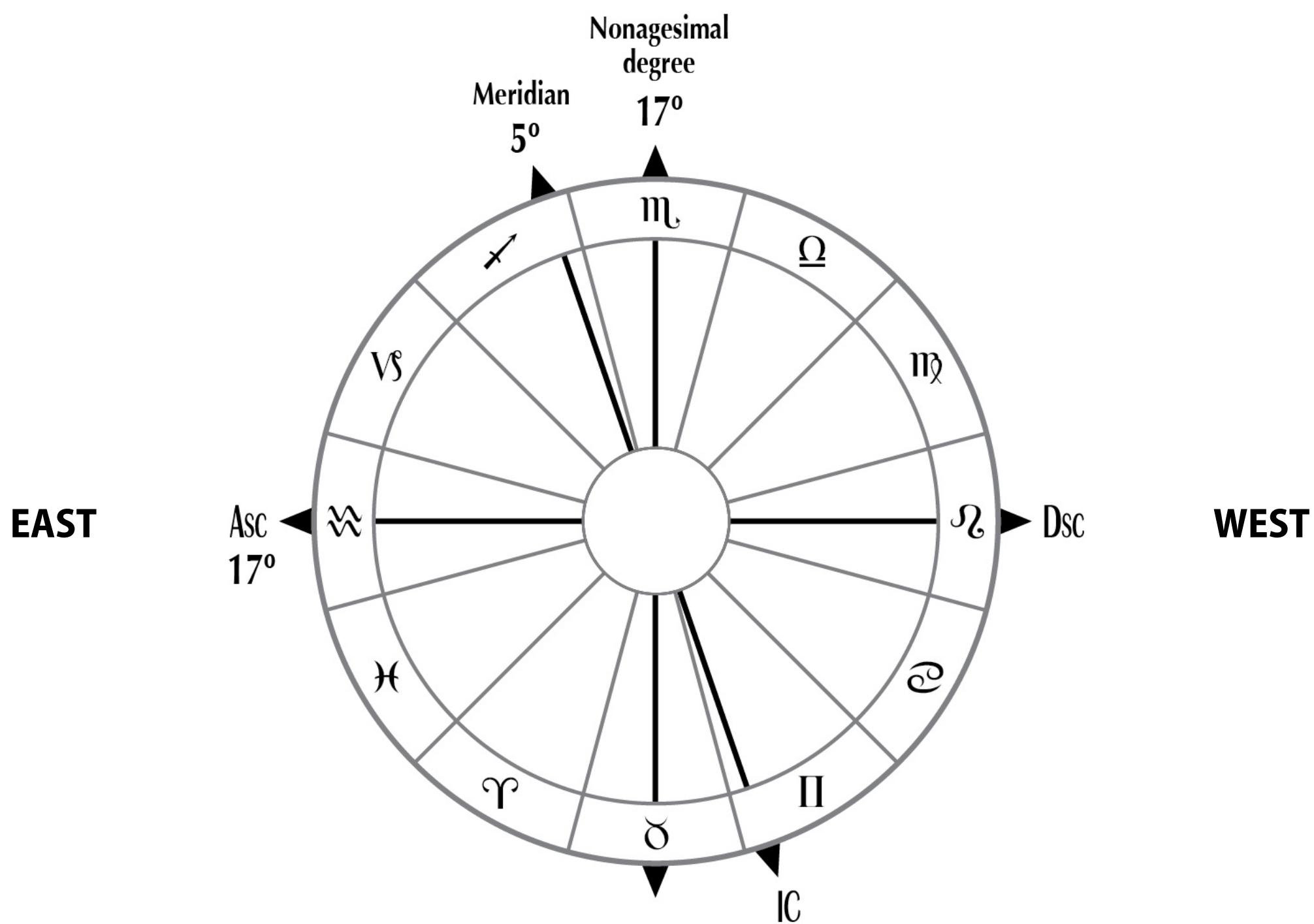


**Meridian
MidHeaven**

10th Whole Sign



Nonagesimal





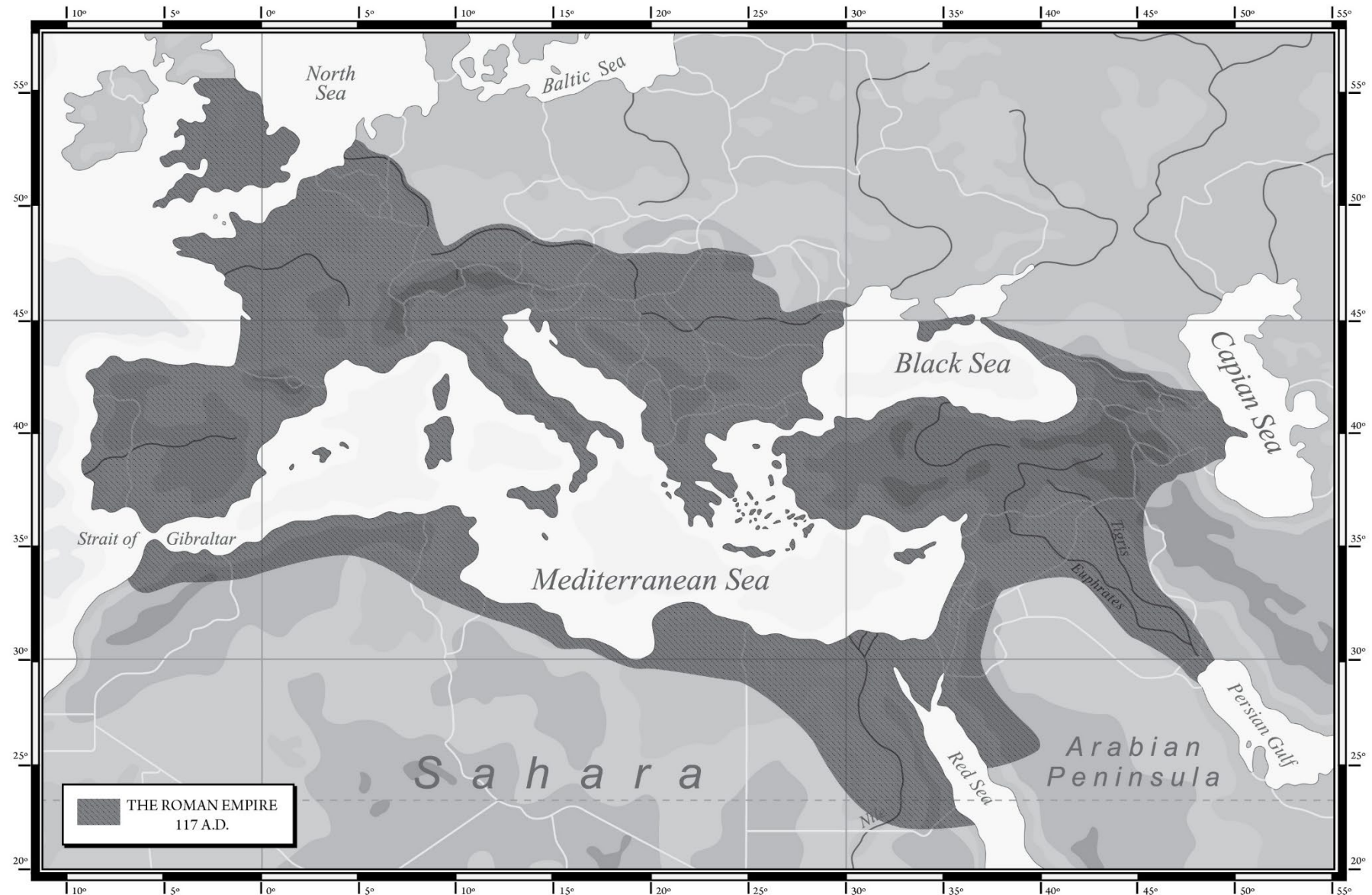
The Surviving Evidence for House Division Usage in Greco-Roman Astrology



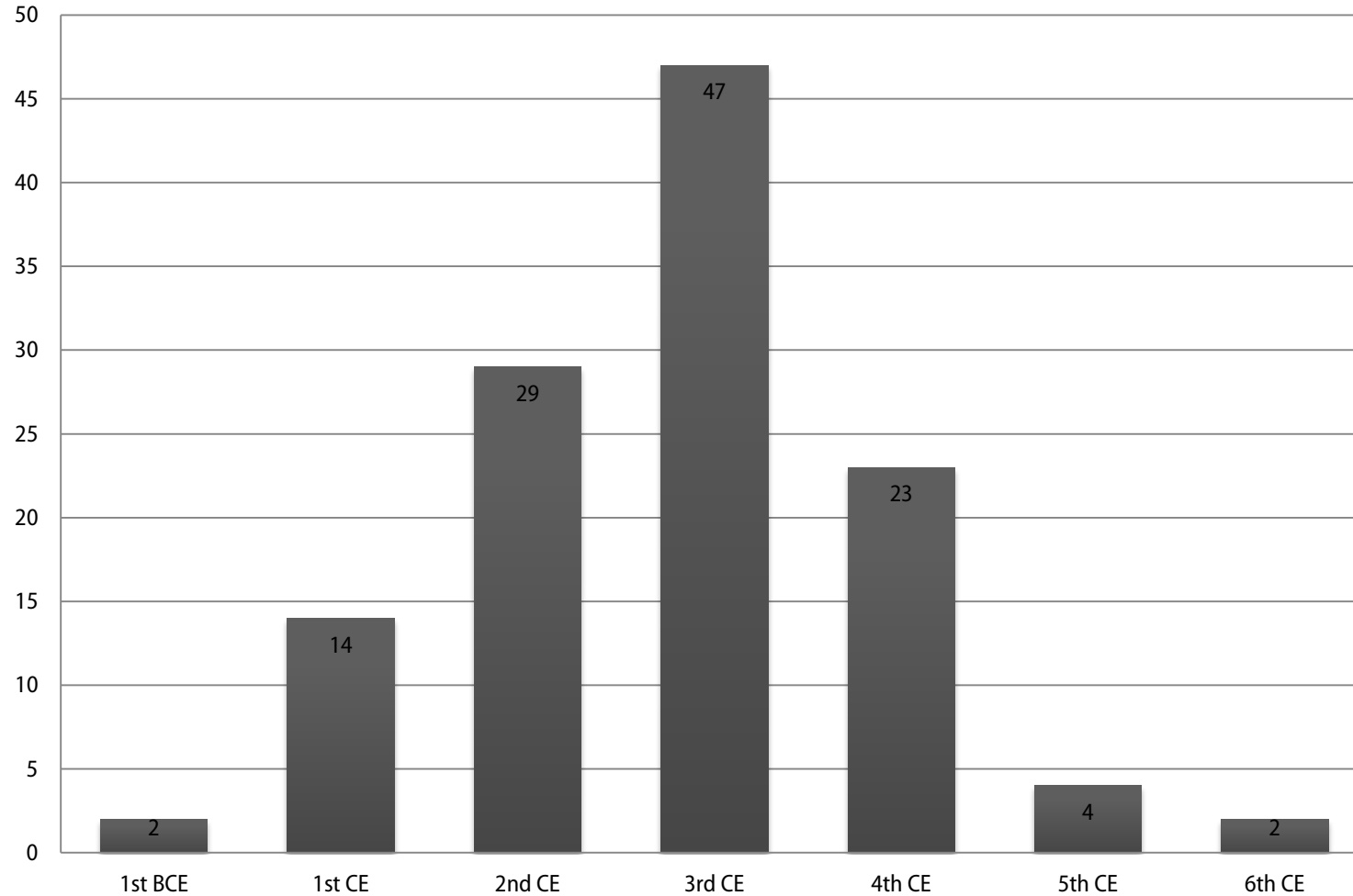
Establishing Prevalence in the Early Tradition

- Hundreds of charts survive from the Hellenistic tradition.
 - Mostly birth charts.
 - 1st century BCE to 6th century CE.
 - Mainly written in Greek.
- Divided into two categories:
 1. Standalone charts
 2. “Literary” charts
- The raw data needed for an astrological consultation.

The Roman Empire in the 2nd Century CE



Datable Charts in Greek Outside of Valens

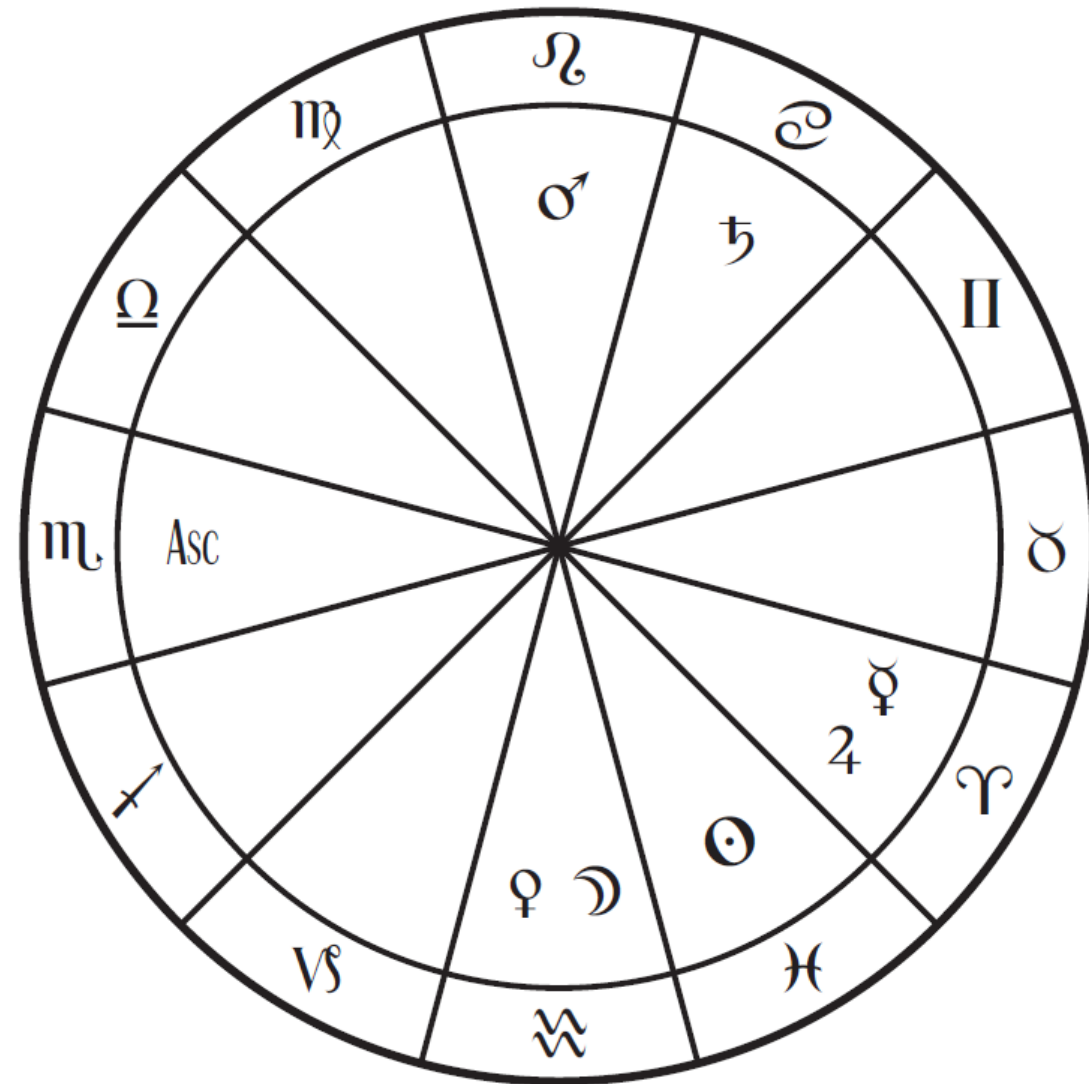


Birth Chart - March 11/12, 150 CE

Nativity of Philoe. Year 13 of Antonius Caesar the Lord. Phamenoth 15 to 16. 4th hour of the night.

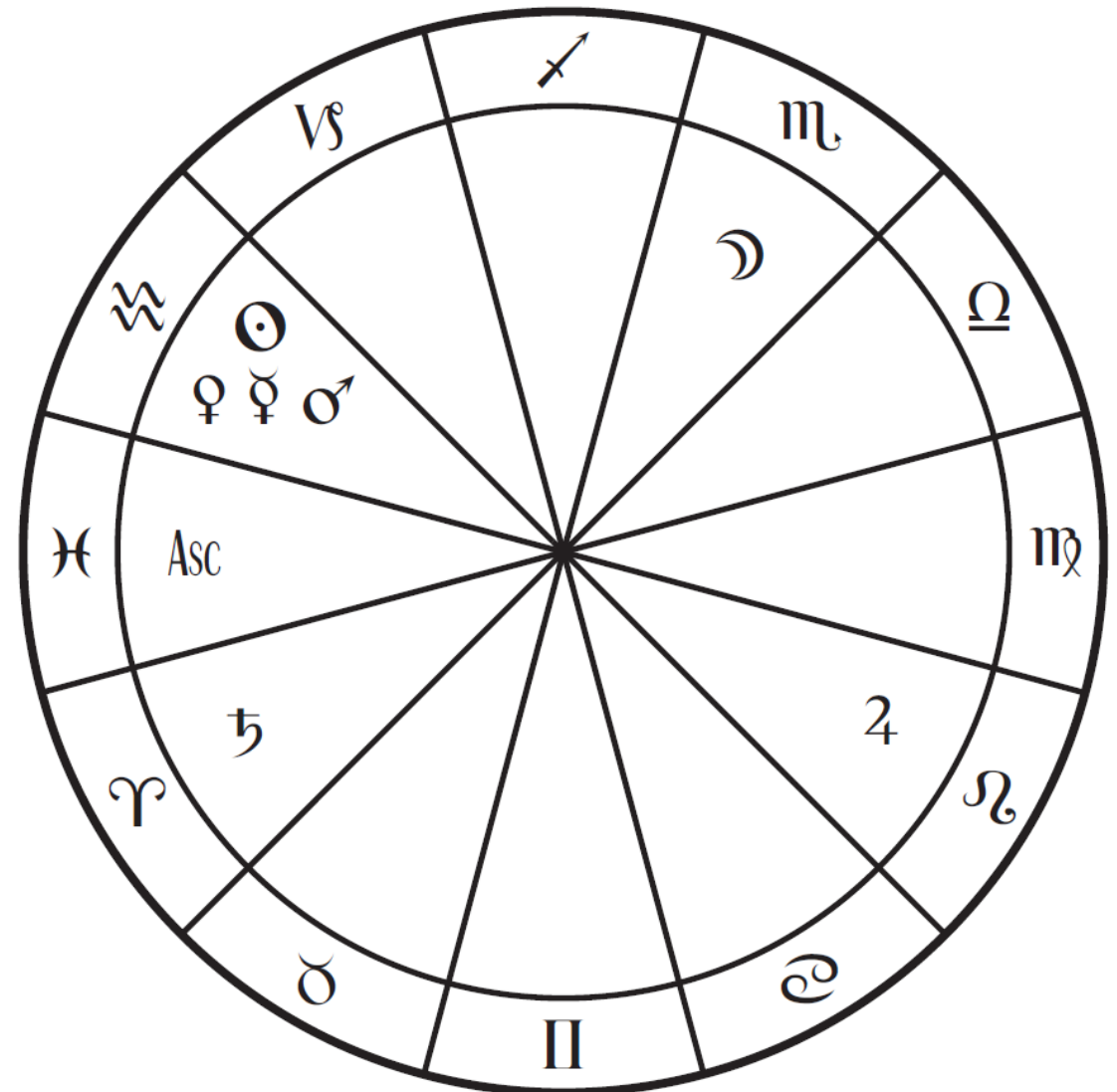
Sun in Pisces, Jupiter and Mercury in Aries, Saturn in Cancer, Mars in Leo, Venus (and) Moon in Aquarius.

Scorpio is the Ascendant.



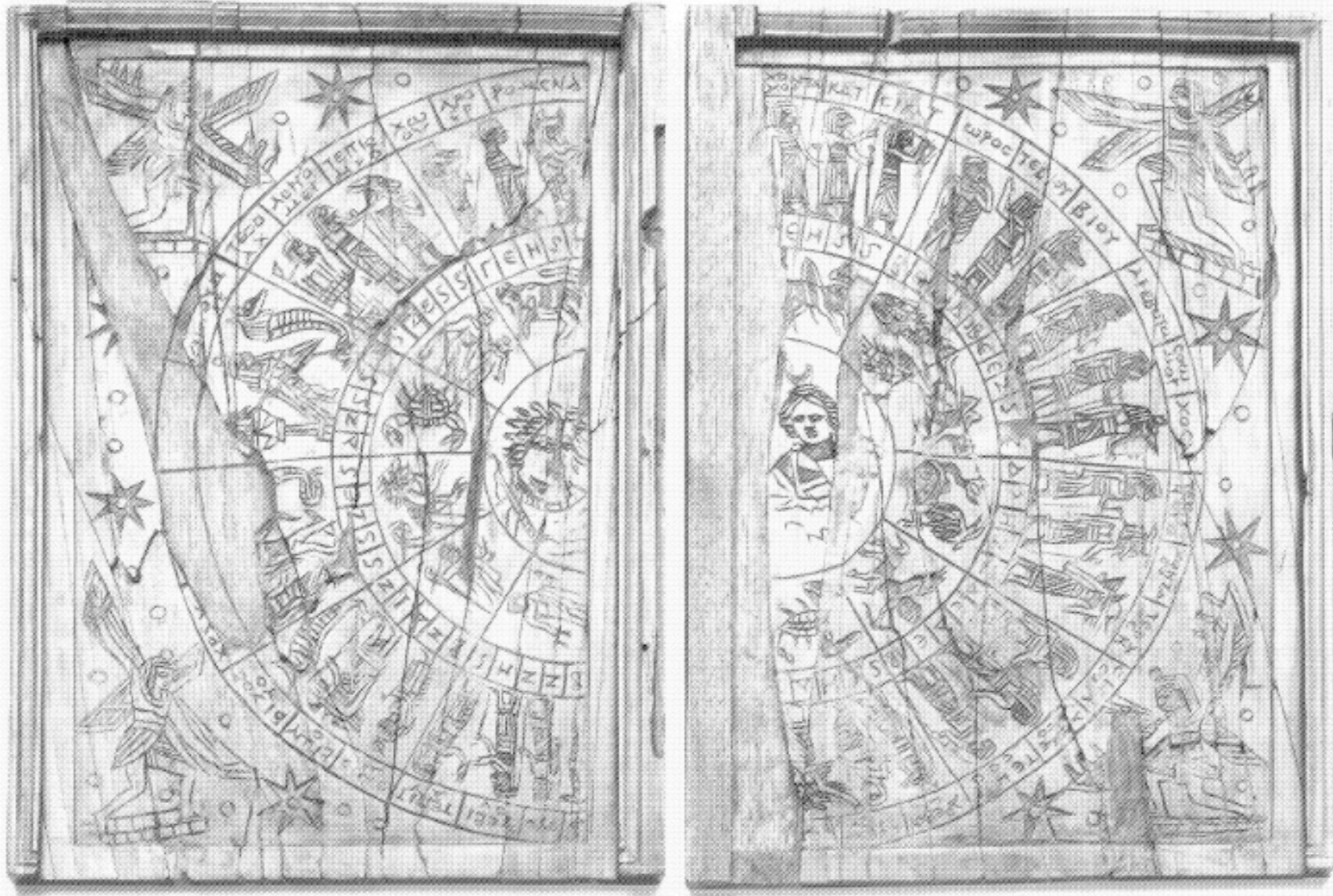
Birth Chart - February 17, 320 CE

Year 36 of Diocletian,
Mecheir 22, hour 2 of day.
Ascendant in Pisces.
Saturn in Aries.
Jupiter in Leo, on the same
day in Virgo.
Sun in Aquarius.
Mars in Aquarius.
Venus in Aquarius.
Mercury in Aquarius.
Moon in Scorpio.
Good luck!



See episode 129 of
The Astrology Podcast:
**“A Newly Discovered
4th Century Horoscope”**

An Astrologer's Consultation Board



From James Evans, "The Astrologer's Apparatus: a picture of professional practice in Greco-Roman Egypt" *Journal for the History of Astronomy*, Vol. 35, Part 1, No. 118, pp. 1-44.

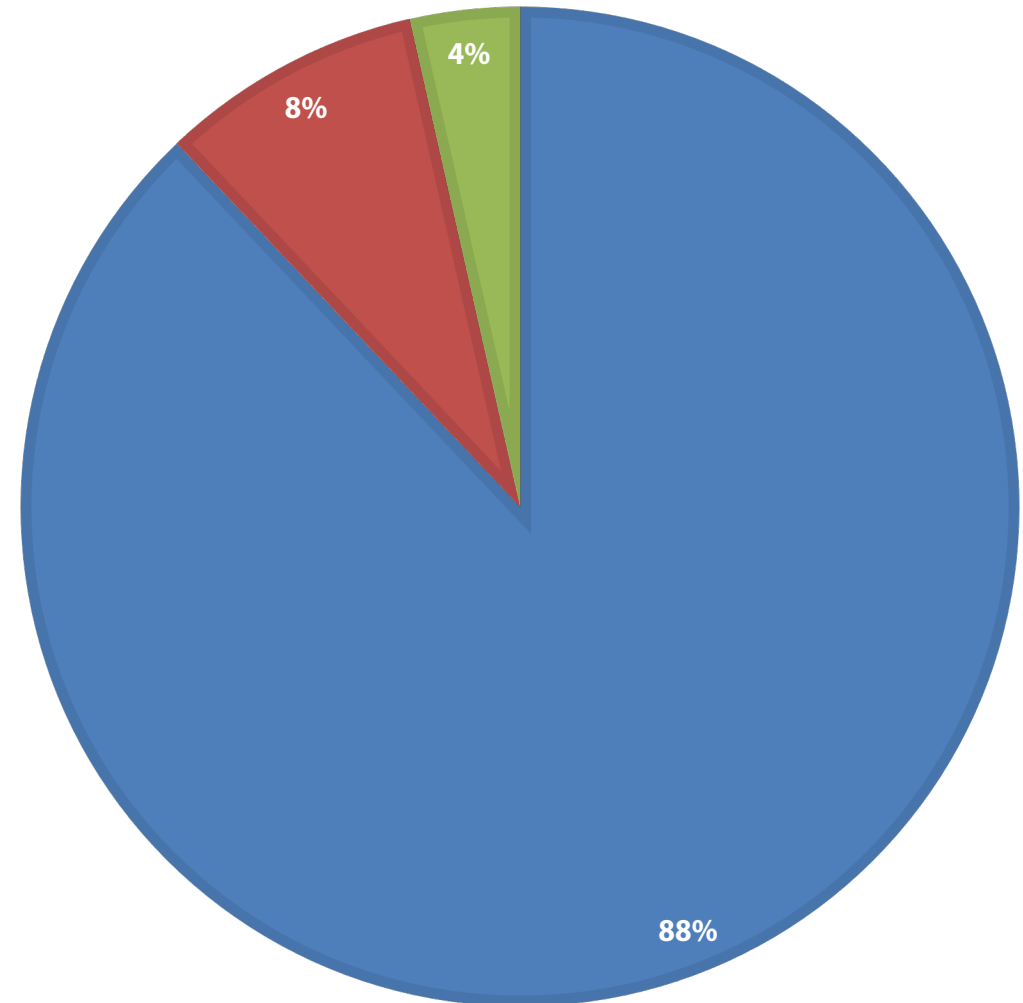


The Three Categories of Charts

- I went through and counted all the charts.
 - This approach first suggested by Rob Hand in his 2007 Culture & Cosmos article “Signs as Houses (Places) in Ancient Astrology.”
- Divided into three categories:
 1. **Only record the rising sign**
 2. **Record the degree of the Ascendant but no Midheaven**
 3. **Record degree of the Ascendant and Midheaven**

Distribution of Standalone Charts

■ Rising Sign ■ Rising Degree ■ Degree of ASC and MC



Only Rising Sign	124
Only Rising Degree	12
Degree of ASC and MC	5



Conclusions Drawn From Standalone Charts

- The vast majority of standalone charts only could have used the whole sign house system.
 - Only system you can calculate with just the rising sign.
- Even many of the ones that list the degree of the Ascendant or Midheaven also would have used WSH.
 - Even when they had the degrees they sometimes still used WSH
- Almost none mention intermediate house cusps.
- Important since these are the equivalent of printed out charts that a client would take to an astrologer.

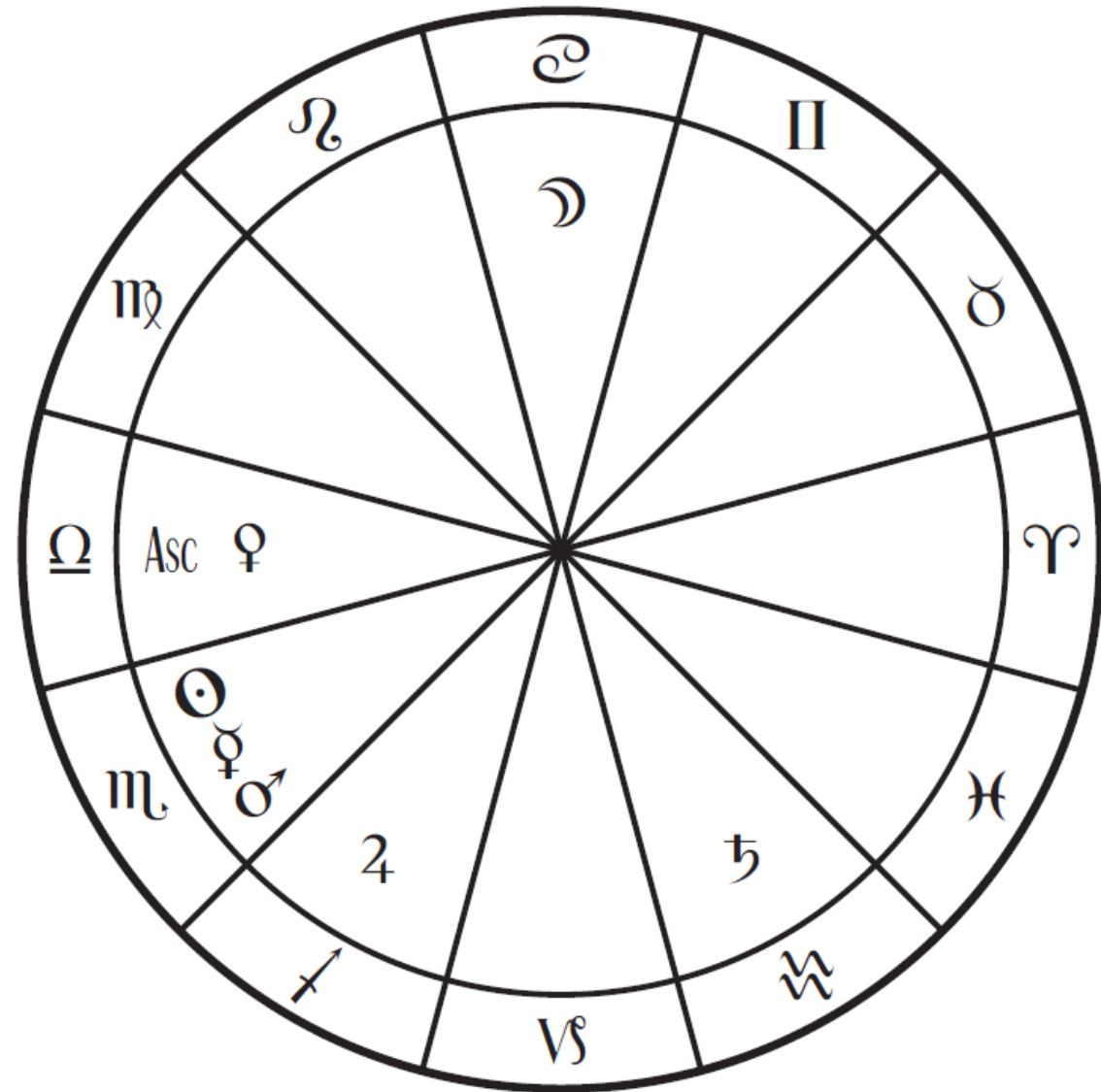


Literary Charts from Textbooks

Notable Nativity from Valens – October 25, 50 CE

“We will make use of illustrations for the diagnosis of the above matters, setting a notable nativity at the beginning. Let the Sun be in Scorpio, the Moon in Cancer, Kronos in Aquarius, Zeus in Sagittarius, Ares in Scorpio, Aphrodite in Libra, Hermes in Scorpio, the Ascendant in Libra.”

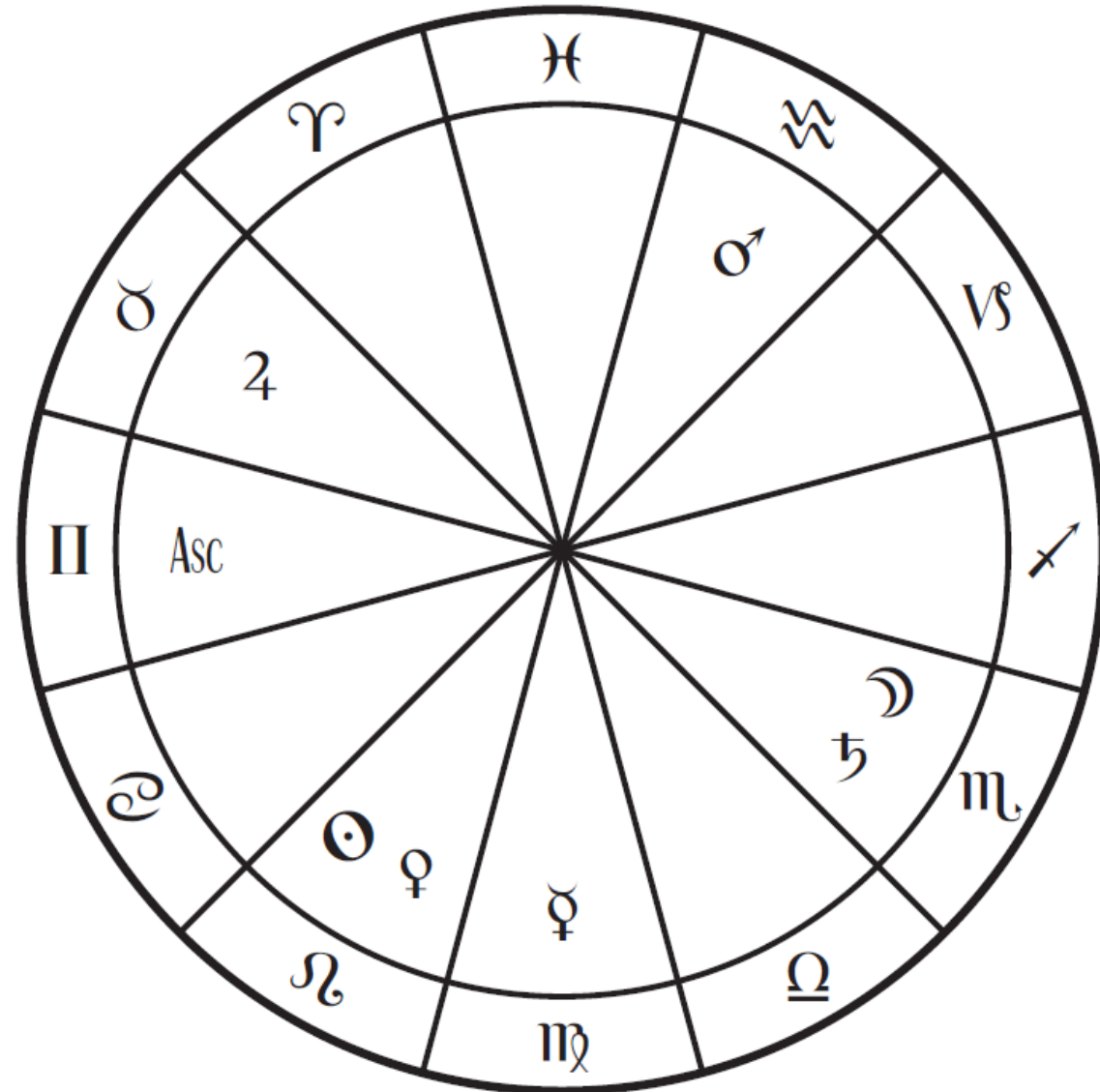
*Valens, Anthology, 2, 22: 1–9,
trans. Schmidt, p. 33.*



Example from Dorotheus – May 2/3, 43 CE

“Now I assign to you things [which] I will make clear to you if you wanted to judge the native in the matter of assets and good fortune. A native was born with the Ascendant Gemini, and the positions of his planets in the circle were according to this image.”

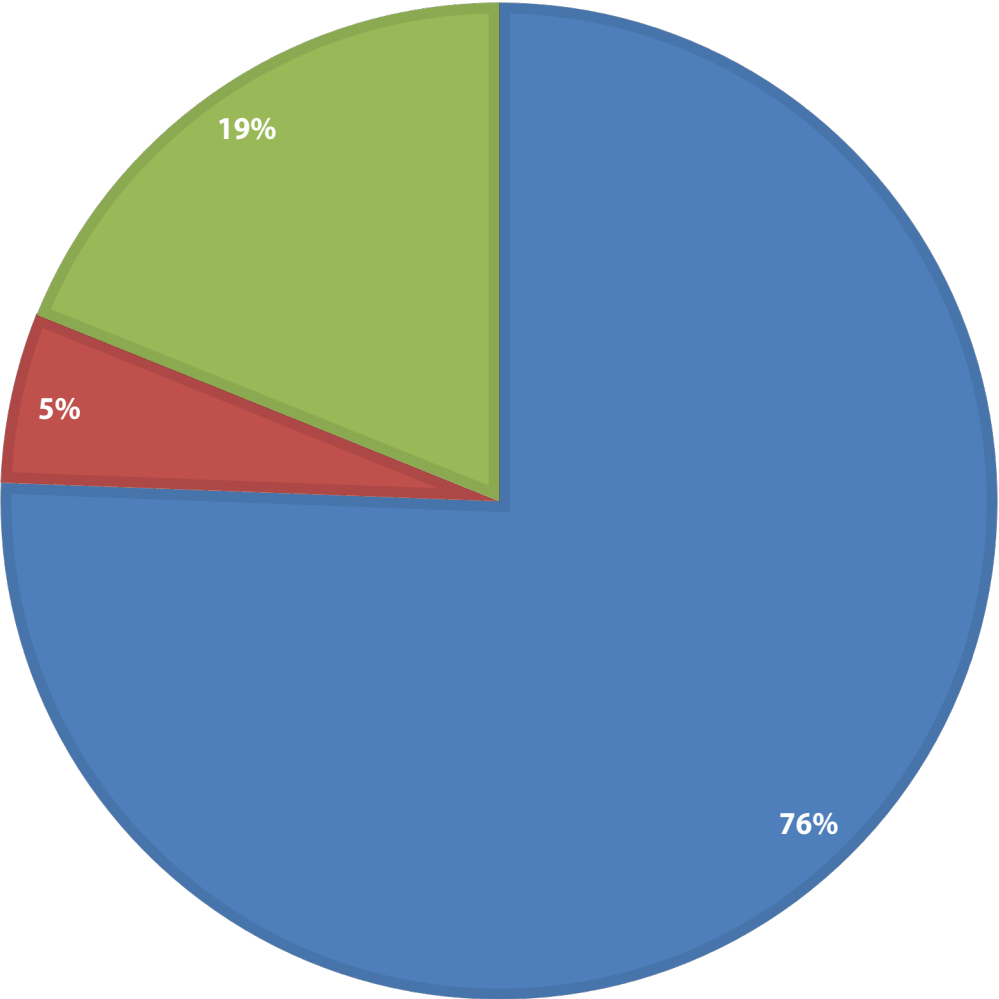
Dorotheus, *Carmen*, 1, 24 (26): 1–4,
trans. Dykes, p. 81.



Distribution of Literary Charts

■ Rising Sign ■ Rising Degree ■ Degree of ASC and MC

Only Rising Sign	96
Only Rising Degree	7
Degree of ASC and MC	24





Conclusions Drawn From Literary Charts

- The vast majority of literary charts still used WSH.
- However, quadrant houses do show up more than before.
- Especially true later in the Hellenistic tradition.
 - Most charts that list the MC come from Rhetorius and Palchus.
 - c. 500 CE forward
- Only a few calculate intermediate house cusps explicitly.



Overall Conclusions from Surviving Charts

- Data shows that whole sign houses was the predominant form of house division in the Hellenistic tradition.
- True both in the standalone charts and the literary charts.
- Raises the question:
 - How did the other forms of house division come about?
 - What were they used for?



The Origins of the Approaches



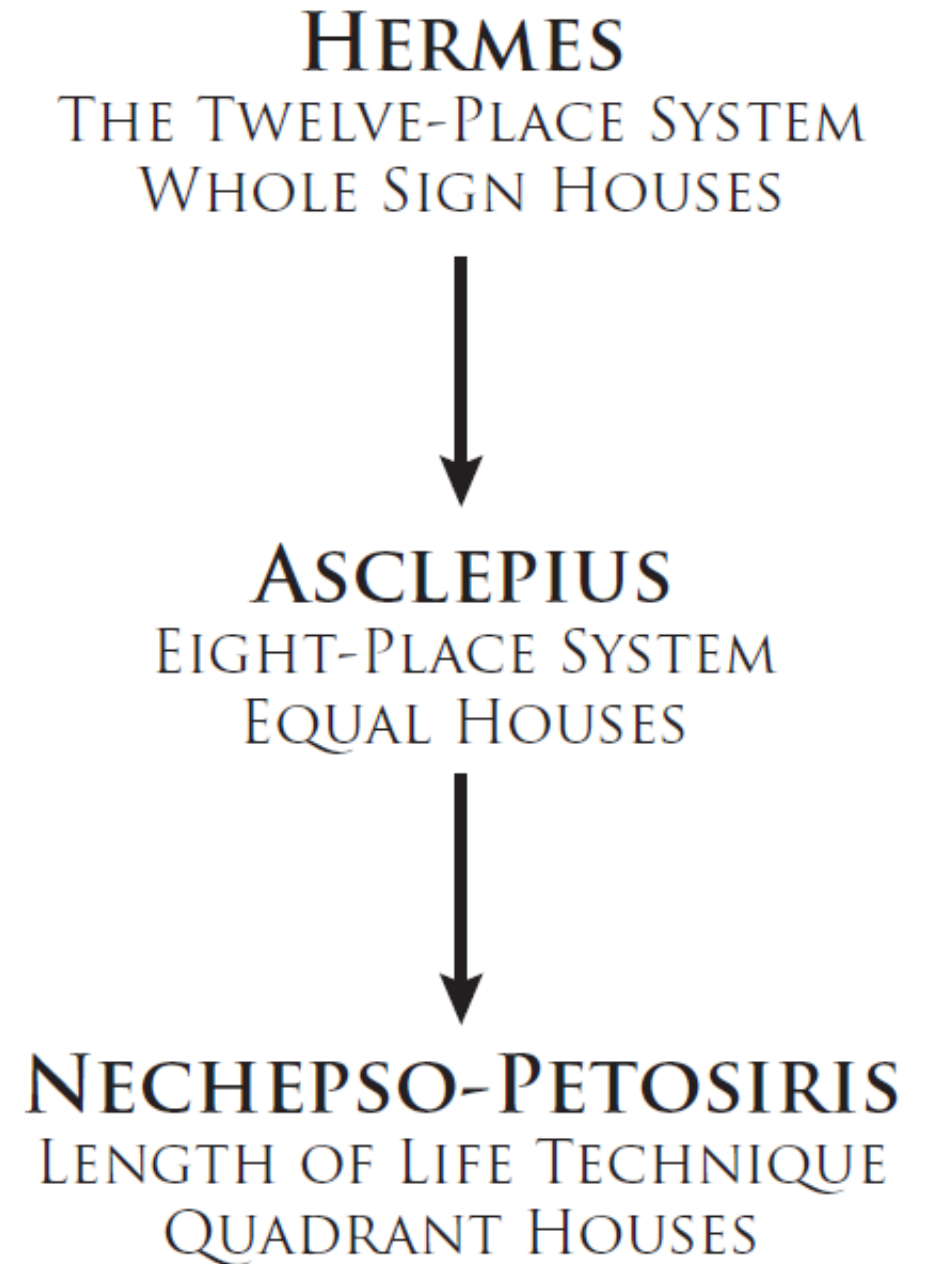
Firmicus Maternus on the Founders of Hellenistic Astrology

“We have written in these books all the things which Hermes and Hanubius handed down to Asclepius; which Petosiris and Nechepso explained; which Abraham, Orpheus, and Critodemus wrote, and all the others knowledgeable in this art.”

Firmicus Maternus, *Mathesis*, 4, proem: 5,
trans. Bram, p. 118, modified.

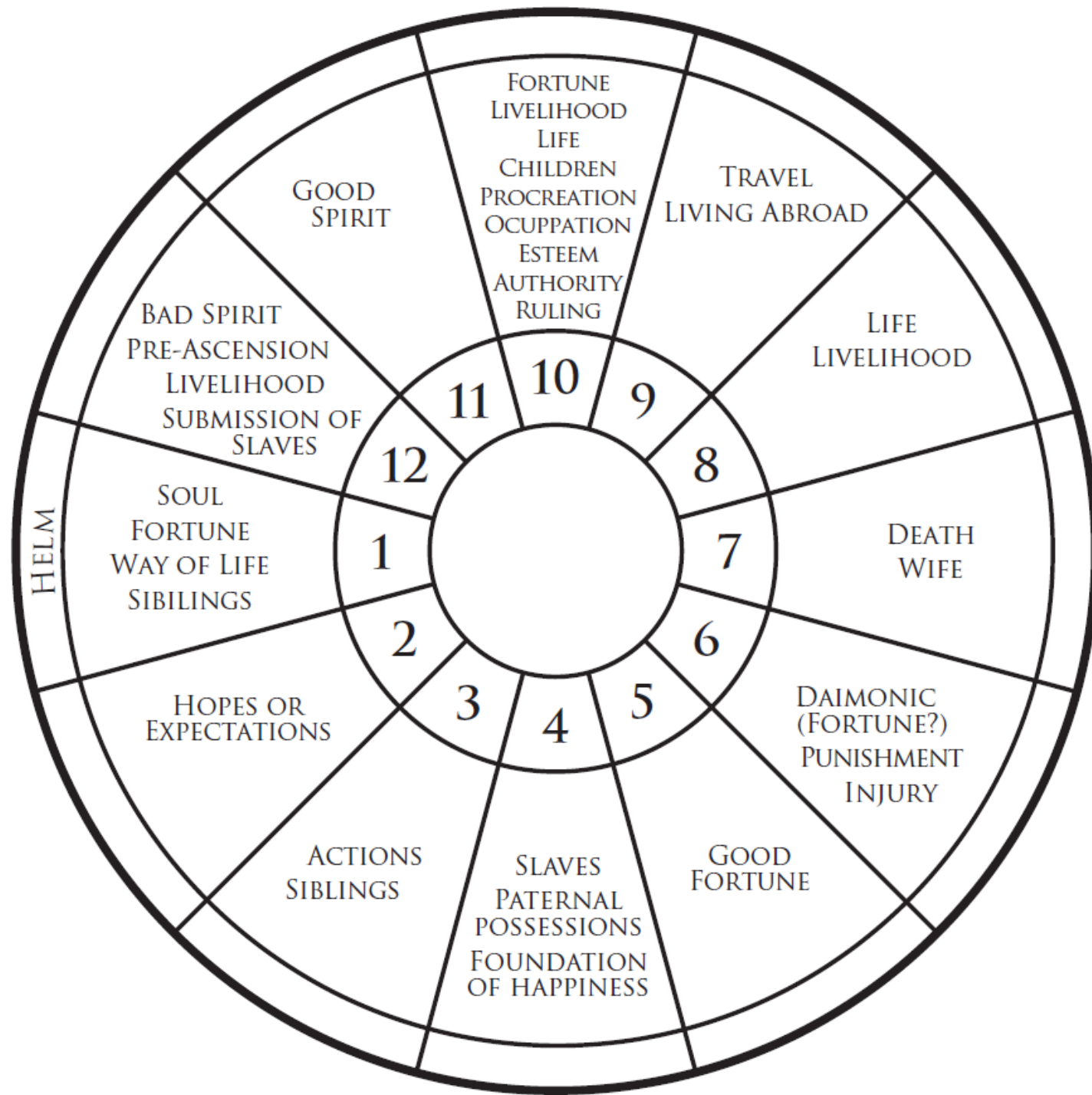
Three Foundational Texts

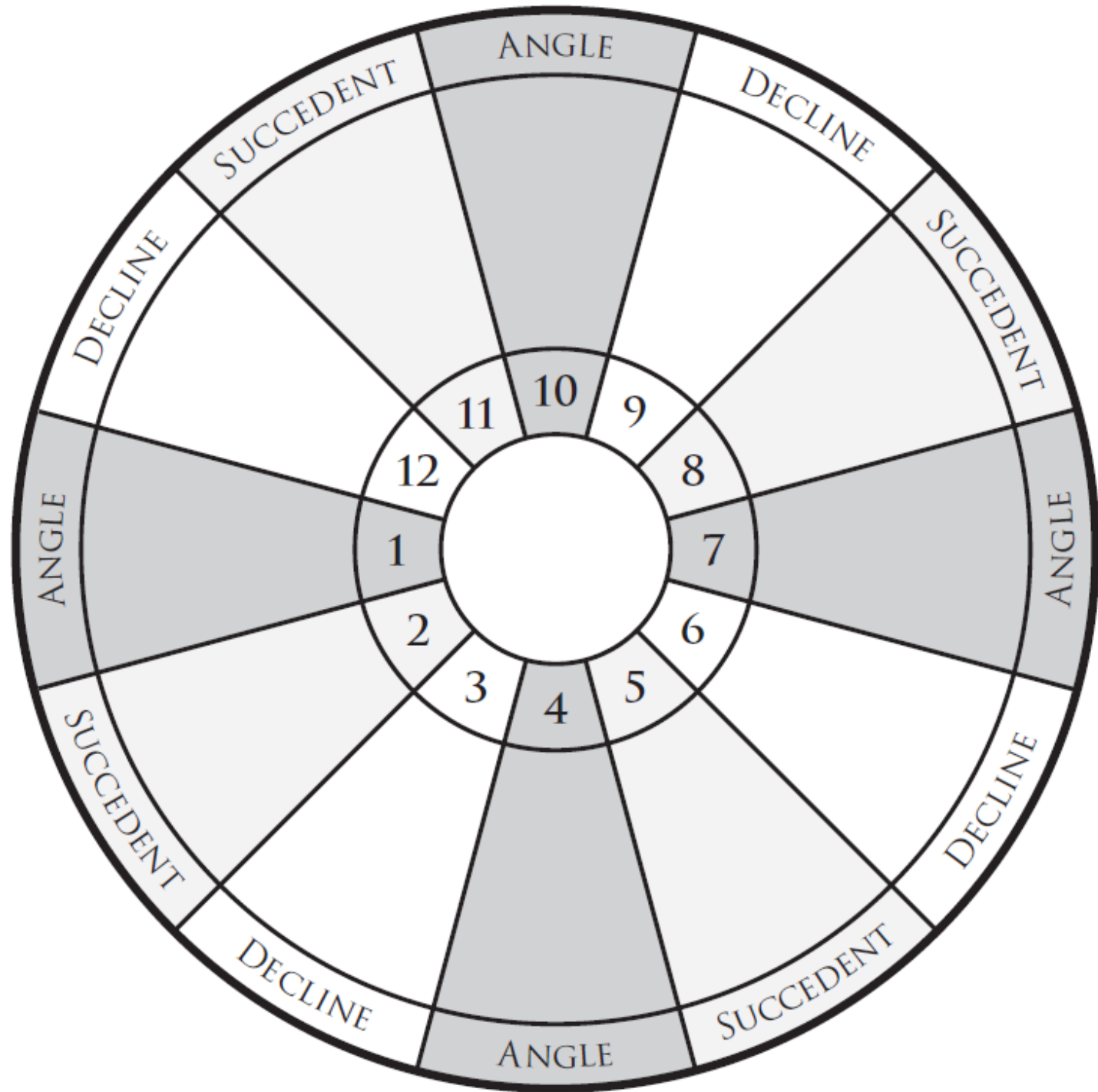
- Written around 100 BCE.
- Outlined some of the earliest core doctrines of western astrology.
- Introduced the technical concept of the twelve houses.
- Each introduced a different form of house division.
- Argument outlined in my book in chapters 2, 4, 10, and esp. 11.

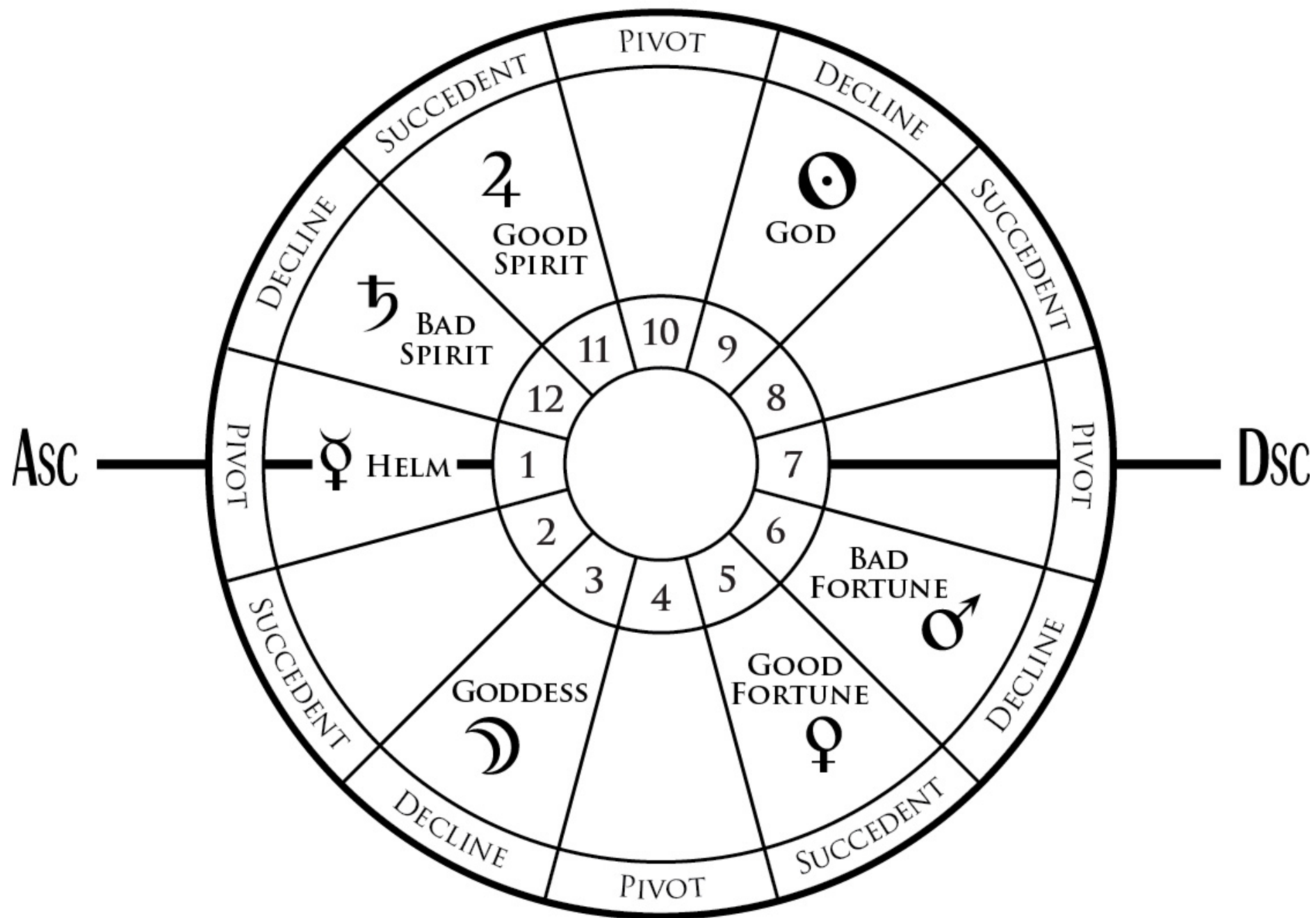


Twelve-Place System of Hermes

- Possibly introduced the concept of the 12 houses.
- Earliest datable set of significations for the houses.
 - Mentioned by Thrasyllus.
- Some significations became standard later in tradition.
 - Other significations dropped.
- Introduces angularity, joys, etc.



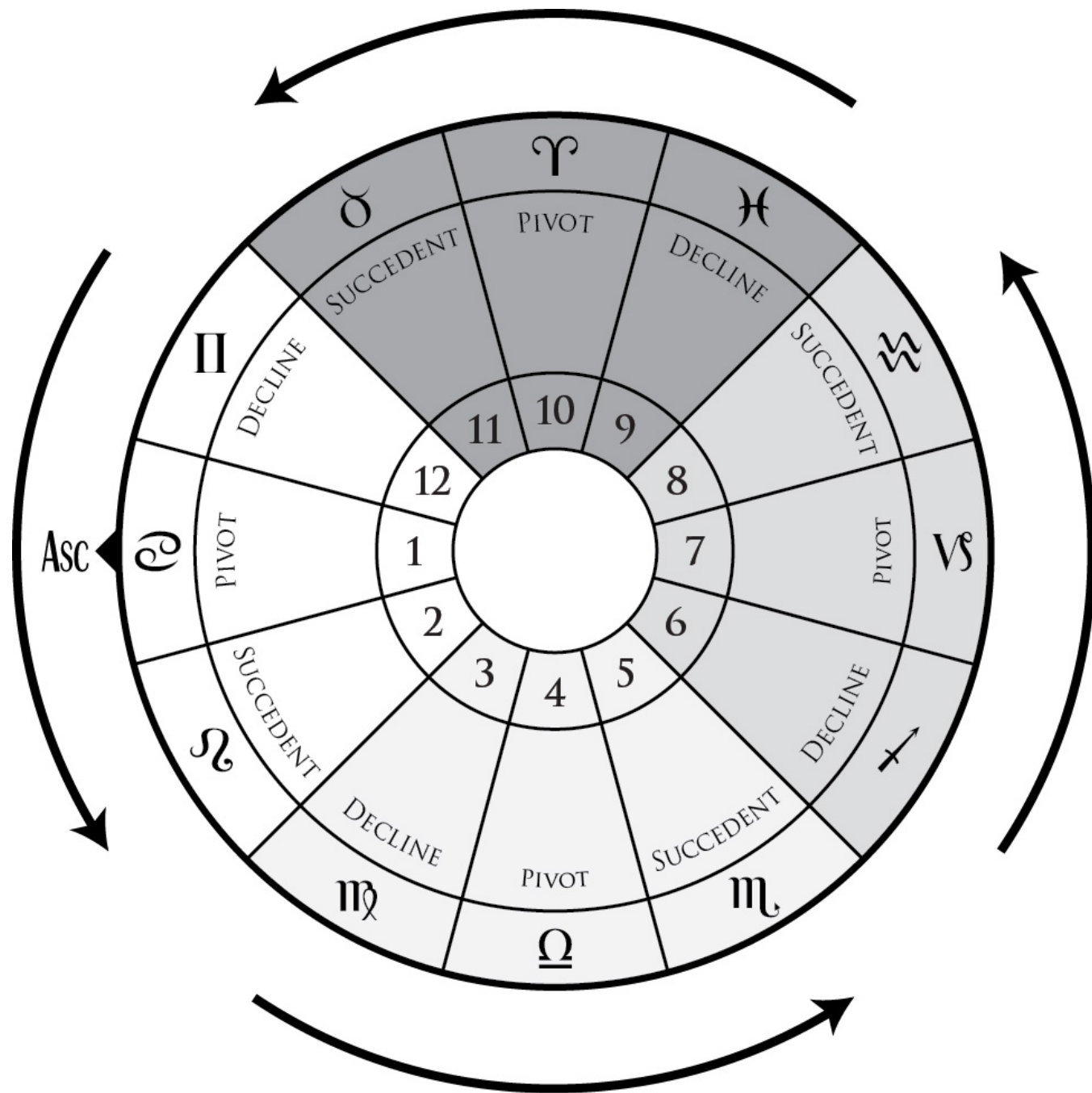




Olympiodorus on Angularity

“The succedents are taken from the angles. For since there are four angles — the Ascendant, Midheaven, Setting, Subterraneous — one must know that the leading **zodiacal sign** (*zoidion*) for each angle is called a decline. The one which is following the angle [is] a succedent. Such as: for the nativity of the Cosmos, let Cancer mark the hour, Aries culminate, Capricorn set and let the Subterraneous Pivot be Libra. Pisces is the decline of Aries, Taurus the succedent; Leo is the succedent of Cancer, Gemini the decline, since Cancer is following. [...] One must take [it] in the same way for each nativity. And those following from the angles are called succedents, but those leading them declines.”

Olympiodorus, *Commentary*, 7, trans. Greenbaum, p. 84, modified.



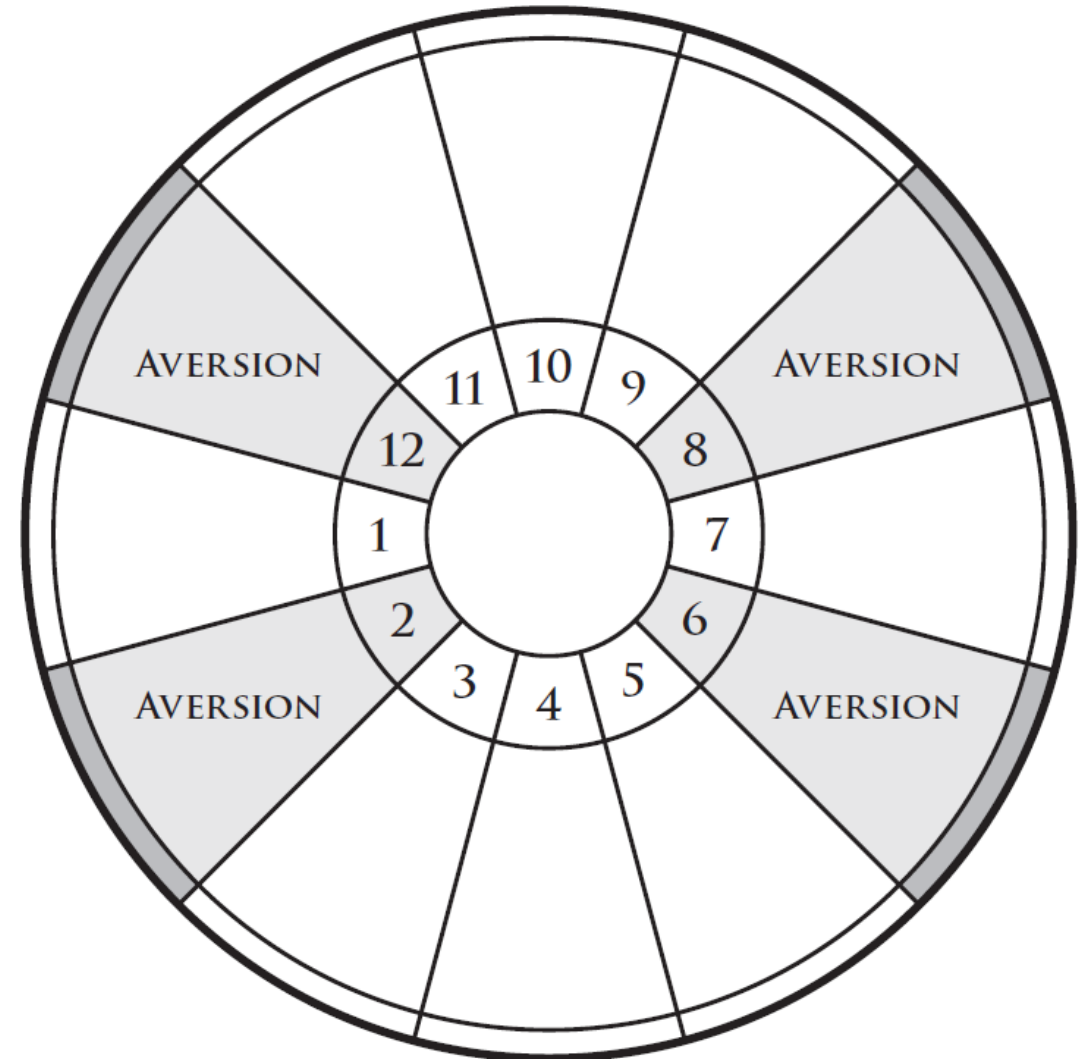
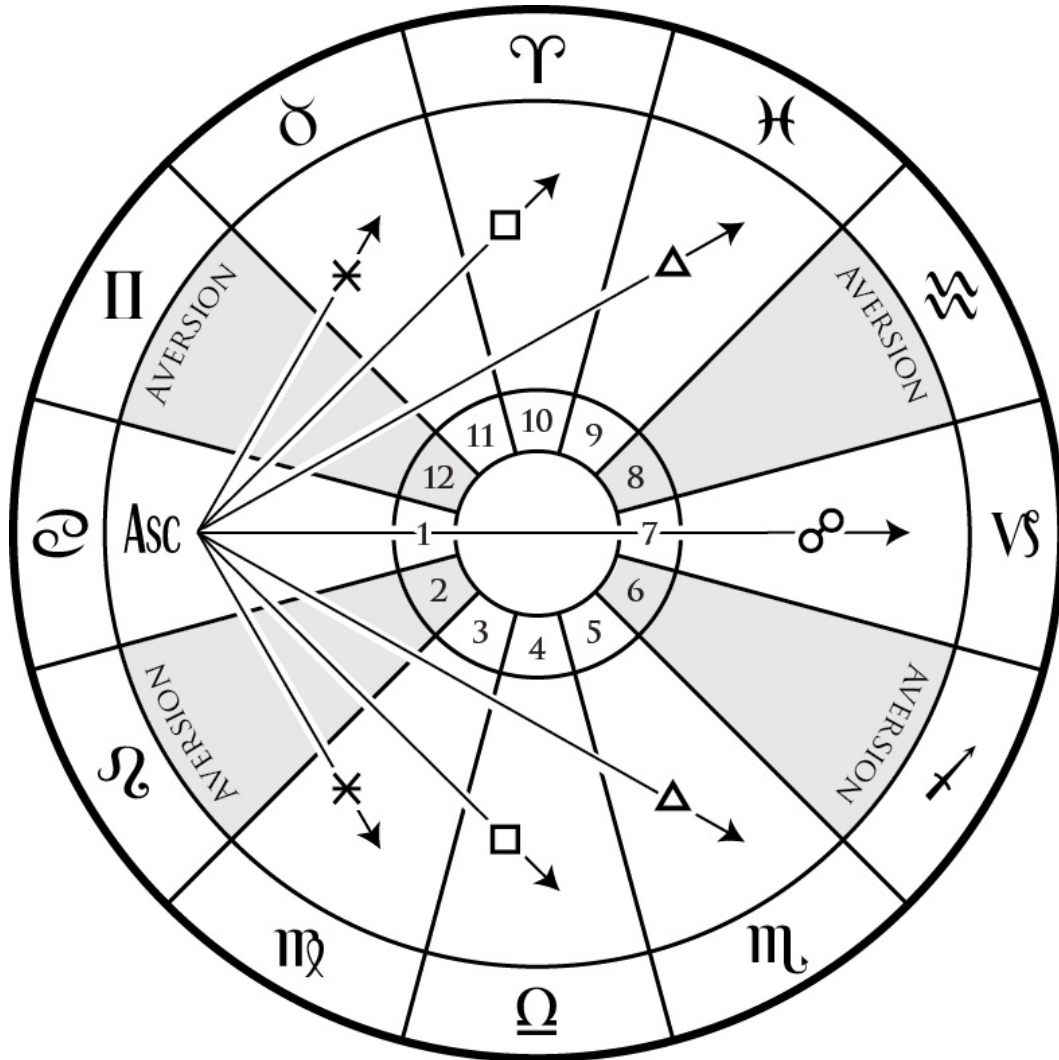


Hermes on the Advantageous Places, as Cited By Timaeus in Thrasyllus

“Following Timaeus, they say that seven **zodiacal signs** (*zōidia*) lend themselves to conduct of advantageous business – I mean the four pivots (*kentra*): the Hour-Marker and Midheaven and Descendant and Anti- Midheaven; the two trigonal figures to the Hour-Marker, and the postascension of the Midheaven. The remaining are without ability to bring advantage.”

Antiochus, *Summary*, 19, trans. Schmidt, *Definitions and Foundations*, p. 279, modified.

Significations of Difficult Houses Partially Based on Lack of Aspect to Rising Sign



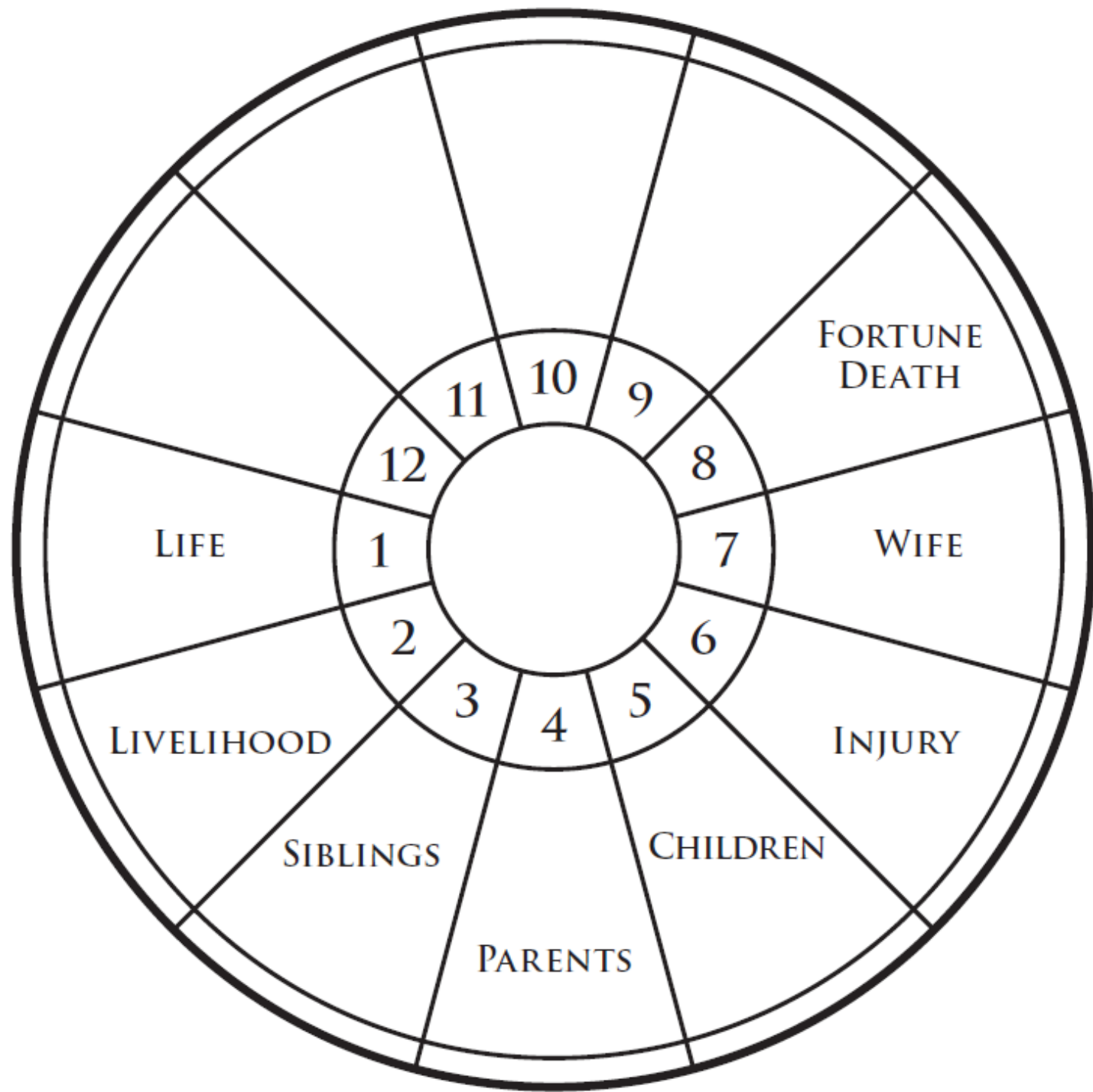
The Asclepius Text

- Text introduced an alternative set of house significations.
 - For just the first eight houses.
 - *Octatropos*: “eight-turning” or “eight-place system.”
- It also seems to have outlined the concept of equal houses.
 - Valens and Firmicus both seem to mention equal houses in connection with the Asclepius material.
- Asclepius text seems to have used both whole sign houses and equal houses at the same time.
 - Not clear if it was just about planetary strength or if it also pertained to overlapping significations.



Eight-Place System of Asclepius

- Alternative set of significations for the first eight houses.
- Modifies some of Hermes significations.
 - Death moved from 7th to 8th.
- Retains others.
 - Injury in 6th, wife in 7th.



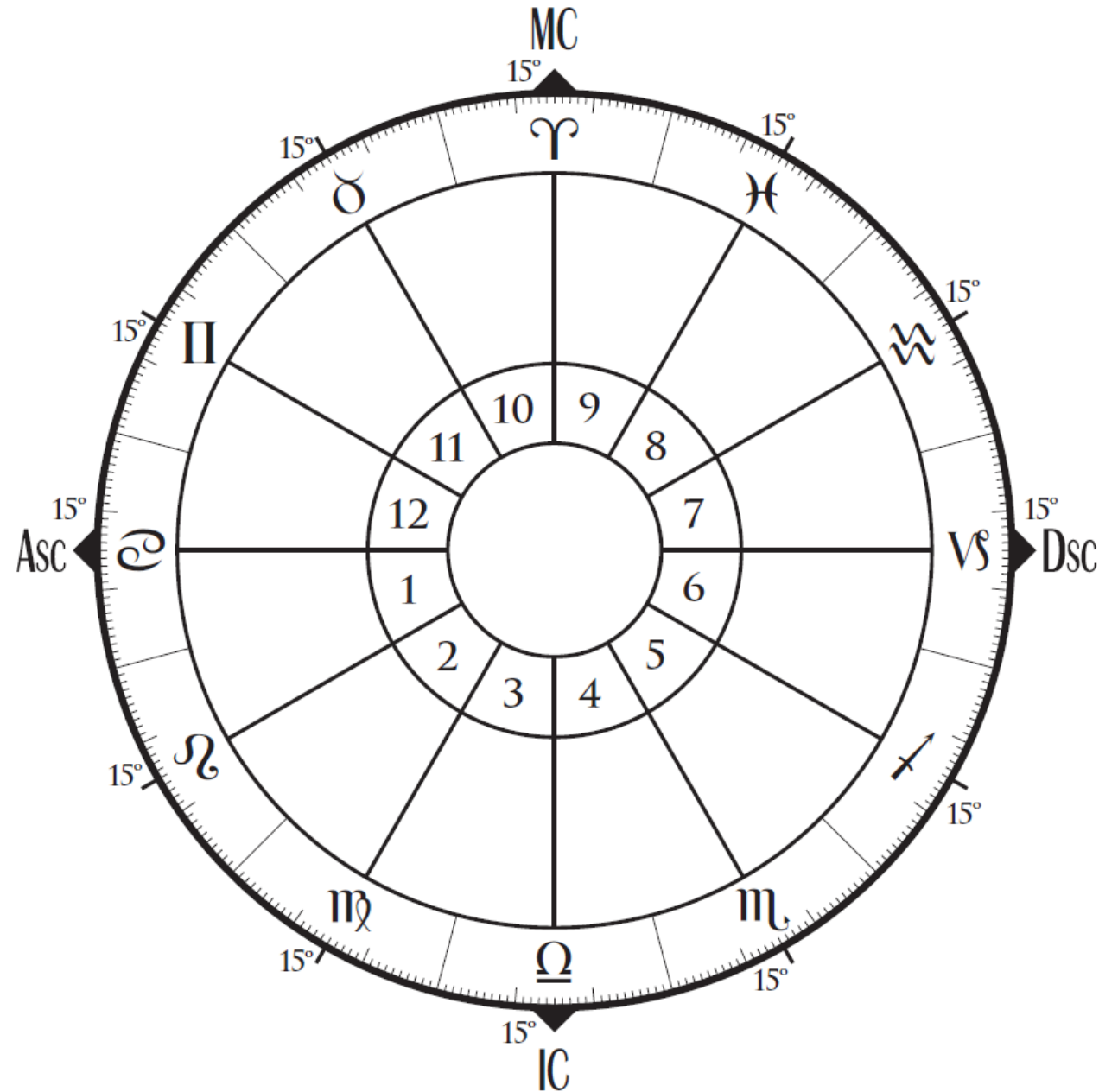
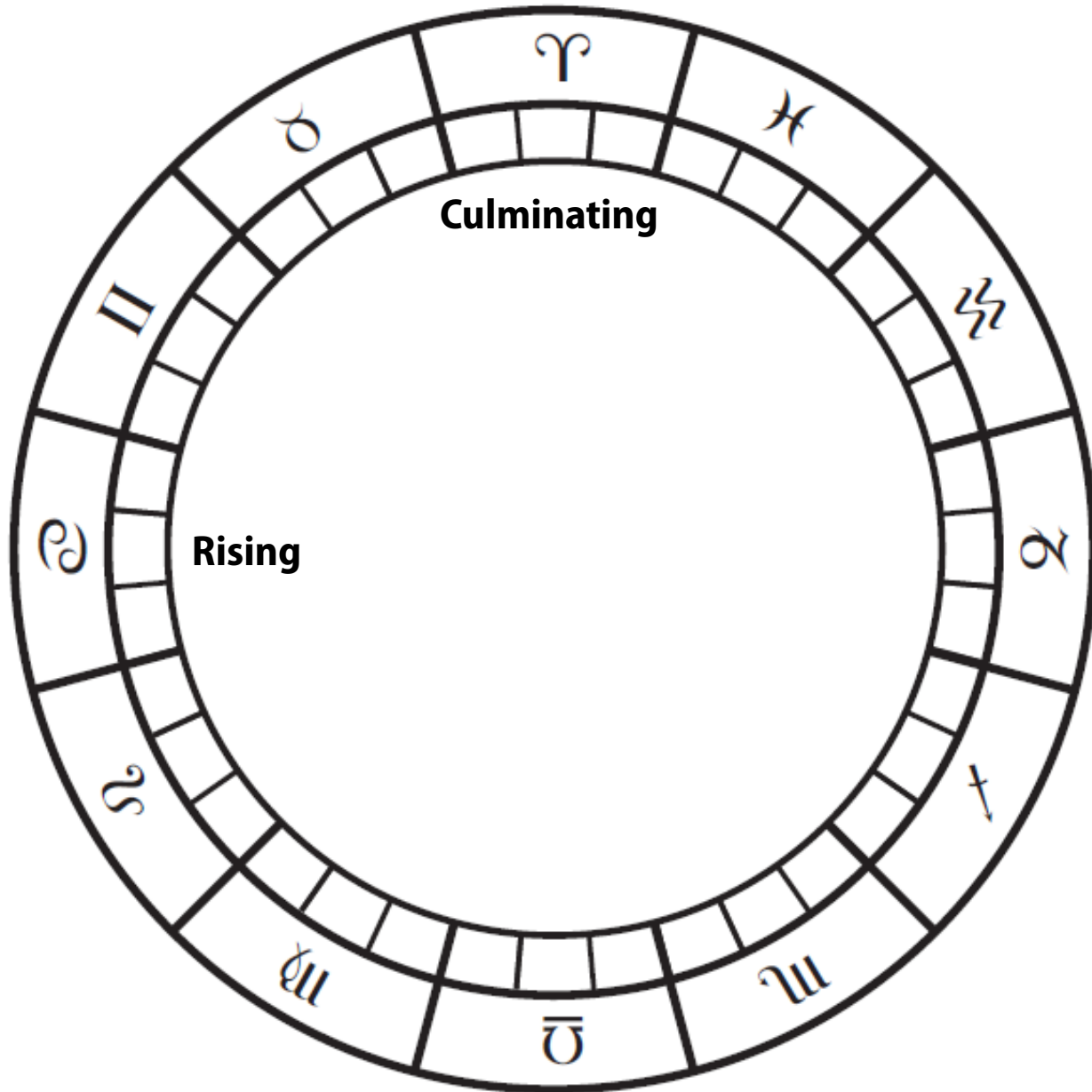


Valens Drawing on the Asclepius Text in Discussion About Equal Houses

“First of all, it is necessary to calculate the positions of the places in degrees: count from whatever point has been determined to be the Ascendant until you have completed the 30° of the first place; this will be the Place of Life. Then proceed until you have completed another 30°, the Place of Livelihood. Continue in the order of signs. Often two places will fall in one sign and will indicate both qualities according to the number of degrees each one occupies. Likewise examine in which sign the ruler of the sign is and which place it controls (according to its degree-position in the horoscope).”

Valens, *Anthology*, 9, 3: 21-25, trans. Riley, p. 154, modified.

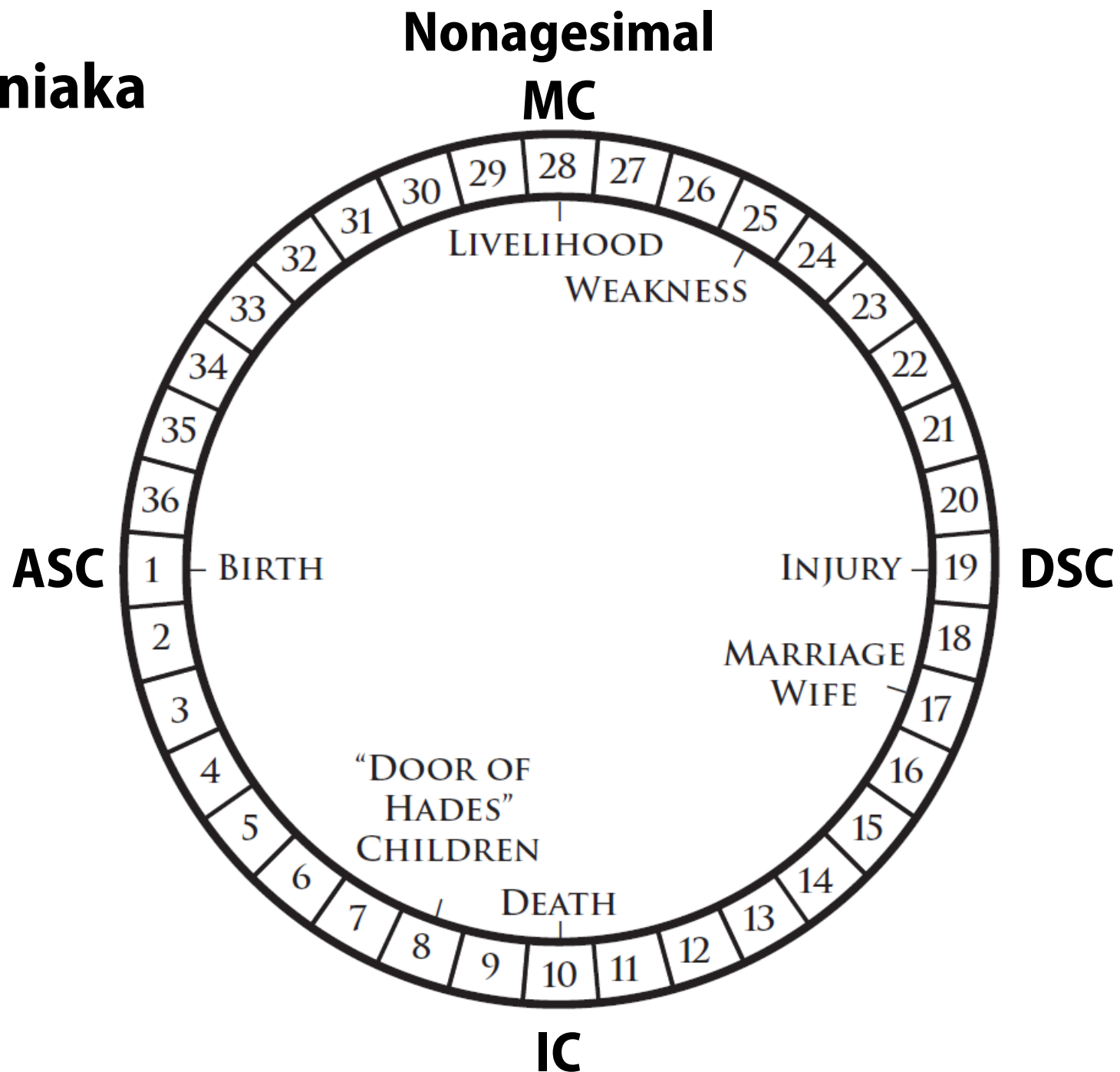
Origins of Equal House MC in Culminating Decan?




Hephaestio on the Salmeschoiniaka

“And one must also examine the decans, since the first decan of the Ascendant deals with birth; **the 28th from the Ascendant, which culminates early, deals with livelihood**; the 25th, which culminates at noon, deals with sickness; the [1]9th, which rises late in the east, deals with injury; the 17th, which rises in the west, deals with marriage and wives; the 8th, door of Hades, deals with children, the one in the subterraneous [angle] deals with death. These are the places that the ancient Egyptians used in every nativity.”

- Hephaestio, *Apotelesmatika*,
2, 18: 75–6, trans. Schmidt



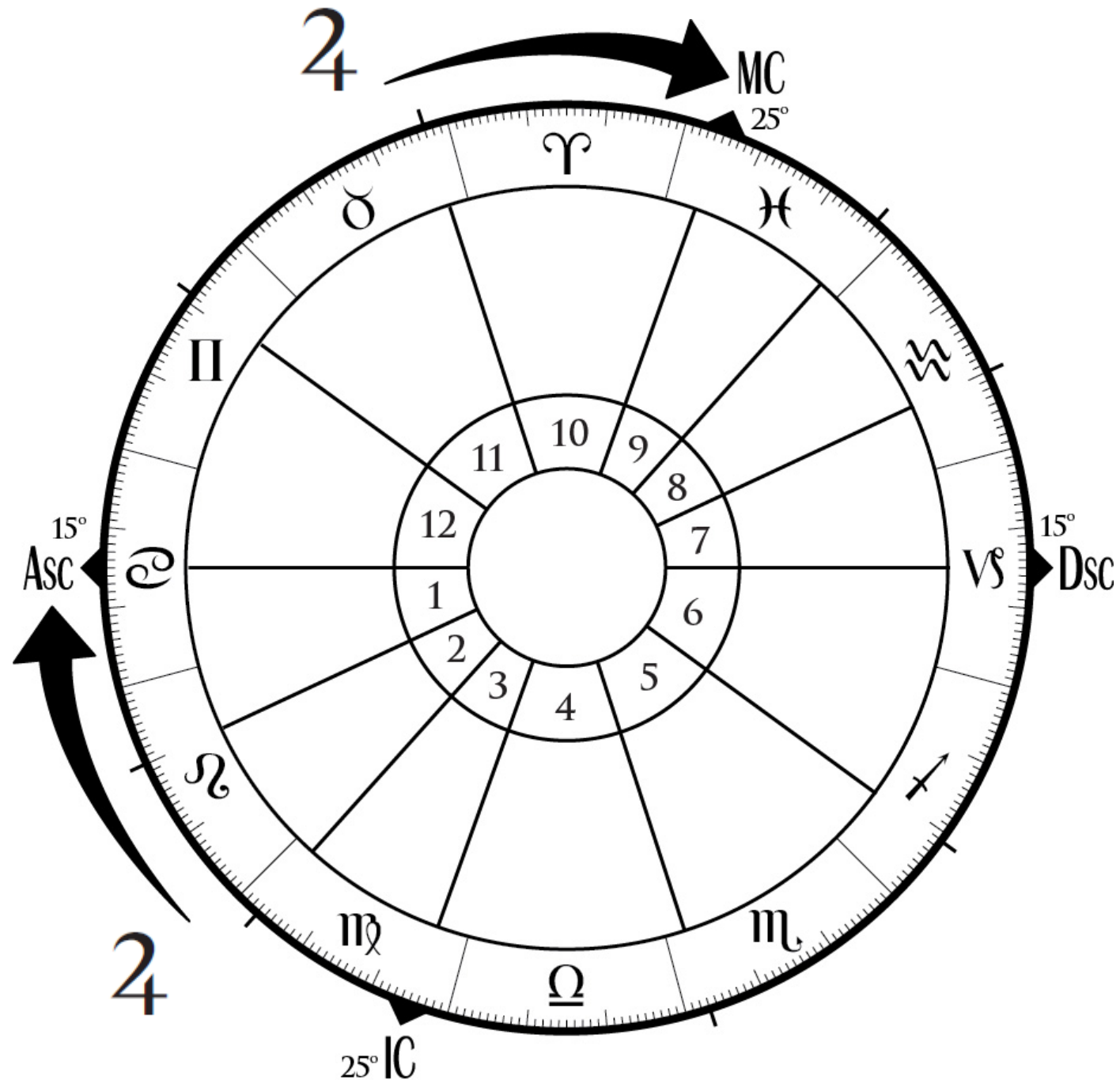


The Nechepso-Petosiris Text

- Outlined the common length of life technique.
 - Utilized primary directions.
- Focused on angularity in order to determine the predominating planet to start from.
 - Must be strong to represent the life force or vitality.
 - See episode 205 of the podcast on the Master of the Nativity.
- Texts often switch to degree-houses in this discussion.
 - To determine planetary strength.
- Range after the degrees of the angles deemed powerful.
- Planets prepare to rise, culminate, set, and anti-culminate.

Quadrant Houses for Dynamic Strength

- Range of degrees following angles deemed “busy”
- Planets at ASC rise or will rise.
- Planets at Meridian MC reach highest elevation.
- Originally just a loosely defined range after the angles.
- Later standardized with Porphyry and Alcabitius houses.





Differing Interpretations of Source Text

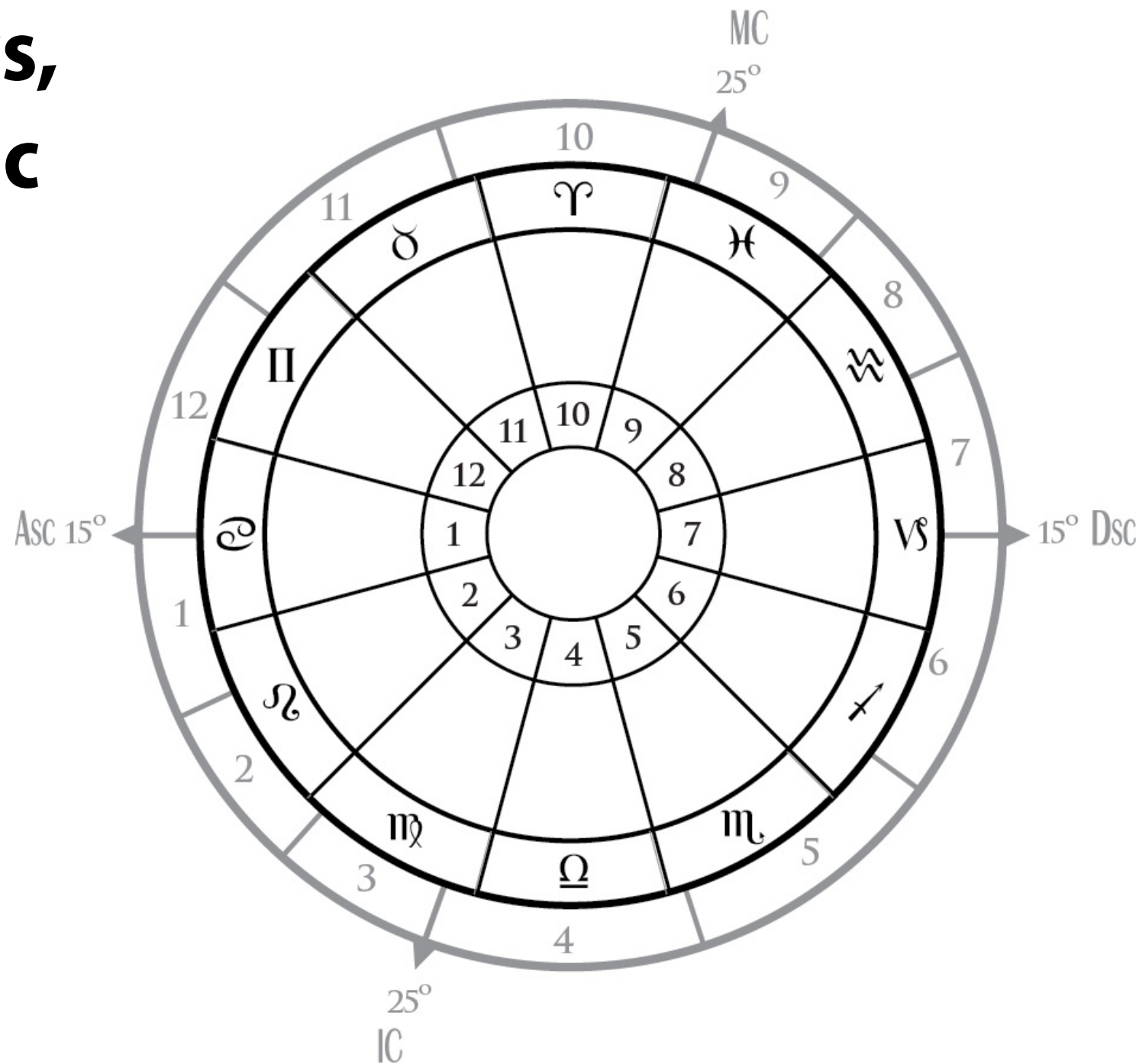
- Length of life technique probably from Petosiris originally.
- Uses ambiguous directional language for houses.
- Different interpretations may have led to variants.
 - Valens uses Porphyry houses for length of life.
 - Ptolemy uses Equal houses.
- Should east and west be interpreted strictly or generally?
 - What does the text mean by east and west?
- Multiplicity of house systems arises from textual ambiguity.



Later Attempts to Synthesize the Approaches

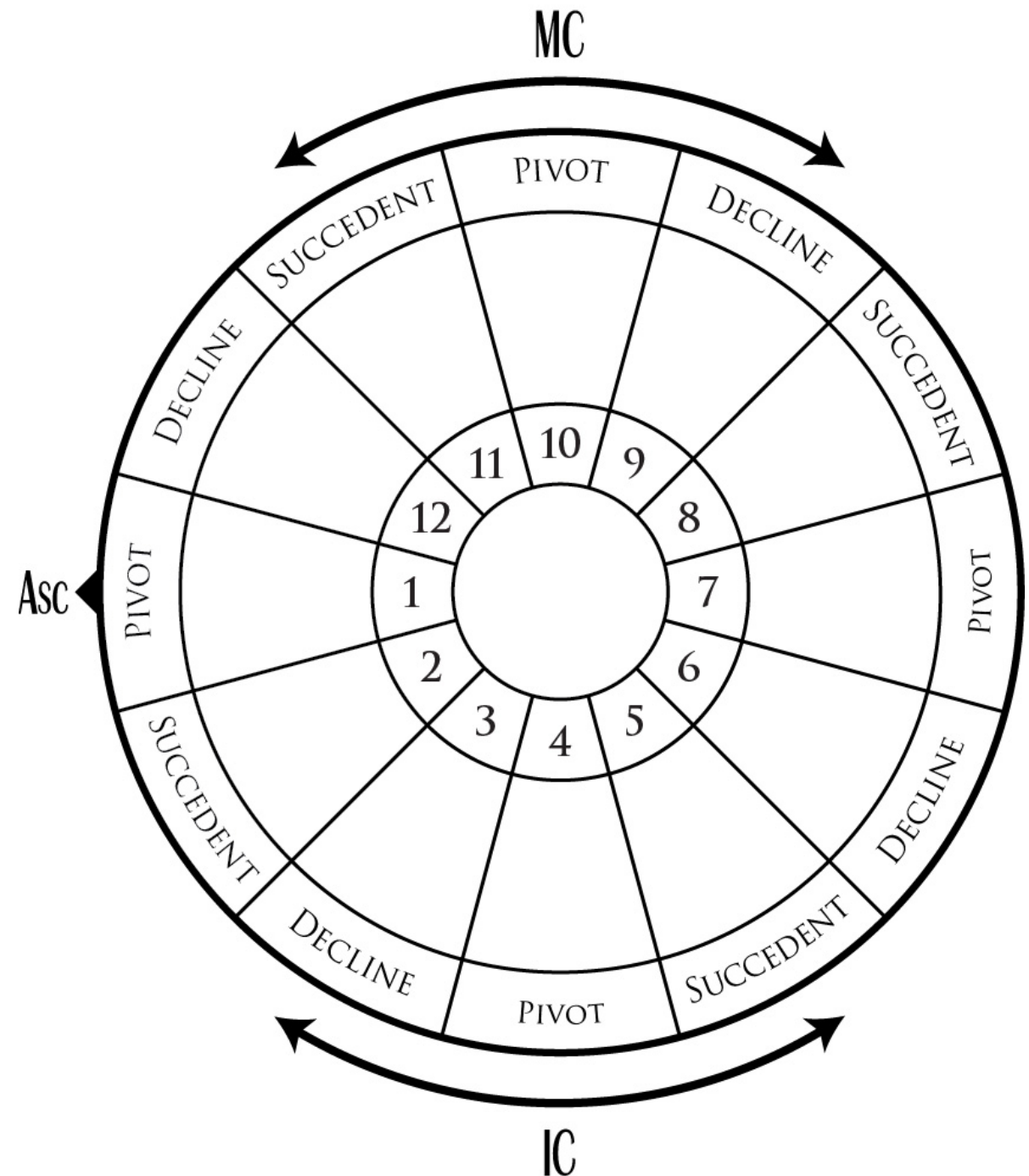
Whole Sign for Topics, Degrees for Dynamic

- Valens and Ptolemy use whole sign houses most of the time for topics.
 - Ptolemy switches to equal for determining planetary strength.
 - Valens switches to quadrant for determining strength.
 - Both in the length of life treatment.



Floating MC and IC Points

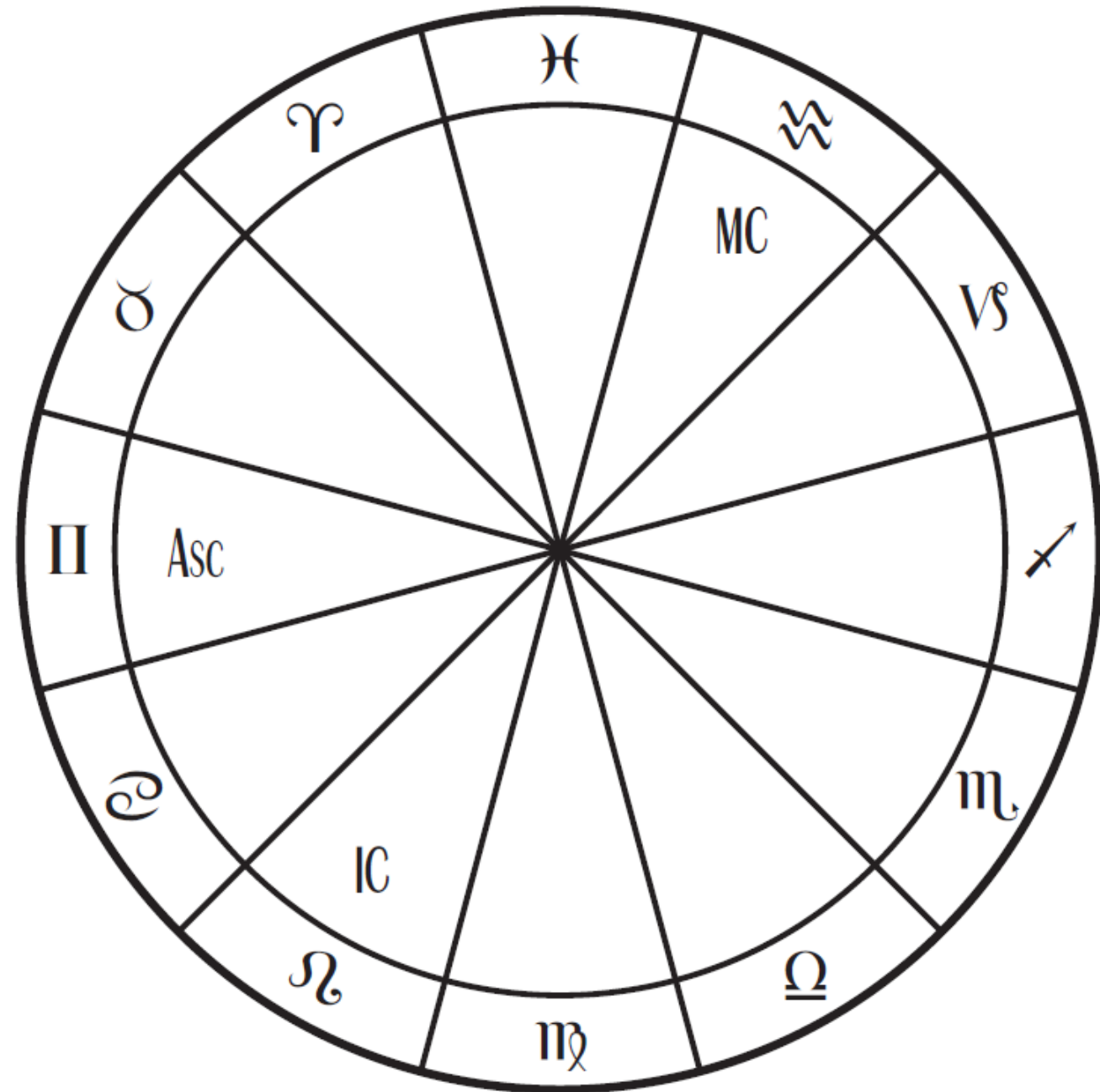
- Valens uses the degree of the quadrant MC topically.
- Degree of MC and IC float around top and bottom half of the chart.
- Sensitive points.
- Mark signs with their significations.
- Import 10th and 4th house significations into other signs.
- Double up significations.



Valens on the MC

“As with the Ascendant in Gemini, the Midheaven in Aquarius by degree. This place, then, possesses the relation concerning activity and reputation and children, and also that concerning a foreign land and god since zodiacally it is found in the 9th from the Ascendant [...] Similarly also, the diameter of Aquarius (that is, Leo), which is the subterraneous angle, possesses the relation concerning foundations, buildings, and parents, as well as that concerning god and siblings and a foreign land.”

- Valens, *Anthology*, 5, 6: 66–67,
trans. Schmidt, p. 30.





Later Hellenistic Synthesis and Transmission

- Rhetorius uses both whole sign and quadrant houses.
- Firmicus may be doing the same, but with equal houses.
- Attempt to use both simultaneously.
- Alternates between sign vs degree.
 - Not always clear if degree is for topics or dynamic considerations.
- Both drawing on earlier source text, maybe Asclepius.
- Question about how much this represents earlier tradition.
- What did the original source text say?



Rhetorius Delineating Planets in Houses Both By Sign and By Degree

“The Moon chancing to be of the sect, in the Midheaven sign (*zōidion*), on the same spot as the angle (*homokentros*), will produce great rulers, kings, rulers of life and death. Chancing to be in the Midheaven place [only] according to sign (*zōidiakōs*): those who are great in their actions and in those efforts with which they are entrusted or which they do for their own benefit, those who receive money.”

- Rhetorius, *Compendium*, 57 (CCAG, 8, 4: p. 170: 5–9), trans. Holden, p. 95, modified



Antiochus/Porphyry on Using Both Sign-Based and Degree-Based Aspects

“They call the configurations of the stars towards each other bearing witness. There are the following figures: the trigon is through five [intervals], whenever there are three zodiacal signs between the two; the tetragon is through four [intervals] whenever there are two zodiacal signs between them, the diameter is through seven [intervals] whenever there are five in the middle, and the hexagon is through three [intervals], whenever there is one between them. . . . It is necessary to consider if the figures are perfect by degree and not only by zodiacal sign. The triangular figure is at an interval of 120 degrees, the square at an interval of 90 degrees, the hexagon at an interval of 60 degrees, the diameter at an interval of 180 degrees. For often [stars] are configured according to zodiacal sign, but no longer according to degree.”

- Porphyry, *Introduction*, 8, trans. Demetra George, unpublished, modified



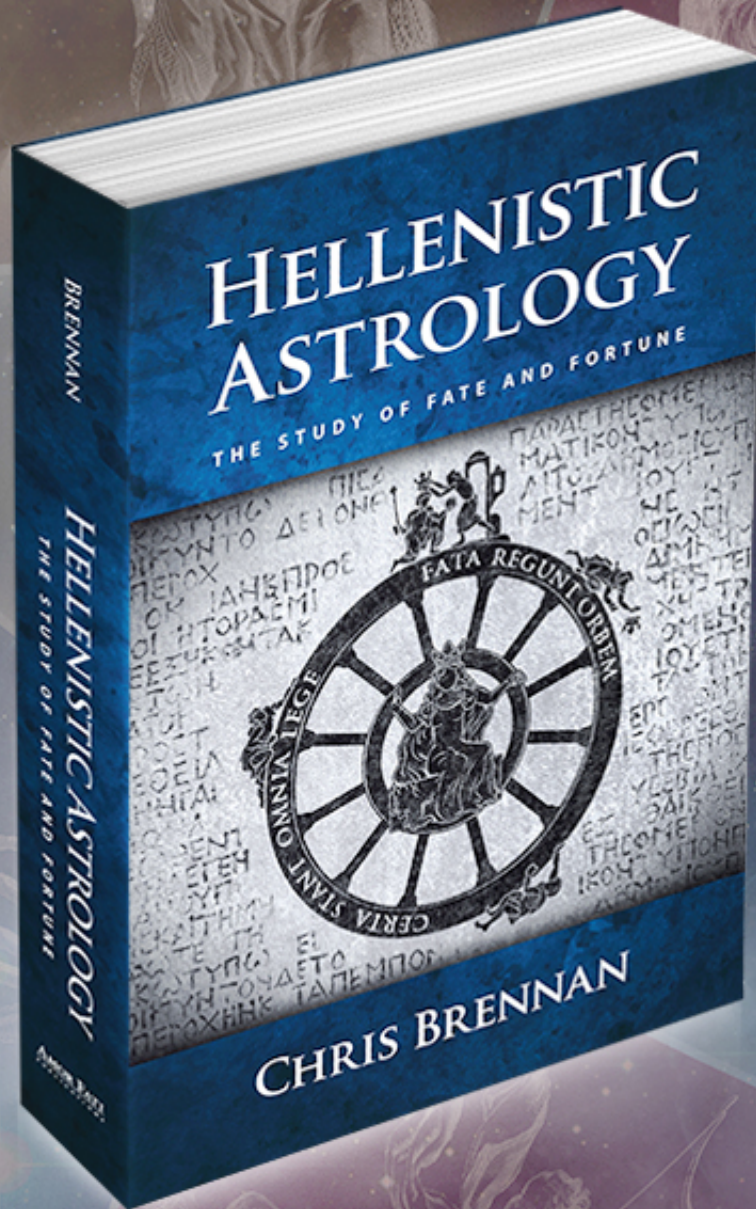
Later Transmission

- Fall of Roman Empire led to the decline of Hellenistic astrology.
- WSH usage initially continued in the early Medieval tradition.
 - Masha'allah and Sahl primarily used whole sign houses, due to being influenced by translations of Dorotheus and Valens.
- Shift towards quadrant houses happened after the 9th century.
- Turning point may have been Abu Ma'shar.
 - He tried to use both whole sign and quadrant houses.
 - When there was a conflict, showed a preference for quadrant houses.
 - Discussed in ep 218, Abu Ma'shar on Solar Returns, with Benjamin Dykes.
- After this point it becomes a question of which quadrant system to use.
 - Many new quadrant systems introduced during and after Medieval tradition.
 - Knowledge of WSH was lost by late Medieval and Renaissance traditions.



Recognizing the Symbolic Importance of Each Approach

- Each approach has its own unique symbolic significance.
 - WSH focuses on the rising and culminating signs in their entirety.
 - Equal focuses on the rising and highest degrees of the zodiac.
 - Quadrant focuses on highest elevation of the planets.
- A synthesis of the systems is desirable.
- Should equal and quadrant be used just dynamically?
 - Or should they be used for topical purposes?
 - Should whole sign houses be used for dynamic or just topics?
- Different astrologers will come to different conclusions.
- To each his own. The important point is to choose your approach deliberately and know why you are doing it.



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A photograph of ancient Greek temple ruins, likely the Temple of Apollo at Delphi, featuring several tall, fluted columns and stone steps. The scene is set against a sunset sky with the sun low on the horizon over the sea. A semi-transparent dark grey box is overlaid on the center of the image, containing the text.

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