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Jewish Astrology

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Jewish Astrology

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Generally, Judaism holds an exoteric stand against astrology while at the same time holding esoteric views which admit astrological influence. This is probably due to the fact that in the early centuries - from the birth of Judaism in Abraham's day - Judaism sought to separate itself from the allegedly debased idolatry and polytheism of its neighbours.

Hence we find Rabbi Johanon's famous statement "Ayn Mazzel l'Yisroel" (literally, "No Constellations for Israel") usually interpreted to mean that Israel is immune from planetary influences. This dictum is based upon Jeremiah 10:12, "Learn not the way of the nations and be not dismayed at them". The nations surrounding the Jews in the Rabbi's day (at the time of the Fall of Jerusalem and Babylonian Captivity) followed an astrological religion replete with idol worship and multiple gods and goddesses.

This attitude was repeated in Maimonides's letter to the Rabbis of Southern France. In his missive, Maimonides condemns astrology as a pseudo science which was responsible for leading the Jews in ages past into serious trouble with God and led God to destroy the Temple and exile them from Zion.

Yet the *Encyclopedia Judaica* is quick to point out (col. 793) that "Despite Maimonides' great prestige, his criticism of astrology had practically no influence on subsequent Jewish writers." "Even the rationalistic Levi ben Gershom maintained that the activities and events of a man's life were predestined by the positions and influences of the celestial bodies.

Astrologers fail, Gershom said, for two reasons: insufficient knowledge about the movements of the stars and the effects of their changed positions upon sublunary bodies and because of the intervention of Free Will and Intellect which enable us to go beyond the limitations imposed by the celestial bodies.

It was no doubt due to the fact that astrology was a universally accepted science in both the ancient and medieval worlds that so many Jewish writers did admit of its influence while scrupulously avoiding any posture which even hinted at reverence of the heavenly bodies.

The mystical dimension in Judaism - the Kabbalistic tradition - went further but does not accord a reverential attitude toward the stars. Thus, astrology as a system of nature - created by God as a means of manifesting His Will- is found in Kabbalistic literature and tradition and forms an important branch of knowledge.

It was viewed as an esoteric science which helped to explain many things but one in which the agents of astrological influence be they physical planets or angelic beings are subordinated to God's Will. It is further held (*Zohar* Pinhas 216b Raya Meheimna) that prior to the giving of the *Torah* all earthly creatures were dependent on the stars; after the revelation at Sinai, however, God exempted those of the children of Israel who studied and observed His Law from the rule of the stars whereas the ignorant and sceptical "were not absolved from the stars injunctions."

Thus we see that according to the Kabbalah, the doctrine "Ayn Mazzel l'Yisroel" does not automatically exempt all Jews from astral subjugation but only those who actively study and observe *Torah*. Those Jews who ignore the *Torah*, like all gentiles, are still enslaved by astral influence.

This attitude is supported by Scripture. Indeed, a number of biblical passages seem to accord a recognition of astrological influence while simultaneously asserting the superiority of the Divine Will; of Divine revelation as true knowing of God's Plan for Israel, to wit:

"And God said, let there be light in the firmament of the heaven to divide the day from the night; and let them be for signs, and seasons, and for days, and years." *Genesis* 1, 14:

Despite its reference to calendrical concerns, this passage could stand quite as it is for recognition of and, further, a divine recommendation for the practice of astrology.

Unlike the polytheistic astrologers who would claim that the stars are active causes which knowingly affect this world, the monotheistic astrologer could claim that the stars were not necessarily causes but - as the passage says - "signs". In this he would be in complete agreement with Plotinus who (*Enneads* translated by Stephen MacKenna, London, 1969, pp 91-105) makes precisely the same assertion. It is noteworthy that the *New Catholic Encyclopaedia* omits all reference to the *Old Testament*, where astrological references are clearer than in the New Testament. Apparently, the Church has learned from former mistakes.

In *Isaiah* 47:13, the prophet Isaiah tells of the coming destruction of Babylon and Chaldea, mocking the magicians' exhortations to avert God's Will, as well as the astrologers' lack of foreknowledge of the destruction of their city.

"Thou art wearied in the multitude of thy counsels. Let now the astrologers, the star gazers, the monthly prognosticators, stand up and save thee from these things that shall come upon thee."

Here we have a clear-cut reference to a Transcendental Deity able to alter the laws of his own Creation at will and against whom the astrologer-priests are helpless. This is a theme which is dominant in the Judeo-Christian tradition and which presents what appeared to the doctors of the Church to be the repudiation of arts such as astrology. Indeed, seen theologically, this doctrine is of prime importance in any consideration of the relationship of God and Nature. This quote is also interesting in that it puts into perspective the relationship between the study of sciences and the worship of religion.

In *Daniel* 2, chapters 1, 2 and 4, the story is told of Nebuchadnezzar's dream after he conquered Judah. The astrologers and wise men of Babylon could not interpret the dream, since the King wanted them to first tell what the dream was.

By the Grace of God, the dream was revealed to Daniel, who recounted and interpreted it to Nebuchadnezzar, thus saving the lives of the Babylonian wise men. Here we have the theme of the Omnipotent God intervening where astrologers and Magi had failed. The concept of the predictability of events (in this case, dreams), due to an understanding of natural law is relegated to an inferior position and questioned, though not denied.

Further along in Daniel, chapter 5, in the famous story of the writing on the wall, "Mene Mene Tekel Uparsin," of which none of the astrologers or wise men save Daniel could make sense, the same relegation is made. However, what we have here, actually, is not the denial of astrological validity, but a statement of the superiority of divine revelation to any effort of man's intellect to understand creation.

In *Deuteronomy* 4:19, however, we read:

"And lest thou lift up thine eyes unto heaven, and when thou seest the sun, and the moon, and the stars, even all the host of heaven shouldst be driven to worship them, and serve them, which the Lord thy God hath divided unto all Nations under the whole heaven,....."

We are not concerned with the admonition against the worship of the stars in this passage, but rather the specific statement that the nations of earth are ruled by the stars. This is a major tenet of mundane astrology, that branch of astrology which deals with the geological, meteorological and political disturbances that affect our earth. This particular statement troubled Origen later on.

In *Ecclesiastes* 3, 1-8, we have the statement:

"To everything there is a season, and a time to every purpose under the heaven:

A time to be born, and a time to die; a time to plant and a time to pluck that which is planted;

A time to kill, and a time to heal; a time to breakdown and a time to build up;

A time to weep and a time to laugh; a time to mourn, and a time to dance;

A time to cast away stones, and a time to gather stones together; a time to embrace, and a time to refrain from embracing;

A time to get and a time to lose; a time to keep, and a time

to cast away;

A time to rend, a time to sew; a time to keep silence,
and a time to speak;

A time to love, and a time to hate; a time of war and a time
of peace."

These lines have frequently been invoked by adherents of electional astrology, that branch of astrology which determines the propitious times at which to commence an enterprise, as indicating that the occurrences on earth, being ruled by their heavenly causes, can be known by man and are justified by God, who told His chosen people as much by these words. Although there is no clear reference to astrology, the concept that things have their own times in which they manifest is clearly stated.

There are quite a few apparent references to astrology in many books of the *Old Testament*, as those already given show. We cannot fail, however, to cite a famous passage in *Job* and a number of psalms. *Job* 38:31-33 has in the Revised Standard Version:

"Canst thou bind the chains of the Pleiades, or loose the
cords of Orion?

Canst thou lead forth the *Mazzaroth* in their season or can
you guide the Bear with its children?

Do you know the ordinances of the heavens?

Can you establish their rule on the earth?"

This passage clearly asserts that the stars (heavens) rule the earth and have ordinances which are known at least by God. This was a frequently met with rabbinical argument (found for instance in Maimonides' letter to the Rabbis of Southern France) that though the stars might have influence on terrestrial things, this influence was too obscure or recondite for mere men to discern.

Yet God, who knows all things, knows this too. At the same time, the esoteric tradition of *Kabbalah* holds that the Beni Navim (literally "Sons of the Prophets", i.e. those who practice the secret prophetic methods) may attain to such knowledge.

It must be pointed out that the word *Mazzaroth* left untranslated in the Revised Standard Version, as in all Christian Bibles, is a famous scribal error. The original word was *Mazzaloth* (i.e. stars or constellations). The letter "r" in *Mazzaroth* was originally an "l" or Lamed. Anyone familiar with the Hebrew alphabet will recognise that somehow the top of the letter Lamed got erased or defaced in the original, leaving what looked to the translator as a Resh or R. The resulting word, "*Mazzaroth*" does not exist in Hebrew but, because the Holy Scripture was deemed a revelation not to be altered, was left as it stood.

Psalms 19:1-6 reads:

"The heavens are telling the glory of God; and the firmament proclaims his handiwork. Day to day pours forth speech, and night to night declares knowledge. There is no speech, nor are there words; their voice is not heard; yet their voice goes through all the earth, and their words to the end of the world. In them he has set a tent for the sun, which comes forth like a bridegroom leaving his chamber, and like a strong man runs its course with joy. Its rising is from the end of the heavens, and its circuit to the end of them; and there is nothing hid from its heat."

A very eloquent declaration, this. God speaks wisdom to us through and from the heavens, i.e. the stars and celestials, yet not by audible voice. This is a clear affirmation that astrology exists.

Psalms 50:6:

"The heavens declare His righteousness, for God Himself is judge."

Psalms 76:8:

"From the heavens thou didst utter judgement..."

Psalms 89:5-11: "Let the heavens praise thy wonders, O Lord, thy faithfulness in the assembly of the holy ones! For who in the skies can be compared to the Lord? Who among the heavenly beings is like the Lord, a God feared in the councils of the holy ones, great and terrible among all that are round about him? O Lord God of Hosts, who is mighty as thou art O Lord,... the heavens are thine and the earth is thine."

Here the heavens praise God's wonders, yet it is clearly stated that God is superior to the heavens, indeed owns them. The heavens are God's tool or instrument.

Psalms 97:6:

"The heavens proclaim his righteousness and all the people behold his glory."

Yet not all know how to interpret, we must assume, recalling the challenge of *Job 38:33*:

"Do you know the ordinances of the heavens? Can you establish their rule on the earth?"

Such rule of the stars on earth is called Mundane Astrology, the oldest form of astrology. The Israelites got it from the Babylonians or preserved it from Abraham's day. Abraham was a Harranian from Ur of the Chaldees and, like his father, he undoubtedly worshipped the astral deities until his adoption of Monotheism.

In these *Old Testament* references we can see that the basis for the conflict between the Judeo-Christian tradition and the Polytheistic adherence to astrology was based on the concept of an Immanent Deity who could suspend the rules of Creation at will, if it served his purposes.

At the same time, we can see an acceptance of the intimate relationship of the stars to earth and the lives of Mankind. We have seen in *Genesis* a reference to the connection of temporal phenomena with celestial signs; in *Deuteronomy* a reference to this relationship in terms of political concerns; and in *Ecclesiastes* a reference to the principle on which Electional Astrology rests.

If *Isaiah* mocked the impotence of the astrologers in the face of the coming destruction of Babylon by God, there was still no statement that, precluding the intervention in Creation by the Creator himself, the astrologers could not ordinarily perform satisfactorily. When we look at the *Old Testament* references, we find that there is no hard and fast statement of the uselessness or inadvisability of astrology. On the contrary, except for those times in which the Deity suspended the rules, we are led to believe that though such study was not equal to revelation, as in *Daniel*, it was plausible and even advisable.

In passing, we note that Josephus (*Bellum Judaicum* V.,5,5.) tells us that the twelve loaves of bread in the temple refer to the twelve signs of the zodiac; that the Holy Living Creatures were originally Constellations and the "seven" referred to in *Zechariah* 4:10 as the eyes of the Lord are the seven planets. He further states that the twelve jewels corresponded to the twelve tribes of Israel.

Though it is tempting to accept what he says, because that would provide a handy means of showing that Christianity broke with beliefs originally held by its predecessor, we find we still must wonder whether he is referring to popular opinion or orthodoxy. Ultimately, we must tend to believe the former is the case since there is no good reason to assume the later.

Perhaps the most cogent argument that the ancient Jews endorsed astrological doctrine and incorporated it into *The Bible*, albeit under a veil, comes from Kabbalistic doctrines. According to the *Zohar*, a kabbalistic book considered by orthodox kabbalists to be the product of Simeon ben Yohai during the reign of the Emperor Antoninus, the prophets were astrologers, beginning with Abraham. When we are told in scripture that God "spoke" to the prophets, we are to understand that the prophets read the heavens astrologically.

Thus, in *Judges* 5:20, where the prophetess Deborah sings:

"From heaven fought the stars, from their courses they fought against Sisera," we are to understand that Deborah alludes to Sisera, the Canaanite commander having gone out to war against Israel at an inopportune time, "inopportune" meaning, of course, astrologically adverse for the Canaanites.

We are clearly dealing with the doctrine of astrological elections. According to the doctrine, it is immaterial whether one consciously elects the time for an event or not. The configuration of the moment is causal; not the intent or lack thereof.

Let it be noted that the Kabbalistic interpretation that the prophets were astrologers is perfectly in keeping with scripture as evidenced in the citations we have from *Psalms* and *Job*.

Encyclopaedia Judaica col. 794 , at entry *Kabbalistic Literature*, tells us "The *Sepher Yezirah* contains several astrological passages concerning such topics as the relationship of the seven Hebrew consonants that take a dagesh to the seven planets and the seven days of the week and the relationship of the twelve simple consonants with the twelve signs of the zodiac and the twelve months. The *Sefer Razi'el Ha-Malekh* (The Book of the Angel Raziel) contains a principle basis for a systematic astrology."

Artepanus, a 2nd century BC Hellenistic Jew wrote a work called *On the Jews* fragments of which are preserved by the Church Fathers. He held that the foundations of Egyptian culture were laid by the Patriarch and Prophet Abraham. When he came to Egypt, he taught the Pharaoh astrology. Jacob established the temples at Athos and Heliopolis and instituted far reaching agrarian reforms. Moses, Artapanus tells us, was Museus, teacher of Orpheus and identical with Hermes Trismegistus (Thoth, the Egyptian god of learning). No doubt Artapanus held that the idolatrous practices of the Egyptians were due to an adulteration of the pristine character of Moses/Museus's teachings.

According to the *Talmud*, Abraham and his descendants are said to have been elevated above the influences of the stars (Gen. R. 44:12. Yal., Jer.285) but on the other hand the blessing bestowed upon him in *Genesis* 24:1 is interpreted as the gift of astrology (Tosef. Kid 5:17) "Now Abraham was old, well advanced in years; and the Lord had blessed Abraham in all things."

Astrological consultation is one of the methods suggested by Jethro to Moses for governing the children of Israel (Mekh., Amelek 2). Knowledge of astrology is also attributed to Solomon (Eccl.R. 7:23 no 1).

Given this view of astral influence it is not surprising that while astrology was not invented by the Jews, nor viewed by them in the same way as their polytheistic, neighbours there was still a number of prominent Jewish astrologers who contributed significantly to the history of astrology. Among these are Messahallah and Ibn Ezra. (to research these astrologers further please return to the home page at www.new-library.com/zoller and conduct a search using the keywords search box)

Messahallah

Messahallah (c. 740-815 AD) was an Egyptian Jew who lived and worked in Basra. He practised the art in the context of the Islamic society during the Golden Age of Arabic Astrology (see *Arabic Astrology* www.new-library.com/zoller/features/).

He and the Persian Al-Naubakht were selected on account of their superior astronomical and astrological skill to elect the time for the founding of the new city of Baghdad {founded 762 AD} which the caliph Al-Mansur intended as a kind of Moslem Rome: The centre-piece of Islamic High Culture.

Messahallah wrote the first treatise on the astrolabe in Arabic. This work was later translated into Latin as *De astrolabii compositione et utilitate* and formed the basis for Geoffrey Chaucer's *Treatise On the Astrolabe*.

Messahallah's works specific to astrology are:

On Conjunctions, Religions And Peoples : deals with Mundane Astrology. This work does not survive intact but is preserved in works of the Christian astrologer Ibn Hibinta (c 900-950 AD).

Messahallah quotes Hermes. His astrology is wholly traditional and not scientific in the sense we use the term today. For instance, his work bears little similarity to that of the Persian Al-Biruni whose material is pleasing to those trained in Greek logic. Moreover, Al-Biruni's pedagogical approach is systematic as he gives a thorough outline of mathematics necessary for practising astronomy and astrology. Messahallah, like most medieval astrological authors, starts by discussing the practical facts of astrological procedure. He does not provide the reader with any theory of astrology as Ptolemy does in *Tetrabiblos*. (for fuller discussion see *Arabic Astrology* www.new-library.com/zoller/features)

Messahallah's *On Conjunctions* shows how the medieval astrologer used the conjunctions of Jupiter and Saturn in connection with known chronologies. Messahallah uses the Persian calendar of 12,000 years in connection with Judeo-Christian-Moslem dates. For locating such things as the Flood, the birth of Jesus, the rise of Islam, and the rise of the Abbassid Empire.

This work seems to have influenced Roger Bacon who was moved to write a similar work in the 13th century to prove that the Empire of the Moslems was that of Anti-Christ and to show that it would soon give way to the Messianic Era when Christianity would prevail.

Messahallah finds the years of these scriptural events by means of the Jewish and Christian calendars; then relates them to the corresponding millennium of the Persian calendar. In this he seems to follow the same concept expressed later in Abu Ma'shar's *Thousands* in which each millennium is allotted rule by one of the seven planets. He then reckons the conjunction of Jupiter and Saturn which preceded the event and relates that conjunction to the preceding Mutation conjunction in which a series of such Jupiter Saturn conjunctions shifts from one triplicity to the next (in 240 years).

These "shifts" as Pingree and Kennedy (authors of *The Astrological History of Masha'Allah*, Cambridge, 1971) call them were considered to indicate the far reaching changes in terrestrial affairs. The Jupiter/Saturn conjunctions were regarded by the ancients as the indicator of God's Will. By the astrological analysis of the zodiacal location as well as the region of the sky in which these conjunctions took place the course of history could be foretold and the rise and fall of nations, religious sects and kingdoms.

The 240 year cycle (which is actually an approximate cycle varying from 238- 258 years more or less) was called the Mean Conjunction and was part of a larger cycle, called the Great Conjunction in which the Jupiter -Saturn conjunction returned to its original position in the zodiac at about the same day of the year: a cycle requiring approximately 960 years or, roughly, 1000 years. This no doubt suggested the millennium used by both Messahallah and Abu Ma'shar to describe the effects of the Great Conjunctions.

At the other end of the scheme of the conjunctions, we have the Minor Conjunction of Jupiter and Saturn every 19 years 11 days or approximately every 20 years.

Once Messahallah found the Mutation Conjunction which signifies an event (e.g. the Flood when the conjunction took place in Scorpio, discussed on pp 40-41 in Pingree and Kennedy), he looks for the Ingress of the Sun into Aries for that year. He then analyses the figure to show how it signifies the event in question.

He gives rules for determining if the sought for (he says "promised") effects will be in the period of that 20 year conjunction or the next. In the case of the conjunction in Scorpio the ascendant of the Ingress figure was in Sagittarius which, being a double bodied sign, meant that its effects would be in the second conjunction - in Cancer. He gives the figure for the Ingress in which it occurred.

His analysis of the figure depends upon finding what house the conjunction falls in, the nature of the sign in which the Almutem (or ruler of the conjunction) falls, how many planets are retrograde and where. In the case of the Deluge figure, he says that because three planets are retrograde in a human sign and above the earth, there will be great mortality of humans. As the figure is nocturnal, the moon is ruler of time and since it is not wholly afflicted, being in the sixth House in Taurus, the world will not be wholly destroyed. He makes a great deal of the triplicity of the Sun - in his second horoscope (the year of the Deluge).

He uses Dorotheus's Triplicity Rulers:

	Diurnal	Nocturnal
Fire	Sun, Jupiter, Saturn	Jupiter, Sun, Saturn
Earth	Venus, Moon, Mars	Moon, Venus, Mars
Air	Saturn, Mercury, Jupiter	Mercury, Saturn, Jupiter
Water	Venus, Mars, Moon	Mars, Venus, Moon

(for fuller discussion of the methods of Dorotheus see *Arabic Astrology* and the Diploma Course in Medieval Astrology) *Liber Messahallae De Revolutione Annorum Mundi* (a work on Ingresses) ed. Heller (Noribergae 1549)

De Rebus Eclipsium Et De Conjunctionibus Planetarum In Revolutionibus Annorum Mundi (a work on eclipses) translated into Latin by Pruckner in *Iulii Firmici Materni Astronomicon Libri VIII*, Basileae 1551 pp115-118, as *Messahallach De Ratione Circuli Et Stellarum Et Qualiter Operantur In Hoc Seculo*.

Kitab Al-Mawalid (a work on Nativities) which is partially translated into English (from a Latin translation of the Arabic) in *Abu Ali Al-Khayyat; The Judgements Of Nativities* James H.Holden MA AFA 1988. A fuller version is given in Pingree and Kennedy's *The Astrological History Of Masha'allah* Cambridge, 1971 as Appendix 3, but it is in Latin. The sole Arabic manuscript of this original is, in Pingree's opinion, *Hamidiye 856*. Pingree's version is longer than which Holden gives. Holden gives the first five pages only. In addition Pingree gives 12 horoscopes from Masha'allah's work.

His version discusses the following :

Chapter One : deals with the question of whether the child will survive long enough to be weaned or not. In Messahallah's day infant mortality was common and the astrologer had to be cautious upon the birth of a child not to blandly predict a long eventful life for a child who might not survive infancy. This consideration shows up in Bonatti's *Liber Astronomia* as the Four *Differentia* of Births. Messahallah was one of Bonatti's sources. We see here some of the raw material that Bonatti used.

We are told to look at the Ascendant from the lords of triplicity {Dorotheus's triplicity rulers}. We are also supposed to look at the lords of the Sun's triplicity in diurnal figures and the Moon's in nocturnal figures. As well as the lords of the New or Full Moon depending on whether the figure is conjunctional or preventional. If the figure is conjunctional or preventional, look to the lords of triplicity of Venus and Jupiter. If the figure is diurnal, look at the diurnal planets; if nocturnal, the nocturnal planets. Unfortunately, he does not enlighten us as to exactly what he means by diurnal and nocturnal planets.

He gives many other rules relating to how we should investigate the lords of the triplicities and then discusses special cases. He has a paragraph in this chapter discussing when the infant will die if it is determined that he will die.

He then discusses the Almutem briefly. He evidently expects the reader to know how to find it and how to use it. A time measure is given for using the Almutem as indicator of length of life.

Chapter Two: continues the question of longevity from consideration of the Hyleg.

Chapter Three: treats of the longevity question from the Alcocoden defined in the first paragraph as the Almutem of the place of the Hyleg. The Alcocoden is a planet used to indicate the length of life. (those wishing to study this rather complex issue should return to www.new-library.com/zoller homepage and search Alcocoden and Almuten in the keywords search box for full references or study the Diploma Course) Different authors had slightly different approaches. For a full discussion of the Alcocoden reference may be made to the Diploma Course. Also, passing it should be noted that the Alcocoden doctrine came under fire during the Renaissance ,especially from Pico della Mirandola as false and as one of many misleading Arab accretions which corrupted the (in his opinion) pristine nature of Greek Astrology.

Chapter Four: continues the consideration of the Alcocoden.

Chapter Five: deals with the will of the native. Today we might consider this Psychological Astrology. It is a form of character analysis.

The ruler of the Ascendant and Mercury are inspected in order to know if the native will speak well, have wisdom, or be irascible.

The nature of the planets involved and their zodiacal state tell the astrologer the nature of the native's mind and his behaviour. The Terms are used to judge the strength or debility of these characteristics. Zodiacal state is considered after the author has set forth the basics of interpretation - almost as special cases.

Chapter six: on knowing the fortunate and unfortunate things of the native - is the largest section of the work as presented in Pingree. This is where the 12 horoscopes are to be found. The direction is given "Look to the lords of the triplicity of the luminaries according to what is appropriate: the diurnal rulers of the Sun if the figure is diurnal and the nocturnal of the Moon if it is nocturnal. If they are in angles and free from the malefics it indicates good fortune for the native all the days of his life."

Various rules are given for judging the well being or poverty of the native. Among them, "And if the *pars fortunae* and its lord are in an angle, namely the eastern, and they aspect the Ascendant (sic), they indicate that he will be very wealthy; but if they are cadent and with malefics, it shows that he will have detriment and more so unless the lords of the triplicity of the Ascendant aspect the Ascendant {*et magis nisi aspexerint ascendens domini triplicitatis ascendentis*}. The 12 horoscopes show poverty, wealth, acquisition of kingship, honour, misery, mendacity, stupidity, evil, prosperity, an evil life and loss, success at mid-life.

Ibn Ezra

Abraham Ibn Ezra (1089-1164) was a poet, grammarian, biblical commentator, philosopher, physician, astronomer, and astrologer. He was born at Toledo, Spain. He travelled widely: as far north as England; as far east as Egypt.

His astrological works (written in 1146; revised in 1148) are as follows:

The Beginning Of Wisdom

The Book Of Reasons

Messahallah's Book Of Astrological Questions (translated from the Arabic into Hebrew)

Messahallah's Book On Eclipses Of The Sun And The Moon (translation from the Arabic into Hebrew)

The Book Of The Consultations

The Book Of Lights

In addition his Hebrew translations of three of Alkindi's works are important because the Arabic originals are lost:

On Rains

On Nativities

On Rain: the Sufficient Treatise.

He also wrote a note to Kalonymus's Hebrew translation of the *Centiloquium* of Ptolemy as well as a treatise on the astrolabe.

It was though Ibn Ezra's *Beginning Of Wisdom* that had the most impact on the Western Astrology . This work was translated by Hagin (known as Hagin the Jew (circa 1273) into Old French. From the Old French it was translated into Latin by Henry Bate 1281, and 1292; by Peter of Abano 1293; and by Arnoul de Quinquempoix (circa 1326).

From the Hebrew original comes a Catalan translation of unknown date. From the Catalan comes another a Latin translation by Louis de Angulo in 1448. It is also important to note that Ibn Ezra was also one of Guido Bonatti's sources in *Liber Astronomiae* (circa 1282).

Analysis of Ibn Ezra's *Beginning of Wisdom*.

The book is divided into 10 chapters:

1. The form of the firmament, its parts, signs, figures, and the seven planets and their ascent, power and rotations.
2. The influence of the signs, ascent, action, conjunction of the stars and their forms.
3. Aspects of the degrees. The influence of the quarters of the sphere and the 12 hours.
4. Conjunction of the seven planets and their influence.
5. The increase and decrease of the influences of the planets.
6. The influences of the planets according to their position before or after the sun.
7. Aspects of the planets, conjunctions, application, separation, their rule over the things subject to them.
8. Decision of the planets with regard to the questions, horoscopes, and revolutions.
9. Parts of the planets, parts of the houses and other parts (these being the Arabic Parts)

10. On the radiation of light of the seven planets, the path of their course, their movement through the degrees of the sphere and everything pertaining to them. (He includes a list of medieval directions here).

Analysis in Detail

Chapter One: Ibn Ezra counts 1022 fixed stars in 6 magnitudes. He gives the primitive qualities hot, cold, wet, dry associated with each of the signs of the zodiac and with each of the seven planets. He identifies the Sun and Moon as diurnal, nocturnal, male and female respectively. He indicates (p.155) that the nature of each planet varies according to how far it is from the Sun and how far they both are from the Earth. His astronomy is of-course geocentric.

He gives a pointing system for determining the strength of planets by position in the circle as follows:

House **	=5
Honour (Exaltation)	=4
Triplicity	=3
Limit (Term)	=2
Face (Decan)	=1

His astrological knowledge is not Jewish in origin. He says "I shall mention in this book all that is in accord with the ancient Babylonians and wise men of Persia, India and Greece whose chief is Ptolemy....."

Chapter Two: In keeping with the Arabic practice which placed the Ascendant or East at the top of the figure, Ibn Ezra describes the 12 signs of the zodiac as 6 on either side of a vertical line with Aries to Virgo on one side and Libra to Pisces on the other.

He describes the influences of the signs and gives the weather associated with each of them. He gives an iconographic representation with each sign & decan, in keeping with the Sabian (originally idolatrous) practice. He gives the countries associated to each sign but mentions the part of the sign without telling us how to find it e.g. "According to Ptolemy, in its Aries part there are houses of worship and justice." He also gives Hebrew letter attributions seemingly from *Sepher Yezirah* (though not actually). He gives the years of the signs, the months of each sign, the days of the sign and hours of the sign. None of these are used in contemporary practice.

He then gives images of the decans of signs. Here again we see non-Jewish, Sabian influences at work. These images were used as mnemonic and talismanic figures. He gives two traditions of these. One is Indian; the other is Ptolemy's (he says) but it is not in the *Tetrabiblos*. According to Ptolemy, the third decan of Aries is said to rise as "the bearer of Satan's head."

He gives illnesses associated with the signs and the dignities of planets therein. Then he gives the "Babylonian" Terms and two systems of decan rulership. The first is what we know as that of Teukros the Babylonian (Mars rules the first decan of Aries and the last of Pisces. The order in Aries is: Mars, Sun, and Venus. The second is what we know as the Hindu system: Aries has Mars as the ruler of its first decan, Sun as ruler of its second and Jupiter as its third. These two competing systems of rulership have had their advocates from Ibn Ezra's day at least.

He speaks of the division of the signs into ninths which he calls novenas - we would use the Hindu term Nawamsas. Next he mentions twelfths = duodecimae or dwadasamsas.

He completes with an analysis of the degrees in each sign. Some are dark, void, male, female, etc. He has obscure dignities too - e.g. the "aras" of the signs: These are the 6,11,17, and 23 degrees.

He also discusses the extra-zodiacal constellations and the fixed stars in each of the signs.

Chapter Three: deals with the aspects of the degrees and their friendship, animosity, and the division of twelve and its prognostics. This is primarily a discussion of the meanings of the Houses.

Chapter Four: along with other writers following the Arabic tradition he places importance on whether the figure is diurnal or nocturnal. He gives the part of the body which every planet rules and the letter of the Hebrew Alphabet associated with each planet.

Chapter Five: gives eleven situations in which the Moon is afflicted:

1. During an eclipse of Sun or Moon.
2. When Combust (within 12 degrees of the Sun).
3. When the Moon is separating from the Sun diametrically by the same number of degrees either in front of an opposition or behind it.
4. When in conjunction with or in aspect to the detrimental elements.
5. When in the 12th sign from Saturn or Mars.
6. Within 12 degrees of the Head or Tail of the dragon.
7. When in the south or declining in it. {declination?}
8. When *Via combusta*.
9. When in the end of a Sign
10. When slow in motion.
11. When in the 9th House

Chapter Six : is a discussion of the seven planets independently and in respect to the Sun. The independent considerations emphasise astronomical considerations viewed from the point of view of Geocentric Ptolemaic Astronomy.

A planet is held to have varying effects when in various places in its epicycle, at perihelion, 90 degrees from aphelion, or nadir in its epicycle etc. These are considerations which are ignored today because we now use Heliocentric Astronomy. Yet I know of no more comprehensive discussion of the astrological implications of these geocentric positions than in this chapter.

Ibn Ezra is relying, I think, on Ptolemy's *Almagest*. Dee, in his *Propaedeumata Aphoristica* {translated as *John Dee On Astronomy*, by Shumaker and Heilbron, University of California Press, Berkeley, 1978} also makes mention of the same considerations. He is not as thorough as Ibn Ezra and, of course, one wonders if Dee was following him.

Chapter Seven : gives thirty criteria for judging the planets as : application, conjunction, fusion, aspect, separation, isolation, feral position, displacement, union, return of brilliancy, communication of ascendancy, communication of influence, communication of ones nature, communication of two natures, directness, obliquity, prohibition, improvement, deterioration, interference, accident, ruin, distribution of brilliancy, pleasantness, recompense, reception, liberality, similarity, mediation and dignity of the planet.

Chapter Eight : lists 120 considerations {like Bonatti}.

Chapter Nine : lists 97 fates of planets and houses.

Chapter Ten : On Directions and deals with the:
three levels of Jupiter and Saturn Conjunctions
the Firdaria
Secondary Progression
Profection
Symbolic "Directions" of degrees of the elliptical degrees at the rates of 1 degrees per 1000 years, one degree per 100 years, one degree per 10 years.

Concluding note on Ibn Ezra and Messahallah

While the astrology of both Messahallah and Ibn Ezra derive from contemporary Arabic Astrology we do not find in their works the presence of Greek Philosophy - i.e. Aristotle - which characterises the works of Abu Ma 'shar.

It is therefore apparent that the movement which Abu Ma'shar started - of the fusion of Greek Science, with Mesopotamian Astrology - a movement which European scholars of the 12th century found so exciting and which powerfully influenced Western Christendom -was apparently not of interest to the Jewish astrologers of the same period.

Instead Jewish Astrology seems to maintain an older, non-Aristotelian astrology based upon a Persian, and Chaldean sources citing Indian and Egyptian wise men. They are influenced by the Hellenistic sources, e.g. Ptolemy and Hermes - but not by Greek Philosophy. The reason for this lies no doubt in their seeing their Jewish religion as sufficient for explaining the central mysteries of life and astrology as a useful tool elucidating God's work in this world.

They are of interest to **the historian of astrology** as their works are quoted by Western authors, relied upon by practical methodologists and one means whereby astrology was reintroduced into Europe in the 12th century.

For **the practising astrologer**, their methods are of interest where prediction of events rather than psychological delineation is emphasised.

Messahallah's work on conjunctions is illustrative of the probable method of the Magi, for instance, in "Following the star" to Christ's birthplace. Indeed, the method still has relevance in connection with world events.

Ibn Ezra's *Beginning Of Wisdom* shows that nawamsas and duadasamsas (or "harmonic figures") as well as parts (or "planetary pictures") were already used in the Middle Ages. The modern "invention" of these techniques is merely a rediscovery of ancient techniques.

As regards the question of Judaism and astrology we have seen that the attitude of Judaism toward astrology is more liberal than that of Christianity.

Orthodox Christian dogma is unalterably opposed to astrology in spite of the fact that, historically there have been numerous Christian astrologers, many of them prelates including Popes. The Christian point of view carries in it a latent Manicheanism which implies that even if astrological influence is part of the warp and woof of the material world it is part of the spiritual bondage to this world which Paul tells us we must fight against (*Ephesians* 6:12).

The exoteric Jewish point of view is that conformity to the Law is more important than one's beliefs. The Rosh Chodesh service is itself a thinly veiled example of Lunar ceremonial magic in which the Lord's blessing is called down on the Moon for protection of the congregation. Thus what makes this service acceptable to Judaism and not an example of idolatry is the fact that it is not the Moon which is worshipped but God. Yet the Moon is allotted a role in the dispensing of God's grace. In Christianity there is nothing analogous to this. The entire cosmos has been exorcised from the divine economy.

Judaism represents an older point of view less opposed to a cosmic role in the distribution of God's Glory. This distinction is important in appraising the relation of two major world religions to astrology and pertinent to analysing what role that a Jew, especially a religious teacher such as Ibn Ezra could play in respect to astrology.

Astrology was never been accorded official sanction. Its practitioners, even the Popes, were, to a greater or lesser degree always pursuing a questionable and possibly heretical Art. Astrology was condemned repeatedly by ecclesiastical authorities in the 13th century. In Judaism the attitude varied at different times and in the opinions of various Rabbis. Nevertheless, even when it was condemned, as for instance, by Maimonides, the condemnation never had the absolute force that it had with the Catholic Church.

The subject was never closed in Judaism. Debate was possible. Perhaps this was due to the Diaspora itself which meant that Jews were scattered across several continents and living in many cultures. This cosmopolitan nature of Jewish life meant that what was condemned in Spain might be permitted in Morocco or Palestine.

What was valuable knowledge in Islamic lands was regarded as Satanic in Christian lands. Jews lived in both areas and the Jewish mercantile network meant that news of advanced Islamic science would become known to Jews in Spain. Thus, an intellectual ferment was bound to occur which would entail the transmission of ideas - astrology included.

Thus, Jews tended to have a more open attitude than the Christians, toward astrology. To Christians, astrology was witchcraft. Jews viewed astrology as a secular science. Just as modern Jews can be scientists, so to could Medieval Jews be astrologers.

For Messahallah and for Ibn Ezra astrology was not a substitute for their religion. It was not an "alternative religion". It was a secular tool devoid of spiritual content unless used in an idolatrous fashion in which case they would have repudiated it. Alternatively, it could be viewed as a declaration of the greatness of God's wisdom - as stated in *Psalms* 19:1-6 and seen as a confirmation of God's active role in this world. In this case, one could be a Jew and an Astrologer and in no way engage in reprehensible activities.

SPECIAL NOTE: digital copies of many of the original texts referred to in the main body of this Study may be obtained by application to the New Library archivist:

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