

**Astrology in Literature: How the Prohibited became Permissible in the Arabic
Poetry of the Mediaeval Period.**

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**The candidate confirms that the work submitted is her own and that appropriate
credit has been given where reference has been made to the work of others.**

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{الحمد لله الذي بنعمته تتم الصالحات}

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Transliteration Scheme

The system of transliteration of Arabic used in this thesis is that of the Library of Congress.

ء		
ب	ز* z	ف f
ت* t	س* s	ق q
ث* th	ش* sh	ك k
ج	ص* ṣ	ل* l
ح	ض* ḍ	م m
خ kh	ط* ṭ	ن* n
د* d	ظ* ḏ	ه h
ذ* dh	ع	و w
ر* r	غ gh	ي y

Short and Long Vowels

ا - a		
آ - ā	إ - i	
أ - ā	إي - I	أ - u
أَي - ay	أَو - aw	أُو - ū

Notes

1: The letters marked with an asterisk are called sun-letters. When following the definite article *al-*, the *shadda* (ˆ) is placed over the sun-letter, indicating that the consonant is doubled and should be stressed when pronounced. All the remaining letters are called moon-letters and when following *al-* the *sukūn* (°) is placed above them, indicating a non-vowel sound.

2: In general the transliteration scheme is applied according to the pronunciation and not the written form of the Arabic word.

3: If the noun begins with a sun-letter, this affects its pronunciation, e. g. *as-sāḥir* not *al-sāḥir* ('the wizard'), though it is often convenient to transliterate using *al-sāḥir* in all cases.

4: The definite article (*al-*) is written as (*l*) when it follows the prepositions *bi* and *aw*, as the transliteration is conducted according to the pronunciation of the words and not the way they are written in Arabic.

Abbreviations

E. I. *The Encyclopaedia of Islam.*

First E. I. *First Encyclopaedia of Islam*

Note

Sometimes the reader will find that certain sentences in the footnotes are marked with an asterisk (*), indicating that a further explanation or clarification of the marked point follows at the end of that particular footnote.

ABSTRACT

This thesis is concerned to position the art of astrology within the context of classical Arabic poetry, primarily by investigating and elucidating attitudes to the notion of *qadar* (fate) and the ideology in which it was embedded. These attitudes were revelatory of the broader world view of the Arabs of those periods, and their shifts from those held in the pre-Islamic and early Islamic eras tell us a good deal about the importance given to the nature and role of fate and about the various understandings of its influence. The pre-Islamic Arab's notion of *qadar* was in some ways similar to that of the early Muslims: both emphasised predetermination and the irresistible power of fate. But while the *jāhilī* (Pre-Islamic) Arabs identified fate with the malign power of *dahr* (Time), the Muslims believed the power of fate lies in the hands of God the Omnipotent, who alone is responsible for the fate of the whole universe. Thus the astrology of the pre-Islamic era was one aspect of divination (*kihāna*) and claimed to be able to reveal in advance an individual's destiny, which could be avoided by taking certain precautions. These precautions, however, were considered effective only in relatively trivial cases; they were useless in the areas of major impact: a person's happiness or misery (*shaqāwa aw sa'āda*), sustenance (*rizq*) and one's term (*ajal*), the three inevitable and irresistible manifestations of fate. In the Islamic period not only these major aspects of life are governed and controlled by the Omnipotent; the destiny of the universe, in even its most minute details, is determined and controlled by God alone. Astrology was considered to be of no value whatsoever, and its practitioners were subject to the death penalty. These two irreconcilable views are evident in early Islamic poetry, which reflected clearly the response of poets, and society, to astrology from the perspective of *qadar*.

When the orthodox caliphate was replaced by dynastic rule the status of astrology was changed dramatically. The idea that the stars, as indicators, play a role in the life of human beings found powerful supporters in some governors of the Islamic world, who allowed astrology to fulfil a public function regardless of the hostility of the official religion of that society. This social phenomenon generated rich material of a controversial character in the realm of literature. Investigating the factors, motivations and impact of mediaeval political, theological and philosophical attitudes to astrology, in relation to the notions of free will and predestination, is the concern of this study.

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Chapter I: Introduction

I. 1: Prologue

There can be little doubt that the heavens, illuminated by the Sun by day and at night lit by the changing Moon and adorned with a myriad of stars, have exerted a profound fascination on human beings since prehistoric times. The relationship between mankind and the celestial bodies, whether mythical, religious or scientific, has been governed by the knowledge and belief systems of particular societies, and it is evident that for millennia the development of astronomy was closely linked to that of astrology. Although Islamic culture rejects this connection, there were some Muslims who saw in the heavens regular patterns of movement that not only enabled them to predict seasonal changes, but empowered them — or so they believed — to lift the veil off the future and reveal the unknown.

Whether we, as twenty-first-century people, believe that the stars and planets affect human destiny, or, sceptical of such mysteries, regard astrology as mere superstition is not the issue of this research, which is, rather, concerned with certain of our ancestors' reactions to the subject of astrology and its claims. This thesis aims to investigate the impact of astrology on the intellectual life of the pre-Islamic Arabs and their Muslim successors. This subject is particularly interesting because a great deal of the poetical material that has come down to us refers to astrological principles and techniques, although many meanings are still obscure to the modern reader, who lacks a proper understanding of the astrological information upon which the poets drew. This research assumes that to appreciate the literature of our ancestors, it is crucially important to understand their sources. To take one example: a mediaeval Arab poet and vizier, aṣ-Ṣāhib ibn 'Abbād (d. 385/ 995), when addressing his patron, the Buyid ruler 'Aḏūḏ ad-Dawlah (d. 372/ 983), composed the following lines:

خوئني مئجّم، أبو خبلٍ ... تراجعَ المريخ في برج الحمل.
فقلت دعني من أباطيل الحيل ... فالمشترى عندي سواءٌ و زحل.¹

An astrologer, the Father of Fools, warned me that Mars was in Aries.
I replied, 'Get away from me with your ridiculous lies; I hold there is no
difference between Jupiter and Saturn'.

¹ Ḥusayn ibn Muhammad ar-Rāghib al-Aṣfahānī, *Muḥāḏarāt al-Uḏabā' wa Muḥāwarāt ash-Shu'arā'* (Beirut: Dār Maktabat al-Ḥayāt, 4 Vols., 1961), Vol. 1, p. 145.

How are we to interpret these lines? What is the significance of the vizier's astrological image, that Mars has entered the sign of Aries? Was he simply expressing the view of a pious Muslim, who would deny that the stars had any influence on human destiny, or did he have a 'hidden agenda'? These questions cannot be answered without access to mediaeval astrological material that allows aṣ-Ṣāhib's reference to be decoded and interpreted. Such non-literary material helps us understand some of the obscure imagery employed by the mediaeval poets, particularly those of the Abbasid period. Although the poets of the mediaeval Islamic world were not expert astrologers, they made use of the basic principles and techniques of astrology to create imagery that may still arouse our admiration but becomes less puzzling to us once we grasp the key to a realm of systematic knowledge in which they moved freely but which is now unfamiliar. It is the concern of this study to investigate the poets' personal attitudes towards astrology, their level of knowledge of the principles and concepts underlying the discipline, and the nature and function of the astrological references in their works. The poets' astrological references were very various in nature and function, ranging from war to love, from the eulogy to the satire, from politics to faith. Moreover, they could be weapons – sometimes brandished, sometimes concealed – in the philosophical and theological debates of the time. It seems astonishing that the mediaeval Muslim poets were allowed to refer openly to such material in an age when astrology was prohibited by the official religion. While astrology had enjoyed a secure social position in pre-Islamic Arab life, within the coming of Islam it was severely condemned and attacked. Moreover, its practitioners were subject to the death penalty. Thus, an important question addressed by the study is how, then, did astrology manage to survive and moreover, to establish itself firmly in Abbasid society only a couple of centuries after the coming of Islam?

The argument of this research is that despite the significant changes Islam brought to the Arab world, the belief in astrology at court and among the people did not disappear, and indeed the discipline became a vital cultural force in the Abbasid period. Our assumption is that, while its fortunes fluctuated considerably, astrology played a profound role in almost all aspects of life in general, and literature in particular: poets employed astrological material in the creation of their works, for example, to lament at ill fortune, rejoice at good fortune, advise princes, warn tyrants, praise patrons and lovers, and scorn rivals and enemies. Thus this social phenomenon generated a rich and often controversial literature. Now, before going into more details regarding the

organisation of this research we need first to clarify certain concepts and terms that will be encountered throughout this work.

I.2: Defining Basic Terms

(1) The term 'mediaeval Muslim world' as used in this study broadly refers to the period of six centuries from the rise of the Umayyad dynasty to the Mongol invasions. Thus, its beginnings coincide with the political transformation of Muslim rulership established by the Umayyad caliphs and continued by the Abbasids: the principle and practice of dynastic succession.² The term 'early Islamic period' refers to the era from the birth of the Prophet Muhammad in 632 A.D. to the end of the Orthodox Caliphate signalled by the death of the fourth Caliph, 'Ali ibn abī Tālib, in 40/ 661. The term 'classical Arabic literature', however, will embrace all the Arabic literary works produced during the whole period from the *Jāhiliyya* to the collapse of the Abbasid empire at the hands of the Mongols in 656/ 1285. It thus includes all works produced before the so-called Age of Decline.

(2) We may divide the Abbasid period into five historical stages, according to the power the caliphs enjoyed.³

I. the Abbasid caliphs consolidated their power during the first one hundred years, namely from 749AD. when Abū al-'Abbās Assafāḥ overthrew the Umayyads until the reign of al-Wāthiq (d. 847 AD.).

II. The ascent of al-Mutawakkil to the throne in 847 AD. marks the beginning of the second phase, which is characterised by the decline of the caliphs' power as the Turkish soldiers were granted privileges that enabled them to exercise power until the reign of al-Muttaqī (d. 944).

III. The third stage begins with the ascent of al-Mustakfī to the throne in 944 AD. In his reign the Buyids, a Persian dynasty, established their power and regained the lost dignity of the Persians. They seized political authority from the Abbasids, who kept

² For more information on this matter see Patricia Crone, *Medieval Islamic Political Thought* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press Ltd, 2004), particularly pp. 33-47.

³ For these divisions see Muhammad al-Khudārī, *Ad-Dawla al-'Abbāsiyya* (Beirut: Dār al-Kutub al-'Ilmiyya, 1998), pp. 445-47.

only the title of Caliph, which enabled them to 'rule' those countries whose citizens were mainly Sunni Muslims.

IV. The Abbasid caliphs came under another authority with the appearance of the Seljuk dynasty. In 1055 AD., Tughrul Begh entered Baghdad and freed the Abbasid Caliph al-Qā'im bi Amr 'l-Lāh (r. 422-67/ 1103-75) from the Buyid pressure. He was given the title 'Ruler of the Lands of East and West' by the caliph and became the protector of the Caliphate. Henceforth the Seljuk sultans ruled the empire until their state collapsed in 1157 AD.

V. In the last one hundred years of the Abbasid caliphate the caliphs regained some of their dignity and practised real power until the Mongol put an end to their empire in 1258 AD.

(3) I will refer to the astrology of the Abbasid period as 'the science of the stars' and to the astrology of the previous periods, that is the *Jāhili*, early Islamic and Umayyad periods as 'the art of the stars'. This is because the astrology of the latter periods relied mainly on accumulated observations and the individual's ability to read the signs of the skies and draw omens from them. In contrast, Abbasid astrology was constructed upon generally accepted scientific theories, and also flourished and found acceptance. We will therefore refer to the astrology of that period as a science, in accordance with the theory of Thomas Kuhn, who 'attempts to judge the past, as far as possible, on its own terms'.⁴ The scientific modifications that Muslim scholars made to the intellectual achievements of the ancient sources, Greek, Pahlavi, Syriac, and Sanskrit⁵ cannot all be judged as faulty. Some of their results are still valid, particularly their achievements in the field of mathematics, upon which Abbasid astrology built its fundamental theories.

Regarding this point, Nallino states:

What really distinguishes the astrology of Muslim peoples [in the Abbasid period] from preceding systems is, apart from its eclecticism, the degree of perfection attained in the mathematical processes. They are set forth with all the precision that could be desired in the astronomical treatises, alongside the other problems of spherical trigonometry; and it was to aid to this end that the calculators drew up very numerous and

⁴ Thomas Kuhn, *The Copernican Revolution* (1957), cited in Ann Geneva, *Astrology and the Seventeenth Century Mind: William Lilly and the Language of the Stars* (Manchester & New York: Manchester University Press, 1995), p. 1.

⁵ See George Saliba, 'Astrology/Astronomy, Islamic', *Dictionary of Medieval Ages*, ed. by Joseph R. Strayer, (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 13 Vols., 1982), Vol. 1, p.617.

detailed mathematical tables. In this regard there is a striking contrast with Greek and Indian astrology which made clumsy calculations and always shrank from an excessive complication of mathematical elements.⁶

(4) The term *nujūmiyyāt* in this study refers to poetry containing astral references, namely to the stars and their various aspects and functions that are connected to their astronomical, meteorological, or physical aspects; that is, of course, besides their astrological significance. A more specific term that will be frequently encountered throughout this study is *tanjīmiyyāt*; that is, poetry containing only astrological references.

(5) Reference to 'the translation movement' will be encountered frequently throughout this study. This is the academic activity that was mainly concerned with translating classical Greek, Persian and Syriac texts into Arabic. The movement received strong institutional backing and financial support under the early Abbasid rulers.

I. 3: Aim of the Research

It is the main aim of this study to investigate (1) the 'factors' influencing mediaeval political, theological and philosophical attitudes to astrology, particularly in relation to the notions of free will and predestination and, more importantly, (2) the 'impact' of astrology on classical Arabic poetry in general and that of the Abbasid period in particular. It will therefore examine the response of poets, and of the wider society, to astrology from the perspective of *qadar* (fate), which was believed to be divinely determined. Thus the study seeks to determine the nature and function of the astrological references used by mediaeval poets. The study does not attempt to prove specific hypotheses, but the main aim, outlined above, is connected to a number of research questions which will be explored. These include: What attitudes can be discerned towards the upper realm in general and the role of heavenly bodies as tools for astrology in particular? How did astrology manage to survive the opposition of orthodox Muslims? What role did astrology play in shaping the ideology of mediaeval

⁶ C. A. Nallino, 'Astrology', *First Encyclopaedia of Islam* (henceforth *First E. I.*), ed by M. Th. Houtsma *et al.*, (Leiden & New York: E. J. Brill, 9 Vols. 1987), Vol. 1, p. 497.

society? In what ways and to what extent did astrology affect the poetry of the periods under study? Is it possible to deduce the attitudes of mediaeval poets towards the subject of astrology from their works? To what extent were they concerned to reflect the general view held by their society towards astrology? Which had a greater impact on mediaeval Arabic poetry: 'the art of astrology' or the 'the science of astrology'? Were the heavenly bodies conceived to be instruments of Divine providence, or agents to whom man's misfortune could be attributed? And How did poets present the notion of 'astral destiny' in their works?

The objectives of this research are: to examine the validity of the assumption that literature can throw light upon the life of a society in ways and in areas unexplored by other cultural products; to help bridge the gap between modern readers and the literary heritage of their ancestors, which might lose its significance because of their unfamiliarity with certain technical terms; and because we are convinced that interdisciplinary research can answer questions that individual disciplines, each investigating its own area, cannot find answers to, this study, which investigates the interplay between literature and astrology, aims to raise awareness of the importance of interdisciplinary studies in addressing complex problems. The study hopes to fill one of many gaps in the study of classical Arabic poetry and of the poesy of nature in particular by offering a new approach, that is the astrological, by which cosmological references in poetry can be analysed. It is hoped that this study will provide a valuable basis for further research and contribute to the understanding of the literary phenomenon of 'astrology in literature'. Finally, since understanding the astrological references and allusions in classical poetry is impossible without deciphering and interpreting the astrological codes, this study seeks to make reading such poetry a more enjoyable experience for the modern reader.

I. 4: Methodology

This study draws on the theory that holds literature to be an authentic reflector of ideas and issues prevalent in particular societies, and to give a sense of historical development it explores the poetry of the pre-Islamic, early Islamic and mediaeval periods according to a generally chronological schema, and analyses the poets' astrological references and the ideas and issues included in them. Also, an investigation of the historical events associated with the poems in question provides a supporting framework for the

interpretation of those references. Although technical discussion is kept to a necessary minimum, the development of astrology, and especially the transformation wrought by the translation movement, is discussed with reference to the development of the *tanjīmiyyāt* genre in each historical stage: the *Jāhili* period, the early Islamic period, the Umayyad period and finally the Abbasid period. This structure is based on three key factors that strongly influenced the development of *tanjīm* poetry in the classical period: the values that shaped the ideology of the pre-Islamic society, the changes that Islam brought to that community, and the expansion of empire and the resulting encounters with other cultures that the Umayyad and Abbasid societies, in particular, witnessed and that affected the Islamic values held by Muslims. It is also important to bear in mind that we seldom find any poem of the *Jāhili*, early Islamic or Umayyad era that includes substantial passages containing astrological references; therefore, the analysis will mostly be limited to small groups of lines, or even individual lines, with reference to the polythematic mode that dominated the poetic discourse of those periods. Furthermore, all references will be considered in the light of the astrological knowledge and theories of each historical stage in an attempt to place them within the context of their time.

The originality of this research lies in both its methodology and its content. The employment of an interdisciplinary approach to the analysis of astrological references, which has been virtually absent from scholarly studies of classical Arabic poetry, offers a new scope for a literary analysis that sheds light on a neglected genre, that of *tanjīmiyyāt*. The study decodes the obscure meanings of this poetry by interpreting them in the light of the astrological material we assume the mediaeval poets made use of when creating their material, situating them in their historical context and taking into consideration the philosophical and theological debates regarding the mediaeval views of astrology as a valid or invalid branch of knowledge. In all these aspects our methodology is original and has proved to be the most appropriate approach for analysing the astrological references found in mediaeval Arabic poetry, and has yielded original findings that will be discussed in the concluding chapter of this thesis.

I. 5: The Content of the Research

After this introductory chapter, the second chapter will discuss the Arabs' vision of the heavens, that is, their conceptions of the upper realm's physical, functional, and essential nature in accordance with the various ideologies that dominated their thinking

in the periods in question. We will then identify the effects of these conceptions on the literary genre of *nujūmiyyāt*, which was broadly concerned with the heavens in their various aspects and not only with the astrological significance of astral bodies.

The main body of this research can be divided into two main parts, both of which concern the branch of astrological poetry.⁷ The first, which comprises chapters 3, 4, and 5 of this study, addresses the question of fate, as astrology's most fundamental and controversial claim is to know the future with a view to changing or at least avoiding evil destiny. This part examines the factors that allowed astrology to survive in a society that built its belief on the notion of absolute submission to and acceptance of whatever destiny God determines for mankind. The second part, which consists of two chapters, namely 6 and 7 focuses on the poetical references to the practical aspects of astrology, namely the four techniques used in the Abbasid period for predicting the future, to see how poets adopted and interpreted them to fit their artistic purposes. Techniques concerned with examining that effect of the upper realm on personal affairs and how this notion was used as poetic theme will be the subject of discussion for chapter 6; while techniques oriented towards predicting worldly matters and how they employed by poets will be the concern of chapter 7. Examination of relevant lines from a great variety of mediaeval poets aims to enhance our comprehension of the phenomenon of 'astrology in classical Arabic literature'. These astrological references can also be presented as evidence regarding one assumption of this research, which is that the poets' personal opinion of astrology is not necessarily the prime motivation for them to utilise such material and employ its concepts and techniques in the creation of their art. Astrology was regarded by poets as a rich source from which to create striking images and sometimes deliver contentious opinions that would have been dangerous to express without the mask provided by such material; astrological references of such characteristic demonstrate that astrology affected almost all aspects of mediaeval

⁷ It is important to define the area under consideration. Initially, astrology had been perceived as a subject composed of two dimensions: natural astrology and judicial astrology. The first of these, also known as meteorology, was sometimes regarded as an independent discipline, being that branch which studied astral effects on natural phenomena. Therefore, this research will make use of studies that investigate literary references to the second type of astrology, namely judicial astrology, which is concerned with the effects of astral phenomena on human behaviour. (Those who are interested in the analysis of literary works concerned with meteorological science are referred to Claude Lévi-Strauss's *The Raw and the Cooked: Introduction to a Science of Mythology*, trans. John and Doreen Weightman (New York: Harper and Row, 1969). See particularly part four: Well-Tempered Astronomy, pp. 199- 281).

Muslim life despite the strong opposition of orthodox Islam, as we noted. The study's final chapter presents a summary of the research and draws conclusions from the results of its investigations.

The main task of this study is to explain the mediaeval poet's astrological imagery by revealing meanings which are not apparent to the great majority of modern readers, who will require assistance to understand their full significance, and thus to enjoy and appreciate the creativity and, sometimes, wisdom of our ancestors. The study's primary sources are those works of the classical poets that contain astrological references, the main secondary sources being the astrological material that we can assume the poets had some knowledge of; that is, the astrological treatises and manuscripts of the mediaeval period. There are also lexicons, which proved to be sufficient for the understanding of certain astrological concepts and principles that formed the astrological material of the *Jāhili* era in particular. The other secondary sources are of lesser importance but are nevertheless crucial to the understanding of the subject; these are the historical materials which help explain the circumstances and occasion of certain verses and thus the meaning and implication of particular astrological references.

A considerable body of literature exists on the topic of astrological influences on the literature of mediaeval England and a great many academic studies concerning the effects of astrological knowledge on the intellectual life of the period have appeared over the past decades; Chaucer's astrological references, in particular, have attracted a great deal of scholarship.⁸ Unfortunately, however, it is almost impossible to find a single substantial work of this kind in the field of Arabic literature, and so this research has benefited from the approaches found in the studies of astrology in mediaeval English literature, which have been very helpful in enabling the formation of a vivid and clear perspective on the research. Attention, therefore, has been paid, firstly, to those works that have investigated the astrological elements employed by some prominent mediaeval English authors in general, and secondly, to those studies that have investigated Chaucer's understanding of the cosmos in particular.⁹

⁸ We provide a list of such works that were helpful for this study and which are to be found in the bibliography.

⁹ In this regard, I am indebted to the bibliographies on Chaucer studies that have sections on Chaucer's poetic use of mediaeval astrology, often included in the scientific chapters, especially that of Mark Allen

Regarding the translation of Arabic quotations, particularly the selected Qur'anic verses and poetic examples, two methods are used in this study. Unless otherwise stated, all translated quotations from the Qur'ān are compiled using four texts: *The Bounteous Koran: A Translation of Meanings and Commentary* (1984); *The Glorious Qur'ān: Text and Explanatory Translation* (1938); and *The Holy Qur-ān: English Translation of the Meanings and Commentary* (1410 H.); and *The Koran* (1964). These different sources have been variously used for the sake of clarity and ease of comprehension. The original texts in Arabic are given in the footnotes so that the translation may be compared with the original, and the numbers of the chapter, sūra, and verse are provided for the reader's convenience. Care has been taken to choose the translation closest to the literary meaning of the original. However, in translating the examples of classical poetry a degree of freedom has often been unavoidable, in order to convey the meaning while attempting to achieve a necessary liveliness and fluency in the English. Almost all the translations are my own; the very few exceptions are acknowledged in the footnotes.

Whenever possible, two dates are given: the lunar Islamic year on the left, and the solar Christian year on the right. Sometimes, however, one of them is not found in the historical sources, in which case the one provided is given the abbreviation A.D. or BC for the solar calendar, and H. or B. H. for the lunar calendar.

I. 6: Literature Review

In order to clarify the position of this research with regard to previous studies, the following discussion will examine the extant body of literature written on astrology and classical poetry; in other words, it will survey those works considered most relevant to this study, noting deficiencies and omissions, in order to present an overview of the studies related to the subject of this research.¹⁰

and John H. Fisher, *The Essential Chaucer: an annotated bibliography of major modern studies* (London: Mansell Publisher, 1987), which is a guide to twentieth-century Chaucer studies and includes a comprehensive literature review of its subject.

¹⁰ For theses written on the subject of astrology, see 'Reference alert 1900-2005, Over 1500 references with author, title, source', (author is not cited), in <www.astrology-and-science.com>, 39 pages, [accessed 10 December 2007]. This article provides more than 1500 references to astrology covering

The approach adopted in reviewing this literature is to classify it by issues; this approach is relevant to the methodology of this research, which links the employment of the principal features of astrology to the literary qualities of certain genres, as has been discussed above. Therefore, the works examined below are analysed to identify their primary focus, to assess their contribution to the study of astrology in the literature in question and, importantly, to specify their shortcomings in order to demonstrate the importance and originality of this study.

An examination of the literature reveals that few attempts have been devoted to an investigation of the role of astrology in classical poetry. Therefore, this survey covers a carefully chosen group of works that in various ways enhance our understanding of this subject. The review is divided into three main sections: the first of these addresses issues related to the different social roles astrology played in the mediaeval Muslim world, the second is concerned with astrology as an intellectual discipline, and the third focuses on studies of the literary phenomenon of the *tanjīmiyyāt* in classical poetry. The main concern of this discussion is to throw light on the salient features of the literature under review in order to outline the study's research context and thus its contribution to the field of literary studies.

Studies of mediaeval Arabic astrology are mainly of two kinds: first, those that concentrate on the theories of that science and their sources that appeared in that age; second, those that are concerned with the debates that centred on astrological practices, particularly those that made use of foreign (especially Greek) sources to justify Abbasid rule. These latter works show a strong antipathy towards astrology, which has always been viewed as a pagan activity and a science standing in diametrical opposition to orthodox Islam. Perhaps for this reason, a search for studies that devote their efforts to investigating the crucial role that astrological works and activities played in the intellectual life of the mediaeval Muslim world results in a very limited list. Nevertheless, the concern of the following discussion is to investigate the rare examples of this type, as they are more relevant to the area of this study. This approach, however,

journals, books and theses in the fields of arts, biology, business, history, humanities, medicine, psychology, science, and social sciences.

necessarily excludes not only the great many treatises and other texts which are concerned with the principles and techniques of the science and which men of letters are supposed to have relied on as sources of their astrological knowledge, but also the numerous arguments devoted to the controversy over astrology's scientific validity. The primary and secondary works pertaining to these two areas of study have been preserved in libraries throughout the world¹¹ and have been the subject of much research. The intention, then, has been to search for studies that examine the effects of astrology on the most important aspects of Abbasid life, namely its social, ideological, economic, political, cultural and intellectual dimensions.

I. 6. 1: The Social Role of Astrology in Abbasid Society

George Saliba in 'The Role of the Astrologers in Mediaeval Islamic Society'¹² has conducted a thorough investigation of the social status of astrologers in mediaeval Islamic society, which provides much valuable information on this subject. The article's key sections are: Sources, Social Integration of the Astrologers, The Making of an Astrologer, Range of Astrological Predictions, Clients and Working Conditions, Remuneration, and Social Mobility of Astrologers. Saliba's main concern is to demonstrate that astrological activities were in high demand among almost all social groups. He sums up by remarking that:

astrologers played a very complex role in mediaeval Islamic society. While trading in a craft which was both religiously and legally frowned upon, they still managed to carve a niche for themselves which was not too different from that occupied by other professional classes in that society. Like other craftsmen, artists, and professionals they had to depend on a patronage system for their sustenance, and they seem to have exploited that system with some success.¹³

Although Saliba's article is certainly a valuable work considered as a sociological and historical study of astrology and astrologers, its usefulness to this research is limited. To assess the social status enjoyed by astrologers in that age, Saliba relies on a variety of sources, the most significant being literary works; he also makes use of the information

¹¹ David Pingree, 'Astrology', in M. Young, J. Latham and R. Serjeant (eds.), *The Cambridge History of Arabic Literature: Religion, Learning and Science in the 'Abbasid Period*, (Cambridge & New York: Cambridge University Press, 1990).

¹² George Saliba, 'The Role of the Astrologers in Medieval Islamic Society', in Emilie Savage-Smith (ed.), *Magic and Divination in Early Islam* (Aldershot: Ashgate Variorum, 2004), pp. 341-370.

¹³ *Ibid.*, p. 362.

provided by miniature paintings, which depict astrologers as a professional group. Although Saliba's study can be classified as pertaining to the area of 'astrology in literature', the area which is the focus of the present research, his purpose in investigating these literary and visual materials is quite different, since this study is not mainly concerned with the social function of astrological knowledge, as Saliba's is.

Many authors of articles in encyclopaedias¹⁴ agree that 'the science, or art, of the stars' denotes indifferently astrology or astronomy or both of them together.¹⁵ Moreover, several studies view the demand for practical astrology as the factor that gave rise to early Arabic astronomy. In refuting this view, a number of scholars argue that there was a definite separation between astronomy and astrology in the early mediaeval period, prominent among whom is George Saliba; in his 'Astronomy and Astrology in Medieval Arabic Thought',¹⁶ Saliba focuses on the historical process by which the distinction between the two disciplines was realised. He explains that his article aims to:

document the conceptual distinction during [that time] between the science of astrology and that of astronomy [...] in order to assess the social perception of these two disciplines, thus hoping to determine their social status and thereby assess their place within the general framework of the sciences.¹⁷

Saliba's argument is that the subject matter and methods of proof of each science provided 'a set of conceptual schemes that characterized the nature of the two disciplines'.¹⁸ Saliba presents a radical hypothesis: that these two aspects of knowledge had been 'considered under two completely different divisions: the division of the physical sciences, in the case of astrology, and the division of the mathematical sciences in the case of astronomy'.¹⁹ Although Saliba's argument is convincing, we should not

¹⁴ Such articles will be excluded from this literary review as they all concentrate on the historical development of the discipline, and all concur in their opinions regarding the subject matter.

¹⁵ See C. Nallino, 'Astrology', in *First E. I.*, Vol. 1, pp. 494- 95.

¹⁶ George Saliba, 'Astronomy and Astrology in Medieval Arabic Thought', in Roshdi Rashed and Joël Biard (eds.), *Les doctrines de la science de l'antiquité à l'âge classique* (Leuven: Peeters, 1999), pp. 131-64.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 131.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 149.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*

forget that most astronomers also practised astrology, whether they believed it or not. For example, al-Khuwārizmī (800-47 A.D.) used the financial support he received as a court astrologer to sustain and fund his astronomical research.

I. 6. 2: Astrology as an Intellectual Discipline

The prime motivation behind the establishment of a new branch of astrology in the mediaeval Arab world has been discussed by Dimitri Gutas in his *Greek Thought, Arabic Culture*.²⁰ Gutas adopts a theoretical standpoint from which to view the Graeco-Arabic translation movement, describing it as ‘a very complex social phenomenon’²¹ that cannot be attributed to a single factor but resulted from a variety of causes.²² He argues that it was a phenomenon that had a great effect on both the foundation of Baghdad in the eighth century and the establishment of the Abbasid Empire; and that it was a movement that was generated and sustained by the needs and tendencies of that society. In tracing back the motives that resulted in this phenomenon, Gutas argues that it was the early Abbasid rulers’ adoption of the Sasanians’ Zoroastrian imperial ideology which made the acquisition of the corpus of works of foreign identity possible and desirable within Abbasid society.²³ This foreign ideology then came to underpin the imperial policy of the Abbasid Empire,²⁴ one of whose fruits was the invention of a new branch of the applied sciences of the Arab world, that is, ‘astrological history’. Gutas explains that ‘astrological history is the account of dynastic history in terms of cyclical

²⁰ Dimitri Gutas, *Greek Thought, Arabic Culture: The Graeco-Arabic Translation Movement in Baghdad and Early ‘Abbāsīd Society* (2nd – 4th/ 8th – 10th centuries) (London & New York: Routledge, 2002), pp. 45-52.

²¹ *Ibid.*, p. 7.

²² Obviously this claim can be applied to any social phenomenon.

²³ Gutas, *Greek Thought, Arabic Culture*, p. 45.

²⁴ For the role played by this doctrine in the formation of the imperial ideology of the early Abbasid administration (see *ibid.*, pp. 28- 52). In brief, according to Gutas, the prime motive was the eagerness of the early Abbasid caliphs to legitimise their dynasty by all possible means. These included relying on religious men to support the righteousness of their claim to the throne as the descendants of the Prophet Muhammad, and, in contrast, depending on astrologers to stress that their right was in accordance with God’s command as revealed in the configuration of His stars, which they interpreted to the advantage of the caliphate. This latter policy was adopted, and given an Islamic character, from the Sasanians imperial ideology in order to convince the caliphs’ Persian rivals, who believed strongly in their customs and traditions, to accept the message of God delivered by the stars.

periods of varying lengths of time governed by the stars and the planets'.²⁵ This branch of astrology had a dual function:

a *political* one in that it presented the dominion of the 'Abbāsīd state, whose cycle was just beginning, as ordained by the stars and ultimately by God, with the implied message to all potential opponents of the 'Abbāsīd regime that political activity against them would be futile; and an *ideological* one in that it inculcated the view of the 'Abbāsīd state as the legitimate and only successor, in the grand scheme of things governed by the stars, of the ancient empires in Mesopotamia and Iran, and most immediately of the Sasanians.²⁶

When astrology became a courtly activity, the major concern of astrologers was to maintain its strong reputation. They therefore endeavoured to build a solid basis for the expansion of their knowledge and to make it acceptable intellectually as well as socially. As a result, a group of expert astrologers, whose careers were heavily dependent on translated sources, also composed original Arabic materials in an attempt to build a theoretical framework of their science, and Islamised a number of its principles²⁷ so that they could gain and sustain acceptance in the wider society.²⁸ The same process can be seen at work, according to Gutas's theory, in all other sciences whose development initially depended on the translation of foreign texts:

Political considerations, ideological or theoretical orientations, or practical need would initially occasion translations, their study and use would result in original Arabic compositions in that particular field, and the development of research on the particular subject in this way would further generate a need both for more accurate translations of texts already available and for translations of new texts.²⁹

Gutas's study makes a substantial contribution to our understanding of the intellectual role of astrology at that period, as it illuminates the main stages of the historical

²⁵ Ibid., p. 45.

²⁶ Ibid., p. 46.

²⁷ 'Islamising astrology' will be discussed in chapter four.

²⁸ As they were accepted by the rulers, we assume that astrologers were also accepted by the lower and less educated strata in that society and thus the targeted audiences of astrologers were the religious men and scientists, whom they endeavoured to satisfy by Islamising some of the principles of their discipline and providing it with a scientific theoretical foundation.

²⁹ Gutas, *Greek Thought, Arabic Culture*, p. 110.

development of the discipline of astrology as an important part of the transmission of knowledge from the classical world to the Islamic world. However, the texts cited as evidence regarding the political and intellectual dimensions of the influence of astrology on that society are, though significant, of too limited a range to support his theory regarding the impact of astrological knowledge. This is because his interest in these astrological texts is focused on analysing the factors that gave rise to the translation movement, in which astrological materials were not only among the first texts to be translated into Arabic but were also of the greatest political importance, since they were used to help establish the legitimacy of the Abbasid caliphs.

I. 6. 3: Astrology in Literature

Some of the principal elements of astrology, in particular those that were also common features of astronomy, are the subject of concern of a very limited number of classical works that adopt a very similar approach in demonstrating how such elements were a subject of interest in both poetical and prose works; they all discuss astrological references found in classical literary material.

Shihāb ad-Dīn Ahmad an-Nuwayrī's *Nihāyat al-Arab fī Funūn al-Adab*³⁰ appears to be one of the rare classical works concerned with astral references occurring in literary texts. This literary encyclopaedia is a kind of anthology, whose sections contain extracts from the prose writings and poems of a variety of authors that incorporate astronomical references. The first section describes the upper world under a number of sub-sections; there then follows a discussion of the four elements (*istaqsis*): air, fire, earth, and water. Although an-Nuwayrī states clearly that he will be selective in discussing literary material containing astral references, and will particularly avoid any mention of the astrological functions of the seven planets as predicting the future so as not to appear to approve of astrologers and their beliefs concerning astral influences,³¹ he fails to adhere strictly to this approach. Although the majority of the references are to astronomy rather than to astrology, they are nevertheless valuable for this research as they provide a good deal of useful astrological information, such as the meaning of some unfamiliar Arabic

³⁰ Shihāb ad-Dīn Ahmad an-Nuwayrī, *Nihāyat al-Arab fī Funūn al-al-Adab* (Cairo: Maṭābi' Kustāmus, 18 Vols., 1965), Vol., 1, pp. 27- 291.

³¹ *Ibid.*, p. 40.

names of stars, and the familiar terms for planets which reflected their astrological function,³² the astrological function of some astronomical instruments,³³ the astrological importance of certain calendrical dates,³⁴ and other data that help build the background to mediaeval Arabic astrology. However, the study gives no consideration to the literary function of employing astrological allusions and provides stanzas with almost no explanation of difficult meanings. This is because an-Nuwayrī's aim is not to analyse these astrological references; his main concern seems to be to provide as many literary references as possible to natural phenomena connected with astronomy.

A work of a similar orientation is al-Baghdādī's *Bulūgh al-Arab fī ma'rifat Ahwāl al-'Arab*.³⁵ This classical work considers the employment of astrological allusions in literature collected under two headings: *at-Tārikh Inda al-'Arab* (History of the Arab World) and *'Ilm al-ihtidā' bi l-Nujūm* (The Science of Navigation). It discusses more clearly than an-Nuwayrī the references to astrology found in some literary material of the mediaeval Arab world along with material of an astronomical, medical, and superstitious nature and investigates that society's perceptions of and responses to

³² For example, the author states that Jupiter, whose Arabic name is al-Mushtarī (literary meaning the buyer) is derived from its astrological function, as it is conceived to be the planet of good fortune regarding trading deals and economic status; see *ibid.*, p. 39.

³³ In providing examples of some of the literary works that describe instruments used for measuring time, the author selects, among other descriptions, stanzas that illustrate the astrological function of the instrument; here it is the astrolabe:

و عالم بالغيب من غير ما ... سمع، ولا قلب، ولا ناظر!
 يُقابل الشمس فيأتي بما ... ضمنتها من خير حاضر.
 كأنها ناجسته لما بدى ... لعينها بالفكر والخاطر.
 و الهمة علم ما يحتوي ... عليه صدر الفلك الدائر.

(*Ibid.*, p. 153).

It is the knower of the unseen, and yet has no ears, heart or eyes.

When it faces the Sun, it reveals instantly the news the heavens have kept hidden.

As if the Sun were whispering its most secret thoughts, it inspires him with the knowledge of the future kept in the heart of the orbiting sphere.

³⁴ For example: 'The World-year [the beginning of the year], according to what some astrologers agree upon, is when the Sun enters Aries, that is the spring equator, but others say it is when the Sun enters Libra, that is the autumn equator'. *Ibid.*, p. 165.

³⁵ As-Sayyid Mahmūd Shukrī al-Alūsī al-Baghdādī, *Bulūgh al-Arab fī Ma'rifat Ahwāl al-'Arab*, ed. Muhammad Bahjat al-Athīrī (Cairo: Maṭābi' Dār al-Kitāb al-'Arabī, 3 Vols., 1964), Vol. 3, pp. 214-345.

various natural phenomena. Al-Baghdādī, was primarily interested in analysing astrological references for the sake of understanding the poem or the text itself, and ignored the significance and function of the reference in the literary context. He did so probably to support his claims concerning the Arabs' knowledge of the celestial realm; as he says: 'Regarding the area of the Arabs' knowledge of the upper world [...] I intend to provide evidences from literary sources in this regard'.³⁶ Al-Baghdādī's work is marred by several weaknesses. He refers his readers to a number of classical works containing astrological references; however, he provides only the names of those authors who composed more than a single work, and, moreover, neglects to mention the titles of their books, which is inconvenient for the interested reader and poor scholarly practice.

When we consider what has been written by modern scholars on the subject of 'astrology in Arabic literature', we find that, surprisingly no comprehensive work that focuses on analysing astrological references in poetry exists in either Arabic or English. The only scholar who has given particular attention to the subject of astrology in literature is Yahyā 'Abd al-Amīr Shāmī in his works, entitled *An-Nujūm fī ash-Shi'r al-'Arabī al-Qadīm ḥattā Awākhir al-'Aṣr al-Umawī* (Stars in Old Arabic Poetry until the end of the Umayyad Period) (1982); and *Tārīkh at-Tanjīm īnda al-'Arab* (The History of Astrology in the Arabic World) (1994). In the former work Shāmī's approach results in a work that is discursive rather than analytical. This is mainly due to his failure to properly explain the astrological knowledge which the poets of the *Jāhili*, early Islamic, and Umayyad periods made use of. Although he provides a section devoted to such information, when he comes to apply it to the analysis of astrological or astral references he sometimes fails to enable the reader to understand their meanings. Moreover, pages 97-112 are unaccountably missing. It seems that Shāmī was aware of such shortcomings, and was determined not to repeat them in his later work, which is a substantial improvement on his 1982 study. His concern, however, is the historical background of mediaeval Arabic astrology. Therefore, the astrological references, to which he devotes almost a quarter of his book are used to demonstrate the strong impact of astrology on classical literature, and so he does not provide a sufficient analysis of

³⁶ Ibid., Vol. 3, p. 223.

their meanings or investigation of their function in poetry. However, whatever the deficiencies and shortcomings of Shāmī's works, he must be regarded as the leading investigator of astral and astrological references in classical Arabic poetry, and indeed his work has proven very helpful to this research, providing a substantial amount of information.

Other secondary sources that have provided valuable insights and understandings include Dalya Cohen-Mor's *A Matter of Fate* (2001), which helped to give this research a perspective from which to approach the subject of this research, that is fate. This study has also benefited from a number of works that provide a sound understanding of the Arabs' vision of the cosmos, Jawād 'Alī's *Al-Mufaṣṣal fī Tārīkh al-'Arab qabl al-Islam* (The Detailed Book on the History of Pre-Islamic Arabs) (1970); Ian Richard Netton's *Allāh Transcendent* (1989), Seyyed Hossein Nasr's *An Introduction to Islamic Cosmological Doctrines* (1993), and E. Edson and E. Savage-Smith's *Medieval Views of the Cosmos* (2004). In addition, all the available treatises and other writings produced by mediaeval Muslim astrologers have been consulted, such as al-Bīrūnī's *Al-Āthār al-Bāqiyya 'an al-Qurūn al-Khāliya* (The Chronology of Ancient Nations) (1923), Abū Ma'shar al-Balkhī's *The Abbreviation of the Introduction to Astrology* (1994), 'Abd ar-Rahmān aṣ-Ṣūfi's *Ṣuwar al-Kawākib* (1981), and Al-Marzūqī' *Al-Azmina wa l-Amkina* (On Times and Places) (2002). Moreover, works concerned with the astronomical basis of mediaeval Arabic astrology were also extremely useful to this study. Prominent among these are David Pingree's *The Thousand of Abū Ma'shar* (1968), and Edward S. Kennedy' *Astronomy and astrology in the Medieval Islamic World* (1998). Also, I am indebted to Ibn Ṭabāṭibā's *Al-Fakhrī fī al-Ādāb as-Sultāniyya* (The Honoured of the Sultanic Deeds) (1927) and Patricia Crone's *Mediaeval Islamic Political Thought* (2004), which succeed in organising a vast amount of information and making comprehensible six centuries of complex historical development. Finally, among the encyclopaedias consulted during the course of this research, *The Encyclopaedia of Islam* has proven to be indispensable for both its range and detail.

Chapter II: The Arabs' Visions of the Upper Realm

II. 1: Introduction

From pre-Islamic times the Arabs, and poets in particular, were fascinated by the stars: their nightly appearance, their arrangement in the sky, their regular rising and setting throughout the course of the year were a source of endless inspiration and wonder. This chapter is concerned with two questions: what was the Arabs' view of the heavens, particularly in relation to their view of a unified world, and what role did this world-view play in shaping their ideology? In answering these two questions it is crucial to determine the transformation in the Arabs' view of the relationship between mankind and the heavens, which was due to a significant ideological shift occurring in the classical period of Arab history, namely, the change from a polytheistic to a monotheistic society, and from a somewhat closed and conservative nation that was reluctant to accept any foreign influence,¹ to a society that welcomed and encouraged all kinds of contacts with other cultures, a development that took place in the Abbasid period in particular. The discussion will investigate the Arabs' opinion of heavenly bodies particularly with regard to their structure, their function, their nature and essence,² in order to throw light on how various astral phenomena were conceived in relation to the notion of a coherent universe. The chapter will also investigate how poets made use of the phenomena of the astral world, and to what extent the effect of the shift from paganism to monotheism and from a closed to a more open society affected the images and expressions found in *Jahilī*, early Islamic, Umayyad and Abbasid poetry. The discussion in this part will be essentially threefold, examining the impact of the (1)

¹ It is related that when 'Umar ibn al-'Āṣṣ entered Egypt and found a great many books on almost all branches of knowledge at the Library of Alexandria, he then wrote to the second Orthodox Caliph, 'Umar ibn al-Khaṭṭāb, asking for his advice concerning what should be done with them. The Caliph replied: 'If their contents can be reconciled with the Qur'ān, then the Qur'ān is enough and they cannot be better; if they cannot be reconciled with the Qur'ān then there is definitely no need for them, destroy them', and it is related then that it took al-'Āṣṣ six months to destroy them all. See Jamāl ad-Dīn Abū al-Ḥasan 'Alī al-Qifṭī, *Ta'riḫ al-Ḥukamā'*: *mukhtaṣar az-Zauzanī al-Mussamā bi l-Muntakhabāt wa l-Multaqaṭat min kitāb Ikhbār al-'Ulamā' bi Akhbār al-Ḥukamā'* (Baghdad: Maktabat al-Muthannā, 1903), p. 355-56.

² Here 'essence' refers to the question whether or not the star was considered to possess a soul and intellect.

physical, (2) mythical and (3) astrological aspects of the upper world that were used by poets as a source of inspiration.

II. 2: The Design of the Cosmos, its Function and Essence: The Pre-Islamic View

The pre-Islamic Arabs, particularly those inhabiting the Arabian Peninsula, had a profound knowledge of the disposition and movement of the stars; their environment forced many of them to travel and wander from place to place in search of water and pasture for themselves and their herds.³ It was not only the nomadic way of life, however, that motivated the Arabs to study the stars. The settled Arabs, such as those working in agriculture, for example, required a good knowledge of stars to predict the directions of the winds and the occurrence of rain, as they needed to know the best time to plant crops. And as the stars were used ‘as guides for night-journeys, both across the trackless desert and at sea’,⁴ merchants had to be familiar with the movements of the stars when deciding on the appropriate time to travel. Stars thus were of crucial importance to the Arabs who relied on them to perform activities that were essential to their life. Daniel Varisco notes that: ‘individual stars and asterisms were used for defining the directions of the winds, timing of rain, planting crops, pastoral activities, pearling and fishing seasons, and the like’.⁵ Thus we will briefly discuss various aspects of the upper realm – such as certain indigenous Arabic star names, the lunar mansions, the *arwā*’ (constellations), the planets and the signs of the zodiac – that particularly affected the pre-Islamic Arabs’ relationship with the cosmos. Before doing so, however, we need to define the perspective from which this relationship is to be investigated. As the aim of this chapter is to identify the elements of astrology found in the pre-Islamic era that would later be integrated effectively with those of Greek, Persian and Sanskrit astrology to form mediaeval Arabic astrology, upon which the poets of the Abbasid period drew heavily and employed in their work, it is crucial to explain the fundamental

³ See an-Nuwayrī’s *Nihāyat al-Arab*, Vol. 1, pp. 27-102 and al-Alūsī, *Bulūgh al-Irab*, Vol. 3, pp. 223-61.

⁴ E. Edson & E. Savage-Smith, *Medieval Views of the Cosmos* (Oxford: The Bodleian Library, 2004), p. 31.

⁵ Daniel Varisco, ‘Stars and texts in Arabia’, *Essays from Archaeoastronomy & Ethnoastronomy News, The Quarterly Bulletin of the Center for Archaeoastronomy*, in <http://www.wam.umd.edu/~tlaloc/archastro/index.html> (Number 16, June Solstice 1995) [accessed 17/03/2008], p. 2.

principles of pre-Islamic astrology, which were inseparable from the Arabs' astronomical understanding of the positions and movements of the stars. Thus, it is the astrological significance of the stars that will be of prime concern here. In this regard, as there are few references to the subject of the astrology of the *Jāhilī* Arabs,⁶ the prime sources that will guide our discussion are 'Abd ar-Rahmān aṣ-Ṣūfī's *Ṣuwar al-Kawākib*,⁷ *al-Āthār al-Bāqiya 'an al-Qurūn al-Khāliyya* of al-Bīrūnī,⁸ al-Marzūqī's *Al-Azmina wa al-Amkina*,⁹ and al-Baghdādī's *Khizānat al-Adab*, particularly volume three. The discussion will also rely on a few lexicons.¹⁰

Although there are no surviving theoretical texts that indicate the extent of astronomical knowledge among the pre-Islamic Arabs, a close examination of their life reveals that they had a substantial knowledge of the nature of the celestial world and were well acquainted with its natural effects upon the earth.¹¹ Thus they were familiar with a great

⁶ Jawād 'Alī, *Al-Mufaṣṣal fī Tārīkh al-'Arab qabl al-Islām* (Beirut: Dār al-'Ilm li 'l-Malāyīn and Baghdad: Maktabat al-Nahḍa, 10 Vols., 1970), Vol. 8, p. 423.

⁷ 'Abd ar-Rahmān Ar-Rāzī aṣ-Ṣūfī, *Ṣuwar al-Kawākib ath-Thamāniyya wa al-Arba 'in* (Beirut: Dār al-Āfāq al-Jadīda, 1981).

⁸ Regarding this work, it is important to draw attention to a number of contradictions. Al-Bīrūnī summarises the information given in the written text in a table designed to make it easy for his readers to understand the subject under discussion. Although the table is indeed very helpful, al-Bīrūnī sometimes classifies certain lunar mansions as considered auspicious or inauspicious, in a way that is incompatible with what is stated in the text. For example, while he states in the text that *Sa'ūd al-Sū'ūd*, one of the lunar mansions, was considered by the Arabs as a great benefic, we find that in the table it was regarded as a malefic. See figure 19 that shows the table of '*Ahwāl al-Manāzil*', or 'The States of the Lunar Mansions', for the original source see Abū ar-Rayḥān Muḥammad ibn Ahmad al-Bīrūnī, *Al-Āthār al-Bāqiya 'an al-Qurūn al-Khāliyya*, ed. C. Eduard Sachau, (Leipzig: Otto Harrassowitz, 1923), pp. 327-328. Therefore, in discussing the astrological implications of the lunar mansions and the stars that form them we choose to rely on the text, as being consistent with other references used in this study.

⁹ Abū 'Alī Ahmad ibn Muḥammad al-Marzūqī, *Al-Azmina wa l-Amkina*, ed. Muḥammad ad-Dulaymī (Beirut: 'Ālam al-Kutub, 2 Vols., 2002).

¹⁰ These are in particular: Abū al-Faḍl Jamāl ad-Dīn Ibn Manẓūr, *Lisān al-'Arab* (Beirut: Dār Ṣādir wa Dār Beirut, 15 Vols., 1956), and Edward William Lane (ed.), *An Arabic-English Lexicon* (London & Edinburgh: Williams and Norgate, 4 Vols., 1863).

Examples of the roots yielding this information when using these lexicons are as follows:

شمس، قمر، نجم، نزل (منازل القمر)، ثرو (ثريا)، عقر-أو عقب (عقرب)، شعر (شعري)، سهل (سهيل)، جوز (جوزاء) ... الخ.

¹¹ See the first three sections of chapter one of an-Nuwayrī's *Nihāyat al-Arab*, pp. 27-102 and al-Alūsī, *Bulūgh al-Irab*, Vol. 3, pp. 223-61. To now more about the relation between the ancient Arab and astronomy see 'Alī's *al-Mufaṣṣal*, Vol. 8, pp. 423-35.

many individual stars and clusters of stars, or asterisms,¹² and in order to have a comprehensive understanding of them, they adopted certain astral systems, and elaborated greatly on them. The lunar mansions, or stations of the Moon (see Figures 3 and 4),¹³ are a system of 28 stars, groups of stars, or areas in the sky¹⁴ near which the moon is found in each of the 28 nights of its monthly revolution,¹⁵ was one of the systems, maybe of Indian origin transferred through channels as yet unknown,¹⁶ that Arabs used in pre-Islamic times. Regarding their functions, Nallino comments:

In their frequent night-journeys the Bedouin often had no other guide than the moon and the bright stars, whose places of rising and setting they knew and from which they could estimate approximately the time by night; they determined also seasons of the year from observing the position of the moon relatively to 28 successive groups of stars called lunar stations (*manāzil al-kamar*).¹⁷

To determine accurately the period of each lunar mansion, Arabs employed the system of 48 *anwā'*, or constellations (singular *naw'*),¹⁸ 'which are merely devices for aiding in

¹² For information on the auspicious or inauspicious nature of stars as conceived by the Arabs see Paul Kunitzsch, *Stars and Numbers: Astronomy and Mathematics in the Mediaeval Arab and Western World* (Burlington and Vermont: Ashgate Variorum Publishing Limited, 2004), pp. 246-48.

¹³ The twenty-eight lunar mansions that Arabs knew are respectively as follows: the Northern *anwā'* (or *Shāmiyya*) and those are: *ash-Sharṭān*, *al-Buṭayn*, *ath-Thurayyā*, *ad-Dabrān*, *al-Haq'ā*, *al-Han'ā*, *adh-Dhirā'*, *an-Nathra*, *aṭ-Ṭarf*, *al-Jabha*, *Zabrat al-Asad*, *aṣ-Ṣarfa*, *al-'Awwā'*, *as-Simāk al-A'zal*; and the southern *anwā'* (or *Yanāniyya*) and those are: *al-Ghafr*, *az-Zubānā*, *Iklīl al-'Aqrab*, *Qalb al-'Aqrab*, *ash-Shawla* (*Ibrat al-'Aqrab*), *an-Aa'ā'im*, *al-Balda*, *Sa'ūd adh-Dhābiḥ*, *Sa'ūd Bula'*, *Sa'ūd as-Su'ūd*, *Sa'ūd al-Akhiyya*, *al-Fargh al-Awwal* (or *Fargh ad-Dalū*), *al-Fargh ath-Thānī*, *ar-Rishā'*. For more information about these 28 lunar mansions see al-Bīrūnī, *Al-Athār al-Bāqiya*, pp. 336-47; and Zakariyyā ibn Muhammad al-Qazūnī, *'Ajā'ib al-Makhlūqāt wa Gharā'ib al-Mawjūdāt* (Beirut: Dār ash-Sharq al-'Arabī, 2006), pp. 40-46.

¹⁴ Sometimes the lunar mansion designates a region void of stars, such as *al-Balda*, located between *an-Na'ā'im* and *Sa'ūd adh-Dhābiḥ*. (See *ibid*, p 351).

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 374.

¹⁶ Paul Kunitzsch, 'Al-Manāzil', in *E. I.*, Vol. vi, p. 374.

¹⁷ See C. A. Nallino, 'Astronomy', in *First E. I.*, Vol. 1, p. 498.

¹⁸ The most important resource for such information is aṣ-Ṣūfī's *Ṣuwar al-Kawākib*, in which the author provides two images of each constellation, one a mirror of the other. This is, according to Edson and Savage-Smith, because 'the earth was imagined at the centre of the globe, while the stars were placed on

the location and recognition of a star'.¹⁹ They are groups of stars covering areas larger than the lunar mansions by observing and recording the acronychal setting of a star or constellation and the heliacal rising of its opposite (*raqīb* or watcher), the ancient Arabs managed to mark the beginnings of the periods. Besides being a pre-Islamic system of weather-prediction, particularly for meteorological phenomena such as rains and winds, the *anwā'* enabled the Arabs to determine seasons as well. On the function of the *anwā'*, Pellat notes that: 'the heliacal rising of [...] stars or constellation, at six monthly intervals, marked out the solar year by fixing a number of periods probably 28',²⁰ (See figure 24). The Arabs adjusted the system of *anwā'* to make them coincide with the lunar mansions; this was done by dividing the zodiac into 28 equal parts of approx. 12° 50'. Thus the 28 *manāzil* are determined by 28 stars or constellations constituting 14 pairs, the acronychal setting of the one corresponding to the heliacal rising of the other, and marking the beginning of 27 periods of 13 days and one of 14.²¹ Thus the solar year of 365 was divided by these 28 constellations, 'which provided an alternative to the twelve divisions of the signs of the zodiac'.²²

Besides their astronomical and meteorological functions, these two systems were also considered to have an astrological function.²³ The earthly sphere and the heavens were seen as linked in a relationship in which the former was dependent on the latter. The

the surface of the globe. The resulting model presented the stars from the viewpoint of an observer placed outside the sphere of stars, with the effect that the relative positions of the stars are the reverse of their appearance when viewed from the surface of the earth'. E. Edson & E. Savage-Smith, *Medieval Views of the Cosmos*, p. 33. (See Figure 12)

¹⁹ Ibid.

²⁰ Charles Pellat, 'anwā'', in *E. I.*, Vol. 1, p. 523.

²¹ Pellat comments on this task that: 'these modifications, the date of which cannot be fixed accurately, were definitely completed after Islam, the passage from one system to the other being favoured by the development of astronomy, and by the anathema hurled by the Prophet against *anwā'*, which are not mentioned in the Kur'ān' (ibid.). However, the act of attributing the falling of rain to *anwā'* and not God is condemned in both the Qur'ān and an authorised Ḥadīth, as will be shown when we come to discuss the orthodox view of the cosmos. This confirms that the two systems were well known in the pre-Islamic Arabs and were the basis upon which mediaeval Islamic astronomy built its principles.

²² Charles Burnett, 'Weather Forecasting in the Arabic World, in Emilie Savage-Smith (ed.), *Magic and Divination in Early Islam*, p. 203.

²³ E. Edson & Savage-Smith, *Medieval Views of the Cosmos*, p. 40.

cosmos was regarded as useful to mankind as well as beautiful, and the heavens' astrological function was crucially important to the *Jāhilīs* as a means of knowing the future. Divination (*kihāna*) of various kinds played a major role in shaping the ideology of the pre-Islamic world. Various forms of supernatural perception were practised by the soothsayers (*kuhhān*), to whom people turned when facing problems of both major and minor impact on their life. According to Ibn Khaldūn, 'The Arabs used to repair to soothsayers in order to learn about forthcoming events. They consulted them in their quarrels, to learn the truth by means of supernatural perception. Their literature contains much information about this matter'.²⁴ The accuracy of divinatory predictions seems to have been the main factor in the spreading of the good reputation of *kihāna*.²⁵

Soothsayers tended to practise several forms of divination to either reveal the future or interpret the past of a client: besides being foretellers of coming events, they were also interpreters of dreams, geomancers or sand writers, and astrologers. Among the forms of divination practiced by *kuhhān* were those noted by Ibn Khaldūn in his *Muqaddimah*: gazing into transparent bodies such as mirrors or bowls of water; examining the hearts, livers, and bones of animals; drawing auguries from birds and wild animals; casting pebbles, grains of wheat, or date pits.²⁶

Thus, astral phenomena were among the many natural tools that *Jāhilī kuhhān* utilised in making their predictions.²⁷ Moreover, soothsayers incorporated some astral terminology in their language to gain admiration and power; they would send their divinations to their clients with an oath sworn in the name of some astral phenomena and certain heavenly bodies. A case in point is the famous soothsayer az-Zabbā'²⁸ and the speech she delivered to her tribe when predicting a coming disaster. Here we should

²⁴ 'Abd ar-Rahmān ibn Khaldūn, *The Muqaddimah: An Introduction to History*, Franz Rosenthal (trans.), (Princeton & Oxford: Bollingen Series, Princeton University Press, 2005), p.84.

²⁵ See the story of Hind bint 'Utba and the Yemeni soothsayer in Ch. III, p. 75, footnote 43.

²⁶ Ibn Khaldūn, *The Muqaddimah*, Rosenthal (trans.), p.84.

²⁷ For more information regarding the different approaches of *kihāna* see al-Alūsī, *Bulūgh al-Irab*, Vol. 3, pp. 269-70.

²⁸ She was one of the famous sorceresses of the pre-Islamic era. For her biography see *ibid.*, pp. 288-91.

note that pre-Islamic *kuhhān* used to proclaim their predictions in rhymed prose of lofty style and cryptic oracular diction for the purpose of making vague but impressive statements in order to maintain power. Therefore, a more or less literal translation, which loses much of the rhetorical power of the original, is as follows:

I swear by the dim dark night, by the clapping ear, by the rising morning, by the knocking star, by the falling rain, that there is a burning disaster laying in ambush behind the trees of the valley, and the stone of the mountain foretells of a destructive death that will leave a great number of widows. It is an inescapable curse.²⁹

It is, then, in the pre-Islamic tradition of connecting natural phenomena to human fortunes that the roots of the Arabs' astrology can be identified.

Roughly speaking, the scope of *Jāhili* Arab astrology was twofold: (1) natural: this aimed at predicting events that would have a major effect on the whole population, such as war, natural disasters, or epidemics (az-Zabbā's speech refers to such an incident); and (2) nativity or *mawālīd*: this was another popular form of astrological prediction, relating all the major events of a person's life to a chart of the planetary positions at the moment of the individual's birth. Evidence of the latter is given by al-Mas'ūdī in his *Murūj adh-Dhahab*: one of the methods of choosing a soothsayer (*kāhin*) was linked to a supposed astral effect; the ancient Arabs believed that a person born under the sign of Mercury or at a time of a great conjunction would become a significant soothsayer.³⁰ However, in the absence of any historical material that can illustrate how the ancient Arabs were able to chart stellar movements, and how they were able to elaborate the characteristics of the planets and their influences upon those born under their signs, the early history of Arab astrology remains deeply obscure. The rare material we have regarding the methods employed by pre-Islamic *kuhhān* to predict the future by

²⁹ Ibid., pp. 288-89.

'و الليل الغاسق، و اللوح الخافق، و الصبح الشارق، و النجم الطارق، و المزن الوداق، إن شجر الوادي لبادوا ختلا، و يحرق أنيابها غصلا، و إن صخر الطود لينذر تكلا، لا تجدون عنه معلا.'

It is related that some people did not take her prediction seriously and mocked her, while others believed her and left the place where the disaster was expected to take place. The prediction came true and the mockers perished. (See *ibid.*)

³⁰ See Abū al-Ḥasan 'Alī al-Mas'ūdī, *Murūj adh-Dhahab wa Ma'ādin al-Jawhar* (Beirut: al-Maktaba al-'Aṣriyya, 4 Vols., 2005), Vol. 2, p. 134.

reference to astral phenomena demonstrates that they relied heavily on the lunar mansions, constellations, and comets and meteors and rarely on the planets and the signs of zodiac; this will be discussed shortly.

Al-Bīrūnī in his *al-Āthār al-Bāqiya* comments briefly on the lunar mansions, and gives a brief explanation of the stars that form each of them. Yet as the concern of this research is to investigate the Arabs' view of the heavens, particularly in relation to their being a means of knowing the hidden future, it is only the lunar mansions that have astrological significance that will be considered here.³¹

It seems that the astrological significance of a particular lunar mansion was sometimes deduced from the 'effect' of the *anwā*' associated with its appearance. The most important and well known of the mansions was probably *ath-Thurayyā* (the Pleiades), the third lunar mansion, which consists of a group of six stars that look like a cluster of grapes. *Ath-Thurayyā* was especially significant because of its supposed meteorological effect resulting from the *naw*' associated with the abundance of rain that followed a season of intense drought,³² and even the word *Thurayyā*, derived from the roots th (ث), r (ر), and w (و) signified the wealth that would be gained by those working in agriculture. Moreover, in regard to the purely human frame, it was believed to be especially beneficial, mainly because of the dangers to health associated with that period of the year.³³ It is related that the healers of that period used to say 'If you could guarantee for me safety from infections during the appearance of that lunar mansion, I

³¹ Here we should draw the reader's attention to the fact that predicting the future in pre-Islamic period did not depend on using astronomical tools such as astrolabe* and other devices that later became known to the Mediaeval Islamic world (see Figure 21); rather *kuhhān* relied on observations of the sky (and the aid of jinn).

* The astrolabe was a Hellenistic invention, but its design and production were perfected in the Islamic world. Ibn Khallikān's account of the origin of the astrolabe is colourful but dubious: 'Ptolemy invented the astrolabe by accident. He was out riding his horse one day and dropped the celestial globe he was carrying, whereupon his mount stepped on it and crushed it and so the astrolabe was created'. (Cited in E. Edson & Savage-Smith, *Medieval Views of the Cosmos*, pp. 42-43). Discussion of Ibn Khallikān's passage is to be found in David King, 'Origin of the Astrolabe according to the Mediaeval Islamic Sources', *Journal for the History of Arabic Sciences* 5 (1981): pp. 48-83, (particularly pp. 60-61).

³² This dry season was associated with *naw' al-Buṭayn* which was regarded as the worst of all *anwā*' mainly for this reason.

³³ To give a more scientific explanation: this association was made because the Moon is in this lunar mansion on 12 November; at this time of year the change in the weather from hot to cold causes certain infections to become more active.

would guarantee good health for the whole year'.³⁴ It should be noted that *an-Najm* (the Star) always signifies *ath-Thurayyā*. *Ath-Thurayyā* is always followed by the star called *ad-Dabrān* (Aldebaran), also known as *at-Tābi* ' (the follower). So, whenever the expression *an-Najm wa Tābi* 'uh (the Star and its follower) is encountered in a text then it should be understood as identifying *ath-Thurayyā* and *ad-Dabrān*. The interstices between two mansions are generally called *furja* or *ḍayqa*.³⁵ The ancient Arabs regarded all of these as auspicious except one: whenever the Moon passed across the *ḍayqa* between *ath-Thurayyā* and its follower *ad-Dabrān* bad omens would be drawn.³⁶

Another mansion that had a bad reputation was the tenth, *al-Jabha*, consisting of four stars, two pairs parallel to each other, forming the neck and heart of Leo. It was claimed that staring at these stars might have harmful consequences and could even deprive a person of his sight. *Al-Ghafr*, however, the fifteenth lunar mansion, which is a cluster of three moderately bright stars, was believed to be particularly auspicious and the most beneficial of all the lunar mansions, mainly because it is situated in the left foot of Virgo, far from the Leo whose claws and fangs are attacking Scorpio (See Figures 10 and 11). At this time the Moon stands in Leo, its governor and its domicile (*bayt*), where its influence was regarded as particularly great. Yet when in Taurus, the Moon attains its maximum influence or 'exaltation' (*sharaf*) and was thus considered a sign of the most auspicious time for initiating ventures. In contrast, the Moon is regarded as inauspicious when it stands in the sign diametrically opposite to its exaltation, as it is said to stand in its dejection, or 'depression' (*hubūf*); it was believed that marriage and travel in particular should be avoided when the Moon in Scorpio.³⁷

³⁴ Al-Bīrūnī, *Al-Āthār al-Bāqiyā*, p. 342.

³⁵ Paul Kunitzsch, 'Al-Manāzil', in *E. I.*, Vol. vi, p. 375.

³⁶ Al-Marzūqī, *Al-Azmina wa 'l- Amkina*, Vol. 1, p. 175; and al-Bīrūnī, *Al-Āthār al-Bāqiyā*, p. 315.

³⁷ See Abū al-Qāsim 'Alī ibn Mūsā ibn Ṭāwūs, *Faraj al-Mahmūm fī Ta'rikh 'Ulamā' an-Nujūm* (Qumm: Manshūrāt ar-Riḍā, 1363 H.), p. 113, and al-Qazūnī, *'Ajā'ib al-Makhlūqāt*, p. 44.

Among the other lunar mansions regarded as auspicious was the twenty-fourth, *Sa' d as-Su'ūd* (the greatest of the benefices), a group of three stars, one of which is much brighter than the others. The Arabs greatly welcomed the appearance of those stars as they signaled the end of the cold season and the beginning of the rainy season. One can imagine the importance of that seasonal change for the nomadic people of the desert and its significance for almost all their activities.

Astrological omens were not limited to the lunar mansions; certain stars and constellations were also a source of divination. Among the many stars that the pre-Islamic Arabs identified was *Ra's al-Ghūl* (*Caput Algol*), a fixed star in the head of the dragon (*ghūl*) in the constellation of Perseus (between Taurus and Cassiopeia) (see Figures 15-16).³⁸ *Ra's al-Ghūl* was the most evil star in the heaven and of dreadful astrological significance as it believed to presage decapitation. So, for pre-Islamic Arabs the appearance of Perseus denoted bloodshed and beheading.³⁹

Extraordinary celestial events were also of astrological significance in *Jāhili* astrology. The appearance of comets for example, was considered to be especially ominous.⁴⁰ They were, in particular, regarded as signs of great historical events. In an anonymous early eleventh-century Arabic treatise, *Kitāb Gharā'b al-Funūn wa Mulaḥ al-Uyūn* (*The Book of Curiosities of the Sciences and Marvels for the Eyes*), we find the following:

If the comet known as 'The Lamp' appears in the east, it is a sign of a great famine in that region, fires, civil wars, bloodshed, and abundance of thunderbolts. It also foretells flames of no known cause destroying forests and inhabited regions, setting ablaze the mansions of kings and especially those which they have erected for themselves, corrupting the fruits, drying up the springs and the rivers and bringing heat to the horizons. And there is a multitude of shooting stars. If this comet appears

³⁸ See aṣ-Ṣūfi, *Ṣuwar al-Kawākib*, p. 81.

³⁹ See Vivian Robson, *The Fixed Stars & Constellations in Astrology* (Abingdon: Astrology Classics, 2005), p. 124.

⁴⁰ See Figure 9 that shows number of the comets identified by the Arabs and which were believed to affect the mundane life.

in the west and the south, it is a sign of civil war erupting in the midst of the region in which it appeared, bringing cruelty, wars and the corruption of crops in the west. This is what it looks like.⁴¹

Indeed comets played a great role particularly in predicting events of great historical impact. A Jewish sage who was claimed to have predicted the coming of the Prophet Muhammad, based his prediction on the rise of a red comet, whose rising soothsayers always associated with the birth of a Prophet'.⁴²

Besides the fixed stars, the pre-Islamic Arabs also knew the seven planets,⁴³ which they referred to as the movable stars, *an-Nujūm as-Sayyāra*, as they moved, the Arabs believed, forwards and backwards, in accordance with and against their spheres.⁴⁴ But the planets, with the exception of the Moon, did not play a significant role in pre-Islamic astrology. It was the Moon, in particular, that was of crucial importance for pre-Islamic astrology, as the 28 lunar mansions and the constellations associated with them that formed the art's basic principles. This is not to say that the planets played no role in predictions of the future. Some significant historical events were predicted from the appearance of certain planets. We mentioned above that Arabs believed that those born under the influence of Mercury were more likely to become soothsayers.

⁴¹ The passage is cited in Edson & Savage-Smith, *Medieval Views of the Cosmos*, pp. 41-42. Online access to the manuscript of *The Book of Curiosities* is provided by the University of Oxford's Bodleian Library, which has in collaboration with the Oriental Institute, mounted the publication on a dedicated website <<http://www.bodley.ox.ac.uk/bookofcuriosities>>, [accessed 11 November 2007].

⁴² Abū al-Fidā' al-Ḥāfiẓ ad-Dmashqī Ibn Kathīr, *Al-Bidāya wa l-Nihāya* (Beirut: Dār al-Kutub al-ʿIlmiyya, 15 Vols, 1997), Vol. 2, pp. 212-13.

⁴³ The table below gives the names of the seven planets known to the pre-Islamic Arabs and the equivalents in English and Persian, and the descriptions assigned to some of them regarding either their physical appearance or behaviour, whenever possible, as believed in pre-Islamic Arabia.

The Arabic term	the Arabic description	English	Persian
<i>Qamar</i>	—	Moon	<i>māh</i>
<i>Uṭārid</i>	<i>al-Kātib</i> , or the writer .	Mercury	<i>fīr</i>
<i>Az-Zahra</i>	—	Venus	<i>anāhīd</i>
<i>Ash-Shams</i>	—	Sun	<i>mīhr, khurshīd</i>
<i>Al-Marrīkh</i>	<i>al-Ahmar</i> , the red.	Mars	<i>bahrām</i>
<i>Al-Mushtarī</i>	—	Jupiter	<i>hurmus</i>
<i>Zuḥal</i>	<i>al-Muqātil</i> , the fighter	Saturn	<i>kaywān</i> .

See Kunitzsch, Paul, 'Al-Nuḡūm - II. The Planets', in *E. I.*, Vol. viii, p. 101.

⁴⁴ Al-Marzūqī, *Al-Azmina wa al-Amkina*, Vol. 1, p. 182. For their movements as understood by the Arabs see Figure 8.

The signs of the zodiac were also known to the pre-Islamic Arabs. However, the conception of pre-Islamic *kuhhān* was different from that of the astrologers of the Abbasid period.⁴⁵ They were familiar with the twelve signs of the zodiac, giving them names equivalent in meaning to the Latin, sometimes with slight differences: Pisces is called the two fishes; Aquarius, the pourer of water, Gemini, the twins; Aries, the ram; Capricorn, the goat. Virgo, however, was called *as-Sunbula*, an ear of corn, though it was also known as *al-‘Adhrā’*, the Arabic for virgin (See Figures 13 and 14).⁴⁶ However, they seem to have lacked knowledge of the division of the ecliptic into 12 equal segments, each of 30°, as was the case later in the Abbasid period; hence they divided the ecliptic into 28 segments as it was the lunar mansions that were of significance to them. Thus Leo and Scorpio were extended so that Cancer, Virgo, and Libra were not included in their ecliptic (See Figure 20). Thus, in the explanation of the constellation *az-Zabānā*, given in the *Book of Curiosities*, we find the following information: it is ‘a large star in the constellation of Libra. In antiquity the constellation now known as Libra was seen as the two claws of a scorpion, with Scorpio and Libra essentially combined into one constellation’.⁴⁷ Moreover, another example on the limited knowledge of the pre-Islamic Arabs regarding the signs of the zodiac, is that they mistakenly identify some signs of the zodiac with certain fixed stars: for instance, they identified a star in the constellation of *al-Jabbār* (Orion) as the Twins (*al-Jawzā’*).⁴⁸

⁴⁵ Al-Bīrūnī, *Al-Āthār al-Bāqīya*, pp. 238- 39.

⁴⁶ See al-Ālūsī’s *Bulūgh al-‘Irāb*, Vol. 3, pp. 241-43. Commenting on the modifications the pre-Islamic Arabs made to the names and forms of the constellations in accordance with their own ideas and beliefs, Edson and Savage-Smith suggest that they did so to fit their Bedouin environment. They state that ‘in the Arabic treatises, the Greek mythological prototypes for these constellations (Orion, Perseus, Andromeda, etc.) were transformed, with garments, hair-styles, and jewellery changed to conform to the fashions and artistic conventions at the time and place of production. So, the lion’s skin which according to Greek tradition hung over the hunter Orion in his constellation was converted in the Islamic world into a very long sleeve’. (Edson & Savage-Smith, *Medieval Views of the Cosmos*, p. 34). Thus, these modifications had been done to make appeal to the pre-Islamic life style.

⁴⁷ This information is to be found in Emilie Savage-Smith and Yossef Rapoport (eds.), *The Book of Curiosities: A critical edition*, World-Wide-Web publication. www.bodley.ox.ac.uk/bookofcuriosities (March 2007), Chapter 4: ‘On knowledge of thirty stars with occult influences’, fol. 11b, (folio side: the right column), [accessed 11 November 2007].

⁴⁸ Al-Bīrūnī, *Al-Āthār al-Bāqīya*, p. 238.

Literary evidence shows that the Arabs of *Jāhili* society were well acquainted with the geocentric model of the universe, yet what they knew about the astrological meanings associated with the zodiac and planets was extremely limited or at least was exclusive to the *kuhhān* and hidden from the public. In this connection we should note that in pre-Islamic times knowledge was transformed orally, as the majority of *Jāhili* people were illiterate. Knowledge of the astrological function of the planets and the signs of the zodiac became widespread only when it became available to a literate public as a written material, a development that took place in the Abbasid period. References in poetry are evidence of this. The pre-Islamic poet, 'Antara al-'Absī (d. 8 B.H./ 614 AD),⁴⁹ in praising the Persian king, Anūsharwān⁵⁰ compares him to the Moon when in conjunction with Kaywān, or Saturn:

يا قِبلةَ القِصَادِ، يا تاجَ العِلا ... يا بَدْرَ هذا العِصرِ في كِيوَانِهِ.⁵¹

Oh you, you are the Qibla of pilgrims and the Crown of the highest honour; you are the Moon in conjunction with Saturn.

Because he is praising a Persian king, the poet used the Persian term for Saturn, which shows that the Persian equivalents were already known to the Arabs of that time, maybe through the Persian channel. Knowledge of the physical Greek model of the universe is also included in this line, but with an apparent lack of understanding of the fundamental astrological significance of the image. To express Anūsharwān's exalted position the poet places the Moon, the emblem of kings,⁵² in conjunction with Saturn, the highest of

⁴⁹ 'Antara ibn Shaddād al-'Absī was hero as well as a poet. The son of a noble Bedouin and an Abyssinian slave-girl, he himself had the status of slave. It was only after he had proven his prowess in battle did his father acknowledge him to be free. He was one of the authors of the *Mu'allaqāt**, which brought him fame; he is considered one of the great pre-Islamic poets. Also, the story of his life, which served as an example of the superiority of personal virtue over noble descent, made him a legendary figure and he became the hero of a celebrated epic, the *Sirat 'Antara*. See 'Azīza Fawwāl Bābtī, (ed.), *Muḥam ash-Shu'arā' al-Jāhiliyyīn* (Beirut: Dār Ṣādir li aṭ-Ṭibā'a wa an-Nashr, 1998), p. 274- 75.

* For the definition of *Mu'allaqāt* see Ch. III, p. 107, footnote 162.

⁵⁰ For a brief biography for Anūsharwān see Ch. III, p. 71, footnote 31.

⁵¹ *Kitāb 'Antara ibn SHaddād*, (Beirut: al-Maṭba'a al-Adabiyyah, 5 Vols., 1883, Author is not cited), Vol. 1, p. 138.

⁵² The Moon, the brightest and largest of the objects visible in the night sky, and the Sun, whose light extinguishes that of all other luminaries, were metaphorically used in poetry, particularly in panegyrics and love songs. In praising a patron or some other illustrious dedicatee, classical poets used the appearance or position of the Sun and Moon for the purpose of stressing certain virtues or moral qualities

all planets in the Ptolemaic model of the universe, despite its being the worst of the malefic planets, and a sign of misfortune. The 'Antara presents a malignant configuration: Anūsharwān is a misfortune to his nation, a meaning far from the poet's intention. 'Antara's lack of proper knowledge of the astrological significance of this heavenly configuration would have made his panegyric seem like a satire to a late mediaeval reader. The astrological significance of Saturn as a malefic only became well known in the Abbasid period. Al-Ḥasn ibn 'Alī al-Miṣrī, nicknamed al-Qādī (the Judge), (d. 561/ 1116)⁵³ considers the order of the planets and the astrological qualities assigned to them and offers the poet's words of wisdom:

لا ترج ذا نقص ولو أصبحت من ... دونه في الرتبة الشمس.
 كيوان أعلى كوكب موضعا ... وهو إذا أنصفته نحن.⁵⁴

Never expect good from a man without honour, even if the Sun itself is placed below him.

Saturn is the highest placed of all planets, yet it is a malefic, if it is to be fairly judged.

The pre-Islamic Arabs' knowledge of the physical aspects of the cosmos was not limited to the fixed and movable stars; they saw *al-Majarra* (the Galaxy, known in Europe as the Milky Way), merely as a white stain shown on the heavens, and called it as *umm an-Nujūm ash-Shawābik* (the mother of the netted, or interwoven, stars),⁵⁵ and

that elevated him above others and distinguished him from them. In love-songs also the *Jāhili* poets referred to the Moon in describing the beauty of his beloved, which dazzles him and casts a shadow over all other women, who become invisible to the lover.

⁵³ Al-Ḥasan ibn 'Alī Abū Muhammad, known also as al-Muhadhhab al-Maṣrī was an Egyptian poet and man of letters. He traveled to Yemen to study the science of lineage and wrote a book on that subject. See Abū 'Abdullah Yāqūt al-Ḥamawī, *Muṣam al-Udabā' aw Irshād al-Arīb ilā Ma'rifat al-Adīb* (Beirut: Dār al-Kutub al-'Ilmiyya, 6. Vols., 1991), Vol. 3, pp. 23-35.

⁵⁴ Ibid., p. 34.

⁵⁵ This term is found in a verse composed by the *Jāhili* poet, Ṭa'abbāṭa Sharran (d. approx. 80 B.H./ 540 AD.). See Abū 'Ubayd al-Bakrī al-Aunabī, *Simḡ al-La'ālī: yaḥṭawī 'alā al-La'ālī 'fī Sharḡ Āmālī al-Qālī*, ed. 'Abd al-'Azīz al-Maymanī (Beirut: Dār al-Kutub al-'Ilmiyya, 2 Vols., n.d.), Vol. 2, p. 761 (particularly

hence also as *Farj as-Samā'* (the vagina of the heavens).⁵⁶ No evidence survives on any mythical significance that might explain the motivation behind this particular term. However it does not mean that the pre-Islamic Arabs did not mix their knowledge of the physical cosmos with myth. According to Seyyed Hossein Nasr, 'the pre-Islamic Arabs [...] had a great love for Nature and like all the nomads who wander endlessly in the great expanses of virgin Nature had a deep intuition of the presence of the invisible in the visible';⁵⁷ and indeed, although the pre-Islamic Arabs seem to have had a deep knowledge of certain aspects of the visible heavens, their intuition of the structure of the cosmos was built on a mythical understanding. In their attempt to understand the apparent order and stability of the universe, they pictured the primordial Earth as rolling like a ship; so the Creator ordered an angel of great power to hold it on his back, his right hand grasping the east side of the earth, his left gripping on the west. To enable him to stand firmly, God then created underneath the angel's feet a great stone made out of red ruby with seven thousand holes, each containing a huge sea. A giant bull, called *Kayūth*, with 4,000 ears, noses, eyes, tongues, and limbs was ordered to hold the stone between his horns. To make this still precarious structure more stable, a gigantic whale, called *Bahmūt*, was ordered to hold the bull on its back. Under the whale was water,

footnote no. 3). For the poet's biography see Bābtī (ed.), *Muḡam*, pp. 64-66. Moreover, the Islamic poet *Dhī ar-Rumma* (77 – 117 / 696 – 735) uses this expression in one of his poems. See Zuhayr Faṭḥ Allāh (ed.), *Diwān Dhī ar-Rumma wa huwa Ghilān ibn 'Uqba al-'Adawī* (Beirut: Dār Beirut li 't-Tibā'a wa 'n-Nashr, 1995), p. 363 (particularly line 34 of the poem).

⁵⁶ Al-Qazūnī, *'Ajā'ib al-Makhlūqāt*, pp. 20-21.

⁵⁷ Seyyed Hossein Nasr, *An Introduction to Islamic Cosmological Doctrines: Conceptions of Nature and Methods Used for its Study by the Ikhwān al-Ṣafā', Al-Bīrūnī, and Ibn Sīnā* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1993), pp. 6-7.

under the water, air, under which was also water; finally, below the lower water was darkness, which no human knowledge could approach.⁵⁸

Cosmological myths were a rich source of inspiration to poets even of later periods, a factor that allowed this pagan legacy to survive. Indeed, the metaphorical significance of such material made it impossible for poets to ignore those myths. The Abbasid poet Ibn ar-Rūmī (d.283/ 896),⁵⁹ annoyed that a friend had kept his promise to invite him to share a meal of seafood, expresses his irritation in the following verse:

أ الحوت حوت الأرض أم حوت يونس ... لك الخير أم حوت السماء أروم؟⁶⁰

Tell me, for God's sake, which whale am I waiting for? Is it the whale of the Earth, the whale of Jonah,⁶¹ or the whale of heaven?

⁵⁸ Kamāl ad-Dīn Muhammad ibn Mūsā ad-Dumayrī, *Ḥayāt al-Ḥayawān al-Kubrā* (Beirut: Dār wa Maktabat al-Hilāl, 4, Vols., 2007), Vol. 1, p. 362.

The *Jāhili* poet Umayya ibn Abī aṣ-Ṣalt (d. 5/ 626)* composed a line in which he invokes the *Jāhili* view of the universe:

رجلٌ وثورٌ تحت يميني رجله ... والتمسُ لليسرى وليث مرصدٌ.

Ibn Kathīr, *Al-Bidāya wa 'n-Nihāya*, Vol. 1, p. 181.

There is standing a Man, beneath his right foot there is a Bull; beneath his left there is an Eagle, and there is a Lion lying in ambush.

Some religious scholars claim that upon hearing this line, the Prophet Muhammad commented on it approvingly. However, the Ḥadīth is dubious and Ibn Rushd doubted its authenticity. (See Abū al-Walīd al-Qurṭubī ibn Rushd, *Al-Bayān wa 'l-Taḥṣīl wa 'sh-Sharḥ wa 'l-Tawjīh wa 'l-Ta'īl fī Masā'il al-Mustakhrāja*, ed. Muhammad Ḥajjī, (Beirut: Dār al-Gharb al-Islāmī, 20 Vols., 1988), Vol. 18, pp. 395-96.

* Umayya ibn Abī aṣ-Ṣalt was a famous *Jāhili* poet and a man of wisdom. His knowledge of the Torah was great and he refrained from worshipping idols and drinking wine. When the news reached him about the prophethood of Muhammad, he came to him and listened to some of the Qur'ānic verses, then went away. When he was asked for his opinion on the Prophet he said: 'I believe he is speaking the truth, but I will not follow him until I examine him properly'. After the Battle of Badr, he announced that he wanted to convert to Islam; however, on hearing of the death of his nephew in that battle, he gave up the idea of becoming a Muslim. See Khayr ad-Dīn az-Ziriklī, *Al-A'ām: Qāmūs Tarājīm li Ashhar ar-Rijāl wa 'n-Nisā' min al-'Arab wa 'l-Musta'ribīn wa 'l-Mustashriqīn* (Beirut: n.p., 12 Vols., 1969), Vol. 1, p. 364.

⁵⁹ For his biography see Ch IV, p. 144, footnote 106.

⁶⁰ 'Abbās Maḥmūd al-'Aqqād, *Ibn ar-Rūmī: Ḥayātuh min Shi'rih* (Cairo: al-Maktaba at-Tijāriyya al-Kubrā, 1973), p. 103.

⁶¹ The poet refers to the story of the Prophet Jonah (Yūnūs) and the whale mentioned in the Qur'ān, from which we quote the following verses: 'Jonah, too, was one of Our apostles. He fled to the laden ship, cast lots with the crew, and was condemned. A whale swallowed him, for he had done amiss; and had he not devoutly praised Allah he would have stayed in its belly till the Day of Resurrection. We threw him, gravely ill, upon a desolate shore and caused a gourd-tree to grow over him. Thus We sent him to a nation a hundred thousand strong or more. They believed in him and We let them live at ease awhile'. See

In mocking the delinquent, the poet sarcastically refers to the mythical, the Qur'anic and the astrological sources in each of which 'the whale' has a different significance. Whether it is the whale upon which the globe is placed, or the whale that swallowed the Prophet Jonah (Yūnus), or Pisces, the sign of the zodiac that was depicted as a whale as well as two fishes, in every case the whale is far from being edible.

II. 3: The View of the Heavens from an Orthodox Islamic Perspective

With the coming of Islam a new ideology was adopted and the perspective from which the universe was viewed changed radically. As Nasr puts it:

The question of the Divine Principle and the consequent unicity of Nature is particularly important in Islam where the idea of Unity (*al-tawḥīd*) overshadows all others and remains at every level of Islamic civilization the most basic principle upon which all else depends.⁶²

The sources from which the Islamic view of the universe is to be understood need to be identified first. Gulzar Haider observes that: 'Any attempt to grasp the nature of Islamic cosmological thought has to begin by accepting the Qur'anic cosmogony, [... which should be drawn] from Qur'anic verses and the utterances of the Prophet, especially the Hadith al-Qudsi'.⁶³ Thus, in discussing this subject, our sources will be the Qur'ān, Ḥadīth, and the lexicons and interpretations concerned with scriptural references to the cosmos.

We have to bear in mind that the cosmology of the Qur'ān and Ḥadīth is not intended to be read as scientific theory, though they make definite observations regarding the structure and evolution of the universe. They do not endeavour to explain in detail cosmological concepts or phenomena. They are fundamental, however, in that they

Qur'ān, aṣ-Ṣāfāt (the Ranks) 23, 37, 139-48; this translation is from *The Koran*, trans, N. J. Dawod, (Middlesex: Penguin Books, 1964), pp. 168-69.

⁶² Nasr, *An Introduction to Islamic Cosmological Doctrines*, p. 4.

⁶³ S. Gulzar Haider, 'Islam, cosmology and architecture', in Margaret Bentley Sevcenko (ed.), *Theories and Principles of the Design in the architecture of Islamic Societies* (Cambridge and Massachusetts: Aga Khan Program for Islamic Architecture, 1988), pp. 73- 85, see particularly, p. 75.

affirm unequivocally that God is the only absolute. The Islamic world-view of the cosmos, particularly the orthodox view, is characterised by its constant reference to the cosmic phenomena as signs of the existence of One All-Powerful God. Exploring this orthodox world-view whose grand scheme is that 'no act is free of an ethical dimension, and no domain escapes connection with the sacred',⁶⁴ is the subject of the following discussion.

With the coming of Islam, although the pagan Arabs' mythological view of the architecture of the cosmos was discarded, certain basic cosmological theories retained their validity, particularly that of the unity of the world, as this was evidence of the unity of the Divine principle. Indeed, Islam accepted and incorporated the architectural aspects of the universe inherited from previous monotheistic religions, rejecting the conceptualisation of the pagan Arabs. Haider notes that:

Islam reaffirmed the essential cosmological framework of the sacred texts and traditions of the Abrahamic faith. The grand scheme of creation, the orderly and law-abiding universe, the original state of the Garden and the earthly exile of man, the temporality of this life, the eternity of the hereafter, the final judgment, heaven, and hell, all remained essentially the same as they had been in the Judeo-Christian tradition. This is understandable because Islam claimed the unbroken flow of revelation from Adam to Noah, to Abraham, his progeny, Moses, Jesus, and Muhammad. Every subsequent revelation affirmed the ones before, clarified the concepts that had been clouded, established the ones that had been erased, corrected the heresies that had crept in, and refined the law to an ever-increasing level of timelessness.⁶⁵

Moreover, Islam retained much of the systematic cosmological knowledge inherited from the *Jāhili* legacy, such as the lunar mansions and the zodiacal constellations. For instance, predicting the weather from the rising or setting of certain constellations was acknowledged by the Prophet Muhammad, but Islam objected to the attribution of the effect of that constellation to the stars themselves and not to God.⁶⁶ It is related that the Prophet on completion of a dawn prayer that followed a rainy night said: 'Do you know

⁶⁴ Ibid., p. 73.

⁶⁵ Ibid., p. 74.

⁶⁶ Islam rejected the pagan belief that regarded the stars as the cause of rain; those who attributed the cause of any natural phenomenon or event to the stars and not to Allah would be accused of atheism. See Ibn Rushd, *Al-Bayān wa ʾl-Taḥṣīl*, Vol. 17, p. 407.

what your Lord has said (revealed)?' Those present replied, 'God and His messenger know best.' He said then: 'Allāh has said, 'During this morning some of my servants (worshippers) remained as true believers in Me and some became disbelievers. Whoever said that the rain was due to the blessing and the mercy of Allāh, had belief in Me, and he disbelieves in the stars; and whoever said that it rained because of a particular star (*naw*), had no belief in Me, but believes in that star'.⁶⁷

The new religion acknowledged the importance of the upper realm, not only as a Divine domain in itself but also as a sign of and guidance to that domain. The heavenly bodies could be used for miraculous proof of the prophecy of the Messenger of Allah: it is related that the people of Mecca asked the Prophet Muhammad to produce a miracle, and 'he showed them the splitting of the moon into two parts, until they saw (the mount of) Ḥirā' between them'.⁶⁸ This miracle is also confirmed by the Qur'ān in the following verse: 'the Hour has drawn near, and the Moon has been cleft asunder'.⁶⁹ Moreover, the cosmic realm is regarded as being among the great signs of God and thus as suitable for Divine oaths: there are a number of such verses, including 'I swear by the position of the Stars';⁷⁰ 'By the Moon [...]';⁷¹ 'By the Heaven with its constellation [...]';⁷² 'By the Star while falling [...]'.⁷³

⁶⁷ Shaykh Safiur-Rahman al-Mubarakpuri (supervisor), *Al-Miṣbāḥ al-Munīr fī Tahdhīb Ibn Kathīr*, (abridged version), (Riyadh, Houston, New York, Lahore: Darussalam, 10 Vols., 2000), Vol. 9, pp. 451-52.

⁶⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 347.

⁶⁹ The Qur'ān, al-Qamar (The Moon), 27, 54, 1.

{ اقتربت الساعة وانشق القمر }.

⁷⁰ The Qur'ān, al-Wāqī'a (The Inevitable Event), 27, 56, 75.

{ فلا أقسم بمواقع النجوم }.

⁷¹ The Qur'ān, al-Muddathir (the One who Wrapped Up), 29, 74, 32.

{ ... و القمر ... }

⁷² The Qur'ān, al-Burūj (The Constellations), 30, 85, 1.

{ و السماء ذات البروج ... }

⁷³ The Qur'ān, an-Najm (the Star), 27, 53, 1.

{ والنجم إذا هوى }

The Prophet also used cosmic phenomena to help people comprehend certain religious truths such as the relative closeness of the Day of Judgment. One evening, as the Sun was about to set, Muhammad spoke of this to his companions: ‘By He in Whose Hand is my soul! Not much of this world is left compared to what has already passed of it, except as much as what is left in this day of yours compared to what has already passed of it’.⁷⁴ In another gathering the Prophet found the sunset a good occasion to remind his companions of the shortness of human life: ‘what remains of your time, compared to what has passed, is as long as what remains of this day compared to what has passed of it’.⁷⁵

Most Qur’ānic verses that refer to the cosmos aim to emphasise two essential facts: the existence of One All-powerful God, the Creator of all things; and the existence of the hereafter and the Day of Judgment. Those who deny bodily resurrection should find in the creation of the heavens above them a sign of the ability of the Creator to resurrect the dead. ‘The creation of the heavens and the earth is indeed greater than the creation of mankind, yet most men know not’.⁷⁶ ‘Have not they seen that Allāh, who created the heavens and the earth, and was not wearied by their creation, is able to give life to the dead? Yea, verily He has power over all things’.⁷⁷ But how is this great construction of the heavens and the Earth revealed in the Qur’ān? The Qur’ānic model of the universe is expressed in fragmentary verses, and so to present it we must refer to a number of verses scattered throughout the Qur’ān which discourse upon the structure of the universe. According to the Qur’ān, before the foundation of the universe the heavens and the Earth were compound as one piece of material, which God later separated and created seven earths and seven heavens:

⁷⁴ Al-Mubarakpuri (supervisor), *Al-Miṣbāḥ al-Munīr*, Vol. 9, p. 345.

⁷⁵ Ibid.

⁷⁶ The Qur’ān, Ghāfir (Thee Who Forgiveth), or al-Mu’min (the Believer) as titled in some versions 24, 40, 57.

{لَخَلْقِ السَّمَوَاتِ وَالْأَرْضِ أَكْبَرُ مِنْ خَلْقِ النَّاسِ وَلَكِنَّ أَكْثَرَ النَّاسِ لَا يَعْلَمُونَ}.

⁷⁷ The Qur’ān, al-Aḥqāf (Winding Sand-tracts), 26, 46, 33.

{أولم يروا أن الله الذي خلق السموات والأرض ولم يعي بخلقهن بقادر على أن يحيي الموتى بلى إنه على كل شيء قدير}.

We inspired all the apostles whom We sent before you, saying: ‘There is no god but Me. Therefore serve Me.’ [...] Are the disbelievers unaware that the heavens and the earth were one solid mass which We tore asunder, and that We made every living thing of water? Will they not have faith? We set firm mountains upon the earth lest it should move away with them, and hewed out highways in their rock so that they might be rightly guided. We spread the heaven like a canopy and provided it with strong support: yet of its signs they are heedless. It was He who created the night and the day, and the sun and the moon: each moves swiftly in an orbit of its own.⁷⁸

These and other verses reveal certain aspects of the Islamic view to the universe. According to the interpretation this verse by Ibn ‘Abbās (3-68/ 619-87),⁷⁹ the celestial bodies are conceived by the Qur’anic model as ‘revolving like a spinning wheel, in a circle’.⁸⁰ With regard to the four elements, it is to be understood from the longer passage quoted above that water was the most important among them, as from this substance every living being is created.⁸¹ With regard to the elements of darkness and light, a man once asked the famous orthodox Qu’anic interpreter Ibn ‘Abbās: ‘Did the

⁷⁸ The Qur’ān, Al-Anbiyā’ (The Prophets), 17, 21, 25 and 30-33. (This translation is from Dawud (trans.), *The Koran*, pp. 289-90).

{وَمَا أَرْسَلْنَا مِنْ قَبْلِكَ مِنْ رَسُولٍ إِلَّا نُوحِي إِلَيْهِ أَنَّهُ لَا إِلَهَ إِلَّا أَنَا فَاعْبُدُونِ ... أَوَلَمْ يَرِ الَّذِينَ كَفَرُوا أَنَّ السَّمَاوَاتِ وَالْأَرْضَ كَانَتَا رَتْقًا فَفَتَقْنَاهُمَا وَجَعَلْنَا مِنَ الْمَاءِ كُلَّ شَيْءٍ حَيٍّ أَفَلَا يُؤْمِنُونَ، وَجَعَلْنَا فِي الْأَرْضِ رَوَاسِيَ أَنْ تَمِيدَ بِهِمْ وَجَعَلْنَا فِيهَا فِجَاجًا سِيلًا لَعَلَّهُمْ يَهْتَدُونَ، وَجَعَلْنَا السَّمَاءَ سَقْفًا مَحْفُوظًا وَهُمْ عَنْ آيَاتِهَا معرضُونَ، وَهُوَ الَّذِي خَلَقَ اللَّيْلَ وَالنَّهَارَ وَالشَّمْسَ وَالْقَمَرَ كُلٌّ فِي فَلَكٍ يَسْبَحُونَ}.

⁷⁹ Ibn ‘Abbās was the son of a wealthy merchant named ‘Abbās ibn ‘Abd al-Muṭṭalib, the parental uncle of the prophet Muhammad. He had memorised the Qur’ān and was an expert in its exegesis, as well as an authority on the Sunna due to his zeal in acquiring new knowledge. He was known among Sunnis as the best commentator of the Qur’ān. See az-Ziriklī, *Al-A ‘Īm*, Vol. 4, pp. 228-29.

⁸⁰ Al-Mubarakpuri (supervisor), *Al-Miṣbāḥ al-Munīr*, Vol., 6, p. 444.

⁸¹ The Abbasids, influenced by Persian philosophy, believed that fire was the most important. See Fakhr ad-Dīn Muḥammad ar-Rāzī, *Sharḥ ‘Uyūn al-Ḥikma*, ed. by Ahmad as-Saqqā, Ṭahran: Mu’assasat aṣ-Ṣādiq, 3 Vols., 1415 H), Vol. 2, p. 191; Abū ‘Uthmān ‘Amr ibn Baḥr al-Jāḥiz, *Al-Ḥayawān*, ed. Muḥammad ‘Uyūn as-Sūd, (Beirut: Dār al-Kutub al-‘Ilmiyya, 4, Vol, 1998), Vol. 3, pp. 51-56.

Reflecting on this notion, Bashshār ibn Burd (d. 168-784), who was accused of *zindaqa*, writes:

إبليسُ أفضلُ من أبيكم آدمُ ... فتبصّروا يا معشرَ الفجّار.
النّارُ عنصرُهُ، و آدمُ طينةٌ ... و الطينُ لا يسمو سماءَ النّار.

Buṭrus al-Bustānī, *Muntaḥayāt Audabā’ al-‘Arab: Fī al-‘Aṣḥur al-‘Abbāsiyya* (Beirut: Dār Ṣādir, 1948), Vol. 2, p. 25.

Satan is better than your father Adam, can’t you see this, hey you bastards!

Fire is his element, Adam is mud; mud can’t rise as high as fire can.

night come first or the day?’ to which he replied: ‘Do you think that when the heavens and the earth were joined together, there was anything between them except darkness? Thus you may know that the night came before the day’.⁸² Ibn ‘Abbās also comments on the beginning of the world when interpreting these verses: ‘The heavens were joined together and it did not rain, and the earth was joined together and on it nothing grew. When living beings were created to populate the earth, rain came forth from the heavens and vegetation came forth from the earth’.⁸³

The duration of the creation of both the heavens and the Earth was six days:⁸⁴ ‘And We created the heavens and the earth and all that is in between them in six days and nothing of fatigue touched Us’;⁸⁵ ‘It is He who created the heavens and the earth in six days, and His Throne was upon the water’;⁸⁶ here the location of the Divine Throne is mentioned as being positioned above the heavens. In more detail, the Qur’ān specifies that two days were spent in the creation of the Earth but the task of providing sustenance was a

⁸² Al-Mubarakpuri (supervisor), *Al-Miṣbāḥ al-Munīr*, Vol., 6, p. 441. It is interesting to contrast this orthodox view with one in which astrological theory is used to explain a mystery of creation. In the Abbasid period when a man addressed the same query to ‘Ali ibn Musā al-Kāzīm, the eighth Shī‘ī Imam of the Twelvers (153- 203/ 770- 818), the Imam responded: ‘According to the Stars, the ascendant of the worldly life is Cancer, and planets were in their exaltations; Saturn in Libra, Jupiter in Cancer, the Sun in Aries, the Moon in Taurus. The Sun thus was exactly in the tenth House of the ascendant thus in the middle of the sky: so day was created before night.’ Abū Ḥayyān ‘Ali ibn Muhammad at-Tawḥīdī, *Al-Baṣā’ir wa ‘l-Dhakhā’ir*, ed. Widād al-Qāḍī (Beirut: Dār Ṣādir li ‘l-Ṭibā‘a wa ‘n-Naṣr, 4 Vols, 1988), Vol. 1, p. 390- 91.

⁸³ Al-Mubarakpuri (supervisor), *Al-Miṣbāḥ al-Munīr*, Vol., 6, p. 441.

⁸⁴ With regard to the interpretation of the six days, some interpreters have said that they are to be understood according to the earthly calendar; others, however, have argued that in God’s reckoning one day is a thousand years long. This according to the verse ‘[...] And truly a day with your Lord is as a thousand years by your counting’, the Qur’ān, al-Ḥajj (the Pilgrimage) 17, 22, 47. I support the latter suggestion as reference to the length of the Divine day is made in a verse that connects the duration of the Divine day to the creation: ‘It is Allāh Who has created the heavens and the earth and all between them in six days, then He established Himself on the Throne, you have none besides Him a guardian or an intercessor: Will you not then receive admonition? He directs the affairs from the heaven to the earth; then it will ascend unto him on a day the measure of which is a thousand years of your reckoning.’ The Qur’ān, as-Sajda (Adoration), 21, 32, 4.

{الله الذي خلق السموات والأرض وما بينهما في ستة أيام ثم استوى على العرش ما لكم من دونه من ولي ولا شفيع أفلا تتذكرون، يدبر الأمر من السماء إلى الأرض ثم يعرج إليه في يوم كان مقداره ألف سنة مما تعدون}.

⁸⁵The Qur’ān, Qāf (The Letter Qāf), 26, 50, 38.

{ولقد خلقنا السموات والأرض وما بينهما في ستة أيام وما مستنا من لغوب}.

⁸⁶ The Qur’ān, Hūd (Houd), 11, 11, 7,

{وهو الذي خلق السموات والأرض في ستة أيام وكان عرشه على الماء}.

greater matter as it took four days, including two days spent in creating the heavens, in which, as is mentioned several times in the Qur'ān, the treasury of the world is kept.⁸⁷ In addressing the disbelievers, God draws attention to the creation of the universe as one of the signs that should guide them to the conviction of the existence of a unique and all-powerful Creator:

Say: 'would deny Him Who created the earth in two days, and make other gods his equals? He alone is the Lord of the creation.' He set upon the earth mountains towering high above it. He pronounced his Blessing upon it and in four days provided it with sustenance for all alike. Then He made his way to the heaven, which was but a cloud of vapour, and to it and to the earth he said: 'Will you obey Me willingly, or shall I compel you?' 'Willingly,' they answered. In two days He formed the sky into seven heavens, and to each heaven He assigned its task. We decked the lowest with lamps [stars] and guardians [comets]. Such is the design of the Mighty One, the All-knowing.⁸⁸

So the universe consists of seven heavens⁸⁹ and the same number of earths: 'It is Allāh Who has created seven heavens and of the earth the like thereof [...]',⁹⁰ and the last heaven, which God refers to as the 'lower heaven', the mundane one, is the one which has been adorned with luminaries, which are the stars and planets. A view different from that of the Greek model, and that flourished in mediaeval Muslim world, which

⁸⁷ For example, 'And in Heaven is your sustenance, as (also) what you are promised'.

{و في السماء رزقكم وما توعدون}.

The Qur'ān, adh-Dhāriyāt (The Winds that Scatter), 26, 51, 22.

The Promised land, thus, according to Islamic ideology, is twofold: hell for disbelievers, Paradise for believers. However, there were some people in the Abbasid period who later came to believe that the Earth is the place of Hell. (See al-Jāhiz, *Al-Ḥayawān*, Vol. 2, p. 357).

⁸⁸ The Qur'ān, Fuṣṣilat (Revelations Well Expounded), 24, 41, 9-12).

{قل انكم لتكفرون بالذي خلق الأرض في يومين و تجعلون له أندادا ذلكم رب العالمين، و جعل فيها رواسي من فوقها و بارك فيها و قدر فيها أنوارها في أربعة أيام سواء للسائلين، ثم استوى إلى السماء و هي دخان فقال لها وللأرض ائتيا طوعا أو كرها قالتا أتينا طائعين، فقضاهن سبع سموات في يومين و أوحى في كل سماء أمرها و زيننا السماء الدنيا بمصابيح و حفظنا ذلك تقدير العزيز العظيم}.

⁸⁹ The Prophet Muhammad's Night Journey, in which he was ascended to the heavens, narrates how the angel Gabriel took him to these seven heavens, in each of which he encountered the previous prophets, until he reached the Lote Tree (*Sidrat al-Muntahā*), beyond which none can pass. (For the whole story and its interpretation see Al-Mubarakpuri (supervisor), *Al-Miṣbāḥ al-Munīr*, Vol. 5, 552-80). References to this journey are also to be found in the Qur'ān in which a full chapter is entitled al-Isrā' (The Night Journey), 15, 17, 1; and in other chapters in which God defends his messenger from the accusation of insanity which the unbelievers mocked on hearing the news of that journey. See also at-Takwīr (The Cessation), 30, 81, 17-29 and an-Najm (The Star), 27, 53, 1-18.

⁹⁰ The Qur'ān, Aṭ-Ṭalāq (The Divorce), 28, 65, 12.

{الله الذي خلق سبع سموات و من الأرض مثلهن ...}.

placed a planet in each of the heavens and the fixed stars in the farthest heaven from the Earth.

Moreover, the Qur'ān tells us that the Earth was created prior to the seven heavens: 'It is He who created for you all that is in the earth. And He returned His will to heaven and fashioned it as seven heavens, for He has knowledge of everything'.⁹¹ The pillars that the heavens have been raised upon are invisible to human sight: 'Allāh is He Who raised the heavens without any pillars that you can see; then He established Himself on the Throne'.⁹² So, the heavens are supported by pillars which can be interpreted as an invisible Divine force: 'He withholds the heaven from falling on the earth except by his leave. Verily, Allāh is, for mankind, full of Kindness, Most Merciful'.⁹³ Moreover, the construction of the universe is not complete, since it is still expanding: 'And We constructed the heaven with Hands (power) and We will expand it'.⁹⁴

According to the Qur'ān, the alteration of days and nights is due to the spinning motion of the spherical Earth,⁹⁵ '[...] And He ceases night to overtake day and ceases day to overtake night, and has subjected the Sun and the Moon (to His law): each running for an appointed term. He is the Mighty, the Benignant one'.⁹⁶ Although the physical object that performs the spherical movement is not stated clearly in this verse, it could be a reference to the movement of the Earth around its axis.

⁹¹ The Qur'ān, Al-Baqara (The Cow), 1, 1, 29,

{ وهو الذي خلق لكم ما في الأرض جميعاً ثم استوى إلى السماء فسوّهن سبع سمواتٍ و هو بكلّ شيءٍ عليم }.

⁹² The Qur'ān, Ar-Ra'd (The Thunder), 13, 13, 2.

{ الله الذي رفع السموات بغير عمدٍ ترّونها ثم استوى على العرش ... }.

⁹³ The Qur'ān, Al-Hajj (The Pilgrimage), 17, 22, 65.

{ ... و يمسك السماء أن تقع على الأرض إلا بإذنه إن الله بالناس لرؤوفٌ رحيمٌ }.

⁹⁴ The Qur'ān, Adh-Dhāriyāt (Revelations Well Expounded), 27, 51, 47.

{ والسماء بنيناها بإيدٍ و إنا لموسعون }.

⁹⁵ See 'Ali ibn Ḥazm al-Andalusī's refutation of those who denied the spherical shape of the Earth in his *Al-Fiṣāl fī al-Milāl wa ʾl-Aḥwā' wa ʾl-Niḥāl*, ed. Ahmad Shams ad-Dīn (Beirut: Dār al-Kutub al-ʿIlmiyya, 3 Vols., 1996), Vol. 1, pp. 352-61.

⁹⁶ The Qur'ān, az-Zumūr (The Hordes), 23, 39, 5

{ ... يكوّزُ الليلُ على النهارِ و يكوّزُ النهارُ على الليلِ و سخرَ الشمسَ و القمرَ كلٌّ يجري لأجلِ مسمى إلا هو العزيزُ الغفورُ }.

References to the lunar mansions and the orbits of the Sun and Moon are found in the Qur'ān:

And a sign for them is the night: from the night We lift the day – and they are plunged in darkness. And the sun hastens to its resting-place: its course is laid for it by the Mighty One, the All-knowing. We have ordained phases for the moon, which daily wanes and in the end appears like a bent and withered twig.⁹⁷ It is not permitted for the Sun to overtake the moon, nor does the night outpace the day. Each swim in its own orbit'.⁹⁸

Moreover, the signs of the zodiac are also encountered in the Qur'ān: 'And indeed, We have put *burūjan* (big stars, constellations, or signs of the zodiac)⁹⁹ in the heaven and We beautified it for the beholders';¹⁰⁰ 'Blessed be He Who has made *burūj* in the heaven'.¹⁰¹

With regard to the nature and function of the heavenly bodies, Haider notes that in pagan societies 'natural phenomena have been given the status of deities, while monotheistic religions have looked upon the cosmos as the wondrous handiwork of God and have treated nature as a treasure chest of Divine portents'.¹⁰² Indeed, with the

⁹⁷ It is worth mentioning the names Arabs give to the ten sets of three nights comprising a lunar month, recognised according to the phases of the moon, as these names are encountered frequently in their poetry. They call the first three nights *Ghurar* (introductory nights), the next three nights *Nufal* (odd nights); the next three nights *Tusa'* (the ninths) – because the last of them is the ninth. The next three nights are called *Ushar* (tenths) – because the first of them is the tenth. The next three nights are called *al-Bīḍ* (the whites) – because of the light of the full Moon. The next three nights are called *Dura'*; the plural of *Dar ā'*, because on the first of them the night is dark as the Moon is waning. *Dar ā'* refers to a black sheep, i.e., one whose head is black. The next three sets are *Zulam*, then *Ḥanādis*, then *Da āḍi'*; then, finally, *Miḥāq*, because of the absence of moonlight at the beginning of the month. See Al-Mubarakpuri (supervisor), *Al-Miṣbāḥ al-Munīr*, Vol., 8 pp. 199-200; and al-Marzūqī, *Al-Azmina wa l-Amkina*, Vol. 2, pp. 60-61.

⁹⁸ The Qur'ān, Yāsīn, 23, 36, 37-40.

{وَأَيُّ لَهْمِ اللَّيْلِ نَسَلَخَ مِنْهُ النَّهَارَ فَإِذَا هُم مَّظْلُومُونَ، وَالشَّمْسُ تَجْرِي لِمُسْتَقَرٍّ لَهَا ذَلِكَ تَقْدِيرُ الْعَزِيزِ الْعَلِيمِ، وَالْقَمَرَ قَدَرْنَا مَنَازِلَ حَتَّىٰ عَادَ كَالْعُرْجُونِ الْقَدِيمِ، لَا الشَّمْسُ يَنْبَغِي لَهَا أَنْ تُدْرِكَ الْقَمَرَ وَلَا اللَّيْلُ سَابِقُ النَّهَارِ وَكُلٌّ فِي فَلَكٍ يَسْبَحُونَ}.

⁹⁹ 'Burūjan' can mean all three.

¹⁰⁰ The Qur'ān, al-Hijr, 14, 15, 16.

{وَلَقَدْ جَعَلْنَا فِي السَّمَاءِ بُرُوجًا وَزَيَّنَّاهَا لِلنَّاظِرِينَ ...}.

¹⁰¹ The Qur'ān, al-Furqān, 19, 25, 61.

{تَبَارَكَ الَّذِي جَعَلَ فِي السَّمَاءِ بُرُوجًا ...}.

coming of Islam a new perspective within which the whole universe had to be viewed created a new ideology uniquely distinguished from that of the pagan world, though not all ideas of the upper realm were rejected, as Islam recognised the validity of certain pre-Islamic conceptions, as stated earlier. This perspective absolutely denied the belief in the divinity of the heavenly bodies: followers of the new religion were to bear witness that God is the Creator and Commander of the whole universe including that of the upper realm, whose objects are scattered westward and eastward, and it is He alone who deserves to be worshipped. The denial that astral bodies are deities is found in many places in the Qur'ān and the Prophet's traditions. For example, when the Prophet Abraham considered the heavens in his search for the Divine, he looked upward in wonder to the planets, the Moon and the Sun. Being sceptical of their divinity, he dismissed them and the truth was revealed to him when he appealed to the true God to guide him. He understood that although they were great and glorious, yet their rising and setting were preordained by a greater power, and their presence pointed to the truly divine and eternal. Thus the prime function of the heavenly bodies is as evidence of the existence of One All-Powerful God.¹⁰³

In the Islamic view, the heavens and Earth are presented as superior to mankind regarding their formation and creation, as mentioned above. However, God elevated mankind above them and, moreover, subjected the whole universe to the service of mankind.¹⁰⁴ Thus, the prime purpose of the creations is to lead mankind to the right path; the absolute God.

Yet, although the new religion strongly opposed certain conceptions of the heavenly bodies dominant in the *Jāhiliyya*, Islam accepted the validity of a number of ideas and

¹⁰² Haider, 'Islam, Cosmology and Architecture', p. 74.

¹⁰³ See Al-Mubarakpuri (supervisor), *Al-Miṣbāḥ al-Munīr*, Vol. 3, pp. 387-89.

¹⁰⁴ The Qur'ān, al-Isrā', (The Night Journey), 15, 17, 70.

{وَلَقَدْ كَرَّمْنَا بَنِي آدَمَ وَحَمَلْنَا فِي الْبَرِّ وَالْبَحْرِ وَرَزَقْنَاهُمْ مِنَ الطَّيِّبَاتِ وَفَضَّلْنَاهُمْ عَلَى كَثِيرٍ مِمَّنْ خَلَقْنَا تَفْضِيلًا}.

'We have bestowed blessing on Adam's children and guided them by land and sea. We have provided them with good things and exalted them above many of our creatures'.

See also Muḥyī ad-Dīn ibn 'Arabī's view regarding this matter in his *Al-Futūḥāt al-Makkiyya*, ed. by 'Uthmān Yaḥyā and Ibrāhīm Madkūr, (Cairo: al-Hay'a al-Miṣriyya li 'l-Kitāb, 14 Vols., 1985), Vol. 3, p.

65.

practices that were free from idolatry. Thus the astral bodies were still considered efficient tools for precisely marking the passage of time and determining directions, particularly for the religious purpose of calculating the time of prayer, and the orientation of the mosque's *qibla* (so that Muslims may direct their prayer towards the *Ka'ba* in Mecca); and other religious activities that require precise determination of time, such as fasting during the month of Ramadan, celebrating the two Eids, and performing Hajj. Islam also valued the knowledge that enabled the stars to be used as navigational aids, and in weather forecasting, the only aspect of prediction that Islam allows, because of its vital importance in the daily life of the people and because it does not encroach on the realm of the unseen.¹⁰⁵ Yet, this permission is given under one condition. Muslims always have to bear in mind that it is God's will that ultimately prevails; they should not consider any astral phenomenon as a definite sign of a future natural event. Regarding the notion of the possible effect of the upper realm on the terrestrial world, Islam did not oppose this way of thought altogether, but set certain guidelines. The effect of the phases of the Moon on human health, for example, is acknowledged by the Prophet Muhammad, who, it is related, said 'The best day on which you can be cupped [be cured by letting blood] is the seventeenth, or the nineteenth, or on the twenty-first day [of every lunar month]'.¹⁰⁶

It is clear thus that Islam acknowledged the usefulness of many functions of the upper realm that had been recognised by the pre-Islamic Arabs, including its aesthetic function, which is to adorn the lowest heaven. But Islam vigorously opposed and prohibited judicial astrology; that is the discipline based on the belief that the heavenly bodies' disposition and relationships could be a source of knowing the future of human individuals or groups.

¹⁰⁵ Islam's encouragement of these practices had a significant effect on astronomy. As S. Nomanul Haq notes: 'indeed, astronomy is the only natural science that escaped the censure of the medieval Muslim opponents of secular science (*ulūm al-awā'ī*) and found a home in mosques, receiving the blessing of mainstream religious circles; and it is virtually the only Islamic hard science that lasted well into the modern period, continuing vigorously and fruitfully long after the Mongol sack of Baghdad, when much of Islamic scientific activity began to decline'. S. Nomanul Haq, 'Astronomy', *The Oxford Encyclopedia of the Modern Islamic World*, ed. by Esposito, John et. al., (New York and Oxford: Oxford university Press, 4 Vols., 1995), Vol. 1, p. 145.

¹⁰⁶ Ibn Qayyim al-Jawziyya, *Medicine of the Prophet*, trans. by Penelope Johnstone, (Cambridge: The Islamic Texts Society, 2004), p. 41. For more information on times of cupping see *ibid*, pp. 41-3.

We have seen that in the *Jāhiliyya* the heavenly bodies were regarded either as deities that themselves bring life to the terrestrial realm (a belief that give rise to the astral religion practised at that time), or as animate objects that totally lack the quality of soul, a quality that Islam restores to them but in a quite different manner. Their possession of soul, the essence of their being was in the pre-Islamic era somewhat vague. Islam, however, was much clearer in determining the aspects of this quality. The Qur'ān contains a number of passages which identify the precise character of the heavenly bodies. From the Islamic perspective, the heavenly realm is living and rational: the heavenly bodies receive divine commands and they are united in the worship of God: 'The seven heavens and the earth and those in them declare His glory, and there is nothing but extols His praise, but you do not comprehend their praise'.¹⁰⁷ It is to be understood from this verse that the seven heavens are inhabited as well as the Earth.

The heavens and the Earth are even portrayed as being more rational than man: when God asked who among his creatures was able to bear the responsibility of trust,¹⁰⁸ heavens, earth and mountains all refused to accept such a great responsibility. Man, however, being ignorant, offered to bear the burden.¹⁰⁹ Thus the heavenly bodies also have a degree of free will, though it is very limited; they can choose when a choice is offered, or if they are commanded, can obey willingly or unwillingly: when God finished separating the heaven from the Earth He then 'took hold of the heaven when it was smoke and said to it and to the Earth, 'Come willingly or unwillingly.' They both said, 'We come willingly'.¹¹⁰ By nature they are created to commit no sins but to obey the Divine command and act according to the law ordained by God. Were they to do

¹⁰⁷ The Qur'ān, Al-Isrā' (The Night Journey), 15, 17, 44.

¹⁰⁸ The interpretation of this word is given as follows: 'The trust is something given to a person, over which he has a power of disposition; he is expected to use it as directed or expected, but he has the power to use it otherwise. There is no trust if the trustee has no power, and the trust implies that the giver of the trust believes and expects that the trustee would use it in according to the wish of the creator, and not otherwise'. (See *The Glorious Qur'ān: English translation of the meanings and commentary*, Abdullah Yusuf Ali (trans. and commentator), (Canada: The Muslim Students' Association, 1975), p. 1129, footnote 3777.

¹⁰⁹ The Qur'ān, al-Aḥzāb (The Confederates), 21, 33, 72.

{إِنَّا عَرَضْنَا الْأَمَانَةَ عَلَى السَّمَاوَاتِ وَالْأَرْضِ وَالْجِبَالِ فَأَبَيْنَ أَنْ يَحْمِلْنَهَا وَأَشْفَقْنَ مِنْهَا وَحَمَلَهَا الْإِنْسَانُ إِنَّهُ كَانَ ظَلُومًا جَهُولًا} .
'We presented the trust to the heaven and the earth and the mountains, but they declined to bear it, being afraid thereof: Man bore it, indeed he was unjust and foolish'.

¹¹⁰ For the full Qur'anic verse see p. 42 above footnote 88.

otherwise no life could exist. The limiting of their free will, thus, is for the benefit of the entire universe, as it maintains the upper world in great peace and order, in contrast to the troubles which plague life below and which result from the freedom mankind enjoys; hence disorder in the upper realm will be the sign of the end of this world.¹¹¹

They thus react with horror to any expression of polytheistic belief:

Those who say: 'The Lord of Mercy has begotten a son,' preach a monstrous falsehood, at which the very heavens might crack, the earth break asunder, and the mountains crumble to dust in complete ruin. That they should ascribe a son to the Merciful, when it does not become Him to beget one! There is none in the heavens or in the earth but shall return to Him in utter submission. He Has kept count of all his creatures, and one by one they shall approach Him on the Day of Resurrection.¹¹²

Moreover, although Islamic doctrine holds that the stars are alive and have sense and reason, they have no sympathy for mankind, they neither mourn nor rejoice at human happiness or grief, death or birth. When it happened that there was an eclipse of the Sun on the day of the death of Abraham, the son of the Prophet Muhammad, the Prophet warned his people not to link the two incidents, though to do so seemed to do honour to his son. He said: 'The Sun and Moon do not weep for the death of any one of you or rejoice at his birth'.¹¹³ In Islam such celestial phenomena should not be thought of as indicating that the upper realm is sympathetic to mankind, rather they are signs of the

¹¹¹ On the Day of Judgment, the whole universe will be destroyed as promised by God in the Qur'ān:

{ إذا السماء انفطرت، و إذا الكواكب انتثرت، و إذا البحار فجرت، و إذا القبور بعثرت، علمت نفس ما قدمت و ما أخرت } .

The Qur'ān, Al-Infīṭār (The Cleavage), 30, 82, 1-5.

'When the Heaven is cleft, and when the planets fall down in fragments, and when the seas have apertures to one another, and when the tombs are strewn abroad, a soul will then know what it did formerly and latterly'.

{ ... يسأل أيان يوم القيامة، فإذا برق البصر وخسف القمر، و جمع الثمن و القمر، يقول الإنسان يومئذ أين المفر؟ }

(The Qur'ān, Al-Qiyāma (The Resurrection), 29, 75, 6-10).

'He [man] asks, 'When is the Day of Resurrection?', so when the sight is dazzled, and the Moon is eclipsed, and the Sun and the Moon are brought together, man shall say on that day, 'where is the escape?'

The heavenly bodies are thus, from the Islamic point of view, mortal and subject to annihilation.

¹¹² The Qur'ān, Maryam (Mary), 16, 19, 88-95.

{ و قالوا اتخذ الرحمن ولداً، لقد جئتم شيئا إداً، تكاذب السّموات يتقطرن منه و تنشق الأرض و تحز الجبال هذا، أن دعوا للرحمن ولداً، و ما ينفي للرحمن أن يتخذ ولداً، إن كل من في السّموات و الأرض إلا أتى الرحمن عبداً. لقد أحصاهم و عدّهم عداً، و كلهم آتية يوم القيامة فردا } .

¹¹³ Al-Ḥāfiẓ abū Na'im Ahmad ibn Ishāq al-Aṣbahānī, *Al-Musnad al-Mustakhrāj 'alā Ṣaḥīḥ al-Imām Muslim*, ed. by Muhammad ash-Shāfi'ī, (Beirut: Dār al-Kutb al-'Ilmiyya, 4 Vols., 1960), Vol. 2, pp. 491-96.

Omnipotence's power that remind man of their Creator. Therefore, whenever there is a lunar or solar eclipse Muslims have to perform a special prayer.¹¹⁴

The new religion's theology and cosmology did not have an immediate impact on poets, who continued to use imagery based on notions condemned by Islam. This is not surprising, however, since language is not easily cleansed of images and metaphors that relate to obsolete practices and modes of thinking. However, many of these survivals do not indicate any strong belief but are used because their meaning is well understood and because they continue to have a powerful emotional resonance. Sometimes, however, ancient beliefs persist in the face of strong opposition by the new ideology; thus we find that the theme of *dahr*, as a Prime Mover, that shaped an essential feature of the pre-Islamic Arabs' ideology, continued to be employed in classical Arabic poetry, as will be shown in the next chapters, even though it was prohibited by Islam, and there was a risk of being accused of atheism. Generally, however, these survivals are mere shadows persisting in the language and used because of the beauty of their imagery or to intensify an emotion. Thus we should not take such image as indicating the poet's belief in the 'reality' of the image. Gustave Von Grunebaum comments:

It should be borne in mind whenever a change is diagnosed in Arabic poetry that this poetry never altogether discards elements and attitudes it once admitted. They continue, sometimes, in a ghostlike manner, and are resumed or restated time and again, but their mention becomes lip service on the part of those poets who, with varying degree of success, are striving for a more adequate expression of the unprecedented attitudes of their day.¹¹⁵

Even so, it is difficult to tell, in individual cases, whether these attitudes were sincerely held. Certainly it seems to have been hard for the poets of the early Islamic period to accept the idea that the universe is utterly indifferent to human suffering. For instance, although he maintained a very clear Islamic tone in the majority of his poems, Ḥassān ibn Thābit, known as 'the Prophet's Poet', expresses his grief in a way that Islam

¹¹⁴ Ibid., pp. 486-96.

¹¹⁵ Gustave E. von Grunebaum, 'The Response to Nature in Arabic Poetry', in *Journal of Near Eastern Studies*, iv, 3 (July 1945): pp. 137- 51, (particularly p. 142).

explicitly condemned. This is especially ironic, as the poem in question was composed in mourning the death of the Prophet:

يُيكون من تبك السموات يومه و من قد بكته الأرض فالناس أكمده.¹¹⁶

We are weeping for a man mourned by the heavens. The Earth too weeps for him. Indeed, people are in deep grief.

Umm al-Barā' bint Ṣafwān¹¹⁷ refers to apparent survival of pre-Islamic belief when mourning the death of the Caliph 'Ali ibn abī Tālib:

الشمس كاسفة لموت إمامنا خير الخلائق و الإمام العادل.¹¹⁸

The Sun suffers eclipse because of the death of our Imam, the best of all creatures, the fair judge.

In the view of this Muslim poet, it seems that an eclipse or any other celestial configuration may still be viewed as expressing sympathy between the upper realm and mankind. Whether metaphorical or not, this view is totally opposed to the clear Islamic opinion on the matter of eclipses: the Prophet Muhammad declared that 'the Sun and Moon never eclipse in response to either someone's death or their birth'.¹¹⁹ Yet the poet seems to still hold to the old belief regarding the cause or significance of eclipses as a result of or response to terrestrial events affecting the elite of society, a belief that was commonplace in ancient Arabia.

Sometimes, poets would find a new conception as interesting, if not more so, than the idea it replaced. This occurred in the case of the shooting stars, when the Islamic view quickly gained acceptance. With the coming of Islam, shooting stars, which had

¹¹⁶ Ḥassān ibn Thābit, *Diwān Ḥassān ibn Thābit al-Anṣārī* (Beirut: Dār Ṣādir and Dār Beirut, 1961), p. 55.

¹¹⁷ Umm al-Barā' bint Ṣafwān ibn Hilāl was an eloquent poet of the *Jāhiliyya* who lived to see the beginning of the Umayyad Caliphate. (See 'Umar Riḍā Kahḥāla, *A lām al-Nisā' fi 'Ālamay al-'Arab wa l-Islām* (Beirut: Mu'assasat ar-Risāla, 5 Vols., 1982), Vol. 1, p. 122-23.

¹¹⁸ 'Abd 'l-Badī' Ṣaqr, *Shā'irāt al-'Arab* (ad-Dūḥa: Manshūrat al-Maktab al-Islāmī, 1967), p. 29.

¹¹⁹ Shihāb ad-Dīn al-'Asqalānī ibn Ḥajar, *Fath al-Bārī bi Sharḥ al-Bukhārī* (Cairo: Maktabat al-Bābī al-Ḥalabī, 17 Vols., 1959), Vol. 3, p. 199. For more information about the Islamic doctrine concerning the causes of eclipses and shooting stars see Yahya J. Michot, 'Ibn Taymiyya on Astrology: Annotated Translation of Three Fatwas', in Savage-Smith (ed.), *Magic and Divination in Early Islam*, pp. 292-94.

previously been viewed as a bad omen, lost their astrological significance and acquired a meaning totally different from that prevalent in the *Jāhili* period. They were no longer a means of predicting an evil future or knowing the unseen, rather they were regarded as a means of preventing such activity from achieving success.¹²⁰ This new function played an important role in shaping Islamic ideology with regard to the upper realm and was evolutionary in that it totally demolished the conventional pagan belief. In poetry, however, both views considered for a time: shooting stars retained their astrological significance, inherited from pre-Islamic times, but also acquired a new role and meaning as missiles sent against evil jinns. In recounting one of his hunting adventures, the Umayyad Dhū ar-Rumma (d. 117/ 735),¹²¹ describes the resistance of his prey, the bull, as follows:

¹²⁰ The relevant Qur'anic references with regard to this new function and meaning of meteors are found in the following verses:

{إِنَّا زِينَا السَّمَاءَ الدُّنْيَا بِزِينَةِ الْكَوَاكِبِ، وَحَفَظْنَا مِنْ كُلِّ شَيْطَانٍ مَارِدٍ، لَا يَسْمَعُونَ إِلَى الْمَلَأِ الْأَعْلَى وَ يُقْتَدِفُونَ مِنْ كُلِّ جَانِبٍ، نُخَوِّرُ أَوْلَهُمْ عَذَابًا وَاصِبًا، إِلَّا مَنْ خَطِفَ الْخَطْفَةَ فَأَتْبَعَهُ شِهَابٌ ثَائِبٌ}.

'We have adorned the lower heaven with the adornment of stars, and a guard against every rebellious devil. They cannot listen to the High Assembly, for they are pelted from every side, subdued, and theirs is an everlasting torment, save him who snatches a fragment (of the angels' discourse), and a piercing meteor pursues him'. The Qur'an, *aṣ-Ṣāffāt* (The Ranks), 23, 37, 6-10.

{وَلَقَدْ جَعَلْنَا فِي السَّمَاءِ بُرُوجًا وَ زِينَاتٍ لِلنَّاطِرِينَ، وَحَفَظْنَاهَا مِنْ كُلِّ شَيْطَانٍ رَجِيمٍ إِلَّا مَنْ اسْتَرَقَ السَّمْعَ فَاتَّبَعَهُ شِهَابٌ مَبِينٌ}.

'We have decked the heaven with constellations and embellished it to the beholders, and We have guarded it against every accursed devils, except he who eavesdrops; he is pursued by fiery meteor'. The Qur'an, *al-Ḥijr*, 14, 15, 16-18.

{وَلَقَدْ زَيَّنَّا السَّمَاءَ الدُّنْيَا بِمَصَابِيحَ وَ جَعَلْنَاهَا رُجُومًا لِلشَّيَاطِينِ وَ أَعْتَدْنَا لَهُمْ عَذَابَ السَّعِيرِ}.

'And We embellished the earth's heaven with lamps, and made them meteorites to stone the devils; and We have prepared for them the torment of the Blazing Fire'. The Qur'an, *al-Mulk* (Sovereignty), 30, 67, 5.

In Islam, the jinn are on the same level as humans, albeit that they are made of smokeless fire and man from dray clay. They are God's creations; they have a life in this world and one in the next. They are either good jinn, who will be rewarded with Paradise in the hereafter, or evil, who will be punished in hell. (For more information on the subject of jinn see Walī Shāh bin Shāh za-Addīn, *al-Jinn fī al-Qurān wa 's-Sunna* (Beirut: Dār al-Bashā'ir al-Islāmiyya, 1996); and Joseph Henninger, 'Beliefs in Spirits among the Pre-Islamic Arabs', in Savage-Smith (ed.), *Magic and Divination in Early Islam*, pp. 1-52. The pre-Islamic Arabs also believed that devils are of various degrees in accordance with the evil deeds they can commit and that they also can marry human beings. See Kamāl ad-Dīn Muhammad ibn 'Isā ad-Dumayrī, *Ḥayāt al-Ḥayawān*, Vol. 3, pp. 36-41; and al-Qazūnī, *'Ajā'ib al-Makhlūqāt*, pp. 279-86.

There is a full chapter in the Qur'an about jinn which refers to the Prophet Muhammad's preaching to them, and to how they were forbidden to obtain any knowledge regarding future events. See al-Qur'an, *The Jinn*, 29, 72.

كأنه كوكبٌ في إثر عفريةٍ ... مسوّمٌ في سواد الليل منقضب.¹²²

It is resisting like a planet chasing after a devilish devil on a very dark night.¹²³

The image of the shooting star as a stone hurled against demons seems to have been a great source of inspiration and the new conception found quick acceptance.

II. 4: Mediaeval Muslim Views of the Cosmos: Philosophical Perspectives

In considering how educated mediaeval Muslims viewed the cosmos, we find that they were influenced more by the Greek model than by the Qur'anic universe. Surprisingly, although they were concerned to explain the Qur'anic verses regarding the structure of the universe, they were reluctant to apply a literal interpretation of the Qur'anic references to the cosmos and sought another approach. Scholars in the Abbasid period, drawing on the achievements of the translation movement, tried to incorporate the Greek, Syriac, Pahlavi and Sanskrit views of the universe into Islamic ideology. Particularly, it was the cosmology of Plato (c.429-347 BC) that was 'so important to the medieval view of the cosmos'.¹²⁴

As the mediaeval Muslim astronomers' works are so numerous, a detailed treatment of their content lies outside the scope of the present research, which will therefore consider only the most significant; but these are sufficient to outline the mediaeval Muslims' view of the cosmos. In regard to the basic elements of Islamic cosmological doctrines prevalent in the mediaeval period, Nasr argues that the *Ikhwān aṣ-Ṣafā'* (the Brethren of

¹²¹ He is Ghaylān ibn 'Uqba al-'Adawī, nickname Dhū ar-Rumma (He of Frayed Cord), a controversial Umayyad poet. Most information concerning his life is of dubious validity; his relations with Mayya, variously reported, bear the stamp of romance and are inspired by verses gleaned from his *diwān*. Other beloveds include Umm Sālim (Umayma). See J. E. Montgomery, 'Dhū al-Rumma', in *Encyclopedia of Arabic Literature*, ed. by Julie Scott Meisami and Paul Starkey, (London and New York: Rutledge), Vol. 1, pp.188-89.

¹²² Faḥ Allāh (ed.), *Diwān Dhī ar-Rūmma*, p. 74.

¹²³ We should keep in mind that poets often used 'stars', 'planets', 'meteors' and 'shooting stars' interchangeably.

¹²⁴ Edson & Savage-Smith, *Medieval Views of the Cosmos*, p. 22.

Purity), al-Bīrūnī, and Ibn Sīnā ‘are to be considered as the dominant figures [... whose views of the universe] are to be found in one form or another in the writings of most of the later Muslim authors’.¹²⁵ Therefore, the ideas of these thinkers will be considered as representative of the mediaeval Muslim views of the universe.

II. 4. 1: The Cosmology of the Ikhwān aṣ-Ṣafā’¹²⁶

The cosmology of the Ikhwān aṣ-Ṣafā’ conforms to the view held by most educated mediaeval Muslims: it places the earth at the centre of the universe surrounded by the seven planets, Moon, Mercury, Venus, Sun, Mars, Jupiter, and Saturn rotating about it. They are enclosed by the heaven of the fixed stars and finally by the outermost sphere, or the *muḥīt*,¹²⁷ ‘which was added by Muslim astronomers to the spheres of Ptolemy to account for the precession of the equinox’.¹²⁸ Moreover, in order to show that their view of the heavens was in accordance with the Qur’anic cosmology as they understood it, ‘they equated the heaven of the fixed stars with the *kursī*, or Pedestal and the ninth heaven with the *‘arsh*, or Throne’.¹²⁹

As for the signs of the zodiac, they are located in the *Muḥīt* and divided into six northern and six southern signs. In this, they also follow the regular astrological schema that divides these signs into four parts according to the nature of their elements:

- (1) Aries, Leo, Sagittarius—fire, hot, dry, east.
- (2) Taurus, Virgo, Capricorn—earth, cold, dry, south.
- (3) Gemini, Libra, Aquarius—air, hot, wet, west.
- (4) Cancer, Scorpio, Pisces—water, cold, wet, north.¹³⁰

¹²⁵ Nasr, *An Introduction to Islamic Cosmological Doctrines*, pp. 13-14.

¹²⁶ For the identity of the Ikhwān aṣ-Ṣafā’ and the content of their *Rasā’il* (epistles) see *ibid.*, pp. 25-43.

¹²⁷ Ikhwān aṣ-Ṣafā’, *Rasā’il Ikhwān aṣ-Ṣafā’ wa Khillān al-Wafā’*, ed. ‘Arif Ṭāmir, (Beirut & Paris: Manshūrāt Uwaydāt, 5 Vols., 1995), Vol. 1, p. 137-38.

¹²⁸ Nasr, *An Introduction to Islamic Cosmological Doctrines*, p. 76.

¹²⁹ *Ibid.*

¹³⁰ Ikhwān aṣ-Ṣafā’, *Rasā’il*, Vol. 1, p. 141.

With the establishment of the Abbasid caliphate the astrological function of the heavenly bodies regained its respectability, for reasons that will be fully explained later in this research, but among which was the eagerness of the caliphs to legitimate their authority and win over the Persians who believed strongly in astrology. In accordance with this policy, the role played by the heavenly bodies in shaping the identity and destiny of human beings was cited as evidence supporting the conception of a unified cosmos, a philosophical foundation upon which the mediaeval view of the cosmos was built. The Brethren of Purity, for example, believed that the human body, in its embryonic development, is under planetary influence, which, as an agent of the Universal Soul, directs the growth of the foetus.¹³¹ Moreover, a correspondence was believed to exist between bodily ailments and the planets: the eyes governed by Jupiter, the ears by Mercury, the nostrils by Mars, nipples by Venus, the channels of excretion by Saturn, the mouth by the Sun, and the navel by the Moon.¹³²

The universe as conceived by the Ikhwān aş-Şafā' is like the cosmos of the ancient Greeks: it is alive as it is composed of a body and the Universal Soul from which everything has been animated. In their view, it is this Universal Soul that causes all actions in the universe. It acts through three agents: the 12 signs of the Zodiac, the heavens (*aflāk*) and the planets. More precisely, it is Nature, which is one of the faculties of this Universal Soul, that governs all things in the sublunary realm.

According to the authors of the *Rasā' il*:

Nature is none other than one of the faculties of the Universal Soul of the spheres which is propagated in all the bodies existing in the sublunary region beginning from the sphere of the ether until the centre of the world. All bodies existed below the sphere of the moon are of two kinds: simple and complex. There are four simple bodies: fire, air, water and earth; and three types of composed bodies; minerals, plants and animals.¹³³

So, in the light of this theory, it is the Nature of these bodies that makes them move or rest, that governs them and perfects.

¹³¹ *Ibid.*, Vol. 2, pp. 330-37, and Vol. 5, p. 129.

¹³² *Ibid.*, p. 148.

¹³³ *Ibid.*, Vol. 1, p. 217; and Vol. 5, p. 196.

The Ikhwān rejected the idea of retrograde motion, asserting that the planets do not move backwards; they move forwards but the difference of their speeds and the size of their spheres make some of them appear to fall behind the others.¹³⁴ The Sun plays a central role in the Ikhwān's universe: 'The Sun has been placed at the centre of the Universe just as the capital of a country is placed in its middle and its king's palace at its centre'.¹³⁵ Below it stands Venus, Mercury, the Moon, the sphere of air, and the earth, and above it there are another five spheres, those of Mars, Jupiter, Saturn, the fixed stars, and the *muhīṭ*. The Sun is thus the heart of the Universe, while the other planets are like the other organs of the body. The Ikhwān also consider the effect of the Sun in each sign of the zodiac and their impact on the sublunary world, such as healthy conditions of animals, physical features of mountains and valleys on the earth, seasonal changes, well-being and misfortune of people, and political conditions of kingdoms.¹³⁶ The Moon is viewed as the second principle of the universe whose effect is mostly confined to feminine cycles occurring on earth.

What above all distinguishes these Mediaeval Muslims' views from those of their ancestors is the philosophical analogy they present between the macrocosm and the microcosm: the anatomy of the upper realm has a miniature model which is to be found in man. For them Man is the symbol of Universal Existence (*al-insān ramz al-wujūd*). This world-view that recognises how the macrocosm has its spiritual analogue in man is expressed in poetry as well:

فاعلم بأن وجود الكون في فلكي ... وفي توجُّهه في جوهر البشر.¹³⁷

Know that the way the universe is placed in its space and its orientation
is analogues to the essence of mankind.

In relating the body of man to the heavens, 'in which the cosmic aspect of man and his correspondence with the Universe is delineated',¹³⁸ the Ikhwān conceived the nine

¹³⁴ Ibid. Vol. 2, pp. 44-45.

¹³⁵ Ibid., Vol. 2, pp. 35-36.

¹³⁶ Ibid., Vol. 5, pp. 216-21.

¹³⁷ Ibn 'Arabī, *Al-Futūḥāt al-Makkiyya*, Vol. 3, p. 100.

heavens as corresponding to the nine substances of the human body: bone, brain, flesh, veins, blood, nerve, skin, hair, and nails lying one above the other like the heavens; and the twelve signs of the zodiac to the twelve openings of the body: the eyes, nostrils, ears, nipples of the breast, mouth, navel, and channels of excretion. The seven planets, whose influence governs the sublunary region, correspond to the seven powers of the body: attraction, sensation, designation, repulsion, nutrition, sleep and imagination, and the seven spiritual powers: the five senses, the power of speech, and the intellectual faculty. The five senses correspond to the five moving planets, the power of speech to the Moon, and the intellectual faculty to the Sun, which illuminates all things.¹³⁹

II. 4. 2: Al-Bīrūnī's Universe¹⁴⁰

Al-Bīrūnī's conception of the design of the universe also follows that of the Greeks. The cosmos is spherical, the outermost sphere being the heaven of the fixed stars. Within this lie the heavens of Saturn, Jupiter, Mars, the Sun, Venus, Mercury, and the Moon and finally the sublunary region of the four elements with the Earth at the centre. The cosmos is a circular object of unified ends that can be divided into two parts: the heavens, which are made of ether (*athīr*)¹⁴¹ and called the upper realm (*al-Ālam al-ʿAlā*), while the sublunary region is called the lower realm (*al-Ālam al-Asfal*). Similarly to the world of the elements, the heavens possess the four fundamental qualities of heat, cold, moistness, and dryness from whose combination the whole universe is created.¹⁴²

¹³⁸ Nasr, *An Introduction to Islamic Cosmological Doctrines*, p. 100.

¹³⁹ See Ikhwān aṣ-Ṣaffāʾ, *Rasāʾil*, Vol. 5, p. 147.

¹⁴⁰ Abū Rayḥān Muḥammad ibn Ahmad al-Bīrūnī was born in Khawārazm in 362/ 973. He was the court astronomer and astrologer during the reign of Maḥmūd Sebūktigin of Ghazna (r. 388-421/ 988-1030) the period that witnessed the rising power of the Turks in Central Asia and the destruction of most of the small Persian kingdoms of the region. For more details about al-Bīrūnī's life and works see Nasr, *An Introduction to Islamic Cosmological Doctrines*, 107-15.

¹⁴¹ Nasr comments on al-Bīrūnī's view of the ether that: 'in contrast to most Greek mathematical astronomers, he believes in the physical existence of the crystalline sphere ... [al-Bīrūnī states that] The celestial sphere is a body like a ball revolving in its own place; it contains within its interior objects whose movements are different from those of the sphere itself, and we are in the centre of it. It is called *falak* on account of its circular movement, like that of a whirl of a spindle, and its name, *athīr* (ether) is current among philosophers'. (Ibid., p. 133).

¹⁴² Abū rayḥān al-Bīrūnī, *Al-Qāmūn al-Masʿūdī* (*Canon Masudicus: an Encyclopaedia of Astronomical Sciences*) (Hyderabad: The Dāīratu'l-Ma'ārf-il-Oṣmānīa, 3 Vols., 1954), Vol. 1, pp. 21-22.

Contrary to the traditional Muslim astronomers 'who added a ninth sphere to the eight of Ptolemy in order to explain the precession of the equinox, al-Bīrūnī remains content with the eight spheres of the Greeks.¹⁴³

In expressing his understanding of the doctrine of the 'Universal Man',¹⁴⁴ al-Bīrūnī explained the human microcosm as containing all of the universe in itself. He believed in the relation between the signs of the zodiac and the parts of the body, the constellations being the macrocosmic counterparts. He explains:

The following are the various parts of the body which are related to the several signs. The head and face to Aries, the neck and windpipe to Taurus, the arms and hands to Gemini, the chest, breast, sides, stomach and lungs to Cancer, the heart to Leo, the womb with its contents to Virgo, the back and buttocks to Libra, the genitals to Scorpius, the thighs to Sagittarius, the knees to Capricorn, the shanks to Aquarius and the feet and heels to Pisces.¹⁴⁵

For al-Bīrūnī there is also a relation between the twelve signs and the four seasonal stages of human life: each stage is governed by a triad of signs of the zodiac with particular features:

Aries, Taurus and Gemini are vernal, changeable, govern childhood [...], Cancer, Leo and Virgo are aestival, restful, govern youth [...], Libra, Scorpius and Sagittarius are autumnal, changeable, govern adult life [...] while Capricorn, Aquarius and Pisces are hibernal, peaceful, govern old age [...].¹⁴⁶

¹⁴³ Al-Bīrūnī notes: 'Now we on our own part were already obliged to assume an eighth sphere, but there is no reason why we should suppose a ninth one'. [Abū ar-Rayḥān al-Bīrūnī], *Alberuni's India: an Account of the Religion, Philosophy, Literature, Geography, Chronology, Astronomy, Customs, Laws and Astrology of India (about A.D. 1030.)*, (an English Edition), trans. and ed. by Edward C. Sachau, (London: Trübner & Co., 2 Vols., 1888), Vol. 1, p. 225.

¹⁴⁴ For more information about the doctrine of the Universal Man and its function in cosmology see the chapter entitled 'The Perfect Man' in Reynold A. Nicholson's *Studies in Islamic Mysticism* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1967), pp. 77- 142.

¹⁴⁵ See Abū 'l-Rayḥān Al-Bīrūnī, *At-Taḥfīm li Awā'il Šinā'at at-Tanjīm*, trans. by R. Ramsay Wright as *The Book of Instruction in the Elements of the Art of Astrology*, (Bel Air: Astrology Classics, 2006), p. 11. (Henceforth this work will be referred to in the notes as *Elements of Astrology*). See Figure 17 that shows the Zodiac Man as depicted by the Greeks and which dominated the Mediaeval Muslim views regarding the zodiac-man relationship.

¹⁴⁶ Al-Bīrūnī, *Elements of Astrology*, p. 25

The analogies between the macrocosm and microcosm extended to the assignment of gender:

All of the three superior planets and the Sun are male, Saturn among them, being like a eunuch. Venus and the moon are female, and Mercury hermaphrodite, being male when associated with the male planets, and female when with the female; when alone it is male in its nature. Some people say that Mars is female. But this opinion is not received.¹⁴⁷

On commenting on the relation between the macrocosm and microcosm al-Bīrūnī accepts the analogy between them without elucidating on the subject. He asserts that ‘it is undeniable that God is capable of combining the whole universe in one man’.¹⁴⁸

Al-Bīrūnī mentions God here, and what really distinguished the view of writers such as al-Bīrūnī and the authors of *Rasāʾil* from paganism was their belief that ‘every event here ‘below’ is performed from ‘above’ by the ‘Universal Soul’, which is God’s agent’.¹⁴⁹ Moreover, this vision of a unified cosmos allowed astrology to become integrated into the mediaeval world-view, which was reflected in the works of the poets of the period, whether or not they agreed that ‘the qualities found here on earth are themselves the reflections of the heavenly archetypes which are the causes of all the diverse phenomena of Nature’.¹⁵⁰ According to this view all natural phenomena are indirect expressions of the Divine Unity.

II. 4. 3: Ibn Sīnā’s Conception of the Universe

The cosmos as viewed by Ibn Sīnā (Avicenna) is akin to classic Neoplatonism in that both attribute the story of creation to a chain of being ‘that makes all things possible and allows the production of the many from the One without infringing in any way the unity of that One’.¹⁵¹

¹⁴⁷ Al-Bīrūnī, *Elements of Astrology*, p. 27.

¹⁴⁸ Al-Bīrūnī, *Al-Āthār al-Bāqīya*, p. 1. Al-Bīrūnī is quoting Abū Nuwās’s line:

و ليس على الله بمستكر ... أن يجمع العالم في واحد.

(Al-Ḥasan ibn Hānī’ Abū Nuwās, *Diwān Abī Nuwās*, ed. by Ahmad al-Ghazālī, (Cairo: Maṭba‘at Misr, 1953), p. 454.

It is not mysterious that God is able to embody the whole world in one man.

¹⁴⁹ Nasr, *An Introduction to Islamic Cosmological Doctrines*, p. 74.

¹⁵⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 165.

The world was created, according to Ibn Sīnā by emanation from the One or Necessary Being or the Cause of Causes (*Illat al-Ilal*). The process of creation is as follows: the One emanates the First Intellect (*al-'Aql al-Awwal*), also termed the First Caused (*al-Ma'lūl al-Awwal*), and ranked as Archangel. This first product is pure immaterial intellect resulting from the Necessary Being's contemplation of His own essence.¹⁵² Then it is from the First Intellect's contemplation of itself and its creator that the whole universe comes into existence.

Avicenna's universe 'consists of nine spheres, the eight of Ptolemaic astronomy and the starless heaven added by Muslim astronomers which stands above the heaven of the fixed stars and symbolizes the transition between becoming and being'.¹⁵³ In his scheme of the hierarchy of being, the first cosmological object and with the greatest degree of purity (*ṣafā*) the highest heaven was formed, and out of the less pure the next heaven was formed, and the process of creation continued until in the heaven of the Moon most of the purity was exhausted. Thence the world of generation and corruption came into being below the sphere of this heaven. Out of a natural process that resulted in the creation of the four elements, the Earth finally was formed.¹⁵⁴ In this regard then, it is the heavens, not the Earth as is clearly stated in the Qur'ān, that first came into existence.¹⁵⁵

¹⁵¹ Ian Richard Netton, *Allāh Transcendent: Studies in the Structure and Semiotics of Islamic Philosophy, Theology and Cosmology* (London & New York: Routledge, 1998), 163.

¹⁵² See *ibid.*, p. 163.

¹⁵³ Nasr, *An Introduction to Islamic Cosmological Doctrines*, p. 236, for the original source see Abū 'Ali al-Husayn ibn 'Abdullah ibn Sīnā, *An-Najāt* (Cairo: Muhyī ad-Dīn al-Kurḍī Press, 1938), p. 136.

¹⁵⁴ See *ibid.*, pp. 205-06.

¹⁵⁵ See Abū 'Ali al-Husayn ibn 'Abdullah ibn Sīnā, *Rasā'il ash-Shaykh Abī 'Ali al-Husayn ibn 'Abdullah ibn Sīnā fī Asrār al-Ḥikma al-Mashriqiyya (al-Juz' ar-Rābi': Risālat al-Qadar)*, ed. by Mikā'il ibn Yaḥyā al-Mahrānī, (Leiden: Brill, 4 Vols., 1899), Vol. 3, p. 29.

If we confine the discussion of Ibn Sīnā's doctrine of the Unity of Being, we find that he goes on to explain the existence of other beings in the universe by a gradual degradation of the four elements until it permits the descent of the lowest form of Soul, that is minerals, the lowest kingdom of the physical

As for the astrological function of heavenly bodies, Ibn Sīnā does not refute the entire cosmological foundation upon which astrology is based,¹⁵⁶ but rejects the astrologers' claim regarding their ability to predict exactly future events. From Avicenna's view, all events occur in the world of generation and corruption are influenced by the heavens, which are rational beings and thus able to regulate and give order to the terrestrial realm. Avicenna also emphasizes the fact that the movement and influence of the heavens is due to the will of God.¹⁵⁷

II. 5: Conclusion

This chapter has endeavoured to outline certain cosmological concepts, particularly those of astrological significance, prevalent in the pre-Islamic, Islamic and mediaeval periods.

We have seen how the *Jāhili* Arabs' view of the heavens influenced their practice of *kihāna*; their astrology, which was mainly concerned with the omens associated with the lunar mansions, comets and shooting stars, played a prominent role in giving legitimacy to that art. Astrology was based on a belief in the coherence and oneness of the universe and claimed that the upper realm had a strong influence on earthly affairs. It was not only the astrological function of the astral bodies that was acknowledged by the *Jāhili* people; they also gave some thought to physical and aesthetic aspects of the heavens. The order of the planets in a geocentric model and the beauty of the stars that adorn the

domain. The purity of the Soul increases in this kingdom, culminating in the jewels, the highest form of this domain. Henceforth the movement of the process of creation is no longer a drawing away from the principle but a return to it, and the driving force is *ishq*, love, by which all things are attracted to the source of all Being. So the hierarchy of being continues rising to allow the existence of the plant kingdom. With increasing purity in the mixing of the elements, a new faculty of the Soul enters the stage of the cosmos: the kingdom of animals, from the lowly snail to the monkey.* From the monkey, as the terminal stage in the hierarchy of being that leads to man, whose various degrees of purity reach the highest level with the world of saints and prophets, which itself comprises numerous angelic worlds. 'The end of the whole cosmic process is Pure Being itself where all things began. Creation therefore comes from God and returns to Him'. (Nasr, *An Introduction to Islamic Cosmological Doctrines*, p. 207).

* Nasr comments on this view that: 'It instructive to note that Ibn Sīnā, like al-Birūnī, considers the monkey as the highest of animals in opposition to the Ikhwān al-Safā' who believe the elephant to be the most intelligent animal and therefore the terminal link in the animal kingdom'. See *ibid.*, p. 207, (particularly footnote 32).

¹⁵⁶ Among the arguments he raised against astrology is that since the heavens are made of ether and not the four elements, they cannot possess the four qualities according to which the signs of the zodiac are divided and thus cannot influence the sublunary world. (See *ibid.*, p. 239).

¹⁵⁷ See Ibn Sīnā, *Rasā'il ash-Shaykh*, Vol. 2, p. 25-31.

heavens, as well as guide mankind at sea and on land were of great importance to the Arabs.

With the advent of Islam, certain notions regarding the upper world were accepted and affirmed by the new religion. Islam acknowledged the functions of the lunar mansions and constellations as guides for navigations and journeys, as well as their aesthetic role, but strongly opposed and vehemently condemned any view that assigned a divine character or role to the celestial bodies. Islam insisted that those bodies are not deities, or mediators that bring mankind closer to God, and have no ability whatsoever to inform mankind of their Divinely determined fate. Thus the art of astrology faced fierce criticism that forced it to remain dormant until it was revived in the Abbasid period. The Abbasid era, indeed, infused new blood into the body of astrology as the translation movement strongly influenced the ideology of that society and allowed the Ptolemaic model of the universe to prevail. This was the key factor that enabled astrology to revive and establish its principles as a 'science' that found acceptance in the courts of the political elites, as will be discussed in the following chapters. These will focus on demonstrating how poets of the classical periods made use of astrological concepts and principles that were current in their times, and so we can recognise the distinguishing feature of the ideology that shaped each historical stage, and sometimes, the factors that enabled astrology to survive in the mediaeval period after the dramatic decline it suffered with the coming of Islam. The characteristic of *al-insan al-kāmil* is the idea of the perfect man, 'who as a microcosm of a higher order reflects not only the powers of nature but also the divine powers 'as in a mirror''¹⁵⁸.

¹⁵⁸ Goldzieher, cited in Nicholson, *Studies in Islamic Mysticism*, p. 82.

Chapter III: Astrological References in the Poetry of the *Jāhiliyya* and Early Islamic Periods

III. 1: Introduction

One assumption of this research is that despite the significant changes Islam brought to the Arab world, some aspects of popular belief inherited from pagan society remained strong enough to permit them to function as a cultural force in the Islamic community. Our main concern is to investigate astrology as one aspect of the pagan legacy that survived despite the attacks it suffered with the coming of Islam, whose ideology condemned it as a branch of divination. Two questions that will be considered are: how did astrologers manage to preserve the popular status of their discipline throughout the mediaeval Islamic period, and to what extent did this knowledge influence the intellectual life of that society?

Our investigation will be confined to the classical Arabic poetry of the *Jāhili*, early Islamic, Umayyad and Abbasid eras. Various astrological references will be analyzed according to the astrological principles and theories which the poets of that time were able to make use of. The analysis will therefore refer to the astrological knowledge and theories of each historical stage in succession in an attempt to place these works within the context of their time, and will above all be concerned with the poetic function of these astrological allusions.

Our approach will be to select certain factors that drew poets to conceive the art, or science, of astrology¹ as an intellectually stimulating discipline whose concepts could be used as metaphors, themes, or motifs in their works. We will therefore discuss the role of the doctrine concerning predestination and free will. This doctrine and its ramifications provided sometimes an ideological brake on, sometimes an impetus to, the poets' use of astrological references. Thus, we shall examine the nature and extent of their response to astrology, whose perceived claims contrasted dramatically with the Islamic notion of fate.

¹ See the definitions of 'the art of astrology' and 'the science of astrology' as used in this study in Ch. I, pp. 4- 5.

It appears that the manifestations of astrology in classical poetry reveal that it had a strong ideological underpinning whose changes are traceable from pre-Islamic times through the early Islamic era to the Umayyad and Abbasid periods. Although the main focus of this research is on the Abbasid period, the *Jāhili*, early Islamic and Umayyad periods provide the foundation of this study, whose concern is to enable the reader to gain an understanding of the functions of astrological references in classical Arabic poetry a knowledge of their formation and development. Thus, it is crucial to investigate the important historical factors and cultural changes that strongly influenced the development of the *tanjīmiyyāt* genre.

Among the many factors that had a pervasive influence on Arab thought and life was the belief in fate. The following discussion will examine the characteristic features of that belief and, most importantly, the doctrine of predestination and free will in its pre-Islamic and Islamic forms. It will explore the ways in which, and the extent to which the astrology practised in different historical periods was reconciled with this doctrine, producing poetic formulas that reveal a variety of intellectual themes.

III. 2: The Concepts of Destiny and Free Will and their Impact on Astrological References in Poetry

The major question dominating the discussion around the subject of astrology in the Arab world concerned the extent to which predetermined fate and man's free will could be integrated through the theory and practice of astrology. This controversy stimulated the imagination of many poets, in particular the idea that the motions of astral bodies were capable of determining man's fate, and therefore diminishing his freedom. Poets found in it a convenient justification of human failings; individuals could escape blame and responsibility for their faults by claiming that their destiny was already determined and written on the page of the heavens before they commit them. A great many writers of classical prose as well as poetry employed the notion of *qadar*, the prime and divine cause of individual actions, and indeed of all events whatsoever, as a vehicle to represent their attitude towards the subject of astrology and to exemplify the ideological framework that governed their astrological allusions and references.

It is not our concern, however, to investigate in detail the debates around this issue, which would be hardly possible in this short discussion. Instead, we will consider some of the prominent principles and features of the arguments, which were based on different understandings of the matter of fate. This will be done mainly to explain how the ideas of free will and predestination affected and indeed dominated the poetic vision of astrology, its principles, and its predictive function.

The motif of the notion of *qadar*, which could be translated as ‘prime mover’, was treated differently according to the different beliefs and views of the world the Arabs adopted during the *Jāhili* era and in the three periods of Islamic history in question. This chapter will consider the conflict between man’s freedom and predestination from the perspective of *qadar* as understood in the classical period of Arab history. At this point, however, it will be useful to define certain key terms that will be encountered frequently throughout the chapter.

III. 2. 1: Defining the Basic Terms

In this chapter, the terms predetermination (or predestination) and free will are used with reference to the various ideologies held by the Arabs of the pre-Islamic and Islamic eras until the end of the Abbasid period (656/ 1250). The interpretation of these concepts was dramatically different in each historical period.

Prime mover, prime agent, fate, predestination, fatalism, determinism are all ideological terms used here that refer, with several shades of meaning, to the notion of human destiny. These terms ‘contrast with the notion of free will, which implies that human beings are endowed with the capacity for choice of action or for decision among alternatives’.²

In the *Jāhili* period, the notion of fate was considered to be synonymous with that of Time, *dahr*,³ and was used interchangeably with it. Cohen-Mor asserts that ‘the pre-Islamic Arabs regarded time as the source of whatever happened to people in the course

² Dalya Cohen-Mor, *A Matter of Fate: The Concept of Fate in the Arab World as Reflected in Modern Arabic Literature* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001), p. xix.

³ *Dahr*, in this sense does not imply the fleeting time. Pre-Islamic Arabs identified *dahr* as eternal, infinite and immortal. Today, yesterday and tomorrow feature as one of its factors to bring vicissitudes to every existing object and make them subject to annihilation while Time remains forever.

of their lives'.⁴ Regarding the same point, W. Montgomery Watt notes that they identified *dahr* with fate but did not worship it.⁵ In this sense, *dahr* was regarded as the prime mover in *Jāhili* thought;⁶ its effect was inescapable but at the same time it lacked the divine qualities that would have qualified it to be a deity. In the light of this view, 'The principle of the prime mover was compatible with the Islamic doctrine of predestination and the idea of God's will as propelling everything that transpires in the universe'.⁷ The main difference, however, between the *Jāhili* concept of the prime mover and the Islamic one is the agent or cause to whom the ordering of man's destiny is to be attributed. Viewed from the Islamic position, this term 'came to designate the eternal originator of all motion and existence in the universe',⁸ which applied to God alone in the Muslim faith. So the prime mover, first cause, causeless cause, or prime agent are all terms referring to virtually identical notions in Islamic thought: God, whose supreme power creates, orders and directs the whole universe.

'Predestination' is the term that will be utilized in this study to refer to fate in the Islamic context, denoting the belief that God determines the course of every individual's life and controls every process and event taking place in the world. There is, moreover, a distinction to be drawn between two notions of Islamic predestination: the potential one that is already written in the 'Preserved Tablet', *al-lawḥ al-mahfūz*, and that which

⁴ Cohen-Mor, *A Matter of Fate*, p. 47.

⁵ W. Montgomery Watt, 'dahr', in *E. I.*, Vol., ii, pp. 94- 95. And W. Montgomery Watt, *The Formative Period of Islamic Thought* (Edinburgh: The University Press of Edinburgh, 1973), pp 88- 89.

⁶ Obviously 'prime mover' in this context is to be understood metaphorically and not literally; we know that this notion was first employed as an ideological concept in the Arab world during the flowering of Islamic theology and philosophy: 'The territorial conquests of the first centuries of the Muslim era brought the Arabs into contact with diverse philosophical traditions, notably those of Greece. Through intellectual contact inquiry and translations, the ideas and writings of prominent Greek philosophers such as Pythagoras, Plato, and Aristotle became known to Muslim thinkers and served to inform and influence their work. Among the pivotal notions adopted was the principle of the first prime mover. Introduced by Aristotle (384-322 B.C.) in his *Metaphysics*, it was subsequently developed by philosophers and theologians in all the three great monotheistic traditions – Judaism, Christianity, and Islam'. (Cohen-Mor, *A Matter of Fate*, p. 9). Cohen-Mor goes on to summarise the opinions of a number of great mediaeval Muslim thinkers who attempted to treat this Aristotelian notion from the Islamic perspective, such as al-Kindī, al-Fārābī, al-Ghazālī and others (see *ibid.*, pp. 9-11).

⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 11.

⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 9.

is taking place in reality; the former is *qadā'* and the latter is *qadar*.⁹ According to this Islamic understanding of divine predestination, the field of the individual's free will is located in between these two concepts, as will be shown later in this discussion.

Regarding the concepts of 'fatalism' and 'determinism' we will borrow the definitions given by Cohen-Mor, who has conducted a searching examination of the meaning of these terms in her valuable study *A Matter of Fate*, to investigate how the Arabs' conception of human destiny was reflected in their literature. In her words, fatalism 'is the belief that all things are subject to fate or inevitable predestination; it implies submission to an omnipotent and arbitrary sovereign power'.¹⁰ As for determinism, it 'is the doctrine that every event, action, or decision is the inevitable result of earlier causes, such as physical, psychological, or environmental conditions, which are independent of the human will'.¹¹

Cohen-Mor notes that throughout the history of Arab society 'the belief in fate dominates social behavior and thought patterns [...] Its organic incorporation into the fabric of society gives rise to certain roles, attitudes, and motives that influence the individual in everyday life'.¹² In line with this conception, the task of the following discussion is to investigate the effect of this ideology in shaping the literary manifestations of astrological ideas. Underlying those ideas was the assumption that the future can be predicted, and astrology claimed the possibility of altering, or at least avoiding, an individual's evil destiny. This issue is figured in varying degrees in classical poetry, either as a central theme of the poem or as a prime motif that supports certain ideas and attitudes.

To start from the earliest point in history where materials on the subject are available, in exploring the influence of *qadar*, or rather the supreme agent behind individual destiny,

⁹ According to *The Encyclopedia of Islam, al-qaḍā' wa 'l-qadar*, 'when combined into one expression, these two words have the overall meaning of the Decree of God, both the eternal Decree (the most frequent meaning of *qaḍā'*) and the Decree given existence in time (the most frequent sense of *qadar*)'. (L. Gardet, 'al-qaḍā' wa 'l-Qadar', in *E. I.*, Vol. iv, p.365).

¹⁰ Cohen-Mor, *A Matter of Fate*, p. xix.

¹¹ *Ibid.*, p. xix.

¹² *Ibid.*, p. xviii.

and its impact on the development of the genre of *tanjīmiyyāt*, it is logical to investigate this matter in the *Jāhili* period first.

III. 2. 2: The *Jāhili* Period

A great number of writers of prose and poetry drew on the notion of *qadar* to interpret different themes and aspects of life. As a view of life, a religious concept, and a constituent of a philosophical theory, this notion was regarded as crucial in the Arab world and a significant proportion of the extant written materials of the classical period was devoted to its discussion.¹³

In tracing back the origin of the doctrine of *qadar* into early Arab history, we find that it might be rooted in the idea of *dahr*, or time, 'especially infinitely extended time'.¹⁴

The Qur'ān refers to this *Jāhili* ideology in the following verse: 'And they say, "there is not but our present life. We die, and we live, and nothing but time that causes us to perish". Indeed, they have no knowledge of that; they but surmise'.¹⁵ According to this *Jāhili* world view, it is *dahr* that brings success or misfortune to man, and above all it is the prime cause of all human life's disasters and tragedies. Philip Kennedy comments: '*al-Dahr* is a prime mover in the *Jāhili* vision of existence and has a dominant role in a limited but powerful philosophy'.¹⁶

The way in which the people of the *Jāhilliyya* reacted to this irresistible force has led a great number of scholars to view the doctrine of *dahr* as closely connected to the concept of fate and the doctrine of fatalism, whose adherents submitted to what befell them with complete acceptance and offered no resistance to its cause which, from their point of view, was *dahr*. M. Montgomery Watt, who holds that submission to *dahr* applied to only certain aspects of life, such as a person's term (*ajal*), sustenance (*rizq*)

¹³ Outstanding examples of studies of this kind are: al-Qāḍī Abū al-Ḥasan 'Abd al-Jabbar ibn Ahmad, *Al-Muḥīṭ bi ṭ-Taklīf*, ed. 'Umar al-Sayyid 'Azmi, (Cairo: ad-Dār al-Miṣriyya li 't-Ta'līf wa 't-Tarjama, 1965); and Ibn Ḥazm, *Al-Fiṣāl*, particularly Vol. 2).

¹⁴ W. Montgomery Watt, 'dahr', in *E. I.*, Vol. ii, p. 94.

¹⁵ Al-Qur'ān, *al-Jāthiya* (The Crouching Down), 25, 45, 24.
{وَقَالُوا مَا هِيَ إِلَّا حَيَاتُنَا الدُّنْيَا نَمُوتُ وَنَحْيَا وَمَا يُهْلِكُنَا إِلَّا الدَّهْرُ وَمَا لَهُم بِذَلِكَ مِنْ عِلْمٍ إِنْ هُمْ إِلَّا يَظُنُّونَ}.

¹⁶ Philip F. Kennedy, *The Wine Song in Classical Arabic Poetry: Abū Nuwās and the Literary Tradition* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1997), p. 86.

and fortune or misfortune; destiny,¹⁷ attributes the pre-Islamic Arab's attitude to an environmental factor.¹⁸ Watt argues:

To take precautions against all the possible chances of disaster is impossible, and to attempt to do so would make a man a nervous wreck, incapable of sustaining life in the desert. To cultivate the attitude of accepting with equanimity what 'the days' bring was probably the best hope of making a success of one's life in the harsh conditions of the desert.¹⁹

Cohen-Mor agrees with Watt's opinion, pointing out that 'in the Arabian deserts the regularities of nature encountered in other lands are replaced by haphazard occurrences [...] a willingness to accept whatever happened fatalistically reduced anxiety and thus served as an adaptive mechanism and an aid to survival'.²⁰

The question that arises at this juncture is: how did this traditional belief affect the perception of the space of freedom offered by the various means of divination practised in the *Jāhili* period? In other words, what was the effect of these fatalistic attitudes on the art of astrology, which claimed to be able to provide information that could be used to change one's destiny? The answer may be found in the works of the *Jāhili* poets.

Numerous pre-Islamic poems of a fatalistic character bear witness to the dominance of this belief. Watt notes the identification of fate with time: 'The pre-Islamic Arabs, as is shown by many passages in their poetry, regarded time ... as the source of what happened to a man, particularly both good and bad; they thus give it something of the connotation of fate, though without worshipping it',²¹ as mentioned earlier. While the Arabs of the *Jāhiliyya* were united in fatalism, it was the prime mover that was a matter of debate between the different religious groups existing at that time.²² Muhammad

¹⁷ Regarding this point, see W. Montgomery Watt, *Islamic Philosophy and Theology: An Extended Survey* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1997), pp. 25- 26.

¹⁸ For a general discussion of the effects of geographical and environmental factors on *Jāhili* literature see Husayn al-Hājj Ḥasan, *Adab al-'Arab fī 'Aṣr al-Jāhiliyya* (Beirut: al-Mu'assasa al-Jāmi'iyya li 'd-Dirāsāt wa 'n-Naṣr wa 't-Tawzī', 1984), pp. 16-21.

¹⁹ Watt, *Islamic Philosophy and Theology*, p. 26.

²⁰ Cohen-Mor, *A Matter of Fate*, p. 49.

²¹ Watt, 'dahr', in *E.I.*, Vol. ii, pp. 94- 95.

‘Uthmān ‘Ali notes that points out, ‘a number of different religions existed in the *Jāhili* period that influenced the entire life of that society’.²³ Thus, we may claim that the belief in the power of fate was not contradicted, and may have been strengthened, by the different religious ideologies existing at that period.

Among the many religions, it seems that the doctrine of *dahriyya* (materialism) and monotheistic religion both had a great effect on the spiritual and intellectual life of the *Jāhili* people, and particularly on their literature.²⁴ Therefore, in investigating manifestations of fatalism in literature, the selection of verses will be confined to those created from a consciously held materialistic or monotheistic perspective, as those doctrines were the most influential on the *Jāhili*’s life and thought, influencing the notion of fate that orientated the *Jāhili*’s attitude towards the subject of divination in general and astrology in particular.

Preoccupied with Time, in the manner common to many of the *dahriyyūns* (materialists), a very famous poet, ‘Uday ibn Zayd (d. 35/ 590),²⁵ portrays *dahr* as an inevitable power that controls the vicissitudes of human life. In an admonitory poem addressed to the king al-Nu‘mān ibn al-Munzir (d. approx. 28/ 595),²⁶ the poet attributes the following two lines to a tree, presumably to save himself from the king’s anger:

²² For a detailed study on the subject of the religions practiced by the ancient Arabs see ‘Ali, *Al-Mufasssal*, Vol. 6; ‘Ali al-Jundī, *Fī Tārīkh al-Adab al-Jāhili* (Cairo: Dār al-Ma‘ārif, 1985), pp. 75- 79; and Al-Abb Jirjis Dāwūd Dāwūd, *Adyān al-‘Arab qabl al-Islam wa Wajhuhā al-Ḥaḍārī wa ‘l-Ijtīmā‘ī* (Beirut: al-Mu‘assasa al-Jāmi‘iyya li ‘d-dirāsāt wa ‘n-Nashr wa ‘t-Tawzī‘, 1981).

²³ Muhammad ‘Uthman ‘Ali, *Fī Adab mā qabl al-Islām: Dirāsa Wasfīyya Taḥlīliyya* (Ṭarāblus al-Gharb: Dār al-Awzā‘ī li ‘t-Tibā‘a wa ‘n-Nashr wa ‘t-Tawzī‘, 1983), p. 56.

²⁴ See ‘Umar Farrukh, *Tārīkh al-Adab al-‘Arabī: al-Adab al-Qadīm min Maṭla‘ al-Jāhiliyya ilā Suqūṭ ad-Dawla al-Umawiyya* (Beirut: Dār al-‘Ilm li ‘l-Malā‘īn, 6. Vols., 1992), Vol.1, p. 62.

²⁵ A *Jāhili* poet, he is claimed to have been Christian and lived at Ḥīrā. (For his biography see Abū al-Faraj al-Aṣfahānī, *Al-Aghānī*, ed by, ‘Abd A. ‘Ali Mihannā, (Beirut: Dār al-Kutub al-‘Ilmiyya, revised edition - 27 Vols., 1992), Vol. 2, pp. 89- 148.

²⁶ An-Nu‘mān ibn al-Munzir was the king of Shām (roughly speaking, an area comprising modern Palestine and Syria) in the pre-Islamic period. He fought against the Byzantines for several years. In the reign of the Byzantine Caesar Tiberius, an-Nu‘mān was caught and held hostage in Constantinople in 584 C.B. by General Manus. For his biography see az-Ziriklī, *Al-A‘lām*, Vol.9, pp. 9-10.

رُبُّ رَكْبٍ قَدْ أَنَاخُوا عِنْدَنَا ... يَشْرَبُونَ الْخَمْرَ بِالْمَاءِ الزَّلَالِ.
عَصَفَ الدَّهْرُ بِهِمْ فَانْقَرَضُوا ... وَكَذَلِكَ الدَّهْرُ حَالًا بَعْدَ حَالٍ.²⁷

As the dwellers, who passed by us, indulged themselves with wine and
pure cold water,
Suddenly Time annihilated them and they ceased to exist.
Indeed, this is Time's peculiar deed and habit with each succeeding
generation.²⁸

The poet is implying that an individual's fate is subject to Time and although he is thought to have been a Christian,²⁹ materialism seems to be more evident than Christianity in these lines, which express a typical *dahriyya* viewpoint: the poet seems to be convinced that Time is the prime agent of eternal destruction, thus representing a view common to much *Jāhili* poetry. In doing so, he deliberately chooses as Time's victims those who indulge themselves in the joys and pleasures of this world, heedless of their unforeseen yet inevitable destruction, and thus warns his listeners that fate in the form of death cannot be avoided by any person, no matter how powerful.

The verses that follow, also composed by the same poet, encapsulate this meaning by referring to those who were enjoying the extremes of idle luxury but found themselves annihilated by the inescapable power of Time and compelled to face the inevitable truth of life, that it must end in death:

أَيُّهَا الشَّامِتُ المَعَيَّرُ بِالذُّ ... هِرَا أَنْتِ المَبْتَرَا مِنَ المَوْفُورِ.
أَمْ لَدَيْكَ العَهْدُ الوَثِيقُ مِنَ الأَيِّ ... أَمْ بَلْ أَنْتِ جَاهِلٌ مَغْرُورِ.
مَنْ رَأَيْتِ المُنُونِ خُلْدِنَ أَمْ مَنْ ... ذَا عَلَيْهِ مِنْ أَنْ يُضَامَ خَفِيرِ.
أَيْنَ كَسْرِي؟ كَسْرِي المُلُوكِ أَنوُثِيرِ ... وَأَنْ أَيْنَ قَبْلَهُ سَابُورِ.³⁰

²⁷ Al-Aṣḥānī, *Al-Aghānī*, Vol. 2, p. 88.

²⁸ Because it is difficult to translate classical Arabic poetry literally, these poems have been fairly freely rendered into English.

²⁹ Regarding his religion, F. Gabrieli asserts: 'Among [his] verses those describing Biblical episodes (the creation and man's first sin) are of interest for the history of religion and culture: they, together with other evidence confirm that the poet was Christian (*ʿibādī*)'. But the main themes of his poetry seem to have been, on the one hand, praise of wine, and on the other, meditation on the decay of human passions and effort, rendered vain by the inexorable passage of time ... [this latter theme] was probably inspired by the poet's own misfortunes [...]'. (See F. Gabrieli, 'ʿĀdī B. Zayd', in *E. I.*, Vol. i, p. 196). For a discussion of the Christian Arabs of pre-Islamic times who were called *ʿibādiyyūn* see J. M. Fiey, 'Naṣārā', in *E. I.*, Vol. vii, pp. 970- 73).

³⁰ Al-Aṣḥānī, *Al-Aghānī*, Vol. 2, p. 131.

Oh you who rebuke those victims of Time, are you the only one who has been granted exemption from its disasters?

Or have you been endowed with an authenticated promise from 'the days' that they will do you no harm? Truly, you are both ignorant and arrogant.

Have you ever seen death grant immortality to any living thing, or have you ever known a single man to survive this irresistible 'injustice' of fate, Tell me, where is Kisrā? The emperor of all kings, Anusharwān, where is he, and where is his ancestor, Shābūr?³¹

By drawing on such mythical figures the poet emphasizes Time's irresistible nature; *dahr*'s ultimate desire is to bring about death, whom even the most illustrious cannot escape. This pessimistic attitude towards life, resignation and submission to *dahr*, inspired *Jāhili* poets to make use of what can be regarded as 'the components of Time' to emphasise the notion of its annihilating power. In this regard, the cosmic realm was a major source of inspiration and various cosmological elements were employed as metaphors. 'Uday ibn Zayd composed the following lines on this theme:

ألا من مبلغ النعمان عني ... علانية فقد ذهب السرار.
بأن المرء لم يخلق حديداً ... ولا هضبا توقاه الويار.
ولكن كالشهاب فتم يخبو ... وحادي الموت عنه ما يحار.
فهل من خالد إما هلكننا ... وهل بالموت يا للناس عار.³²

I wonder who will declare on my behalf this message to an-Nu'mān? Its delivery should be open, as the time of secrets is over,

³¹ The last of these was a king said to have ruled ancient Persia. Shābūr, or Sābūr, is the name of several members of the Sassānī dynasty. The three Persian kings of this name have association with Muslim tradition. The last Sābūr was the son of King Ardashīr ibn Bābik. It is related that King Ardashīr invaded a kingdom, killed its king, and took his daughter as a slave; she became the mother of Sābūr. This legend is often encountered in historical books. (See 'Izz ad-Dīn 'Alī ibn al-Athīr, *Al-Kāmil fī 'l-Tārīkh* (Beirut: Dār Ṣādir & Dār Beirut li 'l-Ṭibā'a wa 'n-Nashr, 13 Vols., 1965), Vol. 1, p. 385- 87). As for Kisrā Anūsharwān, he was a successor of Sābūr. Many great events happened during his reign; he invaded the Byzantine Empire; he killed Mazdak, the founder of a new religion; the Prophet Muhammad was born five or six years before the end of his reign, in the Year of the Elephant, a very famous event in the history of the ancient Arabs. In that year the King of Ḥabasha (modern Ethiopia) decided to invade the *Ka'ba*, a holy place in Mecca, leading a huge army that encountered no resistance from the Arabs of Mecca and yet was defeated because the elephants of his army refused to go forward when they approached that region. A full Sura of the Qur'ān is devoted to this story. See al-Qur'ān, Al-Fīl (The Elephant), 30,150. (For more details about the King Anūsharwān and the events that happened in his reign, including the story of the Elephant, see Ibn al-Athīr, *Al-Kāmil*, Vol. 1, p. 434- 47). Those interested in knowing more about the religion of Mazdak and other pagan religions see Abū al-Faṭḥ Muhammad ibn 'Abd al-Karīm ash-Shahristānī, *Al-Milal wa 'l-Niḥal*, ed. by Ahmad Fahmī, (Beirut: Dār as-Surūr, 3 Vols., 1948), particularly Vol. 2; and Fawzī Muhammad Ḥumayyid, *Ālam al-Adyān bayn al-Uṣfūra wa 'l-Ḥaqīqa* (Damascus: Dār Ḥiṭṭīn li 'd-Dirāsāt wa 'l-Tarjama wa 'n-Nashr, 1993).

³² *Ibid.*, 143.

As man has not been made from metal, nor is he a rocky hill that an army
of maggots could not devour;
But he is like a meteor ³³ that blazes and vanishes in a moment because
death's guide never misses it as one of its victims,
So, are there any immortal beings to give us hope of survival? And is
there any shame in being mortal?

Although Ibn Zayd is advising the most important personage of his society, King an-Nu'mān, the poem's message should not be understood as only addressing the King personally; it also includes all those subordinate to him in social rank, as the greater the addressee, the more important the message. In the *Jāhili* era, this method was employed almost exclusively when the poet's intention was to draw attention to the fleeting nature of life, often using the poet's *ḥikma*, or wisdom, one of the traditional practices of Arabic literature.³⁴ Here, adopting the role of preacher, Ibn Zayd reminds his listeners of the brevity of human existence, using the image of the shooting star as a telling simile. Time, *dahr*, is personified as *ḥādi al-mawt*, death's guide, who never misses his mark. This image of fate was common among the people of the *Jāhiliyya*. This philosophical conception, of *dahr* as a deadly marksman, appears to have had a decisive influence on the *Jāhili*'s literature, inspiring poets with a range of metaphors.

The *Jāhili* poet Sulaymā bint al-Muhalhal³⁵ in mourning her father composed a line of particular eloquence in which she discriminates between the functions of two attributes of *dahr*: its daughters and its arrows:

رمته بنات الدهر حتى انتظمنه ... بسهم المنايا إنها شر رائج.³⁶

He was a target of the daughters of Time until he was pierced by the
arrows of death, which is surely the worst of all disasters.

³³ Al-Aṣḥānī explains this as a torch, but it is clear that the poet means a meteor, which burns brightly for a moment in the sky, then disappears. (See al-Aṣḥānī, *Al-Aghānī*, vol. 2, p. 144).

³⁴ Philip Kennedy explains the function and significance of *ḥikma* in poetry: '*Ḥikma*—an important category of poetry—is the poet's wisdom and most commonly, though not exclusively, takes the form of an aphoristic statement about the fleeting nature of life and the unpredictable vagaries of Fate'. See Kennedy, *The Wine Song*, p. 86.

³⁵ Sulaymā bint al-Muhalhal, a *Jāhili* female poet is best known for her poems of mourning for her father and son. (See 'Umar Riḍā Kaḥḥāla, *A ḷām an-Nisā' fi 'Ālamay al-'Arab wa 'l-Islām* (Beirut: Mu'assasat ar-Risāla, 5 Vols., 1982), Vol. 2, p. 258.

³⁶ 'Abd al-Badī' Ṣāqir, *Shā'irāt al-'Arab* (ad-Dawḥa: Manshūrat al-Maktab al-Islāmī, 1967), p. 170.

Time's daughters are 'the days', responsible for the misfortunes of humanity, and among their many arrows, all of which bring evils, the arrow of death is the worst; all defences are useless against it.

In complaining about life's misfortunes, another *Jāhili* poet, 'Amr ibn Qamī'a,³⁷ ignores the arrow of death and is concerned rather with Time's other arrows, which strike without warning during one's lifetime. In the following lines Ibn Qamī'a gives the role of archer to Time's daughters, as Ibn Zayd does above, and discriminates between their metaphorical arrows and the real arrows of a human adversary:

رمتني بنات الدهر من حيث لا أرى ... فكيف بمن يُرمى وليس برامي.
 فلو أنني أرمى ببطل رأيتها ... و لكنني أرمى بغير سهام.³⁸

The daughters of Time kept shooting me from a hidden, unseen place, so think what would be the fate of an individual who had been a subject of constant hits while deprived of all means of power.³⁹

...
 If they were visible arrows I would be able, at least, to see them but I am a victim of invisible weapons.

The poet imagines the misfortunes which a man encounters in his life and which shape his destiny as arrows that target their victims. Here Ibn Qamī'a seems to be protecting himself from an accusation of cowardice by emphasising the invisibility of the arrows, which makes resistance impossible. So, it is not he who should be accused of cowardice, but rather it is Time, who always targets his unwilling victims from a hidden place and offers them no chance to resist and overcome their fate.

The poets of the *Jāhiliyya* made use of various qualities and characteristics of *dahr*, enlisting metaphors to portray the various and cunning nature of Time and its connotation with the notion of fate: Time 'has "sharp teeth" that sink deep and "hands"

³⁷ Abū Ka'b 'Amr ibn Qamī'a was a companion of Imri' al-Qays, a very famous *Jāhili* poet. It is related that he died in the desert and so came to be called 'Amr ad-Dā'i', or the lost 'Amr. (See Bābfi (ed.), *Muḥjam*, pp. 262-63.

³⁸ Abū Muhammad 'Abdullah ibn Muslim Ibn Qutayba, *Ash-Shi'r wa 'sh-Shu'arā'*, eds. by Ḥasan Tamīm and Muhammad 'Abd al-Mun'im al-'Aryān (Beirut: Dār 'Iḥyā' al-'Ulūm, 1987), pp. 243-44.

³⁹ These means include the power to see one's assailants.

that reach everywhere; it is a “traitorous desert demon” (*ghūl*) devouring human beings: it is “slyer than a fox”; it unites friends, only to separate them again’.⁴⁰ It is beyond the scope of this study to engage here in a full discussion of the images of *dahr* as prime mover to be found in *Jāhili* poetry; however, these few examples may serve to indicate that the pre-Islamic Arabs, whatever their religious background were deeply concerned with the question of fate. Yet, though the matter of fate was of considerable importance, the corpus of their literature provides no evidence that the function of the stars, as indicators of people’s destiny, attained the same importance and enjoyed the same privilege. Thus before proceeding to examine examples of astrological references found in *Jāhili* literature that are evidences of this claim, it must be acknowledged that astrological allusions in the poetry of the pre-Islamic period are very rare.

This rarity of astrological references raises interesting questions and prompts us to investigate the reasons for this lack. Very few poets of the pre-Islamic period alluded to ‘the art of the stars’, despite the *Jāhili*’s unsophisticated but intense interest in the problems of predetermination and free will. As mentioned earlier, the pre-Islamic Arabs believed that their destiny was controlled by *dahr*. Questions concerning astrology, then, must be set within the context of their philosophy to identify the ideological reasons that led the *Jāhili* poets to make so little use of astrological ideas, particularly the part of astrology consisting in the observation of the influence of the stars on human destiny.

One prominent feature of the *dahriyya* doctrine is the materialistic attitude the *dahriyyūn* held towards life. We may reach the assumption that this view, which ‘limits knowledge to the perceptible’,⁴¹ seems to have influenced their attitude towards the cosmic realm, as all evidences suggest that although they made reference to a number of celestial bodies, the majority of these references lack any astrological specification, whose reason for existence is to investigate the status of the hidden future. Thus, it seems reasonable to conclude that to some wise men and many poets of that time who adhered to the principles of this doctrine the limitation of knowledge to what is

⁴⁰ Helmer Ringgren, *Studies in Arabian Fatalism* (Uppsala: Lundequistska Bookhandeln, 1955), p. 32.

⁴¹ I. Goldziher-[A. M. Goichon], ‘Dahriyya’, in *E. I.*, Vol. ii, p. 95.

perceptible by the senses would stand in obvious contradiction with a belief in astral objects as real predictors or indicators of coming events.

In particular, the poets' poor understanding of the astral world as a source of divination can be attributed to another factor. Knowledge of such a kind was exclusive to a small elite who were professionals in the art.⁴² So, although the various forms of divination, including the art of astrology, were highly respected and were regarded as among the authenticated authorities of *Jāhili* society, upon which the merits of that society were evaluated,⁴³ astrology failed to inspire the imagination of the *Jāhili* poets and secure among them the importance it enjoyed in society generally. Thus although the *Jāhili* poets referred to a great many celestial objects, the majority can be characterised as astronomical or meteorological references. The majority of their astrological allusions do not suggest that the *Jāhili* poets had access to the well-guarded knowledge of the elite group of practitioners. This is hardly surprising, given the vagueness of this superstitious art and its divinatory practices.

Although the celestial bodies served as tools of prediction, the professional astrologers' knowledge was not based on scientific method or systematic theory and thus to predict a person's future vicissitudes by reading the skies was 'the astrologer's very arduous task'.⁴⁴ The obscure methods of astrology, which were exclusive to a small elite,⁴⁵ prevented the mass of the uninitiated from understanding more than the simple outlines

⁴² The majority of historical books give references to the same individuals: those are Sa'īh, Shiqq, Jamrat al-Kihāna, Samlaqa and Zawba'a, see al-Mas'ūdī, *Murūj*, Vol. 2, p. 138; and Mahmūd Salīm al-Ḥūt, *Fi Ṭarīq al-Mythilūjiyya 'ind al-'Arab: Baḥth Mushab fi l-Mu'āqadāt wa l-Asāfir al-'Arabiyya qabl al-Islām* (Beirut: Dār an-Nahār li 'n-Nashr, 1983), pp. 232-36.

⁴³ See the story of Hind bint 'Utba and the Yemeni soothsayer: he declared her innocent of a charge of adultery brought by her husband, al-Fākih ibn al-Mughīra and foretold to her that she would give birth to a boy who would become a king and rule the entire Arab world. The prophecy came true, since the child was Mu'āwiya ibn Sufyān, the founder of the Umayyad Empire. This incident demonstrates clearly how the soothsayers of that time were greatly feared and respected as they were considered to be possessors of esoteric knowledge that could contribute to the formation of one's fate. (See Shihāb ad-Dīn Muhammad al-Ibshīhī, *Al-Mustaṭraf fi kulli Fannin Mustazraf* (Beirut: Mu'assasat Dār an-Nadwa, 2 Vols., n.d.), Vol. 2, pp. 87-88,

⁴⁴ C. A. Nallino, 'Astrology', in *First E. I.*, Vol. I, p. 495.

⁴⁵ See al-Mas'ūdī, *Murūj*, Vol. 2, p. 128.

of that knowledge, and thus while they believed that the upper world was a source of divination they lacked deep knowledge regarding the principles of its astrological function, which was not always the case in the Abbasid period. Thus, although *Jāhili* astrology enjoyed high social status and legitimacy, it lacked a scientific basis, which was the essential precondition that produced a flood of astrological references in the works of poets of later periods.

Moreover, there were other factors that caused this dearth of astrological allusions in *Jāhili* poems and prevented heavenly bodies from being viewed as indicators (*dalāʾil*) of future events and thus a source of inspiration for the poet. The *dahriyyūn* held roughly to the idea that *dahr* 'basically denotes the space of time in which this world is living, overcoming the course of time'.⁴⁶ Emphasising the living moment as a perennial quality in the *dahriyyūn*'s apprehension of life, al-Jurjānī describes it as a 'permanent moment which is the extension of the divine majesty and is the innermost part (*bāṭin*) of time, in which eternity in the past and eternity in the future are united'.⁴⁷ According to this principle, the time space of the doctrine of *dahriyya*, which is the 'present', lay outside the scope of astrology, whose domain is the investigation of 'future' events. Ḥātim aṭ-Ṭāʿī (d. 46/ 78)⁴⁸ expresses this view in the following lines:

هل الدهرُ إلا اليومُ أو أمسُ أو غدٌ ... كذاك الزمانُ بيــــننا يتردد.
يردُّ علينا ليلــــة بعد يومــــها ... فلا نحن ما نبقى ولا الدهر ينفد.
لنا أجلٌ إــــمّا تنــــاهى أمامه ... فنحن على آثارها نتــــورّد.⁴⁹

Time is nothing but today, yesterday or tomorrow; this is how Time deals with us, just as night inevitably succeeds day.

Thus we cannot become immortals, nor can Time be annihilated. Therefore, surely every person's term will reach its end when its day arrives. In this, we are like camels that await their turn to drink at the waterhole.

⁴⁶ I. Goldziher-[A. M. Goichon], 'Dahriyya', in *E. I.*, Vol. ii, p. 95.

⁴⁷ Al-Jurjānī, '*At-Ta ḥifāt*', cited in *ibid.*

⁴⁸ Ḥātim 'Abdullah aṭ-Ṭāʿī was a pre-Islamic knight and poet, known mainly for his generosity; the majority of his poems are concerned with this virtue. See al-Aṣfahānī, *Al-Aghānī*, Vol. 17, pp363- 93.

⁴⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 386.

Although the poet recognises the past, present and future aspects of *dahr*, the main theme of the poem shows that the present was the main concern of the *Jāhilī*'s relationship with Time: it was the living moment that concerned them, and so each day was to be lived and experienced until the time of death approached. Thus the generations succeed one another and all face the same ultimate fate, death, while *dahr* is depicted as the prime agent that annihilates its mortal victims while remaining an aspect of eternal nature. In the *Jāhilī* ideology, Moreh asserts, *dahr* is used to refer to the tense relationship between one's fixed term (*ajal*) and the endless Time of the universe. This was reflected in the poetic production of the *Jāhilī* period:

From the spontaneous glimpse of nomadic life and of the mundane, there is progress towards more profound reflection and interpretation of life. The best and most successful example of this seems to be the exceedingly elaborate treatment of human time. Beyond the existential anguish deriving from the confrontation between human duration and adjective time, the majority of poets have considered time to be a cyclical process wherein tension arises from the opposition between the eternal renewal of temporal units and the limited nature of the units of existence allotted to man.⁵⁰

Speaking of the inevitability of death, this view ignores the possibility and rejects the usefulness of foretelling the future; as there seems to be little point in seeking to avoid the lesser misfortunes that might occur during one's lifetime.

A third reason for the lack of astrological ideas in *Jāhilī* poetry may be found in an aspect of the doctrine of *dahr* that dominated the thinking of the *dahriyyūn*: It follows from the principles accepted by the *dahriyyūn* that they rejected 'popular superstitions, the existence of angels and demons and the powers of sorcerers' as they are beyond the boundary of the material world.⁵¹ Obviously, it should not be assumed that this view was held by the whole society; it represents the position adopted by some individuals, including a number of poets. This rejection of *rajm al-ghayb* (exposing the unseen) is expressed by Sadūs ibn Shaybān:⁵²

⁵⁰ S. Moreh, 'Shi ʿ - in Arabic', in *E. I.*, Vol. ix, p. 451.

⁵¹ Al-Jāhiz, *Al-Ḥayawān*, Vol. 2, p. 305, and I. Goldziher-[A. M. Goichon], 'Dahriyya', in *E. I.*, Vol. ii, p. 95.

⁵² Sadūs ibn Shaybān was kin to Ḥujr ibn 'Amr ibn Thawr, nickname Ākil al-Murār (the Eater of Sour Plants), a *Jāhilī* poet. Ibn Sadūs composed these two lines when informing ibn 'Amr of his wife's (non-

أتاك المرجفون برجم غيب ... على دَهش و جنتك باليقين.
 فمن يك قد أتاك بأمر ليس ... فقد أتى بأمر مستبين.⁵³

Those who guess a hazard through divination will come up with uncertain knowledge, but it is I who brought you reliable news.

Another *Jāhili* poet, Qiss ibn Sā‘ida (d. approx. 23/ 60)⁵⁴ was one of the pre-Islamic monotheists,⁵⁵ his religious beliefs led him to view the art of astrology in the same way as Islam later instructed its followers to do. It is related that he was once asked: ‘Have you ever consulted the stars?’ Ibn Sā‘ida replied: ‘Only for navigation, and not as a means of divination’. He added: ‘I even composed some lines on the stars’, and recited

علم النجوم على العقول وبال ... و طلاب شيء لا ينال ضلالاً.
 ماذا طلا بك علم شيء أغلقت ... من دونه الأفلاك ليس ينال.
 هيهات ما أحد لغامض قدرة ... يدري كم الأرزاق والأجال.
 إلا الذي فوق السماء مكانه ... فلوجه الإكرام والإجلال.⁵⁶

The art of the stars is a disaster that destroys the human intellect. It is a myth that never comes true,
 What benefit can one gain from trying to achieve such esoteric knowledge, knowing beforehand it is a mere falsehood that has no solid foundation?

adulterous) love for a man from another tribe. Upon hearing the news, Ibn ‘Amr brutally killed his wife and her beloved. (See the full incident in al-Asfahānī, *Al-Aghānī*, Vol. 16, pp. 382- 87).

⁵³ *Ibid.*, Vol. 16, p. 384- 85.

⁵⁴ Qiss ibn Sā‘ida al-Iyādī, a man of wisdom and eloquence, was the first to perform a speech in the *Jāhili* period. He met the Prophet Muhammad before the declaration of Islam. See Bābtī (ed.), p. 293. Regarding his monotheism, ash-Shahristānī provides a number of verses of the poet that reveal him to be a representative of that ideology. See ash-Shahristānī, *Al-Milal wa ḥ-Niḥal*, Vol. 3, pp. 301-04.

⁵⁵ A great many references concerning the Pre-Islamic monotheists identify them as followers of the Prophet Abraham. See, for example, ‘Umar Farrūkh, *Al-Adab al-Qadīm*, Vol. 1, pp. 61- 65; ash-Shahristānī, *Al-Milal wa ḥ-Niḥal*, Vol. 3, pp. 295-39. However, in Dāwūd’s *Adyān al-‘Arab Qabla al-Islām*, the author discriminates between monotheists and the followers of the Prophet Abraham, whom he refers to as *Ḥanaḥīyya*. Both believed in one eternal and powerful God, but the latter also performed Ḥajj (pilgrimage), *ikhṭitān* (circumcision of male-infants), and washing after sexual intercourse. See pp. 191-97.

⁵⁶ Ibrāhīm ibn Muhammad al-Bayhaqī, *Al-Mahāsīn wa ḥ-Masāwī’*, with an introduction in German by Friedrich Schwally (Gessen: J. Ricker’sche Verlagsbuch handlung, 1902), pp. 253- 54. Saliba claims that ‘the earliest known attack on the astrologers came from the famous eighth-century Arabian prosodist al-Khalīl ibn Ahmad in few a lines of poetry’ (see George Saliba, ‘Astrology/Astronomy, Islamic’, *Dictionary of Middle Ages*, Vol., 1, p. 617. However, the lines of the pre-Islamic poet Qiss ibn Sā‘ida disprove Saliba’s assertion as they provide evidence that the condemnation of astrology can be found in earlier materials.

Poor indeed are those who imagine that it is possible to know one's
provision and life's term through divination;
It is ultimately a divine area that no one can reach except God.

It was not only those who were subscribers to the pagan doctrine of *dahriyya* who rejected the possibility of predicting the future through some form of *kihāna* (divination). A number of pre-Islamic poets were *muwahidūn* (monotheists) and, although their belief strongly opposed and refuted the pagan view of life embraced by the *dahriyyūn*, they agreed with them in rejecting the arts of divination, including that of astrology. This suggests that religious opinions of very different kinds were openly hostile to astrology and discouraged poets from regarding it as a rational discipline worthy of serious consideration.

Another factor might be cited as partially responsible for the small number of astrological references in *Jāhili* poetry. There is no doubt that 'after the introduction of Islam in the 7th century CE, a substantial amount of poetry, proverbs, legends, and folk sciences was written down in Arabic texts'.⁵⁷ However, because of the pervasive influence of religious ideology, it seems that gathering appropriate materials that seemed consistent with that ideology was the prime motivation. Therefore, Ahmad al-Ḥūfī points out, 'it is rare to find any poems of a pagan nature ... among the bulk of *Jāhili* literature'.⁵⁸ Moreover, although attention 'was focused on the star lore of the pre-Islamic and early Islamic Bedouins and farmers of the Arabian Peninsula',⁵⁹ it was the astronomical rather than the astrological function of the stars that attracted the attention of later collectors, and indeed we find a great many more verses that refer to astronomy in comparison to astrology.⁶⁰

⁵⁷ Gary D. Thompson, 'History of Constellation and Star Names', in <<http://members.optusnet.com.au/gtosiris/page11-11b.html>> [Accessed 11 October 2006] p. 2.

⁵⁸ Ahmad al-Ḥūfī, *Al-Ḥayāt al-ʿArabiyya min ash-Shiʿr al-Jāhili*, cited in 'Uthmān 'Alī, *Fī Adab mā qabl ʿl-Islam*, p. 51.

⁵⁹ Thompson, 'History of Constellation and Star Names', p. 2.

⁶⁰ Al-Kindī states that the ancient Arabs composed a great many poetic lines regarding the effects of the celestial realm on the sublunary world, particularly weather, to make the astral influences easy to understand in that primitive society (see 'Abd ar-Rahmān Jalāl ad-Dīn as-Siyūfī, *Al-Muzhir fī ʿUlūm al-Lughā wa Anwāʾihā*, ed. by Muhammad al-Mawlā, 'Alī al-Bijāwī and Muhammad Ibrāhīm, (Cairo: 'Isā al-Bābī al-Ḥalabī, 2 Vols., n.d.), Vol. 2, pp. 528-32; and al-Bīrūnī, *Al-Āthār al-Bāqiya*, p. 337). Thus the majority of those astral references available to us are astronomical or meteorological in nature, concerned with the position of the heavenly bodies or their effects on the weather. However, astrological omens

Nonetheless, one should bear in mind that in the *Jāhilī* period astrology was considered to be part of *kihāna*; this term ‘covers all the concepts and all the practices which are connected, closely or distantly, to the general concept of divination or the art of knowing that which cannot be spontaneously known’.⁶¹ For this reason, it is unusual to find specifically astrological references, particularly when researching the methods of divination practised in the *Jāhilī* period, and, as we have noted, such references are particularly rare in poetical compositions. Therefore, it is necessary to expand the focus of the research to include passages that can be categorised under ‘comprehending the invisible’⁶² in general.⁶³

Having considered a number of factors that can be seen as obstacles to the *Jāhilī* poets’ appreciation of the astrological function of the astral world, it is necessary to discuss briefly the arguments and evidence that contradict the picture given thus far, in order to adequately understand the nature of the conflict between the function of divination and the idea of preordained destiny.

There is a commonly held opinion that the people of the *Jāhilī* period were determinists and fatalists who thought of themselves as unable to make their own choices and deprived of free will; as incapable of independent action, submitting to their destiny and accepting it without question under the influence of political, social, and geographical factors.⁶⁴ There are, however, objections to this view. There is evidence that the people of the *Jāhilī* period practised various forms of divination on a massive scale, a custom

regarding certain lunar mansions or constellations seem to have been derived from the meteorological effect associated with that lunar mansion or constellation. For example in the following rhyming verse an anonymous poet asserts:

خير ليال في الأبد ... بين الزباني و الأمد.

(See al-Bīrūnī, *Al-Āthār al-Bāqīya*, p. 324).

The best ever time in life is that occurring in the lunar mansion of al-Ghafr.

Here, although the poet refers to the beneficial natural effect of al-Ghafr, there is also a reference to its astrological effect: to bring good fortune to the whole Earth. This is a proof that the astrological omens deduced from certain mansion was linked to its natural and meteorological effect.

⁶¹ T. Fahd, ‘Kihāna’, in *E. I.*, Vol. v, p. 99.

⁶² *Ibid.*, p. 101.

⁶³ This point should be considered by future studies that wish to cover any aspect of the subject of astrology in the literature of the *Jāhilī* period.

⁶⁴ See ‘Ali, *Al-Mufaṣṣal*, Vol. 6, pp. 121-22.

which distinguishes that society from others in Arab history. In particular, a great deal of evidence testifying to the eagerness of pre-Islamic Arabs to predict their future and describing the various methods they employed are to be found in the authenticated documents of the Qur'ān and the Prophet's *Ḥadīth*.⁶⁵

This evidence of the *Jāhili* people's reliance on numerous forms of *kihāna* to unveil the future⁶⁶ might be considered a refutation of the idea that they subscribed to the materialist doctrine of fatalism, which deprives mankind of the power to overcome an evil destiny.⁶⁷ This doctrine is equated with the beliefs of the *dahriyyūn*, who attributed their inability to overcome their misfortunes to the irresistible power of *dahr*. The contradiction was in practice more apparent than real, however.

There is no doubt that there were a number of *Jāhili* people who never believed in the art of divination and the capability of human beings to change their fate or even know the coming future, as evidenced by the poetic passages interpreted above. Astrologers and their clients who believed that practising divination might help the client to escape his determined destiny, particularly with regard to his life's term, increasing his appointed amount of sustenance, or ameliorating his evil destiny, left themselves open to severe attack by the wise men of the age who believed that nothing whatsoever can defeat the prime mover: God, according to the monotheists, or Time, according to the *dahriyyūn*.⁶⁸ The interesting point here is that attacks of this kind indicate that the *Jāhili*

⁶⁵ See 'Abd ar-Rahmān ibn Khaldūn, *Kitāb al-Ibar wa Diwān al-Mubtada' wa l-Khabar* (Beirut: Maktabat al-Madrasa wa Dār al-Kitāb al-Lubnānī, 7 Vols., 1967), Vol. 1, pp. 183-209.

⁶⁶ See *E. I.*, where T. Fahd categorises what he calls 'Islamic divination' under three major groupings. Thirty seven divinatory techniques are classified, most of which have their roots in the *Jāhili* period. (See T, Fahd, 'Kihāna', in *E. I.*, Vol. v, pp. 100-01).

⁶⁷ The theme of attributing one's evil destiny to *dahr* continued even after the coming of Islam. A great many lines written in the Umayyad and Abbasid periods employ the theme of *dahr* as the paramount agent of man's evil fortune. (See Cohen-Mor, *A Matter of Fate*, pp. 50- 54).

⁶⁸ This theme continued to appeal even after Islam, as we see in the polemic verses exchanged between the two famous Umayyad rivals al-Farazdaq and Jarīr. (see below) The former delivered the following line addressing his rival:

فإني أنا الموت الذي هو نازلٌ ... بنفسك، فانظر كيف أنت تحاوله.

(Ibn Manzūr, 'Dahr', *Lisān al-'Arab*, vol. 4, p. 295).

I am the Death that one day will surly annihilate your soul; seek refuge then from me if you can!

Jarīr responded:

people were anxious to predict their future and make every effort to modify or avoid their destiny.

The ideology of the *Jāhilī* people limited the power of *dahr* to be ultimately inescapable in only very few aspects of life, Watt explains that:

The control of human life by time is limited. It does not determine every act of the individual, but, whatever he decides to do, it fixes the final outcome. In particular his 'term' (*ajal*) or date of death is fixed; whether he decides to take part in a battle or to keep away from it, he will die if his 'term' has come. His good fortune or evil fortune, as the case may be, is also predetermined, and likewise, it would seem, his 'provision', or 'sustenance' (*rizq*)—an important matter in lands where food was often scarce.⁶⁹

The *Jāhilī*'s view of the limitations of *dahr* allowed many forms of divination to be widely practised. Thus, *dahr* controls the date of death, man's overall destiny and the individual's sustenance, but there are other aspects of life that remained outside *dahr*'s field of influence, such as marriage, travel, finding missing objects, and in all such areas divination could be practised. Yet, although people thought themselves capable of altering certain aspects of their destiny, through various means of divination, once fate had struck they tended to submit without questioning. So, while divination could make predictions to avoid misfortune, success was not guaranteed. This seems to be the way in which the *Jāhilī* people reconciled determinism and man's free will.

The *Jāhilī* poets seem to have understood this system of thought and conceived the concepts of free will and predestination accordingly. Abu Dhu'ayb al-Hudhalī says:⁷⁰

وإذا المنية أنشبت أظفارها ... ألقيت كل تميم لا تنفع.⁷¹

أنا الدهر يفني الموت، و الدهر خالدٌ ... فجنتي بمثل الدهر شيئاً تطاوله.

(ibid.).

I am the Time that annihilates Death, Time is eternal; show me then anything that can challenge its power – if you can!

For the biography of Jarīr and al-Farazdaq see Ch. IV, p. 135, footnote 77 and p. 136, footnote 80 respectively.

⁶⁹ Watt, *Islamic Philosophy and Theology*, pp. 25-26.

⁷⁰ Abū Dhu'ayb Khuwaylid ibn Khālid ibn Muhriz al-Hudhalī witnessed the *Jāhiliyya* and the beginning of Islam. He was martyred while on an expedition during the caliphate of 'Uthmān. It is not known whether this poem was composed before or after his conversion to Islam but the treatment of *dahr* as the main theme seems close to *Jāhilī* ideology. This poem is generally regarded as al-Hudhalī's best. It was written in mourning for his five children, who all died of the plague within a single year. See al-Ḥamawī, *Muṣam al-Udabā'*, Vol. 3, p.306-09.

When death grasps its victim in its claws, you will find that whatever precautions you have taken are useless.

Al-Hudhalī affirms that the power of divination cannot withstand the power of *dahr*: one's term is fixed and death cannot be avoided. But there is also evidence that certain charms were held to be effective during a person's lifetime in avoiding minor misfortunes. Al-Khansā' bint Abī Sulamā⁷² writes in the same vein:

وما يُعني توفي الموت شيئاً ... ولا عُقدُ التمِيمِ ولا الغضارُ.⁷³

Nothing can prove useful when the time of death is at hand, neither tying the amulet nor wearing the green necklace.⁷⁴

When one's term is over no precaution is of benefit. However, the lines indicate that certain precautions were held to be efficacious against lesser evils. Regarding this point Watt states that: 'the fatalism of the Arabian nomad was limited in the sense that it was primarily the outcome of man's acts that was fixed, not the particular acts themselves'.⁷⁵

Another *Jāhili* poet, as-Sulaka umm as-Sulayk,⁷⁶ distraught and grieving for her dead son, at first tries to find reasons for his death, but then acknowledges the supreme and arbitrary power of *dahr*; but this understanding that his time had come does not bring comfort:

طاف يبغي نجوة ... من هلاكٍ فهلاك.
ليت شعري ضلّة ... أي شئني، قتلك.
أمريض لم تُعُد ... أم عدو ختلوك.
أم تولّى بك ما ... غال في الدهر السُّلك.

⁷¹ At-Tawhīdī, *Al-Baṣā'ir wa 'dh-Dhakhā'ir*, Vol. 1, p. 85.

⁷² Al-Khansā' bint Abī Sulamā is a famous *Jāhili* poet. Only a few verses of her poems have survived. See Kahhāla, *A lām an-Nisā'*, Vol. 1, p. 360.

⁷³ Ṣaqr, *Shā'irāt al-'Arab*, p. 108.

⁷⁴ The amulet and green necklace used to be worn to give protection from the evil eye.

⁷⁵ Watt, *The Formative Period*, p. 89.

⁷⁶ A black slave and the mother of as-Sulayk, one of the famous outlaw poets of the pre-Islamic period. See Bābī (ed.), *Muḥjam*, p. 170.

والمنايا رصداً ... للفتى حيث سلك
 أي شيء حسن لفتى ... لم يبك لك
 كل شيء قاتل ... حين تلقى أجلك
 طال ما قد نلت في ... غير كذا أم لك
 إن أمراً فادحاً ... عن جوابي شغلك
 سأعزّي النفس إذ ... لم تجب من سألك
 ليت قلبي ساعة ... صبره عنك ملك
 ليت نفسي قدّمت ... للمنايا بسلك⁷⁷

He left his own town seeking refuge from mortality only to face
 mortality!

Oh, my dear, if you could just tell me how you came to die!
 Had you been sick? Or did an enemy slaughter you, taking you
 unawares?

Or was it, as usual, the habit of Time, who chose you on this occasion to
 be his target?

For I know that Time is always waiting in ambush to target his victim
 from whatever direction.

Tell me, what good thing any young person could dream of was not in
 your hand?

But everything is a killer when one's term is due to reach its end.
 How many times have you been granted your wishes without any effort
 on your part?

Oh my dear, you are not answering! Surely then, it must be a great matter
 that prevents you from responding to my questions!

I shall seek help to allow my soul to grieve if you are not going to
 respond!

I truly wish my heart could be patient and endure your forsaking me, at
 least for a moment;

I deeply wish that death had chosen me before your turn came.

Here, this desperate mother develops the death motif in a set of questions that reveal her troubled psychological state and emotional anguish. She addresses the dead person, but answers her own questions, realizing her son cannot respond. His death may have been caused by any killer, but the real killer is death, who strikes when the person's term (*ajal*) has come to an end. The poem's theme is embedded in the opening line: the mother laments that her son left his own place to escape from mortality's approach only to face mortality itself, the irresistible product of *dahr*. So fate is shown here from a decidedly negative perspective that is infused with wisdom and scorn directed at *dahr*: trying to escape from *dahr*'s power is like seeking refuge from death in death. In the following lines the poet lists a number of possible causes of the death of her son, but in

⁷⁷ Muṭā' Ṣafadī and ʿIliyā Ḥāwī (eds.), *Mawsū'at ash-Shi' al-'Arabī*, supervised by: Khalīl Ḥāwī (Beirut: Sharikat Khayyāt li 'l-Kutub wa 'n-Nashr, 1974), p. 271.

the end such speculation is futile since it is impossible to avoid death if one's time has come—the theme stated in line 1. The poet inserts *ḥikma* verses at various points in the poem in her struggle to reconcile herself to her son's fate and her grievous loss. The second *ḥikma* verse occurs in line 5: No matter where you are, death is lying in wait to seize its prey. However, although this is a line of great wisdom, it fails to bring her comfort, and the remaining lines reiterate her grief and the conviction that despite blessings and good fortune, when one's time has come death will have its way by whatever means it chooses. The poem ends with the mother's wish that death had taken her first.

The importance of this poem for our purposes is that it suggests the extent to which the idea of being unable to escape one's fate dominated the thought of *Jāhili* society and prompted some of its member to attempts to avoid or change it instead of sinking into resignation and submission. The poem illustrates clearly the eagerness of some *Jāhili* individuals, here the poet's son, to change their destiny by any means rather than waiting for it to happen. Although the reader is not told whether the son had been forewarned by a prediction or some specific form of divination or whether he fled prompted by a sense of forbearing or an actual threat, the poet confirms that his action was futile because his intention was to escape from death, an aspect of life dominated by *dahr*.

It is fascinating to realise that the *Jāhili*'s belief system erected definite barriers between what was possible and what was impossible. The ability to discriminate between the limits of man's free will and the apparently limitless power of the prime mover, especially in certain key situations, signifies a sense of philosophy, which, though not sophisticated, allowed the people of the *Jāhiliyya* to lead a life relatively free from anxiety about the future. It was, as Cohen-Mor puts it, a kind of 'physical fatalism', which was 'limited to the outstanding accidents of human life, and specially to death, which it represents as happening of necessity at such and such a time and in such and such circumstances, no matter what one may do to avoid it'.⁷⁸

We will now turn to the analysis of one of the rare poems where astrological information enabling the recognition of omens is accompanied by the dominant idea of

⁷⁸ Cohen-Mor, *A Matter of Fate*, p. 240,

dahr. Here we should be aware that the use of heavenly bodies as tools of predicting the future by means of astrology was different in the *Jāhili* period from that made in later periods, particularly the Abbasid. For the *Jāhili* people, observing the movements of the stars, based on the position of the moon in the course of the lunar month and in each of the signs of the zodiac as known in that time, was the prime source of obtaining information about coming events, whereas the well-known seven planets were the main source of divination for the Abbasid astrologers.⁷⁹ Moreover, the terms ‘star’ and ‘planet’ were used interchangeably and most of the time the ‘planet’ is used to indicate a fixed star, as stated earlier.⁸⁰ Therefore, in interpreting astrological references in the *Jāhili* period we will draw upon materials that discuss the meaning that the stars held in ancient Arabia.

One of the *Jāhili* poems that builds its theme on astrological concepts is the poem of Umayma bint ‘Abd Shams⁸¹ written in mourning for her nephew, who had been killed during an expedition:

أبى ليئك أن يذهب ... ونيط الطرف بالكوكب.
 ونجم دونه الأهوا ... ل بين الدلو والعقرب.
 وهذا الصبح لا يأتي ... ولا يدنو ولا يقرب.
 بعقر عشيرة منا ... كرام الخيم والمنصب.
 أحال عليهم دهر ... حديد التآب والمخالب.
 فحل بهم وقد آمنوا ... ولم يقمرو ولم يشطب.
 وما عنه إذا ما حل ... من منجى ولا مهرب.⁸²

Your night has refused to put an end to its length, and our eyes have been watching the heavens.

I can recognise a star, one presaging disaster, located between Aquarius and Scorpio.

The approach of daylight seems to be still far off.

All these signs announce the inevitable fate that some of our generous good kinsfolk surely will be slaughtered.

⁷⁹In [Abbasid] astrology it was mostly the planets whose influence was considered. But since oldest times, the fixed stars could also be included in the astrological procedure’. J. Knappert, ‘al-Nujūm (A.) the Star’, in *E. I.*, Vol. viii, p. 100.

⁸⁰ See Ch. II, p. 52, footnote 125.

⁸¹ Umayma bint ‘Abd-Shams witnessed many great events in the *Jāhiliyya*; see al-Aṣḫānī, *Al-Aghānī*, Vol. 22, pp. 58- 80.

⁸² See *ibid* pp. 78-79, and Ṣaqr, *Shā‘irāt al-‘Arab*, p. 13.

They will become the prey of Time, which will grip them tightly with its
claws and iron fangs;
It will attack them all unawares, giving them no chance to survive; they
submit without any resistance.
Truly, when it comes there is no place to seek refuge or to flee from it.

This is one of the most pleasing poems we have encountered in terms of its neat structure, whereby every section of the poem fits into the *Jāhili* view of the astral realm as a means of predicting the fate of a group of people. It is also one of the few *Jāhili* poems whose astral references can definitely be classified as astrological allusions that reveal a deep knowledge of the art's basic principles.

A thematic progression is used here to intensify the idea of the predetermined nature of human life: the night sky can be read as indicating events still to come, lines 1-2; a star of ill omen indicates that *dahr* will strike its target; night is extended, prolonging the period of slaughter, line 3; potential fate has become a reality, lines 4-6. This particular thematic pattern seems far from arbitrary or accidental as the main concern of the poet is to justify the death of her nephew, who died not as a coward but as the prey of irresistible destiny; this idea is expressed in line 7. This ordained fate is already written in the page of the heavens.

It is interesting that the poem illustrates the confrontation between the realm of superstition and that of wisdom, highlighting the tension between the two modes of thinking that dominated the ideological life of *Jāhili* society. Although a knowledge of the meaning of astral omens gives man an illusory freedom to verify his destiny, death is the moment of the fulfillment of predetermination that the prime mover controls firmly.

The poem is also notable for its revelation of the quality of the *Jāhili*'s astrological knowledge. The foreknowledge of the slaughter of kin was gained through the observation of an evil star positioned between the two signs of the zodiac: Aquarius and Scorpio. We find in another version the word *an-Nisrān*⁸³ (the Two Vultures) instead of *al-Ahwāl* (disasters):

⁸³ The Two Vultures are two stars: *an-Nasr*, and *Nisr*. The former is a bright star in the constellation called *al-Shilyāq* (Lyra) and rose heliacally in central Arabia on 25 November, with the 18th mansion of the moon, that meets the sign of the zodiac Scorpio and the lunar mansion of Antaras. The latter, *Nisr*,

I can recognise a star, above the Two Vultures, located between Aquarius and Scorpio.

According to the interpretation of the two Vultures,⁸⁵ the star referred to by the poet must be that in the constellation of Perseus, who holds Medusa's head in one hand and a sword in the other,⁸⁶ indicating the dreadful fate of beheading.

Though fatalism, as stated earlier, was applied to certain aspects of life: one's life term; sustenance; and those misfortunes that occur during the course of a person's life, the individual still had the freedom to try to know his hidden future, but not to change or modify it. Here the role of astrology or any other means of divination was to be merely indicative of the divine will or the operation of Time. Indeed, the employment of such astral objects as indicators that might help in predicting coming events was not always for the purpose of averting or amending one's fate. This attitude to astrological prediction seems to characterise the majority of the astrological references found in *Jāhili* literature. Umayma's lines reveal the identity of the attacker: it is Time, against which neither weapons nor any means of protection would prove effective. Thus the bad omen becomes a living reality, and the victims of Time must submit to their destiny with resignation, since all resistance is futile in the face of a fate that has been already ordained and foretold through the page of the heavens. Here we discover the limits of 'man's free will'.

It should be noted, however, that the link between man and his fate ordained by a natural power, *dahr*, was given somewhat different meanings by different groups in *Jāhili* society. We have seen that the Arabs of that time, of whatever ideological or religious background, regarded *dahr* as the prime mover but not as a deity that deserved

consists of three stars in the constellation called '*Uqāb* (Aquila), that meets the sign of the zodiac Aquarius and the lunar mansion of *Akhbiya*. (See Figure 3 and 4 that reveals Perseus placed between the two Vultures). It rises heliacally in central Arabia on 28 December. Both set together anti-heliacally, at that period and in that part, on the 24th of July. (See Lane-Poole (ed.), *Arabic-English Lexicon*, Vol. 4, p. 2789).

⁸⁴ Al-Aṣfahānī's *Al-Aghānī* contains both versions; see Vol. 22, p. 7, particularly footnote 2.

⁸⁵ See above footnote 83.

⁸⁶ See Figures 15 and 16.

to be worshipped. So, it seems that they, or at least those who were not materialists, believed that there was a 'cause' responsible for human fate and saw *dahr* as the agent or mediator between the cause and mankind. Some understood this tripartite relationship as follows: for monotheism and paganism, God or deities are the cause that decree man's fate; *dahr* is the prime mover, responsible for delivering this ordained fate to man, mankind is subject to the cause's will. The heavenly bodies, some believed, are to be regarded as 'aural manifestations' of the divine decree, from which man's fate may be known before it takes place 'verbally'.

The materialists ignored the first party, the cause, and thus attributed man's destiny to *dahr* alone, while rejecting divination as 'superstition' in accordance with their reliance on evidence provided by the senses. And while the monotheists accepted the threefold nature of the relationship, some of them refused to consider the heavens a source of information about coming events, regarding the secure possession of such information as applying to the Divinity alone.

A number of astrological references occur in *Jāhili* literature which illustrates the extent to which the ancient Arabs correlated sublunary events to those in the astral realm. Sometimes even disastrous events that had already taken place were 'doubted' because they had not been confirmed by significant events on Earth and in the celestial world. An-Nābigha adh-Dhubyānī (d. approx. 18/ 604),⁸⁷ grieving for Huṣayn al-Fīrāzī,⁸⁸ rhetorically calls his friend's death into question:

يقولون: حصن، ثم تأبى نفوسهم ... و كيف بحصن، و الجبال جنوح
و لم تلفظ الموتى القبور، و لم تزل ... نجوم السماء، و الأديم صحيح.⁸⁹

⁸⁷ Ziyād ibn Mu'āwiyya, a member of the adh-Dhubyānī tribe, was very famous in the *Jāhiliyya*, and was nicknamed an-Nābigha, the genius, may be because his poems were regarded as among the best of that period. It is related that 'Umar ibn al-Khatāb, the second Orthodox Caliph, considered him the best poet of his time. For his biography see al-Aṣḥānī, *Al-Aghānī*, vol. 11, pp. 5- 43; and Bābīfī (ed.), *Muḥjam*, pp. 356-57.

⁸⁸ Huṣayn ibn al-Humām al-Fīrāzī was one of the elite of *Jāhili* society; his nickname was Mānī' aḍ-Ḍīm, the preventer of injustice, because of the help he gave to those unable to defend themselves against unfair treatment (see *ibid.*, pp. 109- 11).

⁸⁹ 'Abbās 'Abd as-Sattar (ed.), *Dīwān an-Nābigha adh-Dhubyānī* (Beirut: Dār al-Kutub al-'Ilmiyya, 1984), p. 148.

How dare you say Hiṣn has passed away while the mountains still stand,
the graveyards have not vomited forth their dead, the stars in the sky
have not yet been eclipsed and the heavens have not been destroyed?

These lines are surely not to be read as expressing real doubt; the extravagance of the imagery reflects the poet's extreme grief. Nevertheless, they indicate the correspondence that was believed to exist between the terrestrial and celestial realms. Heavenly bodies were not seen only as foretellers, they were also considered to react to events in the sublunary realm. Ibn Aḥmar al-Kinānī writes:⁹⁰

و تغيّر القمر المنير لموته ... والشمس قد كادت عليه تأفل.⁹¹

Because of his death, the bright Moon turns dark and the Sun is almost eclipsed.

In describing one's *ajal*, al-Ḥaraqa bint an-Nu'mān⁹² draws an analogy between life and certain astral elements:

ما الدهر إلا مثل ظل زائل ... و بدور شمس فارقتها الأسعد.⁹³

Time is like a mortal shadow or like planets deprived of their auspicious nature.

Preoccupied with the fleeting and brutal nature of life, the poet compares *dahr*, which he identifies with one's life span,⁹⁴ to a mortal shadow whose ultimate destiny is to vanish completely, and attributes the misfortunes each person encounters to the evil workings of Time, which in this respect resembles certain planets classified according

⁹⁰ Hānī ibn Aḥmar al-Kinānī seems to have a few survived lines; very little information is available regarding his life. See Bābtī (ed.), *Muḥam*, p. 9.

⁹¹ Abū Zayd Muhammad ibn Abū al-Khaṭṭāb al-Qurashī, *Jamharat Ash'ār al-'Arab fī 'l-Jāhiliyya wa 'l-Islām*, ed. by 'Alī al-Bijāwī (Cairo: Dār Nahḍat Miṣr, 1967), p. 21.

⁹² Al-Ḥaraqa was the daughter of King an-Nu'mān ibn al-Mundhir. It is related that she was a nun and had her own nunnery or convent. She is sometimes connected with a woman called Hind: some sources claim that Hind was Ḥaraqa's sister and others that Ḥaraqa was Hind's nickname. See Bābtī (ed.), *Muḥam*, pp. 106-07.

⁹³ Ṣaqr, *Shā'irāt al-'Arab*, p. 67.

⁹⁴ In the lexicon of *Lisān al-'Arab*, Ibn Manẓūr asserts that: 'one's life span, his days, is his Time (*dahr*) that fluctuates between fortunes and misfortunes'. (See Vol. 12, p. 650).

to their astrological significance as bringing misfortune. Life, time and fate are seen here in an entirely negative light.

Al-Aswad ibn Yu‘fur (d. approx. 22/ 600)⁹⁵ when criticising one of his rival asserts that he is misfortune because the time of his nativity indicated so. Yet the poet missed the fact that by attributing the misfortunes that have coloured his rival’s destiny to the configuration of the heavens at the moment of his birth, he gives chance to his rival to escape the blame of all his bad deeds:

وُلِدْتُ بِحَادِي النّجْمِ، يَتْلُو قَرِينَهُ ... وَبِالْقَلْبِ، قَلْبِ الْعَقْرَبِ الْمُتَوَقِّدِ.⁹⁶

I was born when the guide of the star was following his companion, and
in the flaming heart of Scorpio.

At the time of his birth, ath-Thurayyā was being followed by ad-Dabrān, *hādi al-Najm*, which was considered the worst of all lunar mansions, as noted in the previous chapter. If this mansion is associated with the appearance of the bright star *qalb al-‘aqra* (the Heart of the Scorpion or Antares), then the evil will be doubled as this star alone was regarded as malefic.⁹⁷ Fate then is determined from the moment of birth, and so the poet, unconsciously, justifies all his rival’s misfortunes and refrain him from being responsible for them; he is trapped in a prison of misfortune that is entirely governed by *dahr*. Moreover, this verse provides evidence that casting verbal horoscopes from the configuration of the sky at the time of birth seems to have been practised in that period, though not according to the sophisticated theories that would be applied in the Abbasid period.

For our purpose, the *Jāhili* period can be characterised as creating the relatively crude foundation of a tendency to interpret cosmic phenomena in order to draw meaningful connections between events in the celestial realm and those in the sublunary world. These connections would gradually come to influence a great proportion of the

⁹⁵ Al-Aswad ibn Yu‘fur ibn Nahshal, nicknamed al-Jarrah (he who wounds), is considered a good poet, particularly when speaking of love (in the *ghazal*), the arduous camel ride through the desert, and wine and the pleasure gained from it. See Bābtī (ed.), *Muḥjam*, pp. 18- 19.

⁹⁶ Al-Marzūqī, *Al-Azmina wa l-Amkina*, Vol. 2, p. 318.

⁹⁷ Lane-Poole (ed.), *Arabic-English Lexicon*, Vol. 4, p. 2553.

figurative language of later poets, and the practice would become increasingly sophisticated and intellectually rigorous as a result of a changing socio-religious ethic: Islam transformed that primitive tribal community and was itself influenced by contact with other cultures in the Umayyad and Abbasid periods. In sum, it is the period where poets employed astrological references mainly as rhetorical devices; later poets would often make use of astrological allusions to reveal hidden meanings of a philosophical or moral character that are integrated with the main theme of the literary work.

III. 2. 3: *Qadar* as an Islamic Concept and its Incompatibility with Astrological Claims to Foreknow Ordained Fate

It is not an easy task to find astrological references (*shawāhid tanjīmiyya*) in the poetic production of the early Islamic era (from the coming of Islam until the death of ‘Ali ibn Abī Ṭālib, the last of the four orthodox Caliphs in year 40/ 661). This might be a result of the Islamic opposition to ‘the art of astrology’ which in turn can be attributed to a number of factors. Prominent among them, besides the fact that the art of astrology was an aspect of pagan life, is the confusion it created with regard to the doctrine of free will and predestination. Discussing the polemic surrounding the astrology of the mediaeval Muslim world, Carlo Alfonso Nallino claims that from Islam ‘astrology had a much less unfavourable reception than from Christianity’.⁹⁸ Nallino defends his argument on the ground of the different attitudes held by Islam and Christianity towards the notions of divine predetermination and human free will:

The latter [Christianity] had to combat in the teachings of astrology an entire world of pagan ideas and cults; it had to contend against the concept of necessity, which excluded Christian free will. In the 7th and 8th centuries A.D., however, the pagan elements of astrology were completely modified; they were so entirely hidden under a verbal formalism as to be no longer recognizable; and, on the other hand, orthodox Islam with its doctrine of predestination, which excluded the freedom of human actions, was, at bottom, not very far removed from [... the methods] of many astrologers of antiquity. When we consider that the first Muslimān theologians took no heed whatever of the sciences which did not appear to have any relation to the religious content of Islām, we easily understand how astrology had been able to advance unimpeded through its first stages almost up the end of the 2nd cent. of the Hijra’.⁹⁹

⁹⁸ Carlo Alfonso Nallino, ‘Sun, Moon and Stars (Muhammadan)’, in James Hasting *et al* (eds.), *Encyclopaedia of Religion and Ethics*, (Edinburgh: T & T Clark Publishers, 12 Vols., 1921), Vol. xii, p. 91.

⁹⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 91.

Nallino claims that astrology began to face opposition only towards the end of the 2nd/8th century as a result of the opposition that Aristotle's knowledge faced from Muslim philosophers and theologians, and subsequently this affected astrology negatively as it was regarded a branch of that knowledge.¹⁰⁰ According to Nallino, the freedom astrology enjoyed under early Islam was crucial in enabling the development of mediaeval astrology and consequently in making Muslim astrologers generally superior to Christian horoscope casters.

It has been argued, however, that on the contrary, this freedom began with the establishment of the translation movement that took place in the Abbasid period,¹⁰¹ and experienced its 'golden age' in the 4th/10th and 5th/11th centuries; a phenomenon that Seyyed Hossein Nasr has attributed to the Shi'ite influence, which had become relatively powerful in those centuries and the Shi'ite tolerance of pre-Islamic belief systems, particularly in the field of Hermetic sciences and Peripatetic philosophy.¹⁰² Thus Nallino's claim that this freedom existed before the second century is questionable.

Nallino's argument is built on a limited knowledge of both the stance adopted by early Islam towards astrology and the doctrine of free will and predestination. This misunderstanding underpins his explanation of the rise of astrology in the Islamic world as resulting from the freedom it enjoyed under regimes that were unconcerned with its pagan origins, which they saw as irrelevant or unthreatening to Islam. Nallino also argues that Islamic philosophers' later opposition to Aristotelian philosophy impeded the development of astrology. However, this mistaken assumption devalues the great efforts of Abbasid astrologers to reconcile their discipline with Islamic orthodoxy, which openly opposed this branch of knowledge. Thus, it will be useful here to discuss the orthodox Islamic attitudes towards the art of astrology and clarify, in brief, the philosophy of predestination and human free will as understood by the early Muslims.

¹⁰⁰ Ibid., p. 92.

¹⁰¹ Nick Campion, 'The Concept of Destiny in Islamic Astrology and its Impact on Medieval European Thought', in *Nick Campion's Online Astrology Resource*, (2000), <<http://www.nickcampion.com/nc/history/articles/Islamic.htm>> [Accessed 16 November 2005], p. 2.

¹⁰² See the explanation of this phenomenon in Nasr, *An Introduction to Islamic Cosmological Doctrine*, pp. 12- 18.

After the advent of Islam the art of drawing *dalā' il* (indications) from cosmic phenomena as signals of events that might affect human destiny was strongly attacked as being entirely false. As the Qur'ān says: 'Say: No one in the heavens or the earth has knowledge of what is hidden except Allah [...]'¹⁰³; 'With Him are the keys of the unseen, that none knows but He [...]'¹⁰⁴. In a famous *ḥadīth*, the Prophet Muhammad warns his nation against believing in the stars as indicators of coming events and disbelieving in *qadar*.¹⁰⁵ In this sense, astrology and *qadar* are declared to be diametrically opposed to each other. Moreover, there is strong evidence for Islam's antagonistic attitude to all forms of divination, including astrology, to be found in the legal punishment that Islamic law commands to be applied to practitioners of the art: the death penalty.¹⁰⁶ Even those who believe astral bodies can be merely indicators, rather than agents, will be accused of atheism if they attempt to consult an astrologer.¹⁰⁷ As mentioned above, the justification of this Islamic condemnation of the art of astrology seems to have been based on the threat it posed to the ideology Islam established regarding the matter of God's predestination and man's responsibility for his actions.

One of the radical changes Islam brought to the ideology of the Arabs was the attribution of destiny to God and not *dahr*: 'God takes the place of Time as the source of misfortune'.¹⁰⁸ As the Qur'ān states: 'No misfortune has happened in respect either of the land or of yourselves but it was recorded in a book before We bring it into existence:

¹⁰³ Al-Qur'ān, an-Naml (The Ants), 19, 27, 65.

{قل لا يعلم من في السموات والأرض الغيب إلا الله ... }.

¹⁰⁴ Al-Qur'ān, al-An'ām (The Cattle), 7, 6, 59.

{و عنده مفاتيح الغيب لا يعلمها إلا هو ... }.

¹⁰⁵ Muhammad Nāṣr ad-Dīn al-Albānī, *Silsilat al-Aḥādīth aṣ-Ṣaḥīḥa* (Riyadh: Dār al-aMa'ārif, 37 Vols., 1407 H), Vol. 3, p. 119.

¹⁰⁶ Ibn Rushd, *Al-Bayān wa ṭ-Taḥṣīl*, Vol. 17, p. 407, see also 'Abd al-Majīd Sālim al-Maṣḥ'abī, *At-Tanjīm wa ṭ-Munnajjimūn wa Ḥukmuhum fī al-Islām*, (MA Dissertation), (aṭ-Ṭā'if: Maktabat aṣ-Ṣiddīq, 1994), pp. 275-78.

¹⁰⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 408. For more details of the subject of Islam and astrology see Ilyās Balkā, *Muqaddima fī at-Tanjīm wa Ḥukmihī fī al-Islām* (Beirut: Mu'assasat ar-Risāla, 2003).

¹⁰⁸ Watt, *Islamic Philosophy and Theology*, p26.

that is truly easy for Allah'.¹⁰⁹ Moreover, Allah has been identified with *dahr*. The Prophet Muhammad is reported to have said: 'Allah Said: the son of Adam insults Me when cursing *dahr*; I Am the *Dahr*; in My hand is the command, and I cause the alternation of day and night'.¹¹⁰ Thus, while in the *Jāhilī*'s ideology Time was synonymous with the prime mover responsible for certain aspects of man's destiny, the new religion came to affirm the existence of only one all-powerful God, who bears the responsibility of all aspects of man's destiny, a notion consistent with pre-Islamic monotheism. Cohen-Mor comments: 'Fate in Islam was attributed to God and assimilated into a doctrine of predestination, which, as an article of faith, was considered to be compatible with freedom of choice and human responsibility'.¹¹¹ This issue occupied the attention of many great thinkers of both early and later Islamic times and became the focus of considerable debate in medieval Islamic theology. It is not our concern to discuss this debate in any detail; the task is to assess its impact on astrology in general and, more importantly, on the poets' use of astrological ideas in particular. We will seek to explain why the beliefs of the early Muslims regarding the notions of predestination and free will had the effect of minimizing the number of astrological allusions in their poems.

Regarding the Islamic attitude towards the subject of destiny, we find that 'the Qur'ān contains verses which back both the idea of predestination and that of man's free will'.¹¹² A great many Qur'anic verses affirm that God has ordained the destinies of his subjects. According to orthodox Islam all the decrees of the Divine Will have already been written and inscribed in the 'Preserved Tablet' (*al-lawḥ al-mahfūz*), which is kept safely in heaven by a guardian angel, and which is mentioned only once in the Qur'ān.¹¹³ Indeed, the idea that God has foreknowledge of every single action that will

¹⁰⁹ Al-Qur'ān, Al-Ḥadīd (The Iron), 27, 57, 22.

{ما أصاب من مصيبة في الأرض ولا في أنفسكم إلا في كتاب من قبل أن نبرأها إن ذلك على الله يسير}.

¹¹⁰ Al-Muparakpuri (supervisor), *AL-Miṣbiḥ al-Munīr*, Vol. 9, p. 31.

¹¹¹ Cohen-Mor, *A Matter of Fate*, p. 240.

¹¹² Ian Richard Netton, *A Popular Dictionary of Islam* (London: Curzon Press, 1992), p. 200.

¹¹³ See al-Qur'ān, Al-Burūj (The Constellations), 30, 85, 22 {في لوح محفوظ}. The Qur'ān refers to the book in which all deeds, good and evil, have been written as al-Zabūr in the following verse: 'Everything

take place in this world and that all things are under his determination and command is expressed explicitly throughout the Qur'ān: 'Praise the Name of your Lord, the Most High, who created all things and well proportioned them; who has ordained their destinies and guided them';¹¹⁴ 'if God touch you with affliction, none can remove it but He; if He touch you with goodness, He is Omnipotent over all things, He is irresistible supreme over His servants, He is the Wise, the Omniscient';¹¹⁵ 'Allah's decrees are pre-ordained';¹¹⁶ 'our command is but once: that is to be done in a twinkling of an eye'.¹¹⁷ The true Muslims are those who believe that 'nothing will befall us except what which Allah has ordained. He is our Protector. In Allah let the faithful put their trust'.¹¹⁸

Moreover, 'The canonical collections of traditions of the sayings and doings of Muhammad—the Hadith—support the doctrine of predestination'.¹¹⁹ The theme of man's foreordained fate is expressed in a number of *hadīth* – for example the Prophet's statement: 'The pen has dried after writing what you will surely encounter'.¹²⁰ Moreover, we are judged before we enter this world; while a potential human being in the mother's womb, our place in either Hell or Paradise is already determined.¹²¹ It is related that the Prophet Moses blamed the Prophet Adam for committing the sin that caused him to be expelled from Paradise, an especially grievous fault since he was the first man, and greatly blessed to be God's handiwork. Adam replied: 'Are you blaming me for committing a sin that had been ordained for me to commit forty years before I

they have done is in az-Zabūr (the Book of Deeds); therein every matter, small or great, is recorded'. (Al-Qur'ān, Al-Qamar (The Moon), 27, 54, 52-53).

{و كل شيء فعلوه في الزّهر، و كل صغير و كبير مُستطَرّ}.

¹¹⁴ Al-Qur'ān, Al-A'lā (The Most High), 30, 87, 1-3.

{سُبْح اسم ربك الأعلى، الذي خلق فسوّى، و الذي قدر فهدى}.

¹¹⁵ Al-Qur'ān, Al-An'ām (The Cattle), 7, 6, 17-18.

{و إن يمسك الله بضر فلا كاشف له إلا هو و إن يمسك بخير فهو على كل شيء قدير، و هو القاهر فوق عباده و هو الحكيم الخبير}

¹¹⁶ Al-Qur'ān, Al-Aḥzāb (The Confederates), 22, 33, 38.

{... و كان أمر الله قدراً مقدوراً}.

¹¹⁷ Al-Qur'ān, Al-Qamar (The Moon), 27, 54, 50.

{و ما أمرنا إلا واحدة كلمح بالبصر}.

¹¹⁸ Al-Qur'ān, At-Tawba (Repentance) or as entitled in other editions *Barā'a* (Immunity), 10, 9, 51.

{قل إن يُصيبتنا إلا ما كتب الله لنا هو مولانا و على الله فليتوكل المؤمنون}.

¹¹⁹ Cohen-Mor, *A Matter of Fate*, p. 4.

¹²⁰ Muhammad Muhsin Khan (trans.), *Ṣaḥīḥ al-Bukhārī: The Translation of the Meanings of Ṣaḥīḥ al-Bukhārī (Arabic – English)* (Chicago: Kazi Publication, 9 Vols., 1979), Vol. viii, p. 388.

¹²¹ *Ibid.*, p. 387-88.

came into existence?’¹²² Regarding augury, when the Prophet spoke to his companions about those of his followers who would enter Paradise without being questioned about their deeds or receiving any punishment, he stated that they number 70,000; they are those who ‘do not draw evil omens [from birds, etc.] (*yataṭayyarūn*) and do not get treated by branding themselves (*yaktawūn*) and do not treat with *Ruqya* [protection from the evil eye], but put their trust only in their lord’.¹²³ Moreover, it is related that the Prophet Muhammad identified *qadar* in the following *ḥadīth*: ‘Through his decree (*qadar*) Allah indicates the events that were ordained before the creation of the heavens and the Earth by fifty thousand years’.¹²⁴

On the other hand, numerous verses in the Qur’ān support the idea of man’s free will; these play a central role in the formation of the notion of God’s justice, which judges people according to their own choices and responsibility: ‘[I swear] by the soul and who created it, who inspired it with conscience of what is wrong for it and what is right. Successful indeed is he who purifies it, and failed is he who corrupts it’;¹²⁵ ‘We guided man into the path which he himself has chosen, whether he be thankful or ungrateful’.¹²⁶ Everyone will be rewarded or punished according to his deeds on the Day of Judgment: ‘That Day every soul shall be requited for what it has earned, no

¹²² See Ibn Kathīr, *Al-Bidāya wa ḥ-Nihāya*, Vol. 1, p. 89.

¹²³ Muhammad Muhsin Khān (trans.), *Al-Lu ḥu’ wa ḥ-Marjān fī mā Ittafaqa ‘alayhi ash-Shaykhān, The Translation of the Meanings of al-Lu ḥu’ wa ḥ-Marjān, Arabic – English: a Collection of Agreed upon Aḥādīth from al-Bukhari and Muslim*. Compiled by Fuwad Abdul Baqī (Riyadh: Dar-us-Salam Publications, 2 Vols., 1995), Vol. 1, p. 125.

¹²⁴ See Al-Ḥāfiz Abī Bakr Ahmad al-Bayhaqī, *Al-Iṭiqād ‘alā Madhhab as-Sunna wa ḥ-Jamā’ā* (Beirut: Dār al-Kutub al-‘Ilmiyya, 1984), p. 69.

¹²⁵ Al-Qur’ān, Ash-Shams (The Sun), 30, 91, 7-10.

{و نفس و ما سوأها، فالهَمَّهَا فُجُورَهَا وَ تَقْوَاهَا، فَذَ الْفَلْحَ مِنْ زَكَاةِهَا، وَ قَدْ خَابَ مِنْ دَمَاسِهَا}.

¹²⁶ Al-Qur’ān, Al-Insān (The Man), or as titled in some versions as Ad-Dahr (The Time), 29, 76, 3.

{إِنَّا هَدَيْنَاهُ السَّبِيلَ إِمَّا شَاكِرًا وَ إِمَّا كَفُورًا}.

The interpretation of this verse is that ‘Man has been shown the Way by means of revelation, through men of the highest spiritual standing. If he is grateful, he will accept Guidance, be one of the Righteous, and join the company of the Blessed. If not, he puts chains round himself, thus burdening himself with sin, and gets into the Blazing Fire of Punishment ... His choice rests on his will’. *The Holy Qur’ān: English Translation of the Meanings and commentary* (Al-Madinah al-Munawwara: Mujamma’ al-Malik Fahd li ḥ-Ṭibā’at al-Muṣḥaf ash-Sharīf, 1410), p. 1863.

injustice is done this day, for God is swift in taking account'.¹²⁷ Man earns nothing of substance except reward or punishment according to his own deeds, both good and bad: '[...] no soul shall bear another's burden and that each man shall be judge by his own labours; that his labours shall be scrutinised and that he shall be justly requited for them [...]';¹²⁸ bearing in mind that, 'God will not burden any soul greater than it can bear. It shall enjoy the good deeds which it has achieved, and shall suffer every ill it acquired'.¹²⁹

In considering these seemingly contradictory verses, early traditionalist or orthodox Muslims reached an understanding of *qadā'* and *qadar*¹³⁰ through a moderate interpretation which reconciles the notion of man's free will with that of predestination.¹³¹ 'They maintained that people 'acquire' responsibility for their actions, although the actions are willed and created by God'.¹³² In other words, although men have the freedom to choose between good and evil, and thus are responsible for their good deeds and wicked actions, for which they deserve either praise or blame, reward or punishment, they still cannot perform righteous acts without God's grace or commit evil ones without God's willing them to do so. This was the prevailing opinion that characterised the attitude of the early Muslims towards the matter of human responsibility and God's immanent will and unlimited sovereignty over His creations during the formative years of the Islamic community.

¹²⁷ Al-Qur'ān, Ghāfir (He who forgives) or Al-Mu'min (The Believer), 24, 40, 17.

{اليوم تُجْزَى كُلُّ نَفْسٍ بِمَا كَسَبَتْ، لَا ظَلَمَ الْيَوْمَ، إِنَّ اللَّهَ سَرِيعُ الْحِسَابِ}.

¹²⁸ Al-Qur'ān, An-Najm (The Star), 27, 53, 39- 41.

{... أَلَا تَرَىٰ وَازِرَةً وَّرَآءَ أُخْرَىٰ، وَأَنْ لَّيْسَ لِلْإِنْسَانِ إِلَّا مَا سَعَىٰ وَأَنْ سَعِيهِ سَوْفَ يُرَىٰ، ثُمَّ يُجْزَاهُ الْجَزَاءُ الْأَوْفَى}.

¹²⁹ Al-Qur'ān, Al-Baqara (The Cow), 3, 2, 286.

{لَا يُكَلِّفُ اللَّهُ نَفْسًا إِلَّا وُسْعَهَا لَهَا مَا كَسَبَتْ وَعَلَيْهَا مَا اكْتَسَبَتْ ...}.

¹³⁰ For more information about the concepts of *al-qadā'* and *al-qadā' wa 'l-qadar* see the following two articles: Gy. Káldy Nagy, 'qaḏā' in *E. I.*, Vol. iv, pp.364-65; and J. Van Ess, 'al-qaḏā' wa 'l-qadar', *E. I.*, Vol. iv, pp. 365- 72.

¹³¹ 'Āmir al-Jazzār and Anwar al-Bāz (eds.), *Majmū'at al-Fatāwa li Shaykh al-Islām Taqī ad-Dīn Ahmad ibn Taymiya al-Harrān: Al-Imān wa 'l-Qadar* (Al-Manṣūra: Dār al-Wafā' li 'ṭ-Ṭibā'a wa 'n-Nashr wa 't-Tawzī' and Riyadh: Maktabat al-'Ubaykān, 20 Vols., 1998), Vol. 8, p. 272.

¹³² Cohen-Mor, *A Matter of Fate*, p. 7.

In short, Islam has acknowledged mankind's free will but at the same time has fixed its limits and boundaries, thus creating an ethical space in which freedom of choice can be practised and in which man's responsibility is to be judged, while insisting that God's sovereignty is unlimited. Thus Islam has established predestination as a central tenet of its theology but has never excluded the freedom of human actions as Nallino argues it has. In the case of astrology, because of 'the obvious external differences between the astrological attempt to predict future events and the Islamic emphasis upon the omnipotent character of the Divine Will',¹³³ Islam declared itself openly hostile to the principle that forms the basis of astrology: predicting the future to try to avoid misfortune and, thus, modifying one's evil destiny; here human freedom seeks to break the boundaries set by Islam, and is condemned for attempting to encroach on a prohibited Divine field of action. In this regard astrologers and their clients may be accused of disrespecting what all Muslims should respect; their attempt to unveil the future by the art of divination is a serious transgression.

On the other hand, orthodox Islam also rejected astrology as encouraging fatalism and thus weakening the Muslim emphasis on individual freedom, since astrology assumed that human life followed a preordained pattern of destiny that was reflected on the page of the heavens. If the stars are to be seen as reliable indicators of the absolute and immutable decree of God, as astrologers claimed, then people might come to think of themselves as deprived of free will and thus not responsible for their actions, a notion dramatically opposed to Islamic doctrine.

Having reviewed how the conflict between the art of astrology and the doctrine of free will and predestination developed in early Islamic society and was seen as one of the motivations behind the Islamic hostility towards astrology, let us consider another factor; that is, the pagan nature of astrology. It was noted earlier in this discussion that one reason for which Islam rejected astrology was because of its close relation with *kihāna* (divination), a characteristic feature of pre-Islamic pagan society. George Saliba comments: 'The Muslim rejection of the ancient Arabian institution of the *kāhin* (diviner priest) had a negative effect on astrology, inasmuch as the latter was identified

¹³³ Seyyed Hossein Nasr, *Islamic Science: An Illustrated Study* (Westerham and Kent: The World of Islam Festival Publishing Company Ltd, 1976), p. 126.

with that divinatory practice'.¹³⁴ In the Prophetic tradition there is a declaration that 'If anyone acquires a section of the science of the stars for a purpose other than what God has mentioned he has acquired a branch of magic. The astrologer is a *kāhin*, the *kāhin* is a magician, and the magician is an infidel'.¹³⁵

The picture of total opposition seems clear enough, but here the question arises: did Islam oppose all aspects of *Jāhili* life, including the art of divination, considering them irredeemably pagan? Were all means of divination forbidden? It is true that Islam rejected anything which smacked of paganism; however, this does not mean that the new religion sought to annihilate all the legacy of *Jāhili* life. Indeed, not everything from the pre-Islamic era is to be opposed, only those pagan beliefs and practices that were fundamentally incompatible with the ideology of Islam. Prominent among them was the art of divination.

Islam appreciates the role of the intellect as a guide in the performance of action, and particularly as a motivator of moral action, giving human beings a great sense of their responsibility for every decision taken in the light of their free will. Indeed, the numerous verses encountered very often in the Qur'ān that encourage people to employ this method in almost all aspects of their life are evidence of this appreciation.¹³⁶ Therefore, Islam opposed that branch of astrology, the judicial, that consisted in 'the observation of the influences of the stars on human destiny',¹³⁷ and whose predictions lacked any scientific validity. In contrast, Islam acknowledged the other branch, that concerned with the observation of the influences of the heavenly bodies on the natural elements for religious purposes,¹³⁸ which later distanced itself from natural astrology to

¹³⁴ George Saliba, 'Astrology', in *Dictionary of Middle Ages*, Vol. 1, p. 617.

¹³⁵ Muhammad ibn 'Abdullah al-Khaṭīb, *Mishkat al-Masabih: English translation with explanatory notes*, James Robson (trans. and commentator), (Lahor: Sh. Muhammad Sharaf Publisher and Bookseller, 4 Vols., 1964), Vol. III, p. 961, see also the whole chapter of Divination in *ibid.* pp. 958-61.

¹³⁶ See 'Umar Farrūkh, *Athar al-Falsafa al-Islāmiyya fī al-Falsafa al-Ūruppiyya* (Beirut: Manshūrāt Maktabat Minīma, 1952), p. 19.

¹³⁷ T. Fahd, 'Nudjūm (ahkām al-)', in *E. I.*, Vol. viii, p. 105.

¹³⁸ As mentioned in the second chapter of this research this included such practices as observing the movement of the Sun for determining the times of prayer, the times of sunrise and sunset in relation to

form an independent science, that of astronomy (*‘ilm al-hay’a*). Thus, predicting the future in the field of natural phenomena was not prohibited, but in the field of human destiny, controversy surrounding the key issues of predestination and free will, as well as the scientific credentials of the art, raised debates on the validity of such knowledge. Moreover, in the field of medicine Islam did not condemn cures effected through the use of astrological methods, methods that continued to be developed in later centuries:

‘The doctrine of the influence of the signs of the zodiac on the human frame was especially favoured by the Arabists, and was still further developed in the sixteenth century by the mystics; astrological calendars were compiled showing the days on which certain treatments and remedies were ‘dangerous’. The development of the mystical school of the sixteenth century can be traced back to the writing of Averroës’.¹³⁹

Alongside the scientific approach to predicting the future, which Islam accepted as valid, there was another permissible art practiced by those eager to unveil the future. This art was in essence psychological, and it was this that seems to have protected this divinatory technique from the accusation of paganism and gave it legitimacy in Islam; it was the art of *fa’l*, or drawing good omens from certain objects or actions.¹⁴⁰

Fa’l was an exception among the many divinatory techniques practised in the *Jāhiliyya* and forbidden by Islam. Fahd contends that one of the radical tendencies of the Arab mind is to think deeply on the meaning of every name heard, every gesture observed, every incident happening and every physical appearance, and to build upon omens, both bad and good, according to the explanation they assigned to them. The result of this tendency was the proliferation of a massive literature¹⁴¹ of what was to be classified under the category of *fa’l*, which included those phenomena from which happy omens

fasting, and the direction of the *qibla*; taking into account the crescent’s visibility in connection with the determination of the beginning of the lunar month, and calendrical computations.

¹³⁹ Donald Campbell, *Arabian Medicine and its Influence of the Middle Ages* (London: Kegan Paul, Trench & Co., Ltd., 2 Vols., 1926), Vol. 1, p. 190.

¹⁴⁰ Fahd classifies this branch of divination among the legacy that survived from the *Jāhili* period and continued to be practised in the Islamic period. See no. 28 in the list provided by T. Fahd, in his article on ‘*kihāna*’, in *E. I.*, Vol. v, p. 100.

¹⁴¹ See the study of Ibtisām Marhūn aṣ-Ṣaffār, *Al-Fa’l wa’l-Ṭīra wa’l-Tanjīm fī al-Fikr al-Islāmī wa’l-Mawrūth al-Adabī* (Amman: Dār al-Manāhij li’n-Nashr wa’l-Tawzīf, 2003).

could be drawn, and *fīra*, which concerned the evil presentiments aroused by the contents of a certain object or event.¹⁴²

While Islam rejects *fīra*, the *sīra*, the Prophet's deeds and sayings, include many incidents where the Prophet drew good omens from the names of regions and tribes he happened to pass through or encounter while traveling. He also made a great many changes in proper names 'with the double design of effacing all traces of Arab paganism from Muslim terminology'.¹⁴³ Perhaps more importantly, he modified the names of his companions to strip them of all that might be regarded as baleful influences emanating from their meaning.¹⁴⁴ All these actions of the Prophet are evidence that Islam did not oppose all procedures that help indicate one's destiny; on the contrary, the Prophet himself was aware of them and practised a kind of onomancy designed to bring peace to the individual and help him be optimistic, as opposed to other methods of divination that were concerned with predicting misfortune and instilled pessimism, unsettling the community and giving rise to emotional disorders and psychosomatic illness.

Having discussed the Islamic position on the art of predicting the future, we will now consider briefly how Islam attempted to bridge the gap between God's will and man's freedom by allowing the practice of certain methods of obtaining prior knowledge of coming events. It is ultimately false to think of Islam as preventing man from practising his right of applying the privilege of free will he enjoys to modify or prevent an evil destiny that might be defined by any of the methods he accepts. So, besides its concern regarding the approach applied to predict 'the potential' and not 'the definite' future,

¹⁴² See T. Fahd, 'Fa'l', in *E. I.*, Vol. ii, pp. 758-60.

¹⁴³ J. Wellhausen, *Reste2*, cited in *Ibid.*, p. 758. For this Prophetic practice see al-Ḥāfiẓ Abī 'Abdullah al-Ḥākim an-Nisabūrī, *Al-Mustadrak 'alā aṣ-Ṣaḥīḥayn: ṭab'a mutaḍammīna intiqādāt adh-Dhahabī wa bi dhayliḥi tatabbu' awḥām al-Ḥākim al-lafī sakata 'alayhā adh-Dhahabī li Abī 'Abd al-Rahmān Muqbil al-Wādi* † (Cairo: Dār al-Ḥaramayn, 5 Vols., 1997), Vol. 4, pp. 409-15.

¹⁴⁴ It is related that a person called Ḥazn (a man of rough and harsh manners) refused to change his name to Sahl (an easygoing and sociable person) as the Prophet advised him to do. The Prophet then said to him: 'Be then Ḥazn as you wish', after which the man and his descendants became well known for the roughness and ruggedness of their behaviour. (See Abū 'Umar Ahmad ibn 'Abd Rabbih, *Al-ʿIqd al-Farīd*, eds. Ahmad Amīn, Ahmad az-Zīn, and Ibrāhīm al-Anbārī (Cairo: Maṭba'at lajnat at-Ta'lif wa 't-Tarjama wa 'n-Nashr, 7 Vols., 1956), Vol. 2, p. 301.

Islam is also interested in the ways of countering one's 'probable' fate. One of the prominent methods is to take all possible logical and permissible precautions against ill fortune. A case in point is the advice the Prophet Muhammad provides to the sick: to cure themselves and not to submit to their disease claiming that it is destiny;¹⁴⁵ he also advises people to seek all lawful (*ḥalāl*) ways to obtain sustenance (*rizq*) and not to wait passively for it. The Prophet Muhammad always encouraged his nation to seek a lawful method for earning their livelihood, he is reported to have said 'no one has ever eaten better food than what he eats as a result of the labour of his hands'.¹⁴⁶ If the individual's efforts do not succeed, Islam provides another method: to seek refuge in the unlimited power of God by supplication and prayer, and in this way seek to change one's destiny. The Prophet states: 'Nothing can prevent fate (*qadar*) from taking place except supplication (*du'ā*)'.¹⁴⁷ Besides this, other pious practices may turn away ill fortune, such as repentance from sins, alms giving, fasting, and moral conduct, all of which make people conscious that God's final verdict will prevail according to the choices they have made in the exercise of free will. Islam recognizes, then, the usefulness of prior knowledge of possible future events, while cautioning Muslims that 'it is God's decree which will ultimately prevail and not some astrologer's prediction or prognostication'.¹⁴⁸

We have seen that Islam strongly condemned certain of the claims made by judicial astrology, notably that the art could with certainty predict coming events. This condemnation brought about a decline in the fortunes of astrology in the early Islamic

¹⁴⁵ There is a book of prophetic medicine in which the Prophet Muhammad provided a great deal of advice on how to heal particular diseases and which a number of medical institutions in the Muslim world still use. See Shams ad-Dīn Muhammad ibn Qayyim al-Jawziyya, *Aṭ-Ṭibb al-Nabawī*, eds. 'Abd al-Ghanī 'Abd al-Khālīq, 'Ādil al-Azharī and Mahmūd Faraj al-'Uqda (Beirut: Dār al-Kutub al-'Ilmiyya, 1983). For the English version see Ibn Qayyim al-Jawziyya, *Medicine of the Prophet*, trans. by Penelope Johnstone (Cambridge: The Islamic Texts Society, 1998).

¹⁴⁶ Al-Khaṣṣīb, *Mishkat al-Masabih*, Vol. ii, p. 592.

¹⁴⁷ See Abū Muhammad al-Maqdisī, *Kitāb at-Targhīb fī ad-Du'ā*, ed. by Fawāz Ahmad Zahrī (Beirut: Dār Ibn Ḥazm li 'l-Ṭibā'a wa 'n-Nashr wa 't-Tawzī', 1995), pp. 31-37.

¹⁴⁸ Zeina Matar, 'The Chapter on Death-Prediction (*Qaṭ' q Quṭū'*) from the *Kitāb Farağ al-Mahmūm* by Ibn Tāwūs', *Bulletin D'études Orientales: Sciences Occultes et Islam*, xlv (Année: 1992): pp. 119-25, p. 121.

period, and it is not surprising then to find that there are only a few astrological references in the literary material of that period. Moreover, the surviving examples should be regarded as reiterations of pagan belief and extensions of the *Jāhili* legacy as noted earlier; the majority of them do not bear witness to a systematic understanding and theoretical cognition of the basics of the astrological function of heavenly bodies.

Indeed, poets found it difficult to give up a conventional theme that once held strong appeal, such as the identification of the appearance of certain stars to the birth or death of prominent elites, although Islam openly strictly prohibited any practice connected with judicial astrology.¹⁴⁹ Indeed, early Islamic poets continued to refer to this forbidden art, particularly in their panegyrics and elegies. Ḥassān ibn Thābit (d. 54/674), the Prophet's Poet,¹⁵⁰ in mourning the death of the Prophet composed the following line:

يا بكرَ أمانةِ المباركَ نكرةٌ ... ولدتك محصنة بسعدِ الأسد.¹⁵¹

Hey you blessed one, the first son of Āmina,¹⁵² who gave birth to you on
Sa'd as-As'adī.

Affirming that Muhammad was blessed by God – and implying that he was a blessing to his nation, the poet refers to the moment of the Prophet's birth, which coincided with the appearance of *Sa'd as-Su'ūd* (the best of all benefics), an auspicious constellation in

¹⁴⁹ See Abū al-Ḥusayn Muslim ibn al-Ḥajjāj, *Ṣaḥīḥ Muslim*, ed. Muhammad 'Abd al-Bāqī, (Cairo: Dār Iḥyā' al-Kutub al-'Arabiyya, 5 Vols., 1955), Vol. 4, pp. 1750-51.

¹⁵⁰ Ḥassān ibn Thābit al-Anṣārī is one of the prominent poets of the early Islamic period who accompanied the Prophet Muhammad and was known as 'the Prophet Poet'. He lived 60 years in the *Jāhiliyya* and the same number of years in Islam; so he was one hundred and twenty years of age when he died. An important feature of Ḥassān's poems is their bearing on the Qur'ān and the early history of Islam as his verses are a true mirror of his time. See Ḥassān ibn Thābit, *The Diwān of Ḥassān B. Thābit*, ed. by Hartwig Hirschfeld, (Leyden: E. J. Brill & London: LUZAC & CO., 1910), pp. 1-8.

¹⁵¹ *Ibid.*, p. 58 (of the *Diwān*'s part).

¹⁵² She is Āmina bint Wahb, the Mother of the Prophet Muhammad.

the view of the pre-Islamic Arabs. When praising the Caliph 'Alī, Umm Sinān bint Khaythama asserts:¹⁵³

هذا عليٌّ كاللّلال تحفّه ... وسط السماء من الكواكب أسعدُ.¹⁵⁴

Here is 'Alī, who appears like a crescent in the sky surrounded by fortunate planets.

The poet makes use of the inherited idea that the Moon is influenced by the planets with which it is in conjunction and according to their nature, good or bad, the Moon will acquire a malefic or benefic aspect. Now, the Moon alone is benefic, but the poet may want to draw attention to the importance of the companions of 'Alī as Caliph rather than as a private individual. From this political viewpoint, his companions are seen as 'fortunate planets' supporting his efforts on behalf of the Muslim community. Moreover, portraying 'Alī's appearance as a crescent not a full moon signifies that his power and influence will grow, as the crescent grows to fullness. A promising future is thus to be expected then.

Moreover, it was not only poets who seemed to cling to the idea that it was possible to draw omens and prognostications from the configuration of the upper world and attributed their destiny to them. There are accounts suggesting that prominent figures of the early Islamic society still believed in some of the astrological principles of the pagan legacy.¹⁵⁵ An outstanding but dubious example is the fourth Orthodox Caliph, 'Alī ibn Abī Ṭālib. It is claimed that he avoided going on expeditions on Wednesdays, as Arabs used to be pessimistic about that day, particularly when it coincided with a day of the month containing the number four (4, 14, 24), regarding these as inauspicious dates (*naḥs*) on which to undertake certain activities such as traveling, going on expeditions

¹⁵³ She was an illustrious female poet. She witnessed the establishment of the Umayyad Caliphate and had a famous dispute with the Caliph Mu'āwiya ibn Abī Sufyān, the founder of the Umayyad dynasty, when he jailed her grandson. (See Kaḥḥāla, *A ṯām an-Nisā'*, Vol. 2, pp. 263- 65).

¹⁵⁴ Ṣaqr, *Shā'irāt al-'Arab*, p. 176.

¹⁵⁵ Yaḥyā 'Abd al-Amīr Shāmī, *An-Nujūm fī ash-Shi'ar al-'Arabī al-Qadīm ḥattā Awāḥkir al-'Aṣr al-Umawī* (Beirut: Dār al-Āfāq al-Jadīda, 1982), pp. 67-72.

or getting married.¹⁵⁶ However, we find in al-Mas‘ūdī’s *Murūj adh-Dhahab* that ‘Ali ibn Abī Ṭālib ‘had prepared the army for an expedition on Wednesday the first of *Safar*’,¹⁵⁷ which is an Arabic lunar month that the pre-Islamic Arabs used to regard as especially maleficent. Moreover, ‘Ali himself, in the book that is attributed to him, criticizes the art of astrology and refutes the idea that certain dates or periods are inauspicious.¹⁵⁸

It was not only the Islamic hostility to astrology that led to the paucity of astrological references in early Islamic poems; it was the Islamic attitude towards the art of poetry in general. Both the form and the content were regarded with suspicion. Islam did not criticise the art of astrology only; it also openly rebuked the poetic art and the poets, particularly those whose poetic meanings still expressed pagan ideas.¹⁵⁹ The Qur’ān attacks poets in the following verse: ‘And the poets, it is those straying in evil who follow them, Have you not seen how they wander distracted in every valley, and that they say what they don’t practice, except those who believe, work righteousness, engaged much in the remembrance of Allah [...]’.¹⁶⁰ Labīd ibn Abī Rabī‘a, an illustrious poet in the *Jāhili* period, upon his conversion to Islam gave up the art of composing

¹⁵⁶ Al-Mas‘ūdī, *Murūj*, Vol. 2, p. 160.

¹⁵⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 294.

¹⁵⁸ See ‘Izz ad-Dīn ‘Abd al-Ḥamīd al-Madā’inī, *Sharḥ Nahj al-Balāgh al-Jāmi‘ li Khuṭab wa Hikam wa Rasā’ al-Imām ‘Alī ibn Abī Ṭālib*, ed. by Husayn al-A‘lamī, (Beirut: Mu‘assasat al-A‘lamī li ‘l-Maṭbū‘āt, 20 Vols., 1995), Vol. 5, p. 309.

¹⁵⁹ For more information about the status of poems and poets in the early Islamic period see Shawqī Dayf, *At-Taṭawwur wa ‘l-Tajdīd fī ash-Shi‘r al-‘Umarī* (Cairo: Dār al-Ma‘ārif, 1977), pp. 13-21; Ḥusayn al-Ḥāj Ḥasan, *Adab al-‘Arab fī Ṣadr al-Islām* (Beirut: al-Mu‘assasa al-Jāmi‘iyya li ‘d-Dirāsāt wa ‘n-Nashr wa ‘t-Tawzī‘, 1992), pp. 78-90; Muhammad ‘Uthmān ‘Alī, *Fī Adab al-Islam (‘Aṣr al-Nubuwwa wa ‘l-Rāshidīn wa Banī-Umayyā): Dirāsa waṣfiyya Taḥlīliyya* (Beirut: Dār al-Awzā‘ī, 1984), pp. 83- 120; and Ḥabīb Yūsuf Muḡniyya, *Al-Adab al-‘Arabī: min Zuhūr al-Islām illā Nihāyat al-‘Aṣr al-Rāshidī (1-40 H.)* (Beirut: Dār wa Maktabat al-Hilāl, 1995), pp. 69-118. Those interested in studying literature from the Islamic perspective may also find the following reference useful: Ahmad Muhammad ‘Alī, *Al-Adab al-Islāmī: Ḍarūra* (Cairo: Dār al-Sahwa li ‘n-Nashr wa ‘t-Tawzī‘, 1991), and Muhammad Hasan Brīghish, *Al-Adab al-Islāmī: Uṣūluhu wa Simātuh* (Amman: Dār al-Bashīr, 1992).

¹⁶⁰ Al-Qur’ān, Ash-Shu‘arā (The Poets), 19, 26, 224-27.

{و الشعرأه يثبعم الغاؤون، ألم تر أنهم في كل واد يهيمون، و أنهم يقولون ما لا يفعلون، إلا الذين آمنوا و عملوا الصالحات ... }.

poems,¹⁶¹ although he was one of the authors of the most famous poetic works in all *Jāhili* literature, known collectively as the *Mu'allaqāt*, or 'Suspended Poems'.¹⁶²

There are a number of anecdotes that illustrate that in the early Islamic period any poet who dared to compose poems in modes that were regarded as opposing Islamic principles, such as *hijā'* (satires) and *ghazal fāhish* (erotic poetry), was subject to punishment.¹⁶³ A case in point is al-Ḥuṭay'a (d. approx. 41/ 661)¹⁶⁴ whom the Caliph 'Umar ibn al-Khattāb imprisoned because of the lines he had composed lampooning Az-Zibriqān ibn Badr (d. approx. 45/ 665).¹⁶⁵ Anecdotes of this nature, which illustrate the punishment of those whose verses strongly criticised or held up to ridicule some Islamic

¹⁶¹ Shawqī Dayf, *Al- 'Aṣr al-Islāmī* (Cairo: Dār al-Ma'ārif, 1996), pp. 90-91.

¹⁶² These are the most famous poems of the *Jāhili* period. The original meaning of the title was lost and various explanations were suggested to interpret the term *mu'allaqa* (plur. *mu'allaqāt*) and to account for its application to a particular collection of odes. Two that gained wide acceptance by many eminent scholars were those of Sir Charles Lyall and T. Nöldeke. A. J. Arberry, summing up the two proposals explains that the first argues that 'the name is most likely derived from the word *ʾilk*, meaning "a precious thing, or a thing held in high estimation," "hung up" in a place of honour, or in a conspicuous place, in a treasury or storehouse.' T. Nöldeke advanced a conjecture somewhat similar to this; he pointed out that certain Arab authors in the Middle Ages used the fanciful title 'collar' (*simṭ*) for their books, and called attention to the fact that *Mu'allaqāt* could be understood to mean 'necklaces'. (See A. J. Arberry, *The Seven Odes: the First Chapter in Arabic Literature* (London: George Allen & Unwin Ltd. & New York: The Macmillan Company, 1957), p. 22. The number of these odes is variable, some editors recognising seven; others, ten. For more information see Abdullah al-Ḥasan al-Zūnī, *Sharḥ al-Mu'allaqāt as-Sab'*, ed. by Muhammad al-Fāqīlī (Beirut: Al-Maktaba al-'Aṣriyya, 1998); and for the same author and editor *Sharḥ al-Mu'allaqāt al-'Ashr* (Beirut: Al-Maktaba al-'Aṣriyya, 1998).

¹⁶³ Brīghish, *Al-Adab al-Islāmī*, p. 80.

¹⁶⁴ Jarwal ibn Aws al-Ḥuṭay'a ('the Dwarf'), a famous poet of early Islamic period. Some of his poems led the Caliph 'Umar ibn al-Khattāb to incarcerate him. The date of his death is not certain and could be in 41/ 661. (See J. E. Montgomery, 'al- Ḥuṭay'a', in *Encyclopedia of Arabic Literature*, vol. 1, p. 300).

¹⁶⁵ Az-Zibriqān ibn Badr at-Tamīmī, was one of the Prophets' companions and a chief of his tribe. His name was al-Husayn; his nickname, Az-Zibriqān, means Moon bestowed on him because he was so handsome. (Bassam 'Abd al-Wahhāb al-Jābī, *Mu ḡam al-A ʾlām: Mu ḡam Tarājim li Ashhar ar-Rijāl wa ʾn-Nisā' min al-'Arab wa ʾl-Musta ʾribīn wa ʾl-Mustashriqīn* (Cyprus: al-Jaffān & al-Jābī li ʾṭ-Ṭibā'a wa ʾn-Nashr, 1987), p. 277. For the full story see Muhammad ibn Sallām al-Jumaḡī, *Ṭabaqāt ash-Shu ʾarā'*, ed. Ṭahā Ibrāhīm, with an introduction by J. Goldziher (Beirut: Dār al-Kutub al-'Ilmiyya, 1982), pp. 50-51.

virtues indicate that pressure from the religious authorities was one of the major factors diminishing the number of astrological references in early Islamic poetry. Indeed, the majority of cosmological references found in the poetry of that period are astronomical in nature, since this was the branch of astral knowledge which Islam appreciated because of its close relevance to Islamic ritual.¹⁶⁶

The question arises, however, whether in this period a clear distinction was made between astrology and astronomy. Several scholars have argued that the two disciplines were thought to be identical, and the claim has been made that practical astrology should be seen as the prime motivation that 'gave partial incentive for the study and development of astronomy'.¹⁶⁷ Other scholars refute this idea and attempt to show that a clear distinction had been made between the two concepts; they consult both technical and non-technical sources in order to assess the scientific and social perception of these two disciplines and ascertain the extent to which the separation between astronomy and astrology was achieved in mediaeval times.¹⁶⁸ Indeed, the rarity of astrological allusions and the abundance of astronomical references in the literary production of the early Islamic period can be added to the evidences that indicate that astrology and astronomy were clearly distinguished from each other and considered under two completely different categories: superstition and science respectively. Reflections of that distinction in the domain of literature demonstrate clearly how the boundaries set by the new religion impacted on society at large: the distinction was not conceived and understood only by the practitioners of the art of the stars but also by poets, the representatives of both the mass and cultivated minds. This assertion becomes more convincing if considered in the light of Cohen-Mor's argument that evidence from the realm of literature constitutes 'statements on culture and society',¹⁶⁹ and that the cultural and social contexts also shed light on literature. Cohen-Mor argues further that 'literature is

¹⁶⁶ See C. A. Nallino, 'Astronomy', *First E. I.*, Vol. 1, p. 498.

¹⁶⁷ Ahmad S. Dallal, 'Astrology', in *Encyclopedia of Islam and the Muslim World*, Vol. 1, p. 86. Other scholars who support this view include E. S. Kennedy, 'The Arabic Heritage in the Exact Sciences,' *Al-Abhāth*, 23 (1970): pp. 327-44 (particularly p. 329); Albert Hourani, *A History of the Arab Peoples* (Cambridge: Belknap Press, 1991), p. 76; and Nasr, *An Introduction to Islamic Cosmological Doctrine*, p. 75.

¹⁶⁸ One outstanding scholar who holds this opinion is George Saliba's 'Astronomy and Astrology in Medieval Arabic Thought', pp. 131-164.

¹⁶⁹ Cohen-Mor, *A Matter of Fate*, p. xx.

the most faithful and authentic mirror of a living reality. As such, literary texts, aside from being works of art, are also social documents'.¹⁷⁰ The Syrian novelist and sociologist Halim Barakat also holds this view: 'Poems, stories, novels, plays, paintings, graphics and songs constitute historical sources of knowledge about society as well as aesthetic objects to be appreciated in their own right'.¹⁷¹ Thus, this literary phenomenon can be taken as evidence, drawn from non-technical sources, that contradicts the claim that early Islamic society failed to discriminate between astrology and astronomy and dealt with them interchangeably. Poets distinguished clearly between astrology and astronomy in both their subject matter and method of proof when employing cosmological references in their works; consequently their metaphorical language refers preponderantly to astronomy.¹⁷²

III. 3: Conclusion

We have seen in this chapter that some aspects of the popular beliefs of pagan Arab society were strongly influenced in shaping the ideology of that society. Notable among these were submission to the malignant and inescapable power of *dahr* and a belief that methods of divination, including astrology, could reveal the secrets of the future and permit individuals to change or avoid an evil destiny, although such prognostications were held to be effective only in relatively trivial matters.

While the belief in *dahr* was one of the pagan legacy inherited from *Jāhili* society that survived the transformation of the community brought about by Islam, judicial astrology's claim to foreknow the future – albeit in a limited sense – clashed with orthodox Islamic ideology, which, however, encouraged the development of natural astrology; and the Prophet himself practised a form of onomancy. Thus while astrology and its secretive practitioners enjoyed a privileged position in *Jāhili* society, with the

¹⁷⁰ Ibid.

¹⁷¹ Halim Barakāt, *The Arab World: Society, Culture, and State* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1993), p. 210.

¹⁷² A valuable work on the subject of astral references in classical Arabic literature is that of Shāmī, *An-Nujūm fi ash-Shi'ar al-'Arabī al-Qadīm*. He has found that the majority of astral references are of astronomical in nature or are employed for aesthetic effect.

establishment of Islam the art was attacked as a pagan practice. Consequently we find very few astrological references in the poetry of the two periods under discussion: in the *Jāhilliyya* because the knowledge was esoteric and the preserve of a small elite, and in the early Islamic period because it was regarded as incompatible with the Islamic doctrine regarding free will and predestination.

In the mediaeval period the status of astrology changed: besides its transformation from an art into a science, which was due to the translation movement, and the effect this transformation had on its acceptability among the ruling elite, there were other factors that gave astrology legitimacy and allowed it to achieve an unprecedented authority. These factors and their effects on the variety of astrological references found in Umayyad and Abbasid poetry will be discussed in the next chapter.

Chapter IV: Political, Theological and Philosophical Attitudes to Astrology as Reflected in the Poetry of the Mediaeval Period

IV. 1: Introduction

The previous chapter endeavoured to position the art of astrology within that of the *Jāhili* and early Islamic periods, primarily by investigating and elucidating attitudes to the notion of *qadar* (fate) and the ideology in which it was embedded. These attitudes were revelatory of the broader world view of the Arabs of those periods, and their shifts tell us a good deal about the importance given to the nature and role of fate and about the various understandings of its influence. The pre-Islamic Arab's notion of *qadar* was in some ways similar to that of the early Muslims: both emphasised predetermination and the irresistible power of fate. But while the *Jāhili* Arabs identified fate with the malign power of *dahr*, the Muslims believed the power of fate lays in the hands of God the Omnipotent, who alone is responsible for the fate of the whole universe. Thus, the astrology of the pre-Islamic era was one aspect of divination, *kihāna*, and was able (or claimed) to reveal in advance an individual's destiny, which could be avoided by taking certain precautions. These precautions, however, were considered effective only in relatively trivial cases; they were useless in the areas of major impact: a person's happiness or misery, sustenance (*rizq*), one's term (*ajal*); the three inevitable and irresistible manifestations of fate.

In the Islamic period not only are these major aspects of life governed and controlled by the Omnipotent, but so is the destiny of the universe, in even its most minute details, determined and controlled by God alone. Astrology was considered to be of no value whatsoever, and its practitioners were subject to the death penalty. These two irreconcilable views are evident in early Islamic poetry, which reflected clearly the response of poets, and society, to astrology from the perspective of *qadar*.

When the orthodox caliphate was replaced by the dynastic rule of the Umayyad and subsequent dynasties the status of astrology was changed dramatically. The idea that the stars, as indicators, play a role in the life of human beings found powerful supporters in some governors of the Islamic world, who allowed astrology to fulfill public function regardless of the hostility of the official religion of that society. This social phenomenon generated rich material of a controversial character in the realm of literature.

Investigating the factors and impact of mediaeval political, theological and philosophical attitudes to astrology, in relation to the notions of free will and predestination, and its impact on the poetic production of that period is the concern of the following discussion.

IV. 2: Factors of the Revival of Astrology

There is no doubt that mediaeval Arabic astrology reached its apogee in the Abbasid period. How and why did this happen? How did the discipline manage to achieve this position after the severe decline it experienced in the early Islamic period? The answer seems to lie in the two constant factors that determined the status of astrology: legitimacy and methodology. In the pre-Islamic period astrology was given legitimacy as part of the pagan way of life, but its high social status was strongly opposed by the new religion, which sought to abolish beliefs and practices of a clearly pagan nature that were considered irreconcilable with the world view of Islam, centred as it was on the notion of one all-powerful God. It was an age which lacked a coherent astrological theory, and when practitioners relied on the stereotyped inherited system of the lunar mansions and the signs of the zodiac, thus, lacking any scientific credibility, astrology failed to defend itself against the condemnation it received from Islam, but the wound was not mortal; astrology merely slept.

The revival of astrology under the Abbasids can be attributed to a number of factors. First, the translation movement that started in the late Umayyad period and flourished during the Abbasid era can be seen as the physician that revived the body of astrology. The reappearance of a learnable astrology founded upon an organised and plausible system of knowledge established the scientific status of astrology. Carlo Alonso Nallino comments on the special character of mediaeval Muslim astrology that:

Astrology [...] becomes an art which demands a solid scientific preparation, and which tends to give an ever greater mathematical complication and exactness to its methods of research among celestial phenomena [...] while] in the Hellenistic world astrology flourishes while astronomy decays; in the Musalmān world of the Middle Ages astrology becomes a potent ally of mathematical and observational astronomy.¹

¹ Nallino, 'Sun, Moon, and Stars (Muhammadan)', in *Encyclopaedia of Religion and Ethics*, Vol. xii, p. 91.

With this new advantage, beside other factors that will be discussed soon, astrology attracted the elite of Abbasid society and became very influential in the politics of the court.

It should be born in mind that the unified governance of the early Islamic period had undergone a process of separation of powers. The disappearance of the single religio-political leadership was advantageous for astrology or any knowledge of pagan nature or origin. Patricia Crone comments on this political phenomena that:

By c. 800 the community of believers came in several rival versions and had at least two different types of leadership within each version, one political and the other religious. The proliferation of the types of leadership was not to stop there, for the caliphs soon came to coexist with kings and sultans, while the religious scholars soon came to coexist with philosophers and Sufis (mystics) too.²

This separation may have been a factor in the decline of Islamic values in the hearts of a number of Muslim rulers, who encouraged activities they saw as useful regardless of whether the religious men considered them to be irreconcilable with Islamic values and principles. Indeed Some were decidedly irreligious; one extreme example is Al-Walīd ibn Yazīd (88-126/ 707-744),³ the Umayyad Caliph, who was notorious for indulging openly in all sorts of dubious entertainments and was even accused of atheism. It is said that he happened to open the Qur'an accidentally and found the verse {استفتحوا و خاب كل} ⁴ *و استفتحوا و خاب كل*,⁴ a verse threatening dictators and stubborn people. Believing that he himself was the tyrant referred to in this verse, he ordered the

² Crone, *Medieval Islamic Political Thought*, p. 32.

³ Al-Walīd ibn Yazīd ibn 'Abd al-Malik ibn Marwān ascended the throne after the death of his uncle, Hishām ibn 'abd al-Malik in 125/ 743. He was notorious for indulging openly in all sorts of dubious entertainments and was even accused of atheism. His reign lasted only for one year and three months. His killer was his successor, his cousin Yazīd ibn al-Walīd ibn 'Abd al-Malik (86- 126/ 750-744), who himself was poisoned and died less than six months after becoming caliph. For more information about al-Walīd see Al-Aṣḥānī, *Al-Aghānī*, Vol. 7, pp. 5- 97; and for the incident with the Qur'an see particularly pp. 59-60.

⁴ Al-Qur'ān, Ibrāhīm, 14, 14, 15. The translation is as follows: 'And they [the disbelievers] sought succor from God; and disappointed was every obstinate tyrant. Beyond him is Gehenna, and he shall be given to drink from festering pus'. (M. M. Khatib (trans.), *The Bounteous Koran: A Translation of Meaning and Commentary* (London: Macmillan Press, 1986). p 332.

Qurʾān to be hung on a wall and then shot arrows into it until it was in tatters. Al-Walīd then composed these lines:

أترعد كل جبار عنيد ... فيها أنا ذاك جبار عبيد.
إذا لاقيت ربك يوم حشر ... فقل لله مزقتني وليد.

Are you [Qurʾān] threatening dictators and stubborn people? Well then, I am that dictator and stubborn person.
When you meet your Lord on the Day of Judgment, say then, ‘ Oh God, Walīd tore me to pieces’!

It is then related that after this incident al-Walīd was brutally killed and his head hung for a while in the Damascus Mosque.

An example of the rulers’ encouragement and patronage of literary works that included astrological references is the eulogy composed by Ṭurayḥ ibn Ismāʿil ath-Thaqafī (d. 165/ 781),⁵ congratulating the Umayyad caliph Marwān ibn-Muhammad (72-132/ 692-750) his ascension to the throne, in which he prognosticates:

تَسُوهُ عِدَاكَ فِي سِنَادٍ وَ نِعْمَةٍ خَلَقْتَنَا تَسْعِينَ عَامًا وَ أَشْهُرًا.⁶

You will frustrate your enemies for ninety years and a few months,
in which you will be granted victory and blessing.

The Caliph, whose curiosity aroused, asked the poet to be more specific: ‘How many additional months will my reign last exactly?’ The poet replied ‘One hundred, prince of the faithful, in which you will reach your apogee and be fortunate in victory’. Marwān, who was evidently pleased with this prediction, ordered that the poet be rewarded with one hundred thousand *dirham*,⁷ a prize a thousand times greater than the number of the

⁵ Ṭurayḥ ibn Ismāʿil ath-Thaqafī was born in the Umayyad period and witnessed the first thirty years of the Abbasid period; he died during the reign of the third Abbasid Caliph, al-Mahdī (r. 775-85). He devoted a great portion of his panegyric poems to the Umayyad Caliph al-Walīd ibn Yazīd, who in turn honoured him and gave him privileges over other court poets. For more details of his biography see al-Aṣfahani, *Al-Aghānī*, Vol. 4, pp. 298- 323.

⁶ Ibn ʿAbd Rabbih, *Al-ʿIqd al-Farīd*, Vol. 1, p 319.

⁷ See *ibid.*

predicted months. Yet the gullible caliph seems to have been the victim of a confidence trick, as his rule lasted a mere six years and he was beheaded in Egypt in 750.⁸

Our point in referring to this tragi-comic story is to illustrate that political figures of the highest rank accepted the validity of such faked knowledge and to suggest that such acceptance was a political factor encouraging the utilisation of astrological references in literary works. It also suggests that the ideology of the ruling elite, who were inclined to a strong belief in astrology, influenced the character of the literature of that period, encouraging works that emphasised the positive side of this knowledge, and affirmed its validity against the criticisms of orthodox Islam.

But criticism was severe: astrologers became the target of regular attack and numerous condemnations by the men of religion and this threatened the astrologers' high status.⁹ They therefore found it crucial to defend their discipline against any condemnation in order to keep their place and preserve their patronage.¹⁰ Ahmad Dallal notes: 'Although astrology continued to have appeal within the elite political culture and in popular practice, the larger, socially based religious culture vehemently opposed it'.¹¹ Thus, astrologers had to continue struggling to justify the validity of their discipline; this time not to demonstrate its scientific value or to be granted political acceptance, which were

⁸ Marwān ibn Muhammad ibn Marwān ibn al-Ḥakam al-Umawī was given the uncomplimentary nickname al-Ḥimār (the Donkey), because, his sycophants claimed, of his courage on the battlefield. He was the last Umayyad caliph. His head was cut off by the Abbasid rebels and sent to the first Abbasid Caliph, Abu al-ʿAbbas as-Saffāḥ. The period of his caliphate was only five years and ten months, far less than the poet's prediction. For more details see az-Ziriklī, *Al-A ʿlam*, Vol. 8, pp. 96-97.

⁹ See Yahya J. Michot, 'Ibn Taymiyya on Astrology: Annotated Translation of Three Fatwas', in Emilie Savage-Smith (ed.), *Magic and Divination in Early Islam* (Aldershot: Ashgate Publishing Limited, 2004), pp. 277-340, (particularly, p. 278).

¹⁰ It is a mistake to think that all astrologers of that time enjoyed a privileged status. Abū Ma'shar Ja'far ibn Muhammad al-Balkhī known Albumasar (787-886 AD.), who was one of the leading astrologers of the Muslim world, is reported to have received a whipping administered because of his practice of astrology at the time of the Caliph al-Musta'in (862- 866 AD.). (For full information about this famous astrologer see al-Qifī, *Tārīkh al-Ḥukamā'*, pp. 152- 53; and David Pingree, 'Abū Ma'shar', in Charles Coulston Gillispie (ed.) *Dictionary of Scientific Biography*, Vol. 1, pp. 32-39. So this privilege seems to have been subject to the ruler's attitude and mood of thought: If he took a positive view of astrology the practitioner of the science was granted security; if not, the astrologers could face persecution.

¹¹ Ahmad S. Dallal, 'Astrology', in Richard C. Martin (ed. in chief), *Encyclopedia of Islam and the Muslim World*, (New York and Detroit: Macmillan Reference, 2 Vols., 2004), Vol. 1, p. 86.

already obtained, but to represent its principles as consistent with their society's Islamic values through 'Islamising astrology'.¹²

As mentioned earlier, Islam opposed the art of divination mainly because the basic assumptions of the art were held to be irreconcilable with the Islamic doctrine concerning the notions of determinism and free will as conceived, albeit in a moderate way, by orthodox Muslims. However, views on this issue began to change, citing evidence from the Qur'ān and Hadith to form new ideologies that regarded determinism and free will as polar opposites. This ideological shift supported the claim of astrology to be reconcilable with Islamic principles.

Shortly after the establishment of the Umayyad Caliphate in 661 AD the concepts of free will and predestination yielded contradictory views and scholars in the fields of theology and philosophy engaged in theoretical debates upon which a great body of literature was built. The contradiction regarding this dichotomy was sharpened when people holding opposing views gradually came to adopt distinct sets of verses and traditions related to the subject of freedom and determinism and reworked them to serve their purposes, refusing to accept a unified conception reconciling divine determinism and human free will, as had been the case during the life of the Prophet Muhammad and at the time of the four orthodox caliphs. Gai Eaton notes that 'the advocates of 'determinism' and the advocates of 'free will' have argued as fiercely in the Islamic world as elsewhere, and both have found appropriate texts in the Qur'ān and in the *ḥadīth* literature to support superficially opposite points of view'.¹³ The question whether human will is indeed free attracted the attention of many Islamic thinkers who sought to shed light on the nature of man's free will in relation to God's omnipotence. The theological debate crystallised around two opposing parties: the qadarites, advocates of free will, and the jabrites, advocates of predestination.¹⁴ The difficult

¹² It is said that it was Abu Ma'shar's involvement in a bitter quarrel with the Arabic philosopher, Abu Yusuf Ya'qub al-Kindi (796-873 A.D.) that drove him to realise the necessity of providing the philosophical and historical justifications of his subject, 'and to discoursing on and exemplifying the practical efficacy of this science'. See Pingree, 'Abū Ma'shar', in *Dictionary of Scientific Biography*, Vol. 1, p. 33.

¹³ Gai Eaton, *Islam and the Destiny of Man* (Cambridge: The Islamic Texts Society, 1998), p. 209.

doctrine of the irreconcilability of freedom and necessity gave rise to a great deal of confusion and problematic debate, particularly in the Umayyad and Abbasid eras, when theological thought was systemised and given logical expression through the efforts of various sects and religious groups. The attempt to reconcile these two concepts with divine omniscience and justice was the main cause of confusion, and was one of the most interesting controversial issues among the theologians and philosophers of these periods.

In a nutshell, the aspect of the problem that concerned astrology is as follows: if we accept that every event that occurs in human life has already been written and ordained, are these events predictable occurrences that man can legitimately gain prior knowledge of and accordingly take legitimate action to avoid evil fortune, thus exercising free will without in any way contradicting the doctrine of divine omnipotence? If all is preordained and such knowledge and action are legitimate, then that knowledge and action are also preordained and not to be condemned. Thus the individual is granted freedom to act in the human sphere while remaining subject to God's will as inscribed on the Preserved Table. However, once human free will and divine predetermination were conceptualised as opposites, astrology was open to severe attacks from the prevailed doctrine of the determinists who rejected its claim to be able to help alter the course of events. In addition, many simply denied its reliability, or saw it as a form of paganism that endowed the stars with agency and intelligence. Political considerations were another element of the opposition to astrology, which was exacerbated by the hostility between the religious establishment and the world of the princely court.

IV. 2. 1: Astrology and the Theological and Philosophical Aspects of the Notions of Free Will and Determinism

In the early stage of this debate, the problem of free will and predestination was restricted to its inherent theological and ethical dimensions. The debate was concerned with questions such as, what is the real meaning of free will, which humanity has

¹⁴ For the arguments used by these two groups and a third intermediate one, see Muhammad Badr al-Dīn 'Alawī, *Fatalism, Free will, and Acquisition as Viewed by Muslim Sects* (Lahore: Orientalia, 1956), pp. 10-24; and for the use of the terms *qadariyyat* and *jabriyyat* see Watt, *The Formative Period of Islamic Thought*, 1973, pp. 116- 18. According to ash-Shahristānī, the appearance of this division of opinion related to Islamic fundamental doctrine may be traced back to the debates over the notion of *qadar* that took place at the end of the orthodox caliphate. See ash-Shahristānī, *Al-Milal wa 'h-Nihal*, Vol. 1, p. 31.

received as a gift from God and which sets us apart from animals and inanimate objects? Is man in reality free to practise his will in a world where his actions are restricted and constrained? When a person commits evil acts and claims that external forces drove him or her to act in such a way, who is then responsible for the evil deeds in this world? If man is truly responsible for his actions, how, then, can this free will be viewed as compatible with God's will? On the other hand, if man is to be considered as not responsible for his actions how are concepts such as punishment, reward and justice to be understood?¹⁵

With the formation of different religious and theological sects at the beginning of the Umayyad era, a third dimension was added to those mentioned above: the political dimension. At that time rival parties seized the opportunity to advance their arguments against one another as political groups took advantage of the contradictions perceived to exist between predetermination and free will. The Umayyads were the first political power in Islamic history to identify with one of these two diametrically opposed parties and engage in the polemics revolving around them.¹⁶ The Caliphate made use of the idea of predestination to justify its rule. Watt comments:

The Umayyad claims that they were caliphs of God and their rule divinely predetermined are to some extent an abuse of predestination views; yet because this was mostly in line with the old Arab conception it preserved some of the positive value of that and doubtless helped to reduce anxiety in a time of rapid social change.¹⁷

Crone, however, argues that the Umayyads' claim that their power was decreed by God has nothing to do with the commonly held idea that they 'supported determinism against the doctrine of free will (known as qadarism) in an effort to deprive their subjects of a right to resist'.¹⁸ She continues:

¹⁵ As a full discussion of these questions is beyond the scope of this study interested readers are referred to a number of works that address them in detail, such as: al-Qāḍī, *Al-Muḥīt bi al-Taklīf*; and Michel E. Marmūra (ed.), *Islamic Theology and Philosophy: Studies in Honor of George F. Hourani* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1984).

¹⁶ See Tilman Nagel, *The History of Islamic Theology from Muhammad to the Present*, translated from the German by Thomas Thornton (Princeton: Markus Wiener Publishers, 2000), pp. 35-41.

¹⁷ Watt, *The Formative Period of Islamic Thought*, p. 114.

¹⁸ Crone, *Medieval Islamic Political Thought*, p. 35.

Although it is undoubtedly true that the Umayyads were determinists, it has to be remembered that so were most of their enemies, be they Khārijites, Murji'ites, or Shī'ites. Since the political debate took place within a generally determinist ambiance, the Umayyads had no reason to give much thought to the relationship between divine omnipotence and human action for purposes of justifying their regime, nor do they seem to have done so. They simply took their success to mean that God was on their side.¹⁹

Thus the Umayyads took it as axiomatic that, as Luther succinctly puts it, 'God helps the strongest', and 'those of highest merits' to rule his subjects.²⁰ Moreover, Crone argues that the Umayyads grounded their right to the caliphate in the legitimacy of 'Uthmān, the third orthodox caliph, 'who had been lawfully elected by consultation (*shūrā*) yet the legitimate Caliph wrongly killed; thus God has chosen the Umayyads, or indeed 'Uthmān's kinsmen and avengers, to be had taken over his position as imam of guidance.²¹ The Umayyads' unpopularity and subsequent low reputation gave opponents of determinism a convenient weapon. Crone comments: 'The fact that the Umayyads had expressed themselves in a determinist vein came in handy for the advocates of free will, who used it to discredit the determinist position, perhaps already in the Umayyad period and certainly in later times'.²² However, when the Abbasids seized power from the Umayyads in 132/ 749 they made no attempt to discredit the determinist position. On the contrary: to support their claim to the caliphate, they too used the doctrine of determinism to justify their rule although they 'altered the relevance of the doctrine to [fit] current politics'.²³ Being supported and aided by the Khurasānī rebels, and as descendants of the Prophet Muhammad's family, the Abbasids saw themselves as the strongest and of highest merits. Rather than simply accept and assert that God was on their side, as the Umayyads had done, however, took a crucial strategic decision, which was to make use of astrology: henceforth the court astrologer

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 35.

²⁰ Luther (d. 1546), 'On Secular Authority', cited in *Ibid.*, p. 34.

²¹ See Patricia Crone and Martin Hinds, *God's Caliph: Religious Authority in the First Centuries of Islam* (Cambridge and New York: Cambridge University Press, 1990), p. 31-32.

²² Crone, *Medieval Islamic Political Thought*, p. 35

²³ Watt, *The Formative Period of Islamic Thought*, p. 107.

was 'declared openly to be one of the most important court officials'.²⁴ Al-Manṣūr (r.754-75) in particular, the second Caliph and the one generally considered to have established the Caliphate, was fully aware that this innovation would appeal to a large number of groups, particularly among the Persian population, who had supported the Abbasids against the Umayyads. Dimitri Gutas realizes how the early Abbasid caliphs were aware that keeping the newly formed state unified depended largely on their ability to form political coalitions with the different major factions that had participated in the revolution against the Umayyads.²⁵ In addition to those political accommodations, the Abbasid caliphs realised that in order to gain legitimacy in the eyes of those factions, they 'had to be mindful of their ideological appeasement'.²⁶ In this regard the faction that most needed to be appeased was the coalition that had been most instrumental in bringing the Abbasids to power: the Persian faction. For this reason the early Abbasid caliphs expanded their imperial ideology to include the concerns of the Persian contingent. This was done by promulgating the view that the Abbasid dynasty, in addition to being the descendants of the Prophet and hence satisfying the demands of both Sunnī and Shī'ī Muslims was at the same time the successor of the ancient imperial dynasties in Iraq and Iran, from the Babylonians through to the Sasanians, their immediate predecessors. Moreover, to identify with the Sasanians culture meant to show interest and appear to believe in astrology and to allow it to play a crucial role in affirming 'the political message that the dynastic rule of the 'Abbāsids [was] unassailable'.²⁷ Abū Sahl ibn Nawbakht,²⁸ the court astrologer of the Abbasid caliphs from al-Manṣūr (754-774 AD.) to Hārūn ar-Rashīd (786-809 AD.),²⁹ devoted his

²⁴ Al-Mas'ūdī, *Murūj adh-Dhahab*, Vol. 4, p. 250.

²⁵ The early Abbasid rulers employed all possible means to give their caliphate legitimacy in the eyes of their subjects, even the most naive; dreams played a vital role here. It is related that al-Manṣūr's mother said: 'When I was pregnant with al-Manṣūr I had a dream that I gave birth to a lion that was roaring and striking the ground with his tail; then I saw lions come from all different directions towards him, and they all prostrated themselves before him'. (See *ibid.*, Vol. 3, p. 235). This is not so much a dream as a message of clear political significance.

²⁶ Gutas, *Greek Thought, Arabic Culture*, p. 29.

²⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 46.

²⁸ For the life and works of Abū Sahl see D. Pingree, 'Abū Sahl b. Nawbakht', in *E. I.*, Vol. 1, p. 369.

²⁹ Al-Manṣūr and Hārūn ar-Rashīd are two of the most famous Abbasid Caliphs. The former was the builder of Baghdad and is generally credited by modern historians to be the real founder of the Abbasid state. The latter was the fourth Abbasid Caliph; his fame was spread beyond the Arab world by the

knowledge to affirm that the message to the Abbasid rulers is clear: by God's command, the stars have decreed that it is now the Abbasids' turn to rule the Empire.³⁰ The interest in Persian culture, which greatly benefited astrology, increased sharply to reach a peak with the ascent of the Mu'tazilī Caliph,³¹ al-Ma'mūn (170- 218/ 786-833)³² to the

Arabian Nights. For more information about the political role these two Caliphs played in the history of the Abbasid empire see Hugh Kennedy, *The Early Abbasid Caliphate: A Political History* (New Jersey: Barnes & Nobel Books, 1981).

³⁰ See Gutas, *Greek Thought, Arabic Culture*, pp. 45- 52.

³¹ The Mu'tazilī was a religious sect founded in Basra, in the first half of the 2nd/ 8th century by Wāṣil ibn 'Aṭā' (d. 131/ 748). Their doctrine was later systematised by Abū al-Hudhayl al-'Āllāf (d. 235/ 850) and Mu'tazilism became one of the most important theological schools of Islam. On the accession of al-Ma'mūn (see above) Mu'tazilism became, for a brief period, the official doctrine of the Abbasid State. The Mu'tazilī enjoyed the favour of three Abbasid caliphs for a period of some thirty years: al-Ma'mūn (r. 813-33), his brother al-Mu'taṣim (r. 833-42) and the latter's son al-Wāthiq (r. 842-47). When the patronage of the Abbasid Caliphs, was withdrawn, they enjoyed privileges under the Buyid, who also showed a great enthusiasm for astrology, this will be discussed in the following chapter. It was only after the Mongol attacks that Mu'tazilism as an independent doctrine finally disappeared altogether. The term has the sense of 'those who refrain taking sides in judging people'. This may refer to their view on the question of the applicable definition of a Muslim, who has committed a serious offence. Their position was that he is neither *kāfir* (disbeliever), nor *Mu'min* (a true believer), but he is *fāsiq* (malefactor), thus he is acquired an 'intermediate rank'. For an explanation of Mu'tazilism and the many sub-sects derived from it, see ash-Shahristānī, *Al-Milal, wa 'n-Niḥal*, Vol. 1, pp. 57-112; D. Gimaret, 'Mu'tazila', in *E. I.*, Vol. vii, pp. 783-93; and Crone, *Medieval Islamic Political Thought*, pp 65-69. Their method of reaching the truth is using reason on what is given in the Qur'ān. Prominent among their principles that built on that ideology is that 'God is one. He has no attributes which belong to His essence. In particular, He has no human attributes; the Qur'ān could not have been spoken by Him – it must have been created in another way'. See The Mu'tazilites were a religious sect founded in Basra, in the first half of the 2nd/ 8th century by Wāṣil ibn 'Aṭā' (d 131/ 748). They hoped to attain the truth by applying reason to what is revealed in the Quran. They emphasised the principle that God is one and has no attributes which belong to His essence; in particular, His essence contains no human attributes. Therefore, He could not have spoken the Quran, which must have come into being in another way. See Maḥmūd al-Bishbīshī, *Al-Firaq al-Islāmiyya* (Cairo: al-Maktaba at-Tijariyya al-Kubrā, 1932), pp. 15- 26.

³² Al-Ma'mūn ibn Hārūn ar-Rashīd, the seventh Abbasid caliph, who is credited with restoring unity to the empire after a long civil war that had caused a political and cultural upheaval. Though he was the elder, he was designated as heir to the throne after his brother Muhammad al-Amīn. The reason was that al-Amīn's mother Zubayda was the niece of the Caliph al-Manṣūr; he was thus of pure Hāshimite stock and Arabic blood on both his father's and his mother's side. Al-Ma'mūn, however, who was born six months before al-Amīn, was a son of a slave mother, originally Persian. Al-Amīn's pure Arab lineage proved, we assume, a disadvantage when the half-Persian al-Ma'mūn was strongly supported by the Persians, whose role as guards was growing in importance, and who secured al-Ma'mūn's victory during the civil war between him and his brother. The conflict began when the Caliph al-Amīn ordered that the name of his son Mūsā be introduced in the Friday Prayer after that of al-Ma'mūn, who believed al-Amīn intended Mūsā to succeed him as caliph. 'There followed a brisk exchange of diplomatic correspondence between the two brothers (supported respectively by the wazīr al-Faḍl b. al-Rabī' [of Arab origin] , and by the future wazīr al-Faḍl b. Sahl [of Persian origin], the text of which has been preserved by aṭ-Ṭabarī,

throne. Al-Ma'mūn was a Mu'tazilī and so strongly inclined to the Qadarite view: 'They reject the Jabrite and affirm the absolute responsibility of every individual with regard to his transgressions which could not be in any sense the work of God'.³³ Because astrology affirmed the primacy of reason and man's free will, and sought to promote intellectual freedom, it managed to establish a strong argument that human beings are able to change their destiny, and thus that God cannot be accused of determining an evil destiny for His creatures. This argument was consistent with the Mu'tazilī view, D. Gimaret asserts:

The necessary justice of God first of all excludes any notion of predestination; it would be unjust on the part of God, say the Mu'tazila, to decide in advance the fate of every man in the Hereafter and to ordain that one will be saved and another damned, without either having merited this by his actions. It is for human to decide their future lot, according to whether they choose to believe or not to believe, to obey or to disobey the Law.³⁴

Thus it is not surprising to find astrology flourishing under al-Ma'mūn, whose Mu'tazilī ideology led him to encourage astrological studies.³⁵ Astrology's privileged position

and which assumed the form of political manoeuvring or a "cold war" between Baghdad and Marw [a Persian province] preceding the armed conflict' (see F. Gabrieli, 'Al-Amīn, Muhammad', in *E. I.*, Vol. 1, p. 43; For the role of the two viziers see Ibn al-Athīr, *Al-Kāmil fī at-Tārikh*, Vol. 6, pp. 227- 35. Indeed, the conflict, from our point of view, if analysed in terms of the origin of the two rivals, their viziers, and even the cities that witnessed the politico-military conflict, should not be seen as being between two brothers fighting over a throne; it was rather between two nations struggling for power and authority, in which the result was a Persian leader dressed in an Arab costume.

³³ D. Gimaret, 'Mu'tazila', in *E. I.*, Vol. vii, p. 783. One of the prominent principles that formed the Mu'tazilī ideology and had a profound effect on astrology was their opinion on God's justice and man's freedom: 'God is the ultimate just; therefore man must be privileged with the free will to commit evil and good deeds, according to which they will be rewarded by Paradise or punished by Hell, God does not direct man's choice, for to judge men for acts they are not free to commit would not be just'. (See ash-Shahristānī, *Al-Milal wa n-Niḥal*, Vol. 1, p. 59.

³⁴ D. Gimaret, 'Mu'tazila', in *E. I.*, Vol. vii, p. 789.

³⁵ Regarding Mu'tazilism as a driver of astrological studies, M. Rekaya has noted the effect of this theological perspective in motivating the studies and researches of al-Kindī, whose works discussed a great diversity of topics, among which was astrology: 'The stimulus given to translations and to scientific works under al-Ma'mūn continued unabated, permitting the tutor of the sons of al-Mu'tasim a-Kindī, to achieve the integration of Neo-Platonism into Mu'tazilī theology'. (M. Rekaya, 'al-Ma'mūn Abu 'l-'Abbās 'Abd Allāh B. Hārūn al-Rashīd', in *E. I.*, Vol. vi, p. 338). Al-Kindī was a leading astrologer who composed one of the most influential astrological texts in the Middle Ages in the Arabic and Latin-reading world. See Charles Burnett, 'Al-Kindī on Judicial Astrology: 'The Forty Chapters'', in *Arabic Sciences and Philosophy: a historical journal*, 3 (1993): pp. 77- 117.

was short-lived, however. When al-Mu'taṣim (r. 833-42),³⁶ though Mu'tazilī, became aware of the increasing power of the Persians and the many disruptions they were causing to the stability of the Abbasid caliphate, he decided to deprive them of some of the privileges they had enjoyed since the establishment of the empire.³⁷ He came to rely mainly on the Turks, displacing the Persians, rewarding them with high positions in government and the army. This policy was seen by historians as a fatal mistake that marked the beginning of the collapse of the Abbasid empire.³⁸ Rejection of the Persian influence led al-Mu'taṣim, we assume, to reject all characteristic forms of their culture, of which astrology was a prominent feature. Being a Mu'tazilī, retained his astrologers, but weakened the privileges they were enjoying under previous Abbasid patrons, and asserted his independence of mind and will by disregarding their prognostications, notably in winning a glorious victory at 'Ammūriyyah despite their warnings that to engage in battle at an inauspicious time would lead to a disastrous defeat. Al-Wāthiq (r.

³⁶ Al-Mu'taṣim bi 'Llah Abū Ishāq Muhammad ibn Hārūn ar-Rashid was the eighth Abbasid caliph, and some have been claimed to discuss a mysterious relation with the number eight. Besides being the eighth Caliph, he was born in 180 H and died on 18 Rabī' I-227 aged 48; he had eight daughters and eight sons; he ascended the throne at 38 years of age and reigned for eight years. The prominent decisions and events of his reign were: the adoption of policy to reduce dependence on Persian army power and rely more on professional slave troops (armed *ghulmān*), mostly Turkish or Maghribī; the successful expeditions led by him personally into Anatolia against the Byzantine emperor Theophilus, sacking Anqara (Ankara) and 'Ammūriyya (Amorium) in 223/ 838; and the building of Samarra', north of Baghdad, which became the administrative capital of the Abbasid Caliph for some sixty years. For al-Mu'taṣim's life and reign see al-Mas'ūdī, *Murūj adh-Dhahab*, Vol. 4, pp. 39- 53.

³⁷ See C. E. Bosworth, 'Al-Mu'taṣim bi 'Llāh', in *E. I.*, Vol. vii, p. 779.

³⁸ Al-Mu'taṣim's second successor, al-Mutawakkil (r. 847-61), was assassinated by his Turkish slave soldiers, who then effectively took power. This marked the end of the Abbasid empire: though the Abbasid caliphs remained on the throne, they did so in name only, deprived of real legislative power, until the empire finally collapsed in 1258. It is related that when al-Mutawakkil's son, Caliph al-Mu'tazz bi 'Llāh Muhammad (r. 252-55/ 866-69) ascended the throne he gathered the court astrologers together with other guests, and asked them about his life span and the period of his reign. Forestalling the astrologers, one of the guests answered 'I know better than your astrologers, my Lord; it will be as long as the Turk allow'! See Muhammad ibn Ṭabāṭiba ibn aṭ-Ṭaqṭaqī, *Al-Fakhri fī al-Ādāb as-Sulṭāniyya wa 'l-Duwal al-Islāmiyya* (Cairo: al-Maktaba at-Tijāriyya al-Kubrā, 1927), p. 181. For more details on the dire consequences of this unwise decision for the Abbasids and the corruption unleashed within the empire see Shawqī Dayf, *Al-'Asr al-'Abbāsī ath-Thānī* (Cairo: Dār al-Ma'ārif, 1996), pp. 9- 26.

842-47), the last Mu'tazilī Caliph,³⁹ restored to astrology some of the dignity it had lost during the reign of his father, as he encouraged all branches of knowledge and engaged personally in debates between theologians and religious men concerning their different opinions regarding certain natural and metaphysical issues.⁴⁰ His successor, al-Mutawakkil (r. 847-61), repudiated the Mu'tazilī doctrine that had been the official dogma since al-Ma'mūn. This was perhaps 'the most controversial aspect of his policy'.⁴¹ He replaced Mu'tazilism with the doctrine of Ḥanbalī and other orthodox schools, with serious consequences for astrology.

However, even if some of the political elites showed no interest in astrology, the discipline continued to flourish. The ruling elite's approval and patronage was not the only factor; there was also the public appeal of astrology. The belief in astrology, though prohibited by Islam, can be attributed to the instability of the mediaeval political state, which led people to believe strongly in *tanjīm* (astrology) and other forms of divination as a kind of therapy, which comforted those desperate people who wished to escape their bleak reality. In a time of uncertainty and instability astrology offered a measure of comfort and relief, and even of hope for a better future, and a belief in these perceived benefits strongly influenced the kind of literature produced during those years. Regarding this point, in the introductory section to al-Tanukhi's *al-Faraj ba 'da al-Shidda*, the commentator 'Abbud al-Shalji, comments:

It is notable that al-Tanukhi has assigned to his *Nishwar* a number of anecdotes that point to his belief in astrology. This can be attributed to

³⁹ Al-Wāthiq bi 'Llāh ibn Hārūbn son of the Caliph al-Mu'taṣim. His brief reign was not distinguished by remarkable events. he was described as devoted to sensual pleasures. He also took considerable interest in poetry and singing being a musician and composer himself. He extended the cruel and avaricious vizierate of Ibn az-Zayyāt, his father's vizier, who invented a spiked iron cylinder (*tannūr*) for torturing his victims, in which he himself where to be tortured and died when al-Mutawakkil ascended the throne. The many anecdotes regarding the intellectual activities and controversies which took place during al-Wāthiq's reign testify the apparent intellectual curiosity of that Caliph who encouraged that environment. (See K. V. Zetterstéen-[C. E. Bosworth and E. van Donzel]), 'Al-Wāthiq bi 'Llāh', in *E. I.*, Vol. xi, p. 178).

⁴⁰ See Al-Mas'ūdī, *Murūj ad-Dhahab*, Vol. 4, pp. 64- 68.

⁴¹ See H. Kennedy, 'Al-Mutawakkil 'ala 'Llāh Abu 'l-Faḍl Dja'far', in *E. I.*, Vol., vii, p. 778.

the instability of the fourth-century political state, which led al-Tanukhi and his father to believe strongly in *tanjīm* (astrology), *ʿiyāfa* and *zajr*⁴² and such forms of divinations as a kind of therapy, which confronted those desperate people who wished to escape their bleak reality and seek refuge in an imaginary better future by any means.⁴³

We have shown that the status of astrology fluctuated according to the different political ideologies adopted by the Abbasid caliphs. Though it is to prove astrology's position at court was never entirely secure, it played a significant role on the political stage, as its usefulness was recognised by the elites. Its political character was the key factor of the revival of astrology and enabled it to survive despite the vehement hostility of Islam but it was also a weakness, since astrology was vulnerable to changes in its patrons' political policy, and its vicissitudes reflected the instability of the Abbasid political world.⁴⁴ It is a serious mistake, then, to judge Abbasid astrology as if it enjoyed a certain status throughout the whole period of the Abbasid empire, a period of almost six centuries. Political considerations were not the only factor affecting the fortunes of astrology, however, philosophical and theological arguments were also brought to bear.

The theological and ethical debate regarding the problematic notions of predetermination and free will continued into the Abbasid period, and determinism, in particular, appealed to a number of elite philosophers who took the view that man's destiny is entirely subject to God's omnipotence, employing a variety of approaches to emphasise their argument. For instance, to clarify the philosophical significance of man's ordained fate, a number of scholars used the shadow play as an example. Cohen–Mor notes that this 'occurs frequently in the Sūfī writings, particularly in connection with analogies of the shadow play to earthly life and the relation of God to human

⁴² *ʿiyāfa* is the art of drawing omens from the flight, cries of birds and their posture. *Zajr* is one of these techniques, particularly that of causing a bird to take flight by, for example, throwing a stone at it and then drawing an omen from the direction of its flight. (See T. Fahd, 'Iyāfa', in *E. I.*, Vol. iv, p. 290).

⁴³ Abū 'Alī al-Muḥsin at-Tanūkhī, *Nishwār al-Muḥāḍara wa Akhbār al-Mudhākara*, ed. 'Abbūd ash-Shālījī, (Beirut: n.p., 6 Vols., 1971), Vol. 1, p. 29 (of the introduction).

⁴⁴ Here, we should differentiate between two main kinds of astrology: court astrology, and public astrology. The discussion so far has been concerned with noted astrologers whose fame brought them close to the caliphs but whose status was strongly affected by the political situation of the time. The other group, the public astrologers, who were not famous and practised astrology to earn a modest living, were poorly qualified and seem to have never received respect or recognition. They were often mocked by both the elite and the mass. The following chapter gives some insight into their situation.

beings'.⁴⁵ Al-Ghazālī was one such philosopher, who attempted to demonstrate the relation between God-created beings, including the heavenly bodies, and their Creator, in a way that represents His subjects as puppets moved by invisible strings in a perfect performance that make the spectators believe that they themselves determine their own movements, while in fact it is God who determines them.⁴⁶

Muhyī ad-Dīn ibn al-‘Arabī (1165- 1240 AD), in his *Al-Futūhāt al-Makkiyya* (The Meccan Expeditions), describes the shadow play in a more sophisticated manner. It is ‘a parable produced by God to reveal his role as the *Muḥarrik* [the prime mover], for his creatures, in which the first figure to appear represents Adam, and the curtain or screen (*sitāra*) symbolizes the veil screening the hidden, foreordained future or the divine secret’.⁴⁷

Most important, however, for our subject are those astrologers and their philosopher advocators who employed the notions of predestination and free will in their efforts to justify astrology as being consistent with Islamic doctrine. This task is now regarded by a number of scholars as ‘the principal motivation behind the great quest by western scholars for Islamic knowledge from the tenth to twelfth centuries, a quest whose consequences were to transform European thought’.⁴⁸ In attempting to Islamise astrology, Abbasid astrologers, by manipulating the concepts of predestination and free will, ‘explicitly defy the common assumption that astrology and fatalism walked hand in hand’,⁴⁹ the assumption that, according to Nick Campion, distinguished Islamic astrology from that of mediaeval Europe. That is because, Campion asserts, Abbasid

⁴⁵ Cohen-Mor, *A Matter of Fate*, p. 11.

⁴⁶ Abū Hāmid Muhammad al-Ghazālī, *Ihyā’ Ulūm ad-Dīn*, ed. ‘Abdullah al-Khālīdī, (Beirut: Dār al-Arqam ibn Abī al-Arqam, 5 Vols., 1998), Vol. 4, p. 165.

⁴⁷ Muhyī ad-Dīn ibn al-‘Arabī (1165- 1240 AD), in his *Al-Futūhāt al-Makkiyya*, cited in Shmuel Moreh, ‘The Shadow Play (*Khayāl al-Ẓill*) in the Light of Arabic Literature’, in *Journal of Arabic Literature*, xviii (1987): pp. 46-61, particularly p. 48.

⁴⁸ Nick Campion, ‘The Concept of Destiny in Islamic Astrology and its Impact on Medieval European Thought’, in *Nick Campion’s Online Resource*, <http://www.nickcampion.com/nc/history/articles/islamic.htm>, (9 pages), [accessed 16 November 2005], p. 6.

⁴⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 3.

astrologers found it useless to forecast the future unless there was some possibility of changing or amending the predicted events.⁵⁰ Therefore, the function of Abbasid astrology was to offer 'a code to be deciphered by those who were willing to begin the path of personal liberation from the chains of Necessity'.⁵¹

Thus Abbasid astrologers made use of arguments from the realms of theology and philosophy to justify their discipline and make it acceptable in Islamic society. In doing so, therefore, they were careful not to make claims that might be used as weapons by their enemies. Those friendly to astrology in the Abbasid period described the work of astrologers as predicting potential but not certain coming events. For example, the Shī'ī Ikhwān aṣ-Ṣafā', (the Brethren of Purity), an Isma'īlī group,⁵² made this important distinction clear:

Astrology does not pretend and has not the right to pretend to an anticipated knowledge of events. Many people believe that astrology proposes to study the science of the unseen (*ghaib*), however, they are definitely wrong. What they call the science of the unseen is really the science of indetermination; it is to claim the ability to foretell the future without resource to any symptom of reasoning, be it casual or deductive. In this sense the unseen is accessible neither to the astrologers, nor diviners, nor prophets, nor angels. It is inclusive to the Divine filed only.⁵³

Moreover, they attempted to support their argument regarding the importance of astrology, as a branch of philosophy, to religion by claiming that the Sharia (*sharī'a*) had become distorted by the inclusion of inappropriate material and there was no other

⁵⁰ Ibid.

⁵¹ Ibid., p. 5.

⁵² Isma'īlism is a branch of Shī'ism. Their origin is obscure but they seem to have begun as a secret movement. It supported the claim to the *imamat*, guidance-ship, of Ismā'īl, the eldest son of Ja'far aṣ-Ṣādiq, the sixth *imam* of Shī'is. In 298/ 910 there arrived in Tunisia 'Ubaydullāh, claiming to be descended from 'Ali and Fāṭima, the Prophet Muhammad's daughter, he proclaimed himself caliph, and in the next half-century his family created a stable dynasty which was given the name of Fāṭimid after the Prophet's daughter Fatima. Gradually the power of Fāṭimids extended eastwards towards the Abbasid regions; in 358/ 969 they occupied Egypt, then western Arabia and Syria. However, the Fāṭimids lost power in Tunisia. (J. J. Saunders, *A History of Medieval Islam* (London & New York: Routledge, 2005), pp. 125- 39.

⁵³ Ikhwān aṣ-Ṣafā', *Rasā'il*, Vol. 1, pp. 167- 68.

option in order to re-purify it but to examine its principles through philosophy, which could be used to identify the extraneous matter; it would be only through the virtue of philosophy that religion could be revived and the essence of its value discovered.⁵⁴ Nonetheless, the Ikhwān aş-Şafā' recognised that prior knowledge of actions or events decreed by divine command, if it is discovered through the legitimate use of man's intellect, enhances man's freedom to act and permits him to be responsible for changing a tragic *qadar*. Although their view of the *sharī'a* was distinctly unorthodox, their opinion concerning the legitimacy of astrological practice helped astrologers and their supporters to clarify their position concerning the possibility of freedom human beings can enjoy through prior knowledge and thus to engage in the debate, employing theological concepts compatible with Islam. Moreover, there were those who argued that prior knowledge could be beneficial to the soul of the individual and to society, in that it is likely to prompt people to perform good and pious acts in order to avoid an evil destiny:

When people know about events prior to their actual occurrences, they can avert them before they happen, by praying (*du'ā*), invoking God the Omnipotence, and by turning repentantly to Him through fasting, praying (*ṣalāt*), presenting sacrifices and asking Him to protect them and keep them away from all that which they fear.⁵⁵

However, the astrologers' claim that their science was in no way incompatible with Islamic doctrine on the matter of free will and predestination was held to be false and misleading by a great many theologians and philosophers of that time.⁵⁶ Particularly those philosophers who held the notion that events take a predestined course, that the future is already mapped out and the fate of each individual is already decided, found it difficult to accept the astrologers' claim. They therefore rejected the whole idea of astrology and denied that any power could be assigned to the astral bodies, either as a source of divination, indicators from which God's presence is to be revealed and

⁵⁴ To know more about this opinion and the reply provided by its opponents see Abū Ḥayyān at-Tawḥīdī, *Al-Imtā' wa l-Mu'ānasa*, ed. Şalāḥ ad-Dīn al-Hawwārī, (Beirut: Dār wa Maktabat al-Hilāl, 2002), p. 225.

⁵⁵ Ikhwān aş-Şafā', *Rasā'il*, Vol. 1, pp. 169- 70.

⁵⁶ See Bernard Radtke, 'The Attitude of Islamic Theology and Philosophy to Astrology', in *Electronic Journal of Oriental Studies*, viii, 19 (2004): pp. 1-11, available on <<http://www2.let.uu.nl/Solis/anpt/ejos/pdf7/Radtke2-fin.pdf>>, [accessed 18 November 2007]. See also George Saliba, 'Astrology/ Astronomy, Islamic', in *Dictionary of Middle Ages.*, Vol. 1, pp. 616- 19.

acknowledged, as the astrologers claimed,⁵⁷ or as prime agents able themselves to determine a person's destiny, a view that seemed tantamount to idolatry. Ibn Ḥazm al-Andalusī (d. 1064) insisted on the vital importance of proof (*burhān*) without which, he argued,⁵⁸ nothing can be regarded as truth. Thus, astrology, according to this theory of knowledge, is false because it lacks a logical demonstrative proof. Placing astrology in the category of spurious sciences along with sorcery, magic, divination, talismans and alchemy, Ibn Ḥazm elaborated an argument demonstrating the enormous harm they could inflict on religious belief, since they were built on false premises and lacked scientific method, and their assertions and claims could not be proved. Ibn Ḥazm lived at a time, as they lack scientific evidence. This statement was made in a period when these 'sciences' 'were controversial disciplines, with staunch advocates and opponents'.⁵⁹ The reason for his hostility to astrology and astrologers are outlined by A. G. Chejne:

Those who maintain that the stars are rational beings and the managers of the cosmos with or without God are polytheists and unbelievers ... and should be given capital punishment as prescribed by the religious law. On the other hand, those who believe that the stars are created and lack intelligence but who insist that the stars have influence on [or indicate] the course of events are not unbelievers but in error ... things beyond verification must be rejected ... for an experiment to be valid and to have a universal acceptability, it ought to have the same result through repeated experiments.⁶⁰

We have briefly discussed some of the points that a number of theologians and philosophers used in their arguments in defence of their contrasting views regarding

⁵⁷ See Campion, 'The Concept of Destiny in Islamic Astrology', p. 5.

⁵⁸ Ibn Ḥazm al-Andalusī was one of the most prominent humanists of the mediaeval Muslim world. He achieved great success in the fields of juridicotheology, philosophy and history besides being a prose writer and poet. Ibn Ḥazm was attached to various Islamic doctrines during his life. He first adhered to the Mālikī sect, then found interest in the Shāfi'ī school; both were Sunni orthodox, both relied on the Qur'ān and the Prophetic Traditions, yet also gave importance to the consensus (*ijmā'*) of the companions of the Prophet and his immediate successors, and in regard to religious issues encouraged individual inquiry (*ijtihād*). Searching for a school that allowed more room for intellectual stimulation and demonstrative reasoning to be practised in arriving at legal decisions and achieving the truth, Ibn Ḥazm converted finally to Zahirism, which insisted on proofs (*burhān*, pl. *barāhīn*) whether arrived at on the basis of the holy texts (*naṣṣ*, pl. *nuṣūṣ*), through logical demonstration, or both. For more information about Ibn Ḥazm see A. G. Chejne, *Ibn Ḥazm* (Illinois: Kazi Publications, 1982), particularly pp. 43- 46.

⁵⁹ *Ibid.*, p 178. For Ibn Ḥazm's general opinion on astrology see *ibid.*, particularly pp. 180- 84.

⁶⁰ *Ibid.*, pp. 180- 81.

astrology. While it is not the task of this study to discuss these controversies in detail, it has been useful to show that the advocators of astrology were able to argue that their discipline was in accordance with Islamic ideology regarding predestination and free will; their qualified success can be viewed as a huge step forward in the development of astrology. The astrologers and their allies sought to demonstrate that human behaviour was subject to a constant influence from the heavenly bodies and that the implications this influence would have for the notion of man's freedom and responsibility for his actions did not contradict the doctrine concerning God's omnipotence, and in doing so they managed to avoid accusations of atheism. They did not win conclusively, but established a firm ground upon which astrologers were able to practise their discipline with a sense of freedom.

IV. 3: Astrological References in Mediaeval Arabic Poetry

IV. 3. 1: The Umayyad Period

It is a commonly held opinion that astrology began to revive in the Abbasid period mainly because of the large amount of scientific information it gained as a result of the translation movement and the political acceptance it found at the court of the Abbasid Caliphs. However, it would be unjust to ignore the part the Umayyads played in the development of this discipline.⁶¹ The first translations of astrological material into Arabic were made during that era.⁶² Indeed, these efforts can be regarded as the 'empirical stage' of the translation movement that was to bear fruit in the Abbasid period. Moreover, the first political figure to have granted an astrologer an official position was the vizier al-Ḥajjāj ibn Yūsuf ath-Thaqafi (40-95/ 660-714),⁶³ and the first caliph to publicly appoint astrologers to the magistracy was al-Walīd ibn Yazīd (126/ 744). It is related that al-Ḥajjāj, when felt his term approaching, asked his astrologer

⁶¹ For the role of the Umayyad court as one of the foremost factors in the revival of astrology see Yahyā Shāmī, *Tārīkh at-Tanjīm ind al-'Arab wa Atharuhu fi al-Mujtama'āt al-'Arabiyya wa l-Islāmiyya* (Beirut: Mu'assasat 'Izz ad-Dīn li 'ṭ-Ṭibā'a wa 'n-Nashr, 1994), pp. 133- 36.

⁶² *Ibid.*, p. 134.

⁶³ Al-Ḥajjāj ibn Yūsuf ath-Thaqafi was one of the most famous Arab generals. The Banū Marwān owed him their establishment as leaders and granted him the nickname of the Sword of Banū Umayya. He was, however, guilty of much of bloodshed; he killed a great number of people, including a relative of the Prophet Muhammad, 'Abdullah ibn az-Zubayr, the son of Asmā' bint Abū Bakr, who was the sister of the Prophet Muhammad's wife 'Aisha. For al-Ḥajjāj's biography see az-Ziriklī, *Al-A'īn*, Vol. 2, p. 175.

‘Do you see in your chart that a governor is dying?’ The astrologer replied ‘Yes, but his name is Kulayb (Poppy)’. Al-Ḥajjāj then loudly cried ‘By Allah, I am he; it is the name by which my mother used to call me!’ The astrologer confirmed his opinion that the vizier would soon die, upon which al-Ḥajjāj, enraged, ordered him to be beheaded.⁶⁴ We see from this that under the Umayyads, astrologers could hold a privileged, if precarious, position. Moreover, it has been shown that ‘the choice of *kādī* [judge] and of *imām* in the Umayyad period was made by means of astrological procedures’.⁶⁵ The earliest astrological references in poetry, concerning an Arab caliph, after the coming of Islam can be traced back to the mid-Umayyad period, when poets consciously utilised astrological principles to serve a panegyric theme. ‘Abd aṣ-Ṣamad ibn ‘Abd al-A‘lā⁶⁶ delivered a panegyric in which he remembers foretelling the imminent ascension of al-Walīd ibn Yazīd (r. 125-26/ 743-44) to the throne occupied by his uncle Hishām ibn ‘Abd al-Malik (71- 125/ 690-743):⁶⁷

الم تر للجم إذ شئعاً ... يُبَادِر في برجه المَرَجعاً.
 تحير عن قصد مَجْرَاتِهِ ... أتى الغورَ و التمس المَطْلِعاً.
 فقلتُ و أعجبتني شأنه ... وقد لاح إذ لاح لي مَطْمِعاً.
 لعلّ الوليدَ دنا ملكه ... فأمسى إليه قد استجمعاً.
 وكئنا نؤمل في ملكه ... كتأميل ذي الجنبِ أن يُمرعاً.
 عقدا له محكمات الأمو ... ر طوعاً فكان لها موضعاً.⁶⁸

Have you not seen the star which while setting tries to return to its
 constellation?
 It was reluctant to set in its place and went searching for the point from
 which it used to rise;
 I said, amazed by its behaviour after seeing it rise as if to confirm my
 own thoughts,

⁶⁴ Al-Aṣfahānī, *Muḥaāḍarāt al-Udabā*, Vol.1, p. 146.

⁶⁵ Aḥmad Amīn, *Duḥā al-Islām*, cited in T. Fahd, ‘Nudjūm (Aḥkām al-),’ in *E. I.*, Vol. viii, p. 107.

⁶⁶ ‘Abd aṣ-Ṣamad ibn ‘Abd al-A‘lā ash-Shībānī was a panegyrist who dedicated his works to al-Walīd ibn Yazīd and who was one of al-Wāthiq’s court companions who encouraged him to indulge in wine and entertainment. No date is given for the birth or death of this poet. (For his bibliography see Sukkar ‘Azmi, *Muḥam ash-Shu‘arā’ fī Tārīkh aṭ-Ṭabarī* (Beirut: al-Maktaba al-‘Aṣriyya, 1991), p. 264.

⁶⁷ Hishām ibn ‘Abd al-Malik ibn Marwān unlike his nephew, is generally regarded as a good caliph, whose reign witnessed a peak of prosperity. See az-Ziriklī, *Al-A lām*, Vol. 9, pp. 84- 85.

⁶⁸ Abū Ja‘far Muhammad ibn Jarīr aṭ-Ṭabarī, *Tārīkh al-Umam wa ‘l-Imulūk* (Cairo: al-Maṭba‘a al-Ḥusayniyya al-Miṣriyya, 13 Vol., 1909), Vol. 8, pp. 289- 90.

‘Maybe it is a sign that al-Walīd’s reign is drawing closer, and it may be this very night that he is to ascend the throne.’

Indeed we longed for that moment and our eagerness was like that of a drought-stricken land yearning for rain.

We have pledged our loyalty to him; he has used no force or coercion, for he genuinely deserves our allegiance.

The metaphor of the star that strays from its path and rises when it should set, while it is pure fantasy without any astrological significance, shows that the correspondence between the upper world and the sublunary realm had come to be a motif used in panegyric odes.

Certain pre-Islamic astrological elements also survived in *the Umayyad ghazal* (love poetry). Al-Akḥṭal at-Taghlibī (d. 90 / 708)⁶⁹ writes:

و كيف يداويني الطبيب من الجوى ... و بره عند الأعور بن بيان.

فهلأ زجرت الطير ليلة جتته ... بضيقه بين النجم و الذنران.⁷⁰

How could a doctor cure me of this painful anguish,
while Barra is with al-A‘war ibn Bayān?

You should have tried to arouse and chase the bird with cries on the night
you came to marry him!

You should have recognised that Moon was in the *Dayqa* that stood
between the Pleiades and Aldebran!⁷¹

In blaming his fate, which has driven him to divorce his beloved wife, Barra bint Hāni’ at-Taghlibī,⁷² al-Akḥṭal also blames his beloved, who has since married another man, al-A‘war ibn Bayān at-Taghlibī, for not practising the art of drawing omens from certain signs that would indicate that her marriage would be unfortunate: first, divination from

⁶⁹ Ghayyāth ibn Ghawth, whose nickname was al-Akḥṭal (the dirty-tongued), is regarded as one of the greatest Umayyad poets, along with his contemporaries Jarīr (d. 110/ 728) and al-Farazdaq (d. 110/ 728), all of Arab Bedouin origins. For his full biography and his relationships with the other two poets see Al-Aṣfahānī, *Al-Aghānī*, Vol. 8, pp. 290- 332.

⁷⁰ Majīd Ṭarād (interpreter), *Diwān Al-Akḥṭal* (Beirut: Dār al-Jīl, 1995), pp. 19- 20.

⁷¹ The astrological meaning of this celestial configuration has been discussed in Ch. II, p. 28.

⁷² She is the poet’s wife and relative. She bore him two sons and is also known as Umm Mālik (the mother of Mālik). After their divorce both married again and he then regretted his mistake. Al-Akḥṭal composed lines expressing his grief and sorrow for his lost beloved at the first part in a panegyric poem addressed to the Umayyad Caliph Yazīd I ibn Mu‘āwiya (r. 680-83). (See Ṭarād, *Diwān Al-Akḥṭal*, pp. 8-9).

the direction or pattern of a bird's flight, *zajr at-tayr*, which the poet suggests would have aroused presentiments of misfortune; second, the heavenly configuration at the time of the marriage, which involved *Dayqa* one of the narrow paths in which the Moon pass when moving from one lunar mansion to another and of evil portent. The matter of the husband's name is also interesting; the deliberate mention of his nickname, al-A'war (the one-eyed) also has significance here as it is yet one more indication of an evil outcome.⁷³ It suggests, we assume, a harsh, unequal and unfair relationship where one partner behaves insolently and oppressively to the other. All the indications and signs which the poet uses as evidence of an unhappy marriage seem to be employed to bring him some relief; hence they may be understood as indicating the end of the marriage, and thus hope many alleviate the poet's pain, which medicine cannot cure. The poet may also be relieved by giving expression to his deepest feelings as he reproaches his ex-wife for harming both of them by neglecting the signs that would have warned her not to marry al-A'war. He places the blame on her, not on himself, although he caused their parting: and while they were fated to be unhappy, she is ultimately responsible since she could have avoided her unfortunate destiny. The poet seems to pity himself more than his unhappy beloved.

In using pre-Islamic elements, was this Umayyad poet a representative figure or an exception? Al-Akḥṭal was a Christian who insisted on remaining one despite the many attempts of his companions to convert him to Islam⁷⁴. The reason seems to have been the poet's desire to enjoy a free life.⁷⁵ When asked why he would not convert, he

⁷³ This practice of drawing omens from an individual's name, which was widespread at that time, was discussed in the previous chapter when examining the various motivations underlying the theme of *fa'l* and *fīra* in the Arabic and Islamic ideology; see Ch. III, pp. 101- 02. Al-Akḥṭal, as a Bedouin, would have believed in form of divination and indeed a number of his lines confirm this. See Al-Aṣḥānī, *Al-Aghānī*, Vol. 8, p. 291, where he built the theme of *hijā'* in one of his poems on his rival's name Ka'b ibn Ju'al (literally, Ankle the son of Beetle).

⁷⁴ As a Christian he could not have more than one wife, and so appears to have chosen wine over his 'beloved' first wife. In fact he seems to have regretted the divorce after his second wife became difficult. (See the lines he composed in regretting the wrong decision in *ibid.*, p. 309).

⁷⁵ In al-Aṣḥānī's *Al-Aghānī* we find this anecdote about al-Akḥṭal. He scornfully told his first wife, a devout Christian, to run after a priest who happened to pass by them one day and touch to obtain a blessing. Being unable to catch him up, the wife told her husband, 'I could not reach him but I managed to touch his donkey's tail'. Al-Akḥṭal responded: 'Indeed, he and his donkey's tail are the same'. (See *ibid.*, p. 321). This anecdote, if true, clearly reveals that al-Akḥṭal refused to convert to Islam was not

replied: 'When drinking wine is permissible and fasting during Ramadan is optional I will do so'.⁷⁶ So al-Akhṭal's Christianity cannot be connected with his interest in the pagan legacy; rather, he was unwilling to submit to the restrictions that he would have been bound to accept as a Muslim. Therefore, such individual tendencies should not be judged as revealing the intellectual spectrum of the Arab mind of that period.

In the Abbasid period, however, idiosyncratic thought was so widespread as to constitute one of the cultural peculiarities of that society. Another pre-Islamic image found in Umayyad poetry is that of the solar eclipse. This is used in connection with some catastrophic events, usually the death of a prominent figure. Jarīr (d. 110/ 728)⁷⁷ employs this metaphor in mourning the death of Caliph 'Umar ibn 'Abd al-'Aziz (d. 101/ 720):⁷⁸

فالشمس كاسفة ليست بطالعة تبكي عليك ، نجوم الليل و القمر.⁷⁹

The Sun is in eclipse and will never rise again.
Together with the Moon and stars, they are lamenting your death.

from devotion to Christianity or because it was the religion of his tribe, Taghlib, as Majīd Ṭarrād argues in his introduction to *Diwān al-Akhṭal*. (See Ṭarrād (ed.), *Diwān al-Akhṭal*, p. 11). Rather, it is his desire to remain a free individual.

⁷⁶ Ibid., p. 9- 11.

⁷⁷ Jarīr ibn 'Aṭīyya al-Khaṭaṭfi was one of the most illustrious Umayyad poets. His fame mainly rests on the *naqā'īd* (literary analogy) he composed in competition with that of al-Farazdaq. Jarīr was once asked who was the best poet, but before giving an answer, he took the questioner into his house where they found an old man grasping a sheep and sucking her milk, so as not to lose a single drop. Jarīr then replied 'The best of all poets is he who has managed to compose odes praising that man'. He was referring to himself, as the old man was his father whose merits he had praised metaphorically in his *qaṣā'īd*. For a full bibliography see Al-Aṣḫabānī, *Al-Aghānī*, Vol. 8, pp. 5- 94.

⁷⁸ 'Umar ibn 'Abd al-'Azīz, whose uncle and father-in-law was the Caliph 'Abd al-Malik (r. 685-705 A.D.), was appointed as governor of Medina by 'Abd al-Malik's son and successor, al-Walīd (r. 705-15 A.D.). He had a close relationship with his cousin, Sulaymān, al-Walīd's brother and successor, and when Sulaymān ascended the throne 'Umar became his unofficial counselor, and later the Caliph named him his successor with Yazīd ibn 'Abd al-Malik to follow. During his short reign (r. 717-20 A.D.) the fifth Umayyad Caliph's main concerns were military missions and domestic matters. The youth fond of luxury as a typical prince and his maturing into pious, humble ruler is the theme that brought fame and reputation to 'Umar and made him an example of the Muslim virtues of equity and humility. Thus he has been said to deserve the title of the 'fifth Rightly-Guided Caliph', after the four orthodox Caliphs, Abū Bakr aṣ-Ṣiddīq, 'Umar ibn al-Khaṭṭāb, 'Uthmān ibn 'Affān and 'Alī ibn Abī Ṭālib. (See P. M. Gobb, 'Umar (II) b. 'Abd al-'Azīz', in *E. I.*, Vol. x, pp. 821- 22

⁷⁹ Jarīr al-Khaṭaṭfi, *Diwān Jarīr* (Beirut: Dār Ṣādir & Dār Beirut, 1964), p. 235.

His contemporary, al-Farazdaq (d. 110/ 728),⁸⁰ also composed lines on the sympathy of the celestial realm with the fate of particular notables. The poet found the death of Muhammad ibn Musā ibn Ṭalḥa (d. 76/ 695) a suitable occasion to employ this motif, which seems to have been one of the pagan survivals that had wide metaphorical applications in poetry. He says in one of his poems that the Sun is in eclipse as a reaction to the shocking news regarding the loose of a great military leader Ibn Ṭalḥa:⁸¹

كسفت له شمس النهار فأصبحت ... شمس النهار كأنها بدخان.⁸²

The Sun has been eclipsed, it is behind a veil of smoke.

These few examples can be taken as representative of the kind of astrological references found in Umayyad poetry. Although astrological references are employed, Umayyad poets still rely on the pre-Islamic pagan legacy, and so the majority of references concern the astrological significance of certain lunar mansions, the auspicious or inauspicious nature of certain heavenly bodies or times, and the implication of eclipses of the Sun or Moon that foretell or reflect the death of some great figure. Though it cannot be claimed that the Umayyad poets or their audiences were well equipped with astrological knowledge, they are entitled to be credited as preservers of an astrological legacy that might otherwise have been destroyed by Islam's hostility towards it. Moreover these astrological references are employed in developing conventional themes. New astrological meanings connected with more sophisticated astrological techniques and expressed in more complex language are, however, encountered in the poetry of the Abbasid period, partly as a result of the enhanced status astrology managed to achieve in that period. In this regard perhaps the most important factor was

⁸⁰ Hammām ibn Ghālib ibn Tamīm was nicknamed Al-Farazdaq, the round bread with holes, because of the scars left on his face by Small pox. He was one of the early Muslim poets whose poems attracted great respect and attention, particularly among the linguistics scholars, as his Bedouin heritage polished his language. Al-Farazdaq was a particular eloquent poet, whose works, among other sources after the Qur'ān and the Prophet's Traditions, established and composed Arabic grammar. For al-Farazdaq's life and the employment of his poems as grammatical material see Faṭḥī 'Alī Ḥasanīn, *Ash-Shawāhid an-Nahāwiyya fī Shi' al-Farazdaq: Dirāsa wa Taṭbīq* (Cairo: Matba'at al-Amāna, 1991).

⁸¹ Muhammad ibn Mūsā ibn Talha, a prominent military commander in the Umayyad period and was appointed by the Caliph 'Abd al-Malik ibn Marwān as Governor of Sajistān. He was killed by an opponent of the Umayyads. For his bibliography see az-Zirikī, *Al-A'lām*, Vol, 7, p. 337.

⁸² 'Abdullah aṣ-Ṣāwī (collector and commentator), *Sharḥ Diwān al-Farazdaq* (Cairo: Maṭba'at aṣ-Ṣāwī, 3 Vols., 1936), Vol. 2, p. 866.

the Abbasid Caliphate's establishment of an official role for the court astrologer to stress openly their legitimacy.

IV. 3. 2: The Early and Mid-Abbasid Periods

In investigating the impact of the linked notions of free will and predestination on the astrological references found in Abbasid poetry and the ways in which these references demonstrate the poets' view regarding the concept of human destiny, a crucial point should be borne in mind. We should understand that such astrological references, especially those evincing a degree of technical sophistication, could not have been made unless the poet was sure that his audience was capable of understanding his meaning; that is, that it was equipped with at least a basic knowledge of astrology and unless he himself, the poet, had a good knowledge of his subject.

As we noted earlier, despite the strenuous attempts made by astrologers and their apologists to render their discipline credible and acceptable to orthodox opinion, many were sceptical or rejected its claims outright. Al-Khalīl ibn Aḥmad (d. 170/ 786)⁸³ expresses clearly and openly his disbelief in astrology. According to al-Mubarrad, he had once been interested in the science and had tried to instruct himself in its principles but had abandoned his studies.⁸⁴ He subsequently became a harsh critic, taking the view that all actions are divinely determined; he denies that human beings are free to alter their fate, and rejects the idea that an individual's destiny may be modified or avoided by acting on astrological prediction:

أبلغنا عنى المنجم أنى ... كافر بالذى قضته الكواكب.
عالم أن ما يكون و ما كان ... بحتهم من المهيمن، واجب.⁸⁵

Hey you two, tell the astrologer from me that I declare myself an
unbeliever: the planets can ordain nothing.
I am quite certain that what has happened and what will happen is
determined only by the Guardian.

⁸³ Al-Khalīl ibn Aḥmad al-Farāhīdī was a linguist and philologist who founded the science of *ʿarūd* (the technical term for ancient Arabic metrics). For his biography see az-Ziriklī, *Al-A ʿlām*, Vol. 2, p. 363; and for more knowledge on the science of metrics see G. Meredith-Owens, "Arūd", in *E. I.*, Vol. 1, pp. 667-77.

⁸⁴ Muhammad ibn Yazīd Al-Mubarrad, *Al-Kāmil fī al-Lughā wa al-Adab* (Beirut: Dār al-Maʿārif, 2 Vols., 1985), Vol. 1, p.241.

⁸⁵ *Ibid.*

Like Ibn Ḥazm, al-Khalīl denies absolutely that the stars can influence human affairs; God alone can ordain events. God is omnipotent and omniscient, His will is supreme and all actions and occurrences are predestined by Him. Al-Khalīl neglects the question whether the stars may indicate the divine will, as he is concerned to refute the idea that they can autonomously guide or control human destiny. In affirming that God is the prime agent, the poet wisely chooses the divine name 'al-Muḥaymin', the Guardian. Abū Ḥāmid al-Ghazālī, in his explanation of the ninety-nine names of God, annotates on the name al-Muḥaymin as follows:

Al-Muḥaymin—the Guardian—means with regard to God—great and glorious—the one who tends to his creatures with regard to their actions, their sustenance, and the time of their death. He tends to them by His cognizance, His position, and His protection. Everyone who has complete command of a situation, who takes possession of it and protects it, will be its 'guardian'. Taking command comes down to knowledge, possession to the perfection of power, and protection to action. The one who unites these meanings is named guardian. But only God—great and glorious—joins them absolutely and perfectly, so it was said: it is one of the names of God the most high recorded in ancient writing.⁸⁶

The poet's choice of this name strengthens his argument, for it emphasises and clarifies the vast distance between the real power of God and the illusory 'power' of the heavenly bodies. Moreover, God as Guardian tends to his creatures, guiding them continuously in all their actions to the right path, being compassionate towards the heart that believes in Him. This can in no way be said of the heavenly bodies: they neither create nor guide; even if conceived as deities they are no more than manipulators of a cruel or indifferent fate. But even this conception is illusory, as they have no power over the human realm. Thus for al-Khalīl the claims of astrology are false and pernicious. While al-Khalīl scornfully criticises the pretensions of astrologers, astrological prediction is treated more kindly by others, who see it as consistent with divine will. The practice of consulting astrologers before initiating a new building or moving into it seems to have started officially in the Arab world by the second Abbasid caliph, al-Manṣūr (r.754-75),⁸⁷ who had a horoscope drawn up on the occasion of the founding of

⁸⁶ Abū Ḥāmid al-Ghazālī, *The Ninety - Nine Beautiful Names of God. Al-Maqṣad al-Asnā fī sharḥ Asmā' Allah al-Ḥusnā*, translated by David B. Burrell and Nazih Daher, (Cambridge: The Islamic Texts Society, 1992), p. 64.

Baghdad in 762.⁸⁸ Al-Manṣūr asked his astrologer, Nawbakht al-Munajjim,⁸⁹ to ascertain the most auspicious time to start laying the foundations of the circular city, nicknamed Dār as-Salām (the City of Peace), and after the city was completed, the Caliph was informed that the first foundations had been laid when Jupiter was in Sagittarius. The astrological significance of this was that the city would last for an age and be a source of good fortune for its inhabitants and, more importantly, in the computation of the horoscope for the foundation of Baghdad, its ascendant (*tāli'*) indicated that no caliph would die in the city.⁹⁰ Some Abbasid historians seem to have been inclined to allow astrologers a degree of credibility; for example al-Khaṭīb al-Baghdādī recorded the comments of some authorities that he summarises as: 'And,

⁸⁷ There are a number of anecdotes that show al-Manṣūr as a believer in astrology. His vizier al-Faḍl ibn ar-Rabī relates that he accompanied the Caliph in a journey, and when they entered a place to have some rest, he heard the angry Caliph criticising and saying: 'Haven't I warned you not to allow people write on walls and prevent them from such gravity? The vizier responded: 'What is it they wrote my lord?' he said: can't you read these lines? And loudly read the following lines:

أبا جعفر، حانت وفاتك و انقضت ... سنوك، و امر الله لا يبدل نازل.
أبا جعفر، هل كاهن أو منجم ... يرد قضاء الله، أم أنت جاهل.

Hey you Abū Ja'far, your death is approached, your time has elapsed,
God's command must be accomplished.

Hey you Abū Ja'far, is there any soothsayer or astrologer who can prevent God's
predestination from taking place now, or are you just an ignorant?

On reading these lines, the vizier exclaimed: 'Oh my master but indeed there is nothing at all of what you uttered that is written on this wall, it is completely white!' The Caliph then asked the vizier to swear that he was saying the truth and nothing appears on the wall. Upon confirming this, the Caliph then asserts: 'It is then the mourning of my soul, I am absolutely dying soon. Then he asked for the caravan to head towards Mecca to go to Ḥaram (the Sacred Mosque), just when approached the boundaries of Ḥaram (The Sacred Mosque), al-Manṣūr died. See al-Mas'ūdī, *Murūj adh-Dhab*, Vol. 3, p. 254.

⁸⁸ Bernard Radtke, 'The Attitude of Islamic Theology and Philosophy to Astrology', p. 6.

⁸⁹ Nawbakht al-Munajjim was the astrologer of the Abbasid Caliph al-Manṣūr. When he became too old to accompany the Caliph on his journeys, he introduced his son, Abū Sahl al-Hasan, who later replaced his father as the official astrologer of the Abbasid court. The relationship between Nawbakht and al-Manṣūr was established when the astrologer foretold that al-Manṣūr would one day rule the Arabs. When the prediction came true and al-Manṣūr ascended the throne, the Caliph then appointed Nawbakht as his official astrologer and from then on relied on his advice in every major decision. (See Shāmī, *Tārīkh at-Tanjīm*, pp. 258-261; and al-Mubarrad, *Al-Kāmil*, Vol. 1, p. 241).

⁹⁰ See Abū Bakr Ahmad ibn 'Alī al-Khaṭīb al-Baghdādī, *Tārīkh Baghdād aw Madīnat as-Salām* (Beirut: Dār al-Kitāb al-'Arabī, 14 Vols., 1965), Vol., 1, pp. 66- 69.

indeed, no caliphs died in that city except al-Amīn ibn Hārūn al-Rashīd'.⁹¹ After the capital of the Abbasid empire had been moved to Sāmarrā' (He who sees it rejoices) by al-Mu'taṣim (r. 833-42 AD.), 'Umāra ibn 'Uqayl ibn Jarīr al-Khaṭafī (d. 239/ 835)⁹² criticised this act while praising the City of Peace in a poem containing the following lines:

أعابنت في طول من الأرض أو عرض ... كبغداد داراً إلهها جنة الأرض.
صفا العيش في بغداد و اخضر عودهُ ... و عيش سواها غير صافٍ و لا غض.
تطوّل بها الأعمارُ إنْ غداها ... مريّة و بعض الأرض أمرؤ من بعض.
قضى ربّها أن لا يموت خليفة ... بها إله ما شاء في خلقه يقضي.⁹³

Have you ever seen a city like Baghdad?
It is truly the Paradise of the earth.
Living in Baghdad is pure delight, there one's lifespan is increased; its
food nourishes and satisfies.
Surely some lands are more blessed than others.
God has ordained that no caliphs should there face death;
He is truly free to bring whatever judgment he pleases upon His
creatures.

In the fourth line of his panegyric to Baghdad the poet refers to the prediction that no caliph would die in that city, emphasising this as of great significance and a virtue for which Baghdad deserves appreciation and praise. He does not mention astrology, however, but attributes this happy destiny to God alone, who is perfectly free to do whatever He wills. Of course, no astrologer or proponent of the science would have disagreed. Astrological references in poetry had to submit absolutely to the ideology of Abbasid religious culture; as Kamāl abū Dīb points out, when discussing the influence

⁹¹ Ibid., p. 68. One might object that one caliph is enough to discredit the prediction. As for the city lasting an age, it did not – or at least not in its original form, for even in al-Manṣūr's lifetime suburbs were added, the plan disintegrated, and eventually the Round City disappeared, swallowed by the enormous urban complex of Baghdad. See Oleg Grabar, *The Formation of Islamic Art* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1987), p. 65. The Abbasid capital was moved to another site, that is Sāmarrā', by Caliph al-Mu'taṣim in 221/ 838 partly to keep the Turkish soldiers in his service away from the population of Baghdad, who had become hostile to his rule. The seat of government remained there for almost half a century; in 276/ 892 Caliph al-Mu'taḍid returned to Baghdad. (see Ibn al-Athīr, *Al-Kāmil*, Vol. 6, pp. 451-52.

⁹² 'Umāra ibn 'Uqayl ibn Jarīr al-Khaṭafī Ḥamza, was a grandson of the famous Umayyad poet, Jarīr (see above footnote 77) of an Arab origin. He was one of the Abbasid panegyrists who were rewarded with huge sums by their patrons. Like al-Farazdaq, he was one of the sources favoured by grammarians because of his pure Arabic. He died during al-Wāthiq's Caliphate. See az-Ziriklī, *Al-A lām*, Vol.5, p. 193.

⁹³ Al-Baghdādī, *Tārīkh Baghdad*, Vol. 1, p. 68.

of that ideology on some Abbasid poetry: 'It could not exceed a certain limit [...] otherwise [such references] would be accused of competing with the Divine strength; thus this ideology was forced to attribute every action of significant impact to God'.⁹⁴ Thus to escape from any accusation of impiety, the poet is careful to state explicitly that God ordained that no caliph should die in Baghdad. He thus implies that al-Mansūr's astrologer had merely used his skill to discover God's will for the city, for which he cannot be criticised. It is possible to argue, moreover, that God had willed the astrologer to make this discovery.

Besides consulting astrologers before initiating new buildings, the Abbasid ruling elites considered it necessary to determine the most auspicious date on which to undertake an important journey. It is related that Ja'far ibn Yaḥyā al-Barmakī (d. 187/ 803)⁹⁵ asked his astrologers to discover the most propitious time to move to his new palace. Although thunderstorms and heavy rain threatened his journey on the chosen day, the Barmakids insisted on following his astrologer's advice. On the way to the palace a drunken man passed by and said:

⁹⁴ Kamāl Abū Dīb, 'Al-Adab wa 'l-Idyulūjiya', *Fuṣūl: Journal of Literary Criticism (Literature and Ideology)*, v. iv (1985): pp. 51- 89, (particularly p. 73).

⁹⁵ Ja'far was the son of Yaḥyā ibn Khālid al-Barmakī. Both his father and grandfather played an important role under al-Mansūr (r. 754- 75 A.D.) and al-Mahdī (775- 85 A.D.), the second and third Abbasid Caliphs. The Barmakid family seems to have enjoyed a close relationship with the ruling family to the extent that Ja'far's brother, al-Faḍl, became the foster-brother of Hārūn, the son of al-Mahdī. However, after the death of al-Mahdī, Ja'far's father Yaḥyā found himself the subject of the hostility of the new caliph al-Hādī (r. 783-86), who accused him of supporting Hārūn, al-Hādī's brother, against him and of encouraging Hārūn to maintain his rights to the succession, which very nearly brought about his downfall. The very night, however, when the imprisoned Yaḥyā was to have been executed, al-Hādī was found dead; and certain reports suggest that the Queen-mother al-Khayzarān, who supported Hārūn, had a hand in the incident. As soon as Hārūn had been hailed as Caliph, the Barmakid family, that is Yaḥyā and his two sons, enjoyed unprecedented authority and the seventeen years of their vizierate (170-187/ 786-803) have been referred to by some authors as the "the reign of the Barmakids". The Caliph, however, suddenly decided to put an end to their domination; in 187/ 803, he had Ja'far executed, al-Faḍl and his other brothers arrested, Yaḥyā placed under observation and almost all the property of the Barmakids confiscated. The brutal fall of the family came as a surprise to their contemporaries, who had no satisfactory explanation to account for it and therefore invented various fictitious reasons. (For more information see D. Sourdel, 'Al-Barmakī - 3. The *Wizāra* and the fall of the Barmakids', in *E. I.*, Vol. I, pp. 1034- 36).

و يعملُ بالنجوم وليس يدري ... و ربُّ النجم يفعل ما يشاء.⁹⁶

Someone is putting his trust in the stars;
he has not understood that God does whatever He wills.

Taken aback, Ja'far remarked, 'This drunken man was not speaking with his own tongue; it was someone else's'. The vizier understood the admonition given by that 'someone else' and was reluctant to continue his journey, but did so despite his misgivings and reached the palace on the appointed day.⁹⁷ What insight drove the vizier to doubt his astrologer's advice, which he had always followed without question when taking important decisions? He seems to have realised that man's ability to act according to his free will is extremely limited compared to God's unlimited will. Human free will, in attempting to predict the future, is fruitless here because it is encroaching on a divine field; moreover, those who might question that God would speak to a vizier through the mouth of a drunkard are answered by the line 'God does whatever He wills'. While the story of Ja'far and the drunkard is presented as a cautionary tale criticising the pretensions of astrologers, the vizier's nemesis, Caliph Hārūn ar-Rashīd, took a different view in lines written on Ja'far's downfall in which he absolves himself of all blame, holding the vizier responsible for the fatal disaster that befell him and his family, the Barmakids.⁹⁸ According to Hārūn, Ja'far should have

⁹⁶ Abu 'Abdullah Muhammad ibn 'Abdūs al-Jahshayārī, *Kitāb al-Wuzarā' wa l-Kuttāb*, ed. by Muṣṭafā as-Saqqā, Ibrahīm al-Abyārī and 'Abd al-Ḥafīz Shalbī, (Cairo: Maṭba'at Muṣṭafā al-Bābī al-Ḥalbī, 1938), p. 217.

In al-Mas'ūdī's *Murūj adh-Dhahab* the line appears as follows:

تدبّرُ بالنجوم ولست تدري و ربُّ النجم يفعل ما يريد.
You are putting your trust in the stars;

you have not understood that God does whatever He wills

(See al-Mas'ūdī, *Murūj adh-Dhahab*, Vol. 2, p. 270).

⁹⁷ Abū 'Alī Ismā'īl al-Qālī, *Kitāb al-Amālī ma' Kitābayy: "Dhayl al-Amālī" wa "an-Nawādir"*, wa *yalīhim Kitāb at-Tanbīh ma'a Awhām Abī 'Alī fī Amālīh li Abī 'Ubayd 'Abdullāh al-Bakrī al-Andalusī*, eds. Ṣalāḥ Halal and Sayyid al-Jilīmī, (Beirut: al-Maktaba al-'Aṣriyya, 2003), p. 643.

⁹⁸ These lines were written on the night that Hārūn intended to have Ja'far killed, and it is related that Hārūn called for al-Aṣma'ī, one of his most famous 'spin-doctors', and asked him to pay attention to what he was going to say. Al-Aṣma'ī later said 'As soon as I reached my home I heard the news of Ja'far's assassination. I realized then that the Caliph's intention was to spread the news'. (See al-Jahshayārī, *Kitāb*

consulted his astrologer about the danger he was about to face and taken steps to avoid his fate:

لو أن جعفر هاب أسباب الردى ... لنجسًا بمهجته طمر ملجم.
ولكان من حذر المنون بحيث لا ... يسمو به العقاب القشعم.
لكنه لما تقارب وقته ... لم يدفع الحدثنان عنه منجم.⁹⁹

If Ja'far had taken precautions against the causes of death,
he would have managed to keep his soul safe and escape as if riding a
swift steed.
He would have escaped annihilation and found refuge in a safe place far
from the reach even of the high-soaring falcon.
But when one's term approaches
no astrologer has the power to conquer fate.

The contradiction in these lines is evident: although ar-Rashīd criticises Ja'far for not consulting his astrologer, he admits in the last line that all astrological prediction would have been useless and all precautions ineffective in the face of death, which is the ultimate victory of *dahr*, unconquerable fate in the Arab Ideology. In his self-exoneration ar-Rashīd claims that he was merely the tool of fate, not the real agent responsible for the disaster. Thus ar-Rashīd seeks to escape the charge that he betrayed his faithful supporters, by appeasing both the Persians who believed in astrology and thus might have been inveigled into believing that Ja'far's fate was the result of ignorance and arrogance in not taking precautions according to the astrological prediction, and the Arabs, who believed, in the irresistible power of *dahr* and might accept that it was fate, not the Caliph, who took Ja'far as his prey.¹⁰⁰ Moreover, ar-Rashīd's treatment of *dahr* is reminiscent of the *Jāhili* belief in that power, whose control of human fate was limited to one's term; one's ultimate destiny, whether blessed or damned; and the amount of sustenance one is given, although in the Islamic era responsibility for these aspects of fate was unequivocally considered to be God's alone, and believers condemned the notion of *dahr* as a form of idolatry. A knotty theological

al-Wuzara' wa l-Kuttāb, pp. 237- 38). The Caliph's message seems to have been that al-Aṣma'ī should spread the word that Ja'far's misfortune was his own fault.

⁹⁹ Ibid., p. 238, and Al-Mas'ūdī, *Murūj adh-Dhahab*, Vol. 3, p. 313.

¹⁰⁰ The crushing of the Barmakids by Hārūn ar-Rashīd prompted contemporary poets to rely heavily on the theme of *dahr* and portray it as baring ultimate responsibility in order to escape the anger of the Caliph, who was actually responsible. For some examples see *ibid.*, pp. 313- 15.

problem confronts those who argue that all things are predestined by God: the problem of the existence of evil and the responsibility of human beings for their actions. It is a problem reason alone cannot solve. While a discussion of this difficulty lies beyond the scope of this study, it is worth pointing out that in the domain of Abbasid literature, it seems that for some poets the idea that God could be responsible for the evil destiny of particular individuals was unconceivable, though Muslim theology reconciles human responsibility and God's omnipotence, affirming that divine predetermination does not negate human freedom, and that punishment and reward are expressions of divine justice. Despite this orthodox argument, many people still viewed *dahr* as an independent agent of malignant fate, believing that a merciful and compassionate God would not predetermine an evil destiny for any of His creatures. This was a common theme taken up by a great number of poets. To return for a moment to the case of the Barmakids, Ṣālih al-A'rābī¹⁰¹ absolves Hārūn ar-Rashīd of responsibility for their downfall, which he attributes to *dahr*:

لقد خان هذا الدهر أبناء برمك . و أي ملوك لم تخنها دهورها.¹⁰²

Indeed Time has betrayed the sons of Barmak.
Has any king managed to survive the treachery of Time?

This is reminiscent of a typical *Jāhili* view of *dahr* who used to attribute their evil destiny to this motif. Zuhayr ibn abī Sulmā (d. 13 B.H./ 609 AD)¹⁰³ writes:

ألم ترَ للنعمان كان بنجوة من الدهر لو أن امرأ كان ناجياً
فغيزر عنه ملك عشرين حجة من الدهر يوم واحد، كان غاوباً.¹⁰⁴

Have you not understood that if anyone would have been able to escape
Time that person would have been al-Nu'mān.¹⁰⁵

¹⁰¹ There is no mention of his date of birth or death and no biography is available for him.

¹⁰² Al-Mas'ūdī, *Murūj adh-Dhahab*, Vol. 3, p. 314.

¹⁰³ Zuhayr ibn Abī Sulmā, one of the most prominent poets. He was a man of great manner and a life view correspond to the nature of Islam, therefore 'Umar ibn al-Khaṭṭāb, the second orthodox Caliph, regarded him as the best of all poets. (For more details see Al-Aṣḫānī, *Al-Aghānī*, Vol. 10, pp. 336- 65).

¹⁰⁴ Al-Mas'ūdī, *Murūj adh-Dhahab*, Vol. 2, p. 80.

¹⁰⁵ An-Nu'mān ibn al-Mundhir, An ancient king who ruled the Sham in pre-Islamic time. See Ch. III, p. 69, footnote 26.

Yet twenty years of his kingship collapsed when confronted with a single day of Time, whose intention was to seize him that day.

Returning to the Abbasid realm, the power of *dahr* was still considered so great that some poets viewed life as a succession of misfortunes whose sorrows far outweighed any joys life might offer. This melancholic vision is expressed in the following lines by Ibn ar-Rūmī (221-83/ 836-96):¹⁰⁶

لما توذّن به الدنيا من صُروفها ... يكون بكاءُ الطفل ساعةً يولد.
علام بكى لَمّا رآها وإِنها ... لأرحبُ مما كان فيه و أرغذ.¹⁰⁷

Because of the misfortunes promised by life, the new born child cries at the moment he leaves the womb.

Otherwise, why would he cry when he sees the world, since it is much wider and more spacious than the place he was in.

The new born child cries at the moment of his birth as if aware that he has escaped the constricted space of the womb only to be thrust into a world which, though spacious, will be full of misfortunes. Although this image is based on account observation, it reveals a dark, pessimistic view of mundane life (*dunyā*) as controlled by an evil destiny. this destiny is universal and inescapable; man's free will is illusion, and we are born to suffer misfortunes that cannot be avoided, since they have been ordained before we were conceived. It seems that *dunya*, which is used synonymously with *dahr* in Abbasid poetry, was invoked more often, since allusions to *dahr* were likely to invite censure by the religious establishment. In contrast, there were those who held an equally gloomy view, but who did not attribute misfortune to fate but to human agency. Ibn Lankak (d. approx. 362/ 972) compares human behaviour with that of wolves:¹⁰⁸

¹⁰⁶ Abū al-Ḥasan 'Alī ibn al-'Abbās ibn Jurayj; known as Ibn ar-Rūmī, was one of the great Abbasid poets. He was of Mixed Greek and Persian origins. He is especially admired, already by the mediaeval critics, for his ability to 'generate strange motifs' (*tawliḍ al-gharīb*), and to make the most of a particular motif by exhaustively treating it from different aspects. See G. J. H. van Gelder, 'Ibn ar-Rūmī', in Julie Scott Meisami and Paul Starkey (eds.), *Encyclopedia of Arabic Literature* (London and New York: Routledge, 2 Vols., 1998), Vol. 1, pp. 364-65. For a valuable study conducted on the life and work of Ibn ar-Rūmī see al-'Aqqād's *Ibn ar-Rūmī*.

¹⁰⁷ Ibid., p101.

¹⁰⁸ Abū al-Ḥasan Muhammad ibn Ja'far Lankak al-Baṣrī, despite his talent, was eclipsed by his contemporary al-Mutanabbī. He was the rival of the most famous poet and composed a number of lines in which he criticised al-Mutanabbī. See 'Umar Farrūkh, *Tārīkh al-Adab al-'Arabī: al-Adab fī al-Maghrib wa l-Andalus*, Vol. 2, p. 504.

يعيبُ الناسُ كلهمَ الزمانا ... وما لزماننا عيبٌ سوانا.
 نعيبُ زماننا و العيبُ فينا ... و لو نطقَ الزمانُ إذن هجانا.
 ذنابُ كلنا في زيِّ ناس ... فسبـحانَ الذي فيه برانا.
 يعافُ الذئبُ يأكلُ لحمَ ذئبٍ ... و يأكلُ بعضنا بعضاً عياناً.¹⁰⁹

We all blame Time, but surely we ourselves are Time's only fault.
 We condemn Time although it is we who are guilty,
 and if Time could utter a word he would insult us.
 We are wolves dressed in human clothing;
 glorified He who has created us!
 A wolf would turn in disgust from a wolf's flesh,
 but we eat one another without a qualm.

Ibrāhīm ibn al-'Abbās aṣ-Ṣūlī (d. 243/ 857)¹¹⁰ was of a similar opinion, although he recognised the power of *dahr*. He reserves his strongest criticism for those fair-weather friends who abandon the Time's curse:

لو قيل لي خذ أماناً ... من أعظم الحنثان.
 لما أخذت أماناً ... إلا من الإخوان.
 ...
 هب الزمان رماني ... الشأن في الخلان.
 فيمن رماني لما ... رأى الزمان رماني.¹¹¹

If I could take only one precaution against the greatest of Time's
 disasters,
 The only ones I would be cautious from would be those who declare
 themselves to be as my brothers.

...
 To be afflicted by disasters caused by Time is not an important matter!
 What really matter is to find friends beside you [easing crises]
 Yet those [who claim to be my brothers] deserted me when I became a
 Time's prey.

Dahr was seen as synonymous with *falak*, or the upper realm; both influenced the sublunary world and man's destiny.¹¹² The only difference between them lay in their

¹⁰⁹ Ibid.

¹¹⁰ Ibrāhīm ibn al-'Abbās aṣ-Ṣūlī's grandfather, Ṣūl, was the king of Jurjān, a city located near Khurasān. When it was conquered by the Muslims in the Umayyad period its King converted to Islam and so was able to build a good relationship with the Umayyads. Ibrāhīm's father secured governal position under the Abbasids, and Ibrāhīm himself also obtained a high official position during the reigns of al-Mu'taṣim, al-Wāthiq and al-Mutawakkil until his death in 243/ 857. For his full bibliography see al-Aṣfahānī, *Al-Aghānī*, Vol. 10, pp. 52- 84; and az-Ziriklī, *Al-A lām*, Vol. 1, p. 38.

¹¹¹ Ibid., Vol. 10, p 82. Aṣ-Ṣūlī composed a number of lines in which he expresses the disillusioned view that the disloyalty of friends worse than the misfortune brought by *dahr*.

vulnerability: while *dahr* was regarded as eternal, *falak* was seen as not immune from destruction. The theme of *falak*'s vulnerability is employed by al-Buḥturī (d. 284/897),¹¹³ who promises revenge for the harm done to mankind:

انساء أيها الفلك المدار ... أ نهيب ما تصرف أم جبار.
سئقنى مثل ما نئقنى و تئلى ... كما تئلى فيتركك منك تار.¹¹⁴

Hey, Milky Way! Slow down your orbit!
Do you think you can go on in this way with impunity?
You will be annihilated as you annihilate us,
you will be destroyed as you destroy us;
then we will have our revenge.¹¹⁵

The official acceptance of astrology brought fame and a degree of security to the discipline, and it was at this time that clear astrological principles began to be employed in poetry and became an authenticated source of emotionally charged metaphors and images, which were openly used with no fear of religious persecution. In order to express two opposite emotions simultaneously, the poet Abū ash-Shīsh al-Khuzā'ī (d. approx. 200/815)¹¹⁶ has recourse to conventional images that both sharpen and reconcile the apparent contradictions of the poem, which mourns a late caliph and congratulates a new one at the same time. These contradictions are attributed to the

¹¹² This view recalls that of the *Jāhili* poet Umyma bint 'Abd Shams who predicted the coming demise of her nephew from the configuration of the sky. See Ch. III, pp. 86-88.

¹¹³ Abū 'Ubāda al-Walīd ibn 'Ubaydullāh al-Buḥturī was born into an Arab family, Ṭay'. When young he attached himself to the famous elderly poet Abū Tammām and accompanied him on a number of journeys. However, al-Buḥturī's poems were of an independent and peculiar character: he was considered representative of the *maṭbū'*, or natural and improvised style of poetry, in contrast to Abū Tammām (d. 232/845) (see below footnote 132 of this chapter), whose poetry represents the *maṣnū'*, or polished and carefully prepared style. (See J. Meisami, 'Al-Buḥturī', in *Encyclopedia of Arabic Literature*, Vol. 1, pp. 161-62).

¹¹⁴ Abū Ishāq Ibrāhīm al-Ḥuṣarī al-Qayrawānī, *Zahr al-Al-Adāb wa Thamar al-Albāb*, ed. by Zakī Mubārak, revised by Muhammad 'Abd al-Ḥamīd, (Beirut: Dār al-Jīl, 4 Vols., 1972), Vol. 1, p. 270.

¹¹⁵ The poet, speaking from an Islamic point of view, refers to the Day of Judgment, when the whole universe is believed will be destroyed. See Ch. II, p. 48, particularly footnote 111.

¹¹⁶ Muhammad ibn 'Abdullah Razīn al-Khuzā'ī, nicknamed Abū ash-Shīs, was a cousin of Di'bil al-Khuzā'ī, a famous Abbasid poet. He delivered a great many panegyrics to Hārūn ar-Rashīd and his son al-Amīn. He was one of those whom Abū Nuwās sought to emulate by taking their compositions and producing his own versions, which he considered superior. See [Abdullah ibn Hārūn ar-Rashīd] ibn al-Mu'tazz, *Ṭabaqāt ash-Shu'arā'*, ed. by 'Abd as-Sattār Ahmad Farrāj, (Cairo: Dār al-Ma'ārif, n.d.), pp. 72-87.

influence of *an-nuḥūs* and *as-su'ūd*. Abū ash-Shīṣ uses the notion of malefics and benefics to express the conventional wisdom that in life joy and sorrow are sometimes mingled. When al-Rashid died and his son al-Amīn succeeded him to the throne the poet composed the following lines:

جـرت جوار بالسعد و النحس ... فنحن في وحشة و أنس.
 العين تـبكي و السن ضاحكة ... فنحن في ماتم و غي عرس.
 يضحـكنا القائم الأمين و يبـ ... كـنا وفاة الرشيد بالأمس.
 بدر بيغـداد بات في رغد ... و بات بدر بطوس في رمس.¹¹⁷

The heavenly bodies control events both auspicious and inauspicious,
 that is why we feel both joy and sorrow.
 The eye weeps, the mouth laughs; we are mourning and celebrating all at
 once.

The coming of al-Amīn to the throne brings mirth and the death of al-
 Rashīd brings tears.

A Moon in Baghdad is enjoying the luxury of this life, while another
 Moon in Tūs is lying in its grave.

Loneliness and being in good company, sorrow and joy, funerals and celebrations, laughter and tears, succeeding to the throne with its worldly power and luxury and approaching the moment of death, delighting in life and lying dead in a tomb; all these moods and states, presented as binaries, are attributed to the command of those auspicious and inauspicious heavenly bodies. Here, then, an astrological concept is employed to provide an explanation for the apparently dichotomous nature of life, whose vicissitudes are caused by the influence of certain heavenly bodies, to which even fate is subject. The ideas of happiness and misery as generated by heavenly bodies will differ according to the individual's conception of these feelings. Abū Nuwās (d. 198/ 813),¹¹⁸ for instance, observes that the benefic effect of the stars is realised most

¹¹⁷ 'Abd al-Malik ibn Muhammad ath-Tha'libī, *Khāṣṣ al-Khāṣṣ*, ed. by La'mūn ibn Muḥyī ad-Dīn al-Janān (Beirut: Dar al-Kutub al-Ilmiyya, 1994), p. 163.

¹¹⁸ Abū Nuwās was one of the most talented poets among the Abbasid modernists. Despite the religious training he received while young, the influence of his early friendships had a profound effect on him and helped to discover the creative side of his personality. His career reached its zenith when he attached himself to the Caliph al-Amīn, who died in 198 H/ 813, and Abū Nuwās soon after. The Caliph and poet were accused of being a homosexual couple; but before becoming a homosexual the poet had had an affair with a slave-girl, Janān. (See al-Aṣḥānī, *Al-Aghānī*, Vol. 20, pp. 17- 48, and Vol. 25 - the whole volume is devoted to his life and its effect on his poems).

intensely when wine, Satan, and homosexuality,¹¹⁹ what might be called the 'Nuwāsian Trinity', are enjoyed simultaneously in one single night:

يا ليلة طلعت بالسعد أنجمها فبات يفتك بالسكران سكران.
بتنا ندين لإبليس بطاعته حتى نعى الليل بالناقوس رهبان.¹²⁰

O night whose stars rose with good omen, when one drunken queer went
too far and brutally violated another!

A night which we spent obedient to Satan, worshipping him, until a
monk mourned its passing with his monastery bell.

Here the 'stars of good omen' preside over a scene of debauchery that the poet describes with pride, bringing together his three primary motifs, a Satanic trinity that can be found

¹¹⁹ Homosexuality in Arabic literature, and particularly that of the classical period, is a subject that has received little attention in literary studies. More investigation is needed to help us understand how such transgressive behaviour managed to flourish in a climate hostile to every kind of homoerotic inclination and even to establish a new literary genre in Arabic literature, the *ghazal al-ghulmān* (love songs of young male-slaves). In the hands of Abū Nuwās such lyrics 'represent a new stage in the development of the amatory elegiac genre'. (See R. Blachère, 'ghazal', in *E. I.* Vol., ii, p. 1032). This new stage was initiated in the face of strong religious opposition. Islam prescribes a severe punishment for homosexual practices: the death penalty, either by burning alive those who practise sodomy, both the passive and the active, or to be thrown from a high building. See Shams ad-Dīn Muhammad ibn Qayyim al-Jawziyya, *Al-Jawāb al-Kāfi li man Sa'ala 'an ad-Dawā' ash-Shāfi* (Beirut: Dār al-Kutub al-'Ilmiyya, 1987), p. 202. The Qur'ān explicitly states that the main reason that the people of Lot were subject to God's curse is that they were 'sodomites', and that they were the first nation to commit this crime. See al-Qur'ān, Ash-Shu'arā' (The Poets), 19, 26, 160-175; Al-'Ankabūt (The Spider), 20, 29, 28- 35; and 'Al-Anbiyā' (The Prophets), 17, 21, 74. Thus, it is crucially important that studies of the genre of *ghazal al-ghulmān* in Arabic literature should thoroughly investigate the phenomenon of homosexuality in the Abbasid period in order to understand how such a literary phenomenon obtained the legal toleration that allowed Abū Nuwās to write:

من كان تعجبه الأنثى و يعجبها ... من الرجال فباني نقتي ذكر.
فوق الخماسي لما طرّ ثاربه ... رخص البنان خلا من خده الشعر.
لم يجف من كبر عما يراد به ... من الأمور ولا أزرى به صغر.

See Bahjat 'Abd al-Ghafūr al-Ḥadīthī (ed.), *Dīwān Abī Nuwās bī Rīwāyat aṣ-Ṣūlī* (Baghdad: Dār ar-Risāla li 'ṭ-Ṭibā'a, 1980), p. 761.

To those men who desire women who in their turn desire men, I say I am passionate
about one youth above all the rest.

He is around fifteen, his moustache is barely visible; his fingers are soft and his cheek
still beardless.

He is not old enough to object to what I intend to do, and not so young that I cannot
enjoy him.

Moreover, Abū Nuwās goes too far in claiming that sodomy is a kind of religious piety; he was once asked why he slept with Christian, Jewish and Zoroastrian boys. To justify his desire he scornfully replied: 'It is the duty of every Muslim to sleep with them!' See Ewald Wagner, *Abū Nuwās: Eine Studie zur Arabischen Literatur der frühen 'Abbāsidenzeit* (Wiesbaden: Franz Steiner, 1965), p. 188. There have been very few studies that can be regarded as valuable contributions providing useful insights into this literary phenomenon. Among the most prominent are: Stephen O. Murray and Will Roscoe (eds.), *Islamic Homosexuality: Culture, History, and Literature* (New York & London: New York University Press, 1997); and J. W. Wright and Everett K. Rowson (eds.), *Homoeroticism in Classical Arabic Literature* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1997).

¹²⁰ Al-Ḥadīthī (ed.), *Dīwān Abī Nuwās*, p. 607.

in many of his poems. It is rare, however, to encounter all three at once; they are more likely to figure individually or, more commonly, in pairs.

If the political support of the early Abbasid Caliphs protected astrology from the criticism of detractors, the accession of al-Mu'taṣim to the throne heralded a decline in its fortunes, since his strong measures against the Persian faction also affected astrology. The deaths of ar-Rashīd and his successor al-Ma'mūn, both of whom put their trust in astrologers, provided ammunition to the opponents of astrology and opportunity for revenge. In denying the validity of astrology, Abū Sa'd al-Makhzūmī (d. 230/845)¹²¹ mocks those who believe in the stars as able to protect anyone, even the most illustrious, from destruction:

هل رأيت النجوم أغنت عن المأ ... مون شيئاً و ملكه المائوس.
خلفوه بعرضتي طرطوس ... مثل ما خلفوا أباه بطوس.¹²²

Have you noticed that the stars did nothing to protect al-Ma'mūn or the throne he enjoyed?
They left him alone in [the graveyard of] Tarrūs just as they deserted his father in Tūs.¹²³

The poet speaks of death, inescapable fate against which any precautions must prove useless. The stars failed to protect the Caliphs al-Ma'mūn (813-33) and his celebrated father, Harūn ar-Rashīd, who were powerless to avoid their fate. It should be noted that

¹²¹ He is Abū Sa'd al-Makhzūmī 'Isā ibn Khālid. He composed many panegarics for al-Ma'mūn. See 'Afif 'Abd ar-Rahmān, *Muḥam ash-Shu'arā' al-'Abbāsīyīn* (Beirut: Dār Ṣāqir, 2000), p. 511.

¹²² Al-Mas'ūdī, *Murūj adh-Dhahab*, Vol. 4, p. 38.

¹²³ The poet is referring to the Caliph Hārūn ar-Rashīd, the father of al-Ma'mūn. Ar-Rashīd (766- 809), the fifth 'Abbasid caliph, his reign, which witnessed many incidents of critical importance, was a turning point in the history of the Abbasid Caliphate; it marked the decline in administrative efficiency and initiated the political disintegration of the Islamic empire. A great part of ar-Rashīd's fame was due to his interest in the wars against the Byzantines. Opinions on his character are contradictory. He has been represented by various chroniclers as pious and dissolute, statesmanlike and incompetent at the same time. Economically, the commercial activities, which reached as far as China, made ar-Rashīd's name well known to the whole world of the time, and increased the splendour of his court, which was a centre of art and culture. In 809, Hārūn fell ill and died at Tūs, which is a village in Khurasān. (See F. Omar, 'Hārūn al-Rashīd', in *E. I.*, Vol. iii, pp. 232- 34).

al-Ma'mūn's death appears to have been foretold, and that the poet knew about the prediction. Al-Mas'ūdī relates that the future Caliph's birth astrologers predicted that he would die at ar-Riqqa, the name of one of the provinces of Iraq, and so al-Ma'mūn always avoided that province. However, while on an expedition against the Byzantines, it happened that he entered a land known by the inhabitants as Badidūn, in which he fell mortally ill. Feeling his end approaching, al-Ma'mūn asked for a translation into Arabic of the Byzantine name Badidūn. The answer was ar-Riqqa.¹²⁴ So, although the stars indicated the place of al-Ma'mūn's death, they could not prevent it. Al-Mas'ūdī's story is a cautionary tale that, while it is compatible with Muslim orthodoxy, has distinctly pagan overtones and recalls the story of Oedipus, who suffered because of his arrogant belief that he could outwit the power of destiny, and because of his ignorance of his actual circumstances.¹²⁵ The literary attacks on astrology were intensified when al-Mu'taṣim acted with great success against astrological advice. One notable example was composed by the famous Abbasid poet and anthologist Abū Tammām (d. 232/ 845),¹²⁶ who ferociously attacked astrologers physically as well as verbally,¹²⁷ in his celebrated

¹²⁴ In al-Ḥamawī's *Muḥjam al-Buldān*, the name of the site is Badhandūn. Al-Ḥamawī confirms that al-Ma'mūn's death took place in that village, whose location he identifies as near Ṭarṭūs, a province on the border between Syria and Byzantium. See Shihāb ad-Dīn Yāqūt al-Ḥamawī, *Muḥjam al-Buldān* (Beirut: Dār Ṣādir and Dār Beirut, 5 Vols., 1956), Vol. 1, pp. 361- 62.

For the full story of the death of al-Ma'mūn see Al-Mas'ūdī, *Murūj adh-Dhahab*, Vol. 4, pp. 42- 45.

¹²⁵ Oedipus could not avoid his fate despite the precautions taken by his parents and suffered because of his arrogance and ignorance. The point in the story of al-Ma'mūn's death is that the prediction was correct, proving the validity of astrology. Al-Ma'mūn, we may argue, died because he was ignorant of the meaning of Badidūn (or Badhandūn); if he had known, he would not have entered that land, and would have avoided his fate. Again the distinction is between the stars as agents and as indicators: they cannot protect, they can only warn. Therefore Abū Mas'ūd blames the stars for failing to do something that the Abbasid astrologers never claimed they could do.

¹²⁶ Abū Tammām Ḥabīb ibn Awas aṭ-Ṭā'ī, an Arab poet and anthologist. At the beginning of his life he earned his living by selling water in the mosques. His fame as a poet grows during al-Mu'taṣim's reign (r. 833-42 AD.), particularly after the Amorium ode after which Abū Tammām's career as the most celebrated panegyrist of his time began. Having a harsh voice, the Caliph, however, granted him an audience if a *rāwī* (or reciter) is to recite his poems not him. The philosopher al-Kindī is said to have predicted an early death for him as a result of 'over-exertion of his intellectual faculties'. (see H. Ritter, 'Abū Tammām', in *E. J.*, 1960, Vol. i, pp. 153- 55).

panegyric to al-Mu'taṣim on the conquest of 'Ammūriyya (Amorium) in 224/ 838.¹²⁸

Abū Tammām devotes the first ten lines to comparing the power of the sword with that of the stars, as the Caliph insisted on undertaking that expedition against the advice of his astrologers, who warned him that the time was inauspicious and the stars foretold ill fortune and presaged defeat.¹²⁹ The poet's position is determined from the very beginning as antagonistic to astrology, which he seems to have identified as inimical to human free will.¹³⁰ Abū Tammām extols the conquest 'that was accomplished in defiance of astrological prediction'¹³¹ and contemptuously dismisses the claims of astrologers:

السيف أصدقُ أنباءَ من الكتبِ ... في حده الحدُّ بينَ الجِدِّ واللَّعِبِ.
بيضُ الصَّفائحِ لا سودُ الصَّنائفِ في ... مئونهنَّ جلاءُ الشكِّ والرَّيبِ.

¹²⁷ An example of Abū Tammām's hostility to astrologers is given by Ibn al-Mu'tazz, who relates that the poet, traveling on board of a ship, happened to meet an astrologer. Throughout the journey Abū Tammām deliberately assaulted the astrologer in various ways, hitting and slapping him and tearing his clothes. The astrologer complained to the master of the vessel, who asked Abū Tammām the reason for his behaviour. The poet replied: 'If this mother-fucker (*al-ādq buzra ummih*) knows what is going to happen to him as he claims, he would not be here with me on this voyage'. See Ibn al-Mu'tazz, *Ṭabaqāt ash-Shu'arā'*, p. 259.

¹²⁸ According to aṭ-Ṭabarī, in 223/ 838 the Byzantine emperor Theophilus marched with an army of 10,000 and attacked Zibaṭra, taking its inhabitants captive and destroying the city. He then proceeded to attack Malatya, among whose inhabitants were some Muslims. He made some of the Muslim women captives, and as for the men who came into his hands, he put out their eyes and cut off their ears and noses. See aṭ-Ṭabarī, *Tārīkh al-Mulūk wa l-Umam*, Vol. 10, p. 334. In choosing the appropriate target for revenge al-Mu'taṣim decided to conquer 'Ammūriyya, as he was informed that 'no Muslim has attempted its capture since the appearance of Islam, and it is the wellspring and root of Christianity and more honoured among them than Constantinople'. (*Ibid.*, p. 335). Regarding the matter of not being captured by a Muslim army before regardless the many attempts by them, see M. Canard, 'Ammūriyya', in *E. I.*, Vol. 1, p. 449.

¹²⁹ According to at-Tibrīzī, 'The astrologers had determined that al-Mu'taṣim should not invade 'Ammūriyya at that particular time of the year, and moreover the Byzantine astrologers had corresponded with them, informing them that, according to their charts, their city could not be taken until the time of the ripening of figs and grapes was approaching, and because the cold weather was still months away the Caliph would not be able to endure the fighting. However, al-Mu'taṣim refused to listen to them and proceeded towards his goal and conquered the city, thus proving their predictions false'. Muhammad 'Abdu 'Azzām (ed.), *Diwān Abī Tammām bi Sharḥ al-Khaṣīb at-Tibrīzī* (Cairo: Dār al-Ma'ārif, 2 Vols., 1951), Vol. 1, p. 45.

¹³⁰ It is interesting to note that astrology was attacked both by jabrites for seeming to place human free will above divine predestination, and by qadarites for being deterministic and denying human free will.

¹³¹ Suzanne Pinckney Stetkevych, *Abū Tammām and the Poetics of the 'Abbāsīd Age* (Leiden & New York: E. J. Brill, 1991), p. 200.

و العلم في شهب الأرماع لامعة ... بين الخميسين لا في السبعة الشهب.
 أين الرواية أم أين النجوم و ما ... صاغوه من زخرف فيها ومن كذب.
 تخرُصاً و أحاديثاً ملفقة ... ليست بنبع إذا عدت و لا غرب.
 عجائباً زعموا الأيام مجفلة ... عنهن في صفر الأصفار أو رجب.
 و خوفوا الناس من دهياء مظلمة ... إذا بدأ الكوكب الغربي ذو الذنب.
 و صيروا الأبرج العليا مرتبة ... ما كان منقلباً أو غير منقلب.
 يقضون بالأمر عنها و هي غافلة ... ما درا في فلك منها و في قطب.
 لو بيئت أمر قطا قبل موقعه ... لم تخف ما حل بالأوثان و الصلب.¹³²

The sword is more veracious than the book, its cutting edge splits
 earnestness from sport.
 The white of the blade, not the black on the page, its broadsides clarify
 uncertainty and doubt.
 Knowledge lies in the bright spears gleaming between two armies, not in
 the seven gleaming stars.
 Where now is their report? Where are the stars? Where the elaborate
 contrivances they forged?
 Forgeries and fabrications which, when considered, are neither trees for
 bows, nor trees for balm!
 Marvels which they claimed the days would reveal in the mighty month
 of Safar or in Rajab.
 They terrified the populace with dark disaster when the western stars
 appeared with fiery tail.
 They let the high Houses of the Zodiac decide what was overturned and
 what stood firm.
 They decree the affair from Houses that are unaware whether they
 revolve in orbit or rotate round the pole.
 If the stars could foretell anything before its time, the fate of idols and
 crosses would not have been kept hidden.¹³³

Having seen how poets attributed ill fortune to *dahr*, *duniyā*, or *falak*, we find that good fortune in this case among others, is attributed to different agents. Abū Tammām does not directly attribute al-Mu'tasim's glorious victory to God,¹³⁴ but explicitly to military might, and especially military science as opposed to the 'forgeries and fabrications' of the astrologers. It is the sword's 'cutting edge' and the 'bright spears' that are the means

¹³² Muhammad Abū 'Azzām (ed.), *Diwān Abī Tammām*, Vol. 1, pp. 45- 50.

¹³³ The poet here refers to the misfortune defeat the Christian Byzantines faced in 'Amorium that stars failed to predict before it took place in reality.

¹³⁴ See the treatment of the procedure that Abū Tammām employed in his ode before attributing the victory to God as the real factor in Kāmil abū Dīb's 'Al-Adab wa 'l-Idyulūjiya', in *Fuṣūl*, v. iv (1985): pp. 72- 74.

and indicators of the Caliph's victory. The victory then was al-Mu'taṣim's,¹³⁵ but it was also the victory of free will over the prognostications of his astrologers, and so it is human freedom that should be seen as the hidden hero of the poem. Regarding this point, Suzanne Stetkevych comments:

It is the triumph of bold action and initiative on the part of the Caliph in the 'Ammūriyah campaign over passive submission to the astrological charts the poet celebrates in the first ten lines of the *qasīdah*. Moreover, given the Mu'tazilite cultural context in which the *qasīdah* was composed, we must read this passage as a comment on that fiercest of battles among the Mutakallimūn [theologians], that between the Qadarites and the Jabrites, the proponents, respectively, of free-will and predetermination. Not unexpectedly then, Abū Tammām promotes free-will, that tenet without which the essential doctrine of *Ahl al-'Adl wa al-Tawhīd* (The Proponents of Justice and Unity, i.e., the Mu'tazilites) could not stand.¹³⁶

The Caliph's 'bold action' and its successful outcome inspired Abū Tammām to scorn the claims of astrologers and assert the power of free will. But he does not attack astrology from a religious viewpoint, and some court poets who still believed in its value in avoiding an evil fate. Those poets had to adopt to new circumstances, however, and attempt to reconcile astrology with orthodox Islam, when al-Mutawakkil ascended the throne. He rejected the Mu'tazilī doctrine and embraced the Sunni, which was extremely inimical doctrine was the most hated to astrology. When Muhammad ibn an-

¹³⁵ The rejection of the astrologers' advice by al-Mu'taṣim on this occasion should not be understood as stemming from scepticism or piety; a number of incidents related in at-Tanūkhī's *Nishwār al-Muḥāḍara*, and Ibn Ṭāwūs's *Faraj al-Mahmūm* demonstrate the Caliph's strong belief in astrology. For example, Ibn Ṭāwūs relates that Būrān, who was the daughter of the vizier al-Ḥasan ibn Sahl and who had a great knowledge of astrology, warned the Caliph about a 'cutting-off' (*qaṭ'*) in his horoscope on such and such a day, and the cause would be a wooden stet. Believing that the object must be part of a roof, the Caliph moved to another place, where there was no wooden roof, until the time of the prediction's fulfillment had elapsed. While he was waiting for the day to pass, the time of prayer arrived and a slave entered, as usual, holding a comb and a *siwāk* (a twig cut from a particular tree and used in the Arab world as a tooth brush) for the Caliph to use in getting ready to pray. But his vizier prevented him from using them and instead ordered the slave boy to comb his hair and brush his teeth with them; where upon the boy immediately fell dead. See Ibn Ṭāwūs, *Faraj al-Mahmūm*, pp. 137-39. Although the story seems incredible and thus its depiction of the caliph's belief in astrology is doubtful, it is interesting in that it shows the predictions of astrology as credible and accurate, and that it is possible to avoid an evil fate. However, those who believed in fate would say that al-Mu'taṣim's term had not arrived.

¹³⁶ Stetkevych, *Abū Tammām and the Poetics of the 'Abbāsīd Age*, p. 200.

Nadr al-Hārithī arrived in Hīlwān, an Iraqi city, his coming coincided with the appearance of *Kawkab adh-Dhanab* (the Tailed Planet), a star said to be of malefic influence.¹³⁷ His rival 'Ali ibn al-Jaham (d. 249/ 863)¹³⁸ composed the following lines:

لما بدا أيقنت بالعطب ... فسألت ربي خير منقلب.
لم يطلعا إلا لأبدة ... الحارثي و كوكب الذنب.¹³⁹

When it rose I was sure that some evil event would happen, and so at once I appealed to God to give us the best of that omen. They never appear unless a disaster follows, al-Hārithī and the Tailed Planet.

These lines show that heavenly bodies were regarded by some as signs of events predetermined by God, and that the poet believed that human beings were free to avert misfortune and modify an evil destiny not through their own power but by appealing to God's mercy. Thus the poet reconciles the claims of the astrologers with the doctrine of orthodox Islam.

The poets of the mid-Abbasid period were not only concerned to link astrology with individual destinies; the stars could also indicate the fate of empires. In lamenting the Byzantines' defeat of the Sasanians in 629 AD. after a series of long wars, al-Buḥturī (d. 284 H/ 897 AD) used the ruins of the Īwān of Kisrā (Kisra Palace)¹⁴⁰ as a symbol of

¹³⁷ See how the appearance of *Kawkab adh-Dhanab* constituted as a bad omen in that time in al-Qifṭī, *Ta'rikh al-Hukamā'*, p. 156; and Jalāl ad-Dīn as-Siyūfī ash-shāfi'ī, *Min Ḥusn al-Muḥāḍara fī Akhbār Miṣr wa l-Qāhira* (Cairo: Maṭba'at Idārat al-Waṭan, 2 Vols., 1299 H. [1881]), p. Vol. 2, p. 227.

¹³⁸ 'Ali ibn al-Jahm, a prominent Abbasid poet and man of letter of the third/ ninth century. He was a close friend to Abū Tammām, whose poems he greatly admired. Although the Caliph al-Mutawakkil granted him his patronage, envious courtiers caused his downfall and he was then exiled to Khurasān in 239/ 853-4. After he was bestowed with the Caliph's pardon, he returned to Baghdad, and few years later died in Syria. Most of his poetry survives from the reign of al-Mutawakkil, 'he frequent inclusion of religious elements and the strongly pro-'Abbāsīd stance he took due to his Khurasnī origins' is notable in his verse'. See P. F. Kennedy, 'Ali ibn al-Jahm', in *Encyclopedia of Arabic Literature*, Vol. 1, p. 79, and az-Zirikī, *Al-A'īn*, Vol. 5, p. 77.

¹³⁹ Al-Aṣḥānī, *Al-Aghānī*, Vol. 10, p. 255.

¹⁴⁰ It is related that al-Manṣūr, the second Abbasid Caliph, having decided to build Baghdad, consulted his Persian vizier Khālīd ibn Barmak on whether he should remove the ruins to make way for the new capital, whose site had been determined by astrology. The vizier's advice was not to demolish it. It seems, however, that the Caliph was testing the vizier's loyalty; al-Manṣūr accused him of prejudice against Arabs in favour of his own people. In his defence the vizier argued that such a building should be kept as a historical legacy that would testify to the power of the Muslims, who had overcome an empire, the

the Persian empire, to whom he dedicated his famous *Sīniyya* ode,¹⁴¹ which evokes the mood of *aṭlāl*, a nostalgia aroused by viewing the scene of the remains of the beloved's campsite, although the traces here are those of a once-great empire. The main astrological reference in this 56-line poem appears in lines 38-39:¹⁴²

عكست حظه الليالي و بات المشتري فيه و هو كوكب نحس.
 فهو يبدي تجلداً و عليه كل كل من كلالك الدهر مرسى.¹⁴³
 Nights¹⁴⁴ turned its fortune; Jupiter has become a malefic-planet.
 The noble ruins endure, although loaded with Time's Chains.

After a long description of the many joyful times enjoyed in the Iwān in the past, the poet attributes its present devastated state not to the Byzantines but to the nights, the daughters of *dahr*, seen as an unconquerable and inescapable force in the *Jāhili* era. Even a noble empire could not escape its curse; it has turned Jupiter, an auspicious planet, into a star of ill-omen. Why should an Arab poet lament the destruction of a Persian monument? Many scholars have interpreted the Iwān Kistrā *qaṣīda* as an 'anti-Imperial ode':¹⁴⁵ the poet's choice of a Persian palace over the classical Bedouin traces,

Byzantine, which had defeated a great nation, the Persian, whose power is expressed by the remains of such a building. Unsatisfied and unconvinced by this answer, the Caliph ignored the vizier's advice and ordered that the palace be demolished. However, informed that the demolition would cost his government a fortune, the Caliph then commanded that the work should stop. However, the vizier advised that it should continue, this time arguing that people should not be able to accuse the Arabs of being unable to demolish what others had built, and the great difference between construction and destruction is well known; in other words, the wealth and power promised by the new empire would be called into question. This argument appears dubious, and it may be that the vizier, angered by the removal of his ancestors' remaining monument, wished to damage the Caliph's reputation among the Persians, who would remember him as the arrogant Arab prince who had demolished a great building and insulted his allies for the sake of his own glorification. For a reference for the story and the whole ode see al-Ḥamawī, *Muḥam al-Buldān*, Vol. 1, pp. 294- 97.

¹⁴¹ His famous Iwān Kistrā *qaṣīda*, or *sīniyya*, is so called because the final letter of its lines (the rhyme) is *sīn* (or s). The poet's use of this device may reflect an intention to evoke the hiss and clash of swords wielded in battle, and thus praise the heroism of both armies: the Persian defeat then was not because of coward; they did their best and fought heroically, it is fate.

¹⁴² There is no specific date for the composition of the ode: Samer Ali claims that it was 'sometime later during the post-Mutawakkil period' (see Samer M. Ali, 'Reinterpreting al-Buḥturī's Iwān Kistrā Ode: Tears of Affection for the Cycles of History', in *Journal of Arabic Literature*, xxxvii (2006): pp. 46- 67, particularly, pp. 46- 47), while other scholars argue that it was 'in 270/ 884'. (See J. S. Meisami, 'al-Buḥturī', *Encyclopedia of Arabic Literature*, Vol. 1, p. 161).

¹⁴³ Al-Ḥamawī, *Muḥam al-Buldān*, Vol. 1, p. 296, (particularly verses 28 and 29).

¹⁴⁴ Nights were conceived as Times tools, or the daughter of Time, as expressed poetically in the pre-Islamic ideology. See Ch. III, pp. 72 - 73.

¹⁴⁵ See Dayf, *Tārīkh al-Adab al-'Arabī: al-'Asr al-'Abbāsī ath-Thānī*, pp. 229- 31, and A. Serrano, 'Al-Buḥturī's Poetics of Persian Abodes', in *Journal of Arabic Literature*, 28 (1997): pp. 68- 87, particularly, pp. 96 -99.

and moreover, one which was destroyed on the orders of an Arab Caliph, suggests that the poem embodies a harsh criticism of the Abbasids at a time of decline that witnessed the assassination of the Caliph al-Mutawakkil (r. 847-61) and the growing power of the Turks¹⁴⁶. The poet himself seems to have been aware that this accusation might be made, and he makes it clear that his motive was to compose a work of political and moral value: the closing lines of the ode indicate that he appreciated the Persian support that helped the Abbasids gain victory over their rivals and take the throne.¹⁴⁷ Nevertheless, many scholars ignore the poet's defence and insist on regarding his *Sīniyya* as an 'anti-imperial ode'.¹⁴⁸ In a valuable and thought provoking article, Samer Ali, who rejects the thesis that the ode is anti-imperial,¹⁴⁹ argues that the *Sīniyya* 'had

¹⁴⁶ Al-Mutawakkil 'alā Allāh Ja'far ibn Muhammad ibn Hārūn ar-Rashīd ascended the throne after his brother al-Wāthiq aided by two of al-Wāthiq's leading Turkish military men, the vizier Ibn az-Zayyāt and the chief judge Ahmad ibn Abī Dā'ūd. The dominance of the Turkish faction was later confirmed when this Caliph was assassinated by the Turks, who induced his eldest son, al-Muntaṣir, to take part in the conspiracy, warning him that he would not be the next caliph if he did not submit to them. al-Muntaṣir's reign lasted only six months, as he fell mortally ill and died at Sāmarrā' in 248/ 862. The main reason for al-Mutawakkil's assassination seems to be that he acted against the Turks' expectations: he formulated an independent policy against their interests and intended to reduce their power by recruiting a new army consisting mainly of Arab origin. For full information about these two Abbasid Caliphs see aṭ-Ṭabarī, *Tārīkh al-Umam wa l-Mulūk*, Vol. 11, pp. 26- 84.

¹⁴⁷ For our comment on the last few lines of the poem see al-Ḥamawī, *Muḥjam al-Buldān*, Vol. 1, p. 236, particularly from line 42 to the end of the poem.

¹⁴⁸ It might be useful to understand the relationship between al-Buḥturī and the Caliph al-Mutawakkil, as it might bring us closer to accepting or rejecting the assumption argument that the ode is anti-imperial. On the accession of al-Mutawakkil (reigned 233-47/ 847-61) al-Buḥturī came into contact with al-Faṭḥ ibn Khāqān, al-Mutawakkil's vizier, who introduced him to the Caliph in 234/ 848, thus initiating the most brilliant phase of his career as a court poet. Thirteen years later, or so, al-Buḥturī, according to al-Mas'ūdī, was present at the murder of his patron and his vizier, by Turkic slave-soldier. Knowing that al-Mutawakkil's son, al-Muntaṣir, had part in this conspiracy he composed the following lines:

أكان ولي العهد أضمر غدره ... فمن عجب أن ولي العهد غدره.
فلا ملى الباقي تراث الذي مضى ... ولا حملت ذلك الدعاء من بعده.

(al-Mas'ūdī, *Murūj adh-Dhahab*, Vol., 4, p. 99).

Was the successor hiding his treachery? It is strange indeed that the betrayer of a king is to be named as his successor!

Let him not inherit the legacy; let that pulpits not carrying prayers for him.

For the whole story of the night of al-Mutawakkil's death as related by al-Buḥturī, the eye witness, and recorded by al-Mas'ūdī see *ibid.*, Vol 4, pp. 97- 99. Thus it is a mistake to think of al-Buḥturī's ode as anti-imperial, since it is not only an invalid assumption but also deprives al-Buḥturī of merit and dignity.

¹⁴⁹ Ali, 'Reinterpreting al-Buḥturī's *Iwān Kisrā* Ode', p. 46.

the effect of redeeming the Abbasids in order to avoid civil strife in a time of danger',¹⁵⁰ and that the poem can be read as an allegory with reference to the oral lore of the Abbasid era as recorded by ad-Dinawrī (d. 895 AD.) in his *Akhhār aṭ-Ṭiwāl*.¹⁵¹ The poet's elegy to the Sasānian palace celebrates not only the Persian abode but also the Abbasid achievement, which is in danger of destruction. The poem suggests a solution by metaphorically re-uniting two cultures distinguished by great political and military success and splendid civilisation.¹⁵² Ali concludes his article by emphasising that al-Buḥturī was an imperial, not an anti-imperial poet:

Al-Buḥturī raises vividly the archetypal issues that ultimately transform a sordid palace scandal into a tragedy of universal relevance and appeal. Composed after the murder, the poem forced larger questions on the stage, such as who/ what is fundamentally to blame, who deserves their fate, and why power is cyclical. The poet's response, no doubt, is that of an imperial poet concerned not with other-worldly redemptions, but those of this one.¹⁵³

If we are to accept Ali's assumption, the *Sīniyya*, if it is to be read as allegory, addresses two audiences: the Persian culture, openly and explicitly, but more importantly, and yet implicitly and indirectly, the Abbasids. The clear implication is that the ode should be read as a warning that the Abbasids would suffer fate similar to that which befell the Sasanians if urgent actions and wise precautions are not taken against the Turks. This warning is not explicit, however, the mood of the ode is elegiac. As Ali remarks, the true 'villain' of the piece is fate, 'with its vicious cycles of glory, decadence and decay'¹⁵⁴, corrupts the very nature of auspicious planets and turns them inauspicious, and thus destroys the essence of the ruler's claim to power. Thus the Abbasids should remember that their right to the caliphate, though it may appear to be written on the

¹⁵⁰ Ibid.

¹⁵¹ Ibid.

¹⁵² Ali comments that 'al-Buḥturī's poem contributes to a view of cultural assimilation that balanced the one extreme of the *Shu'ūbiyya* movement, which looked to Persian culture over all others for models, and the other extreme of traditionalists who saw Arab culture as the only viable model'. (See Ali, 'Reinterpreting al-Buḥturī's *Īwān Kisrā* Ode', pp. 60- 61; for the notion of *Shu'ūbiyya* see H. T. Norris, 'Sh'ūbiyyah in Arabic Literature', Julia Ashtiany *et al.* (eds.), *The Cambridge History of Arabic Literature: 'Abbasid Belles-Lettres* (Cambridge: The University Press, 1990), pp.31-47.

¹⁵³ Ali, 'Reinterpreting al-Buḥturī's *Īwān Kisrā* Ode', p. 61.

¹⁵⁴ Ibid. p. 51.

page of heaven, is subject to the cycles of fate. Moreover, the Turks were now the holders of effective power in the empire, and as Sunni Muslims they were implacably opposed to astrology. The Abbasid state became progressively weakened and split into a number of independent states. These new political and cultural conditions affected not only the status of astrology but also the poet's use of astrological imagery, and this change will be examined in the next chapter.

IV. 4: Conclusion

This chapter has shown that in the early and mid-Abbasid periods the status of astrology, and hence the poet's use of astrological imagery, was governed by the personal attitude of individual caliphs or other rulers and by the influence of philosophers and theologians. Within a few decades of the Abbasids' accession to power, rulership of the empire was split between various contending factions: the religious separated from the political, and the caliphs had to learn to coexist with sultans and kings. Moreover the unified view of the problem of free will and determinism was broken, leading to the establishment of two apparently irreconcilable positions: that of the Qadarites, advocates of free will, and that of the Jabrites, advocates of predestination.

Thus astrologers and their intellectual allies were faced with the problem of how to defend their discipline in the face of criticism from all sides and in the context of a political climate that was far from stable. Although the Abbasids' need to favour the Persian faction benefited astrology, and the Mu'tazilī caliphs granted an official status and support to astrologers, the status of the science was never completely secure, and its practitioners had to contend with attacks not only from those skeptical or scornful of its claims to be a science, but also from both jabrites and qadarites and, most importantly, from those orthodox men of religion who saw the principles of astrology as entirely incompatible with, and indeed inimical to, those of Islam.

The political, philosophical and religious difficulties that assailed astrology and astrologers were reflected in various ways by the poets of the period, whose works provide insight into the issues that exercised their society. The appreciation and understanding of their response is complicated by the survival into the Islamic era of

certain pre-Islamic pagan elements, most notably the belief in the irresistible power of fate (*dahr*), which flourished partly because of the separation between free will and determinism, but mainly because a great many Muslims found it inconceivable that a compassionate and merciful God would bestow an evil destiny upon His creatures. The *Jāhili* legacy was apparent in other ways in the works of poets of Bedouin origin such as al-Akhtal, Jarīr and al-Farazdaq, whose treatment of astrological material recalls that of the pre-Islamic era.

The chapter has traced the development of these ideas and issues by drawing on the works of the poets of the period, presenting them more or less chronologically except in those cases where a certain theme (such as that of *dahr*) necessitated a different approach. Moreover, to understand the striking transformation in the use of astrological material – with respect to both quality and quantity – that took place in the Abbasid period, it was necessary to examine the transition from the early Islamic period by considering briefly the Umayyad poets, who could not have written as they did without the stimulus provided by the early manifestations of the translation movement. The Umayyad period was one which witnessed the development of knowledge that would equip the astrologers of the Abbasid period with weapons they needed to hold in check the assaults by orthodox Islam, although, not surprisingly, they never won a definitive victory.

That astrology was able to survive and flourish in a country setting was mainly due to the separation of political and religious power and the patronage of a number of caliphs who, whether or not they believed in its prognostications, valued astrology as a political weapon and a means of mollifying their Persian allies. Their patronage was crucial to astrologers and poets alike, and their attitudes ranged from the gullible (Marwān) to the defiant (al-Mu'taṣim). But whatever their personal view, it was the poet's task to glorify the ruler, usually in the most extravagant terms, and, if the ruler were none too intelligent, to bolster his praise with absurd claims that were often drawn from an astrological knowledge that was sometimes genuine and sometimes feigned.

The variety of opinions and their expressions found among Abbasid poets is surprising, and supports our assumption that literature can throw light upon the life of a society in

ways and in areas unexplored by other cultural products. Needless to say, quite apart from questions of literary merit, this period is one rich in poets of talent, some of whom will be considered in the next chapter, which will cover the late Abbasid era. The poets considered in this chapter, were sometimes well-disposed towards astrology, sometimes vehemently opposed to it on religious or empirical grounds, but generally the claims of the discipline and its attempts to be reconciled with Islam were taken to be important issues worthy of approval or condemnation. When al-Mutawakkil re-imposed Sunni orthodoxy, poets had to make sure their use of astrological material was ideologically sound, but with time this material became little more than a storehouse of images which would inspire poets to unprecedented heights of metaphorical complexity as will be shown in the following chapter.

Chapter V: Astrological References in Late Abbasid Poetry

V. 1: Introduction

The previous chapter investigated the literary functions and social political meanings of a number of astrological references found in the poetry of the early and mid-Abbasid periods, and also considered the poetry of the Umayyad period, which saw the beginning of the translation movement, a phenomenon that played a crucial role in revivifying astrology after the near-fatal decline it had experienced with the coming of Islam, and that also provided poets with a wealth of new material. Astrology's fortunes, however, only fully revived with the establishment of Abbasid power and the new caliphate's need to forge strong links with its Persian allies. The Abbasids protected astrology from heated opposition and the vehement attacks of the men of religion, eventually granting astrologers official status at court. This development, as the chapter showed, had wide repercussions on the work of poets, who drew on astrological material in a variety of ways to express a wide range of opinions concerning the connections between the astral and earthly realms. Generally speaking, the poets' use of astrological material was more complex than their predecessors' with regard to both literary expression and technical knowledge, and the variety of responses that material inspired remains truly remarkable.

In the 4th/ 10th century a process began which was to reduce drastically the effective power of the Abbasid caliphs, who became rulers in name only. They exerted some authority in the capital, but distant regions were virtually independent states.¹ This profound political change affected all aspects of late Abbasid society, including astrology, which was influenced by the ideologies of the different political groups and religious sects to be found in the caliphate's territories, and which in turn influenced the poetry of that period, giving it a peculiar character. Moreover, we find distinct differences in the use of astrological references between the work produced by poets

¹ In commenting on the history of the Abbasid Caliphate from 334/ 945 to 656/ 1258, B. Lewis states that: 'During the long period from the Buyid occupation of Baghdad to the conquest of the city by the Mongols, the Caliphate became a purely titular institution, representing the headship of Sunni Islam, and acting as legitimating authority for the numerous secular rulers who exercised effective sovereignty, both in the provinces and in the capital. The caliphs themselves, except for a brief revival towards the end, were at the mercy of the secular rulers, who appointed and deposed them at will [...]' B. Lewis, 'Abbāsids (Banu 'l-'Abbās) 2- 334/ 945 - 656/ 1258', in *E. I.*, p. 20.

addressing aristocratic or royal elite and that produced by poets who were closer to the mass of the people.

V. 2: The Poetry of the Court

The following discussion thus investigates the nature and function of astrological references in poetry either composed by the literary elite or dedicated to eminent political figures. Any discussion of the poets of that era must include the celebrated Abū aṭ-Ṭayyib al-Mutanabbī (303-354/ 915-65)², whose works unfortunately contain few astrological references; moreover, those few are not distinguished by a deep knowledge of astrology but echo *Jāhili* attitudes and themes, stressing in a simple way the significance of certain astral bodies. In mourning one of his friends, Shabīb al-'Uqaylī, who had rebelled against al-Mutanabbī's famous enemy, Kāfūr al-Ikhshīdī,³ and who was killed in 348 / 959, the poet defends his friend against any accusation of cowardice and attributes his defeat to the disposition of the heavens at the time he met his death. At that fatal moment ath-Thurayya and ad-Dabrān were presaging the end of a hero dauntless in battle, a conventional theme of the *Jāhili* period:

نفى وقع أطراف الرماح برمحه ... ولم يخشى وقع النجم و الدبران.⁴

² Al-Mutanabbī Abū aṭ-Ṭayyib Aḥmad ibn al-Ḥusayn's talent as a poet was evident at an early age. As the son of a poor family, he invested his talent and composed panegyrics to a number of patrons until his growing reputation led to an invitation to the famous literary court of Sayf ad-Dawla al-Ḥamdānī in Aleppo. This illustrious Arab prince became the poet's most important patron; al-Mutanabbī spent nine years at his court and dedicated several great poems to him. The prince, however, was both irascible and erratic in his moods, and the poet was easily offended and prickly and had a justifiably high opinion of his own abilities; moreover, he was surrounded by enemies and rivals. Eventually a rupture occurred between the two men, whose relationship had been founded on mutual respect and admiration. Al-Mutanabbī subsequently tried to attach himself to two other patrons, Kāfūr al-Ikhshīdī, a former slave and now ruler of Egypt, and then to the Buyid *amīr* 'Aḍud ad-Dawla in Shirāz, but his pride led to quarrels and his career as a celebrated panegyrist seemed to be over. He decided to return to Iraq, but on his way home he was attacked by Bedouins, who killed him, together with his son, in 354 H/ 965AD. (See A. Hamori, 'Al-Mutanabbī', in Julia Ashtiany et al (eds.), *The Cambridge History of Arabic Literature: 'Abbasid Belles-Lettres*, pp. 300- 14.

³ Kāfūr, also known as Abū 'l-Misk, a black eunuch, was a slave to the Ikhshīdīd, who ruled Egypt and declared himself as sole master of Egypt. The main significance of Kāfūr in Islamic history lies in the fact that during the twenty-two years of his reign he successfully protected the Ikhshīdīd establishment against the dangerous threat posed by those governments bordering with it, the Fātimids and the Ḥamdānīds in particular. Kāfūr also gained a place in Islamic history because of his patronage of scholars and writers, the most prominent among being the great poet al-Mutanabbī who 'immortalized the black ruler in a number of panegyric and satirical verses'. See A. S. Ehrenkretz, 'Kāfūr, Abu 'l-Misk', in *E. I.*, Vol. iv, pp. 418- 19.

⁴ Naṣīf al-Yāzījī (ed.), *Al-Urf aṭ-Ṭayyib fī Sharḥ Diwān Abī aṭ-Ṭayyib* (Beirut: Dār Ṣādir & Dār Beirut, 2 Vols., 1964), Vol. 2, p. 349.

He strove heroically to defend himself against the swords that pressed upon him, yet he ignored the sign delivered by the appearance of both the Star and Aldebaran.⁵

Indeed the theme of a hero who faces death because of a preordained fate witnessed by a heavenly configuration and not because of cowardice is a typical *Jāhili* feature. Al-Mutanabbī's image of the two stars is an unsophisticated one that has a distinctly pre-Islamic character. It is doubtful, however, that al-Mutanabbī believed that the stars were in any sense agents of destruction.⁶ Astrology provided a vital source of imagery which he occasionally used for his own purposes, and this imagery differed according to the occasion. In delivering a panegyric to his patron the Prince of Aleppo and northern Syria, Sayf ad-Dawla al-Ḥamdānī (303- 56/ 916- 67),⁷ the poet curses the worship of heavenly bodies and condemns those who believe in their influence on the sublunary realm:

فتباً لدين عبيد النجوم ... و من يدعي أنها تعقل.
و قد عرفتك فما بالها ... تراك تراها و لا تنزل.
و لو بئما عند قدركما ... لبنت و أعلكما الأسفل.⁸

Damn on the religion of those who worship the stars and on those who
claim that the stars are able to think!
If they can do so, why then do they not descend, having become aware
that you are gazing at them?

⁵ It has been mentioned earlier that 'the Star' refers to ath-Thurayyā (see Ch. II, p. 28).

⁶ A search of his whole *Diwān* for astrological references yielded a very few lines of astrological references. This suggests that he was not a believer in the ability of the upper world to ordain human destiny, and had little interest in astrology even as a source of imagery.

⁷ Sayf ad-Dawla is the most distinguished representative of his tribe, the Taghlib, which ruled, with the help of the Abbasid caliphate, Mesopotamia, particularly Mosul, and Syria (Aleppo). He led for a long time and with success the *jihād* against the Byzantine enemy, and spent large sums of money on the ransom of Muslim prisoners. He suffered terrible ordeals towards the end of his life: defeat at the hands of the Byzantines, the death of two of his sons, debilitating illness and the treachery of his most trusted lieutenants. This individual has inspired an abundant literature, mystical as well as historical. Moreover, he was a man of Shī'ī background, an enlightened poet and philologist who maintained a literary court more brilliant than that of any other Islamic sovereign. In 356/ 967 he died in Aleppo. Prominent among the men of letters whom he invited to his court or who praised him in order to benefit from his generosity were Abū Firās al-Ḥamadānī, his cousin, later known as the 'Captive Prince'; as-Sarī al-Raffā'; the philosopher al-Fārābī; the astrologer Abū 'Abdullah al-Badgdādī, and al-Mutanabbī. He was a Shī'ite and during his reign Sunnism was replaced as official sect by Twelver Shī'ism. See Th. Bianquis, 'Sayf al-Dawla', in *E. I.*, Vol. ix, pp. 103- 10).

⁸ Al-Yāziji (ed.), *Al-Urfat-Tayyib*, Vol. 2, pp. 85- 86.

Indeed, if each were to be placed in his proper position, the one now
above you would be placed below you.

The poet seems to be adopting an orthodox position in order to condemn the devotees of an astral religion that views the stars as intelligences, but this is no more than a poetic device enabling him to praise his patron in extravagant terms: if the stars could think they would acknowledge Sayf ad-Dawla's superiority and descend to earth to take their place below him.

A similar simple use of astrological references that recalls the practice of *Jāhili* poets can be found in another panegyric to Sayf ad-Dawla, but here the religious context is very different, to the extent that the lines seem blasphemous. In striving to satisfy Sayf ad-Dawla who 'was quick to anger',⁹ as-Sarī ar-Raffā' (d. approx. 366/ 976)¹⁰ represents both fate and the planets as subject to the ruler's commands:

له قلمٌ تجري النجومُ بجريه ... يطيعُ له حتمُ القضاء و يسمع.
يريدُ سعوداً أو نحوساً و إله ... من الفلك الدوار في الجو أسرع.¹¹

He has a pen that commands the stars in their courses, and that fate hears
and obeys.

Whether it good or ill fortune his intention, all are subject to his will;
whatever he declares is accomplished with greater speed than the Milky
Way in its orbit.

These astrological references, intended for an Arab dedicatee, appear to be pre-Islamic and pagan in character, thus adding to the stylistic interest of the poem. But the use of the word *qalam* (pen) gives it an Islamic context, and it is striking that orthodox religion seems to be abandoned and replaced by hyperbolic praise of the ruler. Mankind's free will is constrained not by divine predetermination, but because fate is preordained by

⁹ A. Hamori, 'Al-Mutanabbī', in *Abbasid Belles-Letters*, pp. 300- 14, particularly p. 300.

¹⁰ Abū al-Ḥasan as-Sarī Aḥmad Ar-Raffā' was one of the great poets of the fourth/ tenth century, whose reputation suffered because he was a contemporary of al-Mutanabbī. He composed many poems in praise of the Ḥamdānī ruler, Sayf ad-Dawla, who in turn rewarded him and appointed him one of his court poets. However, the ruler's mood towards him changed and the poet was deprived of all the privileges he had been used to enjoy. All as-Sarī ar-Raffā''s humble apologies were rejected and the poet's life was henceforth marked by misfortune. See Ḥabīb Ḥusayn al-Ḥusaynī (ed.), *Diwān as-Sarī ar-Raffā'* (Baghdad: Manshūrāt Wazārat ath-Thaqāfa wa 'l-Ibdā', 2 Vols., 1981), Vol. 1, pp. 21- 47.

¹¹ *Ibid.*, Vol. 2, p. 389.

the ruler's will. The role of God, who ordains man's destiny, is here transferred to the ruler, and the pen that writes mankind's fate has become his property. Undoubtedly this pagan image is not meant to be taken seriously; it follows the convention of Abbasid panegyric in praising the noble patron in ludicrously extravagant terms. This hyperbole is also found in al-Mutanabbī's eulogies to the same patron, Sayf ad-Dawla.¹² Nevertheless, its un-Islamic character should be noted, for it has no parallels in the early Islamic period. While Sayf ad-Dawla enjoyed the praise of the poets who hailed him as lord of fate and commander of the stars, endowing him with divine attributes, his cousin Abū Firās al-Ḥamadānī (d. 357/ 968)¹³ seems immune to such flattery and piously dismisses altogether the claims of astrology. He was advised by an astrologer not to travel on the day he had chosen,¹⁴ and in response he composed the following lines, which express a devout Muslim's rejection of astrology: since God is the omnipotent judge of what is best for each person, one must submit to His will and abandon one's own ideas of self-interest:

يا مُعْجَباً بِنُجُومِهِ ... لَا النُّحُسُ مِنْكَ وَ لَا السَّعَادَةُ.

¹² For al-Mutanabbī's exaggeration in eulogies see the study of his panegyric odes by Ayman Zakī al-'Ashmāwī in his *Qaṣīdat al-Madīḥ ind al-Mutanabbī wa Taṭawurihā al-Fannī* (Beirut: Dār an-Nahḍa al-'Arabiyya, 1983).

¹³ Abū Firās al-Ḥamadānī was the son of Sa'īd Ḥamdān at-Taghlibī, himself a poet who was killed by Nāṣir ad-Dawla Ḥasan on attempting to occupy Mawṣil. Nāṣir was his nephew and the brother of Sayf ad-Dawla, the Prince of Aleppo, who became the guardian and carrier to his orphan cousin, and married his sister. The two cousins enjoyed a close relationship and Abū Firās frequently accompanied Sayf ad-Dawla on his expeditions against the Byzantines. He was captured in 348/ 951 but managed to escape from imprisonment at Kharshana by leaping on horseback into the Euphrates. In 351/ 962, however, he was recaptured in Manbaj, a Syrian province, and was taken to Constantinople where he remained, despite his entreaties to Sayf ad-Dawla, who refused to pay his ransom, until the general exchange of prisoners in 355/ 966. Well known as the 'Captive Prince', it is related that he was received with honour by the Byzantines who kept him in exceptionally pleasant conditions, allowing him the use of his gun, in recognition of his princely status, and also perhaps because his mother was a Byzantine. Abū Firās composed the poems comprising his *Rūmiyyāt* while a captive in Byzantium (or Rūm). These brought him great fame, and in them the Captive Prince gives expression with great dignity and eloquence to the Arab ideal of chivalry. In 357/ 968 Abū Firās claimed right to the succession over Abū al-Ma'ālī, Sayf ad-Dawla's son, who was fifteen at the time, and attempted to capture Ḥimṣ, a Syrian province, as a prelude to taking Aleppo. However, he failed in his rebellion and was put to death in the same year. For more information about Abū Firās's life and poems see H. A. R. Gibb, 'Abū Firās al-Ḥamadānī', in *E. I.*, 1960, Vol. 1, pp. 119- 20; and 'Umar Farrūkh, *Abū Firās: Fāris Banī Ḥamdān wa Shā'iruhum* (Beirut: Maktabat Minīma, 1954).

¹⁴ The reason given by the astrologer is not related in that anecdote; see Sami Dahan (ed.), *Le Diwan D' Abu Firas al-Hamdani: poète arab du IV^e Siècle de l'Hégire (X^e Siècle de J. -C.)* (Beirut: n. p., 3 Vols., 1944), Vol. 2, p. 74.

الله يُنْقِصُ ما يَشَاءُ ... وفي يَمِينِهِ الزيادة
دع ما أريدُ و ما تريد ... ذُفْرَانُ اللهِ الإِرادَةُ.¹⁵

Hey you, who admire his stars, know that they cannot decide what is
auspicious or inauspicious.

God decreases and increases whatever He wills, His hand encompasses
all things.

Therefore cast aside what 'I' want and what 'you' want; God's will alone
is real.

The astrological principles of *nuḥūs* (the malefics – the celestial bodies of baleful influence) and *su ṭūd* (the benefics – the celestial bodies of favourable influence) together with man's free will are denied any validity by Abū Firās, but as an Arab man who is conscious of his heritage he refers to these concepts, which are part of the pre-Islamic legacy. As a Muslim, however, he denies their reality and ascribes agency only to God; further, he seems to deny agency even to human beings, who are entirely subject to divine predetermination. Elsewhere, Abū Firās uses the concepts of *nuḥūs*, without any qualification, as a metaphor of ill fortune. Remembering the day of his beloved's departure, he composed a poem containing the line:

و إن أفلتت تلك البدورُ عشية ... فإن نحوسي بالفراق طوالع.¹⁶

If those moons are to set, then my malefic stars will rise.

Generally, however, Abū Firās affirms the absolute supremacy of God as arbiter of human fate, and it may be that this line merely admits a correspondence between the upper and lower realms without ascribing any agency to the stars. When propounding a philosophical or theological view he shows himself a confirmed jabrite. While in captivity, the Prince composed a poem to his mother in which he insists that help, guidance and consolation are to be found only in God, the all-powerful:

ومن لم يرده الله، في الأمر كله، ... فليس لمخلوق إليه سبيل.
وإن هو لم يدلك في كل مسلكٍ ضللت ولو أن السماءك دليل.
إذا ما وقىك الله أمراً تخافه فما لك مما تتقيه مقيل.
وإن هو لم ينصرك لم تلق ناصراً، وإن جلت أنصاراً و عز مقيل.¹⁷

¹⁵ Ibid.

¹⁶ Ibid., p. 252.

¹⁷ Ibid., p. 318.

Whatever God does not will – and His will encompasses all things – none
of His creatures can accomplish.

If He does not guide you on every path, you are lost, even if Simāk be
your guiding star.

If God saves you from what you fear, nothing of what you fear can touch
you.

If He does not help you, you will find no success even if the whole world
comes to your aid.

Thus Abū Firās's verses affirm the doctrine of predestination and deny human free will. Even while lamenting his fate, the poet is consoled by the orthodox view of human destiny: in Islam 'God's will is [...] regarded as an inexorable law, exercising absolute control over the courses of events and determining the major aspects of human fate'.¹⁸ If Abū Firās found consolation in God and rejected the claims of astrologers, a century later in al-Andalus the king of Seville deeply regretted having placed his trust in astrology, a trust which he believed had contributed to his downfall and exile.¹⁹ Indeed,

¹⁸ Cohen-Mor, *A Matter of Fate*, p. xvii. This feature of the Muslims' faith, absolute resignation and submission, is recognized as one of the striking aspects that differentiate them from other Calvinists, particularly Christians, who tend to blame themselves for every unhappy event as they attribute it to themselves and regret not taking precautions to avoid it. In contrast, Muslims, according to Lane, enjoy a more peaceful mind, as they accept the vicissitudes of life and regard whatever happens to them as God's will. In this sense, the Muslim's belief in fate makes life's trials and tribulations easier to bear.

¹⁹ The fifth/ eleventh century is the era of Spanish history that is 'characterized by the vigorous efforts of the Reconquista, stimulated by energetic and enterprising Christian monarchs who were more and more conscious of the necessity of re-establishing national unity at the expense of Islam'. (See E. Lévi-Provençal, 'Al-Andalus: (6) The Kingdoms of the *ṭā'ifas* up to the battle of al-*Zallāka*', in *E. I.*, Vol. 1, p. 495). It was also the time when the territory of al-Andalus was split into a multitude of small states ruled by different dynasties of the so-called party-kings (*mulūk at-ṭawā'if*); prominent among them were Banū 'Abbād (The 'Abbāids). The Banū 'Abbād ruled Seville and western Andalus from 414/ 1023. until 384/ 1091. The founder of that dynasty was Abū al-Qāsim Muhammad ibn 'Abbād, who died in 433/ 1042. His successor, his son Abū 'Amr 'Abbād, better known by his honorific title al-Mu'taqid, ruled Seville 'when political turbulence in al-Andalus attained new heights with the final collapse of the Umayyad caliphate in 422/ 1031 and the establishment of the several independent principalities'. (See Devin J. Stewart, 'Ibn Zaydūn', in María Menocal, Raymond P. Scheindlin and Michael Sells (eds.), *The Cambridge History of Arabic Literature: The Literature of al-Andalus* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000), pp. 306- 17, particularly p. 307). Al-Mu'tamid was an authoritarian ruler, ruthless and ambitious, and notorious for his cruelty. He killed his own son, who was about to proclaim himself king of one of the provinces under his control. This assassination, however, brought the other son to the political stage. In 461/ 1069, when the powerful sovereign of Seville died, this son, Muhammad al-Mu'tamid, inherited a kingdom which now embraced most of the south-west part of al-Andalus; he was the last of that dynasty to rule that country. (For more information about the party kings see David Wasserstein, *The Rise and Fall of the Party-Kings: Politics and Society in Islamic Spain 1002-1089* (Princeton & New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1985). For a brief history see 'Abd al-'Azīz 'Atīq, *Al-Adab al-'Arabī fī al-Andalus* (Beirut: Dār an-Nahḍa al-'Arabiyya, 1976), pp. 93- 101.

it was the desperate circumstances of the poet-king al-Mu'tamid ibn 'Abbād of Seville (431-488/ 1040-1095) that prompted him to lose faith in astrology and, in this poem, to attack his astrologer and his tools from the first line:

أرمدت أم بنجومك الرمذ ... قد عاد ضداً كل ما تعد.
هل في حسابك ما نؤمله ... أم قد تصرم عندك الأمد.
قد كنت تهمس إذ تخاطبني ... وتخط كرهاً إن عصتك يذ.
فالآن لا عين ولا أثر ... أتراك غيب شخصك البلذ.
وأتراك بالعدراء في عرس ... أم إذ كذبت سطا بك الأسد.
المالك لا يبقى على أحد ... والموت لا يبقى له أحد.²⁰

Have you become blind, or is it that your stars are thus afflicted?
Everything you promised has turned into its opposite.
Is there still any promise your predictions can make, or have you simply
lost faith in yourself?
You used to whisper when talking to me, or if someone disobeyed your
order you would write to complain about him.
Now you are untraceable! Is it your stupidity that has caused you to
disappear?
Or it may be you are celebrating your wedding to Virgo, or perhaps your
lies have caused you to fall prey to Leo.
The throne permits no one to enjoy it for ever, exactly like death, who
allows no one to escape.

Historians have not dealt gently with al-Mu'tamid ibn 'Abbād. The general opinion is that after a long period of indulging himself in all sorts of luxuries and in his passion for wine and music, neglecting his political duties and responsibilities, al-Mu'tamid was inclined to ignore the Christian threat; worse, like the other party kings, he agreed to pay tribute to Alfonso VI.²¹ Seeing this, his people, the majority of whom were Muslims, begged for help from a Muslim leader, the Almoravids commander Yusuf ibn Tashufin (d. 500/ 1106)²², who crossed the Mediterranean and took control of a great

²⁰ Abū al-Ḥasan 'Alī ibn Bassām ash-Shantarīnī, *Adh-Dhakhīra fī Mahāsīn Ahl al-Jazīra*, ed. Sālim al-Badrī, (Beirut: Dār al-Kutub al-'Ilmiyya, 4 Vols., 1998), Vol. 2, p. 31.

²¹ He was a Christian ruler who occupied the city of Toledo in 478/ 1085. 'With it, the Christians gained territory equal to roughly a quarter of the surface of the peninsula'. (See David Wasserstein, *The Rise and Fall of the Party-Kings*, p.287), for more information about Alfonso see Bernard F. Reilly, *The Kingdom of León-Castilla under King Alfonso VI (1065-1109)* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1988).

²² Yūsuf ibn Tāshufīn was the leader of the North African troops that defeated the forces of Alfonso VI in 479/ 1086 at Sagradas (az-Zallāqa). 'This victory was not followed up, and Yūsuf b. Tāshufīn, soon

part of al-Andalus including Seville. In that war the son of al-Mu'tamid was killed, and al-Mu'tamid himself was sent into exile in the Maghrib, at Aghmat, where, four years later he died after composing bitter poems reflecting his desperate passion for his lost kingdom.²³

A knowledge of the circumstances in which the poet-king composed these lines may help us understand the motivation and also the theme of this poem. Devastated by the calamitous destiny he had to face after a long period of calm and contentment, the poet was left brokenhearted and tormented by the disgrace which had befallen him. The exiled al-Mu'tamid remembered with bitterness and chagrin the good fortune his astrologer, Abū Bakr al-Khulānī, had promised him while he occupied the throne: the long and happy reign he would enjoy and the great events his people would witness. But, as he laments, 'Everything you promised has turned into its contrary'. Al-Mu'tamid blames his astrologer for his downfall, since it was Abū Bakr's deceitful flattery that made him believe in a chimera and do nothing to avoid the coming disaster. The poet accuses the astrologer of ignorance (*jahl*) as all his predictions have proved false. But his feelings are mixed; as well as anger, there is nostalgia and irony in these lines, and it is clear that the two men were close, and that the astrologer enjoyed considerable privileges under the prince's patronage: position and power were bestowed upon him. The satiric tone develops as the poet rebukes his astrologer, who has fled to some refuge: is Abū Bakr celebrating his wedding to Virgo, or have his lies caused him to fall prey to Leo? The poet's disillusion brings Virgo and Leo down from their quasi-divine pedestal to the level of the mundane, and his satire ridicules what was once held in high esteem: they fell from the heavens at the exact moment when he fell from his throne. At this point satire turns from mockery and becomes *ḥikma*, a statement of the poet's wisdom: the last line is interesting for the poet's unusual pairing of images. It would be

weariness of the spectacle of the disunion of the Andalusian kings and their compromises with the Christian monarchs, dethroned then one after the other and simply annexed the greater part of al-Andalus to his dominion. From that moment, Muslim Spain was only the vassal of the Maghrib'. (See W. Montgomery Watt, 'Al-Andalus: (vi) General Survey of the History of al-Andalus: (6) The Kingdoms of the *tā'ifs* up to the battle of al-Zallāka', in *E. I.*, Vol. 1, p. 495).

²³ See Shawqī Dayf, *ʿAṣr ad-Duwal wa l-Imārāt* (Cairo: Dar al-Maʿārif, 1994), pp. 339- 41; and Wasserstein, *The Rise and Fall of the Party-Kings*, p. 298.

conventional to compare the throne with life, for no one can enjoy either for ever, but al-Mu'tamid compares the throne with death; this casts a shadow over the pleasures of court life that he has foolishly indulged in, and introduces a note of bitter regret that his wisdom has come too late to prevent his defeat and exile. But of course it is defeat and exile that have brought him the wisdom he never possessed while enjoying the throne. The line juxtaposes pleasure and annihilation in order to emphasise the ephemeral nature of life and the indifference of fate to human desires. Life is a mixture of a good and ill fortune and the astrologer's promise of everlasting happiness should not have been believed. The fleeting nature of pleasure and mortality is ruefully acknowledged.

When addressing a patron of Persian origin the poet could assume that the addressee possessed more than a little knowledge of astrology. A case in point is the lines dedicated to the Buyid ruler,²⁴ 'Aḡuḡ ad-Dawla (d. 372/ 983),²⁵ aṣ-Ṣāḡib ibn 'Abbād (d. 385/ 995).²⁶ The poet explicitly attacks astrologers, calling them 'the Fathers of Fools',

²⁴ The Buwayhids (or Buyid) were the most important of the dynasties which ruled Iran after the Arab domination of the early and mediaeval Muslim world and the Turkish conquest of the 5th/ 11th century. They ruled great parts of Iran and fractions of Iraq and the other territories of the Abbasid Caliphate under the successive *amīr al-umarā'* (the Prince of the Princes), bestowed on them by the Abbasid Caliph, al-Mustakfi (r. 333- 34/ 944- 46). The three major rulers of this dynasty are well known by their honorific titles: Mu'izz ad-Dawla, Rukn ad-Dawla, and 'Aḡuḡ ad-Dawla. After establishing their power they placed the Abbasid Caliphs under the domination of their army. Yet, being Shī'i, who were a minority in Iraq, they allowed the Sunni Caliph to continue as nominal ruler, 'both to legalise his authority over the Sunnis in his states and to strengthen his diplomatic relations with the world outside by the weight of the respected moral authority which the Sunni princes still enjoyed by right. In fact, deriving their official authority from the Caliphate, the Buyids behaved as though they believed genuinely in the legitimacy of the 'Abbāsīd Caliphate'. (See C. Collin Davies, 'Buwayhids or Būyids', *E. I.*, Vol. 1, pp. 1350- 57, particularly 1350).

²⁵ A Buyid ruler who ruled all southern Persia in the reign of his father Rukn ad-Dawla. After his father death, the successor to the throne in Persia was his brother Mu'ayyad ad-Dawla. Having a great ambition to play a visible political role he sought to expand the province of his family and thus controlled Iraq and most of the Arab Peninsula and proclaimed himself a ruler of that provinces. For this reason, he is generally regarded as the greatest *amīr* of the Buyid dynasty, whose power reached its zenith during his reign. (See H. Bowen, 'Aḡuḡ al-Dawla', in *E. I.*, 1960, Vol. 1, pp. 211- 12).

²⁶ Abū al-Qāsim Ismā'il ibn 'Abbād, known with his honorific titles aṣ-Ṣāḡib (or the Friend). He was the vizier of a number of early Buyid rulers in the reigns of Rukn ad-Dawla and his successor and son Mu'ayyad ad-Dawla, and in the reign of Fakhr ad-Dawla, the latter's successor and brother, having helped him to ascend the throne despite the rejection of some members of the royal family, aṣ-Ṣāḡib exercised greater authority than the ruler. It has been said: 'If two declarations were to be issued on a certain matter, one by the ruler, Fakhr ad-Dawla, and the other by the vizier, aṣ-Ṣāḡib, the latter's would be approved and issued'. (See al-Ḥamawī, *Muṣam al-Udabā'*; Vol. 2, p. 217, for full biography see *ibid*, pp. 213- 90).

but his astrological reference can be read as implying a meaning of much deeper purpose and sophistication, partially concealing his fear of losing his political position:

خوفني مؤجج، أبو خبل ... تراجع المريخ في برج الحمل.
فقلت دعني من أباطيل الحيل ... فالمشترى عني سواءً و زحل.²⁷

An astrologer, the Father of Fools, warned me that Mars was in Aries.
I replied, 'Get away from me with your ridiculous lies; I hold there is no
difference between Jupiter and Saturn.

We suspect that aṣ-Ṣāhib's public view of astrology may have been motivated by a desire to appear devout, for evidence exists that the vizier believed in the science of astrology; it is related that he proudly said: 'At the moment of my birth, the chart showed that Orion was rising; a moment later and my horoscope would have indicated my prophethood'.²⁸ It is possible that aṣ-Ṣāhib's remark was meant satirically, as an attack on the pretensions of astrology; as for the lines quoted above, their astrological implications should be analysed. Mars is a malefic planet; its inauspicious aspect is exacerbated by its position in the house of Aries. The significance of this is that those under the influence of their conjunction are likely to fall victim to the unexpected displeasure of a royal personage.²⁹ So, could these lines be regarded as a message to the Buyid ruler, that the vizier was confident that he continued to be regarded with favour by his lord and, should that confidence be misplaced, that the ruler should not act in such a way as to prove the 'Father of Fools' correct in his prognostication? Read in this way, the lines appear to be a subtle and astute political manoeuvre on aṣ-Ṣāhib's part.³⁰

Aṣ-Ṣāhib ibn 'Abbād is thus 'remembered as one of the great viziers of Muslim history. He belongs to the category of ministers who, in the service of princes who were either not suited to or were indifferent to the tasks of administration, were able to acquire an almost autonomous personal power and to become temporarily the true masters of the state'. He also presided over a court which attracted some of the great literary figures of the time. See Cl. Cahen and Ch. Pellat, 'Ibn 'Abbad, Abu al-Ḳāsim Ismā'īl', in *E. I.*, Vol. iii, pp. 671- 73.

²⁷ Al-Aṣfahānī, *Muḥāḍarāt al-Udabā'*, Vol. 1, p. 145.

²⁸ Abū Ḥayyan at-Tawḥīdī, *Mathālib al-Wazīrayn: Akhlāq aṣ-Ṣāhib ibn 'Abbād wa Ibn al-'Amīd*, ed. by Ibrāhīm al-Kīlānī, (Damascus: Dar al-Fikr, 1997), p. 135.

²⁹ See Abū Sa'īd Ahmad As-Sīzī, *Kitāb ad-Dalā'il fī Ahkām an-Nujūm*, in King Abdul Aziz University, The Central Library (MS. Falk, Tanjīm, no. 235/ 2., n.d.), fol. 76, and Abū Ma'shar al-Balkhī, *Al-Mudkhalk ilā 'Ilm an-Nujūm*, in King Abdul Aziz University, The Central Library (MS. Falk, Tanjīm, no. 285., n.d.), fol. 8.

Certainly this is more likely than that they are merely an expression of orthodox religious ideology. Moreover, if this reading is correct, we can be fairly certain that the poet must have been confident that his astrological implication would be understood by his reader.³¹ Aṣ-Ṣāhib's lines suggest that the addressee often had some knowledge of astrology. Sometimes, however, astrological references could be made simply to clarify the poet's thought. Abū al-Faṭḥ al-Bustī (d. 400/ 1010),³² who was often the victim of

³⁰ Royal courts in general were characterised by unstable moods and changing tempers. Abū 'Amr Al-Jāhiz in his *Kitāb at-Tāj fi Akhlāq al-Mulūk* (The Crown of the Kings' Conduct), ed. Ahmad Zakī Bāshā, (Cairo: Al-Maṭba'a al-Amīriyya, 1914), discusses this issue; see particularly pp. 91- 94.

³¹ Many accounts testify to the strong belief in astrology held by the Buyid rulers (reigned 320-447/ 932-1055), particularly 'Aḍḍ ad-Dawla, the ruling head of the Buyid family, who granted his favour to this minister. (See Shāmī, *Tārīkh at-Tanjīm*, pp. 276-78). The importance of this discipline, which was of Zoroastrian origin, has been seen to lie in the role it played in the Buyids' intention 'to form a separate block within Islam itself, under a "national" dynasty'. (See C. Collin Davies, 'Buwayhids or Būyids', in *E. I.*, Vol. 1, pp. 1350-1357, particularly p. 1354).

A number of literary works testify to the Buyids interest in astrology. Even instruments such as the *zīj** could be a source of inspiration to poets. Abū Ishāq Ibrāhīm aṣ-Ṣābi' (313- 84/ 925- 94)** could conceive no better gift than this astrological tool to be given to the Buyid ruler 'Aḍḍ ad-Dawla:

أهديت محتفلاً زيجاً جدوله ... مئـائل المكاييل يستوفى بها العمر.
فقس به الفائف الكوار و اجر كما ... يجـري بلا اجل يخشى و ينتظر.

Abū Manṣūr 'Abd al-Malik ath-Tha'ālībī, *Yatīmat ad-Dahr fi Maḥāsin Ahl al-'Aṣr*, ed. by Ābū Mufīd Qamiḥa, (Beirut: Dār al-Kutub al-'Ilmiyya, 6 Vols., 2000), Vol. 2, p. 331.

I gave a gift to a celebrator; it was a *zīj* whose tables were like weights that measure our life span.

So, measure with it the orbits of the heavens so that you, like they, will be immortal,
neither living in fear nor passing the days in dread.

* In Islamic science *az-Zīj* is an astronomical hand-book with tables, so called after the models of the Sāsānid Persian *zīj aṣ-ṣiḥāh*, the Indian *Sindhind*, and Ptolemy's *Almagest* and *Handy Tables*. In its astrological function the *zīj* was usually used for drawing up a horoscope for a certain moment or for a series of such moments, such as each year in the life of an individual. Given the ascendant, that is, the point of the ecliptic *instantaneously* rising over the horizon, one needs to determine the positions for the astrological houses and to assign the Sun, Moon and five naked-eye planets to the appropriate house, and then to investigate the supposed significance of their positions relative to each other, and other functions. See D. A. King and J. Samsó, 'Zīdg - ii. The scope of the *zīdg* literature', in *E. I.*, Vol. xi, p 504.

** Abū Ishāq Aṣ-Ṣābi' was a 'master stylist of epistolary prose. [He was the] scion of two notable families of physicians from the Sabian religious community of Ḥarrān (his maternal grandfather was Thābit ibn Qurra [a very famous astrologer of the Abbasid period])'. He was employed by several Buyid rulers, but incurred the wrath of 'Aḍḍ ad-Dawla, who imprisoned him for a while and then commanded him to compose his eulogistic history of that dynasty, *Kitāb at-Tājī*, of which only a few fragments have survived. See E. K. Rowson, 'al-Ṣābi', Abū Ishāq Ibrāhīm ibn Hilāl (313-84/ 925-94)', in *Encyclopedia of Arabic Literature*, Vol. 2, pp. 671-2.

³² 'Alī ibn Muhammad Abū al-Faṭḥ al-Bustī was an Arabic poet of Persian origin and a native of Bust, a Persian province. He was one of the prominent men of letters of the 4th/ 10th century. (See J. W. Fück,

his patrons' inconsistent moods, expresses his pain in the following lines, which also demonstrate that the astrological significance of Mars in particular and its relation with the instability of royal moods were well understood at that period:

سل الله الغنى تسلي جوادا ... أمّنت على خزائنه النفادا .
 ولإن حبابك سلطان بقرب ... فلا تغفل ترقبك البعادا .
 فقد تدني الملوك لدى رضاها ... وتبعد حين تحتقد احتقادا .
 كما المريخ في التثليث يعطي ... وفي الترييع يسلب ما أفاد.³³

If you desire wealth, make supplication to God alone; the treasures of His generosity are without limit.
 And whenever a sultan draws you closer to him, never expect that this favour will last and always expect to be cast aside.
 For kings always draw you closer when they are in a good mood, and abandon you when their anger grows hot,
 Exactly like Mars, who blesses when in its trine aspect, and withdraws its bounty when in its quartile aspect.

An explanation of the relations between the poet and the ruling families of his time may help clarify the meaning of his astrological references. Al-Bustī was among the ranks of Bust's officials as he was *kātib* (secretary) to the governor of that province when it was under the rule of the Sāmānids, a Persian dynasty that governed Transoxania and Khurasān (204-395/ 819-1005).³⁴ His career reached its apogee during the reign of Prince Sebūktigin, a former Sāmānid general of Turkish origin and the founder of the Ghaznavid dynasty, which reached the apex of its power under his son Maḥmūd.³⁵

'Al-Bustī', in *E. I.*, 1960, Vol. I, p. 1348). 400 H. is the date of death given by az-Ziriklī, but according to Ibn Kathīr the poet died in 363 H. (See Ibn Kathīr, *Al-Bidāya wa l-Nihāya*, Vol. 11, p. 236). Az-Ziriklī, however, provides convincing evidence for the validity of his date, and thus we have rejected that provided by Ibn Kathīr, (see az-Ziriklī, *Al-A lām*, Vol. 5, p. 144, footnote 2).

³³ Ath-Tha'ālibī, *Khāṣṣ al-Khāṣṣ*, p. 118.

³⁴ The early history of this dynasty is obscure. The Sāmānid first appear on the stage of history in 204/ 819 when the Abbasid Caliph al-Ma'mūn's behest, his governor in Khurasān, Ghassān ibn 'Abbād, rewarded the four sons of Asad ibn Sāmān-Khudā for their support of the Abbasids during the rebellion in Transoxania of Rāfi' ibn al-Layth ibn Sayyār. Nūh was given the governorship of Samarqand; Ahmad, Farghān; Yaḥyā, Shāsh; and Ilyās, Harāt. (From more information about this dynasty and how they established their power over Transoxania and Khurasān, see Ayman F. Sayyid, 'Sāmānids', in *E. I.*, Vol. viii, pp. 1025- 31).

³⁵ The Ghaznavids were the first major Turkish dynasty in the eastern Islamic world, named for their capital at Ghazna, in south-eastern Afghanistan. Though they were Turkish, being Muslims, Arabic was the official language of their state. Yet the literature of the later Ghaznavid court seems to have been almost entirely in Persian. The fall of this dynasty occurred in 582/ 1186. (for a brief account of this

When Sebūktigin took the first step towards the establishment of his power by occupying Bust in 367/ 977, al-Bustī went over to the victor, who retained him in his position as a *kātib*. However, being a former Sāmānid loyalist, he was compelled to retire, but a few months later was recalled by Sebūktigin and remained in his position until the death of the Prince, whereupon he again fell out of favour with the Ghaznavids: when Maḥmūd (r. 388- 421/ 998- 1030) succeeded his father, he patronised al-Bustī for a while, then ordered him to be banished for life to the Turkish lands of Transoxania.

Al-Bustī's lines are interesting on several counts. First, although he is careful to present himself as an orthodox Muslim, he also seems to endow the planets – in this case Mars – with agency. Second, his astrological reference demonstrates a level of sophistication that is very rarely found in literary works before the Abbasid period. Third, it is by no means clear that he was addressing a ruler since the Turkish princes under whom he served would have had little knowledge of astrology and, more importantly, would not have been pleased by his candid criticism of the fickleness of rulers. Moreover, 'you' cannot refer to 'them', it is possible then that the poem was written during his banishment. The last line provides evidence that the poet was well acquainted with astrology, as it shows a knowledge of the trine aspect (when the angle between two planets is 120°) and of the quartile (an angle of 90°). The use of such terminology suggests that astrology had become an integral part of the intellectual life of certain segments of Abbasid society; moreover, such knowledge could be used not merely to display learning or convey information, but to express subtle and penetrating ideas and impart wisdom.

Another poem by al-Bustī is worth discussing here. Its date is uncertain, but it was probably written for Prince Sebūktigin shortly after his occupation of Bust. If this is true, then the 'king' referred to must be the Sāmānid ruler, and the lines can be read as propaganda confirming that the Prince's military victory was written in the stars. Thus the poem re-establishes the Persian practice of proclaiming the legitimacy of a new

dynasty see K. E. Rowson, 'Ghaznavids', in *Encyclopedia of Arabic Literature*, Vol. 1, pp. 251- 52; for full information see Clifford Bosworth, *The Ghaznavids: Their Empire in Afghanistan and Eastern Iran*. Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1963).

ruler's authority through the political use of astrological 'evidence'. Al-Bustī's lines refer to a conjunction presaging disaster:

إذا غدا ملك باللهم مشتغلاً ... فاحكم على ملكه بالويل و الخرب.
أما ترى الشمس في الميزان هابطة ... لما غدا و هو برج اللهم و الطرب.³⁶

Whenever a king indulges in pleasure, disaster and misfortunes are to be predicted for his reign.

Have not you seen the chart for the hour he ascended the throne? It shows the Sun in its depression, in Libra, the house of the sign of the zodiac indicating entertainment and amusement.

Another interpretation is possible, though less likely, if these lines are regarded as having been produced when al-Bustī was employed by the Sāmānids. In this case astrological imagery is employed to comment negatively on the patron's political affairs, but the poet protects himself by claiming that it is the stars, not himself, who are foretelling disaster. His usage of astrological elements seems, however, to be a distortion of the usual interpretation. Al-Bustī, taking on the role of astrologer,³⁷ warns of coming misfortunes, basing his prognostication on the chart drawn at the time of the ruler's ascent to the throne, which showed the Sun in Libra. Libra is the house of Venus,³⁸ a planet whose nature is 'luxury, arrogance, love of amusement, laughing, adornment, joy; dancing, playing with [musical] instruments, moving the strings of lutes, songs; perfumes, scent, games of backgammon and chess [...]'.³⁹ Al-Bustī points out that the Sun, representing the ruler, was in Libra, and would therefore suffer the deleterious effects of the influence of Venus. But al-Bustī is intent on making a political statement, either attacking his new patron's enemy, or warning his own patron (the Sāmānid ruler) against excess and neglect of his duties, and so he ignores the accepted

³⁶ Ath-Tha'ālibī, *Yafimat ad-Dahr*, Vol., 4, p. 359.

³⁷ Predicting the nature of a future caliph or a ruling dynasty, or the duration of their power was practised at that time. See al-Ya'qūbī's *Tarīkh al-Ya'qūbī*, which presents the history of certain dynasties or individual reigns, together with astrological analysis derived from the configuration of the heavens at the time of their accession to power, or in other cases at the moment of the birth of some great figure such as the Prophet Muhammad. See Ahmad ibn Ja'far al-Ya'qūbī's *Tarīkh al-Ya'qūbī* (Beirut: Dār Ṣāḍir, 2 Vols., n.d.). Ch. VII discusses the matter of the mundane astrology in more depth.

³⁸ Charles Burnett, Keiji Yamamoto and Michio Yano (eds. & trans.), *Abū Ma'shar: The Abbreviation of the Introduction of Astrology: together with the Medieval Latin Translation of Adelard of Bath* (Leiden & New York: E. J. Brill, 1994), p. 19.

³⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 65.

characterisation of Libra as signifying justice. A more conventional reading would have been the Sun in Libra presaged not disaster but a reign distinguished by acts of justice. Thus, irrespective of the addressee's identity, the astrological reference has a clear political function.

Ibn Sanā' al-Mulk (d. 608/ 1212)⁴⁰ subverts the conventional aspect of the Moon when in Scorpio, where it exerts a malefic influence, and presents a contrary meaning, one that reverses the usual interpretation. He celebrates the happy relationship he enjoyed with his junior patron, who was forty nine years younger than him, Tūrānshāh (d. 648/ 1250), the son of the Ayyūbid Sultān Najm ad-Dīn.⁴¹ The patron's countenance is, according to the poet's allusion, as beautiful as the Moon, and since his Zodiacal sign is Scorpio, the Moon in Scorpio here signifies good fortune rather than an evil fate, and the poet explicitly refers to the power of his patron to defy astrologers and through his bestowal of favours, to refute the conventional meaning of that heavenly configuration. It is not clear whether or not either Tūrānshāh or his poet believed in astrology, nor does it matter. At this stage the truth or falsehood of astrological predictions was less important than the poet's talent for drawing on astrological knowledge for purely poetic purposes, whether in the panegyric, the elegy, or the satire. Here the intention is to eulogise the patron, and religious considerations are entirely absent:

سُودَتْ بَدْرُ بَرِّ جَهْ بِرْجُ عَقْرَبٍ ... فَكُذِبَ عِنْدِي قَوْلَ كُلِّ مَنْجَمٍ.⁴²

⁴⁰ Ibn Sanā' al-Mulk Hibatu Allāh ibn Ja'far, was one of the prominent figures among the men of letters in Egypt in the Ayyūbid period (see below). He wrote a volume entitled *Rūḥ al-Ḥayawān* (The Soul of the Animal), which is a brief summary of al-Jāhīz's *Al-Ḥayawān* (The Animal), and he also composed his own *Dīwān*, called *Dār at-Ṭirāz*, (The House of Embroidery). See al-Ḥamawī, *Muḥam al-Udabā'*, Vol. 5, pp. 581-84; and az-Ziriklī, *Al-A lām*, Vol., 9, p. 57.

⁴¹ The Ayyūbid dynasty was founded by Ṣalāḥ ad-Dīn al-Ayyūbī, and at the end of the 6th/ 12th century and in the first half of the 7th/ 13th century the Ayyūbids ruled Egypt, Muslim Syria-Palestine, the major part of Upper Mesopotamia, and the Yemen. They were Sunnis of Kurdish origin. The glorious reputation of the dynasty's founder, Ṣalāḥ ad-Dīn, was due to his success in driving the Byzantines out of Palestine and Syria in 1180. The death of his grandson, aṣ-Ṣāliḥ Ayyūb Najm ad-Dīn, who was the eighth king of that dynasty to ascend the throne, marked the end of the Ayyūbid dynasty. His son, Tūrānshāh, was killed by his own Turkish slave troops, and 'even though several child puppets still carried on the name of the Ayyūbid dynasty for a time, it was in fact from 647/ 1249 that the establishment of the new so-called Mamlūk régime dated'. See Cl. Cahen, 'Ayyūbids', in *E. I.*, Vol. 1, pp. 796- 807, particularly, p. 804. For the biography of Tūrānshāh see az-Ziriklī, *Al-A lām*, Vol. 2, pp. 74- 75.

⁴² Al-Ḥamawī, *Muḥam al-Udabā'*, Vol. 5, p. 582.

I am delighted by a Moon whose sign is Scorpio; thus he refutes all astrologers' claims.

V. 3: Astrology and the Public

The world of the court poets and their powerful patrons was very different from the harsh and often dangerous lives endured by the ordinary people of the late Abbasid era in all parts of the empire.⁴³ The precariousness of their existence drove them to seek reassurance by all available means. Thus, despite the continuing hostility shown by religious critics, 'the attacks on astrology apparently did not stop astrologers from practicing in almost every domain of public life—in the streets, in shops, in the company of armies, on ships, at the deathbed',⁴⁴ and of course astrologers still held official positions at the courts of both the Abbasid caliphs and those of independent states. But many of these public astrologers were unqualified quacks whose deception outraged the ordinary citizen and drew condemnation from poets as well as men of religion.⁴⁵ Al-Qāsim ibn Muhammad al-Anbārī (d. 304/ 915),⁴⁶ composed the following lines refuting the astrologers' claim to know the future; astrology is worthless, rendered meaningless by the reality of divine omnipotence:

إني بأحكام النجوم مُكذِّبٌ ... ولمذعبيها لانتُم ومؤنَّبُ.
الغيبُ يعلمه المهيمَنُ وحدَه ... وعن الخلائق أجمعين مغتِيبُ.
الله يُعطي وهو يمنع قادرا ... فمن المنجمُ ويحه والكوكب.⁴⁷

I do not believe in judicial stars, and I condemn and rebuke those who,
observing their movements, claim to predict what is to come.
The unseen is known only by God, it is veiled from all His creatures.

⁴³ See al-'Aqqād, *Ibn ar-Rūmī*, p. 39.

⁴⁴ George Saliba, 'Astrology/Astronomy, Islamic', in *Dictionary of the Middle Ages*, Vol. 1, p. 619.

⁴⁵ In one of al-Hamadhānī *Maqāmat*, which comprises a catalogue of a divers types of beggars and their roguish activities practiced at 4th/ 10th century in the Abbasid period, the hero resorted to astrology as a means of obtaining money from gullible customers. (See 'al-Maqāma ar-Ruṣāfiyya' in al-Hamadhānī's *Maqāmāt Badī' az-zamān al-Hamadhānī*, ed. Muhammad 'Abdu, (Beirut: Al-Maṭba'a al-Kāthulikiyya, 1965), particularly p. 158, they are mentioned as 'ahl al-qaff'. On the subject of astrologers who applied their proficiency as a kind of gaining livelihood see Clifford Bosworth, *The Mediaeval Islamic Underworld: the Banū Sāsān in Arabic Society and Literature* (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 2 Vols., 1976), Vol. 1, pp. 89- 92.

⁴⁶ Al-Qāsim ibn Muhammad al-Anbārī was a respected historian and the author of a number of books including *Kitāb Khalq al-Insān*, *Al-Maqṣūr wa 'l-Mamdūd* and *Al-Amthāl*. For his Biography see al-Ḥamawī, *Muḥjam al-Udabā'*, Vol. 4, pp. 634- 35.

⁴⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 634.

God provides and prevents according to His will; tell me then, what are that astrologer and his planets [in comparison to God]?

Besides poets and men of religion, astrologers themselves were sometimes constrained to attack their own discipline. Some, who were astronomers as well as astrologers, were sceptical of astrology's claim to be a science and nervous of the harsh criticism levelled by the devout.⁴⁸ They were also mindful of the damage done to astrology's reputation by the quacks and charlatans who preyed on the public. The next example can be considered as an attack on astrology itself or as mockery of an ignorant apprentice who claims to have knowledge he does not possess. Al-Badī al-Aṣṭrulābī (d. 534/ 1139)⁴⁹ ridicules his apprentice and derides his pretensions, calling him a bull:

قام إلى الشمس بالآتية ... لينظر السعد من النحس.
فقلت: أين الشمس؟ قال القتي: ... في الثور. قلت: الثور في الشمس.⁵⁰

He took his tools and faced the Sun to observe auspicious and inauspicious signs. I asked him 'Where is the Sun?' The lad replied 'In Taurus.' I said 'Rather it is Taurus who is in the Sun'.

Another astrologer, Umayya ibn Abī aṣ-Ṣalt (d. 592/ 1135),⁵¹ is careful to affirm that heavenly bodies are subject to God's will:

⁴⁸ Al-Bīrūnī (d. 440/ 1048),* for example, 'a compiler of what remains the best encyclopedic work on mediaeval Islamic astrology, found himself in a very awkward position. Asked by his patroness to write a text on astrology, but feeling the pressure of religious objections and his own skepticism towards the subject, he could leave only a few remarks throughout the work disavowing astrological doctrines. On another occasion, he even went so far as to attack astrology directly. And in still another work he says that he discussed astrology only to warn the intelligent man away from it. He tolerates it only as a means of livelihood for the astronomer, whose research might otherwise not be supported'. George Saliba, 'Astrology/ Astronomy, Islamic', p. 618.

* Abū Rayḥān Muhammad ibn Aḥmad al-Bīrūnī was born in Khawārazm in 362/ 973. He was the court astronomer and astrologer during the reign of Maḥmūd Sebūktigin of Ghazna (r. 388- 421/ 988- 1030 - see above) the period that witnessed the rising power of the Turks in Central Asia and the destruction of most of the small Persian kingdoms of the region. For more details about al-Bīrūnī's life and works see Nasr, *An Introduction to Islamic Cosmological Doctrines*, pp. 107-115.

⁴⁹ Hibatu Allāh ibn al-Ḥusayn Badī az-Zamān al-Aṣṭrulābī was a well-known poet, physician and astrologer. He was given the nickname, Aṣṭrulābī, because of his deep knowledge of this astronomical – astrological instrument. For his biography see al-Hamawī, *Muḥam al-Udabā'*, Vol. 5, pp. 586- 88, and Muwaffaq ad-Dīn Ahmad ibn al-Qāsim Ibn Abī Uṣaybi'a, *ʿUyūn al-Anbā' fī Ṭabaqāt al-Aṭibbā'*, ed. by Nizār Riḍā, (Beirut: Manshūrāt Dār Maktabat al-Ḥaya, n.d.), pp. 376- 80.

⁵⁰ Al-Ḥamawī *Muḥam al-Udabā'*, Vol. 5, p. 587; and Ibn Abī Uṣaybi'a, *ʿUyūn al-Anbā'*, p. 377.

لا ترجُ في أمرِك سعد المشتري ... ولا تخفُ من فوقِه نحسَ زحل.
وارجُ و خفُ ربُّهما فهو الذي ... ما شاء من خيرٍ و من شرٍ فعل.⁵²

Do not rely in any of your affairs on the benefic Jupiter or the malefic
Mars.
Appeal only to God, as every good and evil is determined according to
His will.

The poet, who seems concerned to reconcile astrology with divine predestination, insists that in human life all misfortunes and blessings are determined by the will of God. This is essentially the orthodox view of God's omnipotence, and denies agency of any kind to the celestial realm.

In another occasion, however, the same poet composed lines in which he praises the astrological function of the astrolabe and describes it in such a manner that it may be compared, by implication, to the 'Preserved Tablet':

أفضل ما استصحب النبيل فلا ... تعدل به في المقام و السفر.
جرم إذا ما التمسست قيمته ... جـلُّ عن التبر و هو من الصفر.
مسكـئه الأرضُ و هو ينبئنا ... عن جـل ما في السماء من خبر.⁵³

A nobleman could have no better companion, nor one more worthy
whether at home or abroad, for it is incomparable.
It is indeed an object so precious that were its value to be estimated it
would exceed that of gold; yet is made of brass.
Though earth is its abode, it foretells almost all that occurs in the upper
realm.

Abū al-Ḥasan Aḥmad ibn Ayyūb al-Baṣrī,⁵⁴ by contrast, condemns the use of one of the astrologers' tools, the *zīj*:

كنت إذا مسرت في حاجة ... أطلالـعُ التقويمُ و الزيج.
فصارَ لي الزيجُ كتصحيفَةٍ ... وعـادَ لي التقويمُ تعويج.⁵⁵

⁵¹ Umayya ibn 'Abd al-'Azīz ibn Abī aṣ-Ṣalt was an Andalusian physician, musician and mathematician. He was the author of a number of books on astronomy and medicine. (See Ibn Abī Uṣaybi'a, *ʿUyūn al-Anbā'*, pp 501-15.

⁵² Ibid., p. 513.

⁵³ Ibid., p. 511-12.

⁵⁴ No much information available regarding the life of Aḥmad ibn Ayyūb al-Baṣrī an-Nāhī except that he lived for a while in Nissābūr which he later left to Jurjān. His date of birth and death is not cited. See 'Afif 'Abd ar-Raḥmān, *Muḥam ash-Shu'arā' al-'Abbāsiyīn* (Beirut: Dār Ṣādir, 2000), p. 553.

Before embarking on any action, it was my habit to consult the calendar
and zīj;
Yet the zīj proved to be nothing more than useless paper and the calendar
led me astray instead of guiding me.

The orthodox religious opinion of astrology is expressed by al-Kamāl Muhammad ibn
Ṭalha an-Naṣībī (d. 652/ 1254):⁵⁶

إذا حكم المنجم في القضايا ... بحكم حازم فاررد عليه.
فليس بعالم ما الله قاض ... فقلّ دني ولا تركن إليه.⁵⁷

Whenever an astrologer judges any case you should refute his opinion
with strong evidence,
Which is that no one is able to know what God has decided; therefore
follow my example and never rely on him.

He advises people to treat astrologers as he does, by strictly refuting and rejecting all
their claims regarding any matter whatsoever, as they have neither authority nor
credibility and cannot prove the statements they deliver to their clients. Their advice is
worthless, for God alone has knowledge of the unseen. This poet also composed other
lines on the same theme:

لا تركنن إلى مقال منجم ... وكلّ الأمور إلى الإله وسلم.
واعلم بأنك إن جعلت لكوكب ... تدبير حادثة فلمنت بمسلم.⁵⁸

Never depend on an astrologer's decision and always submit all matters
to God with resignation.
And bear in mind that whenever you attribute to a planet the ability to
exert an effect on earthly affairs you are no Muslim.

Al-Kamāl expresses the orthodox opinion that the believer should have nothing to do
with astrology either in practice or in theory; instead, the will of God is to be accepted

⁵⁵ Ash-Shantarīnī, *Adh-Dhakhīra*, Vol., 4, p. 131.

⁵⁶ Muhammad ibn Ṭalha an-Naṣībī was a poet and man of letters, who wrote number of books. He was offered a political position in Damascus but declined for religious reason. See his bibliography in az-Ziriklī, *Al-A lām*, Vol. 7, p. 45.

⁵⁷ Ibn al-'Imād, *Shazarāt adh-Dhahab*, Vol. 7, p. 448.

⁵⁸ *Ibid.*, Vol. 7, p. 448.

'with resignation'. The reader is also reminded that a belief in the power of the planets to influence human affairs is tantamount to pagan idolatry.

Al-Bahā' Zuhayr (d. 656/ 1258)⁵⁹ also exhorts believers to have no faith in the effect of the stars on man's destiny; it is God alone who preordains human fate:

لا ترقب النجم في أمر تحاوله ... فالله يفعل لا جدِّي ولا حمل.
مع السعادة ما للنجم من أثر ... فلا يغرك مريخ ولا زحل.
الأمر أعظم والأفكار حائرة ... والشرع يصدق والإنسان يمتثل.⁶⁰

Do not consult a star on any of your affairs: it is God who ordains [your fate], and neither Mars nor Saturn determine anything.
If your destiny is happiness they can have no influence whatsoever on your fate, therefore pay no heed to Mars and Saturn.
The matter [of our destiny] is greater [than we can conceive] and overwhelms the mind; yet all we have to do is to believe in God's law and treat the matter with submission and resignation.

Condemnation of astrology and astrologers often centred on the contradiction between the astrologers' main claim, that they could foretell the future, and their inability to defend themselves, let alone their clients, from an evil destiny. It is related that the preacher Abū Muhammad 'Abdullah ibn Jābir, known as Māhānī (d. 389/ 998), passed one day by an astrologer who had been crucified and asked him, with heavy irony: 'Didn't you see this destiny in your stars?' The astrologer replied in an equally ironical defence of his science: 'I used to see myself occupying a high position, but it never

⁵⁹ Abū al-Faḍl ibn Muhammad al-Azdī, known as al-Bahā' Zuhayr, was a celebrated Arab poet of the Ayyūbid period; he was born in Mecca in 581/ 1186. Whilst still very young he traveled to Egypt and settled there. In 625/ 1227 al-Bahā' was in the service of aṣ-Ṣāliḥ Ayyūb, son and successor of the Sultan al-Kāmil ibn Ṣalāḥ ad-Dīn al-Ayyūbī. On the death of his father, al-Bahā' returned to his home country. Whilst returning to Egypt in 637/ 1239, the news reached him that his patron had been betrayed by his troops; they had handed him over to his cousin al-Nāṣir Dāwūd, who imprisoned him. The poet remained faithful to his master, and when aṣ-Ṣāliḥ ascended the throne of Egypt, he was duly rewarded: the Sultān appointed him his vizier and showered honours upon him. However, in 646/ 1248 he was found at the side of one of aṣ-Ṣāliḥ's rivals, who was fighting against the Byzantines. As a result of a misunderstanding, the poet fell into disgrace. After the death of his master, he tried his luck with another patron in another country but without success and so disappointedly returned to Egypt, where he experienced solitude and poverty, and died in 656/ 1258. (See J. Rikabi, 'Bahā' al-Dīn Zuhayr', in *E. I.*, Vol. 1, pp. 912- 13).

⁶⁰ Al-Bahā' Zuhayr, *Diwān al-Bahā' Zuhayr* (Beirut: Dār al-Kitāb al-Lubnānī, 1968), p. 179.

occurred to me that the high position would be on this cross!’⁶¹ Abū Bakr ar-Rāzī (d.320/ 932),⁶² the famous physician and astrologer, was scorned by a man who criticised him for failing to avoid misfortune while claiming to have encyclopedic knowledge: ‘You claimed to be an alchemist yet were so poor your wife fought with you over ten *dirhams*; you claimed to be a physician but neglected the disease in your eyes until you lost your sight; and you claimed knowledge of the stars but were unable to defend yourself against the many misfortunes you encountered throughout your life’.⁶³

V. 4: Conclusion

This chapter is an extension of the previous one, and therefore our concern was to continue to investigate the phenomenon of ‘astrology in literature’ with specific references to the philosophical and theological issues connected to the problem of free will and predestination, but the focus here was on late Abbasid material, particularly that produced in provinces independent of the Abbasid caliphate. The chapter also discussed the characteristic features that distinguished the astrological references produced in the context of the court from those intended for the wider public. For this purpose, the selection of astrological material was conducted according to the poets’ social status: on the one hand, the ruling elites and those poets who attached themselves to their courts and, on the other, poets who addressed the general public.

It appears that the main feature characterising those works intended for the public is the poet’s condemnation of astrology through emphasising divine determinism and God’s limitless power over the fate of all His creatures; this is also found in the works of earlier poets. Thus, condemnation of astrology is evident throughout the Abbasid period. Al-Anbārī (304/ 918), al-Badī’ al-Aṣṭulābī (d. 534/ 1139), Umayya ibn Abī aṣ-

⁶¹ At-Tawḥīdī, *Al-Baṣā’ir wa ‘dh-Dhkhā’ir*, Vol. 1, p. 54.

⁶² Muhammad ibn Zakariyya ar-Rāzī, known in the west as Rhazes, was a famous physician, alchemist and philosopher, who also had an interest in logic and engineering sciences as well as the stars. He wrote many great books in which he shows a definite evidence of a Greek influence. (See al-Qifī, *Tārīkh al-Ḥukamā’*, pp. 271- 77)

⁶³ Ibn al-‘Ibrī, *Tārīkh Mukhtaṣar aad-Dwual*, p. 158.

Ṣalt (592/ 1135), an-Naṣībī (d. 652/ 1254), and al-Bahā' Zuhayr (656-1258) are typical of later critics. Moreover, astrology's critics included not only men of religion and devout poets but also astrologers themselves, who were driven by scepticism or fear of religious reaction, and sometimes by both.

In investigating the nature of astrological references that characterized Arabic poetry, which was produced in the Abbasid court we find them holding various messages. It is surprising to find that al-Mutanabbī seems to have had little interest in astrology and that *badī'* is absent from his imagery, which refers to pagan concepts such as *su'ūd* and *nuḥūs* and the significance of al-Thurayyā and Aldebaran. This simple use of the poet's Arab heritage suggests that he ignored recent developments in astrology, which were of little concern to him, and composed lines emphasising his Arab identity, which was of crucial importance to him.⁶⁴ The same can be said of the 'Captive Prince' Abū Firās, whose astrological references recall *Jāhili* examples as well as expressing his devotion to Islamic orthodoxy.

In strong contrast are the works of poets patronised by the Buyid rulers, who were of Persian origin. We find the most sophisticated and deep understanding of astrology in poems addressed to them, such as those of aṣ-Ṣāhib ibn 'Abbād and al-Bustī. Both poets are concerned with politics and their use of astrological material is designed to further their self-interest; and so it is the judicious use of astrological material, rather than astrology itself, that may help avoid an evil destiny. The astrological references made by the Andalusian poets were neither superficial nor of especially sophisticated level but made use of information familiar to the society of the time. Moreover, astrology in al-Andalus was still widely practised, as it was in Baghdad, and its principles were used as source material by poets such as the deposed and exiled King al-Mu'tamid in his lamentation for his lost kingdom. But while he holds his belief in astrology partly responsible for that disaster, he does not excuse himself, unlike the Caliph of Baghdad, Hārūn ar-Rashīd, who asserts that the Barmakids' refusal to follow their astrologer's advice precipitated their downfall, and finally blames fate.

⁶⁴ The poet's deeply felt awareness of his Arab identity may be regarded as a crucial factor that led him to attach himself for almost nine years to one patron, the Arab Prince Sayf ad-Dawla.

In the late Abbasid period belief in the validity of astrology becomes a matter of little concern to poets, who draw on its principles for purely literary purposes. Thus Ibn Sanā' al-Mulk reverses an established astrological principle to fit his intention of providing an image suitable for his panegyric.

The survival of astrology throughout the Abbasid period was in theory, a widespread practice, and a rich source of material for poets may be attributed to the flexibility of the discipline, which was able to adapt itself to different circumstances and various environments, including the strong opposition of Jabrites and Qadarites – for different reasons – and of sceptics and orthodox men of religion. The works discussed in this chapter have provided insights into the nature of astrology and of its survival and of the society in which it struggled to establish a secure position.

Chapter VI: Reflections of the Notion of Astral Destiny in Mediaeval Arabic Poetry

VI. 1: Introduction

The previous three chapters, namely three, four and five of this work, discussed the factors of the fluctuations in the fortunes of astrology in the classical Islamic world. Among the most important of these was the separation of religious and political authority, which contributed to a polarisation of opinion and stimulated poets to create astrological references of a controversial character. Moreover, poets working in Abbasid court circles produced works designed to fit the ideology of the ruling elites, and their references demonstrated the flexibility of the science of astrology, a factor which can be added to those that enabled astrology to survive and indeed reach its apogee in a society whose official religion strongly opposed what the religious authorities saw as its central claims: to predict with certainty coming events and to empower human beings to change or avoid an evil fate. These claims they regarded as incompatible with the Islamic view regarding the issue of free will and predestination. The previous chapters thus have been mainly concerned with examining the classical poets' treatment of this issue.

To elaborate on the foregoing discussion, this and the following chapters will focus on examining how the different astrological techniques used at the time were employed metaphorically. But this phenomenon did not occur because poets were particularly interested in the science of astrology in itself or wished to show themselves as acquainted with the latest intellectual development in their society; although these motivations were not entirely absent, they were not their prime concern. Rather, astrology was utilised because through it, poets could discourse on life's vicissitudes, and particularly shed light on the problem of human freedom. The previous three chapters demonstrated how, from the pre-Islamic era to the end of the Abbasid period, poets played on the theme of the possible effects of the celestial realm on terrestrial affairs and particularly human fate. The following discussion, while not departing from this concern, will shift from a thematic study to examine certain technical aspects of astrology and the poets' attempts to address the ideological dichotomy and the question of compatibility between the freedom of the will and the law of causality.

As the main concern of this part of the research is to show how the treatment of certain themes found in mediaeval poetry was stimulated by a knowledge of the technical side of astrology, our approach is to investigate this literary phenomenon by selecting poems showing some understanding of various astrological concepts and techniques and analysing them in the light of the astrological material available at the time. The choice of examples will be neither chronological nor on a province-by-province basis, as our concern here is different from that of the previous discussion, which examined the factors that enabled astrology to survive and gain widespread acceptance and support from both the political elites and the population at large despite the severe religious attacks against its theoretical foundation. That discussion required a chronological approach that also considered political events in the various parts of the pre-Islamic and Islamic worlds from the Arabian Peninsula to Andalus; events that affected the status of astrology and which consequently had a great influence in shaping the characteristic features of the astrological references found in the poetry of those periods. In contrast, our approach in this discussion is to emphasise the very complex role astrology played in almost all aspects of mediaeval life and thought, with the exclusion of orthodox religious doctrine, through showing that poets were well aware of not only astrology's claim to predict the future, but also its technical aspects and various concepts. The transformation of these aspects and concepts into poetic themes is the concern of this discussion regardless of their chronological date, which seems to us not crucial to an understanding of the matters in question.¹ Even though the majority of mediaeval poets'

¹ Astrology not only influenced mediaeval literature but was often integral to other forms of divination, especially the interpretation of dreams. It is related that a woman came to the most famous dream interpreter of the mediaeval Muslim world, Ibn Sirīn (d. 110/ 728), to tell him of a dream in which she saw the Moon in the constellation of ath-Thurayyā, the Pleiades, and then she heard a voice ordering her to recount the dream. Ibn Sirīn, perturbed, asked her to repeat what she had said. His interpretation was that that he himself would die after seven days (See Abū Sa'd Nāṣr ibn Ya'qūb ad-Dinawarī al-Qādirī's *At-Ta bīr fī ar-Ru'yā aw al-Qādirī fī at-Ta bīr*, ed. Fahmī Sa'īd, (Beirut: 'Ālam al-Kutub, 2 Vols., 1997), Vol. 2, p. 15. (For the bibliography of Ibn Sirīn see Ibn al-'Imād, *Shadharāth adh-Dhahab*, Vol. 2, pp. 52-4). Although there is no explanation of the method Ibn Sirīn used to reach that conclusion, we may assume that his analysis drew on the convention of ancient Arabic astrology that the Moon in the constellation of ath-Thurayyā is a bad omen that implies a radical separation or as in this case, death. The period of seven days might be deduced from the number of stars associated with the constellation of ath-Thurayya, which consists of seven stars. Moreover, the second orthodox caliph, 'Umar ibn al-Khaṭṭāb was informed by one of his soldiers that he had a dream in which he saw the Moon fighting with the Sun, 'Umar immediately addressed the dreamer: 'With which side were you standing?', and the dreamer replied, 'With the Moon', whereupon 'Umar commented: 'With the erased sign', then ordered the soldier de dismissed and should not be employed in the army while 'Umar was caliph. When the civil war

astrological references were not manifestations of a profound astrological knowledge, the aim of this discussion is to show how they moulded out of an often commonplace, or even sometimes superficial, knowledge of the science of astrology verses expressing a sophisticated and philosophical view of life.

VI. 2: Poetic References to Astrological Techniques

While the philosophical dimension of mediaeval Arabic astrology discussed in the previous chapters involved linking the macrocosm and microcosm to demonstrate the unity of creation and the power of the Omnipotent, which determined the fate of both spheres, the principles and methods of that discipline constituted a respectable scientific framework that distinguished it from other branches of divination. It is related that the well-known astrologer, Abū Ma'shar al-Balkhī, or Albumasar (787-886 AD.), happened one day to pass by a charlatan practising astrology on a street in Sāmarrā'. The master of astrology thought to test the charlatan and asked him, 'What is concerning me particularly at this moment?' To his astonishment, the charlatan guessed correctly that Abū Ma'shar was on his way to investigate the case of a prisoner. Abū Ma'shar then asked: 'Will the prisoner be freed or not?' The answer was that he would have been released before Abū Ma'shar's arrival. Immediately Abū Ma'shar set off to see whether the prediction would be proved true or false, and to his surprise he found the case of the prisoner exactly as foretold by the charlatan. Abū Ma'shar was amazed and is reported to have said: 'If I do not discover how this charlatan managed to predict correctly what

between 'Alī ibn Abī Ṭālib and Mu'āwiya ibn Abī Sufyān broke out, the soldier supported Mu'āwiya. See al-Ibshīhī, *Al-Mustaṭraf*, Vol. 2, p. 95-96. Also, a pregnant woman dreamed that she gave birth to Jupiter, which appeared in Egypt and then in other countries. In astrology, this planet indicates a person of religion, piety and good reputation (see Abū Ma'shar, *Abbreviation*, pp. 61-62); the child was ash-Shāfi'ī*. See al-Ibshīhī, *Al-Mustaṭraf*, Vol. 2, p. 95.

* Muhammad ibn Idrīs ash-Shāfi'ī was born in Ghazza, a city in Palestine, in 150/767, but at the age of forty-nine he moved to Cairo and settled there until he died in 204/820. He was the imam who formulated the Shāfi'ī doctrines, which are regarded as the basis of one of the four authorised scholars of law which Sunni Muslims rely on as the main sources of Islamic legislation. The other three are: Ḥanafī (built on the work of Imam Abū Ḥanīfa an-N'mān ibn Thābit, d. 150/767), Mālikī (Imam Mālik ibn Anas, d. 179/795), and Ḥanbalī (Imam Ahmad ibn Ḥanbal, d. 214/855). Ash-Shāfi'ī wrote many important books on religious issues and was also a good poet, concerning on religious themes. See az-Ziriklī, *Al-A'lām*, Vol. 6, pp. 249-50.

was hidden from me, I will lose my mind, tear up my books, and believe that astrology is a lie'. He hurried back to the charlatan, introduced himself and asked the charlatan to reveal what technique he had employed to make such an accurate prediction. Recognising Abū Ma'shar, the charlatan politely kissed his hand, addressed him as 'our master' and confessed that he knew nothing about astrology: 'I just pretend to be an astrologer by placing my *takht* (dust board), astrolabe and *taqwīm* (ephemeris or calendar) in front of me to deceive my clients, who are mostly women'. He went on to say that he had guessed correctly on account of his knowledge of *īyāfa*, *zajr*, and *qiyāfa*, the three modes of divination which he had learned from Bedouin Arabs, and which depended on recognising the particular meanings of the gestures or movements of certain objects or birds. In the case of Abū Ma'shar, the charlatan said that he looked around and saw a water-seller whose water container was locked, and interpreted this as indicating a prisoner; and when Abū Ma'shar was asking whether the prisoner would be freed or not, the charlatan saw that the water-seller had opened his container and was pouring water into a bowl, which he interpreted as the release of the prisoner.²

This story is important on a number of counts. It suggests that the people, not only the political elites, accepted astrology as legitimate and so it was crucially important for those practising the arts of predicting the future to claim the profession of astrologer and deceive their clients through the presence of astrological instruments, thus reassuring them that the prediction was being conducted on a sound theoretical basis. Astrology was no longer one branch of divination among others, as had been the case in the pre-Islamic period; it was regarded as the summit of such knowledge under which almost all other forms of divination were implicitly practised. Abū Ma'shar's story also suggests that the mediaeval Muslim peoples respected scientific, or at least, systematic knowledge, although they might be easily fooled by a plausible quack. The story, if true, shows that the native Arabian forms of divination, *īyāfa*, *zajr* and *qiyāfa*, could prove far superior in their results than that of the exotic science: the well-trained charlatan impressed the master of astrology.

² At-Tanūkhī, *Nishwār al-Muḥāḍara*, Vol. 2, p. 324- 26.

To impress their clients and to gain a respectable place in that intellectual environment, astrologers had to adopt a systematic and scientific approach. One way of doing so was to classify their astrological practices under the following four categories:

- (1) genethliology, or *mawālīd* (nativity), ‘which relates all aspects of an individual’s life to the situation of the heavens at the moment of his nativity’.³
- (2) Catarchic astrology (*masā’īl*) which consists in determining on the basis of the celestial configuration whether a given moment is auspicious (*sa’id*) or inauspicious (*naḥs*) for a particular activity concerns individuals.⁴
- (3) Interrogational astrology (*ikhṭiyārāt*) which ‘determines the answer to the question from the horoscope of the moment when the query is formally presented to the astrologer’.⁵
- (4) Mundane astrology (*al-ḥadathān*), ‘which is concerned with periodic heavenly situations (eclipses, planetary conjunctions, equinoxes, etc.), relating them to events affecting large numbers of people, nations, or the whole world’.⁶

Moving on to the domain of art, we shall see how mediaeval Arabic poetry is permeated with astrology, and how far its astrological references can be identified with these four categories. The present chapter will show how some astrological techniques related to personal concerns were a source of inspiration for poets, while the following chapter will be devoted to the techniques related to matters of major impact on societies or nations, and will also explore their effects on the poetry of that period.

VI. 2. 1: References to Nativity: Astrological Characters in Poetry

Nativity (*mawālīd*) involved the reading of the heavenly configuration at the time of one’s birth to determine the general aspect of one’s future in general, whether happy or miserable, as well as certain events of significant effect; ‘a skillful use of the astrolabe could in principle yield such information’.⁷ Nativity also involved determining the

³ Haq, ‘Astrology’, in *The Oxford Encyclopedia of the Modern Islamic World*, Vol. 1, p. 143.

⁴ Ibid.

⁵ Ibid., p. 144.

⁶ Ibid., p. 143.

⁷ Saliba, ‘The Role of Astrology in Medieval Islamic Society’, p. 353.

individual's character and physical features, which were thought of as subject to the influence of a particular planet. A number of anecdotes testify that the practice of such activities was widespread in the mediaeval Muslim world. A case in point is the anecdote related about the famous Mu'tazilite Abū 'Alī al-Jubbā'ī (235-302/ 850-915) who was asked by his neighbor to cast the horoscope of his newborn baby. According to the narrator 'Everything al-Jubbā'ī predicted came true'.⁸ Though this is probably an exaggeration, this and similar stories are important as evidence of the use of this method in predicting an infant's possible fate.

If we examine how astrologers and their supporters related this method to the notions of predestination and free will we find that they made use of the Islamic view of human destiny, including the notion that character and gender are determined at a very early stage of formation. This Islamic doctrine of the process of man's creation is expressed in the following tradition:

The seed lies in the womb for forty nights, after which the angel gives it form ... and inquires: O my Lord, a male or a female? whereupon God prescribes either a male or female; afterwards he inquires: O my Lord, straight or crooked? whereupon God prescribes straight or crooked; he also inquires: O my Lord, what is its allotment of good? What is its term of life? What is its character? After which God fixes that it shall be either one of the miserable or one of the blessed.⁹

From a strictly religious viewpoint, to relate human physical constitution and character to planetary influence is to be seen as a rebellion against God's will as it ventures into a forbidden zone. And although it is stated clearly that the infant's fate is fixed and determined at forty days, not at birth or conception, astrologers, drawing on the notion of a unified world, argued that this destiny, which is definitely a matter of divine determination, is expressed in the heavens and can be predicted, and that this would validate the theory of a coherent world whose destiny is governed by One All Powerful God. For example, Abū Ma'shar, in the introductory part of his book on nativity, after praising God, provides a Qur'anic verse that reveals the stages that the human foetus

⁸ At-Tanūkhī, *Nishwār al-Mḥādāra*, Vol. 2, p. 332.

⁹ Abū al-Hussein Muslim ibn al-Ḥajāj, *Ṣaḥīḥ Muslim*, ed. by Muhammad 'Abd al-Bāqī, ('Isā al-Bābī al-Ḥalabī, 5 Vols., 1955), Vol., 4, p. 2036. For the translation see Cohen-Mor, *A Matter of Fate*, pp. 83- 84.

goes through in its development from clay to a perfect human being,¹⁰ and stresses the notion that mankind is absolutely subject to God's will; those He wills to enter Heaven He guides to the straight path, and those He wills to enter Hell He makes go astray. Abū Ma'shar continues:

When I, who fear the Day of Judgment, think upon the Qur'anic verse 'Blessed be He who has made in the heaven the signs of the Zodiac (constellations)',¹¹ it comes to my mind to consult God,¹² before casting the horoscope of nativity for men and women, according to their constellation.¹³

Abū Ma'shar here attempts to 'Islamise' his activity and justify his encroaching on a Divine zone by presenting himself as a pious man, who believes strongly in Divine predetermination, and fully acknowledges the Divine wisdom, which creates man and makes his destiny available to him through its expression in the signs of the zodiac, as this is their function from the astrological point of view.

Although astrologers' attempts to justify the validity of their activities were not successful in persuading men of religion to accept their profession and give them legitimacy to practise it confidently without fear of criticism or accusation of atheism, astrology strongly appealed to the public and more importantly to the political elites,

¹⁰ The verse that refers to the stages of the human embryo's growth, a development that begins with the very earliest stage, the clay, is as follows:

{و لقد خلقنا الإنسان من سلاله من طين ثم جعلناه نطفة في قرار معين ثم خلقنا النطفة علقه فخلقنا العلقه مضغه فخلقنا المضغه عظاما فكسونا العظام لحما ثم أنشأناه خلقا آخر فتبارك الله أحسن الخالقين}.

Al-Qur'ān, al-Mu'minūn (The Believers), 18, 23, 12- 14.

'And certainly We create man of an extract of clay, then We make him a small life-germ in a firm resting-place, then We make the life-germ a clot, then we make the clot a lump of flesh, then We make (in) the lump of flesh bones, then We clothe the bones with flesh, then We cause it to grow into another creation, so blessed be Allāh, the Best of creators'.

¹¹ Al-Qur'ān, Al-Forqān (18, 25, 61).

{تبارك الذي جعل في السماء بروجا ...}

¹² He refers to the prayer of consultation, *istikhāra*, which Muslims perform when they are in doubt whether to undertake a certain course of action; they ask God to help them in their decision by easing the good and preventing the bad.

¹³ Abū Ma'shar al-Falakī al-Balkhī, *Ṭawālī' ar-Rijāl wa 'n-Nisā'; wa yalīhī at-Ṭālī' al-Ḥadasī li Abū Ḥay Allāh al-Marzūqī* (Cairo: Maṭba'at al-Bābī al-Ḥalabī, n.d.), p. 2.

who opened their courts and provided them with a professional career under their patronage.

Whether Abū Ma'shar's justification was valid or not is not a concern of this study; rather it is concerned with the impact of such astrological claims on the realm of literature. It is remarkable that the astrological concept of 'astral destiny' endured in mediaeval Arabic life and occasionally in literature; poets, in particular, took a great interest in it. However, we should bear in mind that in drawing on the notion of astral destiny, mediaeval poets tended to make use of astrology to embellish their works rather than to make their poems expound astrology.

Mediaeval Arab poets might use the notion of astral destiny either to escape the blame of being responsible for their own miserable fate or inability to achieve a satisfying and respectable position in society, or to exaggerate the celestial factors that governed their success and to represent their happy state, particularly to their rivals, as irreversible and everlasting. On the other hand, poets also made use of the notion of astral destiny to criticise their rivals by portraying them as created by malefic natural forces.

Thus, the astrological hypothesis that human fate is expressed on the page of the heavens and may be read by interpreting certain planetary configurations seems to have been widely accepted. More importantly, relating an individual's fate to a number of factors, such as *dahr* and Satan, and among which astral determinism was treated as a comic and ironic paradox is to be considered a unique feature that characterised mediaeval poetry and that of the Abbasid period in particular, as we shall see.

The specific features of each individual's character were no longer considered the result of a combination of inherited characteristics and life experiences; another external factor – the influence of astral bodies – was seen as playing a vital role in shaping one's character and hence determining one's destiny. The effect of these bodies was held to be greatest at the moment of birth and thus the influences of a certain planetary motion or configuration and a certain sign of the zodiac were believed not merely to indicate but

to form character. The Andalusian poet, ar-Raṣāfi al-Balansī (d. 572/ 1177)¹⁴ in celebrating the arrival of a new baby in the house of the first Almohads ruler, 'Abd al-Mu'min (r. 524-558/ 1130-1163),¹⁵ draws on the idea of nativity:

فأهنا به من طالع ذي أسعد يزهي بغرته الزمان ويعجب.¹⁶

Be blessed with him, whose ascendant is all good fortune; he is the pride of his time.

Indeed, the prognostications associated with *mawālīd* provided an important theme for the panegyric, particularly when congratulating a significant political figure on the birth of a new baby. Poets found in this practice, which seems to have been one of the birth rituals of the political elites of the medieval Islamic court, a rich and powerful theme and it was referred to particularly by those acquainted with the science and who wished to be granted a bright future. Knowing in advance the destiny of a newborn member of an elite from the horoscope cast at the time of birth motivated those who were ambitious to associate themselves with the promising child. It is related that al-Faḍl ibn Sahl (d.

¹⁴ Muhammad ibn Ghālib ar-Ruṣāfi ar-Raffā' was a prominent Andalusian poet from the province of Valencia. He was known as ar-Raffā' (the weaver), as he gave up obtaining his livelihood by selling his talent to his patrons and preferred to work as a weaver. He is said never to have married. (See az-Ziriklī, *Al-A'lām*, Vol. 7, p. 217; Ibn al-'Imād, *Shadharāt adh-Dhahab*, Vol. 6, p. 402; and 'Umar Farrūkh, *Tārīkh al-Adab al-'Arabī: Al-Adab fī l-Maghrib wa l-Andalus (ʿAṣr al-Murābiḥīn wa l-Muwaḥidīn)*, Vol. 5, pp. 430- 36).

¹⁵ 'Abd al-Mu'min ibn 'Alī ibn Makhlūf, a descendant of a barbarian tribe, was the founder of the Almohads that brought an end to the Almoravids (*Almuwaḥidūn* or the Unitarians) state. The birth of the movement was on the hand of Muhammad ibn Tūmart (see Ch. VII, p. 253, footnote 64), but 'Abd al-Mu'min was the real founder of the state. The main claim of *Almuwaḥidūn* which they used to authorise for their movement was that Islam in Maghrib had been corrupted and thus a new state there had to establish its principle on a reformed Islam. For more information about Almohads see Ibn Abī Ṣāhib aṣ-Ṣalat, *Tārīkh al-Mann bi l-Imāma 'alā al-Mustaḍ'afīn bi 'an Ja'alahum Allāh A'imma wa Ja'alahum al-Wārithīn*, ed. by 'Abd al-Hādī at-Tāzī, (Baghdad: Dār al-Ḥurriyya, 1979), Roger el-Tourneau, *The Almohads Movement in North Africa in the Twelfth and Thirteenth Centuries* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1969).

¹⁶ Jourji Antonious Ṭarabiyya, *Al-Wajdiyya wa Aitharuhā fī al-Andalus* (Beirut: Dār al-Kitāb al-Lubnānī wa Maktabat al-Madras, 1983) p. 176

202/ 818),¹⁷ who had some knowledge of the stars and took the horoscope of al-Ma'mūn (r. 198-218/ 813-33) at his birth, found from the infant's ascendant that he would become caliph; and so al-Faḍl began to cultivate their companionship in the boy's early childhood. When the prediction came true and the young man ascended the throne in 813 he appointed al-Faḍl as his vizier and head of the army and acknowledged him to be his intimate friend, and for a time the glory of the Banū Sahl put that of the late Barmakids in the shade.¹⁸ According to az-Ziriklī, al-Faḍl was a *zindīq* (militant atheist) who converted to Islam in 190/ 806 and because of his dual role well known by his nick-name, Dhū ar-Ri'āsatayn (the owner of two authorities).¹⁹ Yet, the horoscope's prognostication was deceptive: it failed to reveal to al-Faḍl that he would fall prey to royal disfavour. Al-Ma'mūn had him brutally killed in 202/ 818.

On a similar occasion, the anthologist Abū al-Faraj al-Aṣfahānī (d. 356/ 967)²⁰ draws on the same astrological source. Yet he considers the moment of conception, not of birth, as that upon which the future of the individual is to be determined. It seems that this was originally a Sasanian conception, which influenced mediaeval Arab astrology.²¹ He

¹⁷ Al-Faḍl ibn Sahl as-Sarkhīsī, whose formal position had already brought him close to the Caliph, joined al-Ma'mūn's family when his brother, al-Ḥasan ibn Sahl, became the Caliph's father-in-law. (For al-Faḍl's biography see az-Ziriklī, *Al-A'lām*, Vol. 5, p. 354, and for al-Ḥasan's see *ibid.*, Vol. 2, p. 207).

¹⁸ See Ibn Ṭabātibā, *Al-Fakhrī fī al-Ādāb as-Sulṭāniyya*, p. 166.

¹⁹ Az-Ziriklī, *Al-A'lām*, Vol. 5, p. 354.

²⁰ Abū al-Faraj 'Alī ibn al-Ḥusayn ibn Muhammad, a scion of a great Qurayshī noble family, 'Abd Shams ibn 'Abd Manāf, was a famous genealogist and anthologist. It was his 27-volume *Al-Aghānī*, which he is to have taken 50 years to write, that brought him lasting fame. It is related that, on hearing that Abū Firās al-Ḥamdānī, the Prince of Aleppo, had paid Abū al-Faraj one thousand *dīnārs* for a copy of his anthology, aṣ-Ṣāhib ibn 'Abbād commented 'Indeed Abū Firās failed to estimate the real value of this work, for I had in my cupboard 6200 books, all of which were made redundant by Abū al-Faraj's work'. Though he was eminent among the men of letters of his time and so was accepted within the court circle of the vizier al-Muhallabī, on a personal level, he was egregiously dirty and notorious for his hatred of washing. It is related that once he had put on a garment, he would never take it off until it was ragged and filthy. (See al-Ḥamawī, *Muḥam al-Udabā'*, Vol. 4, pp. 50- 71; and az-Ziriklī, *Al-A'lām*, Vol. 5, p. 88).

²¹ In mediaeval astrological treatises we find astrologers advising on the most auspicious time for conception: it is generally when the Moon is in Leo; in Virgo if the woman is not a virgin; in Sagittarius, and particularly in the 27° of Pisces if the girl is a virgin; and it is not advisable when the Moon is in any of the unstable, changeable signs as this would indicate the end of the couple's relationship. (See *Kitāb al-Ghurar az-Zawāhir fī Ma'rīfat al-Jawāhir*, (the author is not cited) in King Abdul Aziz University, The Central Library (MS. Falk, Tanjīm, no. 274, n.d.), fol. 16.

wrote the following lines to celebrate the birth of a baby boy whose father was the vizier al-Muhallabī (d. 352/ 963),²² and whose mother was a Byzantine slave:

أسعد بمولود أتاك مباركاً ... كالبدر أشرق جنح ليلٍ متمر.
 سعدٌ لوقت سعادة جاءت به ... أم حصانٍ من بنات الأصفر.
 متبجج في ذروتى شرف العلا ... بين المهبّاء منتهاه وقيصر.
 شمس الضحى قرنت إلى بدر النجى ... حثى إذا اجتمعا أنت بالمشتري.²³

Be happy with your blessed newborn baby, who looks like a Moon that rises to illumine a dark night!

A true benefic, born at an auspicious time, whose honoured mother is a descendant of the Yellow Race.²⁴

He is made joyously welcome between the two poles of honour: his lineage are those of al-Muhallab and Caesar.

The Sun is in conjunction with the Moon, and their union has brought forth Jupiter.

There was an unresolved debate among mediaeval Arabic astrologers on whether the *mawālīd* horoscope should be cast at the moment of birth or of conception.²⁵ It is not the

It is also related that the Sassanian kings used to bring their astrologers and place them just outside their bedchambers. The kings would signal to them at the right moment to lift their astrolabes and take the ascendant for the moment of conception (See Saliba, 'The Role of Astrology in Medieval Islamic Society', p. 353). Saliba comments: 'Although this story could be apocryphal, it reflects the interest that was paid at the moment of conception as being the appropriate moment for the horoscope.' (See *ibid.*, footnote 74).

²² Al-Ḥasan ibn Muhammad ibn Hārūn, a descendant of al-Muhallab ibn Abū Ṣufra al-Azdī, was born in Basra. He was a man of knowledge and great wisdom who was acquainted with politics. Unlike his friend Abū al-Faraj, he was clean in his habits. It is related that he used to have two youths stand beside him while he was taking his meal: one on his right and the other on his left. The youth on his right held thirty spoons, which he handed one by one to the vizier for each mouthful; the vizier would then pass it to the youth on his left so as not to use the same spoon twice. Though this story is probably exaggerated, it emphasises the vizier's obsession with hygiene. Yet this same scrupulous vizier brought the distinctly unsavoury Abū al-Faraj to his court and treated him with great respect, tolerating his dirt 'because of his knowledge', as he said. (See az-Zirikī, *Al-A lām*, Vol 2, pp. 230-1; and al-Ḥamawī, *Muṣam al-Udabā'*, Vol. 3, pp. 60- 76). Regarding his relationship with Abū al-Faraj see the biography of the latter in *ibid.*, Vol. 4, pp. 50- 71).

²³ Al-Ḥamawī, *Mu'jam al-Udabā'*, Vol. 4, p. 68.

²⁴ The Arabs used to refer to the Byzantines as the Yellow Race, and to the Persians as the Red Race. But the Yellow Race could refer to foreigners in general. This would accord with a political reading of these lines (see below).

It has to be lightened that in the European division of races 'Yellow' refers to Chinese/ Asian and 'Red' to the Indians.

²⁵ Ibn Ṭāwūs (d. 664/ 1266), a famous astrologer of the late Abbasid period, though a devotee of his profession, found it difficult to accept the astrological claim that the heavenly configuration at the moment of birth or conception influences an individual's destiny. He cites the example of twins whose moments of birth, and particularly of conception, coincide almost exactly; and yet each twin may have a totally different fate, (see Ibn Ṭāwūs, *Faraj al-Mahmūm*, pp. 71-72). Some astrologers who believed in such an influence attempted to provide evidence by citing the case of the Prophet Muhammad who was born under the constellation of *as-Simāk ar-Rāmīh*, that is when Mars was in the second house of the

concern of this discussion to consider the arguments of that debate, but only to demonstrate that poets were aware of it. This is apparent in the third line, where the conjunction of the Moon and the Sun indicates the blessed moment of sexual union between al-Muhallabī, the vizier, and his partner, which marked the auspicious destiny of the child, who is identified with Jupiter, the most fortunate among all the benefics. It is interesting that the poet avoids the convention that almost always associated a female figure with the Moon and a male figure with the Sun, maybe to stress the passivity and submission of the Moon, whose light is extinguished when the Sun appears, and consequently to intensify the domination of masculinity in that patriarchal society.²⁶ This passive-active gender dichotomy was apparently no longer thought suitable because of the Arabs' interaction with other nations and their establishment of relationships of various types, among which marriage was the most prominent and influential. Women, particularly in the middle and late Abbasid era, were not passive at all; they were openly recognised as playing a vital role in almost all domains of Abbasid life, particularly in court circles and on the political stage.²⁷ So it may not only have been the racial motif that inspired the poet to identify the Sun through a reference to its

ascendant and thus he possessed no property, as a malefic, Mars, was in the house of money (indicating a lack of it). See at-Tawḥīdī, *Al-Baṣā'ir wa 'dh-Dhakhā'ir*, Vol. 3, p. 448.

²⁶ Regarding such associations in astrology, the Sun is identified with kings, the Moon with viziers or successors to the throne, Mercury with men of letters, Mars with generals and army leaders, Jupiter with Judges, Saturn with the owners of the state treasury, Venus with servants and slave-girls, and stars with soldiers. (See al-Qazwīnī, *'Ajā'ib al-Makhlūqāt*, 1978, p. 54).

²⁷ See the chapter 'Women and Politics', which discusses the political role women played in the Abbasid period, in Wājida Majīd al-Aṣraḡī's *Al-Mar'ātu fī Adab al-'Aṣr al-'Abbāsī* (Baghdad: Dār ar-Rashīd li 'l-Nashr, 1981) pp. 68-79. Also, Shawḡī Ḍayf considers that the intervention of women in the politics of that period was one of the major factors of the collapse of the Abbasid empire, as he claims that their concern was the acquisition and maintenance of high position and, more importantly, the treasure of the state regardless of the political stability of the state. Money, for those former female slave rulers who found themselves enjoying authority, power and luxury after years of servitude and hard labour, was far more important to them than even their own children. A case in point is that of the Caliph al-Mu'tazz (r. 866- 69 A.D.), who was forced to descend the throne because he was unable to pay the wages of his Turkish soldiers, a sum of about 50,000 *dīnār*. Discovering that the state's treasury was empty, al-Mu'tazz turned to his mother for help, but she refused, turning her back to her son, who was then held in custody, tortured and then cruelly killed. The irony of this incident lies in the fact that after the Caliph was dethroned, the Turks seized his properties, whereupon to their surprise they found in one of his mother's drawers two million *dīnārs* and a great many jewels. The Turkish general who discovered the hoard commented, 'May God send damnation on this mother who refused to save the life of her son by giving a small amount of money while owning this treasure'. See Ḍayf, *Al-'Aṣr al-'Abbāsī ath-Thānī*, pp. 23- 25.

colour with a female figure, who is a descendant of the Byzantines, known in the Arab world as the 'Yellow Race'.

If we are to read in more depth, a political message may also be concealed in these lines. Al-Muhallabī, like al-Faḍl 150 years earlier, was known as 'the owner of two authorities'²⁸ because he was vizier to both the Buyid ruler Mu'izz ad-Dawla²⁹ and the Abbasid Caliph al-Muṭṭī li'l-Lāh (r. 946-74 A.D.).³⁰ He exercised this dual authority in the third and weakest phase in the history of the Abbasid empire. Al-Muṭṭī had no authority whatsoever. His caliphate was a nominal one and the real state power was in the hands of Mu'izz ad-Dawla. One historian commented that al-Muṭṭī 'has nothing from the caliphate except the nickname of Caliph, for he who really controls the state and has power over the citizenry is Mu'izz ad-Dawla [meaning he who dignifies and honours the state], but no, rather it is Mudhill ad-Dawla [meaning he who humiliates

²⁸ Both al-Muhallabī and al-Faḍl ibn Sahl were given the same honourific title of 'the owner of the two authorities'. Yet the authorities of al-Ma'mūn's vizier, al-Faḍl, were bestowed by the Caliph's command, as it was the time when the Abbasid caliphate was at its apogee, while al-Muhallabī possessed greater authority than the Caliph, as by that time the caliphate was declining towards its nadir.

²⁹ Abū al-Ḥusayn Ahmad ibn Abū Shujā' Fanākhusrāw Buwayh was born in 303/ 915. He was the youngest of the three Buyids of the first generation. From 332/ 944 he undertook several expeditions from Khurasān against southern Mesopotamia, but without success. Finally, the governor of Wāsiṭ, an Iraqi province, joined forces with him, and so the road to the city of the Abbasid Caliphs was free. Al-Mu'izz marched on Baghdad, and in 334/ 945, the Abbasid Caliph al-Mustakfī bi'l-Lāh (d. 944-46 A.D.) appointed him *amīr al-umārā* and granted him the nickname Mu'izz ad-Dawla, while his brothers, 'Ali and Ḥasan received the nicknames 'Imād ad-Dawla and Rukn ad-Dawla. The rule of the Buyids was now established in Iraq; it was to last for more than one hundred years. (See K. V. Zetterstéen-[H. Busse], 'Mu'izz al-Dawla, Abu 'l-Ḥusayn Ahmad b. Abī Shujā' Fanākhusrāw Būya', in *E. I.*, Vol., vii, pp. 484-85).

³⁰ Al-Faḍl ibn Ja'far al-Muqtadir ascended the throne as al-Muṭṭī after al-Mustakfī, in whose short reign the Abbasid caliphate entered its third and weakest stage that led to a dramatic decline in the power of their authorities. (See Ch. I, pp. 3- 4). Among the rare virtues Islamic historians credit to the reign of this caliph (946-74) is the returning of the Black Stone of the Ka'ba that had been appropriated by the Qarmāṭīs for almost 20 years. (This historical incident is discussed in more detail in the following chapter). (See az-Ziriklī, *Al-A lām*, Vol. 5, p. 352.)

and brings shame on the state]'.³¹ So it may be that Abū al-Faraj is advising the vizier to warn the Caliph against the increasing power of the Buyids, knowing, as a genealogist, that the vizier, as an Arab whose loyalty to the Buyids was always suspected,³² might be more loyal to the Abbasids than to the Buyids. Thus the political implication of his astrological reference can be read as: the Arabs are now feminine, passive, and submissive and the foreigners masculine, active, and dominant. Therefore action is urgently needed.

Abū Tammām (d. 232/ 845)³³ composed lines in which the influence of the stars on human character also seems to be recognised and acknowledged, though we saw earlier how openly he declared himself as antagonistic to astrology in the poem he dedicated to the Caliph al-Mu'taṣim celebrating his victory at Amorium. This most prominent among astrology-haters, who was violently aggressive towards astrology and astrologers,³⁴ seems to be convinced by this particular astrological principle: in praising Abū al-Ḥasan Muhammad ibn al-Haytham ibn Shabāna,³⁵ he composed the following line:

له كبرياء المشتري وسعوده ... و سورة بهرام و ظرف عطارد.³⁶

He has the dignity and fortune of Jupiter, the powerful of Mars, and the sweet temper of Mercury.

Abū Tammām metaphorically casts an imaginary conjunction, relating the characteristic features of his dedicatee to planetary effects that have made him unique and distinguished. By drawing on the specific features assigned to certain planets and putting them in conjunction he 'creates' the character he wishes to eulogise in his

³¹ See az-Ziriklī's footnote no. 2 commenting on the biography of al-Muṣṭafī, in his *Al-A'lām*, Vol. 5, p. 352).

³² Al-Muhallabī's relationship with the Buyid ruler, though generally good, was unstable and experienced a great many vicissitudes because of envious rivals who sought to undermine the relationship by constantly referring to the vizier's Arab origin and casting doubt on his loyalty. (See *ibid.*, Vol. 3, p. 47).

³³ For his biography see Ch. IV, p. 150, footnote 126.

³⁴ See Ch. IV, pp. 150- 51, footnote 127.

³⁵ We could not find any information regarding his biography, or the dates of his birth and death. Even the commentator on Abū Tammām's poem mentions nothing about him except his name.

³⁶ 'Azzām (ed.), *Diwān Abī Tamma bi Sharḥ al-Khaṭīb at-Tibrīzī*, Vol. 2, p. 71.

addressee: he is dignified, blessed, powerful and benevolent. That such a strong opponent of astrology drew on such material is evidence that 'the reductive view of astrology, which divides people into believers and unbelievers, is at its most inadequate when dealing with astrology in an artistic or poetic framework'.³⁷

Another example that confirms this assumption is by Ibn ar-Rūmī (d. 283/ 896).³⁸ Although when criticising one of his rivals he rebuked him for being obsessed with astrology,³⁹ when praising the vizier Ismā'īl ibn Bulbul,⁴⁰ who was a man of letters as well as an army general, he implicitly declares himself a believer in the discipline:

وإلى عطارد و المريخ مولده ... فأعطياه من الحظين ما اقترحا.⁴¹

Mercury and Mars were present at his nativity, and both bestowed their qualities upon him.

Although the poet appeared to be a hater of astrology as he claimed to regard the science as a myth, and ridiculed its devotees describing them as foolish, in praising a noble man he finds it a useful means of flattery. The point that needs to be stressed here is that a poet's use of astrology tells us little about his or her attitudes towards the discipline as a valid or invalid science; it was used because it had proved itself to be a rich source of striking imagery.

Abū Nuwās (d. 198/ 813), who was accused of having a homosexual relationship with Caliph al-Amīn (d. 198/ 813),⁴² announces that his lover's ascendant is the Sun, which

³⁷ Chauncey Wood, *Chaucer and the Country of the Stars: Poetic Uses of Astrological Imagery* (Princeton and New York: Princeton University Press, 1970) p. 44.

³⁸ For his biography see Ch. IV, p. 144, footnote 106.

³⁹ See al-'Aqqād, *Ibn ar-Rūmī*, p. 102.

⁴⁰ Ismā'īl ibn Bulbul, known as Abū aṣ-Ṣaqr, was al-Mu'tamid's vizier; on becoming Caliph, al-Mu'tadiq (r. 892-902) had him killed in 278/ 891. (See Ibn Ṭabāṭiba, *Al-Fakhrī fī al-Ādāb as-Sulṭāniya*, pp. 188-89; and for the description of his death see at-Tanūkhī, *Nishwār al-Muḥāḍara*, Vol. 1, p. 151).

⁴¹ Ibid. P. 102.

⁴² Line three of the poem is strong evidence that the addressee is al-Amīn and that the Caliph did not responded to Abū Nuwās's desire. For the incident that testifies to the homosexual relationship between the poet and the caliph see al-Aṣfahānī, *Al-Aghānī*, Vol. 25, p. 213; but another incident suggests that the poet's passion for the caliph was unrequited. (See *ibid.*, p. 158).

he placed in Scorpio. The Sun in astrology corresponds to royal figures, and when in Scorpio, is associated with a strong sexual drive.⁴³ Abū Nuwās declared that he passionately sought the kind of sexual relationship in which he would be absorbed completely into his partner through the power of a long-lasting love, and accordingly ascribes to the nativity of his lover this particular ascendant:

يا من له في عينه عقربٌ ... فكلُّ من مرَّ بها تضربُ.
ومن له شمسٌ على خده ... طالعة بالسعد ما تغربُ.
يا بكرٌ من سمته سيدي ... ملّخت لي جسماً فما تعذب.⁴⁴

Hey you, in whose eyes there is a scorpion that strikes anyone who
comes near to it,
And in whose cheeks there is an auspicious Sun that always rises and
never sets;
Hey you, the first son of him I called 'my master', I am enamoured of
your beautiful body; but you look coldly upon me.

The general aspect of an individual's fate was also believed to be governed by the upper world. The Andalusian 'Abd al-Jabbār ibn Ḥamdīs (527/ 1133),⁴⁵ whose fame and fortune were due to his reputation as a warrior-poet,⁴⁶ asks himself whether his endless wandering might have been indicated by the ascendant of his natal horoscope:⁴⁷

⁴³ See Abū Ma'shar, *Mawālīd ar-Rijāl wa l-Nisā'*, p. 41. Although this sexual drive is conventionally associated with only heterosexual relationships, the poet twists the theory to make it fit his purpose.

⁴⁴ [Abū Nuwās al-Ḥasan ibn Hānī], *Diwān abī Nuwās*, ed by Ahmad 'Abd al-Majīd al-Ghazālī, (Cairo: Maṭba'at Miṣr, 1953), p. 351.

⁴⁵ Ibn Ḥamdīs was born in Sicily and spent all his youth there. At the age of twenty-four, in 371/ 1078, he left his homeland and traveled to al-Andalus to serve as a panegyrist in the court of al-Mu'tamid ibn 'Abbād. When the latter lost his throne the poet remained loyal to him and never praised the Almoravids, whose founder, ibn Tāshufīn, had seized power from his former patron. At the end of his life, he became blind and died in Bijāya, in north Africa. The poet never forgot his homeland and the pain of exile and regret for the unwise decision of his youth became the theme of many of his poems. See 'Umar Farrūkh, *Tārīkh al-Adab al-'Arabī, al-Adab fī al-Maghrib wa al-Andalus*, Vol. 5, pp. 201- 11.

⁴⁶ See William Granara's article, 'Ibn Ḥamdīs and the Poetry of Nostalgia', in María Menocal, and *et al* (eds.), *The Cambridge History of Arabic Literature: The Literature of al-Andalus*, pp. 388- 403.

⁴⁷ In a natal horoscope, Mars in the ascendant indicates that the individual is fated to travel constantly far from his home country. (See at-Tawḥīdī, *Al-Baṣā'ir wa 'dh-Dhakhā'ir*, Vol. 4, p. 104). See also index (2), which shows the special indications of the Twelve Houses peculiar to nativities.

مالي أطيل عن الديار تغرباً ... أقبال تغرب كان طالع مولدي.⁴⁸

I wonder why I am always far from my home country! Was my wandering life foretold by the horoscope cast at the time of my birth?

An interesting distinction between the stars' function as argued by astrologers and their allies, and as conceived by poets should be considered here. Astrologers and their supporters, in attempting to Islamise their subject, did not view stars as determiners of destiny: they do not constitute destiny, nor they have any power in themselves, and thus a heavenly configuration appearing at the time of birth serves only to indicate a Divinely determined fate. In this sense, they inform, not compel, the individual. Many poets, however, having sympathy with the notion of determinism, seem to have granted more power to the stars, regarding them as agents of fate; in their view, the stars could be held responsible for human misdeeds and misfortunes. Such a view resembles that predominant in the early Islamic era, and which continued to attribute man's evil destiny to *dahr* in order to escape the charge of heresy which would have been made if they had blamed God for their misfortunes. Moreover, poets often saw astrology as deterministic, while the astrology of the mediaeval Arabic world was notable for the freedom it offered to individuals to avoid or as least alter their evil destiny, while emphasising the need to make supplication to God and ask Him to keep them away from all that they feared.

The view that the stars indicate the quality of one's destiny rather than determine it is expressed by the poet Abū al-Ḥasan 'Alī ibn Muhammad at-Ṭihāmī (d. 416/ 1025):

في الجوزهر علت لي همة سبقت ... لكن حظي منها عقدة الذنب.⁴⁹

In the Dragon's Head was a sign that I would achieve a position of high dignity, yet what I have received was indicated by the sign in the Dragon's Tail.⁵⁰

⁴⁸ Iḥsān 'Abbās (ed.), *Diwān Ibn Ḥamdīs* (Beirut: Dār Ṣādir & Dār Beirut, 1960), p. 168.

⁴⁹ [Abū al-Ḥasan at-Ṭihāmī], *Diwān at-Ṭihāmī* (Riyadh: Dār al-Ma'ārif, 1982), p. 102.

⁵⁰ Al-Jawzahr, or the Head and Tail of the Dragon are two points in the ecliptic whose astronomical importance lay in effecting solar and lunar eclipses as they were believed to be a result of the occurrences of conjunction of the Sun or the Moon in or near the lunar nodes. With regard to their astrological effect, it seems that the point of the Head is conceived as auspicious, while that of the Tail as inauspicious. See Abū Ma'shar, *Al-Mudkhal fī 'Ilm an-Nujūm*, in King Abdul Aziz University, The Central Library (MS. Falk, Tanjīm, no. 285., n.d.), fols. 32- 33. (See Figure. 28).

Although the heavens at the poet's birth seemed to promise a bright future, the reality was far from this, if not its opposite. At-Tihāmī's lines imply that either the signs present at his nativity were misinterpreted or that other factors had proved more influential in fashioning his destiny. It is important to note that individual natal astrology was not recognised by scholars and men of letters as the only potential factor shaping a person's character and physical appearance; inheritance and acquisition were regarded as equally important.⁵¹ But whatever the poet's doubts, they did not prevent him from making use of astrological material, and indeed, the notion that the disposition of the stars at the moment of birth, or of conception, could determine an individual's fate greatly interested many poets, who used it as a vital source to create new images, while stressing a deterministic view regardless of their actual attitudes towards astrology, whether adherents or antagonists. Human character was, thus, not only determined by inherited features⁵² and experiences undergone in childhood,⁵³ the upper world also played a role in shaping the identity of the individual that compelled him or her to behave in a certain way to fulfil a destiny consistent with a predetermined fate.

⁵¹ In this regard, David Plant comments that al-Bīrūnī, like Ptolemy, 'was fully aware that considerations of heredity and environment should modify any astrological indications'. David Plant, 'Al-Biruni and Arabic Astrology', in *Islamic Astrology*, <<http://www.skyscript.co.uk/albiruni.html>>, 6 pages [accessed 14 January 2005], p. 4.

⁵² Poets were familiar with this theory; the famous Umayyad poet, Jarīr, employs this notion satirically in mocking one of his rivals and his entire tribe:

إِنَّ الْأَسِيدِيَّ زِنْبَاعًا وَإِخْوَتَهُ ... أَرَزَىٰ بِهِمْ لَوْمَ جَدَاتٍ وَأَجْدَادٍ.

[Jarīr al-Khaṭaff], *Diwān Jarīr* (Beirut: Dār Sādir & Dār Beirut, 1964), p. 90.

The reason for the crisis of those descendants of Asad, Zinbā' and his brothers, is the lack of morality of their grandmothers and grandfathers.

⁵³ An example of the belief that the environment and the experience gained in childhood influence the identity of individuals is Badī' az-Zamān al-Hamadhānī's statement: 'Man's identity is to be determined from the place where he lived not that where he was born, as man is formed according to the place where he settled not that where he was brought to life'. (See 'Abd al-Malik Muhammad ath-Tha'ālibī, *Ajnās at-Tajnīs*, ed. Mahmūd 'Abdullah, (Beirut: 'Ālam al-Kutub, 1997), p. 38.

Ibn ar-Rūmī (221-83/ 836-96) attributes the difficult balance between enjoyment and seriousness apparently achieved by the vizier 'Ubayd 'Llah ibn Sulaymān ibn Wahb (d. 288/ 901)⁵⁴ to the effect of astral influence:

إذا صبت زهرته صيوه ... قال له هرمسه: هندسي.
و إن عدا هرمسه حده ... قالت له زهرته: نفسي.⁵⁵

Whenever his Venus is about to act foolishly from excess of joy, his
Mercury tells him: control yourself.
And whenever his Mercury is about to become too serious, his Venus
says: enjoy yourself!

But what if a person did not follow their astral destiny either because they were forced to do so or because they chose to act freely and ignore the astral influence at birth or conception? Would this freedom bring happiness, or would what was determined is to be viewed as the life most suited fate to the individual? In a moment of nostalgia, Ibn al-Labbāna (d. 507/ 1113)⁵⁶ employs the astrological notion of a fundamental parallelism between an individual's vicissitudes and planetary effects in composing these lines, which address his former patron in an attempt to make him feel sympathy for the poet's situation:

نسبكم حثام لا يـنـبـري ... وطيفك حثام لا يعـتـري.
رمى زحل في أظفاره ... وحمل فدا عيني المشتري.

⁵⁴ He was the vizier of al-Mu'tamid (r. 870-92) and al-Mu'ta'qid (r. 892-902). He was a descendant of a noble family; his father was a vizier and his son also appointed a vizier after him. (See az-Zirikli, *Al-A'lām*, Vol. 4, p. 349.

⁵⁵ Al-'Aqqād, *Ibn ar-Rūmī*, pp. 102- 03.

⁵⁶ Abū Bakr Muhammad ibn 'Isā al-Lakhmay, nicknamed Ibn al-Labbāna (The son of she who makes *laban* (a sour milk)), was a distinguished Andalusian man of letters and poet, who wrote a number of books and has a volume of his collected poems. He was also one of the court elite who served Prince Muhammad ibn Ma'n ibn Ṣamādih (429-484/ 1038-1091), who ruled part of al-Andalus when it was divided into many small states. Ibn Ṣamādih was known by several nicknames: Mu'izz ad-Dawla; al-Mu'tašim bi 'Llāh; and al-Wāthiq bi Faql 'Llāh. His reign lasted for 41 years but at the end of his reign he suffered the same fate as al-Mu'tamid ibn 'Abbād. His reign ended tragically at the hands of the Almoravids military leader, Yusuf ibn Tāshuffīn, who conquered a great part of al-Andalus. (For the biography of Ibn al-Labbāna see az-Zirikli, *Al-A'lām*, Vol. 7, p. 214; and 'Umar Farrūkh, *Tārīkh al-Adab al-'Arabī, al-Adab fi l-Maghrib wa l-Andalus*, Vol. 5, pp.80- 88).

عطار د هل لك من عودية ... فأرجع منك إلى عنصري.⁵⁷

How long will your breeze remain hidden, and when will your shadow
fall upon me?
Saturn had gripped me in his claws and when he left me I was blessed by
Jupiter.
Hey Mercury, will you return and restore my identity?

Ibn al-Labbāna was a prominent Andalusian poet who invested his talent as a means of earning money.

After the fall of Ibn Ṣamādiḥ (d. 484/1091),⁵⁸ Ibn al-Labbāna had to find a new patron, so he travelled to Baṭliūs and prosied its Prince al-Afṣas (the flatted nose) (d. 437/1045),⁵⁹ and then moved to Cordova where he enjoyed a welcome reception from al-Mu'tamid ibn 'Abbad. Commenting on his unsettled life, Ibn Bassām notes that he

wandered from place to place offering his works to the Party-Kings of al-Andalus, as the Moon moves through its mansions, until he settled himself under the patronage of al-Mu'tamid ibn 'Abbād. The poet remained loyal to Ibn 'Abbād even after the latter lost his kingdom.⁶⁰

Having invested his talent to obtain livelihood, after al-Mu'tamid crisis, the poet travelled to Mayūrqa (Majorca) to praise its *amīr*, Nāsir ad-Dawla Mubashshir ibn

⁵⁷ Fāḍil Fathī Wālī, *Al-Fitan wa an-Nakabāt al-Khāṣṣa wa Aiharuhā fī ash-Shi' al-Andalusī* (Ḥā'il: Dār al-Andalus li 'n-Nashr wa 't-Ttawzī', 1996), pp. 82- 83.

⁵⁸ He is Muhammad ibn Ma'n ibn Ṣumādiḥ, who ruled part of al-Andalus (al-Mariyya, Pechina and as-Ṣumādiḥiyya) during the States of Kings. He ruled for forty years and known with the honorific titles Mu'izz ad-Dawla, al-Mu'taṣim bi 'Llāh and al-Wāthiq bi Faḍl 'Llāh. He lost his power with the advent of Almoravids army and he fell ill and died in the same year. (See az-Ziriklī, *Al-A lām*, Vol. 7, p. 327).

⁵⁹ Aftasids (Banū al-Afṣas), is a small dynasty of the 5th/ 11th century reigned during the period of the Kings of States of al-Andalus over a vast territory in the western part of the Iberian peninsula with Badajoz (Baṭalyaus) as its capital. The founder of this dynasty is 'Abdullah ibn Muhammad ibn Maslama, surnamed al-Afṣas and titled as al-Mansūr. His successor Muhammad al-Muzaḥḥar was of literary taste and he is known to have criticised the poets of his age for being unable to produce anything that is equal to the poem of that of al-Mutannabī and Abū al-'Alā' al-Ma'arrī. Almoravids put an end to this dynasty when they decided to dethrone all the Kings of the States of al-Andalus and annex their possessions (see E. Lévi-Provençal, 'Aftasids', in *E. I.*, Vol. I, p. 242).

⁶⁰ Ibn Bassām, *Adh-Dhakhīra*, Vol. 3, pp. 429- 30.

Sulaymān (d. 508/ 1114), under whose patronage he enjoyed some privileges. Yet, this relationship ended sadly: his new patron soon grew irritated by the poet, who thought to regain the lost privileges he had enjoyed as al-Mu'tamid and Ibn Samādh's court-poet.⁶¹ Disappointed, Ibn al-Labbāna then journeyed to another Andalusian province, ruled by the Banū Humūd, and succeeded in winning their patronage, yet it seems that he was dissatisfied, since he continued to petition Nāṣir ad-Dawla, the Prince of Majorca.⁶² For him, Nāṣir was not an ordinary patron whom he was obliged to praise, rather he was the one who inspired him to develop his talent, as Mercury was the poet's tutelary planet.⁶³ So he found himself, after leaving Nāṣir, or Mercury, subject to vicissitudes at the hands of ordinary patrons, who would punish him if they were Saturnine or reward him if they were Jovial. The poet's astrological references tell Nāṣir that since Ibn al-Labbāna left his court he has felt as if he were being forced to act against his astral destiny, which is to be governed and protected by Mercury, that is Nāṣir himself. Because he is not fulfilling his destiny it is immaterial whether he is tormented by Saturn or blessed by Jupiter.

In referring to astral destiny the poet seems to be interested not merely in creating metaphors and images but principally in the philosophical implications of the notions of free will and predestination and their relation to man's suffering or happiness.

Besides determining the individual's character and occupation, each planet and sign of the zodiac was believed to govern some part of the human body and endow it with special physical peculiarities.⁶⁴ Poets, however, tended to modify this astrological doctrine as they chose to make the planets, not the signs of the zodiac, responsible for the physical appearance of individuals.

The practice of portraying characters as governed by particular planets was widespread in mediaeval literature. Poets, particularly in the Abbasid period, were concerned to

⁶¹ Wāli, *Al-Fitan wa an-Nakabāt al-Khāṣṣa*, p. 279.

⁶² See *Ibid.* pp. 282- 83.

⁶³ This is reminiscence of al-Mutanabbī's relationship with Sayf ad-Dawla.

⁶⁴ See Al-Bīrūnī, *Elements of Astrology*, pp. 12- 13 and 39- 34.

assign to their addressees the planet that would endow them with the appropriate qualities. Yet this poetic schema shows man as subject to external factors beyond the power of his will and thus he is not to be blamed or praised either for his misdeeds or his merits. Thus we often find in the works of poets, though not of astrologers, human beings portrayed as puppets moved at least partly by the influence of heavenly bodies, which are seen as indicators of a Divinely decreed fate. This provided a convenient justification for those who wished to escape the charge of being responsible for their bleak destiny or evil conduct, hence 'being virtuous or vicious is not a matter of choice'.⁶⁵ Excusing himself from truly deserving the bad reputation his immoral manners had created, Bashshār ibn Burd (d. 167/ 784)⁶⁶ attributes the evil features of his character to external factors:

طُبِعْتُ عَلَى مَا فِيَّ غَيْرَ مَخِيرٍ ... هَوَايَ وَ لَوْ خَيْرَتُ كُنْتُ الْمَهْدَبَا
أَرِيدُ فَلَا أُعْطَى، وَ أُعْطَى وَ لَمْ أَرِدْ ... وَقَصَّرَ عَلَيَّ أَنْ أَنْالَ الْمُغْتَبَا.⁶⁷

My manners were determined for me, I had no choice in that. If it were
my choice I would choose to be a decent man.
Things I need do not approach me, and those I do not want are given to
me! It is beyond my will to receive what is denied me.

Bashshār makes use of the notion of determinism to represent himself as innocent of the evil deeds he has been 'compelled' to do. He does not name the forces controlling his behaviour, but it is highly likely that he conceived his ordained destiny as a product of heredity, experience and astral influence, the three contributors believed to shape one's destiny in mediaeval times.

When poets portray man's character and conduct as the necessary products of astral influence, this prompts a question. There is no doubt that astral influence is admitted because it generally enhances virtue and morality. However, if its effect is to produce vice and immorality, is it possible for a person to change such a destiny and overcome

⁶⁵ Ilham Dilman, *Free Will: an historical and philosophical introduction* (London and New York: Routledge, 1999), p. 176.

⁶⁶ A famous poet of the early Abbasid period, Bashshār is regarded as the first of the *muḥdathīn* (modernists). He placed his talent at the service of the early Abbasid caliphs, particularly al-Mahdī, the third caliph. He met his death as a result of a plot against him which was provoked when the poet composed a satire against the caliph and his vizier in which he accused the caliph of devoting himself to pleasure while the real ruler was the vizier. The poet was charged with heresy (*zandaqa*) and al-Mahdī had him executed. See al-Aṣfahānī, *Al-Aghānī*, Vol. 3, pp. 241- 47.

⁶⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 224.

the negative aspects of his or her character? If not, what could be done? Some astrologers claimed that if a natal horoscope showed that some dreadful destiny threatened the future of the newborn, it was possible to alter that malignant destiny by the simple expedient of changing the time of birth so that it became subject to an auspicious astral configuration.⁶⁸ Al-Mutanabbī (303-54/ 915-68), however, ridicules this notion, arguing that one's nature and fate cannot be changed by such cynical trickery:

و إذا الحلم لم يكن في طباع ... لم يُحلم تُنمُّ الميلاد.⁶⁹

If merits are not in the nature of one's character, then merits cannot be created by changing the date of birth!

Although Sceptics mocked the practice, several poems refer to the attempt to change an evil destiny by altering the time of conception or birth. For example, here is Abū Bakr 'Ubāda (d. 422/ 1030),⁷⁰ praising Ibn Ḥammūd (d. 431/1040):⁷¹

⁶⁸ Although I could not find anything in the mediaeval Arabic astrological material regarding this practice, the following information is quoted from a Western study that acknowledges that much of its data was obtained from Arabic sources. See A. J. Meadows, *The High Firmament: A Survey of Astronomy in English Literature* (Leicester: Leicester University Press, 1969), p. 44. In it we find the following: 'A Protestant astrologer found that the heavens at Luther's birth were insufficiently impressive. He therefore changed the birth date by more than a month, until a horoscope of sufficient excellence was obtained'. Ibid., p. 65. Also, 'Ali ibn Muhammad at-Tanūkhī* relates that natal horoscope indicated a *qat*' (cutting off), astrologically meaning a disaster that should lead to death, in his future. However, he claims that after making a thorough study of astrology he managed to make an alteration (*tahwīl*) to his ascendant to escape that fate. Yet he admits that the *qat*' took place at the time specified in the first horoscope as he was violently attacked by robbers but managed to escape with his life. According to at-Tanūkhī, this escape was due to the alteration he made his horoscope. (See at-Tanūkhī, *Nishwār al-Muḥāḍara*, Vol. 2, pp. 329- 30, the anecdote also related in al-Ḥamawī, *Muḥam al-Udabā'*, Vol 4, pp. 254- 56.

* We have to draw attention that 'Ali ibn Muhammad at-Tanūkhī is the father of al-Muḥsin at-Tanūkh, the author of the famous books: *Nishwār al-Muḥāḍara* and *Al-Faraj ba'd ash-Shidda*. At-Tanūkhī, the senior, was the judge of al-Ahwāz and was an expert on the science of the stars. (See *ibid*, pp. 241- 57).

⁶⁹ Nabīl al-Faḍl, *La 'ālī' al-Mutanabbī: Mukhtārāt min Shi'r Abī at-Ṭayib al-Mutanabbī* (Surry: LAAM Ltd, 1988) p. 80.

⁷⁰ 'Ubāda ibn 'Abdullah al-Anṣārī, nicknamed Ibn Mā' as-Samā' (the son of the water of the heaven), composed panegyrics for a number of the Party Kings of al-Andalus, and was a famous poet who set rules for *al-Muwashshahāt**. (See Ibn Bassām, *Adh-Dhakhīra*, Vol. 1, p. 292; and az-Ziriklī, *Al-A'lām*, Vol. 4, p. 30.)

* *Al-Muwashshahāt* (sing. *Muwashshah*) is a strophic poetic form, usually performed with musical accompaniment, which originated in Islamic Spain in the third/ late ninth century. For more information about this poetic genre see L. Alvarez, 'Muwashshah', in *Encyclopedia of Arabic Literature*, Vol. 2, pp. 563-66.

⁷¹ Al-Qāsim ibn Ḥammūd al-Idrīsī was of the second line of the Ḥammūd family who ruled Cordova. He was deposed and killed by his nephew, Yaḥyā. (See az-Ziriklī, *Al-A'lām*, Vol. 6, p. 9).

وله من السعد المتاح مُعَدَّلٌ ... يُغني أبا التتجيم عن تعديله.⁷²

His auspicious fortune is great indeed, and so saves the devotee of astrology the effort of alteration.

VI. 2. 2: References to Interrogational Astrology (*Masāʾil*) in Abbasid Poetry

Interrogational astrology (*masāʾil*), as stated above, is concerned with providing answers to personal questions, which are obtained from the particular formation of the horoscope at the moment when the query is formally presented to the astrologer.

The casting of interrogational horoscopes was widely practised to answer questions not only regarding matters of great importance to the individual, but also those concerning more trivial aspects connected with the anxieties of everyday life. Moreover, astrologers claimed to be able to read the questioner's thought. An astrologer was once asked by a female client about her lost ring, and after consulting the stars replied 'God has taken it'. The woman then found her ring hidden in the Qur'ān.⁷³ Also, there is some literary evidence that the astrologers' skills in this regard were tested by their patrons.⁷⁴ It is related that the military regent al-Muwaffaq (d. 278/ 891)⁷⁵ asked Abū Ma'shar and another astrologer, who were accompanying him on a campaign against the Zanj,⁷⁶ a day before the expedition set out, to discover what he was thinking about by casting a horoscope. Their answer was the pregnancy of an animal. Affirming this, the regent then asked them to be more specific, and they replied that it was a cow. The next question was about the sex of the calf, which they determined as a male. Making the task still more difficult, al-Muwaffaq ordered them to describe its colour. Abū Ma'shar answered that it was black with a white forehead, while the other astrologer said it was

⁷² Ibn Bassām, *Adh-Dhakhira*, Vol. 1, p. 296.

⁷³ At-Tawhīdī, *Al-Basāʾir wa ʾih-Dhakhāʾir*, Vol. 3, p. 147.

⁷⁴ Saliba, 'The Role of astrology in Medieval Islamic Society', p. 351.

⁷⁵ For his biography See Ch. VII, p. 245, footnote 32.

⁷⁶ For the Zanj revolt see Ch. VII, p. 245, footnote 33.

black with a white tail. The angry regent then had his servants slaughter the cow and bring out the calf, intending that the astrologer who had predicted falsely should be punished. To his surprise, he found a black bull in a position such that its white tail lay across its forehead; thus both astrologers were proved correct in their prediction, and both were rewarded by al-Muwaffaq.⁷⁷ Such anecdotes demonstrate, first, the great pressure on court astrologers to prove the quality of their proficiency, and, second, the ruler's anxiety regarding the accuracy of his court astrologer on whom he heavily depended, not only in personal matters, but also in matters of state; the purpose of the test described here was to see how accurate their prediction was likely to be regarding the coming battle. On another occasion, al-Muwaffaq again tested Abū Ma'shar's fitness to be a court astrologer. The regent asked Abū Ma'shar and another astrologer to determine what it was he was hiding from them. After casting the horoscope, the first astrologer said: it was a fruit, while Abū Ma'shar said it was a kind of animal. Al-Muwaffaq then congratulated the former on his accurate prediction and showed them the apple he had been hiding. Disconcerted and surprised, abū Ma'shar cast the horoscope a second time and then asked for a knife. He cut the apple in half and all could see that it was infested with worms. The regent then ordered the astrologer to be handsomely rewarded.⁷⁸

It is also related that Abū Muhammad 'Abdullah ibn al-'Abbās ar-Rāmharmazī, a Mu'tazilī theologian, wanted to sail back to his home town after spending some time with his master, Abū 'Ali al-Jubbā'ī (235-303/ 849-916), a famous Mu'tazilī scholar.⁷⁹

However, al-Jubbā'ī advised his guest not to travel on the day chosen, because he said astrologers claimed that those who sailed on that day might risk being drowned, and so he urged him to embark on another day when sea voyages were said to be safe. His

⁷⁷ See at-Tanūkhī, *Nishwār al-Muhāḍar*, Vol. 2, pp. 327- 28.

⁷⁸ See *ibid.*, p. 328.

⁷⁹ Muhammad ibn 'Abd al-Wahhāb ibn Salām was a famous Mu'tazilī imām, and to him the Mu'tazilī sect called al-Jubbā'īyya is attributed. See az-Ziriklī, *Al-A'lām*, Vol. 7, p. 136.

warning surprised ar-Ramharmazī who had believed his master to be hostile to astrology, and he replied: ‘Oh Abū ‘Ali, is this really your advice, you who are such an opponent of the science?’ Wishing to give a rational explanation of the contradiction between his belief and his actions, al-Jubbā’ī answered: ‘Imagine that we are travelling along a road. A passer-by advises us to take a different route, because otherwise we would very likely encounter a dangerous animal; would it not be wise to take his advice into account and choose another path, even though there is a strong possibility that he is lying?’ the apprentice, ar-Rāmharmazī, convinced by this answer, agreed to change the day of his journey to another convenient date.⁸⁰

A correct prediction might not always bring rewards, however; it might bring punishment. Abū Ma’shar relates that he was once sitting somewhere when a group of travellers passed by. Recognising an old friend among the travelers, Abū Ma’shar advised him to wait until he had consulted his astrolabe to see whether it was a fortunate time for travel. Seeing that it was not, the astrologer advised the travellers to postpone their departure until another convenient time, and particularly warned his friend that if his fellow travellers ignored this advice he should not join the caravan and put off his departure for a few days. The travellers ignored Abū Ma’shar’s advice and the Caravan departed. His friend stayed behind. The caravan was attacked by robbers who killed several of the travellers and seized their belongings. On their way back, the survivors met Abū Ma’shar whom they violently attacked, calling him an atheist magician whose prediction of the robbers’ attack had somehow helped to bring it about. Abū Ma’shar then vowed that he would never again make predictions for ordinary people and would henceforth deal only with the elites.⁸¹

⁸⁰ See at-Tanūkhī, *Nishwār al-Muḥāḍara*, Vol. 2, p. 331.

⁸¹ Abu al-‘Abbās Ahmad at-Ṭifāsh, *Surūr an-Nafs bi Madārik al-Ḥawās al-Khams*, revised by Muhammad ibn Manzūr, ed. by Iḥsān ‘Abbās, (Beirut: al-Mu’assasa al-‘Arabiyya li ‘d-Dirāsāt wa ‘n-Nashr, 1980), p. 195.

Astrologers also served the authorities by finding lost or hidden persons or objects. It is related that Abū Ma’shar was once asked by one of the ruling elite, whose identity is not known to us, to find a criminal

It seems that the mediaeval Arabs' anxious and uncertain existence led them to have recourse to all sorts of divination including interrogational astrology, despite the religious condemnation which equated this particular branch of astrology with pagan customs and beliefs. The complexities of professional astrology became simplified to popular conceptions. For example, certain activities were believed to be favourable if conducted on a particular day of the week:⁸²

لنعم اليوم يوم السبت حقاً ... لصيد إن أردت بلا امتراء.
 وفي الأحد البناء فإن فيه ... بدأ الرحمن في خلق السماء.
 وفي الإثنين إن سافرت فيه ... تنبأ بالنجاح وبالنجاء.
 وإن رمت الحجامه ففي الثلاثاء ... فذاك اليوم مهراق الدماء.
 وإن رام امرؤ يوماً دواءً ... فنعم اليوم يوم الأربعاء.
 وفي الخميس قضاء خير ... ففيه الله يأذن بالقضاء.
 وفي الجمعات تتعيم بأهل ... ولذات الرجال مع النساء.⁸³

What a good day Saturday is if you want to go fishing.
 Sunday is good for undertaking all kinds of construction, as God created
 the world on that day.
 Expect success and safety if you travel on Monday.
 If you intend to perform blood-letting, that should be on Tuesday, as it is
 well known to be a good day for that kind of activity.
 If someone wants to take a medicine, the best day for that is Wednesday.
 Thursday is best for judging (between people); it is the day when God
 (will help you reach a good decision).

whose hiding place could not be found by the official police. Upon consulting the stars, Abū Ma'shar exclaimed: 'My master, the is hiding on the top of some mountain; it is made of gold and surrounded by a lake of blood, and there is nowhere on earth that fits such a description!' After the king promised that he would not punish the criminal, the man gave himself up and was brought before the king, who eagerly demanded to know about his hiding place. The man explained: 'I knew that the king would consult Abū Ma'shar about my hiding place and so, to make it difficult to identify I shut myself up in a bath which I filled with blood, placing at its centre a large mortar made of gold upon which I sat'. The king was greatly impressed by the astrologer's accurate description of that place. See Taqqī ad-Dīn Abū Bakr ibn 'Alī ibn Ḥujja al-Ḥamawī, *Thamarāt al-Awrāq fī al-Muḥāḍarāt*, to be found on the margin of Shihāb ad-Dīn Muhammad ibn Ahmad al-Ibshīhī's *Al-Mustaṭraf fī kullī Fannin Mustaṭraf* (Cairo: Muṣṭafā al-Bābī al-Ḥalabī, 2 Vols., 1952), Vol. 1, pp. 77- 78.

⁸² For the identification of auspicious and inauspicious days by means of astrology see M. J. L. Young, 'An Arabic Almanac of Favourable and Unfavourable Days', in *Journal of Semitic Studies*, xxvii. 2, (Autumn 1982): pp. 261- 79.

⁸³ Muhammad Jalāl ad-Dīn Ibn Manzūr, *Niḥār al-Azhār fī al-Layl wa an-Nahār* (Beirut: Dār Maktabat al-Ḥayat. 1983), p. 162. The author of these lines is anonymous.

On Friday, Take pleasure in your family; it is good for men to enjoy women's company.

It would be quite wrong, however, to think that the mediaeval Muslim Arabs generally allowed their lives to be guided by astrology. Many were sceptical critics, such as Abū Bakr Muhammad az-Zubaydī, who ridicules the pretensions of astrologers, though his logic seems faulty:

يقول المنجّمُ لي لا تسرّ ... فأنتك إن سرت لاقيت ضراً.
فإن كان يعلمُ أنني جسير ... فقد جاء بالنهي لغواً و هجراً.
وإن كان يجهلُ سيري فكيف ... يرانسي إذا ما سرت لاقيت شراً.⁸⁴

The astrologer advised me not to travel: 'If you do, it will be unfortunate'!

If he knows that I am courageous and determined to travel, then he is talking nonsense.

And if he does not know what I am going to decide, how can he claim to know the misfortune I will face on my journey?

Sufyān ath-Thawrī (d. 161/ 778)⁸⁵ criticised the famous astrologer Māshā' Allāh al-Munajjim saying:⁸⁶ 'You consult a horoscope before undertaking an action while I consult God in prayer; you fear Mars and I fear my sins; you expect good fortune from Jupiter while I appeal to God to bestow blessings upon me'.⁸⁷

Indeed, the different destinies of twins were often used by antagonists against the astrologers' claim that the main outline of a person's fate and future life can be

⁸⁴ Ath-Tha'ālibī, *Yatīmat ad-Dahr*, Vol. 2, p. 81.

⁸⁵ Abū 'Abdullah Sufyān ibn Masrūq ath-Thawrī was born in Kufā; his piety prompted both the Abbasid Caliph al-Manṣūr and his son al-Mahdī to offer him a governorship but he refused and hid himself in seclusion until his death (see az-Ziriklī, *al-A'lām*, vol. 3. p. 158).

⁸⁶ Mā Shā' Allāh al-Munajjim, a Jewish astrologer, was one of the foremost and most famous court astrologers from the reign of al-Manṣūr to that of al-Ma'mūn. He wrote several outstanding works on astrology. See Abū al-Faraj Muhammad ibn Ishāq Ibn an-Nadīm, *Al-Fihrist*, ed. by Yusif Ṭawīl and Ahmad Shams ad-Dīn, (Beirut: Dār al-Kutub al-'Ilmiyya, 1996), pp. 437- 38.

⁸⁷ At-Tawhīdī, *Al-Basāir wa 'dh-Dhakhā'ir*, Vol. 2, p. 24.

determined by means of *mawālīd* or *masāʾil* techniques. Abū al-ʿAnbas Ibn Abū Ishāq al-Ṣaymarī (d. 275/ 888),⁸⁸ who was acquainted with astrology, experienced a fate quite unlike that of his twin and therefore scorned the science. Abū al-ʿAnbas was a jester of the class of *ahl al-hamāqāt* or *al-muhammaqūn* (fools or people pretending to be fools). He describes himself as *ṣafʿān* (slapstick comedian): ‘My brother and I are twins; we both left Basra on the same day, we both arrived at Sāmarrā’ in the same hour, but he has become a judge while I have become a *ṣafʿān*. How then can astrology be held to be true?’⁸⁹

In the realm of poetry, whether these techniques proved false or true, were not the main concern of poets, rather it was the question of how to deal with them as a source of inspiration that concerned them more. Not surprisingly, poets tended to be especially concerned with amorous relationships, and so devoted a great part of their astrological images to love in all its aspects, often producing striking innovations. The kind of interrogational astrology that sought to gain foreknowledge of the destiny of a particular love affair by observing the configuration of the heavens at the inception of the relationship or at the time of query proved exceptionally interesting for poets, who employed that technique to express in various ways their attitude towards the science of astrology itself and, more importantly, to deliver an opinion regarding human destiny: that man’s freedom is an illusion. As we have noted, the majority of later mediaeval poets did not often see astrological images as an end in themselves or their main concern; rather they were more interested in the philosophical implications of the notion of astral destiny that linked heaven and earth and in what could be deduced from that connection regarding mankind’s relation to fate. Yet the emphasis on style or substance varied among poets within the context of modernity. Some used astrological ideas to create striking metaphors, others took a deeper interest in astrological concepts. This

⁸⁸ Muhammad ibn Ishāq was a court poet in the reign of al-Mutawakkil and al-Muʿtamid. He studied astrology but seems not to have believed in it. Nevertheless he wrote books on the subject, among which are *Aḥkām an-Nujūm* (The Judging of the Stars); and *Ar-Radd ʿalā al-Munajjimīn* (The Refutation of Astrologers). See az-Zirikī, *Al-ʿĀlām*, Vol. 6, p. 252.

⁸⁹ See at-Tawḥīdī, *Al-Baṣāʾir wa ʿdh-Dhakhāʾir*, Vol. 3, pp. 58- 59; Shmuel Moreh, *Live Theatre and Dramatic Literature in the Medieval Arab World*, (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1992), p. 67.

phenomenon is noticeable only from the fourth/tenth century onwards. References to the technique of *masā'il* are hardly ever encountered in the poetry of earlier times. Yet poets did not forget their role as artists and thus, alongside this interest in astral destiny and its philosophical implications, we find poetic imagery increasingly performing a remarkable aesthetic role in which style was not less important than substance. Poets were concerned with the richness and novelty of the images that could be created from astrological principles and themes, and thus astrological imagery was extensively used to enrich their metaphorical language, producing extraordinary images unprecedented in the astrological references of earlier times.⁹⁰ Thus astrology provided a new and fertile stock of meanings and images whose exploration can be regarded as constituting a literary revolution in the poetic art of the classical period. Ibn al-'Imād al-Ḥanbalī notes in his *Shadharāt adh-Dhahab* (The Pure Gold) that 'Ibn aṣ-Ṣam'ānī's *adh-Dhayl* and al-'Imād al-Asbahānī's *al-Kharīda* attribute the following lines to al-Ghazālī (1058-1111 A.D.):

حلت عقارب صُدغُه في خَدَه ... قـمراً فجَلَّ به عن التـشبيهِ .
ولقد عهدناه يحلُّ بِـبرجها... فمن العجائب كيف حلت فيه.⁹¹

⁹⁰ This literary phenomenon is known as modernity, whose essential feature is stylistic elaboration and rhetorical embellishment. Commenting on the work of Bashshār ibn Burd (d. 167/ 783), whose poetic production is described as among the earliest and most representative of new style of poetry which mediaeval Arab critics describe as *muḥdath* (modern), G. Schoeler remarks:

The question arises in what Bashshār's "modernity" consists. He did not introduce new genre, and the thematic innovations which could be adduced are anything but striking. The simple diction, close to the spoken language, which he uses particularly in his love-poems but also, for example, in elegies on members of his family, is already familiar from hijazi poetry [i.e. from the western part of the Arabian peninsula]. What is really new in Bashshār and his modern successors is a stylistic peculiarity, the frequent and conscious use of *badī'* [literally, what is new, unprecedented], i.e. of rhetorical figures and images. Nearly all *badī'* devices already occur in old Arabian poetry; but as the first literary theorist to give a systematic analysis of *Badī'*, ibn al-Mu'tazz (d. 296/ 908), observes, modern poets employ them much more frequently and with greater awareness. *Badī'*, in modern poetry, increasingly becomes an artistic principle rather than merely an artistic instrument.

(See G. Schoeler, 'Bashshār b. Burd, Abū 'l-'Atāhiyah and Abū Nuwās', in Julia Ashtiany *et al.* (eds.), *The Cambridge History of Arabic Literature: 'Abbasid Belles-Lettres*, pp. 275- 99 (particularly pp. 283-84).

⁹¹ Shihāb ad-Dīn 'Abd al-Ḥay Ibn al-'Imād al-Ḥanbalī, *Shadharāt adh-Dhahab fī Akhbār man Dhahab*, ed. by 'Abd al-Qādir al-Arna'ūfī and Maḥmūd al-Arna'ūfī, (Beirut & Damascus: Dār ibn Kathīr, 11 Vols., 1991), Vol. 6, p. 19.

The scorpion of her cheekbone entered into her rounded cheek, which is indeed a Moon. We see an astonishing beauty that is truly indescribable. We used to believe that it is the Moon that should enter that sign of the Zodiac; how strange then that it is Scorpio that has entered into the Moon.

If this attribution is correct,⁹² it is astonishing that this great religious scholar and philosopher, who later came to condemn the science of astrology and classify it under the categories of harmful sciences as it might lead to atheism,⁹³ had found, presumably in his youth, such astrological principles a source upon which he drew to create images of striking impact.⁹⁴ In earlier times, and even in the first decades of the Abbasid period, poets would conventionally compare the cheek of their lover to the rose in regard to both colour and texture.⁹⁵ In these lines, however, it is not the colour or softness of the cheek itself but the shape of the cheekbones that inspires the poet. Al-Ghazālī identifies the curved shape of his beloved's cheekbones with Scorpio when it is in the Moon, the

⁹² Ibn Al-'Imād in his *Shadharāt* was sceptical that these lines could have been composed by al-Ghazālī as he comments that 'Al-Iṣbahānī and aṣ-Ṣan'ānī attribute these lines to al-Ghazālī though they are not by him', p. 19.

⁹³ Faṭḥiyya Sulaymān, 'At-Tarbiya 'ind al-Ghazālī', in *Abū Ḥāmid al-Ghazālī fi adh-Dhikrā al-Mi'awiyya at-Tāsi'a li Milādih* (Damascus: al-Majlis al-A'lā li Ri'āyat al-Funūn wa 'l-Ādāb wa 'l-'Ulūm al-Ijtimā'iya, 1961) (the editor is the publisher), pp. 761- 827, particularly pp. 776- 77.

⁹⁴ Muhammad Bahjat al-Bayṭār asserts that al-Ghazālī composed these lines as a young man before converting to Sufism; according to the dates provided by al-Bayṭār, al-Ghazālī was in his late twenties. Muhammad Bahjat al-Bayṭār, 'Ḥujjat al-Islām Abū Ḥāmid al-Ghazālī', in *Abū Ḥāmid al-Ghazālī fi adh-Dhikrā al-Mi'awiyya at-Tāsi'a li Milādih*, (pp. 591- 93), particularly p. 592.

⁹⁵ Earlier poets had praised the rosy colour of the beloved's cheek in extolling her beauty; later the colour of the cheek is replaced by its shape. Or the image might refer to a fashion of the time, as women used to bend a lock of their hair towards their cheek in a scorpion shape. Some poets combined colour and shape in their love-songs as in al-Mu'allā aṭ-Ṭāṭ's line:

موردة الخدين مهضومة الحشى ... معقربة الصدغين فطرة اللحظ.

(See Ibn al-Mu'tazz, *Ṭabaqāt ash-Shu'arā'*, p. 305).

She is rosy-cheeked, slender-waisted, with a scorpion cheek and a languorous gaze.

Another poet, the Andalusian Abū Bakr ibn 'Ubāda, writes:

إذا رمئتْ قطفَ الورد ساورني الصدغ ... بعقرب سحر في فؤادي له لدغ.

(See Ibn Bassām, *Adh-Dhakhīra*, Vol. 1, p. 293).

Whenever I intend to pluck the rose [of her cheek], the cheek attacks me with a mysterious scorpion whose sting I can feel in my heart.

For more details on the subject of feminine beauty in the Abbasid period see ibn al-Jawzī, pp. 241- 80. This Abbasid attitude can be compared to the typical *Jāhili*'s view expressed by the poet

'Uday ibn Zayd in al-Aṣfahānī's *Al-Aghānī*, Vol. 2, pp. 113- 17.

cheek itself. In doing so, he reverses the positions of the planet and the constellation, since in reality the Moon would be in Scorpio, not vice-versa. This image is a typical example of the fantastic creations of late Abbasid poetry, which breaks the logical links between the elements in a comparison and relies on the imaginary. Abū Bakr al-Arrajānī (d. 544/ 1139)⁹⁶ draws on the same astrological material to create lines rich in such images:

مقرب الصدغ يحكي نور غرته ... بسدر بدا بظلام الليل معتكرا.
 قد سافر القلب في صدري إليه هوى ... ما عداد قطر لم أسمع له خيرا.
 وهو المسيء اختياراً إذ نوى سفراً ... وقد رأى طالعا في العقرب القمر.⁹⁷

There is someone whose cheekbone resembles a Scorpion; the bright lustre of her forehead is like that of the Moon in the blackness of the night sky.

I fell in love with her, and now the heart has left my breast and journeyed to be where she is, and since then he has never returned and no news is heard of him.

Indeed, my heart is at fault; it saw that the Moon was in Scorpio, but insisted on travelling knowing in advance the danger it would face.

The poet writes of the inevitable destiny that has separated him from his own heart, which made the unwise decision to travel to his beloved while knowing that the Moon was in the mansion of Scorpio, an astrological configuration of ill omen indicating that travel should be avoided.⁹⁸ The astrological knowledge of the poet is not what strikes us here; it is al-Arrajānī's inspired imagination and extraordinary imagery, which transforms a conventional theme with an inventiveness rarely approached before. The poet's use of astrological imagery is truly remarkable. In the first line he compares the cheek of his beloved, or rather the shape of her cheek bone, to a scorpion, and the brightness of her forehead surrounded by dark hair to that of the Moon in the night sky. Although this 'facial chart' portends an evil destiny as it conjoins the Moon with Scorpio, the poet ignored this omen and allowed his heart to travel to be with his beloved; his heart never returned and is now lost. The image of the Moon in Scorpio thus does not refer to an actual conjunction but is an elaborate metaphor extolling to the

⁹⁶ Nāṣiḥ ad-Dīn abū Bakr al-Arrajānī Ahmad ibn Muhammad was the judge of Tester, a Persian province, and a talented poet. (See Ibn al-'Imād, *Shadharāt al-Dhahab*, Vol. 6, pp. 224- 25; and az-Ziriklī, *Al-A'ām*, Vol. 1, p. 209).

⁹⁷ Ibn Al-'Amīd, *Shazarāt az-Zahab*, Vol. 6, p. 308.

⁹⁸ It also indicates that marriage should be avoided, see Ibn Ṭāwūs, *Faraj al-Mahmūm*, p. 113.

celestial beauty of the beloved's face. The metaphor is employed to allow the poet to read signs of ill omen in that beautiful countenance as if it were the celestial realm, with that realm's power to determine the lover's good or ill fortune. These lines suggest that in the late Abbasid period astrological principles were being used in a highly creative way to engender new images and a complex metaphorical language. Al-'Antarī (d. 570/1175)⁹⁹ writes on a similar theme, but his celestial world contains two Scorpions:

و بابلي اللحاظ كالقمر ... أصبح لي في الأرض فتنة البشر.
 أولاه فيض الجمال أجمعه ... والحسن والظرف واهب الصور.
¹⁰⁰ خشيت من عقرب به قمر ... فكيف بالعقربين في قمر.

A person with Babylonian eyes has, like the Moon, become a source of fearful allure to human beings.

She has been granted the ultimate beauty of the whole world by the Creator of Images, who also endowed her with unfailing good humour.
 I used to feel fear when I saw Scorpio in the Moon, so what should I feel when I see two Scorpions in the Moon?

Al-'Antarī, like al-Arrajānī, attributes his suffering to the Moon's being in Scorpio, using the image to refer to the face of his beloved. His imagery, however, is not as richly allusive as al-Arrajānī's, and he seems to be aware that he is using a cliché. To emphasise his point and strive for some originality he doubles the number of scorpions (the beloved's cheekbones), thus doubling the ill fortune to be expected.

Al-'Antarī also made use of the idea of interrogational astrology to link love and destiny:

ومخطفُ الخصر زارتنا سحراً ... في غنج عينيه سحرُ هاروت.
 يحملُ تَفْـاحةَ موردةٍ ... كدريةٍ رُصنتِ بياقوت.
¹⁰¹ كأنها النجم في توفدِهِ ... فإرن بدر السماء في حوت.

⁹⁹ Abū al-Mu'ayyad Muhammad ibn al-Majlī was a physician and man of letters. At the beginning of his career as a writer he devoted a great deal of his time to writing about 'Antara al-'Absī, a famous *jāhili* poet, and thus acquired the title of al-'Antarī. See Az-Ziriklī, *Al-A'ām*, Vol., 7, p. 241; and Ibn Abī Uṣaybi'a, *Uyūn al-Anbā'*, pp. 389- 99.

¹⁰⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 395.

¹⁰¹ Ibn Abī Uṣaybi'a, *Uyūn al-Anbā'*, p. 394.

A slender-waisted one visited me at midnight, with the magic of Harūt¹⁰²
in her alluring eyes.
She came; in her cheek was an apple like a pearl ornamented with rubies.
It shone like the bright Star when in conjunction with the Moon in Pisces.

The meaning of these lines is obscure: the significance of the astrological reference particularly is unclear, and so we need to ask certain questions. What is the purpose of the poet in describing the cheek of his beloved as an apple and so eschewing the conventional image of the rose? And what is the significance of the heavenly configuration the poet refers to?

Traditionally in Christianity the fruit Eve gave to Adam was thought to be an apple; assuming that the poet was familiar with this idea, the apple could then be read as a symbol of sexual temptation.¹⁰³ Clearly this Apple is no ordinary fruit: it is a jewel, a

¹⁰² Harūt is of one of the two angels mentioned in the Qur'ān as responsible for magical deeds in this world. The verse is as follows:

{... يعلمون الناس السحر وما أنزل على الملكين ببابل هاروت وماروت وما يعلمان من أحد حتى يقولوا إنما نحن فتنة فلا تكثر فيتعلمون منهما ما يفرقون به بين المرء وزوجه وما هم بضارين به من أحد إلا بإذن الله ويتعلمون ما يضرهم ولا ينفعهم ولقد علموا لمن اشتراه ما له في الآخرة من خلاق}.

Al-Baqara (The Cow), 1, 2, 102.

They [the devils] teach men witchcraft and that which was revealed to the angels Hārūt and Mārūt in Babylon. Yet they never instruct any man without saying beforehand: 'We have been sent to tempt you; do not renounce your faith.' From these two, men learn a charm by which they can create discord between husband and wife, although they can harm none with what they learn except by Allah's will. They learn, indeed, what harms them and does not profit them; yet they know full well that anyone who engaged in that traffic would have no share in the life to come.'

Also, in Islamic lore, we find the following tradition: when God decided to give authority to man as His deputy on Earth, the angels complained to God that man, who by nature is prone to bloodshed and disorder, should be given such a position while they are far more suitable, constantly obeying His commands and never failing. God then challenged them to do better if placed under the same conditions, and asked the angels to choose two of the most pious among them, who would descend to Earth with instructions to avoid the grave sins of idolatry, fornication, murder and the drinking of wine. Hārūt and Mārūt were chosen to perform that task. Once on Earth, however, and having been given human desires, they were immediately captivated by a woman of stunning beauty, who offered them three options: to have intercourse with her; to kill a man; or to drink wine. At first, they rejected all three, but being greatly tempted, they decided that drinking wine might be the least sin, and so succumbed. Becoming intoxicated, they had intercourse with the women, and then killed a man who had witnessed their misconduct for fear of scandal; therefore wine is known among Muslims as 'the Mother of Sins'. Seeing this, the angels in Heaven realised how strong human desires are, and started to pray for the forgiveness of all mankind. Conscious that they had committed deadly sins, the two angels decided to depart without delay and ascended to Heaven, but they found the gates closed. God then gave them the choice: to be punished on Earth or in Hereafter. They chose the first, as it would eventually end, and so they were imprisoned and hung by the feet in a well in Babylon until the Day of Judgment. (See al-Qazūnī, *ʿAjāʾib al-Makhlūqāt*, pp. 55- 56; and G. Vajda, 'Hārūt wa Mārūt', in *E. I.*, Vol. iii, pp. 236- 37).

¹⁰³ In Christianity the apple is a symbol of love and wisdom, and also of evil, lust and temptation. These negative meanings particularly derived from the Christian tradition, dating from the fifth century, that identifies the fruit of the Tree of Knowledge, which Adam and Eve were ordered by God not to eat and which caused them to be driven out of Eden when they did so, as an apple. Neither early Hebrew nor

precious offering, and so may represent the beloved herself. It is also connected to the celestial realm by virtue of its brightness; it is a heavenly fruit. The poet compares the brightness of this unearthly apple to that of the 'bright star', the Pleiades.¹⁰⁴ Although it would seem more apt to refer to Venus in this context, or to some other star brighter than the Pleiades¹⁰⁵ the poet prefers to use ath-Thurayyā. What might be his intention? The bright Pleiades, the beloved's cheek, is in conjunction with the Moon, the beloved's face, and both are in Pisces, which may be an allusion to the shape of the beloved's cheekbone. If the Moon were in conjunction with the Pleiades, however, then it would be in Taurus, since the Pleiades form part of that constellation, and not in Pisces.¹⁰⁶ What is, then, the purpose of the poet in departing both from established astronomical and astrological knowledge and from the fourth/tenth century conventional association of the beloved's cheekbone with Scorpio, which he himself used in another poem, as seen above? It is unlikely that al-'Antarī was ignorant of the location of ath-Thurayyā, and so it seems that this imaginary horoscope is purposely cast in that way and has a poetic significance.

The astrological significance of ath-Thouayyā is clear: the mediaeval Arabs believed that the Pleiades exerted a benevolent influence on mundane life.¹⁰⁷ The conjunction of the Moon with the Pleiades also had a meteorological significance, which the poet may have had in mind. It marked the beginning of the winter season, so nights were now becoming longer and colder.¹⁰⁸ The beloved thus came to him on a cold midnight, when

Muslim works clearly identify the fruit, and some believe an ear of wheat, a fig, or fruit of the vine may have been intended. See Gertrude Jobes, *Dictionary of Mythology, Folklore and Symbols* (New York: The Scarecrow Press, 3 Vols., 1961), Vol. 1, pp. 112-13.

¹⁰⁴ Although the Pleiades is not mentioned by name (ath-Thurayyā) here, we stated earlier that the Arabs used to refer to that cluster as an-Najm, the Star, always using the article al- (the). See al-Marzūqī, *Al-Azminza wa 'l-Amkina*, Vol. 1, p. 167.

¹⁰⁵ Ibn Manzūr, *Lisān al-'Arab*, Vol. 4, p. 416.

¹⁰⁶ According to al-Bīrūnī, on the third day of the lunar month the Moon is in conjunction with ath-Thurayyā, that is located between 10° to 15° on the sign of Taurus. (See al-Bīrūnī, *Al-Āthār al-Bāqiya*, p. 43).

¹⁰⁷ Al-Bīrūnī, *Al-Āthār al-Bāqiya*, p. 342.

¹⁰⁸ This is according to ancient Arab meteorology, which predicted the weather according to the observation of the nightly movement of the Moon and the lunar constellations. Al-Bīrūnī provides, however, the corresponding heavenly aspect that predicts the coming of the winter season in mediaeval

both would be in need of the warmth of love. Moreover, the theme of lovemaking is underlined by the astrological reference here. In mediaeval Arabic astrology, the best time for a woman to lose her virginity is when the Moon is in Pisces.¹⁰⁹ However, the poem suggests that it is ‘the slender-waisted one’ who takes the initiative; it is interesting to see how the woman is portrayed as a wise seducer who takes the first step in this love affair. It is she who comes to her beloved, deliberately choosing a time when he is particularly vulnerable to her seductions: it is not only the middle of a cold night, but also a favourable time, as indicated by the heavens, to fulfill amorous desires. So if the situation is to be stated astrologically, it is not only the beloved’s desire that drives her to approach her lover to satisfy their urgent need for each other; nature as well announces that it is an auspicious time to embrace as their relationship promises to be a life-long commitment.¹¹⁰

In a richly complicated way al-Buḥturī (d.284/ 897) makes use of interrogational astrology to mock the incompetence of professional astrologers, display his own learning and emphasise the inescapability of preordained fate. Al-Buḥturī is unusual in that he is writing from a deep understanding of the theory and practice of astrology, a phenomenon rarely encountered in the poets of the mediaeval Muslim world. This understanding is found in a poem in which al-Buḥturī derides an astrologer who is suffering because of a broken relationship, though he has always claimed to be able to foretell the hidden future. Such arrogant pretensions leading to humiliation gave poets the weapons to engage in *hijā*’ (satire).¹¹¹ The occasion of the poem is that the

meteorology: it is when Sun enters the sign of Scorpio that coincides with the conjunction of the full Moon with ath-Thurayyā. An anonymous line summarises the phenomenon and serves as a mnemonic:

إذا ما البدر تم مع الثريا ... أتاك البـــرد أوله الشتاء.

(See al-Bīrūnī, *Al-Āthār al-Bāqiyā*, p. 337.)

When the full Moon is in conjunction with the Pleiades, cold is to be expected as it is the sign of the coming winter.

¹⁰⁹ This information is found in the anonymous *Kitāb al-Ghurar az-Zawāhir fī Maʿrifat al-Jawāhir*, in King Abdul Aziz University, The Central Library (MS. Falk, Tanjīm, no. 285, n.d.), fol. 16. The subtitle is ‘Elections according to the Seventh House: deciding on the propitious time for marriage and the braking of a woman’s virginity’.

¹¹⁰ Particularly if the Moon was in Pisces by 28° (see *ibid.*).

¹¹¹ For the complete poem see Muhammad at-Tūnjī (ed.), *Diwān al-Buḥturī* (Beirut: Dār al-Kitāb al-‘Arabī, 2 Vols., 1999), Vol. 2, p. 774. Al-Aṣfahānī regards this poem as one of the best of al-Buḥturī’s satires (see at-Tūnjī’s footnote 1 on p. 774).

astrologer al-Ḥasan al-Munajjim,¹¹² nickname Ibn Abī Qimāsha, had a slave-girl with whom one of his friends, Ahmad ibn Šālih, fell in love, and seized every opportunity to meet with her at his friend's house. Eventually Ahmad tricked Ibn Abī Qimāsha by convincing him that it would be safe to let her visit his house, and gave, as guarantee of the innocence of the visit, his mother's vow that the slave-girl would be under her protection. But the mother, seeing how in love her son was, broke her vow and allowed the girl to end his suffering. Realising that he had been deceived, the astrologer spread the news of his friend's betrayal. Al-Buḥturī seized the opportunity and composed an ironic satire, from which the following lines are taken, to mock and rebuke the astrologer for not recognising the astral configuration that indicated the imminent end of his love affair:¹¹³

قد كان حقاً عليك أن تعرف المكتـون من سر صدرها الكلف
 بما تعاطيت من الغيوب و ما ... أوتيت من حكمة و من لطف.
 فكيف أخطأت أي أخي و لم ... تركن إلى ما سطرت في الصحف.
 و كيف مادلتك القران على ... ما فيه من ذاهب و مؤتلف.
 أما أرتك النجوم أنكما ... في حالتي ثابت و منصرف.
 و ما رأيت المريخ قد حاسد الز ... هرة في الحد منه و في الشرف.
 تخبر عن ذاك أن زائرة ... تشفي مزوراً من لاعج الدنف.
 من أين أخطت ذا وأنت على ... التقويم و الزيـج جد معتكف.
 ذلت في هذه الصناعة؟ أم ... أكديت؟ أم رمتها مع الخرف.¹¹⁴

You should have discovered your beloved's secret, which she kept
 hidden from you,
 Since you had attained knowledge of the unseen, and been granted the
 privileges of wisdom and clairvoyance!
 How, then, did you come to commit such an error, my brother, and did
 not seek help in the books you yourself had written?
 Did not the stars disclose, concerning you and your beloved, that the
 position of one was fixed while that of the other was unstable?
 Did you not see that Mars was equal to Venus in both position and
 honour?
 A sign indicated that a female guest would cure the pains of love suffered
 by a new host.
 How could you simply ignore such an omen? You, a devotee of almanac
 and *zīj*!

¹¹² He is al-Ḥasan ibn Mišbāḥ al-Munajjim, wrote number of astrological treatises. (See Ibn al-Qifṭī, *Tārīkh al-Ḥukamā'*, pp. 163- 64.

¹¹³ See at-Tūnjī (ed.), *Diwān al-Buḥturī*, Vol. 2, p. 774 (particularly footnote 1).

¹¹⁴ *Ibid.*, pp. 774- 78.

Had you suddenly grown senile? Had you been practising your profession only to earn a living? Or were you, when you began your studies, already touched in your wits?

Al-Buḥturī holds the astrologer responsible for his pain and sorrow; Ibn Abī Qimāsha has brought his misfortune upon himself by ignoring the clear sign, revealed in the heavens, that his beloved would leave him for another. The astrologer apparently could not bring himself to believe the portent his knowledge and skill told him must be true. He must, then, have been prematurely senile, or an avaricious charlatan; or perhaps he was suffering from dementia when first embarking on his career. The poet does not say, however, that the astrologer could have averted the betrayal, only that he should have foreseen it. Al-Buḥturī's methodology here is to make brilliant use of three key elements: the notion of fate, the theme of love, and the debate concerning the validity of astrology.

The inevitability of the relationship's sad conclusion is revealed by the poet's perfect utilisation of a particular astrological image. The horoscope imagined by al-Buḥturī, in which he says 'Did you not see that Mars was equal to Venus in both degree and honour?', is based on a type of configuration known technically as an 'intervention':¹¹⁵ this occurs when two planets, Mars and Venus in this case, moving at different speeds (as the former is slow and the latter is fast) come into conjunction at a certain point. Before the fast planet (Venus) completes the conjunction, however, a third of intermediate speed (Mercury), retrogrades towards the slow planet (Mars) and passes it

¹¹⁵ See al-Bīrūnī, *Elements of Astrology*, p. 86.

The apparently erratic movement of the outer planets, Mars, Jupiter and Saturn, technically termed retrograde motion (*rujū'* or *khanas*), was wrongly thought of as resulting from the planet's backward movement (i. e. from east to west among the stars); the planet was then thought to continue its journey in a semi-straight path around its sphere, this latter movement being termed *istiḳāma* or straightening (see the root 'Kha-na-sa', in Ibn Manẓūr's *Lisan al-'Arab*, Vol. 6, p. 72, see also figure 15). This apparent motion is actually caused by a combination of its true motion with that of the Earth, which moves more quickly around the Sun. Drawing on this theory, the Damascene poet al-Badī' Ṭarrād ibn 'Alī as-Salamī (d. 524 H.) praises a notable who worked in the court of the Fāṭimid caliphs al-Āmir (r. 495-524/ 1102-30) and al-Ḥāfiẓ (r. 524-44/ 1130-49):

كالمشترى لكن لا ... لك رجعة، ولذا استقامة.

Al-'Imād al-Aṣḫānī, *Kharīdat al-Qaṣr wa Jarīdat al-'Aṣr: Qism Shu'arā' Misr*, ed. by Ahmad Amīn, Shawqī Dayf and Iḥsān 'Abbās, (Cairo: Mat.ba'at lajnat at-Ta'lif wa 't-Tarjama wa 'n-nashr, 2 Vols., 1951), Vol. 2, p. 107.

He is like Jupiter, but it retrogrades, while he is straightforward.

by, so that the fast inevitably conjoins with it and not with the slow; thus Mars is left behind and alone. In applying this theory to Ibn Abī Qimāsha's situation, al-Buḥturī, satirises the astrologer for expecting to enjoy a lasting love-relationship with his partner through the heavenly configuration visible at the beginning of the affair predicted imminent misfortune. Mars, which was in conjunction with Venus, is no longer with his 'mistress', having been forced to separate according to ordained planetary movement. The slow planet, Mars, first comes into conjunction with Mercury, which was following 'his friend', as Mercury is conceived astrologically as the planet of friendship.¹¹⁶ But instead of comforting his friend, Mercury, who is also known as a hypocrite,¹¹⁷ and a swindler and cheater,¹¹⁸ is attracted by Venus and conjoins with her. Thus, Mars, the slow planet, represents the betrayed astrologer, who was slow to comprehend the situation, while his lover, Venus, abandons him to join the newcomer, Mercury, Ibn Abī Qimāsha's false friend,¹¹⁹ and cure his pains of love, as we see in the sixth line. Moreover, Venus, who is characterised by her passion for love-making,¹²⁰ is never depicted as committed to one long-term relationship, and so her attachment to any partner should be interpreted as unlikely to last. For this reason her new lover should not be confident that he will be able to retain her affection. Her nature dictates that he, too, will suffer the humiliation his former friend is now experiencing.

Al-Buḥturī uses his astrological knowledge to create a dynamic metaphor that accurately reflects the love triangle that has caused the astrologer so much pain. The poet does not criticise the astrologer for failing to act to prevent his beloved's departure, which was preordained according to the configuration described above, but mocks him for failing to apply his knowledge, which may in any case be inadequate or fraudulent, to his own situation. Whether or not the poet was a believer in astrology, these lines

¹¹⁶ See al-Bīrūnī, *Elements of Astrology*, pp. 39- 40.

¹¹⁷ This planet is known as a hypocrite because it has no fixed status, it is identified as auspicious when in conjunction with a benefic, and inauspicious when with a malefic. See al-Qazūnī, *'Ajā'ib al-Makhlūqāt*, p. 21.

¹¹⁸ See *Abū Ma ṣhar, The Abbreviation*, p. 66.

¹¹⁹ Al-Buḥturī criticised this false friend, Ahmad ibn Ṣāliḥ for his misdeeds in one of his poems, see at-Tūnjī (ed.), *Diwān al-Buḥturī*, Vol. 2, pp. 845.

¹²⁰ *Abū Ma ṣhar, The Abbreviation*, p. 64.

should probably be read as an ironic satire on an individual rather than a polemic against astrology: al-Buḥturī is claiming to be more expert in the science than the professional astrologer, and indeed these lines suggest that he certainly had more than a rudimentary knowledge of the discipline. Yet he seems sceptical of certain astrology's claim to enable the individual to avert or change an evil destiny; thus the poem's main theme is that man's destiny is absolute and unchangeable.

Another poem referring to the technique of *masā'il* and the preordained fate that can be read on the page of the heavens was composed in al-Andalus. In asking for a favour from the vizier Abū Bakr al-Khūlānī,¹²¹ Abū Muhammad ibn Ṭalā' al-Mahdawī¹²² addresses his dedicatee in lines that recognise his status and acknowledge his expertise as an astrologer:

قل للوزير قتي خولاني خولني ... علمي بفضلك ميزاً فهو في ميزاني.
 رصدت في فلك الأشواق بدر هدى ... له رقيبٌ ثَقِيلٌ مثلُ كيوان.
 فابعث إليّ براح مثل ريقه ... فمثلها كان يسقى عند رضوان.¹²³

Hey, you lad, tell the vizier al-Khūlānī, 'My knowledge of your generosity gives me the privilege of being recognised above your other petitioners.

When casting the horoscope of love, I found a guiding Moon, but it was under the surveillance of a hostile guardian that seems to be Saturn. So please send me a wine like my lover's saliva, which puts me in mind of that dispensed by Raḍwān.¹²⁴

In condensing the procedure which a formal letter should follow, the poet first praises the addressee, then gives the reason for the request, and lastly presents the request. The

¹²¹ He is the astrologer whom al-Mu'tamid, the King of Seville, charged with being responsible for the loss of his throne. See Ch. V, pp. 167- 70.

¹²² Ḥāwī (eds.), *Mawsū'at Shu'arā' al-'Arab*, p. 790.

¹²³ Ibn Bassām, *Adh-Dhakhira*, Vol. 4, pp. 216- 17.

¹²⁴ Raḍwān is known in Islamic lore as the guardian of Paradise, who will serve its inhabitants. Although references to his name are absent from the Qur'ān, early exegesis and the Prophetic Hadith that describe Paradise. The name may result from a personifying exegesis of the *riḍawn* (or Allāh's favour) which believers will meet in the hereafter. He is an accepted figure in Arabic belles-lettres, at least from al-Ma'arrī (d. 449/ 1057) onwards, and in later Islamic literature. (See W. Raven, 'Raḍwān', in *E. I.*, Vol. viii, p. 519). However, a reference to the guardian of Hell occurs in the Qur'ān: 'And they [those in Hell] will call out 'Oh Mālik (the Keeper of Hell) ask your God to annihilate us', he answered: 'Here you shall remain!'. *Az-zukhruf* (The Ornaments of Gold), 25, 42, 77.

more plausible the reason, the greater the chance that the request will be granted. Al-Mahdawī presents his request for a fine wine in the form of an astrological allusion which his addressee would recognise and appreciate. The meaning would be clear and, the poet hopes, persuasive, to the court astrologer: his beloved is being kept away from him by a watchful guardian, and this cruel fate can only be alleviated by a wine like that dispensed in Paradise by Raḍwān, which is compared, in an intensely erotic simile, to his love's saliva. Stating the situation astrologically, the poet presents the case in terms of parallel opposition and compares Saturn (the male relatives) to Raḍwān (the guardian of Heaven) as the function of both is to guard Paradise, but while the girl's relatives prevent the lover from enjoying the wine of sexual love, Raḍwān dispenses the wine of Divine love. Although this comparison would shock a devout puritan, al-Mahdawī is flattering al-Khulānī by presenting his case in astrological language, and clearly hopes that the court astrologer, recognising their common interest in the astral world, will take pity on the poet and grant his request.

Examining the poet's reference in more detail, we find that his misfortune stems from the position of Saturn, representing his lover's guardians, who are observing, and in opposition to, the Moon, his lover.¹²⁵ His choice of the Moon to represent his beloved is entirely conventional, but why choose Kiwān (Saturn) in particular to represent the watchers, and not Mars, for example, as both were well known to be malefics? The choice of Saturn may be attributed to the significance of this planet as understood by contemporary astrologers: it was specifically associated with male kin, particularly 'grandfathers, fathers, [and] older brothers'.¹²⁶ So those watchful guardians, whose anger the poet fears, are the close male relatives of his beloved. Could it be that the implication intended by the poet is that he wants the vizier to use his power and somehow help him overcome the opposition of his beloved's male relatives rather than merely send him a wine that will ease the anguish caused by the separation from his beloved and compensate for her absence?

¹²⁵ In astrology, it is a sign of misfortune if the planets 'are in conjunction with the malefics or in their opposition or in their quartile or their trine or their sextile, or between them and the body of the malefic'. (See Abū Ma'shar, *The Abbreviation*, pp. 54- 55).

¹²⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 61.

It is evident that poems concerned in one way or another with love often made reference to the astrological technique of *masā'îl*. The emotional relationship, whether hate or love; the security of the relationship; the fate of the two lovers was rendered in terms of an astrological configuration. However, though the majority of astrological references connected with the practice of *masā'îl* had to do with queries concerning emotional affairs and prospective spouses, poems were written about other matters, such as determining the most auspicious time for undertaking a variety of activities ranging from the crucially important to the almost trivial. These included meeting with a political figure, weaning an infant, and even removing body hair.¹²⁷ *Masā'îl* was particularly important in the field of medicine. For example, it is related that Ḥadīd, the wife of the Abbasid Caliph Hārūn ar-Rashīd, when suffered from a bowel infection asked the court astrologers al-Abahḥ (d. 230/ 845)¹²⁸ and aṭ-Ṭabarī (d. approx. 200/ 816)¹²⁹ to determine an auspicious time to start a cure. The astrologers were of opposing views: aṭ-Ṭabarī advised her that it would be better not to take medicine on that day as Mars was in conjunction with the Moon, and suggested she waits until the Moon was in conjunction with Jupiter. Al-Abahḥ, however, commented: 'I am afraid that if she has to wait for the Moon to be in conjunction with Jupiter, she will find the infection will have spread so no cure will be of value'. However, the patient preferred aṭ-Ṭabarī's advise and refused to start a cure until a fortunate time is to be approached. This indeed caused her the loose of her life and she died before the Moon is in conjunction with Jupiter.¹³⁰

¹²⁷ According to mediaeval astrological medicine, it is unfavourable, for example, to drink a laxative when the Moon is in Aries, Taurus or Capricorn. Yet at such times medicines that stop vomiting, are particularly effective. More generally, it was believed that each part of the human body was governed by a certain sign of the zodiac. For example, Aries governed the head, Taurus the neck and shoulders, Gemini the arms and hands and so on. According to this theory, it was unadvisable for blood letting to be done when the Moon was in the sign corresponding to the part intended to be cured, since the attraction of the Moon might cause excessive bleeding. The planets too were believed to rule certain organs of the body; Jupiter the liver, Sun the heart, Venus the kidneys and so on. (Abū Ma'shar al-Balkhī, *Al-Mudkhal fī Ilm an-Nujūm*, in King Abdul Aziz University, The Central Library (MS. Falk, Tanjīm, no. 285, n.d.), fols. 16- 21.

¹²⁸ Al-Ḥasan ibn Ibrāhīm, known as al-Abahḥ, was later appointed one of al-Ma'mūn's court astrologers of al-Ma'mūn. For his biography see Ibn an-Nadīm, *Al-Fihrist*, p. 439; and az-Ziriklī, *Al-A lām*, Vol. 2, p. 191.

¹²⁹ Muhammad ibn 'Umar ibn Ḥafṣ ibn al-Farrukhān aṭ-Ṭabarī was one of the prominent Abbasid astrologer and wrote number of works on astrology. (See Ibn an-Nadīm, *Al-Fihrist*, p. 437).

The anthologist 'Abd al-Malik ath-Tha'ālibī (d. 429/ 1038)¹³¹ draws on this astrological doctrine when celebrating the recovery of his dedicatee, whose consumption of medicine coincided with a fortunate time:¹³²

يا سيداً حاز طبيعته الشرفا ... ولم يدع منه للورى طرفا.
لما اخذت الدواء فالطالع السعد ... د على العزم منك قد وقف.
لا زلت تحسو السرور في مهله ... وتتفرض الهم عنك و الدنفا.¹³³

Hey, master, whose nature is honour, of which you took all there was and
left nothing to other men;
When you took the medicine, the ascendant indicated good fortune, that
which you brought merely by drinking.

¹³⁰ Ibn Abī Usaybī'a, *Uyūn alAnbā'*, p. 177.

Also, with regard to the role of physician mediaeval astrologers played, it is related that an astrologer was summoned by a very fat king, who ordered him to find an effective way of helping him lose weight. Recognizing the irrationality of this demand, but afraid of showing himself as not up to the task, the astrologer pretended to consult the stars and then sadly addressed his king: 'Oh my lord, I'm afraid I have bad news for you: it is that you won't need to make an effort to lose weight! Your ascendant shows that you will die in one month, and as a proof of my prognostication keep me in custody this month, and when the moment of your death approaches free me'. Devastated by this news, the king decided to devote the last 30 days of his life to God and gave up all worldly entertainments including indulging in food. After twenty-eight days, the king, sensing the approach of death, asked that the astrologer be freed as promised. The astrologer then asked to see his patron and to his gratification found that the king had lost so much weight as to be almost unrecognisable. He addressed the king: 'My lord, having successfully fulfilled your dream of losing weight I would like to inform you that the news regarding your death is not true. My lord, I have no idea whatsoever about the length of my own life; how then could I predict yours? My prognostication was just a trick, as indeed I have no other cure for those who wish to lose weight but to shock them into changing their habit of consuming food by convincing them to expect an inevitable disaster.' The king, greatly delighted by this news, ordered him to be generously rewarded. (See Ibn Hujja, *Thamarāt al-Awrāq*, pp. 78- 79). Although this story is almost certainly entirely fictional, as the names of the king and his astrologer are not given, it is an example of how astrology was regarded as an established part of mediaeval life and shows that even sceptical popular opinion tended to see astrologers as quick-witted and astute individuals.

¹³¹ Abū Mansūr 'Abd al-Malik ibn Muhammad ath-Tha'ālibī was a native of Nishapur. He was a prolific anthologist and literary critic. Living at a time when the New Persian renaissance was in full bloom, he was a devotee to the promotion and promulgation of Arabic Literature and language, on which he composed a number of poetic lines. His work *Yatimat ad-Dahr* (The Unique Pearl of the Age), a large scale anthology of poetry and prose from the second half of the fourth/ tenth century, brought him a great fame. A number of his work is said to have dedicated to the Ghaznavid governor of Nishapur. (For ath-Tha'ālibī see 'Abd ar-Rahmān, *Muṣam ash-Shu'arā' al-'Abbāsiyīn*, pp. 93-94; and E. K. Rowson, 'al-Tha'ālibī', in *Encyclopedia of Arabic Literature*, Vol. 2, pp.764- 65). As for the Ghaznavids, they are the first major Turkish dynasty in the eastern Islamic world, named for their capital at Ghazna, in south-eastern Afghanistan.

¹³² There is no reference to the dedicatee's identity, but as shown above he had a good relationship with Ghaznavid governor of Nishapur. The tone of this panegyric suggests that the addressee might be his patron or a member of the high elite.

¹³³ Ath-Tha'ālibī, *Khāṣṣ al-Khāṣṣ*, p. 272.

May pleasure be your drink, which you slowly swallow, and may sorrow
and grief be kept away from you.

Exaggeration is a prominent feature of the mediaeval panegyric. This is evident in the above lines, in which the poet reverses the astrological notion in order to eulogise his dedicatee as a superhuman figure. Ordinary man would be cured by drinking the prescribed medicine at the most auspicious time, but the dedicatee's brings good fortune 'merely by drinking'. Thus he creates the condition for his recovery while lesser mortals are subject to the vagaries of fortune. While the third line seems conventional, wishing that the dedicatee should enjoy a life of prolonged pleasure, there is perhaps a veiled criticism in the word 'slowly', while may imply that his illness was brought on by self-indulgence. The implied advice then may be that he will avoid sorrow and grief and prolong his pleasure if he exercises more self-restraint.

Unlike al-Buḥturī or al-Mahdawī, the poet here displays no astrological knowledge. The phrase 'the ascendant indicated good fortune' is merely used as an element of *ath-Tha'ālibī's* flattery of his dedicatee. In this he is typical of the poets of his time, most of whom were not overly concerned with the validity or invalidity of astrology (or of other systems of knowledge upon which they drew) as a science. They saw the material as a source of ideas and images that could be used to extend and enhance the language of their poetry.

Astrology could be combined with other methods of divination. In praising the new palace of Caliph al-Mu'tazz (r. 866-69 A.D.), al-Buḥturī refers to his choice of an auspicious time before visiting the Caliph there:

خبرٌ مبهجٌ و بنیانِ یمن ... فی منی سف عند السماء مشید.
...
زرتہ تلو غرة الشهر ... بالطیر المیامین و النجوم السعود.¹³⁴

What delight it is to hear news of the blessed building, so lofty that it
touches Simāk.¹³⁵

¹³⁴ At-Tūnjī (ed.), *Diwān al-Buḥturī*, Vol. 1, p. 389-90.

¹³⁵ Simāk (Vega) is a term of two very far and bright stars. The Arabs identify two Simāks, the Unarmed (*al-A'zal*), and the Arcturus (*ar-Rāmiḥ*), the former is one of the lunar mansions that has *naw'*, while the

I visited him there at the beginning of the month, after seeing the left bird's flight¹³⁶ and the benefic stars.

Meetings with rulers and courtly elites were best conducted on days when the Moon was in one of the fire signs, particularly, according to Abū Ma'shar, Aries, Leo and Sagittarius, as these were called the monarchical houses.¹³⁷ It is related, however, that the vizier Muhammad ibn 'Ali ibn Muqla (d. 328/ 940)¹³⁸ arranged to meet with Caliph al-Qāhir (r. 932-34 A.D.)¹³⁹ at the ascension of Capricorn, for that was also considered

latter is not regarded as a lunar mansions and has no *naw'*. Both are located in the sign of the zodiac of Libra with al-A'zal above ar-Rāmiḥ. See Ibn Manzūr, *Lisān al-ʿArab*, Vol. 10, pp. 443- 44.

¹³⁶ This refers to one of the techniques of *zajr*: a bird is driven to take flight and from the direction it takes an omen is deduced: good if the bird flies to the right, bad if to the left.

¹³⁷ Abū Ma'shar Al-Balkhī, *Al-Mudkhal fī ʿIlm an-Nujūm*, in King Abdul Aziz University, The Central Library (MS. Falk, Tanjīm, no. 285, n.d.), fol. 16. See also the diagram provided by the Abū Sa'īd Muhammad as-Sizjī, in his *Al-Ma'ānī fī Aḥkām an-Nujūm*, in King Abdul Aziz University, The Central Library (MS. Falk, Tanjīm, no. 235/3, n.d.), fol. 35, diagram, 18. the diagram illustrates the advisable time for meeting with kings and political elites.

¹³⁸ Abū 'Ali Muhammad ibn 'Ali, known as Ibn Muqla, a three-times vizier for three Caliphs. He was a man of high ambitions, he started his career as a tax-collector then he was given an important position in the court-post. Then in 316/ 928 he was appointed as a vizier under the reign of al-Muqtadir (r. 295-320/ 908-32) and al-Qāhir (r. 320-22/ 932-34). He was not loyal to the latter Caliph whom he planned to depose. However, as he failed he was obliged to flee and leave the vizierate for a while. He regained his position as vizier under ar-Rāḍī's reign (r. 322-29/ 934-40) when he succeeded in getting al-Qāhir imprisoned and deposed. Fortune did not accompany him for long as some political events brought him a prey to authorities' anger; he was imprisoned, his right hand was cut off, his tongue was cut out, and died, neglected, in prison in 328/ 940. (See az-Ziriklī, *Al-A'lam*, Vol. 7, pp. 157- 58; and D. Sourdel, 'Ibn Muqla', in *E. I.*, Vol. iii, pp. 886-87.

¹³⁹ Al-Qāhir bi 'Llāh was the nineteenth Abbasid caliph, who reigned from 320/ 932 to 322/ 934 in succession to his brother al-Muqtadir (r. 908-32 AD.), though the latter nominated his son, ar-Rāḍī, to succeed him to the throne. However, that nomination was ignored and al-Qāhir was proclaimed caliph. His headstrong and vindictive personality showed itself at the very beginning of his reign in his ignominious treatment of his mother, whose property he seized after having ill-treated her, and in his conduct towards the sons and officials of the former caliph. However, his reign encountered grave difficulties: the opposition he faced from the former supporters of al-Muqtadir, and a financial crisis. He gradually lost control and power and the support of his vizier Ibn Muqla, who plotted against him, undermined the loyalty of his guard and helped his enemies to seize his property and have him imprisoned. Ar-Rāḍī, then reappeared on the political stage and was proclaimed caliph. He took revenge on al-Qāhir, who refused to abdicate in spite of the pressure put upon him, and had him blinded. Al-Qāhir was released eleven years later by order of Caliph al-Mustakfi (r. 944-64 A.D.), and died in 339/ 950. (See al-Khudārī, *Ad-Dawla al-ʿAbbāsiya*, pp. 327- 29; and D. Sourdel, 'Al-Qāhir bi 'Llāh', in *E. I.*, Vol. iv, pp. 423- 24).

to be an opportune time.¹⁴⁰ Ibn Muqla also arranged to meet secretly with Caliph ar-Rādī (r. 934-40 A.D.)¹⁴¹ after consulting the astrologer Ishāq ibn Ḥunayn (215-98/ 830-910),¹⁴² who advised him to choose a time when the Moon is in opposition to the Sun, as such a time was thought especially auspicious for secretive affairs.¹⁴³

Al-Buḥṭurī's lines show that poets as well as viziers were concerned to present themselves before a caliph only after determining precisely the most auspicious time. Indeed, the significance of such lines is that they demonstrate that methods of divination (pre-eminently astrology) were practised before undertaking certain actions, and that those who were about to meet a ruler were understandably anxious to try all possible means that would grant a safe and tranquil encounter.

This intense desire for reassurance betrays an underlying anxiety, which drove the mediaeval Arab's curiosity about the possible future. Although his chart indicates a happy future, the poet Abū al-Faṭḥ al-Bustī (d. 400/ 1010)¹⁴⁴ still feels worried and insecure:

قد غضن من أمني أني أرى عملي ... أقوى من المشتري في أول الحمل.
و أنني زاحلٌ عما أحاوله ... كأتني أستدر الحظ من زحل.¹⁴⁵

¹⁴⁰ Muhammad ibn 'Abd al-Malik al-Ḥamdānī, *Takmilat Ta'rikh at-Ṭabarī*, ed. by A. Y. Kan'ān, (Beirut: Catholic Press, 1958), p. 72.

¹⁴¹ Abū al-'Abbās Ahmad, known as ar-Rādī, the son of Caliph al-Muqtadir, was born in 297/ 909; his mother was a slave called Zālūm. He was proposed for the caliphate immediately after the assassination of his father, but the choice fell upon al-Qāhir, the late caliph's brother, who had ar-Rādī thrown into prison. After the fall of al-Qāhir he was released and crowned as caliph in 322/ 934. As his advisor in this difficult period, ar-Rādī chose al-Muqtadir's vizier, 'Ali ibn 'Isā, who asked, however, to be excused on account of his great age, whereupon Ibn Muqla was given the office. He died in 329/ 940 of dropsy. (See al-Khuḍarī, *Ad-Dawla al-'Abbāsiya*, pp. 330- 35; and K. V. Zetterstéen, 'Al-Rādī bi 'Llāh', in *E. I.*, Vol. viii, p. 368).

¹⁴² Ishāq and his father Ḥunayn ibn Ishāq al-'Abbādī were among the prominent translators who played a significant role in the translation movement with the quantity and quality of the works they translated from the Greek and Syriac languages. See al-Qifṭī, *Akhbār al-Ḥukamā'*, p. 8 and az-Zirikī, *Al-A'lām*, Vol. 1, p. 286.

¹⁴³ Al-Ḥamdānī, *Takmilat Ta'rikh at-Ṭabarī*, Vol. 1, p. 109.

¹⁴⁴ For his biography see Ch. VI, pp. 172- 73, footnote 32.

¹⁴⁵ Ath-Tha'libī, *Yatīmat ad-Dahr*, Vol., 4, p. 359.

Despite the good omen I see in my chart, Jupiter being in the ascendant
Aries,

I feel dejected; after all these achievements I will leave with nothing.

It is as if I were appealing to Saturn to grant me good fortune.

Al-Bustī's horoscope seems to predict a promising future, particularly regarding his career at the caliph's court. Jupiter being in Aries was a sign that those under its influence would enjoy a good relationship with the court elites; for them the door of opportunity being flung open.¹⁴⁶ Yet the poet is far from encouraged, because the indication is that his good fortune will not last.

Drawing on the notion that the influence of the heavenly bodies was not confined to human beings,¹⁴⁷ a poet might use the idea that the fate of an animal could be determined by means of *masā'il*. Abū Nuwās (d. 200/ 815), in playful mock-heroic mood, mourns a turkey whose unlucky fate it was to be killed and eaten, a fate predicted by an unfortunate heavenly configuration moments prior to the tragic event:

أنعتُ ديكاً من ديوك الهند ... كـرِيمٌ عَمَّ و كَرِيمٌ جَدٌّ
حتى إذا الديك ارتأى من بعد ... ونجمه في النحس لا في السعد.
رأيتُـه كالفراس المعدّ ... يخطرُ خطراً مثلَ خطرِ الأسدِ.¹⁴⁸

I am mourning a turkey, of dignified manners and an honourable lineage.

I saw it from far, with its star that indicated an inauspicious not a
benevolent fortune.

I saw it like a brave knight, walking with a leonine gait.

It may be that Abū Nuwās, who is well known of his opposition to the usage of conventional themes in poetry, is satirising the panegyrics, especially those prising an

¹⁴⁶ See Yahyā ibn Muhammad ibn Abī ash-Shukr, *Aḥkām Tahāwīl Sinī al-Ālam*, in King Abdul Aziz University, The Central Library (MS. Falk, Tanjīm, no. 185/ 2., n.d.), fol. 19.

¹⁴⁷ It was believed that the upper realm influence every object beyond in the world of generation and corruption that exist beyond the sphere of the moon. For example, each of the seven planets believed to influence particular type of stones, planets, foods, geographical regions, besides, of course, parts of the human bodies. See (Abd al-'Azīz ibn 'Uthmān al-Qabīḏī al-Munajjim, *Kitāb al-Mudkhal fī Šinā'at an-Nujūm*, in King Abdul Aziz University, The Central Library (MS. Falk, Tanjīm, no. 235/ 1, n.d.).

¹⁴⁸ [Al-Ḥasan ibn Hānī' Abū Nuwās], *Diwān Abī Nūwās*, ed. by Mahmūd Wāṣif, (Cairo: Al-Maṭba'a al-'Umūmiyya, 1898), pp. 230- 31.

unworthy dedicatee in conventional terms. He may even be mocking an individual whose identity is unknown to us.

VI. 3: Conclusion

Drawing on the Islamic notion that recognised heavenly bodies as superior to mankind in creation, astrologers claimed that the peculiar nature and properties of those bodies could influence things inferior to them, including stones, plants, animals and humans. In other words, 'the nature of every thing on earth can be regarded as solary, lunar, jovial, saturnine, martial, venerian, or mercurial'.¹⁴⁹ The mediaeval poets' recognition of the effects of the astral realm on human bodies and fates, conceived according to the signs of the zodiac and the planetary configurations at the time of birth or conception, enabled them to delineate a multiplicity of human characteristics and to define destiny on the basis of celestial influence. Moreover, many poets found in this branch of astrology, *mawālīd*, some relief, albeit temporary, from their anxiety. Those who had fallen prey to an evil destiny and had failed to achieve a good position in life, those who wanted to justify their evil deeds or to find answers to the questions that worried them, or those fated to be parted for ever from their loved ones; all found in this branch of astrology means of understanding or justifying their fate. The main function of nativity references in poetry seems to be to emphasise the view that behind the action of individuals there is a mysterious, impelling power: that of the heavens over human affairs and fortunes.

The planetary influence on human fate identified by the means of *masā'il* also provided a source of inspiration for poets. One of the significant features that characterised astrological allusions in Abbasid poetry and marked a great step forward in the development of this genre are the sophisticated and newly invented images inspired by astrological principles and techniques. In the realm of love poetry, the idea of Scorpio in the Moon and its astrological significance was used by a number of poets, notably al-Ghazālī, al-Arrijānī and al-'Anbarī, who created images never encountered in the poetic output of previous periods.

¹⁴⁹ Johnstone Parr, *Tamburlaine's Malady and other essays on Astrology in Elizabethan Drama*, (Alabama: University of Alabama Press, n.d.), p. 34.

Moreover, the knowledge displayed by poets in referring to such techniques varies from the profound, like that of al-Mahdawī and al-Buḥturī, to the superficial, like that of ath-Tha'ālibī. This suggests that expertise was not of primary importance. What really mattered was to turn such scientific or quasi-scientific material into art in such a way as to preserve both the significance of the astrological material and the aesthetic value of the poetry.

Finally, it is interesting to realise that mediaeval astrology was able to cross boundaries and enter domains that were regarded as closed in pre-Islamic times. One's life span (*Ajal*), sustenance (*rizq*), and the general character of one's life (*shaqāwa aw sa'āda*), these three domains of man's destiny were no longer thought impossible to predict. Owing to the importance of *at-Ṭāli'* (the ascendant), which is the part of the horoscope that corresponds to the part of the ecliptic just rising in the east and from which the general character of one's life can be predicted, the name *Ṭāli'* came to be applied to astrological prediction as a whole. Also, among the many houses the astrologers identified, the two most important were *al-hīlāj*, a Persian word meaning the house of life, and *kadakhda*, the house of sustenance.¹⁵⁰

Having discussed the astrological references associated with *mawālīd* and *masā'il*, which mainly concerned the effects of the stars on personal affairs, we will now investigate the ways in which poets made use of astrological techniques of wider scope, as they had to do with the effects of the upper realm on large groups of people, societies or nations.

¹⁵⁰ For the astrological functions of these terms see *Ibn Ṭāwūs, Faraj al-Mahmūm*, p. 3, footnote 2; and p. 127, footnote 1.

VII. Principles of *Ikhtiyārāt* (Elections) and *al-Ḥadathān* (Mundane Astrology) as Poetic Themes

VII. 1: Introduction

The previous chapter showed how mediaeval poets' interest in astrological predictions and techniques influenced their poetry, and how they referred to nativity and interrogation techniques to make works which are in general a blend of conventional and new elements, regardless of their attitudes towards the subject. This material inspired them in the creation of images of a striking and unprecedented character, particularly when composing love poetry. The pivotal theme of such astrological references is that man is trapped in his fate; the stars' influence constrains the human will, which has to submit to a preordained fate revealed on the page of the heavens. This is a misunderstanding of the mediaeval astrologers' argument, which sought to resolve contradictions and reconcile stellar influence, the Divine will, and man's free will. The heavens exert upon mankind the influence assigned to them by God, the ultimate cause, and by appealing to Him, the evils foretold by the heavens can be averted. So astral predictions can be taken as warnings that draw attention to a possible coming disaster, and do not foretell dire events which cannot be avoided by any means.

We have examined the two astrological techniques that concern individual destinies. The following discussion will continue to examine the technical aspect of astrology, and will investigate the poetic use of *ikhtiyārāt* (elections) and *ḥadathān* (mundane astrology) which relate to broader social matters. The chapter will discuss astrological references to the methods of determining the most auspicious time to undertake some great enterprise, or predicting a momentous historical or political change.

VII. 2: *Ikhtiyārāt* (Elections)

Ikhtiyārāt is the branch of judicial astrology concerned with determining the most auspicious moment for undertaking activities that affect a large group of people, such as the building of cities or the launching of military campaigns, which is decided according to the horoscope at the moment of inquiry. This kind of divination seems to have been practised in pre-Islamic times, but according to a different method; we noted earlier that the Arabs preferred not to engage in military activity at certain times and particularly when the Moon was in Scorpio. Such notions were mocked and condemned

with the coming of Islam. 'Ali ibn Abī Ṭālib was advised by an astrologer not to undertake an expedition at the time he had decided upon because it was inauspicious, 'Ali mocked the astrologer and then gathered his soldiers and warned them against believing in the stars as a means of knowing the future, declaring that those who practised that kind of divination were unbelievers. Then he ordered his army to get ready for the battle, putting their trust in God alone.¹

The improvement and development of methods of predicting the success or failure of activities of great public concern allowed astrology to gain the credibility and dignity it had lost with the coming of Islam. Consulting astrologers became crucial in almost all aspects of the public domain, particularly in the Abbasid period. The famous story of the founding of Baghdad shows that such consultation was an important stage in the process of constructing mediaeval architectural works.² Baghdad was not the only mediaeval Islamic architectural project to be built according to astrological advice; the wall of al-Manṣūriyya, later known as al-Qāhira (Cairo) (see Figure 27), was also built in 359/ 970, at the time of the Fāṭimids,³ according to the same method.⁴

¹ Al-Madā'inī, *Sharḥ Nahj al-Balāgha*, Vol. 6, p. 309

² See, for example, how the Baghdad was built according to astrological method in Ch IV, pp. 137- 39.

³ The Fāṭimid dynasty, which reigned in North Africa and later in Egypt and Syria from 297/ 909 until 567/ 1171, takes its name from Fāṭima, for the Fāṭimid caliphs traced their origin to 'Ali and Fāṭima, the daughter of the Prophet Muhammad, but their enemies rejected their claim to this lineage. Scholars now agree that the origin of their movement, which in North Africa brought them to power in the person of 'Ubaydullah al-Mahdī, must be sought in Isma'īlism, a Shī'ī doctrine which was at the same time political and religious, philosophical and social, and whose adherents expected the appearance of al-Mahdī, a descendant of the Prophet through 'Ali and Fāṭima, in the line of Ismā'īl, son of Ja'far aṣ-Ṣādiq. The Fāṭimid 'caliphate' encountered many difficulties and was vehemently opposed by Sunnis, who put an end to it in 567/ 1171, and reestablished Sunnism and Abbasid sovereignty in Egypt under Ṣalāḥ ad-Dīn al-Ayūbī (Saladin), the first Ayyūbīd sultan. For more information about this dynasty and their reign see G. Marçais, 'Fāṭimids', in *E. I.*, Vol. II, pp. 850- 64.

⁴ It is related that in the reign of the Fāṭimid caliph, al-Mu'izz li-Dīn 'Llāh (r. 341-65/ 952-75),* his army general Jawhar,** having conquered Egypt, advised the caliph to build a wall to surround Cairo, known at that time as al-Manṣūriyya. He therefore gathered the astrologers and asked them to determine the most appropriate time for laying the foundations. The astrologers then connected a wire, from which bells were suspended, between the place where the wall should be begun and the observatory building from where they would decide on the auspicious moment. They informed the builders that when they had made their decision and the moment arrived they would move the wire and the sound of the bells would be the signal for the builders to start work. While the astrologers were consulting their horoscope, it happened that a crow landed on the wire and caused the cluster of bells to sound. Thinking that it was the signal, the builders started laying the foundations of the wall. The astrologers shouted at them 'No, No, al-Qāhir, al-

Astrologers were also important advisers on affairs of state. Sometimes *ikhtiyārāt* was used to indicate measures that should be taken to avert a disaster or mitigate its effects. It is related that Caliph al-Mustaẓhir bi 'l-Lāh(r. 487-512/ 1094-1118)⁵ asked his official

Qāhir [the defeater]', by which they meant that Mars was in the ascendant; obviously an inauspicious time. Al-Mu'izz, however, deduced a benevolent omen: he took the astrologers' cry as predicting the victory of his army over his enemies and thus renamed the city al-Qāhira. (See Shihāb ad-Dīn Ahmad ibn Yahyā ibn Hajla, *Sakradān as-Sulṭān*, to be found on the margins of Bahā' ad-Dīn al-'Āmilī's *Al-Mikhlat* (Beirut: Dār al-Fīkr li 'l-Jamī', 1317 H.), p. 34; and Taqayī ad-Dīn Ahmad ibn 'Alī al-Maqrīzī, *Muswaddat Kitāb al-Mawā'iz wa 'l-Itibār fī Zikr al-Khiṭaṭ wa 'l-Āthār*, ed. by Ayman Sayyid, (London: Mu'assasat al-Furqān li 't-Turāth al-Islāmī, 1995), p. 37.

It is also related that al-Mu'izz chose a time for invading Cairo in the conjunction of Jupiter and Saturn in Aries. See Ahmad Mukhtār al-'Abādī, *Fī at-Tārīkh al-'Abbāsī wa 'l-Fāṭimī* (Beirut: Dār an-Nahḍa al-'Arabiyya, n.d.), p. 249, footnote 1.

* Caliph al-Mu'izz seems to have believed strongly in astrology. It is related that his astrologer foretold him that his horoscope indicated that in that year, 365 H., there would be a *qaṭ'* ('cutting off'), a sign of extreme ill fortune. The astrologer therefore advised the caliph not to make any appearances at all in that year, to seek refuge in a hole under the ground and to appoint his son al-'Azīz, to run the state. The inauspicious year passed and al-Mu'izz re-emerged to rule the caliphate, but died soon afterwards. (See Jalāl ad-Dīn as-Siyūfī ash-Shāfi'ī, *Min Ḥusn al-Muḥāḍara fī Akhbār Miṣr wa 'l-Qāhira* (Cairo: Maṭba'at Idārat al-Waṭan, 2 Vols., 1292 H.), Vol. 2, p. 17.

Also, on the matter of al-Mu'tazz's belief in astrology, it is related that after deciding to be building a palace called *Qaṣr al-Haḥr* ('the Palace of the Sea') on a certain date, he had a dream in which Claudius Ptolemy, the author of the most famous book on astrology, *The Almagest*, advised him to change the date to another, which would be more auspicious. When he awoke he ordered that the astrological significance of the date given by Ptolemy should be determined, and when the result confirmed the dream-date as highly auspicious he ordered the foundation of the palace to be laid without delay. (See Ibn Tāwūs, *Faraj al-Mahmūm*, p. 174).

** Jawhar aṣ-Ṣiqillī was a famous general, of Roman origin, who led the Fāṭimid army to conquer Cairo and thus brought it under Fāṭimid control in 358 H. after seizing it, without any resistance, from Kāfir al-Ikshidī. Besides being the adviser on the building of the wall of Cairo, he also built the Azhar Mosque in 359 H., which remains one of the most famous of Cairo's mosques. (See *ibid.*, pp. 15-16 and pp. 183-84).

⁵ Abū al-'Abbās Ahmad ibn al-Muqtadī was one of the late Abbasid caliphs who ruled in name only, his domain being under the power of the Seljuks.* He ascended the throne at the age of sixteen and was caliph for 24 years until he died at the age of 41. Although he was described as a caliph of good manners, he was criticised for indulging himself in all sorts of entertainment and for neglecting affairs of state. He was caliph at a time when Abbasid political power was deteriorating and the state witnessed a great many tragic events. (See al-Khudarī, *Ad-Dawla al-'Abbāsiyya*, pp. 394- 97).

* The Seljuks were a Turkish dynasty that ruled over a vast area of the mediaeval Muslim world during the 5th-6th/ 11th-12th centuries. They were of various branches, each of which ruled certain provinces and regions. If in its first phase the Abbasid empire may be characterised as falling under the Persian influence, in its second as being dominated by Turkish military leaders, and in its third as being controlled by Buyid power, the appearance of the Seljuks marks another change in the course of its history. The Sunni Seljuk sultans came to power only a few decades after the caliph's practical authority had been annulled under the Shi'ī Buyid rulers, but the caliphs managed to regain some of their dignity and

astrologer, Ibn ‘Aysūn,⁶ about a rumour he had heard that the country would be destroyed by a flood. The astrologer confirmed the rumour and explained that at the time of Noah’s flood, the seven planets were in conjunction in Pisces, and that six planets – Saturn alone would not be involved – would conjoin in the same sign of the zodiac, and thus an awful event was to be expected. This prediction motivated the caliph to order a wall to be built around Baghdad. The prediction came true but the flood was not as severe as they expected.⁷ Indeed, not all of the prognostications conducted according to this method were successful. Aṭ-Ṭabarī notes that ‘the astrologers warned the people that in the year 284/ 897 there would be a great flood and the majority of the provinces [of Iraq] including that of Babel would be drowned following an abundance of rains [...]. However, the people experienced nothing but drought and had to perform, many times, the pray of *istisqā’*’.⁸

There is a great deal of evidence that Muslim rulers and generals would consult astrologers before undertaking any military activity; indeed, the practice was so common that it can be said to have been a major feature of mediaeval courtly culture. We saw in an earlier chapter how al-Muqtadir tested Abū Ma’shar’s accuracy of prediction on the battlefield. Sometimes astrologers felt that they should deliver important advice even if they had not been consulted officially. The Ayyūbid Sultan Salāh ad-Dīn (532-89/ 1137-93) was told that his proposed expedition to Jerusalem would be successful, but the price would be the loss of one of his eyes. He replied: ‘I am willing to be blind if it means I can open Jerusalem’.⁹ Indeed, it seems that it was regarded as crucial to consult astrologers before the engagement of armies. Those who successfully undertook military actions against astrological predictions were seen by

freedom when authority passed into the hands of the Sunni Sultans. (For the different phases the Abbasid caliphate went through see *ibid.*, pp. 445- 46).

⁶ Little information regarding his life is available but he seems to have worked as an official astrologer in the reign of al-Mustazhir. See Shāmī, *Tārīkh at-Tanjīm*, pp. 199- 200.

⁷ Ibn al-Athīr, *al-Kāmil fī at-Tārīkh*, Vol. 10, pp. 259- 60.

⁸ Aṭ-Ṭabarī, *Tārīkh*, Vol. 11, p. 362. *Istisqā’* is a special prayer in which Muslims appeal to God to send down rain in a period of drought.

⁹ Ibn al-‘Imad, *Shadharāt adh-Dhahab*, Vol. 6, p. 452.

many as exceptional heroes who deserved the praise they received, as in the case of the eighth Abbasid caliph, al-Mu'taṣim (r. 218-27/ 833-43), whom Abū Tammām (d. 232/ 845) eulogises in his famous Amorium ode.¹⁰ In contrast, al-Amīn, the sixth Abbasid caliph, defied the predictions and suffered a humiliating defeat. He decided to lead an expedition against his brother al-Ma'mūn in 195/ 813 despite the astrologers' advice to postpone this military action until a more auspicious time, as the Moon was surrounded by the malefics and none of the benefics were in conjunction with it.¹¹

We saw in the previous chapters how poets were of various opinions regarding the matter of launching expeditions and initiating buildings, or moving into them, in accordance with astrological advice. Although al-Mu'taṣim was praised by Abū Tammām in a way that shows the poet adopting the traditionally hostile attitude of the orthodox towards astrology, he was criticised by 'Umāra al-Khaṭāfi (d. 239/ 835) after the event for his decision to transfer the Abbasid capital from Baghdad to Sāmarrā'.¹² Indeed, several poets played on this astrological theme in criticising the Caliph's foolish act by referring to the horoscopic prediction made at the time Baghdad's foundations were laid and which foretold the good fortune that would be enjoyed by both the inhabitants of that city and their rulers. They attributed the ill fortune associated with the second phase of the Abbasid caliphate, which dated from the enthronement of al-Mu'taṣim's son, al-Mutawakkil (r.232-48/ 847-61), to the moving of the capital.¹³ Di'bil al-Khuzā'i (148-246/ 763-860),¹⁴ who strongly opposed al-Mu'taṣim, composed the following lines deploring the caliph's unwise decision:

¹⁰ See Abū Tammām's panygaric to al-Mu'taṣim on this occasion in Ch. IV., pp. 150- 53.

¹¹ Aḡ-Ṭabarī, *Tārīkh*, Vol. 10, p. 150.

¹² See Ch. IV., pp. 139- 40.

¹³ See Ch. IV., p. 139, footnote 91.

¹⁴ The poet Abū 'Ali Muhammad ibn 'Ali al-Khuzā'i was known by his nickname Di'bil. He was appointed governor of Siminjan in Khurasān and then of Aswan. He was an adherent of Shī'ism, a

بغداد دارُ الملوكِ كانت ... حُسى دهاها الذي دهاها.
 ما غاب عنها سرورُ ملكٍ ... أعاده إلى بلدى سواها.
 ما سرٌّ من رأى بسرٍّ من رأى ... بل هي بوسى لمن رآها.
 عجل ربي لها خزايًا ... برغم أنفِ الذي ابتناها.¹⁵

Baghdad used to be the House of Kings until a disaster befell it,
 It used to be 'the delight of monarchy'.

Sāmarrā' is no longer 'He Who Sees it Rejoices, rather it is 'He who Sees
 it Grieves'.¹⁶

May God hasten its humiliation, and the one who built it can go hang.

partisanship that brought him into conflict with the 'Abbasid caliphs. Nevertheless the forbearance of the caliphs, the intervention of influential friends, and on one occasion, an enemy's unexpectedly helpful lie appear to have saved the life of the poet. When Di'bil was brought before the Caliph al-Mu'tasim, who had ordered his death for having satirised him,* Ibrāhīm ibn al-Mahdī (d. 224/ 839), the caliph's uncle and the brother of Hārūn ar-Rashīd, came forward and, to the astonishment of all, stated that he had composed the satire and attributed it to Di'bil, for he had wished to cause Di'bil's death. After freeing Di'bil, al-Mu'tasim asked Ibrāhīm whether he was really the author of the poem. Ibrāhīm replied that he was not and that he only claimed its authorship in order to save Di'bil's life, though he hated the poet. Having escaped al-Mu'tasim's anger, Di'bil met a violent death the end of al-Mutawakkil's reign. The date of his death is uncertain, but evidence suggests 246/ 860. (For his biography see Leon Zolondek, *Di'bil b. 'Ali: The Life & Writings of an Early 'Abbasid Poet* (Kentucky: University of Kentucky Press, 1961), pp. 1- 8.

* The satire that provoked al-Mu'tasim to order the poet's execution contains the following lines insulting the eighth Abbasid caliph:

ملوك بني العباس في الكتب سبعة ... ولم تلتنا عن ثامن لهم كتب.
 كذلك أهل الكهف في الكهف سبعة ... كرامٌ إذا عُثُوا و ثامنهم كتب.
 وإني لأعطي كتبهم عنك رفعة ... لأنك ذو ذنبٍ وليس له ذنب.
 لقد ضاع ملكُ الناس إذ سامنَ ملكهم ... وصيفٌ وأثناسٌ وقد عظم الكرب.

(See *ibid.*, pp.13- 14).

Seven only are the Kings of the Abbasids, that is according to the books; there is no mention there of an eighth.

Just like the Inhabitants of the Cave, if they are counted, there are seven who are generous, and the eighth is a dog!

Indeed, I even rate their dog above you: you are sinful, he is not.

The kingdom is lost, being ruled by a king who is ruled by Waṣīf and Ashnās;** indeed, we are in deep trouble.

** Waṣīf and Ashnās were Turkish generals who played a significant political role during this troubled period of the Abbasid caliphate, particularly under al-Mu'tasim and his successor al-Mutawakkil. They were seen as paving the way for the Turkish military elite to take control of the caliphate and thus as helping to initiate a radical change in the political state of the empire.

For more information see Ibn al-Athīr's *Al-Kāmil fī at-Tārīkh*, particularly Vols. 6 and 7.

¹⁵ Zolondek, *Di'bil b. 'Ali*, p. 88.

¹⁶ Interestingly the literal translation of Samarrā' can be either 'He Who Sees it Rejoices', if the abbreviation of Samarrā' is read as *surra man ra ā*; or 'He Who Sees it Grieves' if the abbreviation is to be read as *sā ā man ra ā*.

Casting horoscopes by means of *ikhtiyārāt* was not conducted only to decide the most propitious time for laying the foundations of important buildings or moving into them, as mentioned above; this activity was also practised to determine the quality of a certain land or city, whether auspicious or inauspicious, according to the planet and the sign of the zodiac that governed its ascendant.¹⁷ Pondering on the cause of his countrymen's happiness, al-Ḥasan ibn Muẓaffar an-Nīsābūrī (d. 442 H.)¹⁸ refers to the ascendant of his homeland, Nisapūr:¹⁹

أرْيَا شَمَالَ أَمِ نَصِيبٍ مِنَ الصَّبَا ... أَتَانَا طَرِيقًا أَمْ خِيَالٍ لَزِينَا.
 20 أَمِ الطَّالِعُ الْمَسْعُودُ طَالَعُ أَرْضِنَا ... فَاطْلَعُ فِيهِ لِلسَّعَادَةِ كَوَكْبًا.

Is it the breeze from the north, or the gentle breeze aṣ-Ṣibā,²¹ that calls on us? Or is it my Zaynab's shadow that comes to visit us?
 Or is it the auspicious ascendant of our land that makes the benefic planet rise up and bestows happiness upon us?

¹⁷ Astrologers believed that Babylon, Azerbaijan and Palestine were governed by Aries; Constantinople, Oman and Rayy by Taurus, Egypt and Armenia by Gemini; and so on (see al-Bīrūnī, *Elements of Astrology*, p. 15).

The planets were also believed to exert an influence upon certain geographical locations. India, Abyssinia and Egypt were believed to be governed by Saturn; Babylon and Khurasān were governed by Jupiter; Mars was the governor of Syria, Greece and Slavonia; the Sun governed Hījāz, China, and Palestine; and so on. See Ibn Manzūr, *Nithār al-Azhār*, p. 154.

It was also believed that each province was governed by a certain sign of the zodiac. (See Abū Ma'shar, *Abbreviation*, pp. 14-24).

Some astrologers even gave political advice on the way the inhabitants of certain cities and territories should be controlled according to the sign of the zodiac that governed their provinces: Ibn Ḥawqal, for instance, asserted that the people of Mecca, Damascus and Samarqand were difficult to control and the only means of securing their obedience was power and the sword, because they were under the influence of Leo, which made them stubborn and recalcitrant. See Abū al-Qāsim Muhammad ibn Ḥawqal an-Naṣībī, *Kitāb Ṣūrat al-Ard*, ed. by J. H. Kramers, (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1938).

¹⁸ He was an eminent man of letters and composed a number of poems. He was born in Khawarizm and brought up in Nisapūr, from which he obtained his nickname. See Yāqūt, *Muʿjam al-Udabā'*, Vol. 3, pp. 95-97.

¹⁹ Nisapūr is a province near Khurasān that was believed to be governed by Jupiter. See footnote 17 above.

²⁰ Yāqūt, *Muʿjam al-Udabā'*, Vol 3, p. 97. The sign of the zodiac that governed Nisapūr was believed to be Cancer, the house of the Moon and the sign of the zodiac where Jupiter is in its exaltation. (Abū Ma'shar, *Abbreviation*, p. 16).

²¹ The Arabs identified four winds: the North Wind, aṣ-Ṣibā (blowing from the east), the South Wind, and ad-Dabūr (blowing from the west). The first two winds were welcomed as they did not bring heat while the other two were very unwelcome, particularly ad-Dabūr, which the Arabs regarded as inauspicious and a sign of a coming evil event. In poetry, aṣ-Ṣibā and the North Wind are associated with blessings, while the other two are generally associated with devils and similar themes. See al-Marzūqī, *Al-Azmina wa l-Amkina*, Vol. 2, pp. 76- 84.

In accordance with this astrological notion of correspondences, Cordova's ascendant was said to be Cancer, an auspicious sign of the zodiac. Ibn Zaqqāq al-Balansī (490-529/ 1097-1135)²² praises Cordova's prosperity, identifying the ruling Almoravids with the beneficent stars that also watch over the province:

لها من نجوم السعد أيمن طالبٍ ... ومن صاحب الأحكام أفضل صاحب.²³

Its governors are both the best of benific stars
and the best of all rulers.

The use of astrological themes connected with *ikhtiyārāt* reached maturity with those poets who understood its scientific aspect. In his panegyric to the North African judge Ahmad ibn 'Ali ibn 'Ashara,²⁴ Abū 'Āmir Muhammad ibn al-Ḥimāra (500-70/ 1105-1175)²⁵ draws on astrological principles when congratulating him on the completion of his new palace:

يا أوحذ الناس قد شيدت واحدة ... فحلّ فيها محلّ الشمس في الحمل.
فما كدارك في الدنيا لذي أمل ... ولا كدارك في الأخرى لذي عمل.²⁶

Hey you, who are unique among all people, you built a unique building
and inhabited it when the Sun inhabited Aries.

For those ambitious to succeed in this world your house is their ultimate
desire, and for pious men your abode would be their ultimate reward in
the hereafter.

We are already familiar with the astrological significance of the Sun in Aries. In its broader sense, it means the Sun is in its exaltation and its implication for worldly affairs

²² Abū al-Ḥasan 'Ali ibn Ibrāhīm al-Lakhamī, known as Ibn az-Zaqqāq, was of Andalusian origin and claimed a common lineage with Ibn 'Abbād's family, but denied this relationship after the dethronement of al-Mu'tamid ibn 'Abbād. (See Farrūkh, *Al-Adab fī al-Maghrib wa l-Andalus*, Vol. 5, pp. 174- 80).

²³ Ibn Zaqqāq al-Balansī, *Dīwān Ibn Zaqqāq al-Balansī*, ed. by 'Afifa ad-Dīrānī, (Beirut: Dār ath-Thaqāfa, 1964), p. 77.

²⁴ For more information on this see Abū al-'Abbās Ahmad ibn Muhammad al-Muqrī, *Nafḥ at-Ṭīb min Ghuṣṣat al-Andalus ar-Raṭīb wa Dhikri wazīriha Lisād ad-Dīn ibn al-Khatīb* (Amsterdam: Oriental Press, 2 Vols., 1967), Vol. 2, p. 414.

²⁵ He was an Andalusian poet considered a master of the lyric. Little information regarding his life or poems is available. See 'Umar Farrūkh, *Tārīkh al-Adab al-'Arabī: al-Adab fī al-Maghrib wa al-Andalus*, Vol. 5, pp. 416- 19.

²⁶ Al-Muqrī, *Nafḥ at-Ṭīb*, Vol. 2, p. 517.

is that this time is particularly auspicious for the careers of those in authority. Yet since Aries is one of the unstable signs of the zodiac, those under its influence should expect vicissitudes in their destiny and even a reversal of fortune. Thus while these lines seem entirely positive, their underlying message could be that the judge should not imagine that his good fortune will last for ever. His ambition and extravagance might displease his lord; and the poet reminds him in an indirect and subtle way that as a judge he should be pious, as this virtue is essential to the proper administration of justice, and as a pious man he should think of the hereafter in the hope of pleasing his Divine Lord and being rewarded with an abode that will last for ever. Thus the poet both flatters and warns his addressee that his fortune appears promising not only in this world but also in the hereafter, but that he should take nothing for granted and pay attention to the fate of his soul.

Most panegyrics were more straightforward, however, and some referred to *ikhtiyārāt* merely to flatter the dedicatee. In one such instance, the notion of the influence of the signs of the zodiac on the Sun is discarded altogether: here is the young Abū ‘Ali Miskawīh (d. 421/ 1030)²⁷ addressing the Buyid vizier Ibn al-‘Amīd (d. 360/ 970):²⁸

²⁷ Ahmad ibn Muhammad Miskawīh was a philosopher and historian who was also a student of logic, history and astrology. He was of Persian origin and spent his early and middle years at the courts of Buyid rulers and their viziers: with al-Muhallabī (d. 352/ 963) at Baghdad; and at Rayy as the secretary and librarian of Ibn al-‘Amīd (d. 360/ 970) (see below footnote 28) and tutor of his son Abū al-Faḥ (d. 366/ 977), whom he served from his succession to office until his inglorious end. After many vicissitudes Miskawīh returned to his native Iran where he died. (See al-Ḥamawī, *Muḥjam al-Udabā’*, Vol. 2, pp. 3- 9; and G. Endress, ‘Miskawayh’, in *Encyclopedia of Arabic Literature*, Vol. 2, pp. 529- 30).

²⁸ Abū al-Faḍl Muhammad ibn al-Ḥusayn ibn al-‘Amīd was a Buyid vizier, prose stylist, poet, and patron. Born to a secretarial family, he served as vizier to Rukn ad-Dawla from 328/ 940 until his death. Well known for his literary style, he was dubbed ‘the second al-Jāhiz’ and it was said that ‘the art of the secretary began with ‘Abd al-Ḥamīd* and ended with Ibn al-‘Amīd’. Apart from literature, he was also interested in mathematical and physical sciences. As a patron, his court at Rayy was an important cultural centre, in which Maskawīh served as a librarian. He also built an astronomical observatory. His great fame made him an addressee of some of al-Mutanabbī’s panegyrics despite being a non-Arab by origin. (See E. K. Rowson, ‘Ibn al-‘Amīd’, in *Encyclopedia of Arabic Literature*, Vol. 1, pp. 309- 10).

* ‘Abd al-Ḥamīd ibn Yahyā al-Kātib (66-123/ 685-750) began his career as a private tutor, and in 106/ 725 became the official secretary of the Umayyad Caliph Hishām ibn ‘Abd al-Malik (742-43) and remained in this office for twenty-five years, until Marwān ibn Muhammad, the last Umayyad Caliph, was overthrown in 123/ 750. Both the caliph and his chief secretary were killed by the agents of the victorious new regime, the Abbasids. ‘Abd al-Ḥamīd is considered to have raised the Arabic prose epistle to new heights in terms of length, content and style, thus his fame drawn from the characteristic of his

لا يعجبك حسن القصر تنزله فضيلة الشمس ليست في منازلها.
لو زيدت الشمس في أبراجها مائة ما زاد ذلك شيئاً في فضائلها.²⁹

Do not be dazzled by the beauty of the palace where you are going to dwell; the Sun's virtue lies not in the mansions where it dwells.

If one hundred more signs of the zodiac were added to the Sun's mansions, this would add nothing to its virtues.

According to mediaeval astrological theory, the Sun is in its exaltation when in Aries and in its digression when in Libra or in any of the female signs of the zodiac.³⁰ The Sun in the ninth house promises happiness and in Leo its influence becomes more effective.³¹ Using an astrologically invalid argument, the poet flatters his addressee by asserting that Sun is not at all affected by moving into and out of its solar mansions, as its virtue belongs to it alone and is not bestowed by the mansions where it dwells.

When poets disparage the principles of astrology as superficial, mysterious or illusory, it does not necessarily represent an Islamic point of view, or themselves as pious, or their personal attitudes towards astrology. For example, a poem might be written to celebrate a patron's victory over his enemy when rumour and prediction had agreed that the heavens had promised the enemy a great victory. Such a case was al-Muwaffaq's

epistolary style with regard to these three points. (See W. al-Qādī, 'Abd al-Ḥamīd ibn Yaḥyā al-Kātib', in *Encyclopedia of Arabic Literature*, Vol. 1, pp. 13- 14).

²⁹ Abū al-Faḍl 'Ubayd Allah ibn Aḥmad al-Mikālī, *Al-Muntaḥal*, ed. by Yaḥyā Wahīb al-Jabbūrī, (Beirut: Dār al-Gharb al-Islāmī, 2 Vols., 2000), Vol.1, p. 159; al-Ḥamawī, *Muḥjam al-Udabā'*, Vol. 2, p. 4.

³⁰ According to al-Bīrūnī, 'All of the three superior planets [namely, Saturn, Jupiter, and Mars] and the Sun are male, Saturn among them being like a eunuch. Venus and the Moon are female, and Mercury hermaphrodite, being a male when associated with the male planets, and female when with the female; when alone it is male in its nature. Some people say that Mars is female. But this opinion is not received'. Al-Bīrūnī, *Elements of Astrology*, p. 159. Interestingly, according to a conception that seems to be at odds with the realities of Arab society, planets with a female character are generally considered fortunate and those with a male character, except Jupiter, unfortunate. This notion allowed poets to present themselves as powerful and capable of exerting malignant effect on their rivals, as in the anonymously attributed line:

فإنك قد بعثت عليك نصراً ... شقوت به كواكبك ذكور.

Al-Marzūqī, *al-Azmina wa l-Amkina*, Vol. 2, p. 318.

You brought upon yourself a misfortune that will make your life a misery, for its planets are all male.

³¹ Abū Ma'shar, *Abbreviation*, p. 24, p. 30, and pp. 53-54.

(278/ 891)³² victory over his tenacious adversary the Master of the Zanj,³³ whose rebellion lasted for almost fifteen years. The Master of the Zanj decided that the battle would take place on a certain date on which a lunar mansion housed the full Moon (on day 14 of the lunar month), as this indicated the defeat of the caliph and his supporters. He also claimed to have heard a mysterious voice telling him that 'Basra is the round bread; when it is broken into two halves, then it is a sign that the destruction of Basra is about to take place'. He interpreted the round bread to be the full Moon and took this as a confirmation of the astrological prognostication.³⁴ However, the heavens proved deceitful, and the defeat and humiliation of the rebels' leader inspired the poet Yaḥyā ibn Muhammad al-Aslamī (d. approx. 270/ 883)³⁵ to compose a poem satirising the Master of the Zanj and his belief in the stars:

أين نجوم الكاذب المارق ... ما كان بالطَّبِّ ولا الحاذق.
صَبَّحَهُ بالنَّحْسِ سَعْدًا يَدَا ... لَسِيْدٍ فِي قَوْلِهِ صَادِق.³⁶

³² Abū Aḥmad Talḥa ibn Ja'far, son of the union of Caliph al-Mutawakkil and a slave girl, was regent and virtual ruler of the caliphate during the reign of his brother al-Mu'tamid (r. 870-92). He was the chief Abbasid military commander and set about restoring the power of the caliphate after the period of humiliation it had experienced at the hands of the Turks, whom he treated wisely. He became respected and feared, particularly after he managed with the help of his son, the future caliph al-Mu'taḍid, to put an end to the Zanj rebellion in 270/ 883. However, the relationship between him and his son deteriorated in 275/ 889 to the extent that the future caliph ordered his father to be arrested, but they were reconciled just before the father's death in 278/ 891. See H. Kennedy, 'al-Muwaffaq', *E. I.*, Vol., vii, p. 801.

³³ The Zanj revolt was a violent political and social rebellion that lasted for fifteen years (255-70/ 868-83); it aimed to secure power and relieve the harsh living conditions of black slaves in Lower Iraq and Khūzistan. The revolt caused innumerable material losses and tens of thousands of lives were lost. Finally, however, the rebels were subjected to a methodical siege directed by the regent al-Muwaffaq and his son al-Mu'taḍid; the Master of the Zanj was killed and thus ended a period of agony.* The significance of the suppression of this revolt, according to some historians is that 'it put paid to a unique attempt, in the Islamic world, at transforming domestic slavery into a colonial-type slavery'. A. Popovic, 'al-Zandj', in *E. I.*, Vol., xi, pp. 444- 46.

* It is related that this execution was divined astrologically while it was in process. The astrologer al-Mughīra ibn Muhammad ibn al-Mahdī is said to have asked for his astrolabe at the moment when the Master of the Zanj was facing his death, and to have said while looking at the astrolabe, 'Now he is being seized by the robe, and I see him being suffocated! Oh my God! Hey lad, take the astrolabe, he has been killed'. Just after he had uttered these words a great noise was heard and the head of the Master of the Zanj was brought before the caliph. (See Ibn Ṭāwūs, *Faraj al-Mahmūm*, pp. 213- 14).

³⁴ Al-Madā'inī, *Sharḥ Nahj al-Balāgha*, Vol. 8, p. 301.

³⁵ Al-Aslamī was a poet who witnessed the rebel of Zanj (249-70/ 836-83) from the beginning to the end and devoted majority of his poems to describe the tragic incidents associated with it and also to show support to the regent al-Muwaffaq whom he praised highly after the victory he gained over the Zanj. (See Sukkar, *Muḥjam ash-Shu'arā'*, pp. 420- 21).

³⁶ Aṭ-Ṭabarī, *Tārīkh*, Vol. 11, p. 327.

Where are the stars of that bragging, deceitful liar? He is an ignoramus
and his conjuring tricks aren't convincing.
A misfortune befell him at the hands of a fortunate and trustworthy
master.

It is significant that when we examine the astrological references of the Abbasid poets we find that it is neither the poet's personal attitude towards their source material nor the accuracy of its theories that matter; it is, rather, the extent to which they can use such sources to enrich their imagery and deliver substantial meanings. Besides *ikhtiyārāt*, poets referred to another astrological technique, the last we shall consider: *al-ḥadathān* (mundane astrology). How such material influenced the style and content of the poetry drawing on it is the concern of the following discussion.

VII. 3: Astrology of the Mundane (*al-Ḥadathān*) and its Use by Propagandist Poets

Mundane astrology is concerned with predicting events that affect the life of living beings including large human groups: peoples, nations, or the whole world, and most importantly the fate of ruling dynasties and religious states, by observing periodic celestial phenomena such as eclipses, planetary conjunctions, the appearance of shooting stars and equinoxes.³⁷ An example of this kind of divination is the assertions of the astrologer Ibn Shādhān al-Balkhī.³⁸

When Saturn is in *aṭ-Ṭarafa* or Aldebaran, both of which are lunar mansions, plague will spread in Iraq, and a great number of people will die as a result; and when it is in *an-Nathra*, bloodshed and war-like incidents will take place among the people of Iraq; and when it is in *al-Jabha*, a great number of cattle and other beasts will die.³⁹

It was generally held that the three primary pillars of this branch of astrology are: first, the ingress of the Sun into the cardinal signs each year, of these the most important being the vernal ingress or the figure erected for the time of the entrance of the Sun into

³⁷ For how various tragic incidents affecting certain parts of the Islamic world were related to the appearance of the Tailed Planet or the conjunction of Mars and Saturn in Cancer see Ibn Abī Uṣaybi'a, *Uyūn al-Anbā'*, pp. 326-27.

³⁸ No biography is available, but information about him is scattered in a number of books, which agree that he was an apprentice of Abū Ma'shar. (See al-Qifī, *Tārīkh al-Ḥukamā'*, p. 242; Ibn Tāwūs, *Faraj al-Mahūm*, p. 163.

³⁹ 'Abdullah Shibr, *Aḥsan at-Taquīm fī Sa'ādāt al-Ayyām wa Nuḥūsāsīha* (al-Najaf: al-Maṭba'a al-Ḥaydariyya, n.d.), p. 103.

Aries at the vernal equinox; second, the eclipses of the luminaries, of which the most important is the total eclipse of the Sun; third, the conjunction of the major planets, especially those which involve triplicity – that is, when the conjunction of two or more major planets occurs in a sign of a different triplicity from that of the sign in which the preceding conjunction of the same planets took place. These conjunctions are traditionally held to signify great changes in the world's affairs, specifically in politics and religion.⁴⁰

We have seen in previous chapters how the Abbasids relied on mundane astrology to legitimate the authority of their state, declaring that the stars indicated it was time for them to take control and rule the Islamic world. Mundane astrology claimed to predict not only the general destiny of ruling families and other important figures, but also the details of occurrences connected with that destiny. It is related that on one occasion Harūn ar-Rashīd, who seems to have been warned about the disastrous civil war that would take place between his two sons, al-Amīn and al-Ma'mūn, was listening to a person praising their good deeds and conduct, and sadly remarked 'What will be your opinion of them when their hatred for each other erupts and causes bloodshed among the people, who will wish them both dead?' The man then turned to the caliph and asked how he had come by such knowledge: 'Is it something you have learned through astrology or through intuition?' The caliph answered that intuition had given him insight into the future, but the man's question indicates that astrology was held to be an important method of prognostication.⁴¹

Casting horoscopes to determine worldly matters and make decisions regarding the affairs of the empire seems to have been one of the state's means of maintaining stability. It is related, for example, that al-Ma'mūn, seeing how the people greatly admired members of the House of the Prophet, particularly the Shī'ī imams, because they refused to participate in the political affairs of the Sunni state, decided to expose

⁴⁰ See Robert Zoller, *The Arabic Parts in Astrology: A Lost Key to Prediction* (Rochester: Inner Traditions International, 1989), p.186.

⁴¹ For a full account of the incident see Abū Ḥanīfa Ahmad ibn Dawūd ad-Dīnawī, *Kitāb al-Akhbār aṭ-Ṭiwāl*, ed. by Ignace Kratchkovsky, (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1912), p. 384.

their human weaknesses. Such was the people's reverence that they considered some of the imams to be prophets, able to bestow blessings upon those who attached themselves to them. Caliph al-Ma'mūn's plan was to lure the imams into Sunni public life by offering them political positions, thus exposing them as ordinary people with worldly desires and destroying their superhuman image. To do so, however, he needed to choose a time that seemed auspicious but also indicated that the imams' privilege would not be enjoyed for long. Thus the time chosen was when Mercury was in its exaltation in Cancer. Though auspicious, it indicates a definite turn in fortune as Cancer, besides being the house of the malefic Mars, is one of the changeable signs of the zodiac; and thus the stability of any position gained under its auspices would be temporary.⁴²

Practitioners of mundane astrology claimed the ability to predict the outcome of struggles for power. Seeking an appropriate time to proclaim himself caliph and seize power from his brother al-Amīn, al-Ma'mūn consulted al-Faḍl ibn Sahl,⁴³ who would later be his vizier and astrologer, on this matter; al-Faḍl reassured him that the stars indicated a great victory, and that was why he was standing by al-Ma'mūn's side.⁴⁴

Also, Abū Ma'shar became chief court astrologer after predicting that al-Mu'tazz (r. 252-55/ 866-79) would ascend the throne after a period of great hardship and tragic bloodshed. When al-Mu'tazz was appointed caliph after al-Musta'in (r. 248-52/ 862-66) had been beheaded, he rewarded Abū Ma'shar with the position of chief of the official court astrologers at a monthly salary of one hundred dīnār, with an additional thirty for accommodation, besides an immediate payment of 1000 dīnār.⁴⁵ Another case is that of Caliph al-Muktafī (r. 298-295/ 902-908), who, wishing to proclaim his son as his

⁴² See al-Qifī, *Tārīkh al-Ḥukamā'*, pp. 222- 23.

⁴³ Al-Faḍl and his brother al-Ḥasan were well versed in astrology and both were granted great privileges by Caliph al-Ma'mūn. The former was the first to be given the title of vizier since the beginning of the Islamic governments; his brother al-Ḥasan predicted the time and method of al-Faḍl's assassination. Al-Ḥasan warned al-Faḍl that on a particular Wednesday he would face death. When the appointed date came he went to a public bath and was killed. See Ibn Ṭāwūs, *Faraj al-Mahmūm*, pp. 133- 36.

⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 133.

⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, pp. 158- 59.

successor asked his court astrologer, Ishāq ibn Ḥunayn (215-298/ 830-910)⁴⁶ to determine an auspicious time for the declaration. The horoscope indicated, however, that according to the caliph's ascendant, his brother would succeed him and not his son. The prediction came true and al-Muqtadir (295-320/ 908-929)⁴⁷ ascended the throne. Astrologers were very confident of their powers, dismissing the incredulity of sceptics. It is related that an astrologer who was ridiculed by a destitute man called Buwayh for having predicted that Buwayh's three sons would one day rule a great part of the Islamic world, ignored Buwayh's scorn and said to him: 'Remember me when they become great kings!'⁴⁸ The pauper's sons later became great rulers of the Buyid state.

The Abbasids were not the only ruling dynasty to employ astrological propaganda as one means of legitimating their authority. The Fāṭimids (297-567/ 909-1171) also used the same method, and proclaimed that the disposition of the stars in the year 296 H. indicated their rise to power.⁴⁹ There is no doubt that astrology was used as a tool of statecraft and as an aspect of the deliberate policy employed by most rulers of the mediaeval Muslim world to establish their authority. It would be wrong to think that these rulers used it cynically to persuade the mass of their subjects while disbelieving in it themselves; most did believe in astrological divination and regarded it as a valid epistemology. When the Umayyad ruler of al-Andalus, Hishām ibn 'Abd ar-Raḥmān ad-Dākhil (r. 172-80/ 788-96)⁵⁰ ascended the throne, he asked the astrologer aḍ-Ḍabbī how the Umayyad state in al-Andalus would fare under his regime. The astrologer reassured

⁴⁶ Both Ishāq ibn Ḥunayn and his father were famous court physicians and astrologers who served a number of the Abbasid caliphs. They translated several books from Latin and Syriac into Arabic. (See Az-Ziriklī, *Al-A lām*, Vol. 1, p. 286; and al-Qiftī, *Tārīkh al-Ḥukamā'*, p. 80).

⁴⁷ Zāhīr ad-Dīn al-Bayhaqī, *Tārīkh Ḥukamā' al-Islām*, ed. by Muhammad Kurd 'Alī (Damascus: Maṭbū'āt al-Majma' al-'Ilmī, 1946), p. 18.

⁴⁸ Ibn Ṭabāṭiba, *Al-Fakhrī*, pp. 206-07.

⁴⁹ Ḥasan Ibrāhīm Ḥasan, *Tārīkh al-Islām as-Siyāsī wa 'd-Dīnī wa 'h-Thaqāfī wa 'l-Ijtīmā'ī* (Cairo: Maktabat an-Nahḍa al-Miṣriyya, 1965), p. 394.

⁵⁰ He was the second Umayyad ruler of al-Andalus; known as Abū al-Walīd, he had a high reputation as a politician and people compared him to 'Umar ibn 'Abd al-'Azīz, the pious Umayyad caliph known as the Fifth Orthodox Caliph. See az-Ziriklī, *Al-A lām*, Vol. 9, p. 84.

him that there would be a period of stability but added that unfortunately this would not last long as his rule would end after eight years or so.⁵¹

As noted above, the two main domains that concerned mundane astrology were the political and religious status of states. On a religious level, the Persian opponents of Islam and Arab rule found in mundane astrology a source of encouragement for their aspirations. Some of these ideologues, who wished to re-establish the vanished glory of the Sasanians, claimed that the state of *Majūsiyya* (which would be founded on Zoroastrianism) would overcome Islam and defeat the Arabs in the time of the eighteenth conjunction after the birth of the Prophet Muhammad, when Jupiter was in Sagittarius, and its rule would last for six conjunctions. This was supposed to take place, according to al-Bīrūnī, in the time of Caliph al-Muktafi (r. 289- 95/ 902-08) or al-Muqtadir (r. 259-320/ 908-32); needless to say, it did not occur.⁵² Ibn Khaldūn warned against the power of astrology to encourage subversion and recommended that the science should be prohibited for the sake of social and political stability:

Astrology often produces the expectation that signs of crisis will appear in a dynasty. This encourages the enemies and rivals of the dynasty to attack it and revolt against it. We have (personally) observed much of the sort. It is, therefore, necessary that astrology be forbidden to all civilized people, because it may cause harm to religion and dynasty.⁵³

A distinguishing feature of this branch of astrology is that, besides its claim to predict future events, it was also utilised to reconstruct historical events;⁵⁴ in other words, it was concerned with investigating the dominance of a particular ruler or dynasty 'in terms of cyclical periods of varying lengths of time governed by the stars and the planets'.⁵⁵ A typical example of this kind of historical astrology is the *Tārīkh al-Ya'qūbī*, whose author, Ahmad al-Ya'qūbī (d. 284/ 895), presents historical events according to astrological methodology. Al-Ya'qūbī's main concern in the second half of

⁵¹ Al-Muqrī, *Nafh at-Ṭīb*, Vol. 1, p. 216.

⁵² Al-Bīrūnī, *Al-Āthār al-Bāqiya*, p. 213.

⁵³ Ibn Khaldūn, *The Muqaddimah* (trans. Franz Rosenthal), p. 408.

⁵⁴ See David Pingree, *The Thousands of Abū Ma'ṣhar* (London: The Warburg Institute, 1968), p. 57.

⁵⁵ Gutas, *Greek Thought, Arabic Culture*, p. 45.

his book is to compose a political and astrological history of the Islamic world. He adopts a strictly chronological approach, beginning with the birth of the Prophet Muhammad and ending with the accession of al-Mu'tamid in 259/ 870. He records the events that were generally considered to have had a significant impact on the Arab and Muslim life. Since accounts of these events can be found, with almost no differences, in every other important historical source, it is in the astrological data related to them that the novelty of this work lies. Al-Ya'qūbī states in the prologue to the second volume that among the sources on which he drew were Abū Ma'shar, Muhammad ibn Mūsā al-Khawārizmī al-Munnajim, and Mashā' Allāh, all great astrologers of the time. The following example demonstrating al-Ya'qūbī's approach is taken from the opening paragraph of the second chapter and concerns the birth of the Prophet Muhammad:

The Prophet Muhammad's birth was in the year of the Elephant,⁵⁶ fifty nights after that event, and according to some narrators, it was on Monday the second of Rabi' I, while others hold that it was on Thursday the eighth of Rabi' I. And there are others who claim that the event took place on Friday the twelfth of Ramadan, when the Sun was in Scorpio. According to Mashā' Allāh, the astrologer, the ascendant of that year signifies the coming of a prophet as Venus was in its house, Libra, by 22°, Jupiter in Scorpio by 3° & 20 min.; both were in the second of the ascendant, in opposition there were the Sun in Aries in the first minute, Venus in Aries by 1° & 50 min., Mercury in Aries by 18° & 16 min. backward, Mars in Gemini by 12° & 15min.; the Moon was in the middle of the sphere in Cancer by 1° & 20 min.⁵⁷

⁵⁶ In the Arabian Peninsula, pre-Hijra years were named after the most significant incident that took place during that year. See 'Ali, *Al-Mufaṣṣal*, Vol. 8, pp. 521- 24. The Year of the Elephant is the year when Abraha al-Ashram, the King of Yemen, decided to invade Mecca and destroy the Ka'ba with an army of elephants. Abraha, who built a great church in Yemen and called it *al-Qullays*, decided to make it a *qibla* which pilgrims, who wished to perform hajj, would have to visit instead of going to the Ka'ba. Exasperated by Abraha's command, a Bedouin man went to the *Qullays* and defecated in it. Abraha was enraged by this and marched to Mecca in 570 A.D.,* with the intention of destroying the Ka'ba but was defeated, though he met with no resistance from the inhabitants. Flocks of birds were sent against Abraha's army and pelted them with fiery stones. (See *ibid*, Vol. 3, pp. 507-15). Reference to this incident is found in the Qur'ān, al-Fīl (the Elephant), 105.

* There is no certainty as to the exact year of this incident; a number of suggestions have been offered, among which 570 A.D. seems the most likely. The Prophet received the first message from Gabriel when he was forty years old and this we know was in 610 A.D. Thus the Year of the Elephant, in which the Prophet was born, must have been 570 AD.

This is a detailed and technically sophisticated astrological report, yet, surprisingly perhaps, al-Ya'qūbī refrains from giving an explicit interpretation of this astrological information. He merely juxtaposes celestial phenomena and important terrestrial events; no explanations are provided of either the general meaning of those phenomena or the specific interpretation of the relation of a particular planet or sign of the zodiac to the events under consideration. Al-Ya'qūbī's method of surveying the significant historical events of the early and mediaeval Islamic world had been employed by his predecessor, al-Ḥasan ibn Sahl, the astrologer who is considered to be the first scholar – or one of the first – to apply this method to Arabic historiography.⁵⁸ The idea of writing history on the basis of astrological observation had deep Sasanian roots.⁵⁹ Writing history according to this theory 'gained great popularity in late eighth century and ninth century Islam'.⁶⁰ The majority of authors who compiled such works were originally astrologers such as Abū Ma'shar and al-Kindī.⁶¹ However, though interesting, this astrological approach did not influence the writing of mainstream history; no important historians have applied it in their works.⁶²

In the field of literature, however, from the early years of Islam poets and men of letters were interested in the connection between celestial phenomena and significant historical events and created a genre called *malāḥim* (sing. *malḥama*), which was mainly of a

⁵⁷ See Ahmad ibn Ishāq al-Ya'qūbī, *Tārīkh al-Ya'qūbī*, ed. by Khalīl al-Manṣūr, (Beirut: Dār al-Kutub al-'Ilmiyyah, 2 Vols., 1999), Vol. 2, p. 5

⁵⁸ See Gutas, *Greek Thought, Arabic Culture*, p. 45.

⁵⁹ See David Pingree, 'Historical Horoscopes', in *Journal of the American Oriental Society*, 82 (1962): pp. 487- 502, particularly p. 487.

⁶⁰ Ibid.

⁶¹ See *ibid.*, p. 488.

⁶² For more information regarding the subject of Historical Astrology see Abū Ma'shar al-Balkhī, *al-Milal wa 'd-dwal*, ed. and translated by Keiji Yamamoto and Charles Burnett as: *Abū Ma'shar On Historical Astrology : the Book of Religions and Dynasties On the Great Conjunctions* (Leiden : Brill, 2 Vols., 2000); David Pingree and Wilferd Madelung, 'Political Horoscopes Relating to Late Ninth Century 'Alids', in *Journal of Near Eastern Studies*, 36, 4 (Oct., 1977): pp. 247- 75

divinatory character. The term designates an epic, written in verse or prose, sometimes in dialect, that took as its main theme the prediction of historical events from the observation of meteorological signs (such as lightning, thunder, the appearance of halos around the Sun and Moon), and celestial and terrestrial phenomena (such as solar and lunar eclipses, comets, earthquakes). The oracular work that inspired these apocalyptic writings, also known as *ḥadathān* (the two occurrences, namely the occurrences of the day and night in which all events take place), was the *Malḥamat Dāniyāl*,⁶³ a collection of predictions attributed to the prophet Daniel that was being read in Egypt in the year 61/ 680, and whose epilogue announces the coming of the Mahdī,⁶⁴ and then goes on to make predictions concerning the fate of various dynasties. This genre reached its peak in the later Abbasid period, when many ruling dynasties came to power in various provinces of the empire; their supporters endeavoured to legitimise their authority by astrological means. A list of *malāḥim*, some of which are 500 to 1000 verses in length, are given by Ibn Khaldūn in his *Muqaddimat*; these generally concern the Ḥafṣid dynasty.⁶⁵

Among the four astrological techniques discussed so far, mundane astrology seems to have held a particular strong appeal for poets. They were acquainted with the general uses of mundane astrology, especially its main function: to justify a particular political system or the rule of a certain dynasty, even if they lacked knowledge of the basic

⁶³ It is related that under the vizierate of Abū Jaʿfar al-Karkhī (d. 324/ 936) there was in Baghdad a bookseller, called al-Dāniyālī, who exhibited ancient books attributed to the prophet Daniel, in which there figured certain prominent persons together with their descriptions. See T. Fahd, 'Djafir', in *E. I.*, Vol. ii, p. 337.

The epilogue takes the form of a reply by Kaʿb al-Ahbār (d. approx. 34/ 654) to a question asked by Muʿāwiya concerning the Mahdī. For more information on the subject of *malāḥim*, see ED. 'Malāḥim', in *E. I.*, Vol. vi, p. 216; and T. Fahd, 'Malḥama', in *E. I.*, Vol. vi, p. 247.

⁶⁴ Al-Mahdī, the Guided One, is a religious figure that is expected to appear on a specific date and has a specific character and names that vary according to different doctrines; the Sunnis' expectation of this figure differs from that of the Shīʿī, and for Sunnis, his appearance heralds the end of the world. During the late Abbasid period many leaders of different militant religious and political movements declared themselves to be the Mahdī to gain support and gather allegiances, as belief in the Mahdī is a religious obligation, and he who doubts is regarded as an unbeliever. Prominent among them was Ibn Tūmart (d. 1130 A.D.), whose followers became known as the Almohads.

⁶⁵ See the list provided by ED. 'Malāḥim', in *E. I.*, Vol. vi, p. 216. The Ḥafṣid dynasty ruled Eastern Barbary (627-982/ 1229-1574), and were an extension of the Almohads in that region (modern Tunisia and eastern Algeria), which eventually became an Ottoman province. (See H. R. Irdīs, 'Ḥafṣids', in *E. I.*, Vol. iii, pp. 66- 69.)

principles of its technique. Referring to the notion that the rising and sitting of certain heavenly bodies denote the coming of a new ruling dynasty to replace an existing one, the founder of the Umayyad dynasty in al-Andalus, ‘Abd ar-Raḥmān I, ad-Dākhil (113-72/ 731-88)⁶⁶ addresses his subjects in a poem affirming that the Umayyads’ rule of al-Andalus has been Divinely predestined and declared on the page of the heavens. Ad-Dākhil had been informed that one of his generals was telling everyone that his own deeds should be acknowledged, since without him ad-Dākhil would never have ascended the throne, while others were reported to have said that ad-Dākhil’s ascension was due to good fortune and not to any wisdom or strength he might possess. Ad-Dākhil thereupon composed the following lines in which he refutes the general’s claim but admits that good fortune played a crucial role in his success. It was his destiny to rule, but a ruler needs wisdom to hold on to power through the vicissitudes of life. Fate (*dahr*) governs the power of kings, who rise and set like the stars. The poet then assures his subjects that the monarchy will be secure as long as one of his descendants occupies the throne:

لا يُلَفِّ مَمْتَنٌ عَلَيْنَا قَاتِلًا ... لَوْلَايَ مَا مَلَكَ الْأَنْبَاءُ الدَّاخِلُ.
سَعْدِي وَحَزْمِي وَالمِهْنُذُ وَالقَنَا ... وَمَقَادِرٌ بَلَغَتْ وَحَالَ حَائِلُ.
إِنَّ المُلُوكَ مَعَ الزَّمَانِ كَوَاكِبُ ... نَجْمٌ يُطَلِّعُنَا وَنَجْمٌ يَأْفُلُ.
وَالحَزْمُ كُلُّ الحَزْمِ إِلَّا يَغْفُلُوا ... أَيْرُومٌ تَدبِيرُ البَرِيَّةِ غَافِلُ.
وَ يَقُولُ قَوْمٌ سَعْدُهُ لَا عَقْلَهُ ... خَيْرُ السَّعَادَةِ مَا حَمَاهَا العَاقِلُ.
أَبْنِي أُمِيَّةً قَدْ جَبَرْتَنَا صَدْعُكُمْ ... بِالعَرَبِ رَغْمًا وَ السَّعُودِ قَبَائِلُ.
مَا دَامَ مِنْ نَسْلِي إِمَامٌ قَبَائِمٌ ... فَالْمَلِكُ فِيكُمْ ثَابِتٌ مُتَوَاصِلُ.⁶⁷

I warn anyone against thinking that he has done us a favour by claiming that ‘If it were not for me, ad-Dākhil would not rule’.

I rule because of my good fortune, my wisdom, my sword, my spear, my preordained destiny, and the vicissitudes of life.

In all ages, the fate of kings resembles the stars; one rises, another sets. The ultimate wisdom is to recognise the time of your fortune and seize it; how could a fool dream of ruling people?

Some people are saying ‘It is his good fortune, not his wisdom’!

⁶⁶ ‘Abd ar-Raḥmān I was the prince who established the Umayyad dynasty in al-Andalus. He was young when the Abbasids seized power from his royal family and managed to escape to Palestine and then to other Arabian provinces. He was proclaimed Amīr of al-Andalus in 138/ 756 and reigned for thirty-three years. The news of his success spread to the East and supporters of the fallen empire made their way to Spain to help with the restoration of the dynasty in the West. The Abbasid Caliph al-Manṣūr (r. 136-58/ 754-75) gave the honorific title Ṣāqir Quraysh (the Hawk of Quraysh [the tribe]) as a tribute to his courage and determination. See Ahmad Mukhtār al-‘Abādī, *Fī at-Tārīkh al-‘Abbāsī wa l-Andalusī* (Beirut: Dār an-Nahḍa al-‘Arabiyya, n.d.), pp. 307- 20.

⁶⁷ Al-Muqrī, *Nafḥ at-Ṭīb*, Vol. 2, p. 29.

True enough, but only the wise man is able to protect his fortune.
 Hey Umayyads, we healed your broken power in the west: the auspicious
 [stars] are making their appearance.
 As long as one of my lineage rules there, you may be sure your monarchy
 stands firm.

Proceeding in time, we find that mundane astrology was built on a sophisticated and elaborate theoretical foundation that was mainly a result of the translation movement. Examining in detail this theoretical base, which seems to have been of little interest to the poets of the time, is not the concern of this discussion. However, many did draw on the theory of the conjunction of the great planets, Saturn, Mars and Jupiter and we find many extracts from *malāhim* scattered in literary works, for example the lines doubtfully attributed to Ibn Sīna in which the poet predicts the coming of the Mongols and the destruction of the Abbasid state on the basis of the conjunction of the two great planets, Jupiter and Saturn, in the sign of Capricorn, the house of Saturn and the most inauspicious of all the signs of the zodiac. Commenting on this *malḥama*, Ibn Abī Uṣaybi'a notes that 'the most astonishing part of the *malḥama* is the prediction of the defeat of the Mongols at the hands of al-Muẓaffar Quṭuz that took place in 658/[1260]'.⁶⁸

احذر بُني من القرآن العاشر ... وانفسر بنفسك قبل نفر النافر.
 لا تركنن إلى البلاد فإنها ... سيعمها حد الحسام الباتر.
 من فتية فطس الأنوف كأنهم ... سيلا طما أو كالجراد الناشر.
 وإذا مضى حد القرآن رأيتهم ... يردون جلق وهي ذات عساكر.
 يفنيهم الملك المظفر مثل ما ... فنيت نموذ في الزمان الغابر.⁶⁹

⁶⁸ Ibn Abī Uṣaybi'a, *Uyūn al-Anbā'*, p. 454.

Quṭuz al-Muẓaffar* was the third king of the Mamālīk. When the Abbasid caliphate collapsed in 656/1258 at the hands of Hulagu, the general of the Mongol army and the grandson of Genghis Khan, the Islamic world was shocked by this disaster; for the first time in the history of Islam, Muslims found themselves without a spiritual leader. Although the Abbasid caliphs at the time had no political power and could only claim to rule Iraq, Muslims regarded them as Christians did the Pope, and thus to lose this figurehead was seen by Muslims as a sign of the approach of the Day of Judgment and the end of the world. The Islamic countries the Mongols had invaded so far had come under their control sometimes by force, sometimes without resistance. When they decided to extend their power to Egypt, which was ruled by Quṭuz, the Sultan of Egypt and Sham, he decided to face them. The Battle of 'In Jālūt took place in 658/1260 and ended in a great victory of the Muslims over the Mongols, who tasted defeat for the first time in their history. Quṭuz also brought an end to the Ayyūbid regime in Damascus. The Ayyūbids had the Mongols in their invasion of Egypt after the latter had promised to depose the Mamālīks and return the province to the Ayyūbids.

* Quṭuz was a descendant of a royal family, of Turkish origin, who ruled Khuwārazm, a Persian province, for a period before the Mongols conquered the province. Determined to take revenge, he escaped to Egypt and became a slave-boy to the first King of Mamālīk, Aybak al-Mu'izz (r. 598-655/1250-57).** He rose through the military, becoming an *Atābik* (chief general) in the army of the second King, Nūr ad-Dīn 'Alī

Beware, my son, of the fifth conjunction, take refuge and flee before a
catastrophe occurs.
Do not seek refuge in these countries, they will all suffer brutal
bloodshed.
A flat-nosed nation will invade them, they will flow like a flood, spread
like locusts.
At the end of the conjunction, you will see them heading to well-armed
Jilli⁷⁰,
the king al-Muzaffar will annihilate them like Thamūd⁷¹ before them.

The conjunction of the malefic planets, Saturn and Mars, in Cancer every 30 years was also of interest to poets. Ibn Sīna is also claimed to have warned against the destructive effect of this celestial configuration on another occasion:

إذا شرق المريخ من أرض بابل ... واقترن النحسان فالحذر الحذر.
ولا بد أن تجري أمور عجيبة ... ولا بد أن تأتي بلادكم القتر.⁷²

(r. 655- 57/ 1257-59), known as al-Malik al-Manṣūr, but later dethroned his master and in 657/ 1259 proclaimed himself sultan and gave his prior position as *Atābik* to Prince Baybars, who played a prominent role in the battle of 'In Jālūt. After the victory, on his way back to Egypt from Damascus, Qutūz was killed by Baybars, who proclaimed himself King of the Mamālīk, with the honorific title al-Malik az-Zāhir. See Ahmad Mukhtār al-'Abādī, *Fī Tārikh al-Ayyūbiyyīn wa l-Mamālīk* (Beirut: Dār an-Nahḍā al-'Arabiyya, 1995), pp. 127- 39.

** Interestingly the death of Aybak was predicted by an astrologer who informed him that a woman will put end to his life. The king al-Mu'izz was killed on the hands of his wife Shajarat ad-Durr. See Ahmad ibn 'Ali al-Maqrīzī, *Kitāb as-Sulūk li Ma'rifat Duwal al-Mulūk*, ed. Muhammad Ziyāda, (Cairo: Maṭba'at at-Ta'lif wa l-Tarjama wa l-Nashr, 3 Vols., 1957), Vol. 1, part 2, pp. 401- 04.

⁶⁹ For the whole poem, which is composed of fifty-two lines, see Ibn Abī Uṣaybi'a, *Uyūn al-Anbā'*, pp. 454- 57.

⁷⁰ Jilliq was a Syrian village, a district of Damascus, famed for its statue of a standing woman from whose mouth water flowed. When the Umayyads established their rule in al-Andalus, they named some of the cities there after those of Sham in remembrance of their lost glory in the east, and thus there were Andalusian provinces known as Ḥimṣ, ar-Raṣāfa, and Jilliq, all originally names of Syrian cities. See al-Ḥamawī, *Muḥam al-Buldān*, Vol. 2, pp. 154- 55.

⁷¹ The name of a people inhabiting al-Ḥijr in central Ḥijāz in ancient times (approx. 315 B. C.) and later known as Madā'in Sāliḥ after the prophet Sāliḥ. He was sent to them, but they disbelieved and did not heed his warning not to cause harm to a sacred she-camel which was created out of stone, through a miracle performed by him; and when they slaughtered the she-camel God punished them by a cry, earthquake or thunderbolt, which utterly destroyed their village. The site became an accursed spot and was a place of ill-omen even during the Prophet Muhammad's lifetime, and thus during one of his expeditions, Tabūk, in 9 H., he forbade his army to refresh themselves at its wells. 'The secular arm of Arabic literature was not slow to avail itself of Sāliḥ and Thamūd, and the two appear in mediaeval Arabic poetry in the appropriate contexts'. (Irfan Shahīd, 'Thamūd' in *E. I.*, Vol. x, p. 436).

⁷² Ibn Abī Uṣaybi'a, *Uyūn al-Anbā'*, p. 457.

When the ascendant of Babel is Mars, and the conjunction of the two
malefics is about to take place, then beware! beware!
Incredible events will happen! The Mongols will surely arrive in your
lands.

The theory of predicting historical and political change on the basis of heavenly configurations and phenomena ‘appealed strongly to dissident groups in the early Abbasid period and later, and specially to those with Iranian connections; in particular [...] the Ḳarmaṭians and the Ismā‘īlīs’.⁷³ One of the strategies the Qarāmiṭa (Carmathians; sing. Qarmaṭī),⁷⁴ used to legitimise their right to challenge the power of the Abbasids was to claim, as the Abbasids had done before them, that their revolt was announced by the heavens. The Carmathians’ leader, Abū Ṭāhir ibn Sulaymān ibn al-Ḥasan (d. 332/ 944),⁷⁵ composed the following lines, in which astrology is used to support his boasts:

إذا طلع المريخ من أرض بابل ... وفارقة النجمان فالحذر الحذر.
سأملك أهل الأرض شرقاً ومغرباً ... إلى قيروان الروم والترك والخزر.
وأعمر حتى يأت عيسى ابن مريم ... فيحصد أثاري ويُرضى بما أمر.

⁷³ D. Pingree, ‘Kīrān’, in *E. I.*, Vol. V, pp. 130- 31, particularly 130.

⁷⁴ The Carmathians were a sect, adherents of an Ismā‘īlī branch; the name was derived from the surname of its leader, Ḥamdān Qarmat, whose missionary activity is said to have started some time between 261/875 and 264/ 877. They refused to accept the claim of the Fāṭimid caliphs to the imamate as descendants of ‘Ali and Fāṭima. In the early fourth/ tenth century, the movement appears to have oriented its ideology in accordance with Neoplatonic cosmology that affirmed the imminent appearance of the Mahdī. Several of their leaders claimed to be the Mahdī to gain support, interpreting the conjunction of Jupiter and Saturn that took place in 316/ 928 as a sign of the end of the Islamic era and the advent of a final religious era. To affirm their claim, the Carmathians conquered Mecca during the hajj season of 317/ 930, committed barbarous bloodshed among the inhabitants and pilgrims and carried off the Black Stone, thus proclaiming the end of the Islamic era. They managed to establish a state in al-Baḥrain and al-Aḥsā, but their power was crushed in 470/ 1078 by a local rebellion that lasted for seven years. (See W. Madelung, ‘Ḳarmaṭī’, in *E. I.*, Vol. Iv, pp. 660- 64).

⁷⁵ He was Sulaymān ibn al-Ḥasan ibn Bahrām al-Janābī, known as Abū Ṭāhir al-Qurmuṭī. He was King of Bahrain and the chief of the Carmathians, who removed the Black Stone in 317/ 929. He led a number of rebellions against the Abbasids, disrupting the social and political stability of the empire. His followers believed him to be divine, and he himself appears to have believed this. He composed the following lines, in which he takes pride in being responsible of the enormous loss of innocent lives:

أنا بـالله و بـالله أنا!
يخلقُ الخلقَ و أفنيهم أنا!

God and I are indeed one, albeit in a different permutation;
He creates men, and I annihilate them!’

Al-Qurmuṭī died in old age after being afflicted with smallpox. (See az-Ziriklī, *Al-A lām*, Vol. 3, pp. 183- 84).

ففي جنة الفردوس لا شكّ مرّبعي ... وغيري يصلّي في الجحيم و في سقر.⁷⁶

When Mars appears from the Land of Babel, and the other two stars⁷⁷
depart from it, then beware, beware!

I will take control of the Earth, east and west, I will reach Qayrawān,
Rome, Turkey, and the Khazar lands.⁷⁸

I will keep hard at work, until Jesus the son of Mary comes and then he
will thank me for my deeds and be satisfied, seeing his commands are
fulfilled.

I am sure that Paradise will be my abode, and that my enemies will be
consigned to Hell.

As if to fulfil this prognostication, as al-Bīrūnī relates, a man called Muhammad ibn ‘Alī
ibn al-Ghurāqir ibn Shalmaqan (d. 322/ 934)⁷⁹ and claiming to be Jesus the son of Mary
and began to gather followers.⁸⁰

⁷⁶ Al-Bīrūnī, *Al-Āthār al-Bāqīya*, p. 214.

⁷⁷ The identity of ‘the other two stars’ is not known, but he may be referring to the two auspicious planets, Jupiter and Venus.

⁷⁸ The Khazar were a mixture of Pagans, Muslims, Christians, and Jews. However, their king (titled *Khāqān*) and his courtiers had to be Jews. Among their customs was that the king had to take as official wives twenty-five women, all of royal lineage, besides sixty slave-girls. Each of their kings had to rule for exactly forty years; if his reign overran by only one day, his subjects were obliged to kill him on account that he had gone mad. When a king died, he had to be buried in a palace of 20 rooms and all those who participated in his funeral had to be killed, so that no one would know in which room he had been buried. See al-Hamawī, *Muḥam al-Buldān*, Vol. 2, pp. 367- 69. The Khazars had a great history of ethnic independence extending approximately eight hundred years from the 5th to the 13th century. At its maximum extent, the independent country of Khazaria included the geographic regions of southern Russia, northern Caucasus, eastern Ukraine, Crimea, western Kazakhstan, and northwestern Uzbekistan. Because of their jurisdiction over the area, the Caspian Sea was named the ‘Khazar Sea’, and even today the Azeri, Turkish, Persian, and Arabic languages designate the Caspian by this term (in Turkish, ‘Hazar Denizi’; in Arabic, ‘Baḥr al-Khazar’; in Persian, ‘Daryaye Khazar’). Kevin Alan Brook, ‘An Introduction to the History of Khazaria’, in <http://www.khazaria.com/>, last updated in April 5, 2008, [accessed in April 8, 2008]. See Figure 26.

⁷⁹ Az-Ziriklī spells his name Ibn Abī al-‘Azāqir ash-Shalmaghānī. He claimed at first to be Jesus, then, as a spiritual advance, that the soul of the Holy Spirit inhabited him, and finally declared himself to be God, whereupon the Abbasid men of religion asked for his blood and Caliph ar-Rāḍī (r. 322-29/ 934-40) ordered him to be killed and his body to be burnt so it would not be worshipped by his followers. See az-Ziriklī, *Al-A lām*, Vol. 7, p. 157.

⁸⁰ See al-Bīrūnī, *Al-Āthār al-Bāqīya*, p. 214.

One phenomenon that characterised the history of the Abbasid caliphate was the constant arguments and opposition of views between Shī'ī and Sunni, which was among the prominent factors that brought an end to the caliphate. It is related that the Shī'ī Mu'ayyad ad-Dīn Muhammad ibn al-'Alqamī (593-656/ 1197-1258),⁸¹ the vizier of al-Musta'sim (r. 640-56/ 1242-58), the last Abbasid caliph,⁸² seeing the privileges the Sunnis were granted, which led them to humiliate the people of Karkh, a Shī'ī province in Iraq, corresponded with Hulagu, the leader of the Mongols, and encouraged him to invade Baghdad to put an end to the Sunni state. When the Abbasid empire collapsed the vizier was treated well by the Mongols and escaped torture and execution, the fate meted out to all officials of the conquered state. This leniency confirms, according to the historian ibn Ṭabāṭiba, that he was a traitor.⁸³ The tension between the Sunni Abbasids and their antagonists among the Shī'ī led the Shī'ī to employ the ideology used by the Abbasids five hundred years before and declare that the end of the Abbasid caliphate was written in the heavens. 'Abd Zuḥal (the servant of Saturn), the astrologer and poet (d. 376/ 986),⁸⁴ writes of the 'time for revenge' indicated by the planets:

⁸¹ Al-'Alqamī became al-Musta'sim's vizier in 642/ 1244 and held the office for fourteen years. The accusation of treason against the state has been refuted by some historians. It is possible that his son, 'Izz ad-Dīn Muhammad, was the traitor as he became vizier to Hulagu. (For the biography of Ibn al-'Alqamī see az-Ziriklī, *Al-A'lām*, Vol. 6, p. 216.

⁸² His death at the hands of Hulagu marked the end of the Abbasid Caliphate and the beginning of a new era in the history of the Muslims in which the Turks held power and authority. During his reign, al-Musta'sim indulged openly in all sorts of entertainments, leaving the affairs of his state to his entourage, who were quit unqualified for such a task, with the exception of his vizier, al-'Alqamī, who continually warned the caliph of the consequences of such neglect but who was unable to exercise any real power as he was a Shī'ī. See al-Khudārī, *Ad-Dawla al-'Abbāsiyya*, pp. 441- 43.

⁸³ Ibn Ṭabāṭiba, *Al-Fakhrī*, pp. 388- 90.

⁸⁴ He was Abū al-Qāsim 'Ubaydullah ibn al-Ḥasan, also known as Ghulām Zuḥal (the lad of Saturn). He served the judge Abū al-Qāsim at-Tanūkhī, the father of the author of *Nishwār al-Muḥāḍara*, in which some anecdotes about Ghulām Zuḥal are scattered (particularly Vol. 6). After the death of his master and when his talent as astrologer brought him fame, he moved to Shiraz, to serve the Buyid Prince 'Aḳud ad-Dawlah. (See Ibn Tāwūs, *Faraj al-Mahmūm*, pp. 168- 69). He was the author of a number of treatises on astrology. (See az-Ziriklī, *Al-A'lām*, Vol. 4, p. 346).

ووديعه من سرّ آل محمدٍ ... أودغـثها وجعلتُ من أمنائها.
 فإذا رأيت الكوكبين تقاربا ... في الجري بين صباحها و مساتها.
 فهناك يُطلبُ ثارُ آل محمدٍ ... وتراثها بالسيفِ من أعدائها.⁸⁵

I have been entrusted with a secret by Muhammad's family, and I am its guardian.

When you see the two planets coming closer to each other,
 It is a sign that the time for revenge for Muhammad's family is at hand;
 The sword will bring back what enemies took away.

The theme of astral destiny appears in mediaeval Arabic poetry in the appropriate contexts; mundane astrology is related to the 'state of the nation'. In commenting on that state's religious and political dimensions, declaring it to be glorious or grievous, poets made the astrology of their time a handmaiden to their literary purposes. In this sense, they were following the example of their rulers, who made astrology serve their political purposes.

Having seen in the recent past how some dynasties such as the Fātimids came to power by claiming a certain lineage and how the claims of some religio-political movements, notably the Carmathians, gained support by claiming their leader to be the Mahdī, Abū al-'Alā' al-Ma'arrī⁸⁶ ridiculed them and their absurd doctrines. Here he attacks the Carmathians in terms that would satisfy the most devout, apparently without irony, as if his hatred of schismatics and their violent behaviour drove him to make common cause with orthodox Islam:

إذا ما رأيتم غضبة هجرية ... فمن رأيها للناس هجر المساجد.
 وللذهر سرٌّ مرقـدٌ كلُّ ساهرٍ ... على غيرةٍ أو موقظٍ كلُّ هاجد.
 يقولون تأثيرُ القرآنِ مُغـيـرٌ ... من الذين آثار السراة الأمجاد.
 متى ينزلُ الأمرُ السـمـاويَّ لا يفيـذُ ... سوى شبح رمح الكمي المناجد.
 وإن لحق الإسلامَ خطبٌ يفضنه ... فما وجدت مثلاً له نفسٌ واجد.

⁸⁵ Ibn Tāwūs, *Al-Malāḥim wa 'l-Fitan fī Zuhūr al-Ghā'ib al-Muntaẓar* (Beirut: Manshūrāt al-A'lamī, 1978), p. 199.

⁸⁶ Ahmad Abū al-'Alā' ibn 'Abdullah ibn Sulaymān was one of the most important poets and men of letters of the Abbasid period and indeed in the whole history of Arabic literature. He was born in 363/ 973 in Ma'arrat an-Nu'mān, a town between Aleppo and Ḥimş in northern Syria, and died there in 449/ 1058 at the age of eighty-five. He was known as the philosopher of the poets. When he was not yet four years old he contracted smallpox and as a result lost his eyesight, a trauma that contributed to shaping his later philosophical outlook. For more information about his life and works see Tāhā Ḥusayn *et al.*, *Āthār abī al-'Alā' al-Ma'arrī: Ta'rif al-Qudamā' bi Abī al-'Alā'* (Cairo: ad-Dār al-Qawmiyya li 'l-Ṭibā'a wa 'l-Nashr, 1965),

و إن عظموا كيوانَ عظمتُ واحداً ... يكونُ له كيوانٌ أولٌ ساجدٌ.⁸⁷

Whenever you see a band of Hajarites,⁸⁸ their advice to the people is,
'Forsake the mosques!'

Time hides a secret whose disclosure will instantaneously put to sleep all
who are awake and arouse all who slumber.

They say that the influence of a planetary conjunction will destroy the
religious institutions established by the noblest leaders of men,
And that, when the heavenly fate descends, the champion's spear will be
as effective as motes are in blocking a sunbeam.

Even if Islam has on occasion been overtaken by calamities which
lowered its prestige, yet no one ever saw such a prophecy fulfilled.

And if they revere Saturn, I revere One of whom Saturn is the most
ancient worshipper.

The claim that the heavens have announced that a certain dynasty or religion will
prevail for a particular period is seen by al-Ma'arrī as a trap set for the ignorant that
allows the claim to be fulfilled in reality:

جاءَ القرآنُ و أمرُ اللهِ أرسله ... وكانَ سترٌ على الأديانِ فاتخرقا.
ما أبرمَ الملوكَ إلا عادَ مُتتقصاً ... ولا تألفَ إلا شئتُ و افترقا.
مذاهبٌ، جعلوها من معاشهم ... من يُعملَ الفكرَ فيها تُعطيه الأرقا.⁸⁹

The conjunction has come, God's command sent it! There was a veil on
religions, now it is torn away!

No matter how firm a kingdom is, it will become unstable; no matter how
coherent it is, it will be scattered.

Doctrines have become a means of living; whoever employs his mind
truly must be perturbed!

In the following lines al-Ma'arrī censures the rulers of his time for their self-indulgence
and indifference to the people's sufferings, and deplores the people's longing for a
religious leader, for such leaders are no different from others:

يا ملوكَ البلاد، فزتم بنساءِ الـ ... عُمر، والجورُ شأنكم في النساءِ.
يرتجي الناسُ أن يقومَ إمامٌ ... ناطقٌ في الكتيبةِ الخرساءِ.
إنما هذه المذاهبُ أسباً ... بَ لجلبِ الدنيا إلى الرؤساءِ.
غرضُ القومِ متعة لا يرغـو ... نَ لدمعِ الشُّمامِ و الخنساءِ.

⁸⁷ Abū al-'Alā' al-Ma'arrī, *Luzūm mā lā Yalzam* (Beirut: Dār Sāḍir wa Dār Beirut, 2 Vols., 1961), Vol. 1, p. 364.

⁸⁸ Hajar in Bahrain was the Carmathians capital.

⁸⁹ Al-Ma'arrī, *Luzūm*, Vol. 2, p. 196.

كالذي قام بجمع الزنج باللب ... صرة، والقرمطي بالأحساء.⁹⁰

Hey you kings of the countries, you have been privileged to have the moment of your death postponed;⁹¹ all your concern is a long life. People hope that an imām will rise among the silent ranks of the dumb. These doctrines serve to bring life to the leaders, Who demand to be entertained, careless of their people's cries, Such as those who gathered the Zanj at Basra and the Carmathians in Aḥsā'.

Al-Ma'arrī condemns the propaganda used by would-be rulers to deceive the people, whose dream will inevitably be crushed by the grim realities of life:

ويقوم ملك في الأنعام، كأنه، ... ملكك يبرح بالخبيث المارد.
صنع اليمين بقتل كل مخالف ... بالسيف يضرب بالحديد البارد.
قالوا سيملكنا إمام عادل ... يرمي أعاديينا بسهم صادر.
و الأرض موطن شريرة وضغائن ... ما أسمحت بسرور يوم فارد.
ولو أن فيها ناظراً كالمشتري ... يعطي السعود و كاتباً كعطارد.⁹²

A king shall rise amongst mankind like an angel that torments the wicked;
His hand will slaughter all evildoers with cold iron.
They said: 'A just man will come to rule us and pierce our enemies with well-aimed arrows'.
Earth, where evils and envies dwell, is never joyful, not for a single day.
Even if it were governed by Jupiter, the watcher, bestowing blessings, or a writer like Mercury!⁹³

While informing those believing in astrology that he is well aware of the attributes of Jupiter the beneficent he insists that its theories are invalid. The astrologers' claim that a pious ruler will appear and replace violence with peace, corruption with regeneration and make the Earth a paradise is a delusion; the Earth has always been and will always be the abode of evils. In another poem he attacks such naïve and unrealistic hopes and

⁹⁰ Muhammad al-Jundī, *Al-Jāmi' fi Akhbār Abī al-'Alā' al-Ma'arrī wa Āthārih*, ed. by 'Abd al-Hādī Hāshim, (Damascus: Maṭbū'āt al-Majma' al-'Ilmī al-'Arabī, 1962), p 412.

⁹¹ This is totally anti-orthodox opinion; Muslims believe that the moment of death is never to be postponed or escaped.

⁹² Al-Ma'arrī, *Luzūm*, Vol. 1, p. 394.

⁹³ The poet may be referring to himself as the writer who ceaselessly advises people to tread the path of virtue but whose efforts are in vain as evil is the essence of life.

adds that even if the nature of the malefics, Mars and Saturn, were transformed into its opposite, death would still be inescapable:

يُقال أن سوف يأتني، بعدنا، عُصْرٌ ... يُرضى، فتضبط أسد الغابة الخطم.
 هيهات هيهات هذا منطق كذب ... في كل صقر زمان كائن قطم.⁹⁴
 مادام في الفلك المريخ أو زحل ... فلا يزال عباب الشر يلتطم.
 وإن تغيرت الأفلاك وانعكست ... بالسعد فالوهد يُبني فوقه الأطم.
 هب الفتي نال أقصى ما يؤمله ... أليس راعي المنايا خلفه حطم.⁹⁵

It has been said that, after our generation, there will come a time when nations will live content under rulers who will command even the lions of the jungles!

Nonsense! That is nonsense, it is a lie; in every age hawks seek flesh to feed on, love to fight and mate.

Hence Mars and Saturn are running in their spheres, great evils are to be expected.

Even if their nature were transformed and became auspicious, castles are built over pits.

Let us imagine that man were granted all his wishes; would not the Guardian of Death be waiting to annihilate him?⁹⁶

Whenever a leader who claims to be the glorious one, promised by a particular conjunction, who will bring peace and happiness to the world proves the prediction false by his cruel deeds, the deluded do not renounce their hopes but keep expecting the Mahdī to appear at another conjunction:

رجوت إماماً في القرآن، مُضَلَّلاً، ... فلما مضى فلتتم إلى سنوات.⁹⁷

You expected an imām, a misguided one, to appear at the conjunction of the planets;

And when it passed, you said, 'His coming has been put off for a few years.'

The people's hopes for liberation by a perfect imām is, al-Ma'arrī contends, a harmful illusion. But if astrology were true, and a conjunction could signal the beginning of a transformation, he wishes it to fulfill another function rather than foretell of a coming saviour: to guide people to the right path, the path of virtue:

⁹⁴ Qaṭam, is the desire for meat, war and women. See Ibn Manẓūr, *Lisān al-ʿArab*, Vol. 12, p. 448.

⁹⁵ Al-Ma'arrī, *Luzūm*, Vol. 2, p. 400.

⁹⁶ This is a reference to the pre-Islamic idea of the Guardian of Death. See Ch. 3, p. 72.

⁹⁷ Al-Ma'arrī, *Luzūm*, Vol. 1, p. 224.

لَسَلُّ قَرَانٌ هَذَا النِّجْمِ يَهْتِي ... إِلَى طَرِيقِ الْهُدَى أَمَّا حَيَارَى.⁹⁸

I wish for a conjunction of this star to guide confused nations to the right path!

Poets were not subject to the constraints placed on astrologers, and were free to imagine heavenly configurations that suited the messages they wished to convey. As-Sarī ar-Raffā' celebrates the safe returning of the prince Abū al-Hayjā' Ḥarb ibn Sa'īd ibn Ḥamdān (d. 382/ 992),⁹⁹ who had been taken hostage by Bedouins and later released:

و مظفر بندي بديك و لو غزا ... بالحمد غيرك عاد غير مظفر.
أذكى له المريخ نجم نحوسه ... وتغيبت عنه سعود المشتري.
تاج كبر التمام عاد ضياؤه ... بعد الكسوف فراق عين المبصر.¹⁰⁰

Great will be the victory won by your hands. Indeed, if any one else would venture to lead such an expedition, he would surely return unvictorious.

Mars will inflict upon your enemy its malefic blaze, and the benefits bestowed by Jupiter will be absent.

Your crown is like the full Moon, whose beams return after an eclipse and bring relief to the eyes.

The poet here refers to the period of captivity his dedicatee experienced at the hands of the Bedouins, and the defeat and humiliation he suffered as a period of eclipse as-Sarī asserts that it is time for the prince's enemies to taste defeat: their bad luck is confirmed by the appearance of Mars, the malefic planet particularly influential in warfare.¹⁰¹ He seems to be encouraging the prince to take revenge on his enemies by assuring him that the planet's destructive influence will be aggravated by the absence of the benefic, Jupiter. The poet suggests that the lunar eclipse (if there was one and the reference is not purely metaphorical) was the cause of his patron's captivity and loss of power, and

⁹⁸ Ibid., p. 74.

⁹⁹ He was the brother of Abū Firās al-Ḥamdānī, the Prince of Aleppo. See az-Ziriklī, *Al-A lām*, Vol. 2, p. 183.

¹⁰⁰ Ḥabīb Ḥusayn al-Ḥasanī (ed.), *Diwān as-Sarī ar-Raffā'* (Baghdad: Dār ar-Rashīd & Beirut: Dār aṭ-Ṭalī'a, 2 Vols., 1981), Vol. 2, pp. 166-67.

¹⁰¹ Abū Ma'shar subsumes war in a broader category by saying that Mars governs 'every bloody means of causing death'. Abū Ma'shar, *Abbreviation*, p. 62.

that his enemies' defeat will be brought about by the malefic Mars. He thus assures his patron that a sympathetic cosmos will aid the punishment of his captors. In any case, whether the military activity takes place in reality or on an imagined battlefield, determining the winner or loser according to astrological principles became a popular theme of the panegyric ode.

A disaster that befalls a ruler came within the remit of mundane astrology; what affects the ruler affects his state and subjects,¹⁰² and so to predict the fate of a ruler was to predict the fate of his nation. Two prominent figures among the Ṭāhirids,¹⁰³ the line of governors serving the Abbasid caliphs in Khurasān, were Muhammad and his younger brother 'Ubayd 'Llāh. They were said to have been firm believers in astrology. It is related that Muhammad predicted his own death; he is reported to have said: 'My nativity was in Cancer, the ascendant of this year is Cancer, and the Moon which is now in Cancer will be eclipsed today; surely I am going to die! However, if I manage to escape the disastrous consequence of this crisis and survive I shall live long; if not, it is definitely a sign of my annihilation, and I will die this very night'. The story goes on to describe how he then watched with anxiety the eclipse of the Moon and, realising that his chance of survival was extremely weak, he went to prepare himself for the moment of death. He performed his ablutions, wrapped himself in the *kafan*, the white cloth which Muslims used as a shroud, and, wearing *hanūt*, a special perfume for the dead made of various kinds of flowers, he prayed and then lay down in peace upon his bed. When the eclipse had passed, his brother, who was engaged in casting the horoscope at

¹⁰² As-Sijzi, *Kitāb al-Ma'ānī fi Ahkām an-Nujūm*, fol. 67.

¹⁰³ Three dynasties who ruled in the mediaeval Islamic world bore the name Ṭāhirids. The one under consideration here held high offices in Iraq and flourished in the 3rd/9th century (205-78/ 821-91). Al-Faḍl ibn Sahl was the astrologer who advised the founder of this dynasty, Ṭāhīr I ibn al-Ḥusayn, on the time for the establishment of their state and promised him that it would last no less than sixty years (see al-Jahshayārī, *Al-wuzarā' wa l-Kuttāb*, p. 291). Ṭāhīr was the Persian commander, who was appointed a military officer under the Abbasid Caliph al-Ma'mūn (r. 198-218/ 813-33), became governor of Khurasān in 205/ 821, but two years later (in 207/ 823) he died almost immediately after showing a desire for independence, and thus he is suspected to have been assassinated. His sons later managed to fulfil their father's dream. What characterised their rulership was that 'they were able to provide firm government for an important sector of the empire at a time when the caliphs themselves were increasingly constructed in their power'. C. E. Bosworth, 'Ṭāhirids', in *E. I.*, Vol. x, pp. 104- 05, see also Ibn al-Athīr, *Al-Kāmil*, Vol. vi, pp. 381- 83.

that moment, rushed in, crying ‘Is my brother dead?’ Given the sad news, he wept and cried: ‘I knew he would die’, and thereupon composed the following lines:

هَذَا رَكْنُ الْخِلَافَةِ الْمَوْطُودِ ... زَالَ عَنْهَا السُّرَادِقُ الْمَمْدُودُ.
كَسَفَ الْبَدْرُ وَالْأَمِيرُ جَمِيعًا ... فَاتَجَلَّى الْبَدْرُ وَالْأَمِيرُ عَمِيدًا.
عَاوَدَ الْبَدْرُ نُورَهُ فَتَجَلَّى ... غَيْرَ نُورِ الْأَمِيرِ لَيْسَ يَعُودُ.¹⁰⁴

The corner-stone of the Caliphate has fallen, its strongest pillar has been demolished.

Both went into eclipse, the Moon and the Prince;

The Moon re-emerged, yet the Prince is still obscured.

The Moon returns to its full glory, brightly shining; but the Prince’s glory will never shine again.

In delivering his panegyric celebrating the victory of Sayf ad-Dawla, the Prince of Aleppo, in one of his expeditions against Byzantium, as-Sarī ar-Raffā’ addresses his patron using the third person:

يَزِفُ نَجُومًا لَيْسَ يَمْنَعُ ضَوْءُهَا ... تَكَائِفُ لَيْلِ النَّقَعِ أَنْ يَتَوَقَّدَا.
إِذَا مَا رَأَتْهُنَّ الْبَطَارِقُ أَنْحَسًا ... رَأَهُنَّ مُجْتَاحُ الْبَطَارِقِ أَسْعَدًا.¹⁰⁵

He holds before him ‘stars’¹⁰⁶ that still shine brightly in spite of the swirling sand of the battlefield.

Though for the Byzantium they foretell inauspicious events, for its invaders they foretell auspicious ones.

In cases where the heavenly event or configuration predicted an evil destiny the poet’s response was usually to either piously reject the notion that the stars could possibly affect human affairs, or see such an omen as applying to the dedicatee’s enemies. In mundane astrology, the appearance of shooting stars and comets and planetary conjunctions and aspects were especially important. During the reign of Ahmad ibn Ṭūlūn (d. 270/ 884),¹⁰⁷ an abundance of shooting stars filled the sky one night, and he

¹⁰⁴ For the full story and poem see Ibn Ṭāwūs, *Faraj al-Mahmūm*, pp. 171- 72, who mentions different Ṭāhirid personalities from those in Ibn al-Athīr, *Al-Kāmil*, Vol, 7, pp. 180-81.

¹⁰⁵ Al-Ḥasanī (ed.), *Diwān as-Sarī ar-Raffā’*, Vol. 2, p. 116.

¹⁰⁶ ‘Stars’ here connote swords, a double meaning impossible to translate.

¹⁰⁷ He was the founder of the Ṭūlūnids, a Turkish dynasty, and was the first Muslim governor to annex Syria. His father Ṭūlūn served in Caliph al-Musta’in’s private guard; Ahmad also engaged in military activities and his ambitions for independence led him to declare himself ruler of Egypt and Syria after gaining the financial control of those provinces. His relations with the Abbasid authorities deteriorated. Although he enjoyed a good relationship with Caliph al-Mu’tamid (256-79/ 870-92), whose political power was now a mere shadow,* the caliph’s brother and the real authority at the time, al-Muwaffaq (d.

asked his astrologers about its significance. They replied that it was a sign of a coming disaster according to traditional astrology. However, a poet called al-Jamal was among those who were attending Ibn Ṭūlūn and commented on the astrologers' prognostication in a way that would entertain and encourage his patron:¹⁰⁸

قالوا تساقطت النجوم لحادثٍ فظير.
فأجبتُ عندَ مقالهم بجوابٍ محتكٍ خبير.
هذي النجوم الساقطاتُ نجومُ أعداءِ الأمير.¹⁰⁹

278/891), compelled the caliph to have Ahmad cursed in the mosques, while Ahmad had the same measure applied to al-Muwaffaq in the mosques of Egypt and Syria. 'Ibn Ṭūlūn owe[d] his success not only to his talents, cleverness, and the strength of his Turkish and Sudanese slave-armies, but also to the [Zanj] rebellion, which prevented [al-Muwaffaq] from devoting himself to counter his encroachments.' Zakkī Hassan, 'Aḥmad B. Ṭūlū', in *E. I.*, Vol. 1, pp. 278- 79.

* Abū al-'Abbās Ahmad al-Mu'tamid 'ala 'l-Lāh, son of Caliph al-Mutawakkil, ascended the throne after the death of his nephew, al-Muhtadī (869-70 A.D.). In his reign the Abbasid capital was moved from Samarrā' and returned to Baghdad. He was a mere figurehead; the real authority lay in the hands of his brother Abū Ahmad, who obtained the quasi-caliphal title of al-Muwaffaq. 'Ubayd 'l-Lāh ibn Khāqān, Sulayman ibn Wahb and Ismā'īl ibn Bulbul served as al-Mu'tamid's viziers; some of them were the choice of his brother, who managed to build a power base and to be the only member of the Abbasid family to command the allegiance of the Turkish military. Knowing that he had been deprived of power by the Turks, who favoured his brother al-Muwaffaq over him and deprived him of all authority except the title, al-Mu'tamid (256-79/ 870-92) expresses his grief and sorrow in lines he composed after his brother refused to give him 300 dinārs:

أليسَ من العجائبِ أنْ مثلي ... يرى ما هان ممتنعاً عليه
وتؤخذُ باسمه الدنيا جميعاً ... وما من ذلك شيءٌ في يديه.

See Ibn al-Athīr, *Al-Kāmil*, Vol. 7, p. 455.

Is it not strange indeed that someone like me finds that he cannot afford even the most trivial possessions?

Everything is done in his name, yet truly nothing is in his hands!

¹⁰⁸ Rulers and other powerful figures sometimes punished those who delivered news that did not match their expectations. It is related that al-Bīrūnī (362-440/ 973-1048), who lived at India for some years and became very famous there, once was put to the test by the Sultan of Ghazna, who asked a trivial question: that al-Bīrūnī should predict which of the chamber's four doors the Sultan would use on leaving the assembly. After consulting his astrolabe for a long time, al-Bīrūnī left a paper on which the answer was written. While he was consulting his astrolabe, the Sultan ordered that a fifth gate be prepared, wishing to prove al-Bīrūnī's prediction false. Yet, to the Sultan's surprise, on opening the paper left by the astrologer, he found that al-Bīrūnī had predicted that a fifth door would be built through which the Sultan would exit. Frustrated by this defeat, the Sultan then ordered that al-Bīrūnī be thrown from the balcony of his palace, but no harm came to the astrologer, who later told the Sultan to look at a second paper attached to the first, in which he also predicted the Sultan's angry reaction and his own escape from death. After reading this, the Sultan put al-Bīrūnī in prison, where he stayed for six months. He was released after the Sultan's vizier advised his master to benefit from rather than punish such a greatly talented astrologer. The Sultan's self justification was 'I know that this man has no peer in the whole world except Ibn Sīnā [370-428/ 980-1037]. Yet his prediction did not match my desires, and kings are like young children, people have to talk to them in a way that fulfils their desires; then they will win their rewards, and so it would have been better if al-Bīrūnī had predicted wrongly'. He then agreed to release al-Bīrūnī and moreover bestowed great rewards upon him, among which was a horse caparisoned with gold, and two slaves, a boy and a girl. See Ibrāhīm Ḥasan, *Tārīkh al-Islam ad-Dīnī wa 'l-Thaqāfī wa 'l-Ijtīmā'ī fī al-'Asr al-'Abbāsī ath-Thānī fī al-Sharq wa Misr wa 'l-Maghrib wa 'l-Andalus* (Cairo: Maktabat an-Nahḍa al-Miṣriyya, 1965), pp. 396- 97.

¹⁰⁹ Ibn Hījla, *Sakradān as-Sultān*, p. 24.

They asserted that the fall of the stars is a sign of a coming disaster.
But I say, being well qualified and experienced,
Those fallen stars are nothing other than the enemies of the Prince.

Greatly assumed, the prince turned to his astrologers and said: 'What a shame that none of you could interpret the falling of the stars according to this view'. He then made the poet his court companion and rewarded him with a costly gift.¹¹⁰

While the great majority of poems written at court were addressed to a powerful or royal patron, occasionally the powerful man himself would address the people. In mediaeval astrology, the aspects of the planets, their relative position to one another, were important in predicting events impacting on worldly affairs. Generally, planets in the trine aspect (when three planets form an equilateral triangle) and the sextile aspect (when six planets form a hexagon), are considered favourable. The quartile aspect (four planets at 90° from each other forming a square), and opposition (when two planets face each other) are considered unfavourable. Ibn al-Mu'tazz (47-96/ 861-909),¹¹¹ a prominent figure of the royal family and a poet, seeing the miserable life the people suffered under the reign of his family, comforted them:

و لا تفزعن من كل شيء ومفزع ... فما كل تربيع النجوم بضائر.¹¹²

Do not be terrified by all terrifying things! Not all quartile aspects of the stars are of harmful effect.

According to astrological theory, phenomena such those mentioned in connection with Ahmad ibn Ṭūlūn and Ibn al-Mu'tazz have only one interpretation: the approach of

¹¹⁰ Ibid.

¹¹¹ He is known as 'the Caliph of a day and a night'. He was killed by Caliph al-Muqtadir on the same night he was proclaimed caliph. (See Ibn Ṭabāṭiba, *Al-Fakhrī*, p. 196). He witnessed a great many tragic incidents that occurred as a result of the political and social deterioration of the caliphate. One that particularly affected him was the death of his father, Caliph al-Mu'tazz bi 'l-Lāh, at the hands of his Turkish soldiers. They pierced him with pins, burnt parts of his body, and made him stand outside on a day so hot that he ground seared his feet, which he suffered while they slapped his face. Then they put him in a small room and locked its door; he remained there until he died. See *ibid*, p. 181.

For the political and social conditions of this period see Muhammad 'Abd al-'Azīz al-Kafrāwī, *'Abdullah ibn al-Mu'tazz al-'Abbāsī: Ḥayātuh wa Intājuh* (Cairo: Maktabat Nahḍat Miṣr, n. d.), pp. 3- 15.

¹¹² ['Abdullah ibn al-Mu'tazz], *Diwān Ibn al-Mu'tazz* (Beirut: Dār Ṣādir & Dār Beirut, 1961), p. 249.

inevitable disaster. But, as we have noted, poets were free to interpret them as they thought would please their patron, or for some other purpose of their own, often for no other reason but to create striking images. They employed astrological references as metaphorical devices; thus science served literature and not vice versa. Astrological principles could be adjusted to enhance the material's potentialities and the poet's accomplishment. Poets did not neglect poetry's role as sophisticated entertainment for an elite audience, and were not particularly concerned to express a personal view on the matter of celestial influence on affairs of state.

Celebrated poets perfectly comprehended that astrological material is a servant of their poetic purpose. Al-Buḥturī (d. 284 H/ 897 AD) provides a good example in a satire on one of his rivals called al-Ḥārithī.¹¹³

أبا حسن أنت وشك الأجل ... وتكل الغنى وانتقال الدول.
 زعمت بأنك لست الدمار ... ولست العثار ولست الزل.
 وتظهر في آل وهب هوى ... وأنت نحس لهم يا زحل.¹¹⁴

Hey you, the father of Ḥasan, you are the sign of the approach of death,
 the loss of wealth and the vicissitudes of kingdoms' fate.
 Yet you claim not to be responsible for any disasters, obstacles or faults.
 You claim to be loyal to the Wahn,¹¹⁵ yet you have inflicted upon them
 your malignant effect, hey you Saturn.

In satirizing his rival, al-Buḥturī identifies him as Saturn and thus a sign of the annihilation of those he served; and so the Wahn should expect imminent end of their long and distinguished history as viziers.

¹¹³ He might be Muhammad ibn an-Naḍr al-Ḥārithī, who was satirised by 'Ali ibn al-Jaham (d. 249/ 863) who compared him to the Tailed Planet in his malefic effects. See Ch. IV, p. 153- 54.

¹¹⁴ At-Tūnjī (ed.), *Diwān al-Buḥturī*, Vol. 2, p. 868.

¹¹⁵ Banū Wahn, a family whose members worked as secretaries and viziers to the Abbasids during the 3rd/ 9th and early 4th/ 10th centuries. Although some sources indicate that the family was of Nestorian Christian origin, they claimed a purely Arab origin as descendants of Balḥārith, a Yemeni tribe. Their official role went back to Umayyad times, and continued under the Abbasids. They mainly associated themselves with the Barmakids, and then when they were replaced they attached themselves to al-Faḍl ibn Sahl, al-Ma'mūn's vizier. See C. E. Bosworth, 'Wahn', in *E. I.*, Vol. xi, pp. 33- 34. The article contains a list of the prominent figures and their offices.

VII. 4: Conclusion

The concern of this chapter has been to throw light on the impact on the realm of poetry of two astrological techniques: interrogational and mundane astrology. It endeavoured to show how poets, reflecting on the possible influence of heavenly bodies on terrestrial life, and especially on events of great significance, often succeeded in treating conventional themes in new ways.

In general, the poets' use of such astrological material shows a superficial knowledge of the original sources; however, it would be misleading to accuse them of triviality. Regardless of their attitudes towards astrology, whether they held it to be a trustworthy source of information or regarded it as unworthy of respectability, poets played on its themes for their own particular purposes.

Explicitly or implicitly, when employing *ikẖtiyārāt* as a theme in their works, poets addressed those elite individuals who insisted on acting according to a horoscopic prediction, ridiculing them and holding them responsible for the ill fortune that followed an unwise decision, or praising them when, by sheer luck, good fortune followed. When eminent figures chose to act freely and ignore astrological prediction, they would also be subject to criticism and praise. Poets would blame them for any disaster that befell their subjects, but if their freely chosen action brought prosperity or military success they would be considered worthy of panegyrics.

Mediaeval astrology's impact on poetry is strikingly evidenced in the creation of a new literary genre, that of *malāḥim*, which had its roots in the first century after the hijra and reached its zenith towards the end of the Abbasid period, at a time that witnessed a proliferation of new states. This and the abundance of astrological references scattered in Abbasid poetry supports the argument of this research that prognostications deduced from the page of the heavens regarding human fate had a significant impact on mediaeval poetry. Moreover, the more talented poets' astrological references were often employed in a far from conventional way, enlivening the rigid metric frame.

Poets subjected the notion of the correspondence between microcosm and macrocosm to human emotions. At a time, when knowledge of the practical techniques of astrology was not widespread, they draw on its main theories, which came within the realm of

common knowledge, such as that utilised by ad-Dākhil, the Prince of al-Andalus, who compares the setting and rising of stars to the vicissitudes of rulers and kingdoms. When mediaeval poets, who were keen to absorb the essentials of many kinds of knowledge became familiar with the key ideas associated with astrological technicalities, particularly the idea that particular celestial phenomena and configurations forebode disastrous events affecting a large group of people or an important personage, they employed them freely, subordinating technical accuracy to the imaginative demands of poetry in which they mourn death, celebrate victory, foresee disaster or look forward for revenge.

So far, the study has been concerned to show the role astrology played in shaping the ideology of mediaeval Muslims by examining its effects on a particular fraction of that society, namely poets, whose works reflect the thought of their people. Just as mediaeval astrologers were rewarded for their ability to relieve a wealthy patron's anxiety regarding an expected misfortune, so most court poets sought to gain by drawing on the theories and techniques of astrology in their works for dedicating them to men of power. Others, however, used astrology to put their thoughts into the mouth of an astrologer to express a personal view of life. In both cases, although the majority show no deep knowledge of astrological technicalities, they make the most creative use of astrology in the history of classical Arabic literature.

Chapter IIIV: Conclusion

This study has been concerned with the impact of a forbidden branch of knowledge – human astrology – on classical Arabic poetry. It has covered several centuries, from the pre-Islamic era to the fall of the Abbasid caliphate. While not neglecting the *Jāhiliyya* and early Islam, the discussion has concentrated on the Abbasid period. The central assumptions of the thesis are that literary works can tell us as much about a society as histories can, and that interdisciplinary studies can be particularly useful in bringing to light hitherto neglected aspects of the culture in question.

Considering that orthodox scholars took the view that the claims of astrology regarding the prediction and possible avoidance of human fate were incompatible with the essential teachings of Islam, astrologers had to struggle to make their science respectable. They were aided in this by the achievements of the translation movement and by the need of rulers to legitimise their power. The first gave their discipline a measure of scientific credibility, and the second opened the door to acceptance and even influence in the courts of caliphs and princes. At the same time, street astrologers, whether skilled in traditional forms of divination or mere charlatans, continued to ply their trade, seeking out the gullible or desperate. The unscrupulous behaviour of the quacks did much to bring astrology into disrepute.

Astrology by its very nature could not but be drawn into the debate between the advocates of human free will and those who believed that all events are Divinely predestined. Those on both sides who regarded astrology's claims as spurious attacked it for their own reasons, which were usually based on misunderstandings of those claims. These critics included many poets, who were generally not well versed in the principles of the science, but saw that astrology could provide a rich store of ideas and images that could enrich the treatment of genres such as the panegyric, the love lyric and the satire. Since these basic notions were common currency, poets could be fairly certain that their astrological references would be readily understood by their audiences. Occasionally a poet who possessed a deeper knowledge, such as al-Buḥturī, aṣ-Ṣāhib ibn 'Abbād and al-Bustī could display this learning in lines whose meaning is difficult, though fascinating, to decipher.

Given astrology's treasury of images, its controversial relationship with orthodox theology, its ramifications into cosmology and philosophy, its involvement with human fears and hopes about the future, and its association with the magnificent spectacle of the heavens, it is not surprising that it became so popular a subject among mediaeval poets. But, generally speaking, poet's personal view of its validity was of far lesser importance than their desire to create striking metaphors and to please their patron. However, the more thoughtful among them, as al-Ma'arrī, also used astrological material to express their own view of life. The scandalous Abū Nuwās may have openly flouted convention; he was able to do so because he was supported by a powerful Caliph, al-Amīn, but very few others dared to imitate him.

The evidence, then, suggests that astrology, although attacked by sceptics and persecuted by the orthodox, had a significant impact on the life and thought of the mediaeval Muslim world and thus on its cultural products in general and its literature in particular. In the study's investigation of these literary manifestations, one of its first concerns was to discuss the emergence of astrology as a discipline separate from astronomy.

It is important to understand that the mediaeval Arabs were aware of distinction between the two main branches of the science of the stars: Arabic astrology was a branch of knowledge separate from, though not independent of, astronomy. The Arabs of the pre-Islamic period had possessed considerable knowledge of astral configurations and phenomena, which they related to recurrent natural events and to the vicissitude of human destiny. The supposed predictive power of astrology, which at that time was not distinct from astronomy, placed it among the techniques of divination. With the advent of Islam, the distinction between the two types of astrology was made absolute: human astrology was prohibited and natural or metaphorical astrology was encouraged. From this point in history, astronomy was disassociated from astrology and became an independent branch of knowledge while astrology, needing to establish its credentials as a science, became entirely dependent on astronomical data. Thanks to the translation movement which introduced Greek, Indian and Persian traditions, astronomy gained a sound theoretical base that had the effect of separating it completely from its pre-Islamic manifestation, which is based

on methods inherited from a non-theoretical but valid tradition. Astronomers sought to distinguish their science from astrology, which many saw as parasitic upon their discipline, but even those who did not reject astrology were fearful of persecution if they admitted this opinion, since Islam condemned all kinds of divination and any claim to the ability to penetrate the unseen, particularly concerning human destiny.

Astrology was able to flourish because it was patronised and protected by men of authority. Whenever a ruler was known to support astrology, for example, Hārūn and al-Ma'mūn, poems delighted or addressed to him contained astrological material used without fear of the reaction of orthodox men of religion. But whenever a ruler opposed the idea of heavenly influence on human affairs, such as al-Mu'tasim and al-Mutawakkil, poets either ridiculed astrology or were careful to refer to the will of God when referring to the science.

After examining the factors that were instrumental in the revival of astrology after its virtual disappearance in the early Islamic period, the study explored the classical poets' usage of astrological principles and techniques, a result of the interaction of astrology in the lives of the people. These references were examined in the light of astrological material found in the contemporary milieu. It was evident that the poet's personal attitude towards astrology or belief in its validity and efficacy was not a prime factor in the use of such material. Although some vehemently opposed the science, they made use of it for their own poetic purposes, revealing to a greater or lesser degree their personal view of life. The religious, political and social restrictions imposed upon the expression of opinion compelled many to disguise opinions which, if expressed explicitly, could have had serious consequences: they might be accused of atheism, arouse a ruler's anger, or be accused of violating taboos. Many also engaged in the contentious debate on the issue of free will and predestination, often for personal reasons. Most of the poets whose thoughts on this subject have survived seem to have been inclined to take a deterministic view, particularly regarding their own failures and weaknesses. Thus responsibility lies with *dahr*, Satan, or the influence of the heavenly bodies; their fate is predestined, but they are careful not to attribute the evils and misfortunes of the world, and of their own life in particular, to

God, either from prudent self-protection or because they could not bring themselves to accept such a shocking notion, which conflicted so violently with the Islamic faith.

The often autocratic power exercised by mediaeval rulers drew ambitious poets to their courts, where they made use of astrological allusions in ways that they hoped would please their employers. But since preferment depended on the ruler's whim, many found that even the most fulsome panegyric did not bring the hoped-for reward. More rebellious spirits, who were unwilling to be bound by the dominant social mores, might allude to astrology in expressing opinions that challenged the prevailing moral conventions. Few poets dared to go so far, since to write in this way placed them outside respectable society and condemned them to the marginal life of an outcast, no matter how excellent the quality of their poetry.

What unified all these poets, irrespective of their views on the issues of the day or the extent of their willingness to conform, was a concern for their art. They were first and foremost poets, not philosophers, theologians or astrologers, and their greater pleasure lay in producing an elegant phrase or striking metaphor, or composing a formally perfect poem. For this reason few poets took the trouble to master the details of astrological theory, and even poets who were also professional astrologers often subordinated accuracy to poetic effect.

Few poets could claim a profound knowledge of astrology; nor did they, as poets, need such knowledge, as they were not writing treatises on the subject. But most were aware of the four main astrological techniques. Some were interested in nativity others in interrogations, or elections or mundane astrology. No poet seems to have taken an interest in all four. Thus although mediaeval poetry, particularly that of the Abbasid period, abound in astrological allusions, few of these references give the impression that poets possessed more than a commonplace knowledge of the science, despite the unprecedented position of influence it had gained among the elite. Experts such as al-Buḥturī were rare. Interestingly the pre-Islamic poets' knowledge, particularly the females, of astrology, which could not be called scientific, was more pervasive and deeply rooted than in later periods, when knowledge of astrology became widespread through written material.

Although few Abbasid poets took an interest in the detailed complexities of astrological theory, their poems bear witness to the degree to which astrology had become integrated into all aspects of mediaeval society. It appealed to the elites and the mass of the people alike. Rulers who believed in astrology or used it to legitimise their power protected astrologers from the criticism of orthodox men of religion, who were subject to the ruler's political authority; and relied upon him to maintain their privileges. Princely courts were not the only places where the science flourished; astrologers who were insufficiently qualified to serve the elite, or who were outright quacks, turned to the street sought a living by playing on the insecurities of the ignorant, targeting women especially. Many poets were merely skeptical of what they saw as astrology's fraudulent claims. Others were revolted by such trickery and saw it as both a symptom and a cause of the corruption of their society.

Astrology was criticised not only by the orthodox but also by the proponents of human free will, who saw it as essentially deterministic, and by those who believed that all events, in their minutest details, were predestined and so rejected on principle what they saw as astrology's claim to be able to alter human destiny. Astrologers themselves took a less dogmatic and dichotomous view, dealing in probabilities rather than certainties. Poets tended to be less sophisticated in their judging and few held strong principles regarding this issue, though most inclined to determinism, like al-Ma'arrī. Those who depended on a powerful patron would not contradict his beliefs.

On the whole, they were content, for example, to praise a commander who had won a great victory against his astrologers' advice (as at Amorium) without questioning whether the victory or the commander's exercise of 'free will' in the matter was Divinely determined. When using astrological references, poets were content to find new approaches and new linguistic means to express traditional concepts.

A belief in predestination was the prevalent mood in classical Arabic poetry: mankind is not the master of his destiny, but a puppet manipulated by forces he cannot control. While mediaeval Arabic astrology claimed that a probable evil event could be avoided by discovering the time of its occurrences and taking appropriate action, which included making supplication to God, poets who were not skeptical of astrology's predictive claims tended to believe that what was declared by the heavens must

inevitably come to pass. This is a fundamental feature of the astrological references in classical poetry. Many poets were fatalists because they found it convenient to shift the responsibility for their own weaknesses, vices or lack of worldly success onto some external power, as mentioned above.

The attribution of an agency to the heavenly bodies was in fact not a tenet of mediaeval astrology, which held that they were only indicators of a potential fate and unable themselves to determine worldly affairs. Whether or not poets understood this distinction, they tended to ignore theoretical subtleties in the interests of poetic expression. And whether or not poets were familiar with technical details, they generally felt free to use astrological principles as they chose regardless of scientific accuracy. They would reinterpret the significance of stars and planets, find contrary meanings in certain conjunctions, or even invent conjunctions, in order to praise a lover's beauty or a prince's valour, or satirise a rival's folly or an enemy's malice.

This thesis endeavoured to reflect an interesting tendency to interdisciplinary approach in Middle Eastern studies. Its originality and value lie in the fresh insights it provides into the interaction between two well-researched fields – classical Arabic poetry and Abbasid philosophical and theological debates – and one that is far less clearly understood – mediaeval Muslim astrology. It offers new perspectives through a combination of innovative methodology and original findings. Employing detailed primary research, the study engages with a diverse range of material and provides a historical framework for its analysis, venturing beyond a narrow focus on literary sources and taking the view that such an approach can reveal new aspects of familiar topics.

In mediaeval Muslim society, poets and astrologers sought to obtain a measure of security for themselves and to search for meaning in a turbulent time. Both were practitioners of demanding and esoteric disciplines, and those employed in princely courts had to serve masters whose moods were often capricious; the terrain they negotiated was precarious. Poets were drawn to astrology for a variety of reasons, and an analysis of the variable influences of astrology on poetry and of poetry's very diverse responses to astrology creates a broad picture of mediaeval society which

reveals, on closer inspection, fascinating details and nuances indicative of cultural borrowings, confrontations and interminglings.

The study of mediaeval astrology is particularly profitable because of the contested nature of its theoretical assumptions and its practices, which inevitably led to its involvement in philosophical and theological debates and disputes that often had a political resonance, such as those on rationality versus faith and free will versus predestination. Those controversies are reflected in the poetry of the period, which brings them vividly to life by showing that their meanings were active in the lives of real people and were not confined to learned and abstract discourses. We see how, for example, shifting political authority, competing epistemologies and different interpretations of Islam impacted on a hugely diverse group of people united only by their devotion to a prestigious art form. It is this sense of immediacy, of lived experience, that compels the reader's attention to what might otherwise be perceived as matters distant from our own concerns. The variety and aesthetic richness of the poet's responses may delight us, but their words serve to remind us that the questions that perplexed them are echoed in those that trouble our world.

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Appendix I: Special Indications of the Houses Peculiar to Nativities¹

- I. Soul, life, length of life, education, native land.
- II. Suckling, nutriment, disaster to eyes if over-taken by ill-luck, livelihood, household requisites, assistants profession of children.
- III. Brothers, sisters, relations, relations in-law, jewels, friends, migration, short journeys, intelligence, knowledge, expertness in religious Law.
- IV. Parents, grandparents, descendants, real estate, fields, houses, water supply, knowledge of genealogy, what succeeds death and what happens to the dead.
- V. Children, friends, clothes, pleasure, joy, little acquisition of property, accumulated wealth of father, what was said of him at his burial-services.
- VI. Sickness, defects of body, overwork, if unfortunate accident to legs, loss of property, disease of internal organs, slaves, maids, cattle.
- VII. Women concubines, giving in marriage, marriage-feasts, contentions, partnership, losses, lawsuits.
- VIII. Death and its causes, murder, poisoning, evil effects of drugs on body, inheritance, wife's property, expenditure, poverty, extreme indigence, feigning death.
- IX. Travel, religion, piety, fate, seriousness, attainment of knowledge from the stars and divination, philosophy, surveying, sharp discernment, trustworthiness, interpretation of visions and dreams.
- X. Rule of Sultan, government with council of nobles, absolute well-behaved children, liberality.
- XI. Happiness, friends, enemies, concern for next world, prayer and praise, friendship of women, love, dress, perfume, ornaments, commerce, longevity.
- XII. Enemies, misery, anxieties, prison, debt, fines, bail, fear, adversity, disease, prenatal, fancies of mother, cattle, harbours, slaves, servants, armies, exile, tumults.

¹ This information is from Al-Biruni, *The Book of Instruction in the Elements of the Art of Astrology*, p. 60.

Appendix II: Indications Relating to Horary Question²

- I. Asking horary questions, important public matters, nobility, advancement in rank, witchcraft and spells.
- II. Examining the querent, lending and borrowing, counting friends, arrival of stranger, enemies or friends, mandate of amir, winds when they blow.
- III. Secrets and news and commentaries, well-born ladies, journeys by water.
- IV. Old and hidden things, treasures, thieves' hiding-places, schools, fortresses, fetters, [dismissal from offices], opining abscesses, lancing and cautery, stepfather, prison.
- V. Messengers, right guidance, bribery, rectitude, distant places, poor harvests, securing the wealth of the ancients, feasts, food and drink.
- VI. Lost and escaped, some lost trifle which does not turn up, affairs of women and eunuchs, suspicion, hatred, calumny, violence, dissipation, deceit, terrors, prison, enemy, poverty, moving from place to place.
- VII. The absent, thief, places where travelers assemble, treasure, death of contemporaries, foreign travel, sudden murder [for a trifle], denial, obstinacy, claiming a right, cheapness and dearness.
- VIII. Buried and hidden treasure, things ruined or lost or old, middens and rubbish-heaps, sickness of friends, lawsuits without a case, folly, contention, pride, dullness, of the market, leisure.
- IX. Failure, abandoned business, books, information, ambassadors, miracles, roads, brothers-in-law.
- X. Kings, notables, judges, the celebrated in all classes, amir and his conduct in office, things newly legitimized, wine, stepmother.
- XI. The treasury of the sultan, its officials, trouble in the office, foreigner's child, servants child, things which are sound, beautiful, advantageous, the beginning of affairs, friendship of the great, bribery, food.
- VII. Fugitives, writers, those who neglect devotion, a precious gem, prisoners, the matter which preceded the question, property of oppressors, thieves, lost property, scorn, envy and fraud.

²This information is from Al-Biruni, *The Book of Instruction in the Elements of the Art of Astrology*, p. 61.

The Account of the Description of the Twenty-eight Mansions of the Moon:

- 1- Al-Sharṭain. When the Moon lodges in it, then make in it talismans of love between women, and do not put on new clothing in it, and do not approach kings in it, and deal with its spiritual forces for hatred. Whoever is born, if he is male, the outcome for him is not good; and if she is female, she will be secretly (dissolute). (*illustration of two-headed portent*).
- 2- When the Moon lodges in al-Buṭain, then make in it talismans of love for kings, but not for women, and make in it amulets, and approach in it kings [and kings] and Emirs, and do not put on new clothing in it. Whatever male is born in it, he will have many enemies, and if she is female she will be immortal disgraced and hated by men. (*illustration of a pot-bellied man*).
- 3- When the Moon lodges in al-Thurayyā, then make in it talismans of love and the loosing of the bound, and the loosing of ([...]) and approach kings and dignitaries ([...]) in it, and build building in it. Whatever male or female is born in it, they will be good and beautiful ([...]) and chosen for marriage. And Allah will make it known. (*illustration of candelabra*).
- 4- When the Moon (lodges in) al-Duburān, then make in it (talismans of) hatred and enmity, and do not (approach) in it kings and dignitaries (and do not) rebuild In it, and do not plant and do not travel. Whoever (is born, if he is male, the outcome) will not be good, and if she is (female) she will be immoral and men will not love her. (*illustration of buttocks*).
- 5- When the Moon (lodges in) al-Haq'a, then make in it (talismans of [...]), do not sow and do not build, and do not ([...]) not good, and put on (new clothing [...]) travel. Whoever is born ([...] favoured) among (men). (*illustration of a mystical creature*).
- 6- – (*illustration of a mystical creature*).
- 7- – (*illustration of the forearms*).
- 8- When the Moon lodges in al-Nathra, then make in it talismans of enmity and hatred, and do not marry and do not buy and do not sell. Whatever male is born in it, he will be hated and slandered among men, and if she is female she will be favoured among men. (*illustration of a rose with four heads growing from it*).
- 9- When the Moon lodges in al-Ṭarf, then make in it talismans of enmity and bind in it desire, and do not put on new clothing in it, and do not approach kings in it, and sow. Whatever male or female is born in it, they will be unfortunate, wicked, disgraced, not of good conduct. And Allah will make it known. (*illustration of the tail-end of a creature*).

- 10- When the Moon lodges in al-Jabha, then make in it (talismans) for the loosing of desire, and make in it amulets, and approach kings in it, and marry and do not put on new clothing in it. Whatever male is born will be sly and if she is female she will have a god nature. And Allah will make it known. (*illustration of the forehead of a lion*).
- 11- When the Moon lodges in al-Zubra, make in it talismans for love and affection, and approach kings in it, and marry and do not put on new clothing in it and do not travel, and dispatch spies in it, and make foundations for a building in it, and solitude with women will be good in it. And Allah will make it known. (*illustration of a piece of iron?*)
- 12- When the Moon lodges in al-Şarfa, then make in it talismans of enmity, and make in it amulets, and do not approach kings and do not marry, and do not put on new clothing in it, and travel in it, and in it there is well-being. Whatever male is born in it will be loved, and if she is female will be immoral. And Allah will make it known. (*illustration of turning-away candelabra*).
- 13- When the Moon lodges in al-‘Awwā, then make in it talismans of love and encounters with dignitaries, and put on new clothing in it. Whatever male is born in it, will bring fortune to his family and do to himself, and if she is female, she will be intelligent, favoured among men. And Allah will make it known. (*illustration of barking dog*).
- 14- When the Moon lodges in al-Simāk, then make in it talismans of enmity and ([...]) and lethal poisons, and do not marry. Whatever male or female is born in it, they will be unfortunate and of a bad conduct, slandered in their action. And do not approach kings in it. And Allah will make it known. (*illustration of two fish*)

Appendix IV: Table of the Nature and Temper of the Signs of the Zodiacs³

	Dry	Moist
Hot, odd & inauspicious	Aries, Leo & Sagittarius	Gemini, Libra & Aquarius
Cold, even & auspicious	Taurus, Virgo & Capricorns	Cancer, Scorpios & Pisces

³ See Al-Bīrūnī, *Elements of Astrology*, pp. 7-8.

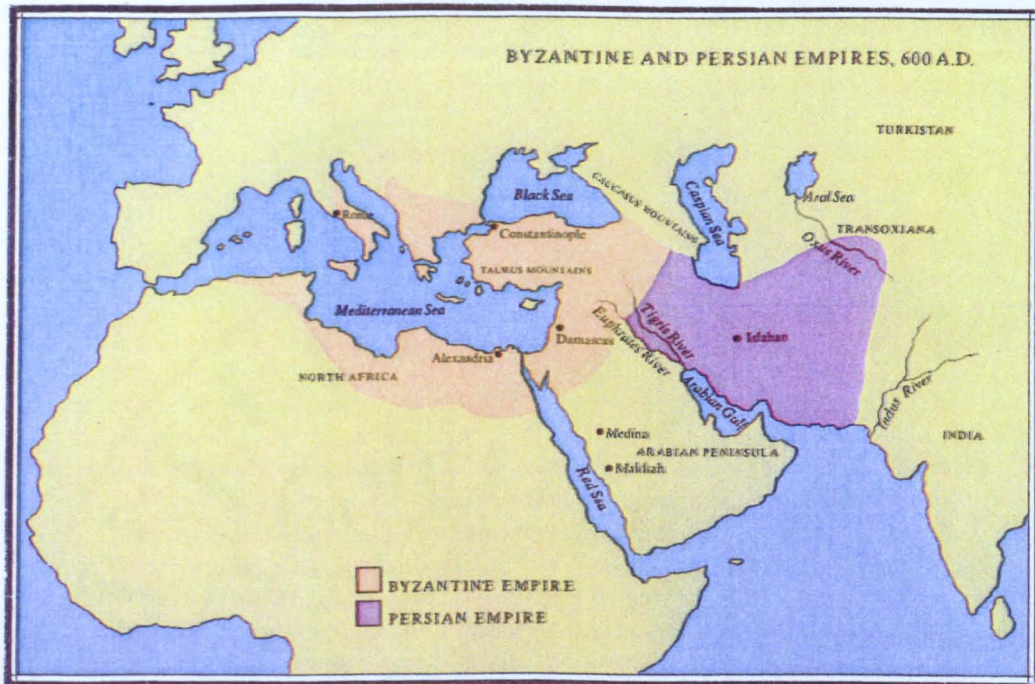


Figure 1: Map showing the extent of Byzantine and Persian Empires at 600 A.D. copied from John R. Hayes (ed.), *The Genius of Arab civilization: Source of Renaissance* (London: Eurabia (Publishing) Ltd., 1983), p. 9.



Figure 2: Map showing the Arab Empire at its greatest extent, 700-853 A.D., copied from John R. Hayes (ed.), *The Genius of Arab civilization*, p. 11.

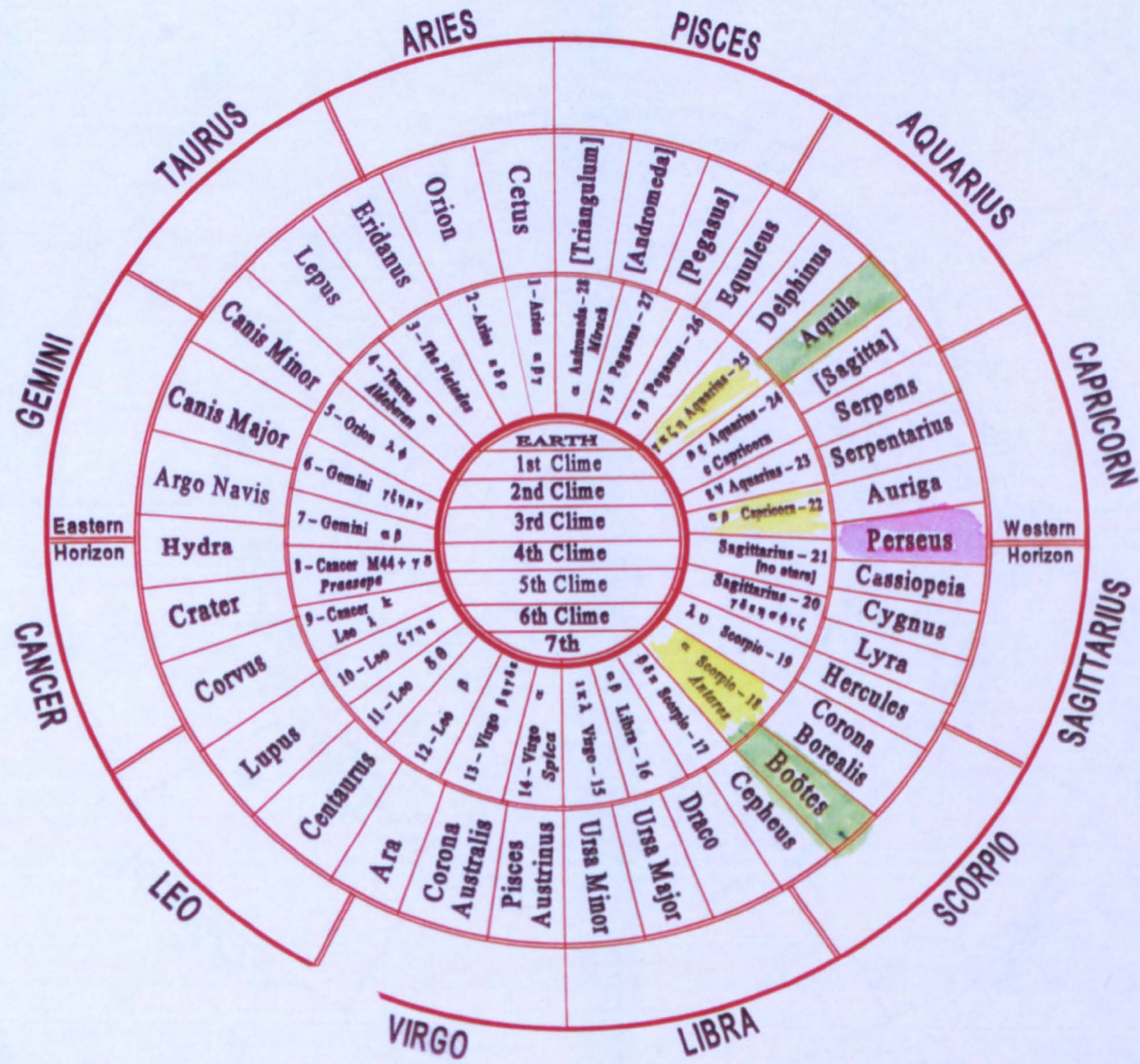
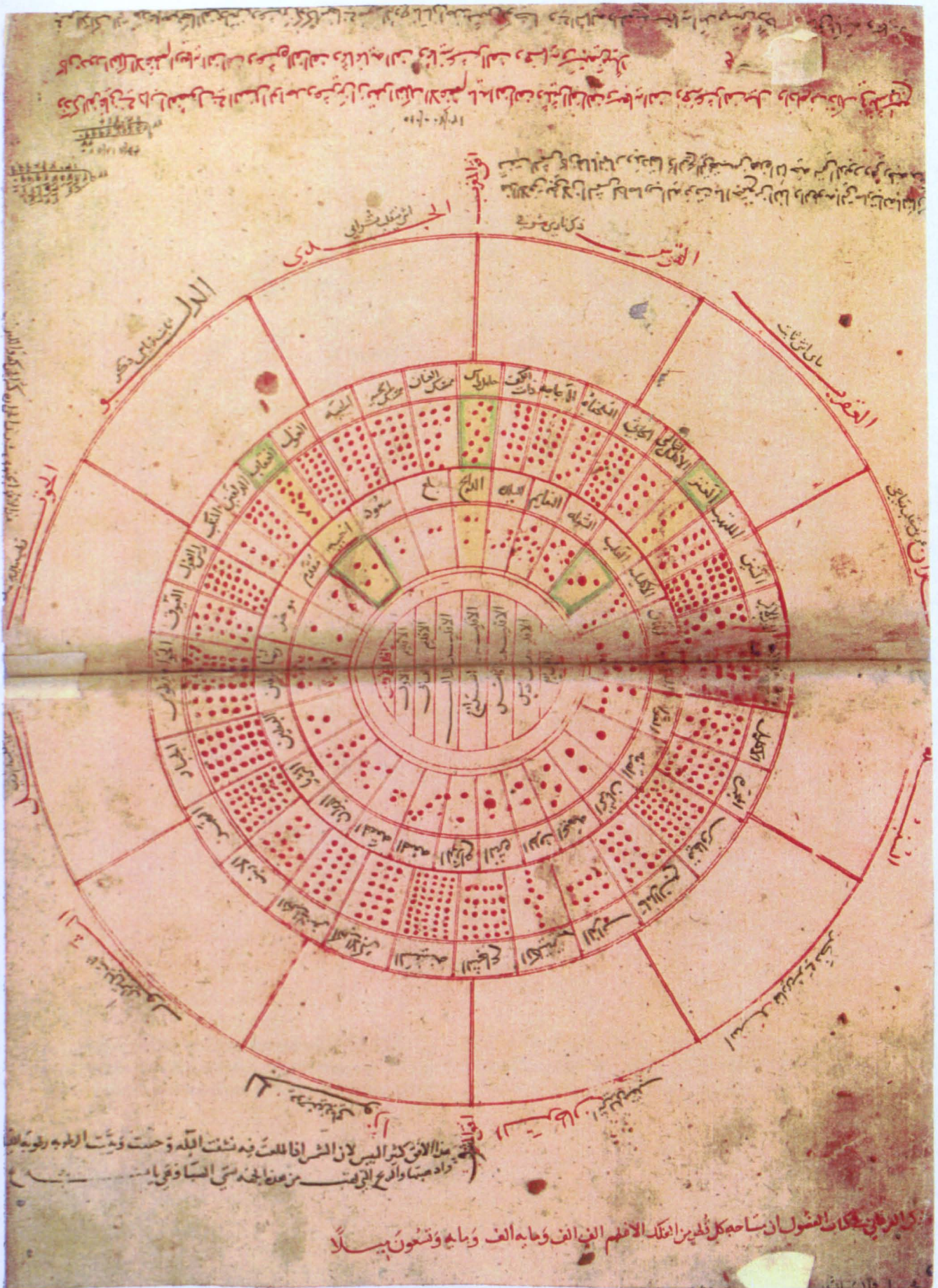


Figure 3



Figures 3& 4: Diagrams of the heavens with the Earth at the centre of the universe surrounded by the 28 lunar mansions, and a ring of 48 constellations and the belt of the 12 signs of the zodiac, that must be added in the Abbasid period as it shows them according to the Greek arrangement and not the pre-Islamic Arabs. The manuscript is shown to be conducted in the 12th – 13th century. Ms. Arab, c 90, fols. 2b-3a (12th-13th century), copied from Edson and Savage-Smith's *Medieval Views of the Cosmos*, pp. 37-39

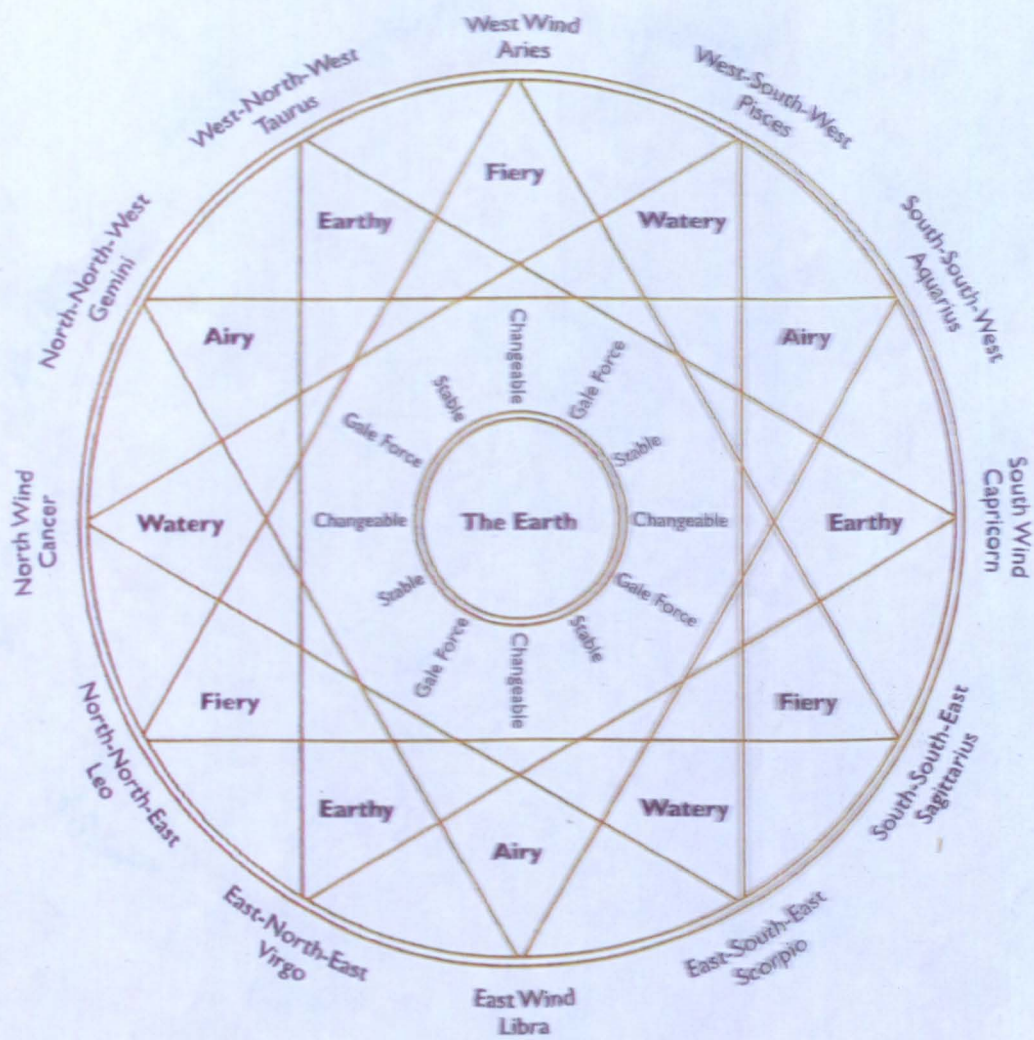


Figure 5

Figure 5 is a diagram of the wind directions and the elements (fiery, watery, airy, earthy) associated with them.

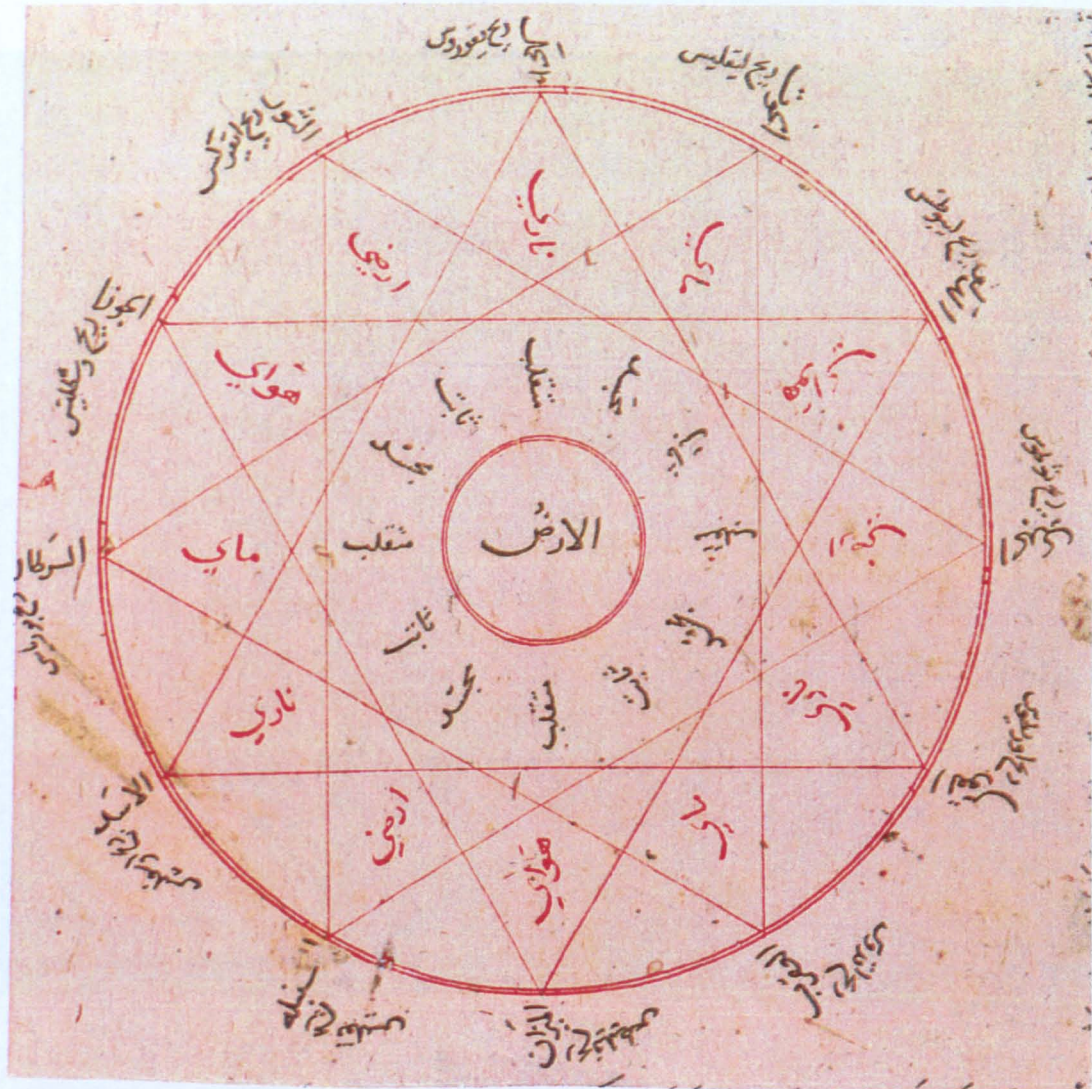


Figure 6

Figures 5& 6: Diagram showing the Earth in relation to the four elements (earth, air, fire, water), the winds and the seasons (as represented by the 12 zodiacal signs), Ms. Arab, c 90, fols. 21b (12th-13th century), copied from Edson and Savage-Smith's *Medieval Views of the Cosmos*, pp. 16-17.

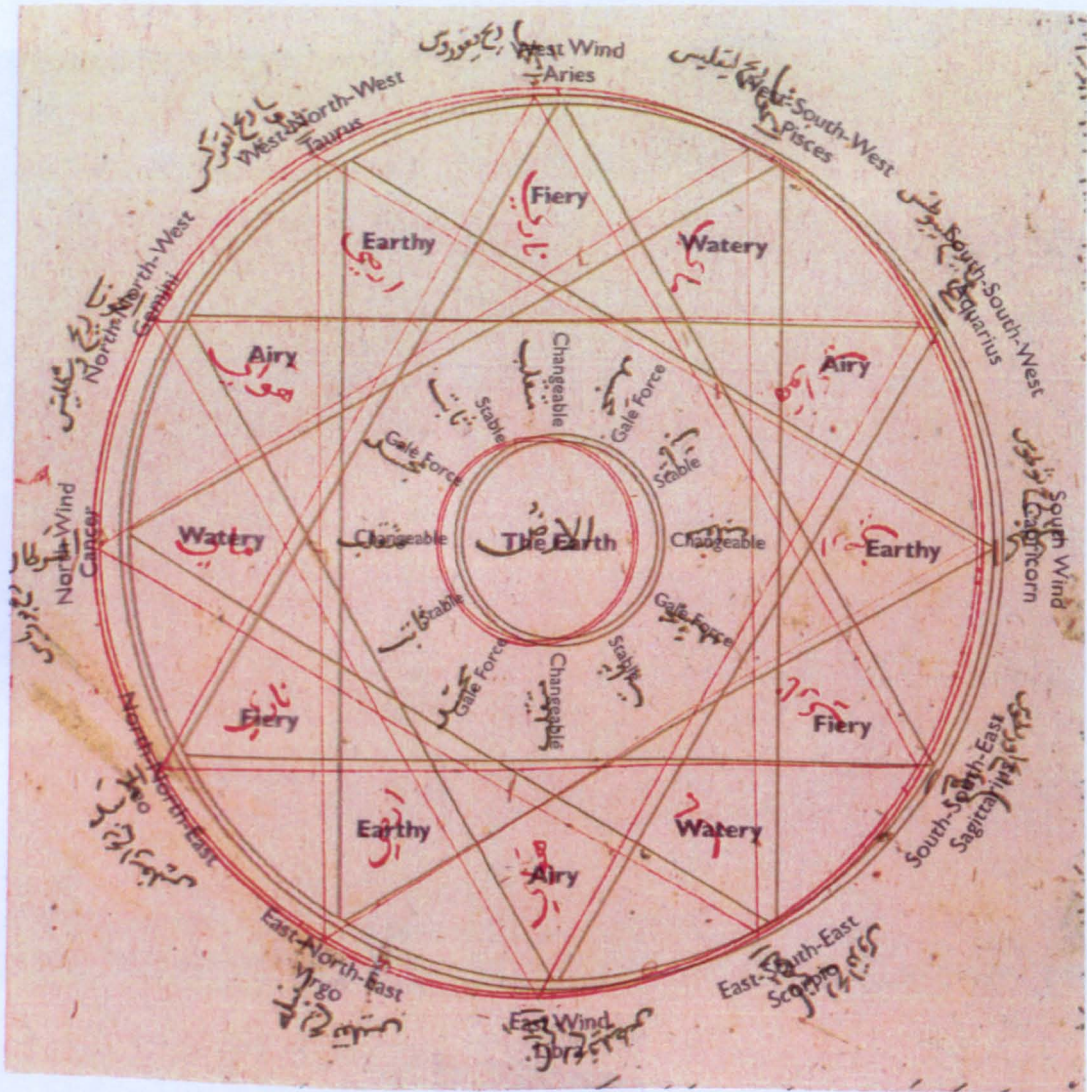


Figure 6

Figures 5& 6: Diagram showing the Earth in relation to the four elements (earth, air, fire, water), the winds and the seasons (as represented by the 12 zodiacal signs), Ms. Arab, c 90, fols. 21b (12th-13th century), copied from Edson and Savage-Smith's *Medieval Views of the Cosmos*, pp. 16 -17.

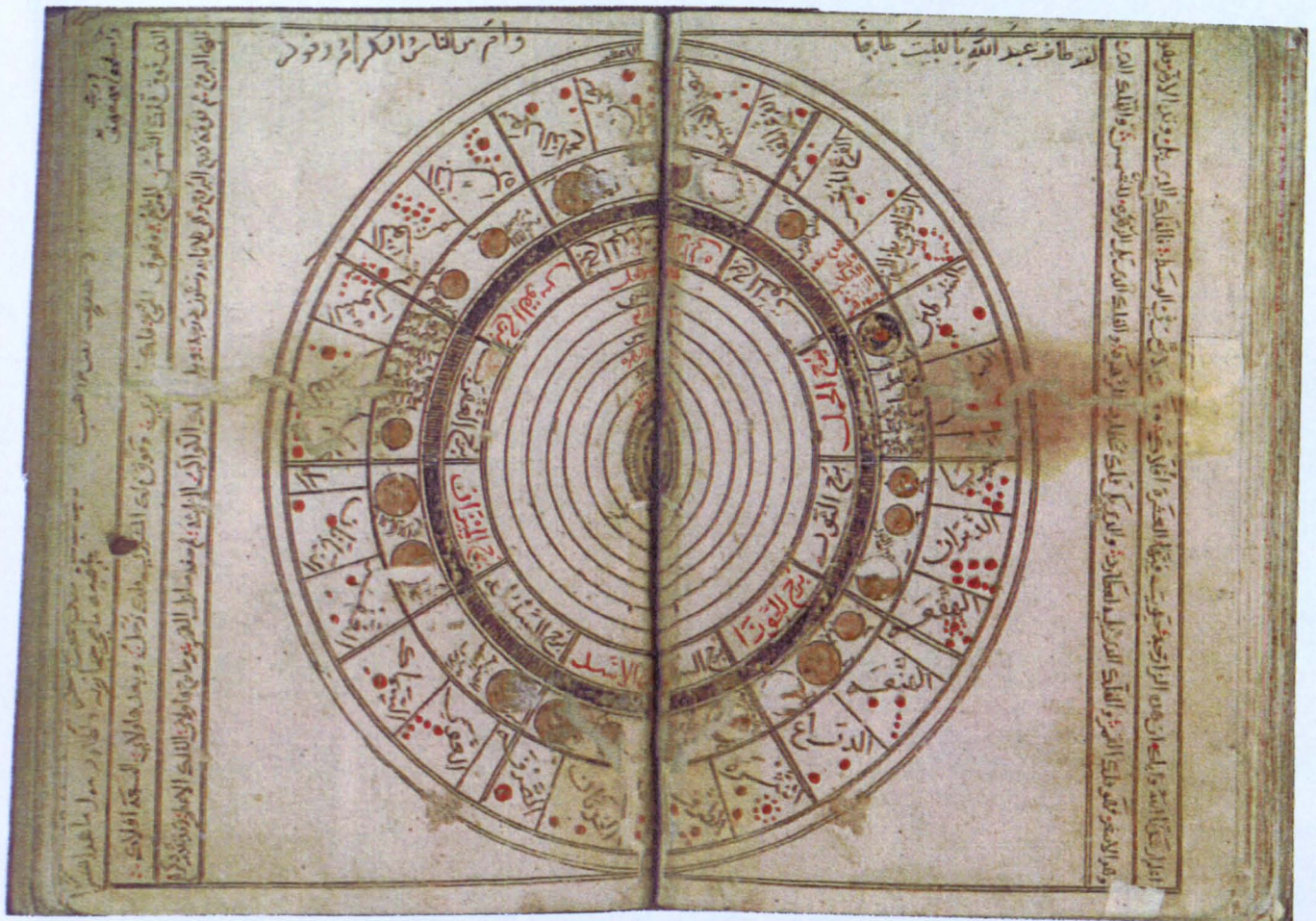


Figure 7: Diagram showing the universe as viewed by Mediaeval Arabs, Earth at the centre surrounded by the spheres of the seven planets, the Moon, Mercury, Venus, The Sun, Mars, Jupiter, Saturn; enclosed by the 12 signs of the zodiac, major stars and banded by the 28 lunar mansions, from an autograph copy made in 1333 of an Arabic treatise on timekeeping, MS. Bodl. Or. 133, fols. 117b-118a (Egypt, 1333), copied from Edson and Savage-Smith's *Medieval Views of the Cosmos*, p. 23.

من رابع عنهما بالمرح واحصل القمر من رابع عليه معكوسا بالجل صبار بنت المريج ثم ه لوالا بد للملك من فاضى
 حكيم في رعيته فاحصت الشمس من رابع بنفا مريج القوس صبار المشرك واحصل القمر من عنده معكوسا
 بالخاص روج الحوت صبار ايضا بنت المشرك ه لوالا بد للملك من صاب روج وولاحه وعماراه فاحصت
 الشمس من سادسها مريج اجدي صبار لرجل واحصل القمر من سادسها معكوسا بالذلو صبار ايضا لرجل والله اعلم

منه اوتار الكواكب المختصه واخصاصها بالبروج الاثني عشره

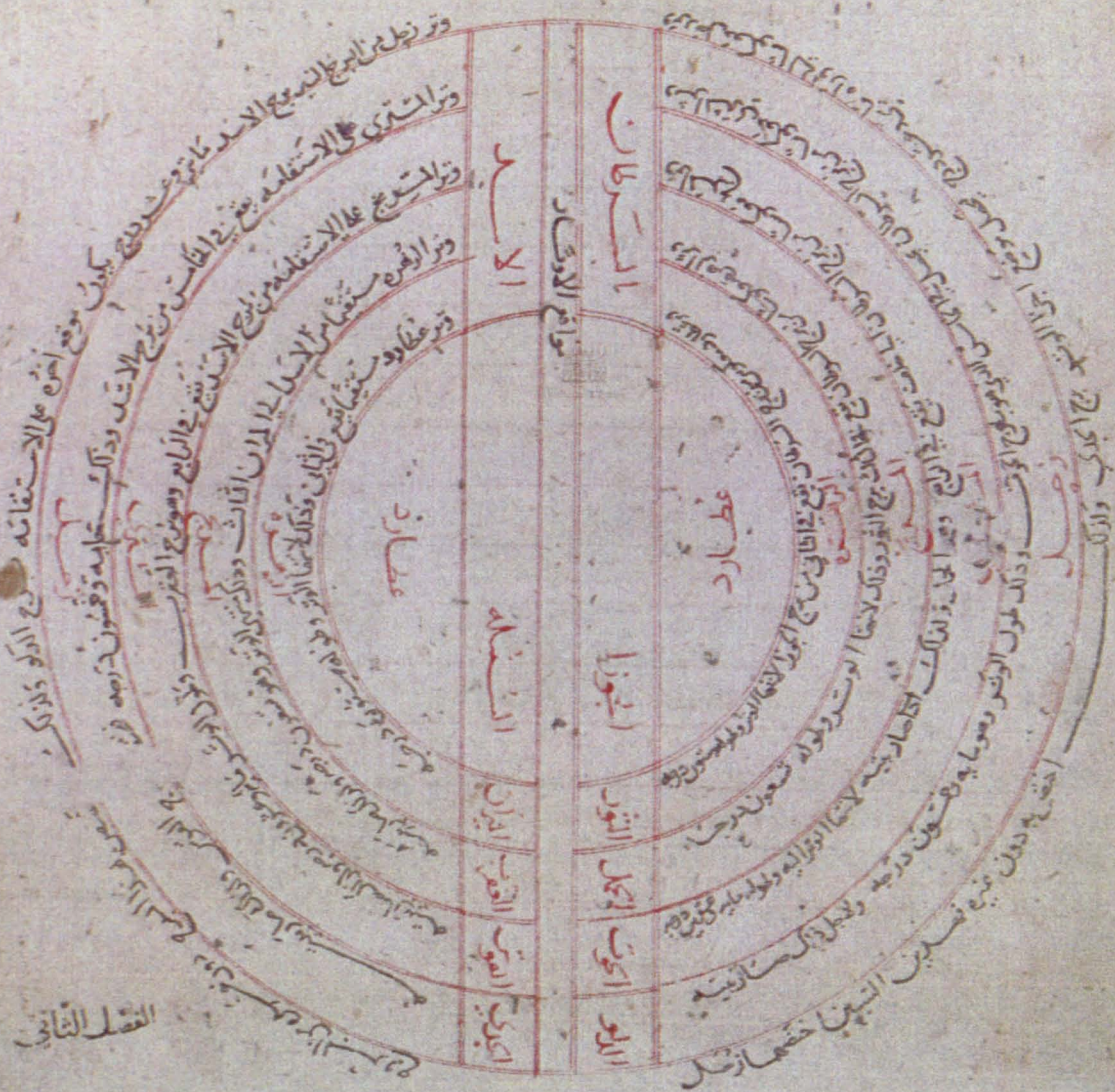


Figure 8: Diagram of planetary domiciles; extent and structure of celestial sphere and their movements backwards and onwards. The diagram taken from Emilie Savage-Smith and Yossef Rapoport (eds.), *The Book of Curiosities: A critical edition*. World-Wide-Web publication. www.bodley.ox.ac.uk/bookofcuriosities (March 2007), accessed [11/3/2008], fol. 5b.



Figure 9: Number of comets that were recognized by Arabs illustrated in the anonymous Book of Curiosities (*Kitāb Charā'ib al-Funūn wa Mulaḥ al-Uyūn*) compiled about 1020-1050 AD. Ms. Arab, c 90, fols. 13b-14b (12th-13th century), copied from Edson and Savage-Smith's *Medieval Views of the Cosmos*, p. 42.

Figures 10 & 11(see the following two pages): **The Constellations:** an Islamic view of the constellations. This manuscript synthesizes knowledge of astronomy and includes accounts of the Hindu, Islamic and European systems. Image taken from *The Jewel of the Essence of All Sciences*, originally published in India, 1840. Downloaded from British Library Images Online available online: <http://www.imagesonline.bl.uk/index.asp> , section of science and technology/ astronomy and astrology, image no. 004227. (Note: The image printed onto the transparency sheet is my editing of the origin).

Figure 10
Figure 11



Figure 11



Figure 10
Figure 11



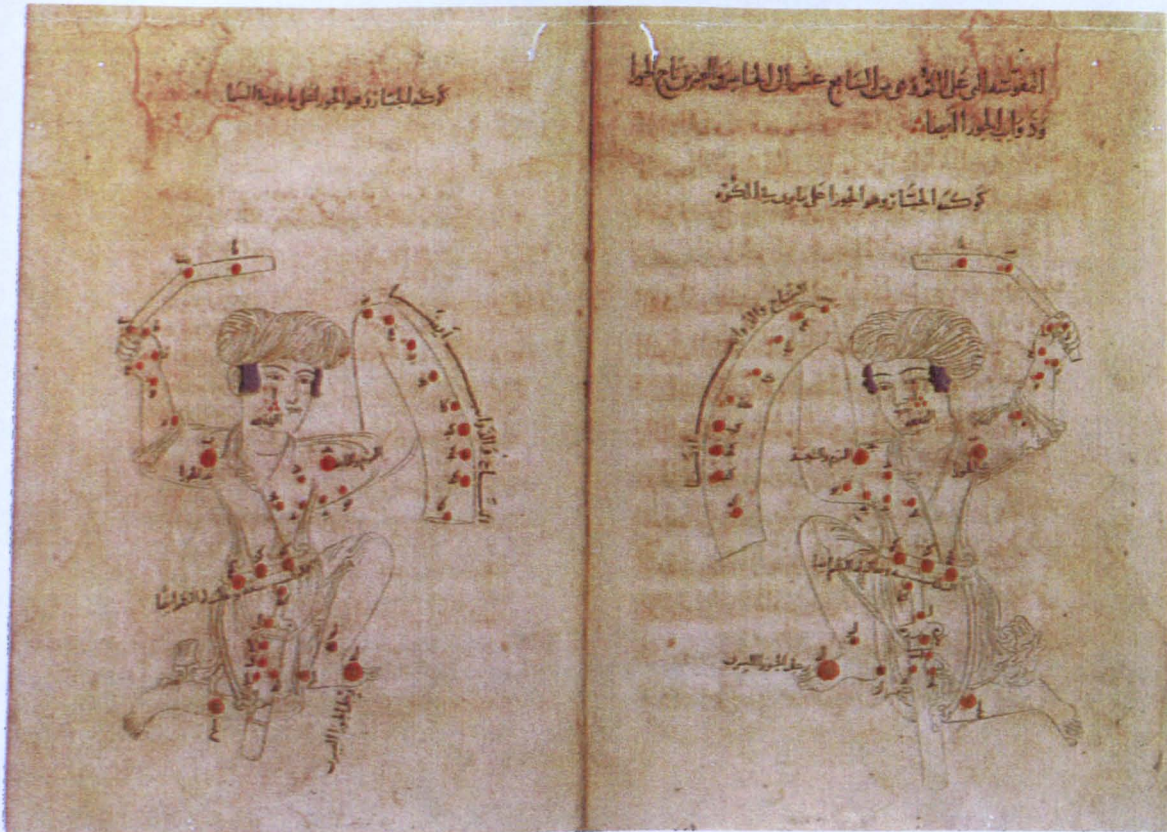


Figure 12: The constellation Orion (al-Jabbār or al-Jawz‘ā’) as seen on the globe, right, and in the sky, left, as illustrated in aṣ-Ṣūfī’s *Ṣuwar al-Kawākib*, MS. Marsh 144, pp. 325-6 (dated 400 H. [1009], 12th-century?), copied from Edson and Savage-Smith’s *Medieval Views of the Cosmos*, p. 32.



Figure 13: The constellation Cassiopeia, from the *Poetica Astronomica* of Hyginus (1st cen. B.C.). Ms. Canon Class. Lat. 197, fol. 34v (15th century), copied from Edson and Savage-Smith's *Medieval Views of the Cosmos*, p. 34.



Figure 14: The constellation Cassiopeia as seen on the globe, with the Arab constellation of the Camel drawn over her, as depicted in aṣ-Šūfī's *Ṣuwar al-Kawākib*, MS. Hunt 212, folio 40b (1170-I [566 H]), copied from Edson and Savage-Smith's *Medieval Views of the Cosmos*, p. 34.

Figure 15: The constellation Perseus, from the *Poetica Astronomica* of Hyginus (1st cen. B.C.), Ms. Canon Class. Lat. 197, fol. 35v (15th century), copied from Edson and Savage-Smith's *Medieval Views of the Cosmos*, p. 34.



PERSEUS

سور الكواكب
 لابي الحسين الصوفي
 صورة برشاوش على ما ترى في السماء



Figure 16: The constellation Perseus (Birshāwish) as seen on the globe and illustrated in aṣ-Ṣūfi's *Suwar al-Kawākib* (Beirut: Manshūrāt Dār al-Āfāq al-Jadīda, 1981), between pages 85-86.

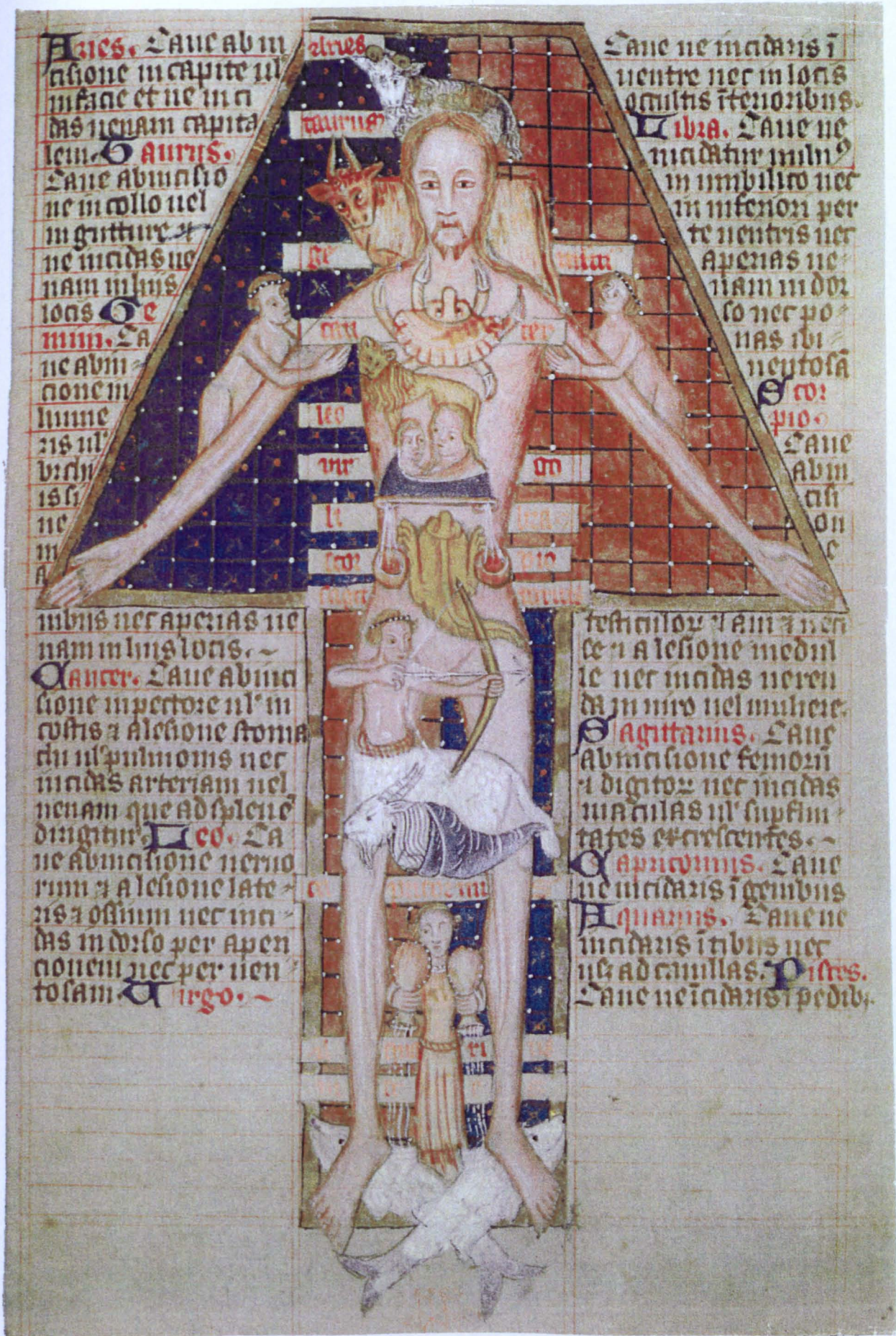


Figure 17: The Zodiac Man that shows how human body was thought of as a microcosm reflecting the large universe, or macrocosm. MS. Ashmole 391, item 5, fol. 9r (late 14 century), copied from Edson and Savage-Smith's *Medieval Views of the Cosmos*, p14.

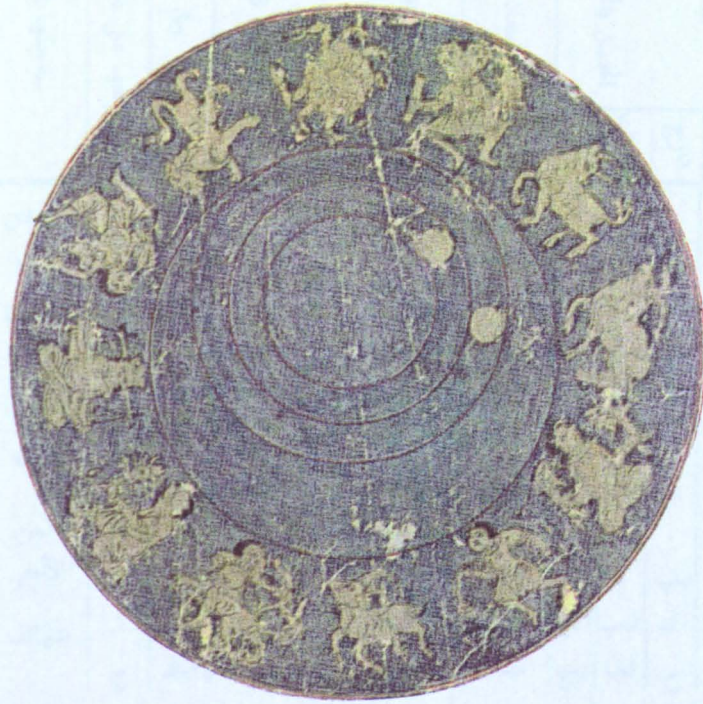


Figure 18: A zodiacal disc from an astrological clock designed by the engineer, al-Jazari in *Kitāb fī Maʿrifat al-Ḥiyal al-Handasiyya* (The Book of Knowledge of Ingenious Mechanical Devices). The disc revolves in such a way that the sun and moon are aligned with the appropriate sign of the zodiac throughout the year, copied by Farruk bin Abd al-Latif, Syria, 1315; 30.74v., Smithsonian Institution, Freer Gallery of Art, Washington, D.C., copied from John R. Hayes (ed.), *The Genius of Arab civilization*, p. 191.

Figure 20: The Table of 'Aḥwāl al-Manāzil', or 'The States of the Lunar Mansions', that shows the difference in corresponding them with the signs of the zodiac as depicted by the astrologers and ancient Arabs, illustrated by Abū ar-Rayḥān Muhammad ibn Ahmad al-Bīrūnī, *Al-Āthār al-Bāqiya*, pp. 349-50.

اسماء منازل القمر	كثيثة كواكبها	طلعها في شهور السمرقانيين للسنة الف وثلاثمائة للاسكندر	وقى كم يوم منها	سقوطها في شهور السمرقانيين للسنة الف وثلاثمائة للاسكندر الرومي	وقى كم يوم منها	مراتب صور كواكبها عند المنجيين	مراتب صور كواكبها عند العرب
الشرطان	ب	نيسان	ك ب	تشرين الأول	ك ب	قرنا الحمل	قرنا الحمل
البطين	و	آيار	ي ج	تشرين الآخر	ه	البيتة الحمل	بطن الحمل ^١
الثوبيا	و	آيار	لا		ل	سنام الثور	البيتة الحمل
الدبران	ا	حزيران	ي ج	كانون الأول	ل	عين الثور	عين الثور
الهقعة	ب	حزيران	ي ج	كانون الأول	ي ج	راس الجبار	راس الجوزاء ^٢
الهقعة	ب	تموز	كو	كانون الآخر	كو	قدما النوعم التالخم	قوس الجوزاء
الذراع	ب	تموز	ط	كانون الآخر	ط	راسا النوعمين	ذراع الاسد المبسوط
النثرة	ب	آب	ك ب		كا	السرطان	انف الاسد
الطرف	ب	آب	و	شباط	ج	رقبة الاسد	عين الاسد
الجبهة	و	آب	يز		يو	عرف الاسد وقلبه	جبهة الاسد
الزبرة	ب	آب	لا	اذار	ا	مغرز ذنب الاسد	كاهل الاسد
الصفرة	ا	ايلول	ي ج		يد	طرف جنب الاسد	ذنب الاسد
العواء	و	ايلول	كو		كز	صدر العذراء	ورك الاسد
السمك	ا	تشرين الأول	ط	نيسان	ط	يد العذراء	ساق الاسد
العقر	ج	تشرين الأول	ك ب		ك ب	ذيل العذراء	مغفر العقرب
الزباني	ب	تشرين الآخر	و		ه	كفة الميزان	زانيا العقرب
الالكيل	ج	تشرين الآخر	يز	آيار	ي ج	جبهة العقرب	راس العقرب ^٣
القلب	ا		ل		لا	قلب العقرب	قلب العقرب
الشولة	ب	كانون الأول	ي ج	حزيران	ي ج	مثير العقرب	مثير العقرب
النعائم	ج	كانون الأول	كو		كو	قوس الرامي	نعام
البلدة	و	كانون الآخر	ح	تموز	ط	بدن الرامي	بقعة قفرة
سعد الذابح	ب		كا		ك ب	قرن الجدى	لا في صورة
سعد بلع	ب	شباط	ج	آب	و	يد ساكب الماء اليسرى	لا في صورة
سعد السعدون	ج		يو		يز	منكب ساكب الماء الايسر	لا في صورة
سعد الاخبية	و		ا		لا	ذراع ساكب الماء اليمنى	لا في صورة
الفرغ المقدم	ب	اذار	يد	ايلول	ي ج	منكب الفرس ويمينه	عرقوة الدلو العليا
الفرغ الموحتر	ب		كز		كو	جناح الفرس وستره	عرقوة الدلو السفلى
بطن الحوت	ا	نيسان	ط	تشرين الأول	ط	جنب المرأة المسلسلة	بطن الحوت ^٤

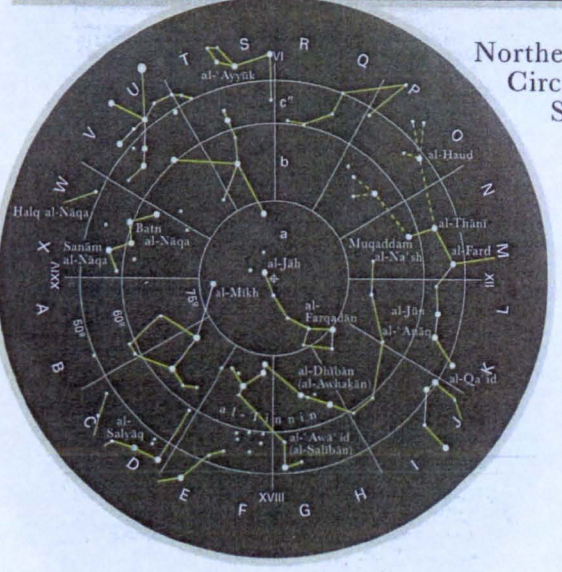
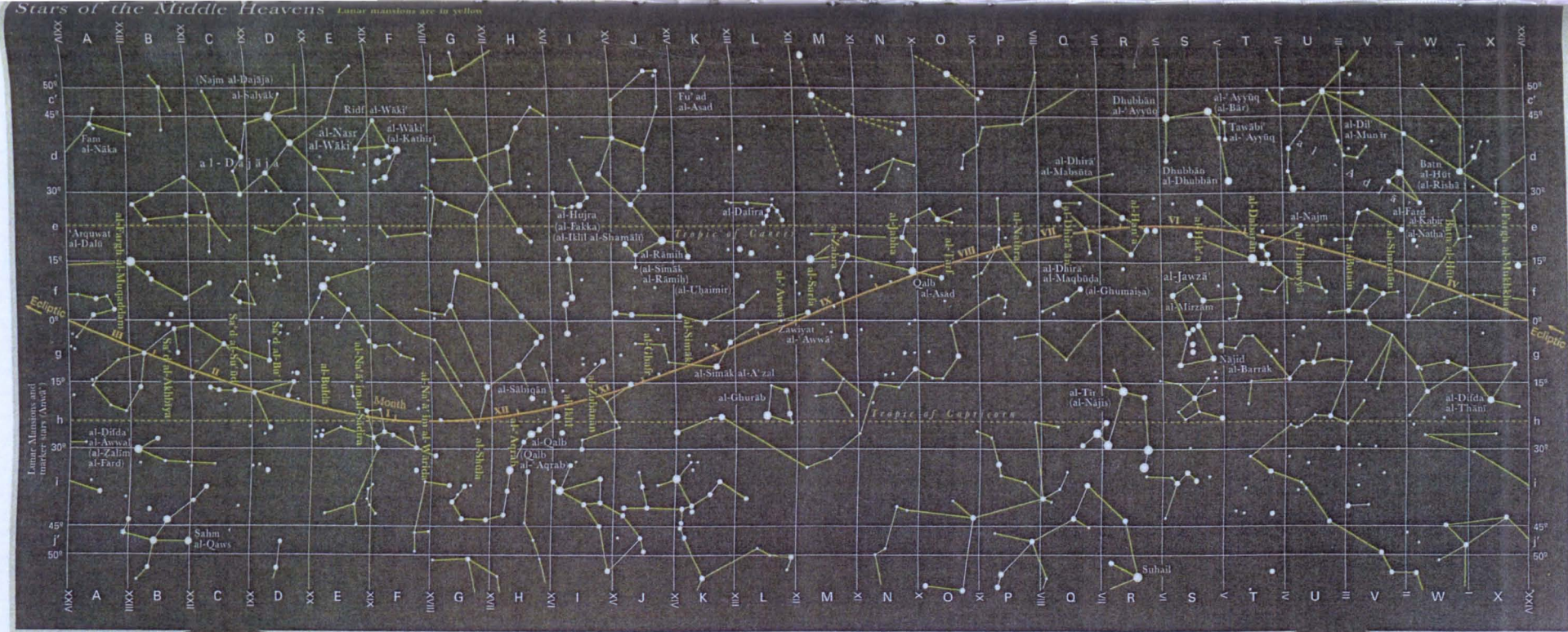
a Diese Tabelle fehlt in L und in R.



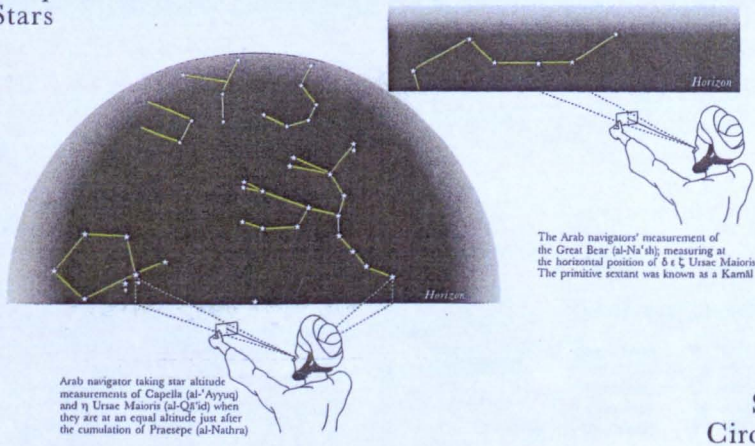
Figure 21: Planispheric astrolabe amade in 474/ 1082 I Spanish city of Guadalajara by Muhammad ibn Sa'īd aṣ-Ṣabbān, known as Ibn al-Mashshāṭ as-Saraqusī, al-Aṣṭurlābī ('the astrolabe-maker of Saragossa'). Oxford, Museum of the History of Science, Inv. No. 52473, copied from Edson and Savage-Smith's *Medieval Views of the Cosmos*, p. 43.



Figure 22: Talismanic designs of 14 lunar mansions, from an Arabic miscellany compiled for the Mongol ruler of Baghdad, Sultān Ahmad, who ruled 1382-1410. MS. Bodl. Or. 133, fol. 27b, copied from Edson and Savage-Smith's *Medieval Views of the Cosmos*, p. 40.

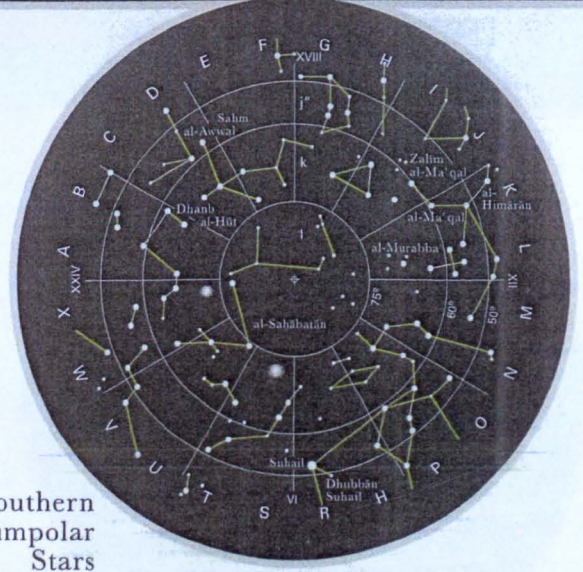


Northern Circumpolar Stars



Arab navigator taking star altitude measurements of Capella (al-'Ayyūq) and η Ursae Majoris (al-Qa'iq) when they are at an equal altitude just after the culmination of Praesepe (al-Nathra)

The Arab navigators' measurement of the Great Bear (al-'Ayyūq) and η Ursae Majoris (al-Qa'iq) at the horizontal position of β & γ Ursae Majoris. The primitive sextant was known as a Kamāl



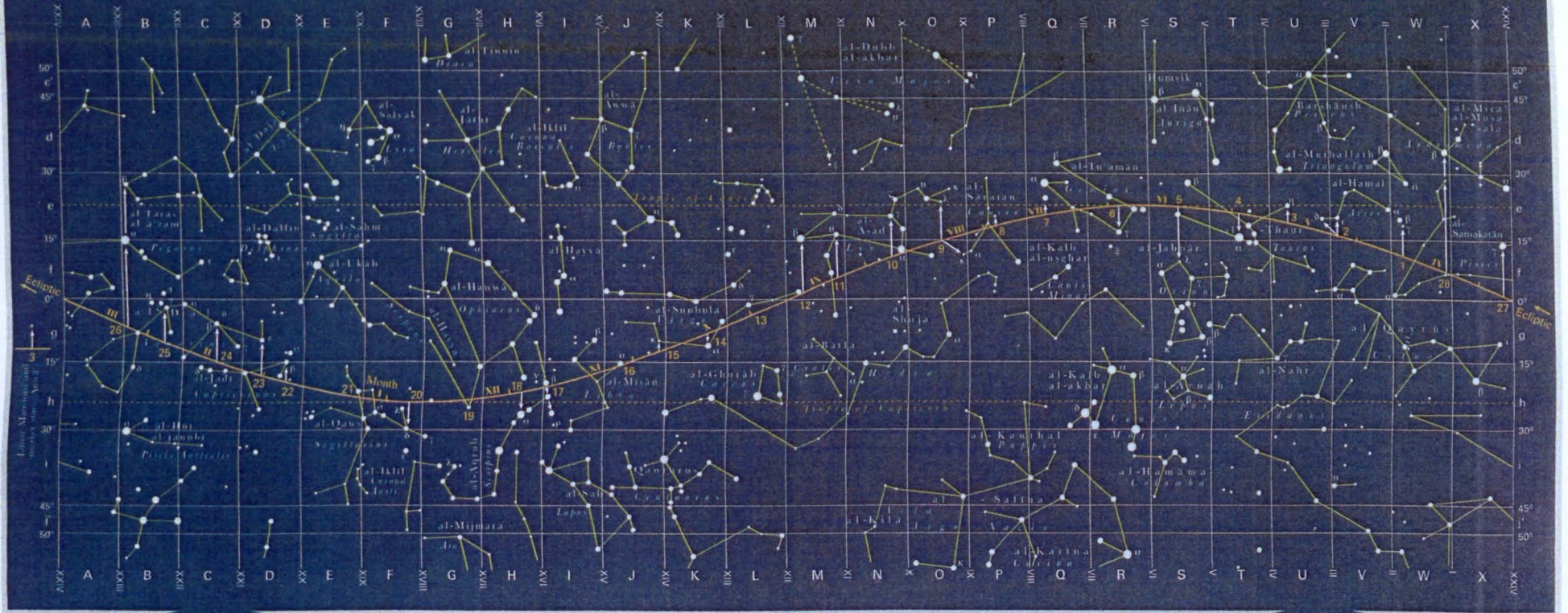
Southern Circumpolar Stars

STAR NAMES USED BY THE ARABS IN THE INDIAN OCEAN

Consultant: Gerald Tibbetts

Figure 23: Diagram showing stars names, their locations, and longitudes as known to the Arabs in the Indian Ocean, with a view of Southern Circumpolar Stars (the right circle), and Northern Circumpolar Stars (the left circle). Also shows how measurement were taken, here for al-Na'sh (Ursa major), on the right, and al-'Ayyūq (Capella), on the left, mainly by visual observation, copied from Hugh Kennedy (ed.), *An Historical Atlas of Islam* (Brill: Leiden and Boston, second and revised edition, 2002), p. 3.

Stars of the Middle Heavens



THE TWENTY-EIGHT ANWĀ'

with their constellations, dates of setting, and duration (in days) according to al-Šūfī (cf. back end-paper, right)

1. al-Nath/ (Aries) 19 x (2)	16. al-Zubānān (Libra) 1 v (4)
2. al-Sharatān (Aries) 31 x (3)	17. al-Ikil (Scorpio) 14 v (4)
3. (Ghaṭās) (Pleiades) 13 xi (7)	18. Kalb (al-'Aqrab) (Scorpio) 28 v (1)
4. al-Thurayyā (al-Thurayyā) 18 i (4)	19. al-Shūla (Scorpio) 10 vi (3)
5. al-Dabarān (Taurus) 26 xi (3)	20. al-Na'a'im (al-Wārīda) (Sagittarius) 23 vi (1)
6. al-Haq'a (Orion) 8 xii (6)	21. (al-Na'a'im) (Sagittarius) 6 vii (3)
7. al-Han'a (Gemini) 22 xii (3)	22. al-Šādira/al-Bilda (Sagittarius) 6 vii (3)
8. al-Dhirā'an (Gemini) 4 i (5)	23. Sa'd al-Dhābiḥ (Capricornus) 19 vii (2)
9. al-Nathra (Cancer) 18 i (4)	24. Sa'd Bul' (Aquarius) 2 viii (1)
10. al-Tarf (Cancer/Leo) 29 i (7)	25. Sa'd al-Su'ūd (Aquarius) 14 viii (1)
11. al-Jabha (Leo) 12 ii (7)	26. Sa'd al-Akhbiyya (Aquarius) 27 viii (1)
12. al-Zabra (Leo) 25 ii (4)	27. al-Fargh (Pegasus) 10 ix (3)
13. al-Sarfa (Leo) 9 iii (3)	28. al-Muqaddam (Pegasus) 22 ix (4)
14. al-'Awwā' (Virgo) 21 iii (4)	29. al-Mu'akhkhar (Pegasus) 5 x (2)
15. al-Simāk (Virgo) 12 iv (5)	
16. al-Ghafr (Virgo) 25 iv (3)	28. Batn al-Hūt (Pisces) 5 x (2)



Northern Circumpolar Stars

Consultant: Paul Kunitzsch



Southern Circumpolar Stars

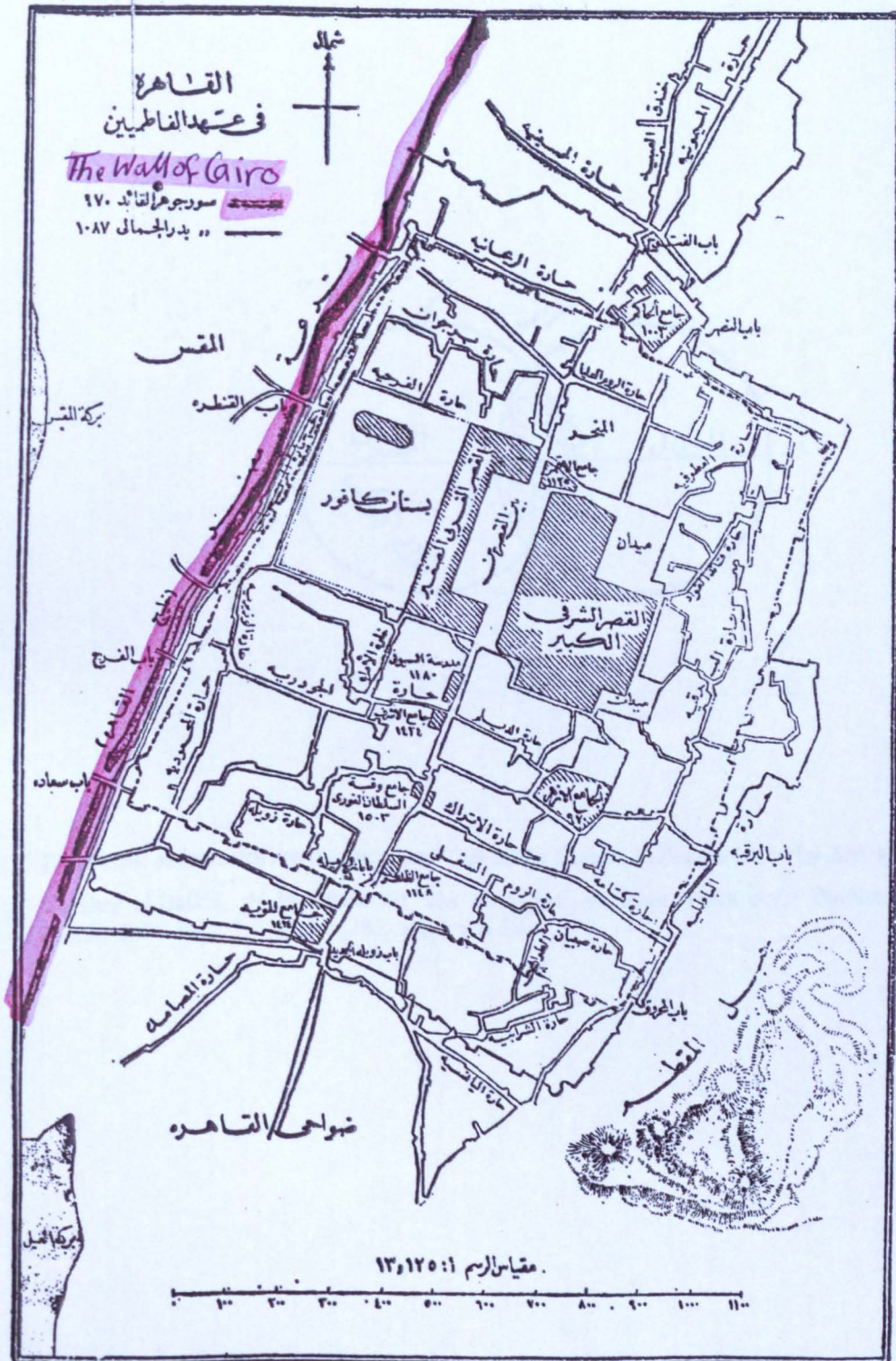
	al-Han'a	'Naw' al-Hak'a	December
Y	Days		
	'Naw' al-Dabarān	al-Layālī	November
U	'Naw' Ghafās al-Thurayyā	Butayn	Days
	Butayn	Shitā	October
Y	'Naw' al-Naḥ	'Naw' Baṭn al-Ḥūt	Days
	'Naw' Fargh al-Mū'akhkhar	'Naw' Fargh al-Muqaddam	September
C	Days		
	'Naw' Sa'd al-Akhhbiya	'Naw' Sa'd al-Su'ud	August
Y	Days		
	'Naw' Sa'd al-Dhābiḥ	Kharif	July
Y	al-Hawāḥar	'Naw' al-Bulda	Days
	'Naw' al-Na'ā'im	'Naw' al-Shawla	June
C	Days		
	al-Anṣara	'Naw' al-Iklil	May
Y	'Naw' al-Kalb	'Naw' al-Zubānā	Days
	'Naw' al-Ghafr	Ṣāif	April
C	'Naw' al-Simāk	Nisān	Days
	Nisān	'Naw' al-'Awwā'	March
Y	Days		
	'Naw' al-Khurtān	'Naw' al-Djabha	February
Y	Days		
	Ḥusūm	Rabi'	January
Y	'Naw' al-Ṭarf	al-Naḥra	Days
	'Naw' al-Dhirā'an		

Figure 25: The table demonstrates the distributions of the Arabic constellations over the Christian month, and the seasons, and the times of their varieties and their beginnings, transcribed from the Calendar in Ahmad al-Sharfi's Sea-Atlas, A.D. 1571-72: (MS. Marsh No. 294), Bodl. Lib. Oxford., copied from Hugh Kennedy (ed.), An Historical Atlas of Islam (Brill: Leiden and Boston, second and revised edition, 2002), cf. back end-paper, right.



Figure 26: Map of the Khazar Empire in the early 4th/ 10th century, in *Khazaria Image Gallery*, <http://www.khazaria.com/khazar-images.html>, last Updated: March 3, 2006, [accessed 12 March, 2008].

Figure 27: The Wall of Cairo, in al-'Abādī's *Fī at-Tārīkh al-'Abbāsī wa l-Fātimī*, p. 375.



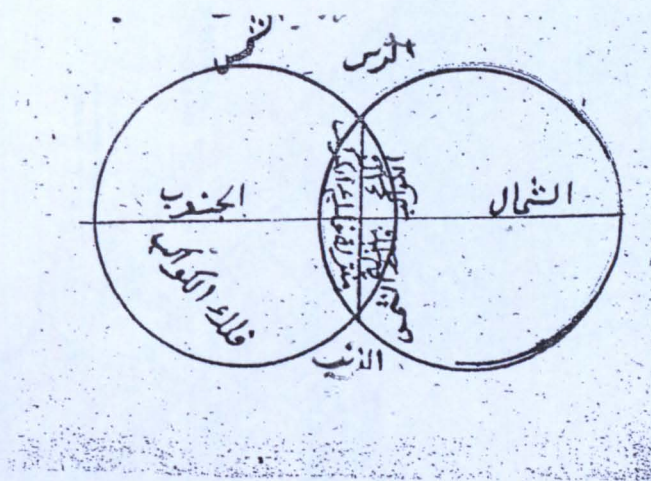


Figure 28: al-Jawzahar, or the Head and Tail of the Dragon as demonstrated by Abū Ma'shar. See Abū Ma'shar al-Balkhī, *Al-Mudkhalk ilā 'ilm an-Nujum*, in King Abdul Aziz University, The Central Library (MS. Falk, Tanjīm, no. 285., n.d.), fol. 32.

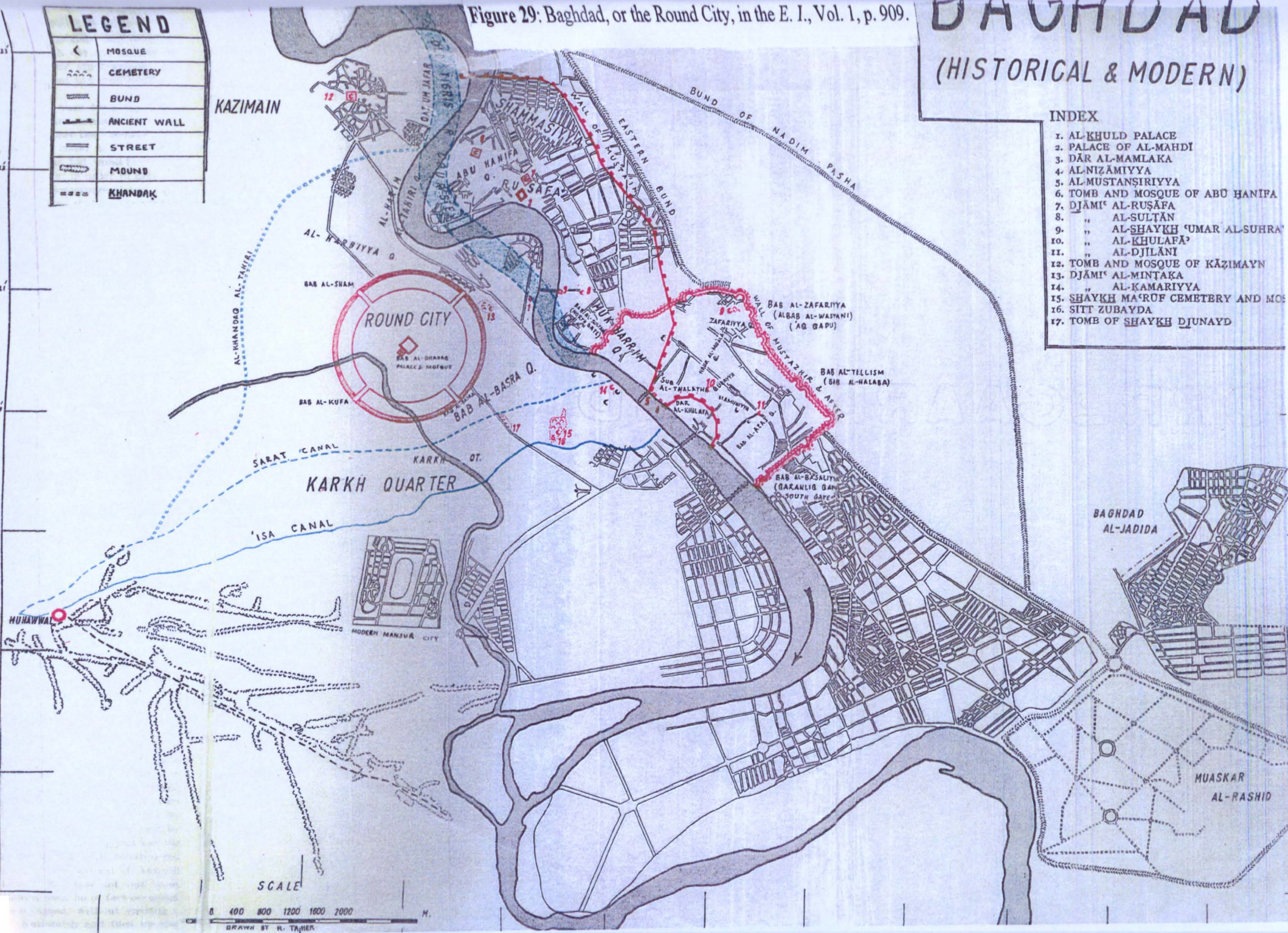
Figure 29: Baghdad, or the Round City, in the E. I., Vol. 1, p. 909.

BAGHDAD

(HISTORICAL & MODERN)

LEGEND	
	MOSQUE
	CEMETERY
	BUND
	ANCIENT WALL
	STREET
	MOUND
	KHANDAK

INDEX	
1.	AL-KHULD PALACE
2.	PALACE OF AL-MAHDI
3.	DAR AL-MAMLAKA
4.	AL-NIZAMIYYA
5.	AL-MUSTANSIRIYYA
6.	TOMB AND MOSQUE OF ABU HANIFA
7.	DJAMI' AL-RUSAFI
8.	" AL-SULTAN
9.	" AL-SHAYKH 'UMAR AL-SUHRAN
10.	" AL-KHULAFI
11.	" AL-DJILANI
12.	TOMB AND MOSQUE OF KAZIMAYN
13.	DJAMI' AL-MINTAKA
14.	" AL-KAMARIYYA
15.	SHAYKH MA'RUF CEMETERY AND MOS
16.	SITT ZUBAYDA
17.	TOMB OF SHAYKH DJUNAYD



SCALE
 0 400 800 1200 1600 2000 M.
 DRAWN BY R. TAYLOR