

This combination of techniques was also described in various ways by ibn Ezra⁵⁵ and Abū Ma‘shar, but there is at least one significant difference between Māshā’allāh’s account and theirs: in *BA* there is *no indication* that one should construct a separate solar revolution chart or even construct the quadrant houses on the basis of the calculated east of the year. So far as I can tell, according to al-Andarzaghār the solar revolution was really a set of *transits*, with certain planets and places being prioritized based on their time-lord status or relative to the calculated east of the year. But by the time Abū Ma‘shar wrote his own version of the same material (over a century later), we see explicit instructions for establishing all twelve house cusps and more besides. Abū Ma‘shar’s list of items to examine becomes overwhelming unless we can identify the core of the technique as it is presented and organized in *BA*. At this time I do not know whether the construction of a separate chart with house cusps was Abū Ma‘shar’s own invention, or whether it had simply become standard by his time.

§8: *Abū ‘Alī’s* On the Judgments of Nativities

Abū ‘Alī al-Khayyāt (ca. 770 – ca. 835 AD) is primarily known to us due to two facts: he was a student of Māshā’allāh’s, and he wrote *JN*, a slim and very popular manual suitable for astrological beginners.⁵⁶ In the 12th Century it was translated twice into Latin: by Plato of Tivoli in 1136, and John of Seville in 1153. Joachim Heller’s printed edition (based primarily on John of Seville) was published in 1546 and reprinted in 1549, and my translation is of the latter. In this section I will explain the relationship between *JN* and Māshā’allāh’s works, and why we need a new translation.

JN is closely related to several works of Māshā’allāh’s, all of which are translated in full by me in this volume or in my *Works of Sabl & Māshā’allāh: BA, Nativities, On Sig. Planet, and Twelve Dom.* In Appendix F I present a table which compares *JN* to *BA* and other sources in Māshā’allāh by chapter, but the basic relation is this. Chapters 1-7 derive from a copy of *Nativities*; next, Chs. 8-38 are in part a very simplified and disorganized version of *BA* III (along with other sources, one of which is certainly ‘Umar’s *TBN*); lastly, the cookbook-style delineations in Chs. 39-50 are again transcribed mostly from

⁵⁵ See ibn Ezra (2008) and Abū Ma‘shar (Volume II of this book).

⁵⁶ He wrote other works, but only *JN* was prominently received in the Latin world.

other works of Māshā'allāh, especially from *On Sig. Planet* and *Twelve Dom.*⁵⁷ Of course, since Dorotheus was so important to Māshā'allāh and others, some of *JN*'s material is indirectly related to *Carmen*.

BA now allows us to understand some of the organization (and disorganization) of *JN*. Take for example the material on prosperity and wealth: portions of *JN* Chs. 7-8 are actually organized along the lines of *BA* Chs. III.2.0-6, and distinguish between natives who enjoy great prosperity for their whole lives, or mediocre wealth, or who are brought to wealth after struggle and so on. But since neither the Latin *JN* nor Holden's translation make this organization clear in their paragraphing or by headings or footnotes, I have done so below. On the other hand, while Abū 'Alī's material is closely related to *BA*, it is often presented out of sequence. Thus the end of *JN* Ch. 7 contains material corresponding to the following chapters of *BA*, in roughly this order: III.1.2, 3.3, 2.8, 2.10, 2.12, 4.1, 4.2.

Following are some of the more notable differences between *BA* and *JN* in terms of topical delineation:

- *Eminence.* *JN* and *BA* mention *dustūrīyyah* with regard to the nati-
vities of kings, whereas *Nativities* does not.
- *Siblings.* *JN* is totally disorganized when compared with *BA*.
- *Children.* *JN* seems to be unaware of the difference between the
Jupiter-Saturn Lot, the Lot of Children used for transits (Mars-
Jupiter), and the Lot of Sons (Moon-Jupiter) and Daughters (Moon
to Venus).
- *Slaves and Animals.* *JN* adds animals, along with a Lot of Captives
(which might be the same as the Lot of Slaves used in *BA*).
- *Marriage.* *JN* omits both the Lot of Erōs and the Venus-7th Lot.
- *Faith, Law.* Like other Arabic-period works, *JN* adds this topic,
whereas *BA* lacks it. It would probably have been added during the
end of the Sassanian or the beginning of the Arabic period.
- *Enemies.* *JN* connects this with the 12th, whereas *BA* uses Lots and
synastry.

After the topical treatments, Ch. 38 presents valuable and rare general delineation instructions. We now know that Abū 'Alī's own work ends

⁵⁷ Chs. 39-45 come from *On Sig. Planet.*, Ch. 46 from an unknown source, and Chs. 47-50 from *Twelve Dom.*

immediately after, followed by the material stemming from Māshā'allāh (Chs. 39-45, from *On. Sig. Planet.*). But in an editorial note, Heller states that everything else (Chs. 46-50, largely from *Twelve Dom.*) comes from another manuscript (which must be Plato of Tivoli's). Although Heller is not sure they are really by Abū 'Alī, this other manuscript claims they are and so he includes them. Indeed, chapters after the core of *JN* do bear traces of another translator. Several chapters use Greek terms which John of Seville hardly ever uses: *thema*, *bōroskopos*.⁵⁸ The text uses synonyms for planets "being" in a house or domicile, in an attempt at literary diversity: so the planets "dwell" or "linger" or "persist" in a place. This language is not totally foreign to the rest of the *JN*, but it is notably concentrated there.⁵⁹ These facts should convince us that Heller was not simply working with two versions of John's translation (one being more complete than the other), but rather used Plato of Tivoli to supplement John. Thus, Heller's copy of John of Seville's translation had *already* included material from Māshā'allāh (Chs. 39-45), to which Heller added even more (Chs. 47-50), believing that all of it was definitely or probably by Abū 'Alī.

Since *JN* has a core apparently by Abū 'Alī, bookended by chapters which follow pieces by Māshā'allāh very closely, there are several possibilities for understanding what *JN* really is:

1. None of the smaller works (like *Nativities*) is by Māshā'allāh at all: it is all by Abū 'Alī, accidentally mislabeled throughout the manuscript tradition but fortuitously preserved and put together by medieval translators and Heller. To me this is the least likely scenario.
2. Abū 'Alī copied the first and last parts of *JN* from Māshā'allāh as suggested; while the core is really more like crib notes or a short textbook based on *BA*, *TBN*, and other works. For this to be true, we would have to accept that Māshā'allāh always meant to end *Nativities* when he did, in what seems to be the middle of the prosperity and wealth discussion. This seems odd to me, but then again *Nativ-*

⁵⁸ Latin spelling: *horoscopus*.

⁵⁹ One exception is Ch. 34, which uses the distinctly Hellenistic phrase "star of" Mars for Mars, and then uses the Latin for *bōroskopos*. This chapter is on the native's "boldness and strength," and while Abū Bakr mentions it in his book, it is not a standard topic in traditional delineation, and not what one would expect to find a whole chapter on. Thus it might have been inserted from somewhere else (though by whom and when, is unknown).

ities might always have been intended to be only a short summary of life and character as a whole, not a complete guide to nativities.⁶⁰

3. The most radical possibility from my point of view is that *all* of *JN*'s core is really Abū 'Alī's own copy of a lost work by Māshā'allāh, of which *Nativities* is the first and only surviving part. In that case, Māshā'allāh is ultimately responsible for all of the material, and *JN* represents a handy guide and textbook which Abū 'Alī copied from his teacher for his own use.

One serious problem with the third possibility is that the organization of each topic in *JN* differs greatly from that found in *BA*. Recall that in *BA*, Māshā'allāh obsessively provided two layers of content guides for each topic:⁶¹ an opening list of questions for the topic, another list detailing the items to be examined for each question, and then chapters explaining each item on the second list. Moreover, Māshā'allāh or perhaps Buzurjmīhr had gone through a lot of trouble to separate and organize *individual sentences* from throughout the first few books of the Pahlavi *Carmen* in order to achieve that result. It does not make sense to me that Māshā'allāh would have rejected this organization in favor of what we find in the core of *JN*.

Therefore I favor the second explanation, and my current view is as follows. Separately from *BA*, Māshā'allāh wrote a short piece devoted to a general view of the native's life and character, which we know as *Nativities*. It was based on, but not a copy of, material he had already found in his sources for *BA*, along with other things (such as the delineations of Mercury and the Lord of the Ascendant). Then, again separately from *BA*, he also wrote handy sets of cookbook-style delineations, which we know as *Twelve Dom.* and *On Sig. Planet.*

But after writing *BA*, Māshā'allāh probably wrote a short text devoted to topical delineations (or he lectured based on his own notes). This text, or more likely notes, would also have been based in part on discussions already taking place among his Persian contemporaries, or as he found them in the earlier commentaries of Buzurjmīhr and others. For example, these discussions or commentaries would have included ideas about delineating a native's

⁶⁰ If so, then *Nativities* represents Māshā'allāh's own summary of more complicated material found in *BA*, along with his own summary of some delineations for character. That would help to explain why the longevity material in *Nativities* is similar to but not as complicated as that in *BA*.

⁶¹ See §2 above.

faith, or one's relation to livestock, and how to delineate friendship using the 11th house (which *BA* does not). Moreover, since the Sassanians or early Arabic-period astrologers lacked Hellenistic precedents for some of these topics and approaches, they borrowed and adapted from one of the two Sassanian contributions to astrology: horary.⁶² Thus the treatments of religion, friendship, enemies, and part of eminence⁶³ in *JN* have a horary-type feel to them insofar as they emphasize the relationships and conditions of domicile Lords, downplay the use of a natural significator, and look at planets in the stakes or angles of the relevant houses.

If I am right, then the core of *JN* contains Abū 'Alī's cleaned-up lecture notes, bookended by actual works and lists by Māshā'allāh himself. As a handy manual for the working astrologer, *JN* omits many details in favor of a general approach. For instance, it does not define basic terms, because they have already been learned. It instructs the reader to look at fixed stars for delineating eminence and prosperity, but unlike *BA* it does not list (much less describe) all 27 of them. It takes other shortcuts as well, such as not offering any Lot calculations. It omits other Lots altogether.

This possibility also helps explain why *JN* has lost much of the longevity material from Valens and the Sassanian commentaries (which *BA* contains), in favor of a simplified hybrid of Ptolemaic and Dorothean approaches. It has lost much of its connection to Rhetorius and Māshā'allāh's own, more complete edition of *Carmen*. What it also lacks (which we have in a separate Latin translation by Plato of Tivoli) is a text on annual predictions parallel to *BA* IV: I hope to remedy this and make it available in the future.

Two other features of *JN* deserve mention: first, the use of the term *mubtazz* (often called an *almuten*); second, its method. As I state below in my description of the *mubtazz* (§9), *BA* does not use this term or its equivalent at all, and *JN* only uses it three times, and never to indicate a weighted *mubtazz* (where each dignity is awarded a different number of points). In those three places, *JN* is rather ambiguous as to its determination, while a reference to the planet with "more votes of dignities" (Ch. 22) suggests at most a single-point *mubtazz* (where each dignity receives one point). Thus, however later astrologers may have used it in other works, *BA* and *JN* cannot be used as sources for any clear notion of a weighted *mubtazz*, and the use of a single-

⁶² The other contribution is the collection of mundane techniques, particularly the cycles of Saturn-Jupiter conjunctions. There may have been an Indian precedent for horary as well.

⁶³ From Ch. 31 to the first paragraph of Ch. 32.

count *mubtazz* in *JN* is very general and unemphasized. In stark contrast to this stands 'Umar, who relies on a *mubtazz* throughout *TBN*, and seems to draw on Ptolemy's single-count version system at the end of *Tet.* III.4.

Second, there is the question of Abū 'Ali's method, which also begins to touch on the question of why a new translation is needed now. In the Preface to his 1546 edition of *JN*, and translated in Holden's edition, Heller states inaccurately that Abū 'Ali's method is that of "the rest of" the Arabs, Indians, and Persians: namely, that he first looks at "the cusp of the particular house" for a given matter, along with planets on or aspecting the cusp. This is wrong on two counts. First of all, the Arabs, Indians and Persians did not all use the same approach; second, Abū 'Ali never uses the word "cusp" or its equivalent to denote intermediate cusps in a quadrant-style house system. He refers to the axial degrees (such as the Ascendant or the Mid-heaven), but so do all other astrologers, including those who never or only ambiguously refer to intermediate cusps. In one place he does refer to the IC as the "house of fathers." But since antiquity, Hellenistic astrologers had recognized that the degrees of the MC and IC had something to do with the profession and parents; and they also designated the tenth and fourth *signs* as meaning the same thing. So there is nothing conclusive about Abū 'Ali's text all by itself which could indicate the use of *any* quadrant-style house system, even that of Equal Houses.⁶⁴

Following are the items Abū 'Ali himself describes as comprising his own general method (where he does not simply copy the approaches in *BA*):⁶⁵

⁶⁴ *JN* does mention a Lot of Death. This is probably *BA*'s Lot of Death, which uses the "degree of the eighth." But this phrase could equally refer to the first degree of the eighth sign, since Hugo's text also refers to the "degree of the [ninth] house" for the Lot of Travel, but the corresponding passage in Sahl simply says "the ninth place." In Hellenistic and Sassanian practice, transits to places could be activated as soon as the transiting planet entered the first degree of the sign; likewise, primary directions to planets in bounds could be activated as soon as the direction entered the bound, and not only when arriving at the planet itself (see below III.1.8, and *Anth.* III.5 p. 48). So it is equally possible that the Lot of Death is measured using the first degree of the eighth sign.

⁶⁵ *JN* Ch. 38.

- House: planets in it and in its stakes.⁶⁶
- Lord of house: condition, place and aspects.
- Relevant Lot: its place.
- Lord of Lot: place, aspects.
- Significators (I take this to mean the general significators, such as Venus for marriage): their condition.
- If the “majority” of these do not agree in meaning, then Abū ’Alī prioritizes by analyzing the one with the more “powerful” or “better” dignities, or “more testimonies of dignities.”

This brings us to the final issue: why a new translation of *JN* now? For its time, Holden’s 1988 edition (since reprinted) was groundbreaking, and he deserves credit for being among the first to realize the very existence of whole-sign houses, much less their importance. But since 1988, numerous other translations and insights into traditional astrology have made new translation standards necessary, and thus new editions of works like *JN*. In particular, two important problems in Holden’s edition stand out.

First, Holden’s translation conventions contribute to misleading statements and misunderstandings. Not only does Holden introduce misleading abbreviations and terms, but he intentionally (and sometimes unintentionally) mistranslates key words.

For example, *JN* Ch. 1 speaks of the sign of the “conjunction,” which denotes the syzygy before birth, and by itself brings to mind two planets joining: since the Sun and Moon signify male/paternal and female/maternal principles, speaking of their relationship in these terms reminds us that the child is the result of such a union.⁶⁷ But Holden substitutes “New Moon”: not only does this mistranslate the Latin, but the exclusive focus on the Moon communicates a different idea. This approach can divert us from key notions in other areas. In *Anth.* III.7, Valens introduces a Lot which was known in the medieval period as the Lot of the *Hilāj* (though the Persians calculated it slightly differently). Valens clearly states that the Lot is calculated from the prenatal conjunction to the Moon; but if the birth was preventional, we measure from the natal Moon to the *next* conjunction. If we understand the conjunction as signifying the union of male and female, then the rationale

⁶⁶ That is, the angular signs from that place. See my *Works of Sahl & Māshā’allāh*, pp. xxxviii ff.

⁶⁷ In *BA*, Hugo regularly calls the conjunction the “coming-together” (*conventus*), which again suggests the act of uniting.