



Astrology in the Arab-Muslim world

Concerning the practice of astrology, I receive many worried inquiries about its legitimacy in Islam. One of the first reactions that a Muslim should have when questioning is to remember the many prophetic words that state the obligation to seek science, "from the cradle to the grave" and even "whether in China."

This means that according to Islam, one should not judge on prejudices even if sometimes they seem to be suggested by so-called theologians who themselves have not done any research on this subject. Indeed, what can we say if some are based on a fear, itself produced by ignorance presented - abusively - as a fear of God. Reverential fear based on a science of the Majesty should not be confused with fear of the darkness.

Let us look at what history says and note that astrology is very old. It was relayed in the West by the Greeks, including Ptolemy in 140 AD, but it has also existed for 6000 years in India and also among the Sumerians for thousands of years. At the time of the Roman Empire it began to disappear from European thought, but it is thanks to the Arab-Muslim civilization that it reappeared in Europe in the 9th century.

The Muslims, in fact, following the advice of the Prophet of Islam, began from the beginning of the seventh century to seek science. They integrated very quickly the Greek data including that of astrology and the whole Aristotelian system by adapting it and integrating it into the global and synthetic vision of Islam. It is important to understand that the spirit of Islam is not exclusion but rather "integration and assimilation" and that is why the word Qur'an means "Synthesis that encompasses everything that has existed."

Knowledge is therefore not the enemy of faith (as it may have appeared in the theology of Christianity at the same time) especially if this knowledge allows one to understand the laws of the universe of which God is the creator. Thus, in the first Islamic universities, the Islamic sciences were divided into two parts: Islamic law, theology, grammar, etc., and foreign sciences, geometry, arithmetic, philosophy, astronomy, alchemy and astrology.



It is worth noting that the first major Islamic university was founded and directed by Imam Jaffar Sadiq, the great-grandson of Imam Hussein, who was himself a grandson of the Prophet. Jaffar Sadiq was the teacher of many scholars including the famous founders of legal schools Malik and Abu Hanifa who both acknowledged to be his disciples unequivocally.

In this university, Alchemy was taught where one of Jaffar's students, remains one of the greatest alchemists in history: Jabir Ibn hayyan (see on this subject my book : *La chevalerie spirituelle par l'alchimie des lettres sacrées*, Dervy).

Concerning astrology, Imam Jaffar Sadiq declared: "Only one family among the Arabs (*Ahl Al bayt min Al 'arab*, i.e. the family of the Prophet, the Imams), and one family from India (*ahl Al bayt min Al Hind*) hold the Science of astrology" (*Al kulayni, Al Rawda*, II 167), indicating that the complete knowledge of astrology is in the hands of the Imam of the time, he is the holder par excellence and disseminates it to his invested followers according to a precise suitability and measure.

To better understand this Islamic vision of astrology, we must quote the verse of the Qur'an, (36-12) which says: "*kullu Shayn ahsaynahu fi Imam mubin*", "all things are inscribed in a clear and evident prototype". This prototype, the source of all things, is the Qur'an and it is also the one who realizes it, the Prophet and his spiritual heirs. We are talking about the Universal Man who contains the creation. It is not a question of saying that the planets influence man but rather of recognizing that the planets are the external reflection of the inner world of man.

This point is important to meditate on: man, made in the image of God, according to the hadith, contains within him the universe and it is within him that he can discover the signs of creation. Astrology is therefore a science that allows us to distinguish, to "read" our inner world whose reflection is in the signs of creation. This is confirmed by the Koranic verse: "We will show you our signs in the horizons and in yourself...".

This vision is also supported by René Guénon, Sheikh Abdel Wâhid Yahya, a true authority on traditional science for our time. He reports :



"... Astrology, another cosmological science, is in reality something quite different from the "divinatory art" or the "conjectural science" that only moderns want to see in it; it refers above all to the knowledge of the "cyclic laws", which plays an important role in all traditional doctrines. There is, moreover, a certain correspondence between all these sciences which, because they proceed essentially from the same principles, are, from a certain point of view, like different representations of one and the same thing: Thus, astrology, alchemy and even the science of letters do nothing but translate the same truths into the languages proper to different orders of reality, united between them by the law of universal analogy, foundation of all symbolic correspondence; and, by virtue of this same analogy, these sciences find, by an appropriate transposition, their application in the field of the "microcosm" as well as in that of the "macrocosm", because the initiatory process reproduces, in all its phases, the cosmological process itself" (*Aperçus sur l'ésotérisme islamique et le taoïsme*, p°25).

This last point is fundamental for us, hence our insistence.

By virtue of this universal analogy, the "macrocosm" is taken as a support as a reflection of the "microcosm" and thus allows us to lay a foundation towards a quest for our inner being according to the well-known prophetic injunction: "*Man 'arafa nafsahu fa qad 'arafa rabbahu*, He who knows his soul knows his Lord".

The search for science, always according to the prophetic order, explains why it is easy to find in reliable historical data how for example at the court of Baghdad at the time of Haroun Ar Rashid (at the time of Charlemagne) and especially at the time of his son the Caliph Al-Mamoun in the ninth century, existed "the house of science", *bayt al-hikma*, whose first director wrote works on astrology. Let us also not forget that at that time the same Caliph gave his daughter to the greatest scholar of that time, Imam Ali Redha, the grandson of the famous Jaffar Sadiq. At that time, there were still many debates on these subjects studied by the Muslim scholars. In this context, astrology was omnipresent. Therefore, how can we say without shame that the theologians of our time who have not studied this science are more advanced than the ancients and how can we accept those who make a summary judgment of prohibition ? During this period, both the elites and the people studied astrology, and we are talking about a period of intellectual proliferation accompanied by a great development of Islam.

The Fatimid Caliph El Hakim, at the beginning of the 9th century, practiced astrology himself and in Baghdad, the doctors themselves studied astrology in order to integrate it with profit in the establishment of their diagnoses. To go further, we could read the works of Abu Ma'char



(787-886) practicing in Baghdad, or read what the philosopher al Kindi or Ali Ibn Ridwan (died in 1061) says about it. But even stronger, let's look at the opinion of one of the most famous theologians of Islam: Fakhr ad-din ar-Razi, Sunni Shafiite (disciple of a student of Ghazali) who taught precisely theology, philosophy, astronomy, medicine, died in Herat in 1210. Yet he considered astrology as a science!!! Are we just going to ignore thinkers of this level? And what about the great Sufi master Ibn Arabi of the same period, who himself wrote about astrology in relation to the divine names (see Titus Burckhardt's book on this subject) ? Ibn Arabi, moreover, wrote a letter (translated by Michel Vâlsan) to the theologian Razzi judging him worthy of opening himself to the vision through the eye of the heart to which he exhorted him. Are we to believe that today's censors have more science than these people in the era of an Islam shining with science and studies of its elites?

In order not to sink into obscurantism, we must return to the true understanding of astrology: a mirror of self-knowledge, rather than reducing it to a science of predictions and obscure fortune-telling. It is only this side of "fairground phenomena" that was rightly denounced in the course of history because it led the people towards a deviant illusion.

Let us now return to another important point : the analogical correspondence that exists between the different traditional sciences. The common point between alchemy, medicine, astrology and the science of letters is the famous notion of the four elements that are at the heart of things: Earth, Water, Fire and Air. Let us note that these four elements are also constitutive of the letters of the Arabic alphabet : each letter having a proportion well determined by the "science of the balance" about which Jabir, disciple of Imam Jaffar Sadiq, speaks. This is a sign of the closeness of the Arabic language to the original solar language (*lughâ suryaniyya*) whose characteristic is that the word designating a thing is of the same nature as the designated object. This characteristic justified the title of my book : *La chevalerie spirituelle par l'alchimie des lettres sacrées*.

Now, these four elements are multiplied by 3 tendencies of movement that can be summarized as : fixed, mutable and cardinal. The whole gives the 12 signs of the zodiac which correspond



to 12 phases of life in nature. As for the planets, they are managed by the spirits of the 7 most famous prophets of history who carry a specific wisdom and the teaching of divine names.

Moreover, what is called "the sky map" of our birth reflects the soul "contract" that we have made with our Lord *Rabb*, to go towards our life mission. This notion of celestial pact is well known in Islam. We therefore have in astrology a mirror of self-knowledge that highlights the cycles or stages of our maturation, all according to the axis of our destiny. The astrologer who helps, according to this spirit, a consultant, takes the role of a mirror by respecting the prophetic word which says: "*al mu'min mirat al mu'min*", "the believer is the mirror of the believer". There is no search for influence but just the principle of helping the other to know himself through this mirror effect. How can this search for self-knowledge with the help of such a tool be detrimental?

Nevertheless it is necessary to draw the attention of the researcher to the risks. Indeed, if I have found it fair to show the acceptable origin of astrology, it is also fair to point out that there are many deviations in the interpretations of astrologers. There is an analogy here with the science of letters which is pure in its origin but sometimes deviates. This is because we are in a period of this cyclic descent which tradition speaks of as the four ages of humanity: Gold, Silver, Bronze and Iron. We are in this Iron Age, dark and obscure, where the sacred has lost the preponderant place it had in previous eras. Today, people look to astrology for simple predictions as if they were consulting a fortune teller, and unfortunately astrologers please them. This does not mean that the quest for knowledge should stop. It is a matter of looking for the right interpreters. It is true that this is not easy because everything is mixed up, but the work is precisely to distinguish the "good grain" from the ryegrass. It is advisable to look for those who take up the traditional orientation. For a reason intended in the divine plan, science has been "dispersed", *tabdîd al 'ilm*, it is up to us to reconstitute the puzzle. It is up to you to use several books and especially to attach the branch of a particular science to the trunk of the great primordial Tradition "*dîn al Qayyim*".

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