

This is an excerpt of the entire chapter on house division in ancient astrology from the book by Chris Brennan titled *Hellenistic Astrology: The Study of Fate and Fortune*, Amor Fati Publications, Denver, CO, 2017, pp. 365–414.

## CHAPTER 11 THE ISSUE OF HOUSE DIVISION



While the whole sign system appears to have been the primary form of house division in the Hellenistic tradition, it was not the only form, and other methods of dividing the diurnal rotation into different sectors were developed and employed for different purposes. Many of the modern debates about house division have their origins in the ambiguous way in which different house systems were used by the Greco-Roman astrologers, and even the precise role of the different forms of house division is still a matter of ongoing debate amongst those who research Hellenistic astrology today. Here I will attempt to provide an overview of some of the main points related to the house division issue and suggest some tentative conclusions, although I consider this to be an area of ongoing research and debate.

I want to first begin this section by citing a couple of later Medieval sources for their characterization of the earlier Hellenistic tradition as they were looking back on it a few centuries later. In the critical edition of the commentary on Paulus by the sixth-century astrologer Olympiodorus, there is a short chapter in Greek that explains how to calculate quadrant houses.<sup>1</sup> The editor, Emilie Boer, set this chapter in a smaller typeface in the critical edition, essentially bracketing it as possibly not belonging to the original text at all, and instead potentially being a later Medieval insertion.<sup>2</sup> While this excerpt probably comes from a later

<sup>1</sup> Olympiodorus, *Commentary*, 23, ed. Boer, pp. 75–78; trans. Greenbaum, pp. 118–120.

<sup>2</sup> That this passage was probably a later Medieval interpolation was recently pointed out by Schmidt, *The So-Called Problem of House Division*, pp. 56–58. This was necessary because it had recently generated some discussion as possible evidence for quadrant houses in the late Hellenistic tradition since it appears in Olympiodorus (e.g. Hand, *Whole Sign Houses*, pp. 16–

Medieval source, perhaps as late as the fourteenth century, the opening remarks that the author makes are illuminating, because they explicitly acknowledge that the earlier astrologers used the whole sign house system:

There has come to be a certain amount of difference and ambiguity for the astrologers concerning the division and separation of such twelve places. For they define the whole place as the zodiacal sign (*zōidion*) itself, whose degree is found marking the hour or culminating.<sup>3</sup>

There is a similar statement in a Medieval text called the *Book of Aristotle*, which its editors attributed to the late eighth century astrologer Māshā'allāh.<sup>4</sup> In this passage the author says that there has been disagreement amongst the astrologers about the concept of the Ascendant, and that some say that the first house begins around the actual degree of the Ascendant, while others say that the entire sign that contains the Ascendant is the first house, even if the Ascendant is located in the very last degree of the rising sign.<sup>5</sup> This seems to establish that, at least by the Medieval tradition, astrologers were wrestling with a dual inheritance: a tradition in which sometimes houses began with the rising sign, and other times with the rising degree. How did this confusion come about?

### **The Midheaven and the Three Forms of House Division**

Broadly speaking, there were three different approaches to house division in the Hellenistic tradition: (1) whole sign houses, (2) equal houses, and (3) quadrant houses. All three appear to have originated very early in the Hellenistic tradition, although they are not all mentioned with the same frequency in the surviving texts. Additionally, sometimes one approach or the other is mentioned more

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17), and because the bracketing convention in the critical edition that flagged it as a possible interpolation was not properly conveyed in the Greenbaum translation of the chapter. In the critical apparatus for this passage Boer says that this chapter only exists in the β manuscript tradition, which was evidently produced in the fourteenth century in the school of John Abramius (as noted in Pingree, *Yavanajātaka*, vol. 2, p. 428). Pingree had warned elsewhere that in copying other texts such as Hephaestio, “Abramius has felt free to make extensive changes, omitting long passages, adding many others, and altering both the expression and sometimes the contents of a large number of passages.” Pingree, “The Astrological School of John Abramius,” p. 202. Thus, this chapter cannot be taken for granted as being by Olympiodorus, but instead may derive from a later Byzantine source. I am indebted to Levente László for clarifying some of the manuscript details for me.

<sup>3</sup> Olympiodorus, *Commentary*, 23, ed. Boer, p. 75: 24–27, trans. Greenbaum, p. 118, slightly modified.

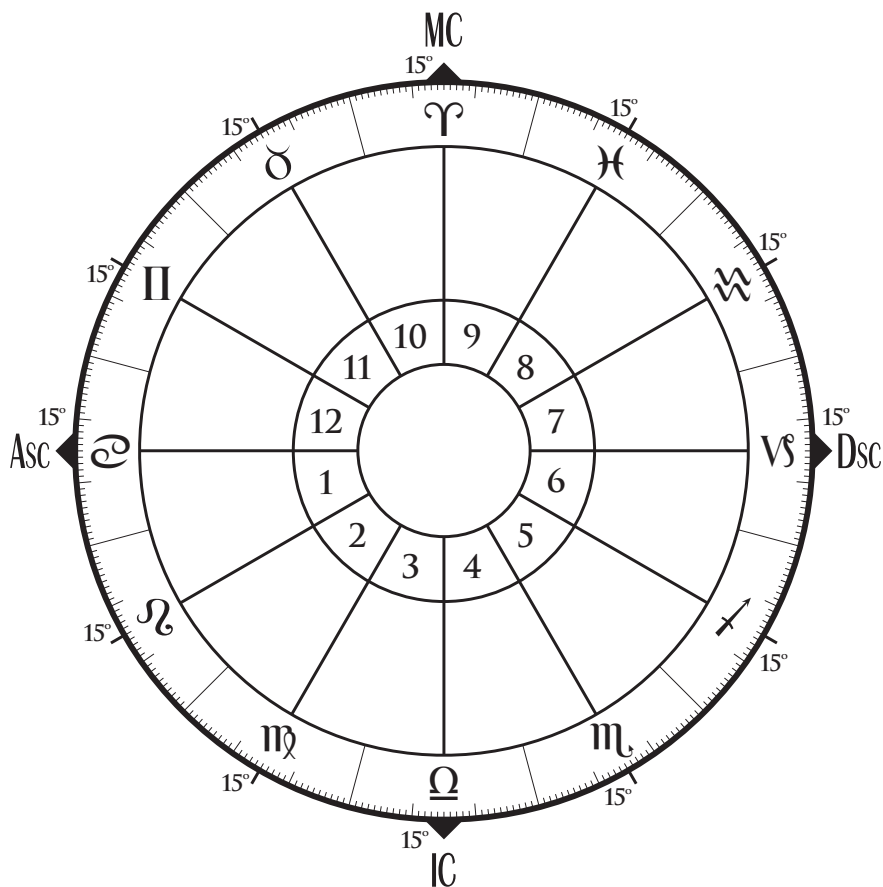
<sup>4</sup> *The Liber Aristotilis of Hugo of Santalla*, 1, 4, ed. Burnett and Pingree.

<sup>5</sup> For a translation see Dykes, *Persian Nativities*, vol. 1, p. 15.

frequently within the context of certain techniques or measurements, which may imply that some house systems were originally developed for the purpose of specific techniques, and may not have been used at all times for more general purposes.

The existence of three different approaches to house division seems to partially have its origins in the fact that there are three different ways of defining the concept of the “Midheaven.” Many of the early Hellenistic astrologers tend to focus on the tenth sign relative to the rising sign, and typically when the Midheaven is mentioned without qualification this seems to be what they are referring to: the tenth whole sign house. The second point that can be referred to as the “Midheaven” is the degree that is at the top of the chart, exactly 90° from the degree of the Ascendant, which is sometimes known in modern times as the nonagesimal, from the Latin word for ninetieth. In the equal house system the nonagesimal becomes the cusp or starting point of the tenth house. Finally, the third point that is called the “Midheaven” is the degree of the meridian, which is the point where the north-south axis or *meridian* intersects the ecliptic. The Ascendant and Descendant are not always exactly due east or due west, but instead will shift slightly over the course of a day. The meridian or north-south axis, however, does not shift and is always exactly due north-south. Therefore, the relationship of the meridian and the point opposite to it (the IC) shifts with respect to the Ascendant-Descendant axis, and quadrants of varying size created by these two axes are the result. Since the Ascendant and horizon become a fixed reference point, when viewed on a two-dimensional diagram, the intersection of the meridian and the ecliptic becomes a specific degree of the zodiac that moves around the top half of the chart relative to the Ascendant-Descendant axis, and does not necessarily always fall in the tenth sign relative to the rising sign. In quadrant house systems the degree of the meridian becomes the starting point of the tenth house. For the sake of clarity, in what follows I will refer to this point as the “meridian,” “meridian-Midheaven,” or “quadrant Midheaven.”

These three different approaches to defining what the Midheaven is leads to three different ways of calculating the houses. The first approach to house division is whole sign houses, where, as outlined above, once the rising sign is identified, each of the twelve houses are measured out relative to it by assigning one house to each sign of the zodiac, so that each house starts and ends with the beginning and end of the signs. In other words, what modern astrologers refer to as the “cusp,” which is the beginning of each house, becomes the dividing line between the signs in this approach. Each house consists of exactly thirty degrees, since that is the length of each of the signs of the zodiac. Additionally, there are exactly twelve houses because there are twelve signs, and this is probably the



*Figure 11.1 - Equal House System*

reason why there are twelve houses in western astrology to begin with, rather than some other number such as eight or thirty-six.

The second approach to house division is known today as the equal house system. In order to calculate equal houses in a chart, you start with the degree of the Ascendant and then measure forward 30° in zodiacal order (counterclockwise). That entire span of degrees, from the degree of the Ascendant to the same degree in the next sign becomes the first “house” or sector. Then you measure out each of the subsequent houses in thirty-degree increments from that degree. For example, if the Ascendant is located at 15° of Cancer in a chart, then in equal houses the first house will extend from 15° Cancer to 15° Leo, the second house will extend from 15° Leo to 15° Virgo, the third house from 15° Virgo to 15° Libra, and so on.

The third approach I will refer to as quadrant house systems. In quadrant houses you first determine the exact degree of the Ascendant, the meridian,

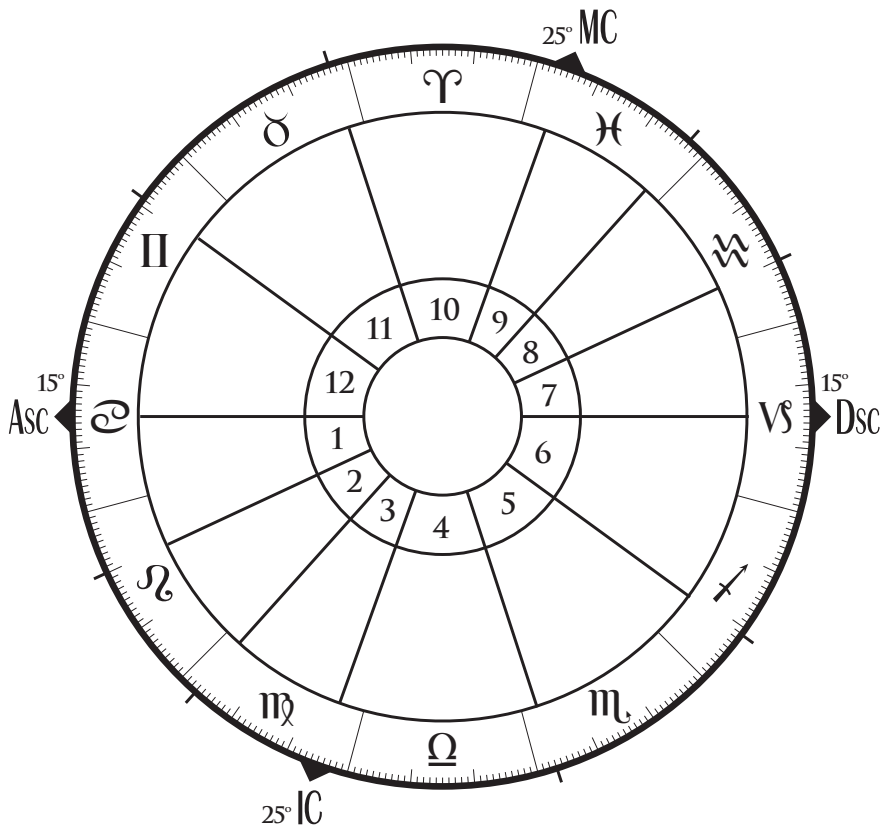


Figure 11.2 - Quadrant House System

the Descendant, and the point opposite the meridian, which we will call the *Imum Coeli* or IC, following the modern convention. You then trisect the arc between these four pairs of degrees, in each of the four quadrants that they establish in the chart. In the most common method in the Hellenistic tradition, which is known today as Porphyry houses, each quadrant is divided evenly into thirds by degrees on the ecliptic. So, for example, you would take the degree of the Ascendant and the degree of the meridian, and then divide the space between them into three parts evenly, depending on how many degrees lie between them in a given chart. You then repeat the same process for the other three quadrants, with the degrees between the meridian and Descendant, the degrees between the Descendant and IC, and then finally the degrees between the IC and Ascendant. The result is that each quadrant is broken up into thirds, and each of those thirds becomes one of the twelve houses. Unlike whole sign houses and equal houses, in this approach the houses will not usually consist of

exactly thirty degrees each, but will tend to vary in size.

Broadly speaking, these are the three different approaches to house division that were used by the Hellenistic astrologers. In what follows I will make the argument that all three approaches were introduced very early on in some of the foundational texts of the Hellenistic astrological tradition: whole sign houses in the Hermes text, equal houses in the Asclepius text, and quadrant houses in the Nechepso-Petosiris text(s). The whole sign house system became the primary form of house division, while the quadrant and equal house systems were typically used as a secondary overlay, oftentimes only within the context of specific techniques, such as the method for determining the length of life. Eventually this usage was expanded so that they came to be used for more general purposes alongside whole sign houses in the late Hellenistic tradition, although still evidently as secondary overlays. The Medieval astrologers initially continued this tradition of using both whole sign and quadrant houses together, but eventually quadrant houses completely eclipsed the whole sign approach in the later Medieval and Renaissance traditions for reasons that are unclear.<sup>6</sup> After the ninth century, knowledge of the whole sign house system as a concept was slowly forgotten.

### **General Survey of Surviving Horoscopes**

I want to begin by first providing a general survey of the use of each of the three approaches to house division, based on the evidence that survives in horoscopes from the first century BCE through the sixth century CE. What we will find is that the whole sign house system is the only approach that could have been used in the vast majority of the surviving horoscopes.

One of the most compelling pieces of evidence about the pervasiveness of whole sign houses in the Hellenistic tradition is the fact that while hundreds of horoscopes survive, the vast majority of them only list the sign that the Ascendant was located in at the time of the native's birth, and they usually do not mention the exact degree of the Ascendant, nor do they record the degree of the meridian-Midheaven.<sup>7</sup> This point is important because the whole sign system is the only approach where you only need to know the rising sign in order to calculate the twelve houses. The exact degree of the Ascendant is required in order to calculate equal houses, while both the exact degree of the Ascendant and meridian-Midheaven are needed in order to calculate quadrant houses. Let's take a look at some specific numbers in the surviving horoscopes in order

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<sup>6</sup> For an analysis of the use of whole sign houses and quadrant houses together in the early Medieval tradition see Dykes, *Works of Sahl and Māshā'allāh*, pp. xxxviii–lix.

<sup>7</sup> This point was originally made in Hand, "Signs as Houses," pp. 135–143.

to get a sense of how many charts are involved when I say that the majority only list the rising sign.<sup>8</sup>

A number of standalone charts or horoscopes survive from the Hellenistic tradition and have been published in different collections. These “horoscopes” are usually just small pieces of papyrus that only record the positions of the planets in a person’s birth chart. During an astrological consultation, the recorded positions from the papyrus would be recreated on a horoscope board by the astrologer in order to present the delineation.<sup>9</sup> Thus the surviving individual horoscopes that we have are the raw data needed in order to interpret a chart, and they are essentially the ancient equivalent of a modern printed astrological chart that a client might take to different astrologers in order to have them interpret it. In Neugebauer and Van Hoesen’s collection, *Greek Horoscopes*, there are approximately thirty-eight standalone charts that only record the sign of the Ascendant, and thus could only be used to calculate whole sign houses.<sup>10</sup> Most of the planetary positions in these charts are only given by sign. For example, here is a chart written on a piece of papyrus that has been dated to March 11 or 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 Hour-Marker.<sup>11</sup>

Most of the other standalone charts look very similar to this one. This particular chart is interesting because it actually says that the sign Scorpio is itself the Hour-Marker or first place, thus acknowledging the power of the Ascendant to mark or designate the first sign in the sequence of whole sign houses. In contrast

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<sup>8</sup> Robert Hand originally proposed a similar approach and tallied up the number of charts that contained references to the Ascendant or Midheaven in “Signs as Houses,” pp. 138–142. One of the points that he noted is that while most Greek horoscopes contain the Ascendant, few of them explicitly record the position of the Midheaven. I decided to recount all of the horoscopes in some of the major collections myself in order to be clear about when specific degrees are mentioned versus just signs, and the numbers that follow are based on that research.

<sup>9</sup> As pointed out in Evans, “The Astrologer’s Apparatus,” pp. 3–4.

<sup>10</sup> These are called “original documents” in Neugebauer and Van Hoesen, *Greek Horoscopes*, pp. 14–75. The dates range from the late first century BCE to the late fifth century CE.

<sup>11</sup> Neugebauer and Van Hoesen, *Greek Horoscopes*, No. 150, pp. 47–48, translation slightly modified to say “Hour-Marker” instead of the printed “Horoscopes.”

with the thirty-eight standalone charts in *Greek Horoscopes* that simply record the Ascendant by sign, there are only seven standalone charts that give the actual degree of the Ascendant. These charts could have been used to calculate either whole sign or equal houses, in theory, although in practice most of these likely would have employed whole sign houses as well. Finally, there are only three standalone charts in *Greek Horoscopes* that included both the degree of the Ascendant and the degree of the meridian-Midheaven, and thus could have been used to calculate quadrant houses. Even here there is some ambiguity, since sometimes, even when an author calculated the degree of the Ascendant and meridian, they would still use whole sign houses, as we will see later in Valens. Nonetheless, it is only in these three charts that quadrant houses could have been calculated at all, whereas there are seven charts that could have been used to calculate equal houses or whole sign houses, and thirty-eight charts where only the whole sign house system could have been used.

We find similar numbers in another collection of standalone charts by Alexander Jones titled *Astronomical Papyri from Oxyrhynchus*. These charts all come from the same Greco-Roman city in Egypt, with dates ranging from the first through the fourth century CE, thus right in the heart of the Hellenistic astrological tradition.<sup>12</sup> By my calculation, there are thirty-four charts in this compilation that only record what sign the Ascendant is located in, and thus only could have been used to calculate whole sign houses. As with the charts in *Greek Horoscopes*, most of the planetary positions are also only given by sign. There were only three charts that gave the degree of the Ascendant, and thus could have been used for equal or whole sign houses. Finally, there was only one chart in this collection that gave both the degree of the Ascendant and degree of the meridian-Midheaven.

There are also a number of smaller collections of standalone horoscopes, and the results here are similar. Neugebauer and van Hoesen published a supplement to *Greek Horoscopes* in 1964 in which they added three additional standalone charts or “original documents” that only list the Ascendant by sign, and one additional chart that provides the degree of the Ascendant but no meridian-Midheaven.<sup>13</sup> Later, a scholar named Donata Baccani published another supplement to *Greek Horoscopes*, and this work contains sixteen additional charts that only recorded the Ascendant by sign, and one chart that gives the actual degree of the Ascendant, but no meridian.<sup>14</sup>

Elsewhere, Neugebauer published six standalone horoscopes written in

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<sup>12</sup> Jones, *Astronomical Papyri from Oxyrhynchus*, vol. 2, pp. 371–447.

<sup>13</sup> Neugebauer and Van Hoesen, “Astrological Papyri and Ostraca,” pp. 67–70.

<sup>14</sup> See Baccani, *Oroscopti greci*.



Demotic Egyptian in 1943, and all of them only recorded the sign that the Ascendant was located in, with five of them also listing the signs of the other three angles, all of which are consistent with whole sign house placements (i.e. the signs square or opposite to the rising sign).<sup>15</sup> Neugebauer and Parker published two more Demotic horoscopes in 1968, one of which only lists the Ascendant and other planets by sign, and the other which lists the actual degrees of the planets, as well as the degrees of the Ascendant and meridian-Midheaven.<sup>16</sup> Later, Micah Ross published a collection of Demotic horoscopes written on ostraca or potsherds from the Greco-Roman city of Medînet Mâdi in Egypt, which contained at least fourteen horoscopes that explicitly record the position of the Ascendant by sign, and one chart that provides the degree of the Ascendant but no meridian-Midheaven.<sup>17</sup> This compilation contains an additional fifteen separate horoscopes that use a more economical style of writing, where only the positions of eight zodiacal signs are listed in a row, which then implicitly refers to the placements of the seven traditional planets plus the sign of the Ascendant.<sup>18</sup> All of these charts date to a period around the second century CE.<sup>19</sup> Ross concludes elsewhere that the Demotic charts that are known about at the present time generally conform to whole sign house placements.<sup>20</sup>

As stated earlier, these standalone charts had been calculated for individual clients, and they would have been the raw data used in a consultation to set up the chart on a horoscope board. The fact that only the sign of the Ascendant is recorded in the vast majority of the surviving charts implies that the majority of astrologers felt that the whole sign house system was sufficient for the purpose of delineating a chart most of the time, in terms of the typical practice of Hellenistic astrology. The fact that neither the degree of the Ascendant nor the degree of the meridian were recorded in the vast majority of surviving horoscopes means that neither equal houses nor quadrant houses could have possibly been calculated in these charts, since those degrees are required prerequisites in those systems of house division. Therefore, only whole sign houses could have been used in the vast majority of standalone horoscopes. Since the dating of these standalone charts range from the first century BCE through the fifth century CE, this implies the whole sign house system was the primary or predominant form of

<sup>15</sup> Neugebauer, "Demotic Horoscopes," pp. 115–121. He notes on p. 120 that most of these charts date to the first half of the first century CE.

<sup>16</sup> Neugebauer and Parker, "Two Demotic Horoscopes."

<sup>17</sup> Ross, *Horoscopic Ostraca from Medînet Mâdi*, pp. 47–143.

<sup>18</sup> Ross, *Horoscopic Ostraca from Medînet Mâdi*, pp. 145–266.

<sup>19</sup> Ross, *Horoscopic Ostraca from Medînet Mâdi*, pp. 268–9.

<sup>20</sup> Ross, "A Survey of Demotic Astrological Texts," p. 25.

house division during the majority of the Hellenistic astrological tradition.<sup>21</sup>

Aside from the standalone charts that survive on pieces of papyrus or ostraca, there are also a number of “literary horoscopes” that are preserved in astrological manuals and other books from the Hellenistic tradition. The literary charts should be treated separately from the standalone charts, since oftentimes large groups of them will come from the same author. The vast majority of these charts come from Vettius Valens in the second century, since he used over a hundred example charts in order to demonstrate different concepts and techniques in the *Anthology*, sometimes using the same chart multiple times. In the literary charts collected in Neugebauer and Van Hoesen’s *Greek Horoscopes*, there are approximately eighty-eight charts that only record the sign that the Ascendant is located in, six charts that list the degree of the Ascendant but no meridian, and approximately twenty-four charts that list both the degree of the Ascendant and the degree of the meridian-Midheaven.<sup>22</sup> Of the twenty-four charts that list the Ascendant and meridian-Midheaven, four of the charts also explicitly calculate intermediate house cusps, thus clearly employing quadrant houses. It should be noted that the majority of these twenty-four charts that list both the Ascendant and meridian-Midheaven in this collection date to the later part of the Hellenistic tradition, and originate from two sources in particular, Rhetorius and another source known as “Palchus.”<sup>23</sup> If one excludes charts that date to the fifth century CE or later from this tabulation, then that leaves only six literary charts in *Greek Horoscopes* that include both the degree of the Ascendant and the meridian-Midheaven. This is worth noting, since as we will see later, quadrant houses and equal houses may have become more prominent later in the Hellenistic tradition than they were during the earlier centuries.

Additionally, some of these numbers with respect to the literary charts would be altered by including astrological manuals that contain charts that were discovered after *Greek Horoscopes* was published by Neugebauer and Van Hoesen in 1959. For example, Pingree published a critical edition of the

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<sup>21</sup> This conclusion agrees with Holden’s assessment that the whole sign house system “was used by the majority of classical astrologers for half a millennium.” Holden, “The Sign-House System of House Division,” pp. 3–4. Greenbaum similarly says that the whole sign system was “by far the most prevalent among Hellenistic astrologers.” Greenbaum, *The Daimon*, p. 400, fn. 6.

<sup>22</sup> The “literary” horoscopes are presented in Neugebauer and Van Hoesen, *Greek Horoscopes*, pp. 76–160.

<sup>23</sup> For an important discussion about the identity of Palchus see Pingree, “The Astrological School of John Abramius,” who argues that “Palchus” is a pseudonym used by a fourteenth century Byzantine astrologer/scribe named Eleutherius Zebelenus of Elis. Pingree says that Eleutherius preserved much material from earlier Greek sources, although he would sometimes make changes to the texts he copied.

Arabic version of the lost text of Dorotheus in 1976, and this text contains nine additional literary horoscopes from the first century CE. There are eight charts in this text that only record the Ascendant by sign, and one chart that mentions the actual degree of the Ascendant but still uses whole sign houses.<sup>24</sup> A number of other stray charts could be added, but the results would remain largely the same, and I think that the general point about the prevalence of the whole sign house system in the surviving horoscopes has been sufficiently demonstrated in this broad survey.<sup>25</sup> We will now turn to an analysis of the surviving astrological manuals in order to get a sense of the context in which the different forms of house division were used.

### References to Whole Sign Houses in the Manuals

The primary factor that makes whole sign houses unique compared with other forms of house division is that in this system, the signs of the zodiac become the houses. Therefore, one of the ways that you can tell when one of the Hellenistic astrologers is using whole sign houses is that they will refer to the “houses” or “places” as if they are zodiacal signs, treating the two concepts as interchangeable. This is clearly not done when an author is using another form of house division such as quadrant or equal houses, as the Hellenistic astrologers will generally go out of their way to be clear when they are using a different form of house division, and they will stop referring to the places as signs.<sup>26</sup> This point is also important because when the astrologers qualify their statements about other forms of house division, it implicitly acknowledges that whole sign houses was the standard or primary system. Especially in the early Hellenistic astrologers, we find frequent instances of the use of whole sign houses through the references to the houses as zodiacal signs (plural: *zōidia*, singular: *zōidion*). Let’s take a look at some examples.

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<sup>24</sup> The one chart that mentions the degree of the Ascendant is the example used in Dorotheus, *Carmen*, 3, 2. This is the chart that Pingree originally dated to 281 and assumed was an interpolation, but Holden later re-dated to October 2, 44 CE (Holden, *A History*, p. 35). In the diagram the Ascendant is said to be around 6° Scorpio, and the Midheaven is not given. The Sun and Moon are said to be cadent in the delineation, which is true by sign, with the Sun in Libra and Moon in Cancer. Mars is said to be in the place of Good Fortune, by which is meant the eleventh place, which is again true by sign. This example is interesting, then, because even though he is using degrees here because he is demonstrating the length of life technique, he is still evidently measuring the angularity of the planets by sign. Holden notes Dorotheus’ use of whole sign houses even in instances where he discusses the Midheaven on p. 34 of *A History*.

<sup>25</sup> Those who wish to conduct a more comprehensive survey should make use of the catalogue of all known ancient horoscopes that was recently published in Heilen, *Hadriani Genitura*, vol. 1, pp. 204–333.

<sup>26</sup> E.g. Valens, *Anthology*, 3, 2.

Our first piece of testimony is from the second-century CE skeptic named Sextus Empiricus, who wrote a long attack on astrology in which he outlined several of the core technical doctrines of the subject before critiquing it. His statements about the places are worth quoting at length here because he tries to be very deliberate about articulating how the places are determined, and in the process he clearly defines them in terms of whole sign houses:

However, of all these zodiacal signs (*zōidia*) those which are dominant at each nativity for the production of outcomes (*apotelesmatōn*) and from which they principally frame their prognostications are, they say, four in number; and to these they give the general name of “angles” (*kentra*), and more specifically they call them “Hour-Marker,” “Midheaven,” “Setting,” “Subterranean” or “Anti-Midheaven,” this last being also in the middle of the heavens. Now, the “Hour-Marker” is [the sign]<sup>27</sup> which happens to rise up at the time when the birth is completed; the “Midheaven” is the fourth zodiacal sign (*zōidion*) therefrom, it being included; the “Setting” is that opposite to the “Hour-Marker”; and the “Subterranean” or “Anti-Midheaven” is that opposite to the “Midheaven”: thus (for an example will make it clear), when Cancer is the “Hour-Marker” Aries is the “Midheaven,” and Capricorn is the “Setting,” and Libra is the “Subterranean.”<sup>28</sup>

<sup>27</sup> The word “sign” is implied here grammatically through a *men/de* construction that connects the beginning of the sentence with the use of the term “sign” (*zōidion*) later in the same sentence when Sextus talks about the Midheaven. R. G. Bury, the translator of the Loeb edition of Sextus, recognized this and translates the beginning of this passage as “Now the ‘horoscope’ is the sign which happens to arise at the time when the birth is completed...” Nonetheless, since the word sign technically isn’t printed in the Greek text until later in the sentence, I have put it in brackets here. If you omit it then the sentence reads awkwardly: “Now, the ‘Hour-Marker’ is [blank] which happens to arise...” It becomes even clearer that he is talking about a sign being the subject of the sentence later in the paragraph when he gives the example where Cancer is the Hour-Marker, or again later when he refers to “the sign of the Hour-Marker” towards the end of the passage. Spinelli similarly adds in the word “sign” in brackets in the Italian translation due to the grammar: “Oroscopo è (il segno) che si trova a sorgere al tempo in cui viene portata a compimento la nascita...” Sextus Empiricus, *Contro Gli Astrologi*, trans. Spinelli, p. 59.

<sup>28</sup> The translation of this passage here and in what follows is a modified version of the translation in Sextus Empiricus, *Against the Professors*, 5: 12–19, trans. Bury, pp. 327–331, with some help from the edition and Italian translation of the passage in Sextus Empiricus, *Contro Gli Astrologi*, trans. Spinelli, pp. 59–61. For the most part my translation follows Bury’s very closely, although I use my own terminology for the names of the places, and he is generally more liberal about inferring when the signs are being referred to, due to the way the grammar is constructed in this passage. I have taken a slightly more conservative approach here due to the context in which I am using the passage, although I think his translation is correct, and I would recommend comparing it with what I have here.

This passage is important because it shows that all four of the angles were being defined in terms of signs relative to the rising sign, including the Midheaven, and it shows that even an educated external observer of the astrological tradition understood this to be the case in the second century. As the passage continues, Sextus outlines the doctrine of angular triads in terms of which signs of the zodiac are either moving away from (declining) or following after (succeedent) the angular signs, just as we saw Olympiodorus doing in the last chapter:

Moreover, in the case of each of these “angles” (*kentra*) they call the preceding zodiacal sign “decline” (*apoklima*) and the following one “succeedent” (*epanaphora*). Also they say that which ascends before the sign (*zōidion*) of the Hour-Marker, and is in view, is that of “Evil Spirit,” and that after it, which follows the “Midheaven,” is that of “Good Spirit,” and that which precedes the “Midheaven” is “downwards region” (*katō merida*) and “single-degree” (*monomorion*) and “God,” and that which comes to the “Setting” is the “Idle” zodiacal sign (*zōidion*) and “dominion of death,” and that which comes after the “Setting,” which is out of view and it is opposite to the “Evil Spirit,” is “punishment” and “Bad Fortune,” and that which comes to the “Subterranean” is “Good Fortune,” being opposite to the “Good Spirit,” and that which comes next after the “Anti-Midheaven,” towards the east, is “Goddess,” being opposite to the “God,” and that which comes next to the “Hour-Marker” is “ineffective” (*argon*), and it again is opposite to the “Idle.”

Finally, he summarizes the entire arrangement one more time even more explicitly in terms of the angular triads:

Or, to speak more concisely, the “decline” of the zodiacal sign (*zōidion*) of the “Hour-Marker” is called the “Evil Spirit,” and its “succeedent” [is called] “ineffective”; similarly, the decline of the “Midheaven” is “God,” and its succeedent “Good Spirit”; and in the same way the decline of the “Anti-Midheaven” is “Goddess,” and its succeedent “Good Fortune”; likewise, the decline of the “Setting” is “Bad Fortune,” and its succeedent “Idle.”

Sextus’ clear enumeration of the places as signs here is an important piece of evidence because he is clearly articulating something that is otherwise often taken for granted by the astrologers themselves, because it was such a basic or obvious astrological doctrine at that point in time. Once this is understood, many of the statements that the astrologers themselves make about the places

become clear, and the fact that they are often taking whole sign houses for granted is evident.<sup>29</sup>

In terms of the astrologers themselves, one of our earliest sources for the doctrine of the twelve places is Thrasyllus, and in the summary of his work that survives, when he talks about the places he clearly treats them as signs, for example saying that the Hour-Marker is an “advantageous zodiacal sign” (*chrēmatisation zōidion*), and then enumerating the other angles in terms of their configuration to the rising sign by whole sign aspect:

the one diametrical to it is said to be the Setting; and the one pre-ascending the Hour-Marker in a square figure on the right the Midheaven; and the remaining pivot the Anti-Midheaven, which is also called the subterraneous pivot and one that is square to the Hour-Marker on the left.<sup>30</sup>

It must have been astrologers like Thrasyllus and his predecessors that the first-century BCE astronomer, Geminus, had in mind when he criticized certain unnamed people who always treat the sign of the zodiac that is square to the rising and setting signs as if it is the Midheaven:

The squares, too, are used, as has been said, for sympathies in the nativities. Moreover, the arrangement of the squares is used by some for another purpose. For they supposed that, when one of the signs of the selfsame square is setting, the next sign culminates <in> the hemisphere above the Earth, <the next rises, and the last culminates in the hemisphere beneath the Earth,> as when Capricorn is setting, Aries culminates, Cancer rises, and Libra culminates beneath the Earth. The same logic applies to the remaining squares.<sup>31</sup>

Later, towards the end of the *Summary*, Thrasyllus begins recounting the significations of the *dōdekatropos*, which he mentions as being derived from

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<sup>29</sup> Compare this passage in Sextus Empiricus with Olympiodorus, *Commentary*, 7, where the angular triads are also explicitly defined in terms of zodiacal signs that precede or follow after the four angular signs.

<sup>30</sup> CCAG, 8, 3, p. 100: 30–34, trans. Schmidt, *Definitions and Foundations*, pp. 343–4. I have modified Schmidt’s translation slightly by having it say “square” instead of “tetragonal” for the sake of clarity, although it means the same thing.

<sup>31</sup> Geminus, *Introduction*, 2: 18–19, trans. Evans and Berggren, p. 129. The bracketed words are in the translation, and were added by the editor of the text. For the rest of Geminus’ argument read through the entirety of 2: 18–26. On dating Geminus to the first century BCE, see Geminus, *Introduction*, trans. Evans and Berggren, pp. 15–22.

Hermes Trismegistus, and there he specifically refers to each of the places as being a “twelfth-part” (*dōdekatēmorion*) in the chart, using the synonym for zodiacal sign that we have seen Ptolemy and others using earlier.<sup>32</sup> He goes on to enumerate the houses starting with the first place, and later confirms the equivalency between zodiacal sign and place when the summary says “the eleventh zodiacal sign (*zōidion*) in the chart he calls Good Spirit.”<sup>33</sup> This is important because it is the earliest testimony we have to the text on the twelve places that was attributed to Hermes Trismegistus, which may have introduced the earliest set of meanings for each of the twelve houses, as well as the names of the places and the planetary joys scheme. If Thrasyllus is saying that Hermes treated each of the twelve places as zodiacal signs, then it implies that the earliest and perhaps original text on the twelve places used the whole sign house system. This would then partially explain why whole sign houses subsequently became the predominant system of house division in the Hellenistic tradition.

This theory seems to be confirmed in the treatment of the places in other early authors such as Antiochus. At one point in the *Summary* of Antiochus’ text he discusses the concept of advantageous (*chrēmatistikos*) and disadvantageous places, and he first gives the opinion of Hermes Trismegistus, as reported by Timaeus. What is interesting here is that he defines the places in terms of the zodiacal signs they occupy relative to the rising sign:

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 post-ascension of the Midheaven. The remaining are without ability to bring advantage.<sup>34</sup>

If Antiochus and Timaeus were drawing on the same text on the places attributed to Hermes Trismegistus that Thrasyllus was drawing on, then this seems to further confirm that the conceptual premise of that treatise was primarily predicated on viewing the twelve places as zodiacal signs.<sup>35</sup> Serapio makes a similar statement when he ranks the twelve places from best to worst,

<sup>32</sup> CCAG, 8, 3, p. 101: 16–18. For this usage of “twelfth-part” see Ptolemy, *Tetrabiblos*, 1, 14: 1.

<sup>33</sup> CCAG, 8, 3, p. 101: 28–29: “To de ia’ en tōi diathemati zōidion agathon ekalei daimona...”

<sup>34</sup> Antiochus, *Summary*, 19, trans. Schmidt, *Definitions and Foundations*, p. 279, modified slightly to say “zodiacal signs” instead of Schmidt’s preferred translation of *zōidia* as “images.”

<sup>35</sup> This passage goes on to make a statement about the ability of the succedent place from the rising sign to be jointly advantageous that we will come back to later.

saying that the “benefic signs” (*agathopoia zōidia*) are “the Hour-Marker, the Midheaven, eleventh, fifth, God, Goddess,” while the “malefic” ones are the “second, fourth, sixth, seventh, <eighth>, and twelfth.”<sup>36</sup> Later in the *Antiochus Summary*, he recounts the names and significations of the *dōdekatropos*, likely derived from the same Hermes text that Thrasyllus cited, and there he clearly refers to the places as signs. For example, Antiochus says that “the eighth is called After-Setting and Idle zodiacal sign (*zōidion*).”<sup>37</sup> In other authors such as Valens, the eighth is called the “Idle place” (*argos topos*) as a specific name or designation, whereas here it is the “Idle sign” (*argon zōidion*), again showing the equivalency of the two.<sup>38</sup>

In terms of other early first-century CE authors, Manilius is sometimes assumed to have used some form of quadrant house division.<sup>39</sup> Admittedly, there is some ambiguity in the text that arises from the fact that Manilius wrote it in the form of a poem, and thus he uses a number of poetical allusions and idealized metaphors when he describes the twelve places, rather than just outlining them in a more straightforward manner.<sup>40</sup> Some of this is compounded by Goold’s somewhat loose translation of the text, where for example Manilius will use the word *locus* which means “place,” and Goold will sometimes instead translate this as “temple” or occasionally as “point.”<sup>41</sup> However, when one reads the actual Latin verses of Manilius carefully, the language that he uses to describe the places is consistent with the other Hellenistic astrologers, and he never outlines any specific method for trisecting the quadrants. As a result of this, it seems likely that he followed the same approach as the other early astrologers of his era

<sup>36</sup> CCAG 8, 4, p. 226: 20–23.

<sup>37</sup> Antiochus, *Summary*, 24, CCAG, 8, 3, p. 117: 11–12.

<sup>38</sup> For an example of the eighth as the “Idle place,” see Valens, *Anthology*, 4, 12: 1.

<sup>39</sup> Houlding, *The Houses*, pp. 95 & 100, who cites Jones, “Celestial and Terrestrial Orientation: The Origins of House Division in Ancient Cosmology.” Jones’ paper was published in 1989, which was prior to the widespread rediscovery of whole sign houses as a concept. Many of the arguments she makes about Manilius using the Campanus house system are equally applicable to the whole sign house system, and one wonders if the same argument would still be made today given the advancements in our understanding of the Hellenistic tradition that have occurred since that time.

<sup>40</sup> For his main treatment of the places see Manilius, *Astronomica*, 2: 788–970.

<sup>41</sup> Throughout Manilius, *Astronomica*, 2: 788–970, trans. Goold, pp. 145–159. Pingree also called attention to Goold’s misuse of the term “zenith” in his review of this translation, which has important implications for understanding how Manilius describes the houses, saying that in Manilius the term zenith “refers to the point on that sphere directly above the observer.” See Pingree, “Review of Manilius, *Astronomica*,” p. 265. Along the same lines, Greenbaum points out that in the main passage where Manilius outlines the houses, that “one would think, reading Goold’s translation of this section, that Manilius uses ‘templum’ in every other sentence. This is not the case. It only appears twice...” Greenbaum, *The Daimon*, p. 57, fn. 50.



in using the whole sign house system.

In later authors of the first and second centuries CE, the trend of equating the places and signs that we saw earlier continues. As stated previously, in the late first century Dorotheus only uses whole sign houses in his example charts, and the instructions that he gives in the different procedural chapters of his work also commonly equate the signs and places. For example, Hephaestio paraphrases Dorotheus' treatment of the topic of injury by saying:

The [treatments] of Dorotheus are likewise in accord with these. One must examine these [figures], he says: If the sixth zodiacal sign (*zōidion*) is bestial or moist, or the lord of this domicile is itself in such a place, it causes injury.<sup>42</sup>

There are similar statements throughout Dorotheus' text for other topics. For the topic of marriage, Hephaestio paraphrases Dorotheus by saying that you look at "the seventh zodiacal sign (*zōidion*) from the Hour-Marker."<sup>43</sup> The Arabic translation of the same passage of Dorotheus is even more explicit:

If you find the malefics aspecting the sign of wedding, which is the seventh from the Ascendant, and you find the lord of this place cadent or corrupted by the aspect of the malefics or by a bad position, then it indicates what I will tell you.<sup>44</sup>

Elsewhere, in his treatment of the topic of siblings in the Arabic version of Dorotheus, he instructs the reader to "look from the third sign from the Ascendant about the matter of brothers."<sup>45</sup> In describing financial matters, he says "I instruct you to look at the sign which is the second place from the Ascendant. If you find a malefic in it or in opposition or quartile to it, then judge a decline in property and livelihood."<sup>46</sup> On the topic of children, he says:

Look from the fifth, from the sign which is the sign of children, and its lord – in what place it is, whether it is a benefic or a malefic [...] If a

<sup>42</sup> Hephaestio, *Apotelesmatika*, 2, 13: 24–25, trans. Schmidt, pp. 50–51, slightly modified. This corresponds with Dorotheus, *Carmen*, 4, 1: 65–66, which says virtually the same thing. I quote from Hephaestio here because it is sometimes closer to the original Greek version than the Arabic translation is.

<sup>43</sup> Hephaestio, *Apotelesmatika*, 2, 21: 33.

<sup>44</sup> Dorotheus, *Carmen*, 2, 1, 16, trans. Pingree, p. 198.

<sup>45</sup> Dorotheus, *Carmen*, 1, 21: 8, trans. Pingree, p. 180.

<sup>46</sup> Dorotheus, *Carmen*, 1, 27: 4–5, trans. Pingree, p. 193.

benefic aspects the fifth place and its lord is in a good place aspecting the Midheaven, then this is an indication of the abundance of [his] children and their goodness.<sup>47</sup>

A similar pattern of equating signs and places is followed by Dorotheus in the treatment of the rest of the standard topics that correlate with each of the twelve places. Interestingly, Hephaestio says at one point that Dorotheus drew on the work of Nechepso when treating certain topics such as marriage, and if this is true then it implies that the early foundational text attributed to Nechepso and Petosiris may have also employed whole sign houses for studying specific topics.<sup>48</sup>

The situation is similar in the work of Vettius Valens in the second century. When he talks about the places he frequently alternates between calling them places (*topoi*) and signs (*zōidia*). For example, when he first introduces the twelfth place, at one point he says “benefics found in this place (*topos*) will not bestow their benefits,” but then in the very next sentence he switches to calling it a sign: “Whenever these three stars fall in this zodiacal sign (*zōidion*)...”<sup>49</sup> With the eleventh place, he says “if the benefics are in the sign (*zōidion*) of the Good Spirit, appropriately situated (*epitopōs keimenoī*) and in their proper faces, they make men illustrious and rich from youth...”<sup>50</sup> Elsewhere, he begins the

<sup>47</sup> Dorotheus, *Carmen*, 1, 12: 17–19, trans. Pingree, p. 211.

<sup>48</sup> Hephaestio, *Apotelesmatika*, 2, 21: 26.

<sup>49</sup> Valens, *Anthology*, 2, 5: 2–3, trans. Riley, p. 28.

<sup>50</sup> Valens, *Anthology*, 2, 6: 1, trans. Riley, p. 28, modified. The word *epitopōs* clearly means “appropriately” or “upon its place” in Valens, which primarily means being in a zodiacal sign that it has some rulership over or familiarity with, such as its domicile, *contra* Schmidt, *The So-Called Problem of House Division*, pp. 14–18; p. 33. The opposite is *atopōs*, which means “inappropriately” or “not upon its place.” The meaning is similar to a statement in Hephaestio (*Apotelesmatika*, 2, 18: 12) when he is paraphrasing Dorotheus (*Carmen*, 1, 25: 6) and mentions planets being in their “proper place” or “familiar place” (*oikeiois topoīs*). Valens uses a similar term several times later when he refers to planets being in their “proper place” (*idiotopēō*), which demonstrates that sometimes *topos* can mean “zodiacal sign” (e.g. *Anthology*, 2, 17: 23; 2, 20: 5, etc.), and I see no reason to treat *epitopōs* as much more than a synonym. For example, at one point in an example chart that Valens gives where Jupiter is in Pisces (*Anthology*, 2, 22: 37), he refers to Jupiter being in its “proper place” (*idiotopēō*). Similarly, in the very first example chart that Valens gives in the same chapter (*Anthology*, 2, 22: 1–9), he explains how the three main planets he is examining in the chart are all in their own domiciles (*idiōi oikōi*) and not in declining places, and he concludes by saying that it is obvious that the native will be eminent, because all three of the rulers are configured “appropriately” or “upon their places” (*epitopōs*). In this example the planets are also well-situated by whole sign house, so the term may have a more general meaning of being well-situated by sign and place, but this still does not support Schmidt’s interpretation that this keyword is used to invoke a secondary overlay using the equal house system. Furthermore,

section on the eighth by referring to it as a place, saying “benefics appearing in this place (*topos*) are ineffectual and weak,” but then switches to referring to it as a sign: “if Mercury alone is in this zodiacal sign (*zōidion*)...”<sup>51</sup> In a later chapter on the topic of marriage he says “the place (*topos*) of marriage is naturally considered to be the seventh zodiacal sign (*zōidion*) from the Hour-Marker.”<sup>52</sup> He continuously alternates between saying sign and place as he goes through the rest of the places. Eventually he introduces dozens of example charts later in book 2 of the *Anthology*, and in all of them he consistently demonstrates the use of the whole sign house system.

The other major astrologer who lived in the second century is Claudius Ptolemy. One of the things that makes Ptolemy’s work unique is that he has a distinct tendency to focus primarily on the planets as significators for certain topics such as parents, marriage, character, etc., while at the same time he has a tendency to not use the places or lots for topical purposes, which is what his contemporaries like Dorotheus and Valens did.<sup>53</sup> This tendency to emphasize the planets and deemphasize the use of the places for topical purposes is so marked that at one point one of his translators notes that “Ptolemy says little about the ‘places’ (less correctly ‘houses’) of a geniture.”<sup>54</sup> Now, this is true to a certain extent, but only for topical purposes. For example, Ptolemy never mentions the seventh place in association with the topic of marriage, while both Dorotheus and Valens do, as we have seen. However, Ptolemy does refer to the places quite frequently when it comes to the concept of the angular triads. Angularity (whether a planet is angular, succedent, or declining) was partially conceptualized as providing information about how active and prominent a planet is in a chart, and Ptolemy says at one point that angular and succedent planets are effective, while planets that are in declines are weak.<sup>55</sup> There is almost not a single chapter in books 3 and 4 of the *Tetrabiblos* in which Ptolemy does not refer to this concept of angularity. To the extent that this is related

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my understanding of *epitopōs* as a general term that means well-situated by sign and place seems to be supported by a gloss in one of the appendices of Valens (*Anthology*, Appendix, 11: 35), where the text uses the word *epitopōs* and then makes the parenthetical remark: “that is to say, not declining (*apoklinōn*) and not situated without dignity (*adoxōs*).” This is likely a Medieval gloss, but that does not mean that it is without merit, and discussion of this gloss as well as many other instances where Valens himself uses the term *epitopōs* are conspicuously absent in Schmidt’s argument about the “original” or “intended” meaning of the term.

<sup>51</sup> Valens, *Anthology*, 2, 9: 1 and 5, trans. Riley, p. 28.

<sup>52</sup> Valens, *Anthology*, 2, 38: 2.

<sup>53</sup> Ptolemy makes a dismissive remark about the use of lots by other astrologers in *Tetrabiblos*, 3, 4: 4.

<sup>54</sup> Ptolemy, *Tetrabiblos*, trans. Robbins, p. 267, fn. 3.

<sup>55</sup> Ptolemy, *Tetrabiblos*, 3, 4: 7.

to the concept of the places, which it is closely, Ptolemy actually is using the places quite frequently, just not for topical purposes, but rather primarily for determining how “busy,” “energetic,” or “operative” the planets are.

That being said, it is not the case that Ptolemy does not use the places for topical purposes at all. In fact, there are several places where he explicitly uses them for topical purposes, and his usage is largely in line with the significations that other Hellenistic astrologers ascribe to those same places. For example, at certain points in books 3 and 4 he makes the following associations:

HOUR-MARKER with the appearance of the native.<sup>56</sup>

SIXTH PLACE with injuries.<sup>57</sup>

MIDHEAVEN with occupation.<sup>58</sup>

TWELFTH PLACE with slaves.<sup>59</sup>

TENTH, ELEVENTH, FOURTH, AND FIFTH PLACES with children.<sup>60</sup>

These are the only instances that I’ve found in which he associates specific topics with the places, and the rest of the places are not mentioned within the context of their topical significations. To some extent this seems to result from Ptolemy’s tendency to act as a reformer of the tradition, and thus it is possible that his silence on the significations of some of the places represents a rejection of the traditional associations that many of his contemporaries took for granted. For example, why doesn’t he mention the third place in his chapter on siblings, or the seventh place in his chapter on relationships? On the other hand, his treatments of many of these topics are exceedingly brief, and perhaps it is the case that he would have used more of the traditional topics associated with the places if he had chosen to write a larger, more detailed exposition of each topic. Unfortunately, we cannot say for sure.

All of that being said, while Ptolemy’s tendency to focus on the planets and downplay the use of the places for topical purposes means that there are not many instances in the *Tetrabiblos* that we can study in order to infer what type of house division he used, the instances where he does discuss the places often seem to indicate that he was using the whole sign house system as his primary approach. Let’s take a look at a few specific instances.

In chapter 4 of book 3 of the *Tetrabiblos*, Ptolemy provides a broad overview

<sup>56</sup> Ptolemy, *Tetrabiblos*, 3, 12: 2ff.

<sup>57</sup> Ptolemy, *Tetrabiblos*, 3, 13: 1ff.

<sup>58</sup> Ptolemy, *Tetrabiblos*, 4, 4: 1ff.

<sup>59</sup> Ptolemy, *Tetrabiblos*, 4, 7: 10.

<sup>60</sup> Ptolemy, *Tetrabiblos*, 4, 6: 1.

of his general approach to natal astrology, which he then attempts to employ systematically in subsequent chapters. In the second to last paragraph he says that planets are most effective in a nativity when they are angular or succedent. It is here that we find his first reference to what appears to be whole sign houses:

And they are most effective with respect to the nativity whenever they should be passing through the pivots and the post-ascensional twelfth-parts (*dōdekatēmoriōn*), and especially the primary pivots (I mean those ascending and culminating).<sup>61</sup>

Ptolemy should say “places” here if he was using some other approach to house division besides whole sign houses. In that case the sentence would say something like “whenever they should be passing through the angles and the succedent places.” Instead he refers to the succedent places as “twelfth-parts” or “signs.” This doesn’t make a lot of sense from the perspective of quadrant or equal houses, but it seems quite natural if we understand his approach within the context of the whole sign house system. Elsewhere, Ptolemy says that the topic of slaves is studied by looking at:

the zodiacal sign (*zōidion*) occupying the Evil Spirit, and from the natural fitness of the stars regarding this place (*topos*) in the nativity itself and by ingress or diametrical opposition, and especially whenever the stars having lordship over this twelfth-part (*dōdekatēmorion*) should be either harmonious with the authoritative places of the nativity or should make configurations which are opposite.<sup>62</sup>

This is an unequivocal reference to whole sign houses, because he says the “sign” occupying the Evil Spirit, and then later refers to it as both a “place” and a “twelfth-part.”

In the following chapter on the topic of travel, Ptolemy begins by saying that the primary criteria for travel is the relationship between the two luminaries and the angles. What he ends up establishing is that all of the “declining” places are associated with travel, as is the seventh place. Ptolemy then begins giving some specific examples or placements which indicate travel. First he says that when

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<sup>61</sup> Ptolemy, *Tetrabiblos*, 3, 4: 7, trans. Schmidt, p. 12. The Robbins translation says “whenever they are passing through the angles or signs that rise after them, and especially the principal of these, by which I mean the signs ascendant and culminating.” Ptolemy, *Tetrabiblos*, trans. Robbins, p. 239.

<sup>62</sup> Ptolemy, *Tetrabiblos*, 4, 7: 10, trans. Schmidt, p. 33, slightly modified.

the Moon is declining or setting that it causes travel. Then he says that when Mars is setting or declining from the Midheaven, which means being in the ninth place, that it also causes travel. Finally, at the end of this paragraph he says:

And if the Lot of Fortune also should fall out in the zodiacal signs (*zōidia*) that cause being away from home, [the natives] will continue to have their whole lives and their dwelling and their activities in a foreign land.<sup>63</sup>

This is another explicit reference to whole sign houses, because no specific zodiacal signs were mentioned at this point in the chapter. The only areas associated with travel that were mentioned so far were the places—specifically the four declines and the seventh place. Ptolemy explicitly refers to these “places” as “signs” here, thus there is good reason to think that he was like his contemporaries in that he used the whole sign house system much of the time for the purpose of studying certain topics.

While there are many other instances of whole sign house usage that we could look at in these and other authors, for our purposes I think that this survey is sufficient to establish that the use of the whole sign system was prevalent not only in the surviving horoscopes, but also in the technical manuals of the astrologers themselves. Furthermore, we can see now that the overwhelming use of whole sign houses in the horoscopes was not merely the result of technical restrictions, such as issues related to the accuracy of recorded birth times, or the astronomical precision with which one could calculate the degree of the Ascendant in ancient times. Instead, what we can see here is that there was something fundamental about the way that the places were conceptualized from very early on in the tradition that made it so that they were closely connected to the signs of the zodiac. The question then is, if that is the case, where did the other forms of house division come from, and how were they used?

### **Quadrant Houses and Dynamic Strength**

As we have seen, the Hellenistic astrologers generally tend to treat the zodiacal signs as places, especially when discussing specific topics or areas of life associated with them. However, sometimes when the places are used within the context of determining how “busy” or “energetic” (*chrēmānistikos*) the planets are, this is when other forms of house division were sometimes employed. Schmidt first noted this tendency among the Hellenistic astrologers in the preface to his translation of book 3 of Ptolemy, and introduced the convention of referring to the use of houses in order to determine topics or areas of life as a “topical”

<sup>63</sup> Ptolemy, *Tetrabiblos*, 4, 8: 2, trans. Schmidt, p. 33, slightly modified.

application of the concept, while the use of the houses to determine planetary strength or activity was referred to as a “dynamic” application.<sup>64</sup> While this is not a perfect distinction, since sometimes there can be overlap between the two categories, for the most part it is a useful and necessary one to keep in mind in order to understand how and why some of the different forms of house division were first introduced and used in the Hellenistic tradition.

This distinction initially appears to have developed out of a notion that we find in some early texts where the power of the degree of the Hour-Marker to “energize” the planets was thought to extend or radiate downward for several degrees in zodiacal order, even if this involved crossing a sign boundary. For example, in the Arabic version of Dorotheus, in a discussion about identifying planets that are *chrēmatistikos*, it says:

If you find a planet [such that there are] fifteen degrees between it and the Ascendant, then, even if it is in the second sign from the Ascendant, reckon its power as if it were in the Ascendant. But if it goes beyond this, it has no strength in the Ascendant.<sup>65</sup>

The conceptual impetus underlying this seems to be the fact that the degrees that follow immediately after the exact degree of the Ascendant are the ones that will rise in the near future, so that even if a planet is not exactly on the degree of the Ascendant at the moment of birth, if it is only a short interval below the Ascendant it will rise not long after. There is a similar statement in the summary of Antiochus, later in the same passage where the *chrēmatistikos* places were outlined earlier, as derived from Hermes via Timaeus:

But often, should the majority of the degrees of the Hour-Marker pre-ascend while the last degrees mark the hour, then the post-ascensional zodiacal sign (*zōidion*) will lend itself jointly to the conduct of advantageous business with the Hour-Marker.<sup>66</sup>

This passage is similar to the statement in Dorotheus in that it is saying that the power of the degree of the Ascendant can extend beyond the rising sign, but it is unique in that it says that in those instances both the rising sign and the second sign in zodiacal order become marked as “busy” or *chrēmatistikos*, referring to

<sup>64</sup> Ptolemy, *Tetrabiblos*, Book III, trans. Schmidt, p. viii. Cf. Schmidt, “The Facets of Fate,” pp. 84–85, and p. 106, fn. 3.

<sup>65</sup> Dorotheus, *Carmen*, 1, 7: 7–8, trans. Pingree, p. 165. Cf. *Carmen*, 1, 26: 1–9.

<sup>66</sup> Antiochus, *Summary*, 19, trans. Schmidt, *Definitions and Foundations*, p. 50.

them as “jointly-busy” or “co-active” (*sunchrēmation*).

This conceptualization of the degree of the Ascendant extending its power downward in zodiacal order seems to have provided part of the motivation for the development of the other forms of house division, and it is notable that other forms of division besides the whole sign system are often only introduced by earlier authors during discussions that involve determining whether a planet is *chrēmastikos* or not. In particular, discussions about other forms of house division usually first come up when discussing the specific technique that was used in order to determine the length of a native’s life. For example, Valens uses dozens of example charts in book 2 of the *Anthology* that all use whole sign houses, but then when he gets to the length of life technique in book 3, he suddenly introduces a form of quadrant house division for the first time (the so-called Porphyry house system), and explains how to use it to determine which planets are “busy” (*chrēmastikos*) and which are not, within the context of this specific technique.<sup>67</sup> This use of quadrant houses for dynamic purposes occurs when finding the “predominator” (*epikratētōr*), which is the planet that is strong enough to represent the native’s vitality in the length of life technique, although it is also sometimes used in other techniques such as finding the Master of the Nativity as well. Once Valens completes the discussion of the length of life technique in book 3, he reverts back to using whole sign houses in his example charts for the rest of the *Anthology*.

Interestingly, when Valens first introduces the use of quadrant houses for dynamic purposes, it is not necessarily even a full set of quadrant houses in the conventional sense; at first he says that when you trisect the arc between the degrees of the angles in all four of the quadrants, then the first third following after the angles will be “busy” (*chrēmastikos*), while the remaining two thirds in each quadrant will not be busy.<sup>68</sup> This results in what is essentially a division of the quadrant houses into eight functional sectors: the four areas immediately after the angles which are busy, and then the four areas that follow which are not busy. However, he then introduces what may be his own modification of this approach, and says that it seems better to him to treat the first third of the quadrant after the degrees of the angles to be the most “busy,” and then the second third to be moderate or middling, and then the last third to be unenergetic.<sup>69</sup> Essentially this is the extension of the concept of angular, succedent, and declining places from the whole sign house framework into the quadrant framework, although it is striking that in Valens’ time in the second century such an extension was

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<sup>67</sup> Valens, *Anthology*, 3, 2.

<sup>68</sup> Valens, *Anthology*, 3, 2: 1–14.

<sup>69</sup> Valens, *Anthology*, 3, 2: 15–19.



evidently an innovation. At the end of this discussion there is a statement that an author named Orion “expounded all this in his book,” which indicates that Valens was drawing on an earlier source for some of this material on quadrant houses, although presumably this does not include the modification that Valens seems to have introduced himself.<sup>70</sup>

This can be compared with another passage in Dorotheus where he says that the power of the degrees of the angles radiates outward in zodiacal order in fifteen-degree increments, apparently in degrees of ascension.<sup>71</sup> This is presented within the context of the triplicity rulers of the sect light technique, and he says that the first fifteen degrees after the angles are powerful, the second fifteen degrees are similarly powerful, the third fifteen-degree segment is middling, and then any placements beyond that range all the way up until the degree of the next angle will have no power. It is unclear if he is talking about the degrees of the equal house angles here or quadrant angles. In either case, though, this again reiterates that the three standard gradations of angular, succedent, and cadent were not always directly applied to the quadrant or equal house overlays in the early tradition. Instead that classification appears to have originally been used within the context of the whole sign house system, and then later astrologers eventually began applying it to the secondary divisions.

This chapter from Valens, taken together with the passage in Dorotheus, seems to indicate that the degrees of the quadrant angles may have originally been conceptualized as extending their power over a certain range following the angles, but this did not necessarily always translate into a full division of the quadrants into twelve sectors that included three gradations of maximum, moderate, and weak power (i.e. strictly following the angular, succedent, and declining distinction). Instead there was just a general notion that the regions following the exact degrees of the angles had the power to energize the planets and make them “busy,” but there were different methods for establishing what these ranges were. It seems as if much of this may go back to different interpretations of some of the early source texts that the later authors were drawing on, such as the Nechepso text, which, according to Antiochus, said that the four angles and the four succedent places are *chrēmastikos*, while the four declining places are not.<sup>72</sup>

Like Valens, Ptolemy waits until he deals with the length of life technique in book 3, chapter 11 of the *Tetrabiblos* to first introduce his alternative form of house division. Which specific form of house division Ptolemy describes in

<sup>70</sup> Valens, *Anthology*, 3, 2: 20, trans. Riley, p. 59.

<sup>71</sup> Dorotheus, *Carmen*, 1, 26: 1–9.

<sup>72</sup> Antiochus, *Summary*, 19.

this chapter has historically been the subject of controversy, although in recent times both Schmidt and Holden have interpreted this passage as outlining a form of equal houses that begins five degrees above the degree of the Ascendant.<sup>73</sup> This appears to be how Hephaestio initially interprets this passage in Ptolemy two centuries later, and he seems to say that others follow a similar approach for the purpose of this particular technique.<sup>74</sup> However, he then goes on to cite an early commentator on Ptolemy named Pancharius who evidently interpreted the passage differently, as outlining a form of quadrant house division.<sup>75</sup> Here Pancharius outlines what is either a modified form of the Porphyry house system, or possibly a version of what later became known as the Alcabitus house system.<sup>76</sup> In his *Introduction* to the *Tetrabiblos*, Porphyry similarly interpreted this passage of Ptolemy as referring to quadrant houses for the purpose of the length of life technique.<sup>77</sup> In this chapter, Porphyry recommends trisecting the four quadrants proportionally into thirds, resulting in the approach that is known today as the Porphyry house system, although the same approach was already described by Valens in the second century, as we saw earlier. Thus, we can see that this passage in Ptolemy was used as the justification for the promotion of quadrant house systems by at least two different authors within a few centuries after his death, based on different interpretations of what Ptolemy himself meant to say, but also likely with the awareness that other early astrologers such as Valens were already using quadrant house systems rather than equal houses for the purpose of the length of life technique.

The question then naturally arises: why are the Hellenistic astrologers such as Valens and Ptolemy only first introducing these alternative forms of house division within the context of this particular technique for determining the length of life? The answer to this seems to be that the standard length of life technique that was used in the Hellenistic tradition, which involves finding a predominator and then moving it forward in the chart using primary directions, can be traced back to the Nechepso and Petosiris texts. In the late first century, Pliny reports that a technique for determining the length of a person's life

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<sup>73</sup> Ptolemy, *Tetrabiblos*, Book III, trans. Schmidt, pp. xii–xiv. Holden, “Ancient House Division,” pp. 22–24. Elsewhere Holden remarks that this chapter of Ptolemy “has occasioned more astrological controversy than any other ever written” (*A History*, p. 49).

<sup>74</sup> Hephaestio, *Apotelesmatika*, 2, 11: 6–7.

<sup>75</sup> Hephaestio, *Apotelesmatika*, 2, 11: 8ff.

<sup>76</sup> Schmidt identifies the system that Pancharius uses as a modified form of Alcabitus in Hephaestio, *Apotelesmatika*, 2, trans. Schmidt, p. v. However, Holden describes Pancharius' system as a modified form of the Porphyry house system, in “House Division II,” p. 33, instead saying that Rhetorius was the first to mention Alcabitus houses a few centuries later.

<sup>77</sup> Porphyry, *Introduction*, 43.

was handed down by Nechepso and Petosiris, and that it is called the theory of “quarters,” because it holds that no person can live longer than the time it takes for the predominating planet to move ninety degrees forward in primary directions from its position in the natal chart.<sup>78</sup> This doctrine was widely reported by later authors, such as Manetho, who summarizes it by saying “a quartile side bounds every prorogation. For this is pleasing to the Fates as the longest end of mortals.”<sup>79</sup> Valens cites this same doctrine and criticizes it early in his treatment of the length of life technique, saying that he has seen nativities that lived longer than the side of a square, even though “the old one” (*palaios*) specifically said that this was not possible.<sup>80</sup> Ptolemy must have drawn on the same text, as he opens his chapter on the length of life by saying that this technique should be applied before all others because, according to “the ancient one” (*archaion*), it is ridiculous to make predictions about events in the future for a person who will not live long enough to see them.<sup>81</sup> While Pliny attributes the technique to both Nechepso and Petosiris, I suspect that Petosiris was the one more closely associated with it, since already by the first century CE he was satirized in an epigram by the poet Lucillius:

Aulus the astrologer, after making out his own nativity, said that the fatal hour had come and that he had still four hours to live. When it reached the fifth hour and he had to go on living convicted of ignorance, he grew ashamed of Petosiris and hanged himself, and there up in the air he is dying, but he is dying ignorant.<sup>82</sup>

The implication of this piece of satire is that the astrologer was so embarrassed that Petosiris’ length of life technique didn’t work that he decided to kill himself. This may be why Valens and Ptolemy both refer to this mysterious ancient author in the singular as “the old one” or “the ancient one,” because the specific technique that became popular among later astrologers for determining the length of life was originally published in a text attributed to Petosiris. This would explain, then, why both Ptolemy and Valens introduce alternative forms of house division when they start talking about this specific technique, since that must have been what the Petosiris text did as well. By extension then, this

<sup>78</sup> Pliny, *Natural History*, 7, 49: 160.

<sup>79</sup> Manetho, *Apotelesmatika*, 3: 427–8, trans. Lopilato, p. 237.

<sup>80</sup> Valens, *Anthology*, 3, 3: 2.

<sup>81</sup> Ptolemy, *Tetrabiblos*, 3, 11: 1.

<sup>82</sup> This is epigram number 164 in vol. 11 of the *Palatine Anthology*, which is T3 in Riess, *Nechepsonis et Petosiridis*, p. 330. The translation is from *The Greek Anthology*, trans. Paton, vol. 4, p. 151.

may be another instance of a technique that was written about in an ambiguous manner, which left room for different authors to come to different interpretations about what form of house division was intended for this particular technique, similar to some of the issues that arose from differing interpretations of Nechepso's statements about how to calculate the Lot of Fortune.<sup>83</sup> For Ptolemy, he may have interpreted it as outlining equal houses, whereas for Valens and others it may have been interpreted as referring to quadrant houses. The general point of agreement, though, was that the source text seemed to imply that for the purpose of this specific technique, the houses needed to be calculated by degree rather than just by sign. We may be able to get some sense of the sort of language that was used in the original source text from the *Antiochus Summary*, which preserves a short passage for determining the predominator (*epikratētōr*), which was a precursor for calculating the length of life in later authors:

But more precisely, in the case of a diurnal nativity, when the Sun chances to be in the east, it also has the predomination itself because it rules over the day; but when it is declining westward by day, if the Moon is in the east, the Moon itself will predominate. Similarly, even if the Moon itself chances to be in the post-ascension of the Hour-Marker while the Sun is declining from the east, the Moon itself will have predomination. But with both of them declining westward, the Hour-Marker will assume the predomination.<sup>84</sup>

This sort of vague directional language is somewhat unique here, and when Valens lists a very similar set of rules in his chapter on finding the predominator, presumably drawing on a common source (Petosiris?), he translates the directional terminology into more specific placements within the twelve houses.<sup>85</sup> It is possible then that it was the vagueness of some of this language that gave rise to different systems for dividing up the houses within the context of this specific technique. In particular, one wonders if the way that the Midheaven was described was ambiguous enough to leave room for different interpretations. Whatever the case, all of this taken together effectively means that some of the alternative forms of house division, quadrant house systems in particular, may have developed out of comments made by Petosiris within the context of the length of life technique very early in the Hellenistic tradition. Moreover, there seems to have been a tendency to use these systems as a secondary overlay for

<sup>83</sup> As discussed in the beginning of Valens, *Anthology*, 3, 11.

<sup>84</sup> Antiochus, *Summary*, 1, 29, trans. Schmidt, *Definitions and Foundations*, p. 54.

<sup>85</sup> Valens, *Anthology*, 3, 1.

dynamic rather than topical purposes, although there were some exceptions to this, which we will look at next.

### **Topical Significance of the Degree of the Midheaven**

While Valens seems to restrict the use of quadrant house systems to the length of life technique, and otherwise employs whole sign houses in his example charts, at one point in book 5 of the *Anthology* he does have a brief digression about the topical significance of the meridian-Midheaven and the point opposite to it (the degree of the IC).<sup>86</sup> He says that those degrees carry significations related to the tenth and fourth places, and they import those significations into whatever whole sign house they fall in, so that it doubles up the topics associated with those signs. This is similar to the way the lots are used, as we will see later, where the degree of a sensitive point falling in a specific zodiacal sign will mark the entirety of that sign with its significations, rather than just a restricted range of degrees that follow after the placement. Valens gives an example at one point in order to explain what he means:

As with the Hour-Marker 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 Hour-Marker [...] Similarly also, the diameter of Aquarius (that is, Leo), which is the subterraneous pivot, possesses the relation concerning foundations, buildings, and parents, as well as that concerning god and siblings and a foreign land.<sup>87</sup>

He goes on to say that the same is true in other placements of the meridian-Midheaven, such as when it falls in the eleventh whole sign house. This becomes an important principle when working with the whole sign house system in practice, because it means that the degree of the meridian-Midheaven and IC are still taken into account, but their positions are interpreted as importing significations into whatever whole sign house they fall in. In this way it seems to represent an early attempt to reconcile the whole sign and quadrant house systems, although it is worth noting that Valens only applies this to the degree of the meridian-Midheaven and IC, and he does not seem to say anything about calculating intermediate house cusps within the context of quadrant houses in this chapter, instead evidently just focusing on the degree of the meridian and the point opposite to it.

<sup>86</sup> Valens, *Anthology*, 5, 6: 65–69.

<sup>87</sup> Valens, *Anthology*, 5, 6: 66–67, trans. Schmidt, p. 30.

We see Valens apply this concept in one example chart later in book 7 of the *Anthology*, where he interprets the activation of Saturn in the ninth whole sign house but copresent with the meridian-Midheaven as indicative of a period of troubles in the native's life, although he also takes into account that Mars was also being activated in another way in the tenth whole sign house as being a similar contributing factor as well.<sup>88</sup> In this way we can see that even in some of the surviving horoscopes where the degree of the Ascendant and the degree of the meridian-Midheaven are calculated, it cannot be taken for granted that they would have used some form of quadrant house division, because sometimes the astrologers were incorporating these degrees as sensitive points into what was still fundamentally a whole sign house framework.

### **Dynamic Power of the Degrees of the Angles**

Another important way in which there was some overlap between the whole sign and quadrant house systems towards the middle of the Hellenistic tradition is mentioned by Paulus of Alexandria in the fourth century, when he introduces the idea that the degrees of the Ascendant and meridian-Midheaven have the power to goad other planets into action and render them *chrēmatistikos* or “busy” by being closely configured to them.<sup>89</sup> Paulus mentions this as a mitigating condition for planets that fall in one of the declining or cadent whole sign houses, as a way for the planet to be made “busy” despite falling in a place that is otherwise partially characterized by the fact that it renders planets unenergetic. He says that in order for this mitigating factor to be in effect, the planet in a declining or cadent place has to aspect the exact degree of an angle by a trine within three degrees. He then gives an example where the Ascendant is at 14 degrees of Leo and Jupiter is at 15 degrees of Aries. He says that Jupiter in this example is in a decline since it is in the ninth place relative to the rising sign; however, Jupiter's condition in this instance is made more “busy” or energetic as a result of the fact that it is configured to the degree of the Ascendant by a trine within three degrees.<sup>90</sup>

Paulus then goes on to give another example in order to show how this

<sup>88</sup> Valens, *Anthology*, 7, 6: 111–116. Chart no. L 111, IX in Neugebauer and Van Hoesen, *Greek Horoscopes*.

<sup>89</sup> Paulus, *Introduction*, 27.

<sup>90</sup> Levente László has pointed out to me privately that these examples in Paulus are missing from the primary manuscripts, as well as from the excerpt made by Rhetorius, and so it is possible that they comprise a later interpolation. He points out that the example used in the Olympiodorus commentary is more reliable from a philological standpoint, which has the Hour-Marker at 15° Scorpio and the Sun at 15° Cancer in the ninth place. I've retained the Paulus example here for the sake of demonstration, since it is consistent with the principle outlined by both Paulus and Olympiodorus, although compare this with Olympiodorus, *Commentary*, 26.

works with the degree of the Midheaven. He says to imagine that the Midheaven is at 14 degrees of Taurus and Venus is at 15 degrees of Capricorn. Venus would be in the sixth whole sign place, and thus in a decline, but since it is configured to the degree of the Midheaven by trine within three degrees, Venus becomes “advantageous” and “busy.” Presumably here Paulus is referring to the degree of the meridian-Midheaven, since he later gives instructions on how to calculate it in chapter 30 of the *Introduction*, although technically in this example the Midheaven would be exactly 90 degrees from the Ascendant, and thus the same as the cusp of the equal house Midheaven, if the previous example with the Ascendant at 14 degrees of Leo is meant to be the same chart. Like Valens, Paulus notes in the later chapter that the degree of the meridian-Midheaven does not always fall in the tenth sign from the Hour-Marker, but sometimes it falls in the ninth or the eleventh.

That Paulus was integrating the degrees of the Ascendant and meridian-Midheaven into what was otherwise a whole sign house approach can be seen from the way that he repeatedly describes the places as zodiacal signs in chapter 24 of his *Introduction*. For example, he calls the second place the “succeedent of the Hour-Marker,” and then in the next sentence when he gives the delineations of planets in this place, he begins by saying “In this zodiacal sign (*zōidion*), when the benefic planets are present there...”<sup>91</sup> In the next paragraph when he talks about the third place, he refers to it being opposite to “the zodiacal sign (*zōidion*) that concerns gods,” by which he means the ninth place. He resumes talking about the third, and says that “in this sign the Moon rejoices.”<sup>92</sup> A similar pattern where he alternates between referring to the houses as places and signs continues for the rest of the chapter.

In this way we see another instance in which there was some overlap between the whole sign and quadrant house systems towards the middle of the Hellenistic tradition, or at least where even when working within the framework of whole sign houses, the actual degrees of the Ascendant and meridian would still be incorporated into the interpretation of the chart, in this instance for dynamic purposes. As we will see later when we start looking at chart examples, this is actually a very useful and important mitigating factor to take into account when interpreting planets that are in difficult places in a chart.

### **Equal Houses and the Asclepius Text**

While Ptolemy may have used equal houses for dynamic purposes where others used quadrant houses within the context of the length of life technique, he was

<sup>91</sup> Paulus, *Introduction*, 24, ed. Boer, p. 54: 16–19.

<sup>92</sup> Paulus, *Introduction*, 24, ed. Boer, p. 55: 9–12.

not the only Hellenistic astrologer who mentioned the equal house system. Outside of Ptolemy, equal houses also show up in two other major sources from the Hellenistic tradition, Valens and Firmicus. In Valens, the concept is only referenced briefly once in book 9 of the *Anthology*, immediately after Valens first introduces the delineations for derived house meanings, which I presented earlier.<sup>93</sup> As I argued previously, much of this short chapter in Valens (which starts with the derived house meanings) appears to be a summary or a paraphrase of material from the early text attributed to Asclepius which dealt with the *oktatropos*, and there are some parallels in the early chapters of Firmicus' *Mathesis* where he introduces the places by starting with the *oktatropos*.<sup>94</sup> The fact that Valens actually mentions Asclepius at the beginning of this section as someone who wrote much on both the *dōdekatropos* and *oktatropos* before giving the derived place meanings was probably meant to signal that he was summarizing material from elsewhere, in the same way that a chapter or so of material on the topic of parents appears to be summarized earlier in the *Anthology* after the heading "on parents, from Timaeus" appears.<sup>95</sup> Or again elsewhere, when Valens cites Abraham for the topic of travel and then gives some specific delineations for placements that indicate it.<sup>96</sup> After introducing the derived place meanings in this same chapter of book 9 of the *Anthology*, the text makes some brief statements about the interpretation of the places and their rulers, and then discusses their use within the context of an unspecified time-lord technique (which sounds like annual profections).<sup>97</sup> This is followed by a sudden digression wherein the equal house system is introduced:

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). With these procedures, the turn (*tropos*) can readily be

<sup>93</sup> Valens, *Anthology*, 9, 3.

<sup>94</sup> Firmicus, *Mathesis*, 2, 14–20.

<sup>95</sup> Valens, *Anthology*, 2, 32.

<sup>96</sup> Valens, *Anthology*, 2, 29–30. Riley notes that Abraham's terminology is slightly different than that of Valens, and suggests that most of chapter 30 is a summary (*A Survey of Vettius Valens*, p. 8).

<sup>97</sup> Valens, *Anthology*, 9, 3: 19–20.



interpreted. If it is calculated that each place exactly corresponds to each sign in the chart as a whole (a circumstance which is rare), then the native will be involved in confinement, violence, and entangling affairs.<sup>98</sup>

This appears to be a clear explanation of the equal house system, as well as an admission that sometimes a planet can fall in one place according to the whole sign house system and another according to equal houses, and that the qualities of both will become relevant somehow in the delineation. The text then starts to say something about what happens when the places are exactly aligned with the zodiacal signs, but then unfortunately the text becomes garbled and some sort of natal delineation is given, followed by an abrupt transition to a new timing procedure in the very next sentence:

If the star of Mercury is associated with these chronocrators (i.e. with the sign of the sun or with the signs belonging to the star of Mars), then this circumstance indicates that the attack or the confinement occurs because of documents. And so on. Be aware of the transits of the stars and their changes of sign at the various chronocratorships, as I have described. It is necessary to calculate as follows: add a number of days to the birth date equivalent to the age (in years) of the native. Then, having first determined the date, whether in the following month or in the birth month itself, cast a horoscope for that day.<sup>99</sup>

Schmidt has recently interpreted the statement at the end of the previous passage as an admonition against only using whole sign houses, although since the text becomes garbled and transitions into specific natal placements and timing techniques right at this point, it is not clear if that is necessarily what was intended here, nor is it clear whether the statement was originally made

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<sup>98</sup> Valens, *Anthology*, 9, 3: 21–25, trans. Riley, p. 154, modified. Riley translates the term *tropos* towards the end of the sentence as “place,” probably since the places were referred to as the “twelve-turning” (*dōdekatropos*) earlier, although elsewhere Valens uses this term to mean “change.” It literally means “turn.” Valens once quotes Nechepso for using the term *tropos* in a way that seems to mean “place” (*Anthology*, 7, 6: 212), so it very well may simply be a synonym for *topos* here, but we should be careful since if it instead means “change” then the sentence might carry a different interpretation.

<sup>99</sup> Valens, *Anthology*, 9, 3: 26–28, trans. Riley, p. 154. The timing procedure outlined here appears to be the first and only reference to secondary progressions that I am aware of in the Hellenistic tradition. This is notable since Holden says that the earliest author he is aware of who mentions secondary progressions is Johannes Kepler in the seventeenth century. Holden, *A History*, p. 173.

by Valens or Asclepius.<sup>100</sup> The only points that are clear about the passage are that it occurs immediately after the first and only extended treatment of derived places in the *Anthology*; it is sandwiched in between two fragmentary discussions of separate timing techniques (which appear to be profections and secondary progressions), and it makes a statement that two places can coincide with the same sign. What is not made clear in this brief paragraph is whether the doubling up of two places on one sign is envisioned in terms of topics, such as when Valens mentions in book 5 that the degree of the meridian can import additional topics into whatever whole sign house it falls in, or whether instead it is being used purely for dynamic purposes, such as the way that Valens uses quadrant houses as a secondary overlay in book 3 of the *Anthology*, or how Ptolemy uses equal houses for dynamic purposes in book 3 of the *Tetrabiblos*.

Unfortunately, Valens never seems to use the equal house system in any of the 100+ chart examples that he gives in the *Anthology*, and so we are left somewhat in the dark about whether this was actually a technique that he regularly employed in practice, as a secondary overlay on top of what appears to be his primary system, whole sign houses. If most of this chapter is in fact a paraphrase of some part of the lost text of Asclepius, then one explanation for the absence of equal houses elsewhere in the *Anthology* may be that this represents a piece of lore that Valens found in an earlier text, but otherwise did not use himself in practice. One possible explanation for this is that the equal house system may have been the original secondary overlay that was meant to be used for dynamic purposes in order to render the planets *chrēmastikos*, as this is clearly how Ptolemy uses it, but then the Petosiris text later introduced some form of quadrant houses for determining which planets are *chrēmastikos*, and that became a competing system that subsequently turned out to be the more popular one to use as a secondary overlay for dynamic purposes. This would partially explain why later commentators like Pancharius and Porphyry kept reinterpreting Ptolemy's equal house system as a quadrant system for dynamic purposes. The fact that Valens introduces a quadrant house system for determining which planets are *chrēmastikos* within the context of the length of life technique, whereas Ptolemy used equal houses for the same treatment, implies that by the second century, the two systems had become different approaches for accomplishing the same thing. If that was the case, then Valens doesn't use equal houses elsewhere in the *Anthology* probably because he preferred to use quadrant houses for that specific purpose instead, although when summarizing some material from the Asclepius text in book 9 he still dutifully recorded the paragraph in which equal

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<sup>100</sup> For Schmidt's recent discussion of this passage see *The So-Called Problem of House Division*, pp. 27–32; 59–61.

houses were outlined as a concept.

Even if Valens himself did not use the equal house system in practice, that does not detract from the fact that the presence of this statement in the Asclepius text would imply that equal houses were introduced very early in the tradition. In point of fact, Hephaestio's description of the Egyptian decan text called the *Salmeschiniaka* implies that it probably would have used a quasi-equal house system, but only for the four angles in order to identify the rising, culminating, setting, and anti-culminating decans.<sup>101</sup> This would result in a whole-decan house system, where the "angles" would be ten-degree segments that coincide with those four "angular" decans. In Hephaestio's short synopsis of the *Salmeschiniaka*, the culminating decan that deals with "livelihood" is said to be the twenty-eighth decan relative to the Hour-Marker, and this decan would contain the nonagesimal degree. This would not be a division of the diurnal rotation into twelve segments; only the four angular degrees would have been used to establish the four pivotal decans. It seems as if the full division of the chart into twelve segments with the equal house angles as the starting point was the unique innovation that the Asclepius text introduced later, as a spinoff of the twelvefold division of the houses that was based on the signs, as introduced by Hermes. The decans do not really provide a good motivation for dividing the diurnal rotation into twelve sectors, but the twelve-fold division of the zodiac does, and that provides an additional reason from a logical standpoint for why the equal house division would necessarily have developed after the introduction of the whole sign house system as a concept. Specifically how equal houses were meant to be employed as a secondary overlay may have been a matter of debate, though, as we see Ptolemy using it in the length of life technique for dynamic purposes, whereas Firmicus may have used it for topical purposes, as we will see next.

### **Firmicus, Rhetorius, and the Two Delineation Texts**

Firmicus appears to have drawn on the Asclepius text as his primary source for material on the places, and as a result he appears to have emphasized the approach outlined in that text more than some of the other Hellenistic

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<sup>101</sup> As described in Hephaestio, *Apotelesmatika*, 2, 18: 75–6, quoted earlier. The dating of this text is uncertain, although it is usually assumed to have preceded Nechepso and Petosiris. However, this is partially based on the mistaken notion that Nechepso cited the *Salmeschiniaka* at some point, which itself seems to be based on a misreading of the Hephaestio passage above. Heilen clarifies this point in his treatment of the *Salmeschiniaka* in *Hadriani Genitura*, p. 1333ff. Heilen notes that Porphyry and Iamblichus mention it in connection with the Egyptian priest Chaeremon, who lived in the first century CE, so the best we can say is that the *Salmeschiniaka* was probably written around or somewhere before that time, probably in the Ptolemaic period.

astrologers did. One of the pieces of evidence for this is the fact that when Firmicus first introduces the concept of the twelve places and their meanings in book 2 of the *Mathesis*, he begins with a brief chapter outlining the significations of the *oktatropos*.<sup>102</sup> Interestingly, Firmicus initially outlines the significations of the *oktatropos* in terms of whole sign houses:

Generally, the Place of Life is in that sign (*signum*) where the Hour-Marker is located, the Place of Hope or Money in the second sign (*signum*) from the Hour-Marker, that of Brothers in the third, that of Parents in the fourth, that of Children in the fifth, that of Illness in the sixth, that of the Spouse in the seventh, [and] that of Death in the eighth.<sup>103</sup>

He goes on to say that this is how the concept of places is defined generally (*platicus*), but he also explains how it is defined according to degrees as well.<sup>104</sup> These later seem to become Firmicus' keywords for talking about whole sign houses versus equal houses, as argued by Schmidt.<sup>105</sup> Rhetorius uses similar language a few centuries later when he alternates between using whole sign houses and quadrant houses in one of his example charts, and so this may represent a more general trend in terms of how some of the later Hellenistic astrologers would invoke additional forms of house division by referring to the places "by sign" versus the places "by degree."<sup>106</sup> In the following chapter Firmicus defines the four angular places both in terms of signs and in terms of degrees:

But so that you may more readily understand, measure from the degree of the Hour-Marker through the other signs 180 degrees, and in whatever sign the 181st degree is found, in that very sign, <namely the seventh, it is found by degree. Which, so that you may understand it more clearly, in that very sign> or degree of the nativity the Setting is located. The Midheaven is in fact the tenth sign from the Hour-Marker, but now and then the Midheaven is also found by degree in the eleventh sign from the Hour-Marker. But so that you may more readily understand, measure 270

<sup>102</sup> Firmicus, *Mathesis*, 2, 14.

<sup>103</sup> Firmicus, *Mathesis*, 2, 14: 3, trans. Holden, p. 61, modified. I have changed Holden's translation of locus as "house" to "place," and also rendered Firmicus' use of the Latin word horoscopus as "Hour-Marker" instead of Holden's "ASC." I will continue modifying these words in the other passages that follow from Firmicus in order to keep them in line with the conventions I have adopted in this book.

<sup>104</sup> Firmicus, *Mathesis*, 2, 14: 4.

<sup>105</sup> Schmidt, *The So-Called Problem of House Division*, pp. 33–35.

<sup>106</sup> Rhetorius, *Compendium*, 113.

degrees from the degree of the Hour-Marker through the other signs that follow, and in whatever sign the 271st degree is found, that is allotted the Midheaven...<sup>107</sup>

This passage is interesting because Firmicus appears to be emphasizing that the Midheaven is the tenth sign relative to the rising sign, although, like Paulus, he notes that the degree of the meridian-Midheaven does not always fall in the tenth sign from the rising sign. He continues referring to the places as signs in the next chapter when he gives the traditional names for the places, as perhaps first introduced in the Hermes text:

Goddess is the third place, i.e. the third sign from the Hour-Marker; that place is called *Thea* by the Greeks as we just mentioned. But the sign is called God that is located in opposition across from that [previous] sign—that is to say the ninth sign from the Hour-Marker. That place is called *Theos* by the Greeks.<sup>108</sup>

Again, in the following chapter in which he defines the good and bad places, he seems to do so in terms of the signs they occupy relative to the rising sign:

Moreover, the first of these four remaining places is that which is located in the second sign from the Hour-Marker, which place is called the Gates of Hades or *anaphora*. The place that is in opposition to this sign, i.e. in the eighth sign from the Hour-Marker, is called *epikataphora*. But the last <places> are those of Bad Fortune and the Bad Spirit. And the Bad Fortune is located in the sixth <sign> from the Hour-Marker, but the Bad Spirit is placed in the twelfth sign from the Hour-Marker. But the Greeks call the Bad Fortune *Kake Tuche*. The Bad Spirit, which is the twelfth sign from the Hour-Marker, the Greeks call *Kakos Daimon*.<sup>109</sup>

Finally, in chapter 19, Firmicus explicitly defines each of the places in terms of the equal house system, beginning by saying that he is now going to explain the “particular” (*specialiter*) significations of the twelve places in this chapter, which seems to harken back to the way that he outlined the places by sign earlier

<sup>107</sup> Firmicus, *Mathesis*, 2, 15: 3–4, trans. Holden, pp. 62–63, modified. The section in brackets is in Holden’s translation, which he added from manuscript N.

<sup>108</sup> Firmicus, *Mathesis*, 2, 16: 2, trans. Holden, p. 63, modified.

<sup>109</sup> Firmicus, *Mathesis*, 2, 17: 1, trans. Holden, p. 64, modified. All text in brackets is included in Holden’s translation. He says that manuscript A adds “sign,” while manuscript N adds “place.”

as “general” (*platicus*). As in book 9 of Valens, Firmicus defines each equal house as beginning at the degree of the Hour-Marker, and then he says that it extends its “power” (*vires*) through the remaining 30 degrees, until eventually the second equal house begins at the same degree in the following sign. In the chapter that follows, Firmicus gives instructions for interpreting the places and their rulers, and much of the material here sounds like an expanded version of the short synopsis that Valens summarizes in book 9 of the *Anthology*, just after explaining how to calculate equal houses.<sup>110</sup> I suspect what we are seeing here is Firmicus paraphrasing the same source as Valens, which is the lost text of Asclepius, and this would explain why Firmicus is unique among the Hellenistic astrologers in introducing equal houses very early on in his work, whereas for Valens this material is only summarized briefly in a chapter later on in the *Anthology*. Firmicus seems to have prioritized this material from Asclepius more than Valens did for some reason.

In book 3 of the *Mathesis*, Firmicus provides an extended set of interpretations for what the planets mean when they are located in each of the twelve places. This material should be useful for getting a clearer understanding of how Firmicus used the places, although it is complicated because he evidently translated many of the interpretations in this book into Latin from an unknown Greek source text. Unfortunately, it is not always clear which parts represent the original source text versus which comments are additions by Firmicus. Parallels between Firmicus’ delineations and some fragments that have survived from the work of Anubio were originally interpreted as meaning that Firmicus translated the delineations from Anubio directly.<sup>111</sup> However, Heilen has recently argued that instead, Anubio and Firmicus independently drew on a separate source text for these delineations.<sup>112</sup> Generally, the delineations in Firmicus are wordier than those that survive from Anubio, and sometimes there are different interpretations for the same placement.<sup>113</sup>

More importantly, Holden notes that there are many close parallels between the delineations of planets in the places in this book of Firmicus and a chapter that deals with the same topic in Rhetorius, which led him to conclude that “plainly, both Firmicus and Rhetorius derived these statements from the same source.”<sup>114</sup> This becomes important because then the delineations in Firmicus must be read together with the parallel delineations in Rhetorius in order to

<sup>110</sup> Compare especially Firmicus, *Mathesis*, 2, 20: 3–7 with Valens, *Anthology*, 9, 3: 20.

<sup>111</sup> Parallel delineations are noted in Anubio, *Carmen*, ed. Obbink.

<sup>112</sup> Heilen, “Anubio Reconsidered,” p. 131ff.

<sup>113</sup> As discussed by Heilen, “Anubio Reconsidered,” p. 131–133.

<sup>114</sup> Firmicus, *Mathesis*, trans. Holden, p. 95, fn. 2. Holden notes a number of additional parallel passages in the footnotes of Rhetorius, *Compendium*, 57, trans. Holden.

understand what the original source text said, as well as to clarify how it was being interpreted by later authors, including Firmicus.

Rhetorius' primary treatment of the meanings of the twelve places occurs in chapter 57 of his *Compendium*. This is an extremely long chapter, where Rhetorius starts with the twelfth place and then works his way through the rest of the places in zodiacal order. He introduces a new place each time by listing the different names associated with it, as well as some of its general significations. Then he goes through each of the planets and gives a set of interpretations for what they mean when they are located in that particular place in a natal chart. Rhetorius then does something unique: after finishing the first set of interpretations, he then starts the process over again and gives a second set of delineations for each of the planets in the same place. This second set of interpretations is significantly different than the first set. He goes through this same process for all twelve places, where he presents two different sets of delineations for each of the planets. What is even more interesting about this is that the first set of delineations that Rhetorius gives has some close parallels with the chapters on the same topic in Dorotheus, Valens, and Paulus, while the second set of delineations that Rhetorius gives often closely matches the corresponding passages in book 3 of Firmicus.<sup>115</sup> With the second set of delineations, it seems clear that Rhetorius and Firmicus were drawing on the same underlying source text, whereas with the first set of delineations it is not clear if Rhetorius had access to the original source text underlying them or if he is just compiling the delineations directly from Dorotheus, Valens, and Paulus, since we know that he had access to all three of their texts.<sup>116</sup> I would argue that the fact that there are similarities between the delineations in Valens and Paulus (and to a lesser extent Dorotheus) to begin with, as well as the fact that Rhetorius treats them as a distinct tradition of its own, implies that there probably was some sort of specific underlying delineation text that originally motivated the interpretations that they provide. What this results in, then, is effectively two major variant traditions among the Hellenistic astrologers for how to interpret the planets in the twelve places.

<sup>115</sup> For the first set of delineations in Rhetorius, *Compendium*, 57, compare Dorotheus, *Carmen*, 2, 20–27; Valens, *Anthology*, 2, 4–15; Paulus, *Introduction*, 24. For the second set of delineations in Rhetorius compare Firmicus, *Mathesis*, 3, 2–13.

<sup>116</sup> Pingree described this chapter of Rhetorius as “a late conflation of material from Valens, Firmicus (or his source), Paulus, and others. Uses Dorotheus and Critodemus.” Pingree, “Antiochus and Rhetorius,” p. 211. Elsewhere Pingree says that Rhetorius may have drawn on the same source text as Valens for this material, rather than from Valens directly (Pingree, *Yavanajātaka*, vol. 2, p. 431). Rhetorius mentions Dorotheus, Valens, and Paulus by name at different points elsewhere in his *Compendium*.

The identification of these two variant traditions for delineating planets in places is important within the context of the discussion about house division, because in variant one (represented by Dorotheus, Valens, Paulus, and Rhetorius), the places are always discussed in terms of signs—i.e. whole sign houses—whereas in variant two (Firmicus and Rhetorius), the places are sometimes discussed in terms of signs and sometimes in terms of degrees. I suspect that the difference between these two traditions has something to do with the variance between the text attributed to Hermes Trismegistus that introduced the *dōdekatropos* and the text attributed to Asclepius that introduced the *oktatropos*. It is hard to be certain, however, since later authors tended to conflate the two systems, whereas earlier authors such as Thrasyllus and Antiochus tended to present them separately. The fact that the Asclepius text seems to have introduced the concept of equal houses, as we have seen in Valens and Firmicus, might explain why there seems to be some additional focus on the places both in terms of signs and in terms of degrees in the delineations in variant two of Firmicus and Rhetorius. Some of the specific details surrounding the use of the places in terms of degrees in the source text of Firmicus and Rhetorius are a bit murky, though. Let's take a look at how both authors treat this issue.

Firmicus opens book 3 of the *Mathesis* with a treatment of the Thema Mundi. Just before he gives some extended interpretations of it, he cites the title of a specific book by Asclepius that he says dealt with the topic, called *Infinite Nativities* (*Myriogenesis*).<sup>117</sup> Elsewhere, Firmicus says that this same book gave delineations for the Ascendant at each degree and minute of the zodiac.<sup>118</sup> If this is true, then it may partially explain the greater preoccupation with the exact degrees of the angles in the Asclepius tradition. At the end of this chapter, Firmicus completes the discussion of the Thema Mundi, and then prepares to transition into giving delineations for the planets in the twelve places for the rest of book 3 of the *Mathesis*, but first he makes an important prefatory statement:

Now, because these things have been stated and demonstrated, it ought to be defined what the individual stars denote in the individual places of the nativity. [...] But even though these things are thought by some to be defined only generally (*platicus*), many things should also be stated by degrees (*partiliter*) in this book. For the stars will then have their own efficacy, if they are also located precisely in their own individual places.<sup>119</sup>

<sup>117</sup> Firmicus, *Mathesis*, 3, 1: 2.

<sup>118</sup> Firmicus, *Mathesis*, 5, 1: 36–38.

<sup>119</sup> Firmicus, *Mathesis*, 3, 1: 19, trans. Holden, p. 94, modified.



In other words, Firmicus acknowledges here that some astrologers only define the places by sign (i.e. whole sign houses); however, he says that he thinks they should also be defined by degree, because the planets are more “efficacious” or “powerful” (*efficacia*) when they are located precisely in the degrees of certain places. The language he uses here sounds reminiscent of the way that some of the other Hellenistic astrologers would use the Greek word *chrēmatistikos* to describe how the planets become more “busy” or “energetic” the closer they get to the exact degrees of the angles, as we have seen earlier.

In the following chapter, Firmicus begins giving the delineations for the planets located in each of the places, starting with Saturn. What is interesting and unique about these delineations is that in all four of the angular places Firmicus always starts the delineation by using some specific wording that seems to refer to the degree of the angle. For example, for Saturn he begins by saying:

Saturn partily (*partiliter*) posited in the Hour-Marker by day, i.e. if he is in that very degree in which the Hour-Marker is, will make the birth to occur with a very loud outcry.<sup>120</sup>

The Latin word that Firmicus uses here, *partiliter*, is distinctive and important, although there is some ambiguity about what it means. It is derived from the Latin word *pars*, which means “portion,” which in this context is probably equivalent to the Greek term *moira*, which also means “portion,” although in an astrological context it usually means “degree.” *Partiliter* is an adverb, so it means something like “to-the-degree.” Holden interprets this as meaning that the placement is on the very degree of the angle, while Schmidt has recently argued that this wording is used by Firmicus to refer to his use of equal houses as a secondary overlay.<sup>121</sup> Firmicus uses the same language with the other three angles as well, for example saying “Saturn being established to-the-degree (*partiliter*) in the fourth place from the Hour-Marker, that is, in the IC,” or “Saturn being established in the seventh place from the Hour-Marker, that is in the setting, to-the-degree,” or “Saturn being established in the tenth place from the Hour-Marker, to-the-degree in the MC.”<sup>122</sup> However, for some reason Firmicus never uses this language when discussing the intermediate houses in book 3 of the *Mathesis*; instead he just refers to those places according to their number relative to the rising sign, or occasionally even refers to the intermediate places

<sup>120</sup> Firmicus, *Mathesis*, 3, 2: 1, trans. Holden, p. 95, modified.

<sup>121</sup> Holden talks about the meaning of *partiliter* briefly in Firmicus, *Mathesis*, trans. Holden, p. xxviii. Schmidt, *The So-Called Problem of House Division*, p. 33ff.

<sup>122</sup> Firmicus, *Mathesis*, 3, 2: 8; 3, 2: 14; 3, 2: 20.

as signs (*signum*).<sup>123</sup> For example, when Firmicus starts talking about Saturn in the second place he says “when Saturn occupies the second place (*locus*) from the Hour-Marker,” but then when he moves on to the third place he says “Saturn established in the third sign (*signum*) from the Hour-Marker.”<sup>124</sup> This creates an odd situation in which Firmicus is somehow emphasizing the exact degrees when he talks about the four places associated with the angles, but he does not emphasize the degrees associated with the other eight places. This then leaves us with some uncertainty about whether Firmicus’ delineations of the four angles “to-the-degree” (*partiliter*) are meant to be interpreted as only referring to the exact degree occupied by the angles, or if they are meant to refer to the entire thirty-degree range that follows the exact degree of the angles, which would be the range associated with the four angular places using the equal house system that Firmicus outlined earlier in book 2.

In the parallel delineations in Rhetorius that match the ones in Firmicus, he tends to refer to the places in terms of their number rather than referring to them explicitly as signs. This may be notable since Rhetorius talks about the places as if they are signs much more frequently in the first set of delineations that match Dorotheus, Valens, and Paulus, as well as in his introductory remarks about each of the places. The only exceptions to this in the second set of delineations that he shares with Firmicus are when Rhetorius talks about the first and tenth places, which he does tend to refer to as signs. For example, compare Firmicus’ statement about Saturn in the Hour-Marker “to-the-degree” quoted above with this parallel passage in Rhetorius:

When the [star] of Saturn chances to be in the Hour-Marking sign (*hōroskopountos zōidiou*), it will produce a loud outcry...<sup>125</sup>

In Firmicus, this placement is given as relating to the degree or possibly degrees associated with the Hour-Marker, whereas in Rhetorius the delineation is situated within the context of the rising sign. Similarly, compare Firmicus’ delineation of Jupiter in the tenth place:

Jupiter posited in the tenth place, i.e. the MC partilely (*partiliter*) by day, will make principal managers of public affairs. And it will make one of the First Ten of the greatest nations, and those on whom the greatest honors

<sup>123</sup> Thanks to Benjamin Dykes for noting this point about the intermediate places.

<sup>124</sup> Firmicus, *Mathesis*, 3, 2: 4 & 7. For other examples see Firmicus, *Mathesis*, 3, 2: 8; 3, 3: 12; 3, 4: 24.

<sup>125</sup> Rhetorius, *Compendium*, 57 (CCAG, 8, 4, p. 135: 10), trans. Holden, p. 51, modified.

are conferred by the people, distinguished persons and those who would always like to avail themselves of the grace of ostentation...<sup>126</sup>

In Rhetorius the parallel delineation for Jupiter in the tenth reads:

Jupiter chancing to be in the sign (*zōidion*) of the Midheaven by day denotes athletic contestants, directors of public affairs, those esteemed by the people, famous, well-known, or those who are entrusted by kings and magnates with [the management of] their affairs, [or] those who wear crowns throughout their whole lives.<sup>127</sup>

The delineations are both clearly drawing on some similar underlying source text, but for some reason Rhetorius seems to be emphasizing the culminating sign, whereas Firmicus has some language about a specific degree or degrees being involved. Is the difference then that Rhetorius was using whole sign houses, while Firmicus was using equal houses? If that is the case, then what did the underlying source text originally say? The fact that there are some delineations of specific placements given in Firmicus that would only be possible in whole sign houses implies that the original source text did take whole sign placements into account to some extent.<sup>128</sup> For example, at one point Firmicus gives a delineation for the Sun in the first place in a day chart, although this would only be possible using the whole sign house system, since in the equal and quadrant house systems the first place lies entirely underneath the horizon.<sup>129</sup>

While this seems to establish that the whole sign house system was used in the original source text to some extent, that does not necessarily mean that this was the only system that was used. There are a few isolated instances elsewhere in the same chapter of Rhetorius where he also uses language that might imply that specific degrees are involved with the angles, using the uncommon Greek word *homokentros*. Rhetorius only uses this word a few times in his entire treatment of the places in this chapter, but there are two points that are clear: (1) the term only appears in the second set of delineations that are from the same source as Firmicus, and (2) the term only appears when Rhetorius is

<sup>126</sup> Firmicus, *Mathesis*, 3, 3: 18, trans. Holden, p. 107, modified.

<sup>127</sup> Rhetorius, *Compendium*, 57 (CCAG, 8, 4, p. 168: 6–9), trans. Holden, p. 93, modified.

<sup>128</sup> As noted in Holden, *A History*, p. 74, fn. 170.

<sup>129</sup> Firmicus, *Mathesis*, 3, 5: 3. The parallel passage in Rhetorius starts by talking about the Sun in the rising sign in what is implicitly a day chart, and then halfway through it explicitly switches to talking about it in a night chart. Rhetorius, *Compendium*, 57 (CCAG, 8, 4: p. 136: 9–20).

talking about the first and tenth places. The word *homokentros* seems to correspond to Firmicus' use of the word *partiliter* when talking about the four angular places. Surveying other authors that use the same term, Valens uses *homokentros* twice in the *Anthology*, and both times it seems to refer to when two planets are "located at the same angular place."<sup>130</sup> It is also used twice in Hephaestio/Antigonius, in the example chart of Hadrian, where it is used to refer to the placement of the Moon and Jupiter in the chart, which are both conjunct the Ascendant, and thus "located at the same angular place."<sup>131</sup> It is perhaps worth noting that in this example, the Moon and Jupiter are both conjunct the exact degree of the Ascendant in the first degree of Aquarius, and this may help us to understand Firmicus' usage of this concept. There may have been a general sense of the term *homokentros* which simply involved two planets being in the same angular whole sign house, and then there may have been a more idealized version of the placement in which the two planets were exactly conjoining each other to the degree while also being exactly on the degree of the angle. If that is the case, then Firmicus may have been emphasizing the degree placement each time in his delineations because that was the most idealized form of the specific placement, when it was angular both by sign and by degree.

Rhetorius only uses the term *homokentros* when talking about the first and tenth places. As stated earlier, these are also the only places in the second set of delineations that he shares with Firmicus where the places are explicitly described as signs, although Rhetorius seems to use the word *homokentros* as his keyword occasionally to modify the delineation by referring to the specific degrees associated with those angles. The end result is that Rhetorius presents two delineations for the same placement: one in which the planet is in the angular place just by sign, and another when it is in the angular place to the exact degree. The distinction seems to be one of intensity, since the placements by degree generally seem to be interpreted as more extreme or idealized, whereas the placements by sign are toned down a bit. An example of this is when Rhetorius gives two delineations back-to-back for the Moon in the tenth place, with the first referring to the idealized placement of the Moon on the Midheaven degree, and the other just in the Midheaven sign:

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]

<sup>130</sup> Valens, *Anthology*, 2, 4: 1; 2, 38: 16.

<sup>131</sup> Hephaestio, *Apotelesmatika*, 2, 18: 33; 48.

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.<sup>132</sup>

Firmicus has a very similar although somewhat expanded delineation in the parallel passage for the same placement:

The Moon posited in the tenth place from the Hour-Marker, i.e. the MC, if it was found partilely in this place in a nocturnal nativity in those signs in which it is exalted or in which it rejoices—namely, increasing in light, and with Jupiter protecting it with fortunate aspects—it will make the greatest Emperors or powerful administrators, to whom the power of life and death is entrusted in ready fashion. When posited thus, it also gives ordinary consulates. But if it either precedes or follows the MC degree in the next place (*locus*) and is located in nearby degrees, it will produce generals, tribunes, and administrators; but if it is plactically posited in the same sign (*signum*), it yields those who are great in all their actions and adorned with various kinds of good fortune.<sup>133</sup>

What is interesting here is that both authors are emphasizing the exact degree of the Midheaven as indicating the most ideal and powerful placement, while indicating gradations for anything outside of that. Both agree that one of those gradations is just being in the sign associated with the Midheaven; Firmicus adds an additional one of being in the vicinity of the degree of the Midheaven but in a different place. If the Midheaven degree that Firmicus is using here is the equal house Midheaven that he outlined in book 2, then this implies that he is using whole sign houses and equal houses together in this chapter. It is interesting that Rhetorius does not mention this additional gradation, leaving it unclear whether it was in the original text or whether this was added in by Firmicus himself due to his personal emphasis on using equal houses as a secondary overlay.

The other instances of the use of the word *homokentros* in Rhetorius occur when he is talking about the first place. Most of the delineations of planets in the first place in this chapter are given by Rhetorius in terms of the entire rising sign, but when he talks about the Sun and Moon he gives different gradations again based on the proximity to the exact degree of the Ascendant:

<sup>132</sup> Rhetorius, *Compendium*, 57 (CCAG, 8, 4: p. 170: 5–9), trans. Holden, p. 95, modified.

<sup>133</sup> Firmicus, *Mathesis*, 3, 13: 9, trans. Holden, p. 169, modified.

The Moon being of the sect in the sign of the Hour-Marker, making application to none [of the planets], will be judged to be not good. But chancing to be on the same angle (*homokentros*) of the Hour-Marker, she will produce those in command, rulers, magnates, kings [...] But chancing to be of the sect in the Hour-Marking sign (*zōidion*), she will produce priests who handle temple funds or high priests or those who preside over the sacred games or who have actions and benefits in sacred things [...] And in general, when the Moon is void of course in the important places (*topoi*) of the nativity, no good will be produced. You are helped to decide [by noting] in which place (*topos*) of the nativity she is [and] what phase she was allotted; for, if she chances to be in the sign of the Hour-Marker by day, on the same spot as the angle (*homokentros*), she will produce ship-masters or pirates or those in charge of places that are difficult to traverse.<sup>134</sup>

Again, Rhetorius is alternating between interpreting the placement just by sign versus when it is exactly on the angle by degree, and the interpretation when the placement is exact by degree often involves themes of greater eminence or power. The parallel delineation in Firmicus is shorter and seems to focus more on the placements being exact to the degree:

The Moon partilely (*partiliter*) posited in the Hour-Marker in a nocturnal nativity, if it was full and found in those signs in which it rejoices, denotes great increases of good fortune. It makes the native to be put first among his brothers, both by age always and by merit. But if it was found partilely in this place by day, it will make pilots of major ships.<sup>135</sup>

What we seem to be seeing here is a tension in the later Hellenistic tradition, where Rhetorius is describing the places largely as signs and then occasionally in terms of specific degrees, whereas Firmicus has a distinct tendency to emphasize the degrees associated with the angular places, and then only occasionally mentions them in terms of signs. Clearly the underlying source text that both Rhetorius and Firmicus were drawing on said something in the original delineations about planets in the four angular places being the most powerful when they are located at the exact degrees associated with the angles, but it seems as if Firmicus may have extended this so that the power of the equal houses as a secondary overlay was conceptualized as spreading beyond the sign boundary in some instances,

<sup>134</sup> Rhetorius, *Compendium*, 57 (CCAG, 8, 4: p. 138: 3–22), trans. Holden, pp. 54–5, modified.

<sup>135</sup> Firmicus, *Mathesis*, 3, 13: 1, trans. Holden, p. 166, modified.

certainly for dynamic purposes, and perhaps even for topical purposes. Rhetorius seems less clear on this point, as he almost seems to want to restrict his use of the secondary overlay as being for dynamic purposes, since the discussion of the degree of the angle is typically limited to the specific sign that is involved in, as a range of degrees within that sign that confer additional power and intensity to the delineation. At one point when he gives the delineation for the Sun in the first place, he situates it within the context of the entire rising sign, but he does distinguish between the “angular” part of the sign and what is presumably the non-angular part of the sign:

The Sun being upon the sign (*zōidion*) of the Hour-Marker, on the same spot as the angle (*homokentros*), will produce kings or commanders [...] But by night this god being upon the sign (*zōidion*) of the Hour-Marker indicates that the parents will be lower class. [...] But always the Sun, when he is present in the angular (*epikentros*) portions of the signs will become the destroyer of the elder brothers, but it also indicates that some [of the natives] are first born or first nourished.<sup>136</sup>

There is also some uncertainty surrounding which house system Rhetorius would have used in these delineations when it comes to determining what the range is after the degrees of the angles that would be considered more active, although we do know from elsewhere in his *Compendium* that he used quadrant houses as his secondary overlay for dynamic purposes. For example, later in the *Compendium* Rhetorius delineates an example chart of a native who was a scholar that suffered a downfall after taking part in a revolt.<sup>137</sup> Rhetorius outlines all of the placements in the chart, and then when he proceeds with the delineation he jumps back and forth between analyzing the placement of the planets by whole sign house, which he calls “by sign,” and then by quadrant house, which he calls “by degree.” Here is the first part of the delineation:

Investigating the foregoing nativity, I found the Moon and Saturn and Venus and Mars by degree to have been declining, but by sign the Moon

<sup>136</sup> Rhetorius, *Compendium*, 57 (CCAG, 8, 4: p. 136: 9–20), trans. Holden, pp. 52–3, modified. The editors of the CCAG emended the text and added Saturn as being *homokentros* with the Sun on the degree of Ascendant based on a comparison with the parallel passage in Firmicus. I am not clear if this was an appropriate insertion to make, as Rhetorius could have just been talking about the Sun being on the degree of the angle, as he did with the Moon. On the other hand, the delineation here is a bit more negative than one might expect, so perhaps Saturn was originally supposed to be mentioned in the text.

<sup>137</sup> Rhetorius, *Compendium*, 113.

and Saturn and Venus angular, and the Sun and Mercury and Jupiter by sign to have been declining, but by degree the Sun chanced to be in the succedent of the Setting [place]. I see then Saturn being ruler of the Hour-Marker and first ruler of the triplicity of the Hour-Marker and of the [sect] light, signifying the first age, in the decline of the Subterraneous angle and retrograde and aspected by Mars with an equal-sided trine, but also Venus, ruler of it and of the Moon posited in opposition to her. How could he have not had a troublesome first age...<sup>138</sup>

The important point here is that Rhetorius was using quadrant houses as his secondary overlay for dynamic purposes, whereas Firmicus seems to have been using equal houses. This is similar then to the parallel we find with Valens and Ptolemy, where the former used quadrant houses and the latter used equal houses for dynamic purposes. It is left ambiguous what the original source text that Firmicus and Rhetorius shared in common would have used, since it only seems to have emphasized the degrees of the four angles, and used them to determine which planets were the most “busy” or powerful within the broader context of whatever whole sign house they were placed in. The point that is clear, however, is that by the time of Firmicus and Rhetorius in the later Hellenistic tradition these secondary overlays were being used for more general purposes in order to interpret the basic placement of planets in the birth chart, and they were no longer restricted to only being used within the context of certain techniques. While there was still a tendency to use the secondary overlays more for dynamic purposes rather than for topical purposes, by the later part of the Hellenistic tradition, the other forms of house division had become integrated into the system to such an extent that they were always used alongside whole sign houses.

### Concluding Remarks

At this point I think we can understand some of the statements by the later Medieval astrologers that I opened this discussion with, about how there seemed to be some confusion in the inherited tradition regarding whether the first house began with the rising sign or the rising degree. This issue had its origins in the earliest strata of the Hellenistic tradition, where we find the whole sign house system being introduced in the text attributed to Hermes

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<sup>138</sup> Rhetorius, *Compendium*, 113, trans. Holden, p. 160–161, modified. Holden says that Rhetorius uses the so-called Alcabitius house system here (p. 160, fn. 5). Levente László points out privately that while Alcabitius may be used in one other nativity in Rhetorius’ *Compendium*, it is not clear if this example uses the Alcabitius or Porphyry house system.



Trismegistus, the equal house system being introduced in the text of Asclepius, and some form of quadrant houses likely being described in the compilation of Nechepso-Petosiris. While I believe that it is still safe to say that the whole sign house system was the original and the primary form of house division in the Hellenistic tradition, it is clear that from a very early stage, other foundational authors thought it was necessary to introduce other forms of house division to use alongside whole sign houses as a secondary overlay. It does appear that most of the time these secondary overlays were used for dynamic purposes, in order to gauge angularity and planetary strength, whereas whole sign houses tended to be used more for determining topics or areas of life. I would suggest that this has to do with the fact that many of the significations associated with the places are closely tied in with the sign-based aspect that each of the whole sign places have with the rising sign as well as to each other. To the extent that the aspect doctrine was originally intertwined with the signs of the zodiac in the Hellenistic tradition, many of the basic meanings that were first developed for the twelve houses in the Hellenistic tradition are conceptually predicated on the framework of whole sign houses.

That being said, it is also clear that from a very early period in the Hellenistic tradition, there was an attempt to integrate and reconcile the different frames of reference that equal houses and quadrant houses represent. The reason for this is that each of these frames of reference has some independent symbolic value, and this provided the early astrologers with an impetus to integrate them in some way. Moreover, even if there was a tendency to use equal houses and quadrant houses mainly for dynamic purposes in the Hellenistic tradition, we can also clearly see that steps were being made towards using them for topical purposes, such as Valens' use of the meridian to import tenth house topics into other whole sign houses, or Firmicus' apparent desire to treat equal houses as a secondary overlay for topical purposes, perhaps motivated by statements going back to the Asclepius text. In this way the eventual transition towards using quadrant or equal houses for topical purposes in the later Medieval tradition seems to represent the next step in a process that was already occurring in the Hellenistic tradition. An unfortunate side effect of this process was that the discussion eventually shifted entirely towards determining which form of quadrant house division was the most accurate, and in the process the concept of whole sign houses as a system was completely forgotten as the tradition progressed. This was an unfortunate loss because of the important conceptual and practical role that the whole sign house system plays in the overall system, as well as the fact that it was always meant to be used together with the other systems of house division.

In what follows I will continue to use whole sign houses as my primary

approach to house division in this work, since many of the techniques of Hellenistic astrology were originally developed and practiced within the context of that approach, and I consider it to be the most representative of the Hellenistic tradition in general, for reasons that should be clear at this point. Part of the purpose of this book, then, is to demonstrate the efficacy of the whole sign house system, and to teach the reader how to use that approach in practice. However, I will occasionally incorporate Valens' topical use of the degrees of the meridian-Midheaven and IC, as well as Paulus' use of close configurations to the degrees of the Ascendant and meridian-Midheaven as mitigating factors, as I have found both of these considerations to be very useful in practice. I encourage the reader to explore the house division issue more deeply, since ultimately a hybrid approach that incorporates some elements of the whole sign and other house systems is desirable in terms of the contemporary practice of astrology, and we can see that this was the direction that the tradition was headed by the time of Rhetorius. It is not clear whether this synthesis is something that was fully accomplished during the Hellenistic tradition, though, so it is not my place to present such an innovation here.