PRIFYSGOL CYMRU
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Hellenistic Astrology and its Place within Divinatory Practices

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Cosmology, Magic and Divination

Seminar 5

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The Rise of Astrology in the Greco-Roman World (1)

- Plato (*Timaeus*)
- “What about which of them [the gods] come into conjunction and opposition with one another, and in what order they pass in front of one another, and at what times any of them are veiled from our sight and then reappear, [so that] they send fears and signs of the future to those [un]able to calculate?” (40d) (trans. Waterfield, modified)

The Rise of Astrology in the Greco-Roman World (2)

- Plato (*Timaeus*)
- “heavenly kind of gods” (39e-40a)
- “the visible and generated gods” (40d)
- *Epinomis*: “let none of us ever idly suppose that some of them are gods while others are not…but let us all declare and say that they are all cognate.” (986b)

The Rise of Astrology in the Greco-Roman World (3)

- Stoics (Zeno as described by Cicero):
- [gods] “Moreover, they are endowed with supreme beauty of form, and situated in the purest region of the heavens, so that they move and regulate their courses in such a manner that they seem to be conspiring together to preserve and protect all things.” (Cicero, *De natura deorum* II, 23) (trans. Rackham, modified)

The Rise of Astrology in the Greco-Roman World (4)

- Aristotle (qualities and elements)
- *On Coming-to-be and Passing-away* (a.k.a. *On Generation and Corruption*) II, 3 [330b])
- Fire = hot and dry
- Earth = cold and dry
- Air = hot and wet
- Water = cold and wet

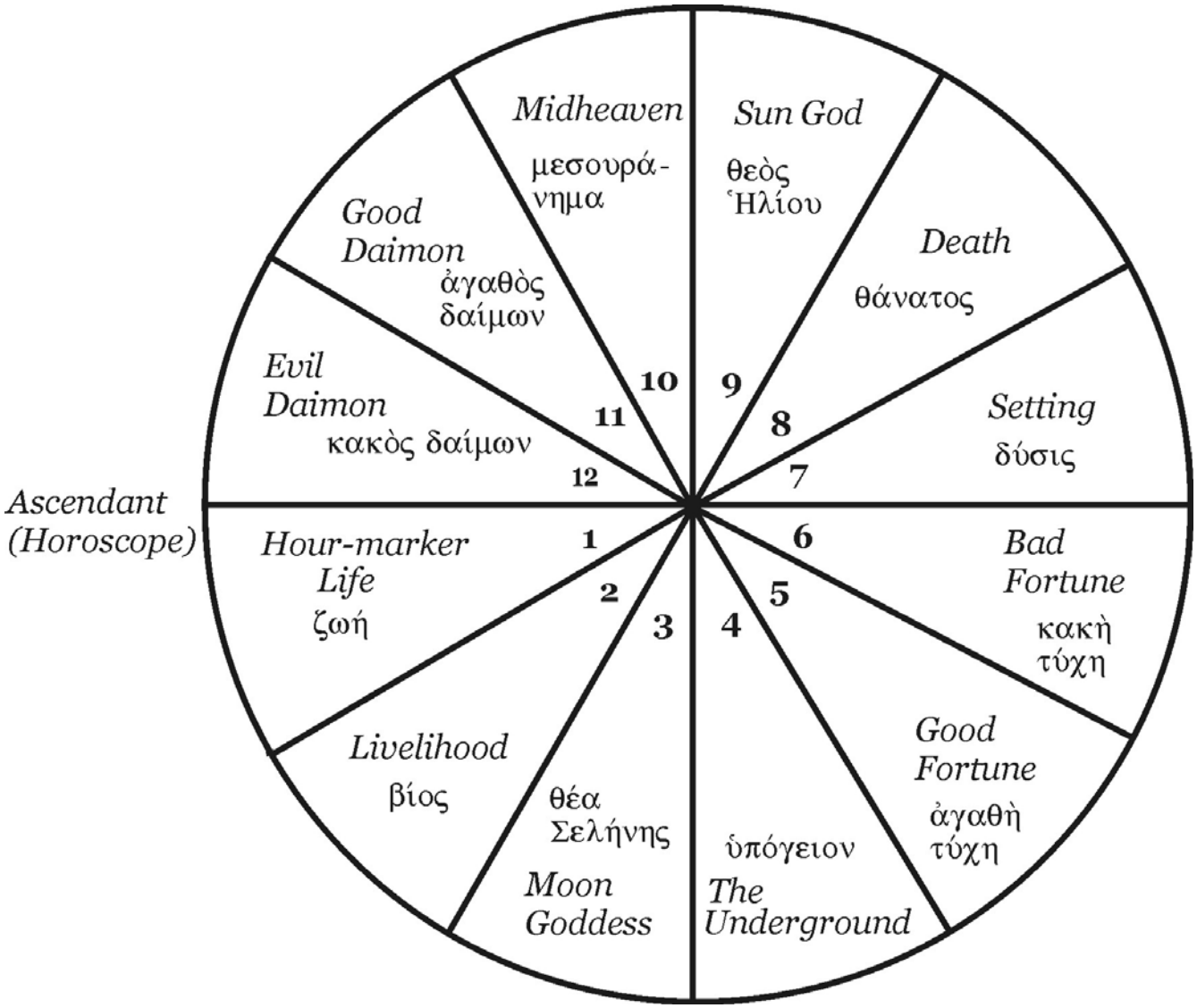
The Rise of Astrology in the Greco-Roman World (5)

- Valens: first to link triplicities with elements (I, 2)
- Stoics (qualities and elements)
- Fire = hot
- Earth = dry
- Air = cold
- Water = wet
- Valens: air is “ice cold and opaque” (II, 4)

The Mechanics of Hellenistic Astrology

- Planets: 7 classical ‘planets’: Sun and Moon (called the luminaries); Mercury, Venus, Mars, Jupiter, Saturn
- Often in a specific order: ‘Chaldaean’ order. Saturn, Jupiter, Mars, Sun, Venus, Mercury, Moon
- Signs: the usual twelve; at the time Hellenistic astrology became more codified (1st century BCE-1st century CE) sidereal placements would have been used (Ptolemy popularised tropical based on seasons, but seasonal correlations were always important)

Names of the Places



The Sect of the Planets

The Sun leads the day sect
The Moon leads the night sect

Most Diurnal

Sun
Jupiter
Saturn

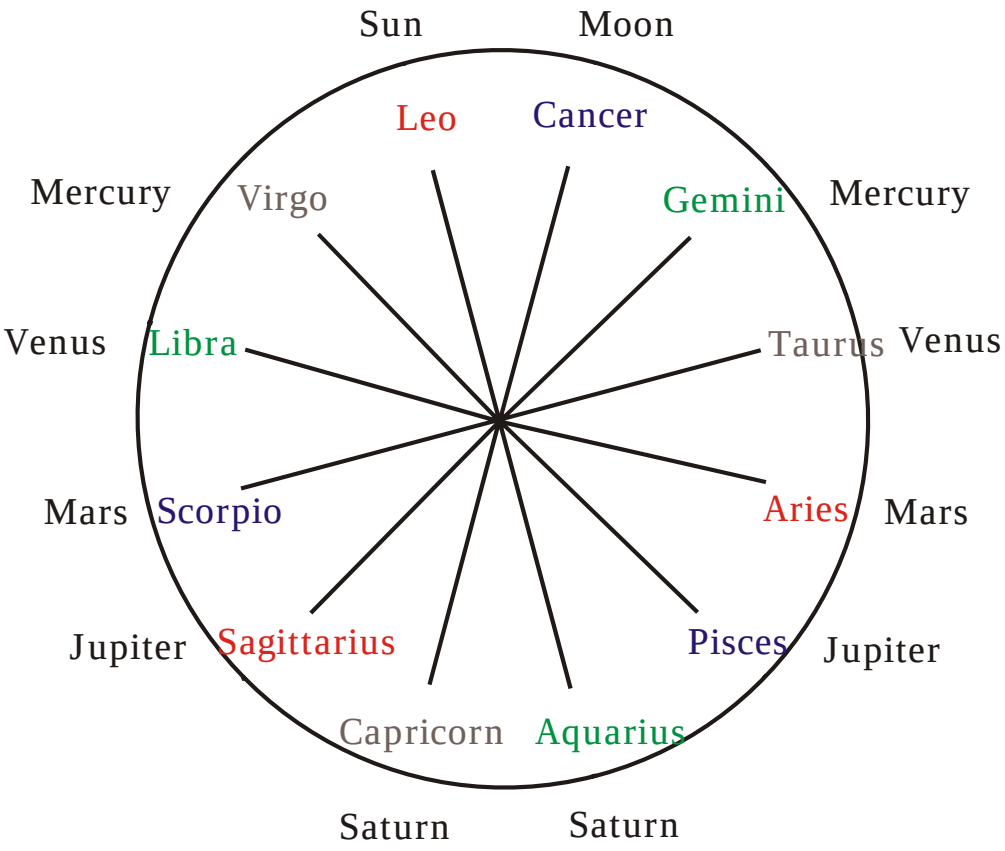
↑ **Mercury** ↓

Venus
Mars
Moon

Most Nocturnal

Some Planetary Dignities*

House Rulers



Triplicity Rulers

Fire
***(Day)* Sun**
***(Night)* Jupiter**

Earth
***(Day)* Venus**
***(Night)* Moon**

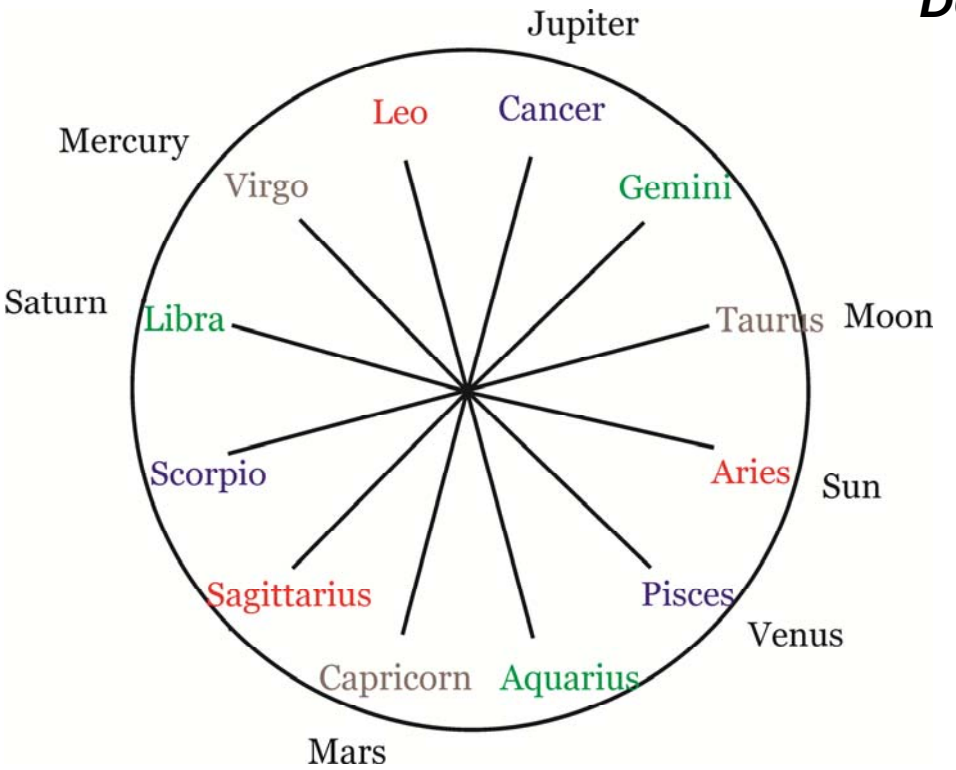
Air
***(Day)* Saturn**
***(Night)* Mercury**

Water
***(Day)* Venus**
***(Night)* Mars**

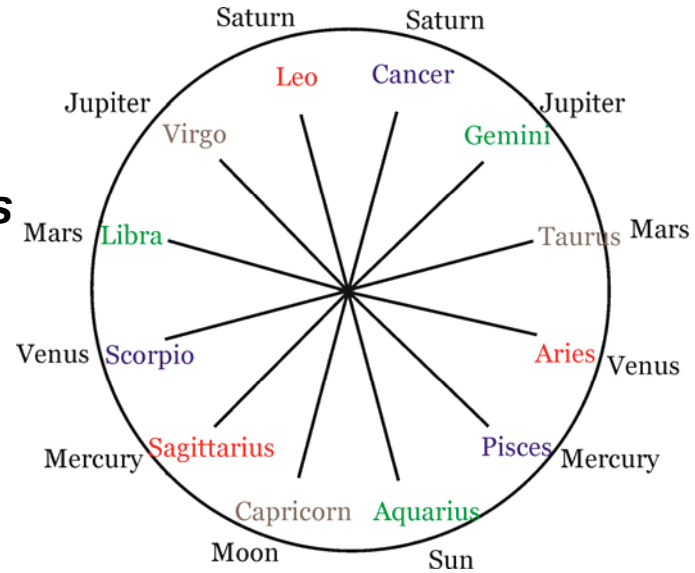
*anachronistic term

Exaltations, Detriments and Falls

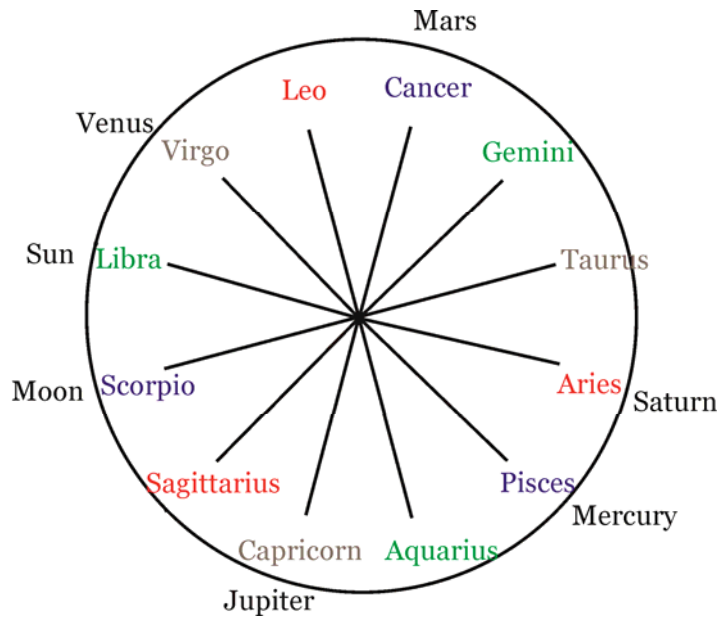
Exaltation Rulers



Detriments



Falls



Terms

Terms (Boundaries or Bounds) (*horia*)

- Certain degrees of a sign were assigned to a planet
- Different systems existed (Egyptian, Ptolemaic, Chaldaean)

  (see D. Houlding, "The Transmission of Ptolemy's Terms: An Historical Overview, Comparison and Interpretation." *Culture and Cosmos* 11 (2007): 261-307. Also S. Heilen, “Ptolemy’s Doctrine of the Terms and Its Reception”, in A. Jones, ed., *Ptolemy in Perspective* (Springer 2010): 45-93)

Astrological Board from Grand, showing Terms

Table of Rulerships

Sg.	Houses of the Planets	Exalta-tion of the Planets	Triplicity Rulers		The Terms of the Planets According to the Egyptians					The Faces of the Planets			Detr.	Fall
			Day	Night										
♈	♂ D.	☉ 19	☉	♃	♃ 6	♀ 12	☿ 20	♂ 25	♄ 30	♂ 10	☉ 20	♀ 30	♀	♄
♉	♀ N.	☽ 3	♀	☽	♀ 8	☿ 14	♃ 22	♄ 27	♂ 30	☿ 10	☽ 20	♄ 30	♂	
♊	☿ D.	♋ 3	♄	☿	☿ 6	♃ 12	♀ 17	♂ 24	♄ 30	♃ 10	♂ 20	☉ 30	♃	♋
♋	☽ N. D.	♃ 15	♀	♂	♂ 7	♀ 13	☿ 19	♃ 26	♄ 30	♀ 10	☿ 20	☽ 30	♄	♂
♌	☉ D. N.		☉	♃	♃ 6	♀ 11	♄ 18	☿ 24	♂ 30	♄ 10	♃ 20	♂ 30	♄	
♍	☿ N.	☿ 15	♀	☽	☿ 7	♀ 17	♃ 21	♂ 28	♄ 30	☉ 10	♀ 20	☿ 30	♃	♀
♎	♀ D.	♄ 21	♄	☿	♄ 6	☿ 14	♃ 21	♀ 28	♂ 30	☽ 10	♄ 20	♃ 30	♂	☉
♏	♂ N.		♀	♂	♂ 7	♀ 11	☿ 19	♃ 24	♄ 30	♂ 10	☉ 20	♀ 30	♀	☽
♐	♃ D.	♍ 3	☉	♃	♃ 12	♀ 17	☿ 21	♄ 26	♂ 30	☿ 10	☽ 20	♄ 30	☿	♋
♑	♄ N.	♂ 28	♀	☽	☿ 7	♃ 14	♀ 22	♄ 26	♂ 30	♃ 10	♂ 20	☉ 30	☽	♃
♒	♄ D.		♄	☿	☿ 7	♀ 13	♃ 20	♂ 25	♄ 30	♀ 10	☿ 20	☽ 30	☉	
♓	♃ N.	♀ 27	♀	♂	♀ 12	♃ 16	☿ 19	♂ 28	♄ 30	♄ 10	♃ 20	♂ 30	☿	☿

Table Design by Robert Hand

Note: The degrees given in this table must be read as the ending longitude and should be interpreted as being an exact longitude X°00'00.00".

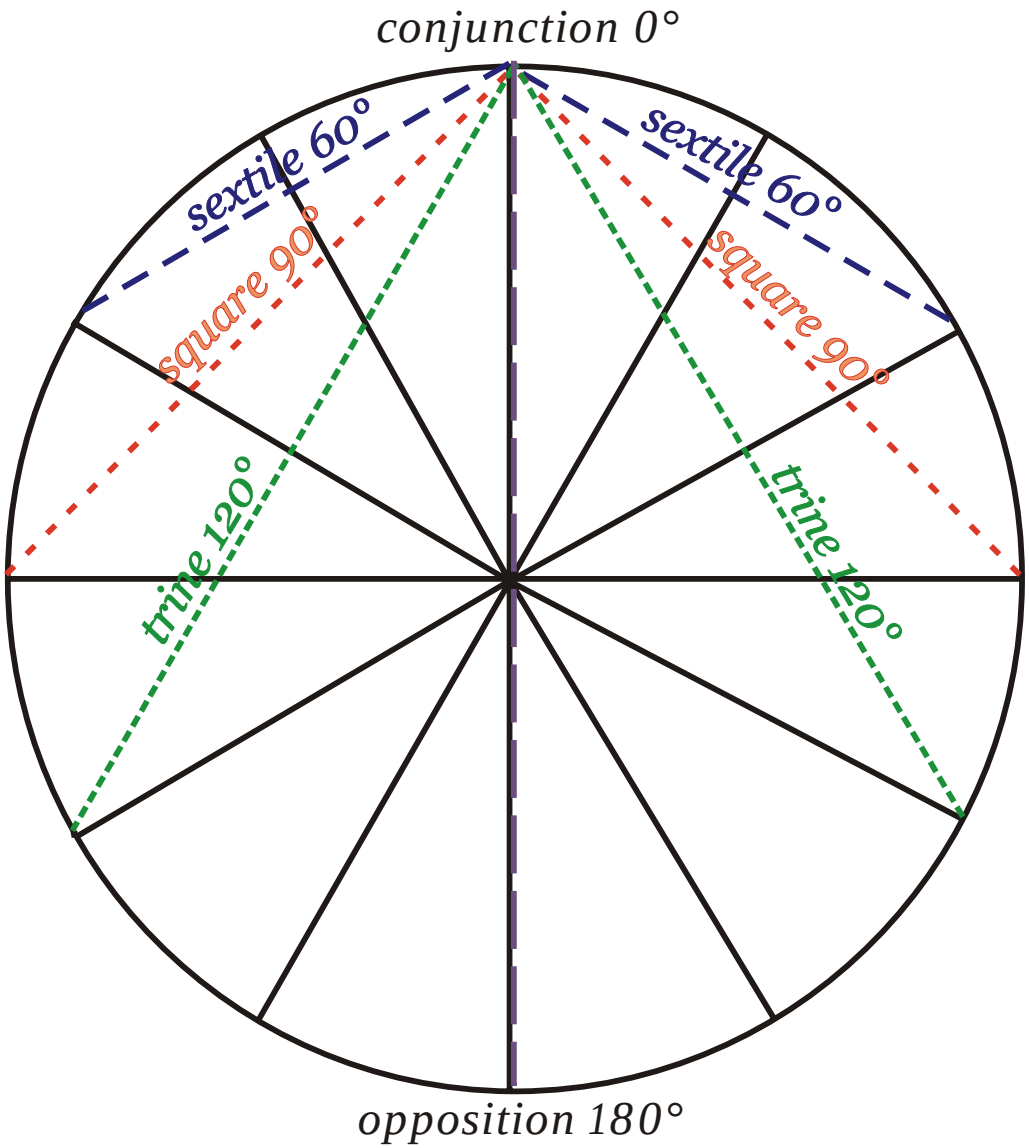
Faces/Decans

- Groups of 10 degrees were also each ruled by a planet
- Derives from Egyptian decans
- The system starts with Aries, and the 1st decan (first 10 degrees) are ruled by Mars
- System uses Chaldaean order
- (second ruler is Sun, then Venus, then 1st decan of Taurus ruled by Mercury, etc.)

Table of Faces

Sg.	The Faces of the Planets		
♈	♂10	☉20	♀ 30
♉	☿ 10	☽ 20	♄30
♊	♃ 10	♂20	☉30
♋	♀ 10	☿ 20	☽ 30
♌	♄10	♃ 20	♂30
♍	☉10	♀ 20	☿ 30
♎	☽ 10	♄20	♃ 30
♏	♂10	☉20	♀ 30
♐	☿ 10	☽ 20	♄30
♑	♃ 10	♂20	☉30
♒	♀ 10	☿ 20	☽ 30
♓	♄10	♃ 20	♂30

Aspects


conjunction 0°
sextile 60°
sextile 60°
square 90°
square 90°
trine 120°
trine 120°
opposition 180°

Origins of Hellenistic Astrology

- Developed out of astral omens and religious ritual involving stars and sky
- Babylon (astral omens, birthcharts)
- Egypt (Ascendant and Midheaven?; decans)
- Greece (some cosmology, systematization, symmetry)
- Persia
- It is a mongrel

Pingree's Theory

However, sometime in the late 2nd or early 1st century B.C. someone, perhaps in Egypt, invented genethialogical astrology, which assumes an Aristotelian universe in which the earth is at the center, consisting of the four sub-lunar elements, is surrounded by the eternally circling spheres of the seven planets in the so-called Hellenistic order (Moon, Mercury, Venus, Sun, Mars, Jupiter, Saturn).

From Astral Omens to Astrology: From Babylon to Bīkāner, Rome: Istituto italiano per l'Africa e l'Oriente, 1997, p. 26

Rebutting Pingree's Theory

- 'Someone...invented genethlialogical astrology'
- 'in the late 2nd or early 1st century BC'
- 'which assumes an Aristotelian universe in which the earth at the center, consisting of the four sub-lunar elements...'
- 'surrounded by the eternally circling spheres of the seven planets in the so-called Hellenistic order'

Astrology and Divination (1)

- Is astrology divination? Historically, yes
  - Uses words and practices similar to other forms of divination
  - Cicero
  - Modern scholarship (with exceptions)
- ‘Natural’ and ‘Judicial’ astrology
  - No ontological distinction between these two in antiquity: natural events (weather, moon, eclipses) could influence life on earth, but both natural and ‘judicial’ [making judgements] astrology were intrinsically connected by similar doctrines and practices

Astrology and Divination (2)

Pingree rejects connection between astral omens and astrology (*Astral Omens to Astrology*, pp. 21-22)

"...the notion that the planets, in their eternal rotations about the earth, transmit motion (change) to the four elements and to the assemblages of elements, animate and inanimate, in the sublunar world. This theory is completely different from that of celestial omens, in which the gods, whose physical manifestations are the constellations and planets, send messages concerning their intentions regarding kings and countries by means of celestial phenomena. That these divine intentions can be altered by the use of propitiatory rituals...emphasizes the fundamental conceptual difference between omens and astrology."

Astrology and Divination (3)

- Whether astrology is divination is a debate among modern astrologers
  - Why? Because of historic differentiation of parts of astrology?
  - Divination as fortune-telling?
  - Astrology as science more respectable?
  - Influence of Ptolemy? Pingree?

Astrology and Divination (4)

- Branches of astrology
  - Natal astrology (for Ptolemy, ‘seed moment’?)
  - Mundane or universal (*katholikos*) astrology (includes weather, some medical, comets, earthquakes)
  - Katarchic astrology (inceptions) (elections, events, interrogations)
- Ptolemy’s position
  - Astrology is stochastic
  - Interested in physical causation; the physical relationship between the heavens and the earth
  - [Does not mention katarchic astrology in the sense of electing times, but does talk about the birth moment as a ‘katarche’]

Katarchic astrology (1)

- The word itself associated with religious ritual and beginning things at a propitious time
- *Katarchē* means beginning, but a special kind of beginning, one associated with ritual – this word came into astrology
- Elections
- Horary (Interrogations)
- Decumbiture

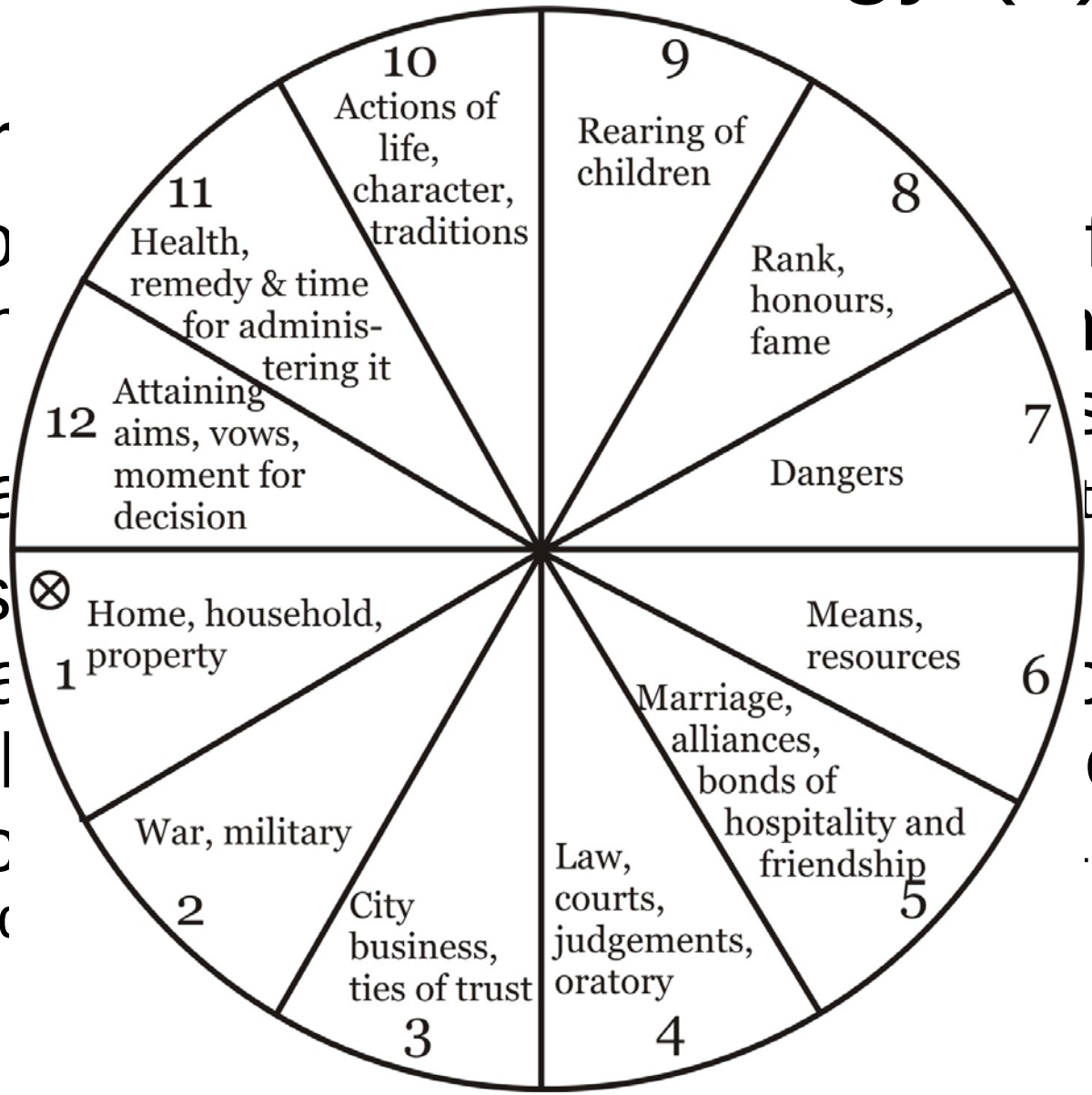
Katarchic astrology (2)

- **Porphyry** on astrology in ritual:

"“But these [who generate effective images],” the letter says, “observe the movement of the heavenly bodies, and they tell, from the presiding of a given star with another or others around the heavens, whether the divination will be true or false, and whether the rites performed will be of no purpose, or have annunciatory power and bring about the [desired] effects (*apotelestika*).”’*Letter to Anebo* 2.6c Sodano = *DM* III.30 [173.7-10] trans. Clarke/Dillon/Hershbell modified

Katarchic astrology (3)

- **Mar**
- ‘cho for
  adm ıerapy
  and s have
  grea tr. Goold
- ‘this hour
  for a planets
  as tl e
  favc -55, tr.
  Goolc



Katarchic astrology (4)

- **Dorotheus**
- Pentateuch V, 17: ‘[title] The courtship of a woman, and what occurs between a wife and her husband when she quarrels and scolds and departs from her house publicly. If you want to know, if she returns to him, whether he will profit from her or will see joy and happiness or other than this in her, then look at the hour <u>in which you are asked about this</u> at the position of the Sun and of Venus.’
- Sim. in Heph. III, 11.2: ‘[According to] the *katarchē* in which the separation has come to be, or *even in which hour someone inquires of you* [my italics], look at Aphrodite and the Sun.’ [my trans.]

Katarchic astrology (5)

- **Valens**

Astrology is provided by the gods to those with the proper outlook (like Valens):

"…but when I lit upon the divine and revered theory of the heavens, I wished to purify my way of life of every vice and pollution, and anticipate the immortal soul. From that point divine things seemed to converse with me, and I acquired the intellectual capacity for sober investigation." (VI, 1.15-16) [my trans.]

Katarchic astrology (6)

For Valens, the *katarchē* must be synchronised with the 'right moment' (*kairos*):

Whence for every *katarchē* one must observe carefully, in putting out a fleet and military command…. Truly, it is useless to sacrifice to god or to consecrate offerings; for prayers will not be answered and god will not let himself be worshipped, but he will be called upon idly and ineffectively. (V, 2.22, 23)

And the right moment is coordinated with the movement of the stars:

"…the authority of the *katarchē* for beginning the action coming to be in accordance with the cosmic movement…" (IX, 12.31)

Katarchic astrology (7)

- **Hephaestio**

Apotelesmatika III, 4: title: “How one might know beforehand the questions of those wishing to investigate from *katarchē*”

Apotelesmatika III, 16.11:

“The composed *katarchē* points out each [part of the ritual] before the opening of the animal: the Hour-marker reveals the one making the sacrifice; the Setting [place] that which is sacrificed or the sacrificial victim; the Midheaven the god or gods; the Underground [place] the reason for the altar, the completion of the matter and how it is sacrificed. One must carefully consider the stars – in what places they are, their position and phase, and the four lots – Fortune, Daimon, Necessity, Love.”

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