

# INTRODUCTION TO VOLUME I

It is with great pleasure that I present two important translations of early Arabic-language natal astrology: a first-ever translation of the so-called *Book of Aristotle* (*BA*) by Māshā'allāh, and a new translation of *On the Judgments of Nativities* (*JN*), a shorter work by his student Abū 'Alī. In Volume II I will publish a new translation of *Three Books of Nativities* (*TBN*) by Māshā'allāh's colleague 'Umar al-Tabarī, the first English translation of Abū Bakr's *On Nativities*, and the first complete English translation of Abū Ma'shar's *On the Revolutions of Nativities*. I hope this exciting material will transform and enrich the practice of traditional natal astrology.

## §1: *Hugo of Santalla and the Book of Aristotle*

In 1140 or 1141, the Latin translator Hugo of Santalla sat down at his desk in northern Spain to begin work on a remarkable Arabic astrology book called the *Book of Aristotle*. Actually, the book had nothing to do with Aristotle, and Hugo did not even know who its true author was. But Hugo or his patron (Bishop Michael of Tarazona) had discovered this long and apparently important book in the deep recesses of the library in the fortress at Rueda Jalón, which had just been given up by a defeated Muslim ruler to the Christian King Alfonso VII. The text was long, complex, and claimed to be based on many famous and ancient astrological sources, including a few works by an "Aristotle."<sup>1</sup> So Hugo and Michael knew it had to be important. Little did Hugo know, however, that his translation would virtually disappear for centuries, and the chance to put medieval natal astrology on a totally different footing would be lost. For *BA* contains authentic Hellenistic<sup>2</sup> and

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<sup>1</sup> One reason for identifying Māshā'allāh as the author is that a Byzantine Greek version of its bibliography, discovered separately, explicitly credits him with the authorship.

<sup>2</sup> Currently, astrologers use this imperfect term in a somewhat wider sense than many historians do. It normally refers to Greek culture throughout the Mediterranean and Near East, especially after the conquests of Alexander (late 4<sup>th</sup> Century BC) to about the 1<sup>st</sup> Century BC. But here we mean a certain *approach* to astrology, usually written in Greek, which began during the Hellenistic period but lasted until late antiquity (whose end-point is itself indeterminate). I would say the Sassanians practiced Hellenistic astrology written in Pahlavi, but augmented and somewhat changed by their own contributions in horary and mundane astrology. Thus Ptolemy could not have practiced Sassanian astrology (since the Sassanians did not rise until the 3<sup>rd</sup> Century AD), but Sassanians practiced Hellenistic astrology.

Sassanian Persian<sup>3</sup> astrological methods which went back to the 3<sup>rd</sup> Century AD and were still being practiced in the 8<sup>th</sup>—but were hardly at all transmitted to or embraced by the medieval Latins.

Hugo was lucky in that Bishop Michael was actively interested in Arabic knowledge and was personally involved in finding, selecting, and commissioning translations for Hugo to work on. Hugo also lived at the right time and place for a Latin scholar interested in making Arabic-language sciences available. And Michael's secure and long-lasting position as a bishop in the Church (1119-51) guaranteed that someone could work for a long time at this.<sup>4</sup> There was a lot to translate, especially in the area of astronomy and astrology.

Hugo lived in an uncertain political period that turned out to be a boon to scholars eager for access to Arabic libraries. The Muslims still held onto significant portions of Spain, especially in the south; toward the north, the centuries-old Reconquista to take Spain back was being aggressively pursued. Since the fall of the Cordoban Caliphate in 1018, the area around Zaragoza had broken off and become a *taifa*, an independent Muslim state. Since 1038 it had been ruled by a new group, the Banū Hūd. But as the new regional Muslim power, the Almoravids, tried to bring the independent *taifas* under their own control, the Banū Hūd decided to ally with El Cid (from Valencia) and the Castilians against them. Ultimately the Almoravids conquered territory up to the Ebro River (on which Zaragoza stands), abutting Aragon, and defeated the Banū Hūd in 1110. The Banū Hūd and their last king, Imad al-Dawla, joined up with the Christians for support and established themselves at a town and fortress a little southwest of Zaragoza, named Rueda Jalón. In 1118 the Christians finally took Zaragoza back and established the capital of the Kingdom of Aragon there.

In 1138 Christian forces conquered the Almoravids, and Alfonso VII added the throne of Aragon to his already lengthy list of titles, including being king of Galicia, León, and Castile. Within two years Imad al-Dawla had ceded Rueda Jalón to Alfonso. The thirty-year Muslim tenure there had

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<sup>3</sup> The Sassanian Persian empire lasted from 226 AD until its overthrow by the Muslims in 651 AD.

<sup>4</sup> Some of Hugo's other translations include a version of Ptolemy's *Centiloquy*, another work of Māshā'allāh's, the book on weather prediction known as the *Liber Imbrium* of "Jafar Indus," a translation of 'Umar al-Tabarī's horary work (later incorporated into the *Book of the Three Judges* and the *Book of the Nine Judges*), a work on geomancy, and one on metaphysics and cosmology called *On the Secrets of Nature*.

ended, and Hugo and Michael traveled from Tarazona (a little northwest of Zaragoza), entering the library where *BA* lay.

Hugo would have wanted the knowledge he uncovered to be known far and wide. Unfortunately for him and all later astrologers, one thing worked against him: his writing style. Hugo was part of a new humanist movement that disdained medieval Latin style and did not care for direct, word-for-word translations from Arabic (as found in the writings of John of Seville).<sup>5</sup> Instead, Hugo affected a complicated and often irritating neo-classical style which made his writings less comprehensible to the average, moderately-educated astrologer.<sup>6</sup> Thus Hugo's works were rarely copied, not well known, and did not bequeath his Latin astrological vocabulary to later generations. Instead, most readers up through the 17<sup>th</sup> Century learned their astrology from works by John of Seville and those who copied his style. Thus even today we use John's vocabulary to speak of planetary "exaltations," instead of Hugo's "kingdoms, supremacy." We call certain planets "significators," not "leaders." We speak of a chart's "angles," not its "pivots" or "hinges." And true to John's plain style, we simply say a planet "is" in a sign, not that it "traverses" or "lingers" there. In the end, *BA* was forgotten almost as soon as it was translated, and the Arabic original was lost sometime after that. Perhaps the only reason the two remaining manuscripts<sup>7</sup> of *BA* survived was that they were both later owned by that remarkable man, John Dee: the 16<sup>th</sup> Century mathematician, original James Bond,<sup>8</sup> ceremonial magician, and astrologer to Queen Elizabeth I. Who knows what might have become of them if his library had not later been preserved?

Medieval astrology might have gone in a very different direction had Hugo only known the true identity of the author of this unusual book: it was none other than Māshā'allāh (ca. 740 – ca. 815 AD), the colleague of 'Umar al-Tabarī and contemporary of Sahl bin Bishr, all famous astrologers of the first and second generations of the Arabic astrological period (ca. 760-840 AD). Māshā'allāh and 'Umar, among others, were given the task of casting an election chart for the founding of Baghdad.<sup>9</sup> Māshā'allāh was a regularly-cited

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<sup>5</sup> Also known as John of Spain.

<sup>6</sup> Except for a few instances, I have maintained Hugo's sentence structure and wording. In Books I-II it takes more time to read, but in Books III-IV the reader should have few problems.

<sup>7</sup> Digby 159 and Savile 15, both in the Bodelian Library.

<sup>8</sup> John Dee's code name in his espionage work for Elizabeth was 007.

<sup>9</sup> Cast for approximately 2 PM on July 31, 762. See al-Bīrūnī 1983, p. 263.

authority in Arabic astrological texts, and was later one of the “judges” excerpted in a work known in the 13<sup>th</sup> Century as the *Book of the Nine Judges*—whose Latin translation bears the marks of Hugo and his colleague Hermann of Carinthia. Moreover, numerous other works by Māshā’allāh on mundane and horary astrology (though little on natal techniques) were eventually translated by John of Seville or those using his style. A large natal work known to be by Māshā’allāh would have garnered much attention and introduced more complete Hellenistic methods to medieval Latins, despite Hugo’s own Latin style.

Medieval natal astrology in Latin was changed for centuries by the neglect of *BA*. Other natal treatments took its place. A century after Hugo, the natal portions of Guido Bonatti’s 13<sup>th</sup> Century compilation, the *Book of Astronomy*, derived largely from four other sources: works by and ascribed to Ptolemy, Abū ’Alī al-Khayyāt’s *JN*, ’Umar al-Tabarī’s *TBN*, and al-Qabīsī’s short *Introduction*. But Ptolemy openly states that he does not follow certain methods of his Hellenistic contemporaries; Abū ’Alī’s work is a simplified mixture of material from Māshā’allāh and other sources, combined with a horary-style treatment of some topics; ’Umar’s book seems to be largely an economical paraphrase and adaptation of material in Dorotheus and Ptolemy.<sup>10</sup> Al-Qabīsī only summarizes some basic approaches to longevity and annual predictions. By contrast, al-Rijāl’s 11<sup>th</sup>-Century compendium does indeed follow more in the suit of *BA*, and even quotes Zaradusht (see below) in many places; but it does not seem to have been used as a primary natal text by medieval Latins, either. It was not available to the Latins until the 13<sup>th</sup> Century, and even then astrologers such as Bonatti used it more for horary technique than for nativities. If only *BA* had caught on, it could have paved the way for a wider acceptance of al-Rijāl’s natal treatment a century beforehand.

*BA*’s absence also helps explain why Sassanian-Arabic methods of annual solar revolutions, profections and directions were not very well known by astrologers such as Bonatti. For although Stephanus of Messina translated the Greek version of Abū Ma’shar’s presentation of it in 1262, it seems Bonatti had no access to this work either due to old age or expense or having fewer contacts among the Byzantines or the Sicilians. Thus Bonatti was limited to very brief summary statements about the Lord of the Year (known

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<sup>10</sup> It is possible that Abū ’Alī’s and ’Umar’s texts were originally meant to be handbooks, not complete manuals.

as the *sālkhudhāy*), the bound Lord of the directed *hīlāj* (the *jārbakhtār*), and other matters which he had to get from his Latin edition of al-Qabīsi.<sup>11</sup> We cannot say with certainty how someone like Bonatti would have approached these matters in practice, but he certainly did not have access to lore such as annual transits to Lots and such which *BA* handles at length.

So what is so important about *BA*? To begin with, it presents a complete treatment of Hellenistic astrology as commented upon and augmented by several centuries of Sassanian astrologers in the Pahlavi language. It gives calculations for Lots which Abū 'Ali omits. It reveals new material from Dorotheus that was wholly unknown until now. It makes the material of Rhetorius accessible to Western astrologers, which had not been done until recently. With this translation of Burnett's and Pingree's (hereafter, BP) 1997 critical edition, it is available again after 900 years.

## §2: *The Book of Aristotle: Sources, Significance, Structure*

*BA* is key for understanding more deeply how astrology was transmitted up to the early Arabic period (mid-late 8<sup>th</sup> Century), as well as for recovering formerly lost material. It derives from the following sources:<sup>12</sup>

- A Pahlavi edition of Valens which probably originated in the 3<sup>rd</sup> Century, later used and commented on by a Persian called Buzurjmīhr. The received view was that Buzurjmīhr had been a 6<sup>th</sup> Century minister to the Sassanian ruler Khusrau I (r. 531-579), who was known for fostering Greek and Indian scholarship in Persia (this would also have been when the classical pagan philosophers left for Persian courts after the Byzantine Emperor Justinian closed the philosophical schools in 529). But according to Pingree he was instead a certain Burjmīhr, a 6<sup>th</sup>-Century Sassanian scholar also responsible for introducing chess into Iran from India.<sup>13</sup> Regardless, his commentaries on Valens and others were pivotal for later Sassanian and early Arabic astrologers.

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<sup>11</sup> Again, Bonatti does not use this material as found in al-Rijāl: perhaps he only had certain portions of it.

<sup>12</sup> Here I draw on numerous pieces by Pingree (1963, 1977, 1989, 1997) and BP's Introduction to the critical edition of the *BA*.

<sup>13</sup> Pingree 1989 p. 231. I cannot help but point out another astrologer who is not well known but is likewise responsible for important cultural changes: Thrasyllus, the astrologer to Emperor Tiberius, was a Platonic philosopher who arranged and published the canonical collection of Platonic dialogues still in use in academia today.

- A more complete version of Dorotheus's *Carmen Astrologicum*. Although Dorotheus's poem was available in Greek until the 600s, and prose paraphrases were available to the Byzantines until the 11<sup>th</sup> Century, our longest and most complete version is based on a Pahlavi translation of the 3<sup>rd</sup> Century, put into Arabic by 'Umar al-Tabarī (this is the version published by Pingree in 1976 and available in paperback now). Māshā'allāh also translated it from Pahlavi into Arabic, but only small portions remain. *BA* contains huge amounts of material based on Māshā'allāh's copy, including passages missing in 'Umar's.
- An edition of Ptolemy's *Tetrabiblos* and the *Almagest*. Some of the material from *Tet.* is gotten indirectly through Rhetorius, with some distortions.
- An edition of or excerpts from, or a commentary on, Paul of Alexandria's 4<sup>th</sup>- or 5<sup>th</sup>-Century *Introductory Matters*. Māshā'allāh uses Paul's Lots of Male and Female Children, which differ from those in 'Umar's *Carmen* and Valens. But he may have gotten them from al-Andarzaghār's *Book of Nativities* (see below), which could have drawn on Paul.
- An edition of Rhetorius, probably in Greek (according to Pingree),<sup>14</sup> perhaps given to Māshā'allāh by Theophilus of Edessa. If Pingree's dating is correct, Rhetorius was one of the last Greek-speaking astrologers in Alexandria, before the Muslim invasions in 640 AD. He also excerpted from texts in the same collection to which Olympiodorus would have had access when the latter lectured on Paul of Alexandria in 564 AD.<sup>15</sup> Only some of the technical definitions in Rhetorius (which go back to astrologers of the 1<sup>st</sup> Century BC/AD)<sup>16</sup> are found in Māshā'allāh, but they were picked up in various ways by other astrologers such as Sahl bin Bishr in his *Introduction* and other works. This edition of Rhetorius is used extensively throughout Book III.

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<sup>14</sup> Pingree 1989, p. 232. See §3 below, where I argue that this edition of Rhetorius was not exactly the same as the versions we have today.

<sup>15</sup> To my knowledge Pingree has not actually posited a *textual* relationship between Rhetorius and Olympiodorus.

<sup>16</sup> Such as the description of a planet in detriment in II.8, which goes back to Serapio. There is apparently a controversy over the original Serapio and a later pseudo-Serapio from the Byzantine era, but I take it that Māshā'allāh's source comes from one similar to Rhetorius's and not from a Byzantine compiler.

- A Pahlavi (originally Old Persian) *Book of Nativities* written by “Zaradusht” (Zoroaster), translated into Arabic in the mid-700s. Pingree argues that this work was probably, at its core, a Greek work produced in the school of an astrologer at Harran—whose nativity is included in the work and dated April 9, 232. This work contains material attributed to a certain “Hermes” which is used by Māshā’allāh for his list of fixed stars in Ch. III.2.1. The same list is used in its Greek form by Rhetorius, whereas Māshā’allāh’s list still retains some Pahlavi designations for the stars. According to Pingree, Paul Kunitsch had already argued that this list (which appears in a Latin translation by Salio of a portion of a work of Abū Ma’shar) was taken from a Pahlavi source, but *BA* confirms it.
- This same text of “Hermes,” or another one attributed to him, used for certain delineations in Book IV on annual predictions. However, it is possible that this material was also included in al-Andarzaghār’s book (see below).
- The *Zīj al-Shab* or *Zīj al-Shabriyār*, a famous astronomical book of tables from the Sassanian period.
- A *Book on Nativities* by al-Andarzaghār or “the Advisor” (whose real name was Zādānfarrūkh), who may have lived after the Muslim overthrow of the Sassanians. Al-Andarzaghār expounds the extensive Sassanian method of annual predictions used in Book IV (and by Abū Ma’shar in his *On the Revolutions of Nativities* in Volume II of this book). He is also quoted by al-Qabīsī, presumably from the same lost source. Extensive Arabic excerpts from al-Andarzaghār’s book corresponding to *BA* are found in a work by a late compiler named al-Dāmaghānī (Da.) written in 1113 AD. However, they are out of order in al-Dāmaghānī, and Hugo’s text now allows us to put them in the correct one.
- A hypothesized, lost 6<sup>th</sup> Century Greek source, a version of which is preserved in part in *CCAG* VIII.1, pp. 220-48. This material contains commentary and quotations from Valens, Dorotheus, and other authors, and was used by the Sassanians especially in longevity delineations.<sup>17</sup>

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<sup>17</sup> See Pingree 1977, pp. 216-18.

In short, *BA* provides a window into the manuscript transmission and unbroken tradition of Hellenistic astrology among the Persians, going back all the way to the 3<sup>rd</sup> Century.

Moreover, *BA* preserves material that would otherwise have been lost or remained unidentified. This is especially true for Dorotheus: on the basis of *BA*, Pingree and Burnett were able to identify prose Greek passages<sup>18</sup> in other manuscripts which had been unlabeled but are now known to be based on the original in Greek. At the time of his publication of 'Umar's *Carmen* in 1976, Pingree did not know of their existence, and no other source besides *BA* provides them:

- Friendship. Dorotheus uses the same Lot of Erōs as Valens (by day from the Lot of Fortune to the Lot of Spirit, and by night the reverse), along with the Lot of Friendship. But Māshā'allāh (III.12.2-3) gives us extra information on how to use the Lots of Erōs and Friendship, whereas the newly-identified Greek *Excerpt* does not. In his treatment on friendship, Dorotheus also uses the hearing and seeing signs (though Māshā'allāh or Hugo substitute the commanding-obeying signs, perhaps for cultural reasons).
- Travel. *BA* Ch. III.9.2 presents more complete Dorothean material on travel which had only been given in fragmentary form in Hephaestio II.24. Abū 'Alī draws on the same material but in a more abbreviated and misleading form.
- Marriage. Related to the friendship material above is a similar passage (III.7.6) based on the lost edition of Dorotheus. Māshā'allāh's discussion of the Lots of Erōs and Marriage is very similar to the one in the friendship material, but it appears neither in 'Umar's Dorotheus nor Valens. Perhaps other Dorotheus excerpts exist in those very same manuscripts identified by Pingree, which will shed more light on his treatment of marriage.
- Profession. Māshā'allāh seems to get all or most of his material from Rhetorius, so these passages seem to have been identified by BP from the Byzantine texts themselves along with the others just mentioned.
- Numerous other fragments dealing with annual predictions, elections, and much more.

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<sup>18</sup> Printed as the *Excerpts* in the critical edition of *BA*, to complement the *Fragments* in Greek which were published by Pingree in his 1976 edition of *Carmen*.