



History of Astrology: The Islamic World

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- The purpose of this session is to
- 1.highlight issues
- 2.illustrate the use of primary sources.

The Geographical Context



Chronology

- 622: The Hijira, Mohammed's flight from Mecca to Medina, retrospectively marked as beginning of Muslim calendar.
- 754-775: Al-Mansur: Abbasid dynasty begins to patronise intellectual culture and the arts. Translation into Arabic begins from Greek, Latin, Syriac, Farsee, Sanskrit.
- 786-809: Harun al-Rashid *Bayt al-Hikma (House of Wisdom)*
- 813-833: Al-Mamun
- 1258: Mongol sack of Baghdad. Conventionally this marks the end of active intellectual culture in Islamic Persia. This notion is now being critiqued.

Required Reading: Historiography

- Liba Taub:
- Context: one if the younger (nowadays under 65/70!) generation of historians who reject the 'presentism' of the previous generation.
- 'Presentism' = projection of present values in to the past.
- In this case, the condemnation of ancient astrology as 'superstition' or 'pseudoscience'

Required Reading: Historiography

- Issues Taub draws from Barton:
- Disciplinary boundaries – e.g. Science
- Comparison of astrology to astronomy – was astrology considered less speculative than astronomy?
- The role of the author in astrological texts: display of erudition, self-promotion
- Cultural context: do astrology's internal self-contradictions co-exist with the general agnostic nature of classical society?
- CAN SUCH NOTIONS BE APPLIED TO MODERN ASTROLOGY

Required Reading: Primary Sources

- A few translations by Kennedy, Pingree, Burnet et al
- An increasing amount of astrological material available in English due to Ben Dykes (not critical editions).
- Bearing in mind that the technical structure of judicial astrology in the Islamic world was fundamentally that inherited from the Greek world, this week pay attention to theoretical issues – the Emerald Tablet and passages from the Koran.

- *In the name of God, Most Gracious, Most Merciful*
- *1. Say: I seek refuge*
- *With the Lord of the Dawn,*
- *2. From the mischief*
- *Of created things;*
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Theory: Ahmet Abu Ja'far *Kitab al-Thamara* or *Book of the Fruit* (10th century)

- In medieval Europe mistakenly ascribed to Claudius Ptolemy,
- The English translation of 1679 '*Sapiens, a wise Man doth Co-operate with the Coelestial Operations, and doth assist Nature, as the Husbandman in the ploughing and preparing his Ground*'.
- Ptolemy, Claudius, 'Centiloquium', para 5, in John Partridge. 1679. *Mikropanastron, or an Astrological Vade Mecum, briefly Teaching the whole Art of Astrology - viz., Questions, Nativities, with all its parts, and the whole Doctrine of Elections never so comprised nor compiled before, &c.* William Bromwich: London., pp 305– 321.
- 'One skilful in this Science may evade many effects of the Stars, when he knows their Natures, and diligently prepares himself to receive their effects'.
- Partridge, John, 1679. *Mikropanastron, or an Astrological Vade Mecum, briefly Teaching the whole Art of Astrology - viz., Questions, Nativities, with all its parts, and the whole Doctrine of Elections never so comprised nor compiled before, &c.* William Bromwich: London., pp 305-6.
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Secondary Sources

- Very sparse
- Use Champion as a basic guide, but try not to quote him too much!
- Use Pingree
- Consult Tester

Issues

Terminology: The Islamic World

Is there such a thing as 'Islamic astrology'?

Issues: innovation in astrology

- One common view is that the astrologers of the Islamic world did not innovate but merely acted as conduits between the classical and medieval worlds.
- This view has to be suspect: is it a consequence of 'orientalism' (Edward Said)?
- On the other hand, this view is recent:
- 'it is perhaps not too much of an overstatement to say that true Medieval astrology begins with Masha'Allah, or at least with his circle'.
- Benjamin Dykes, trans., *Works of Sahl & Masha'Allah*, Minneapolis, Minnesota: The Cazimi Press, 2008, p. viii.
- On the other hand, do we know enough yet about the technical history of the astrology of either Greek or Islamic worlds to reach a conclusion?
- What does Dykes mean by 'true Medieval astrology'?

Issues

- **Diversity:**
- The Islamic world inherited the spectrum of philosophical and cosmological views that characterised the areas conquered by Muslims.
- Monotheistic religion, in which all authority resides with God.
- Platonic, Aristotelian and Stoic models, which present a variety of ways in which individuals and collectives engage with the stars.

The key names

- Masah'allah
- Abu- Ma'shar
- Al-kindi
- Averroes
- Avicenna
- Ibn Arabi

THE USE OF PRIMARY SOURCES: A CASE STUDY

- **The foundation of Baghdad**
- **An interesting study because**
 - **1. There are sources which indicate astrological election**
 - **2. There are sources which indicate the layout of the city on cosmological principles**
- **Baghdad was a cosmopolis**

Providing Context

(addressing the SEAC conference)

- Clive Ruggles on Astrology 1
- ‘What interests these scientists [archaeologists and anthropologists, whose interest is human behaviour] is the fact that people throughout the ages have drawn direct connections between the appearance of the sky and events on earth, and that this forms an integral part of their understanding of the way the world works’.
- Ruggles, Clive, *Ancient Astronomy: An Encyclopaedia of Cosmologies and Myth*, Santa Barbara: ABC CLIO, 2005, p. 24
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Providing Context

- Clive Ruggles on Astrology 2
- ‘why should the archaeologist, and in particular the student of Neolithic and Bronze Age Wessex, be interested in the perception of astronomical phenomena? A general answer is that in many, if not virtually all, non-Western world-views celestial phenomena are not separated from terrestrial ones, but form part of an integrated whole with complex interconnections. The association may often be viewed as closer in nature to modern astrology than modern astronomy’.
- Ruggles, Clive, 'Astronomy and Stonehenge' in Barry Cunliffe and Colin Renfrew (ed.) *Science and Stonehenge*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1997, p. 204.
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The Astrological 'Election' of Baghdad

- The examination of astrological sources provides additional astronomical material unavailable through normal astronomical site surveys.
- The horoscope data was given by al-Yaqubi (Pingree 1970, 104) in the ninth century and al-Biruni (1879, 262) in the tenth-eleventh.

Precedents

Left: Babylonian Boundary Stone 1100 BCE



- Left: Babylonian Boundary Stone 1100 BCE; indicates the use of astrology to mark space.
Persepolis: a cosmic city
- Selucia: story of astrological election
- Constantinople: story of astrological election

Philosophical Context: Plato

- Timaeus 38C: 'Wherefore, as a consequence of this reasoning and design on the part of God, with a view to the generation of Time, the sun and moon and five other stars, which bear the appellation of "planets" [i.e., 'wanderers'], came into existence for the determining and preserving of the numbers of Time.'
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- Timaeus 42A and 42D: the stars are 'organs of time'.
- Timaeus 47C: the cycles of the stars and planets reveal the 'revolutions of Reason in the Heaven'.

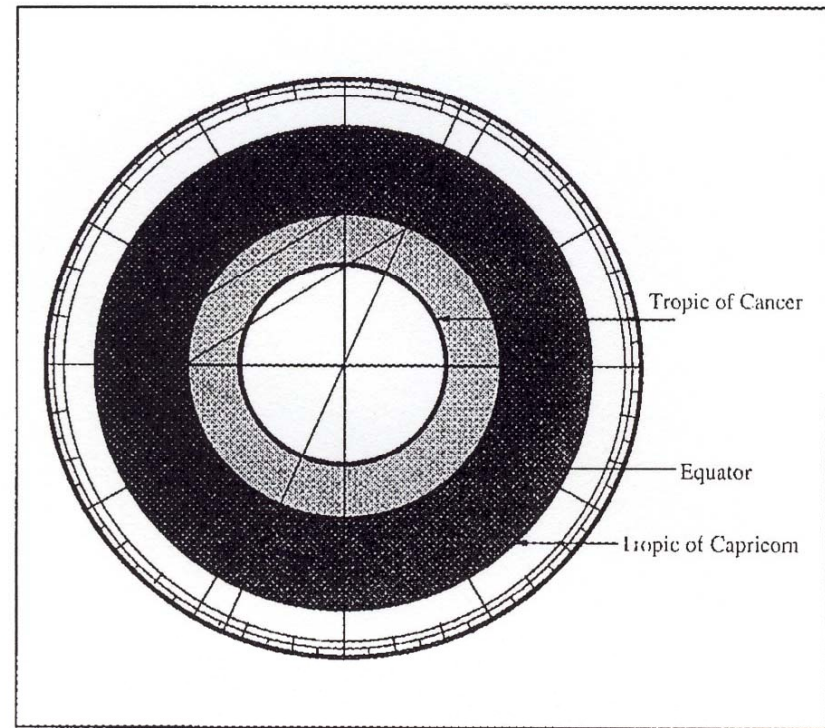
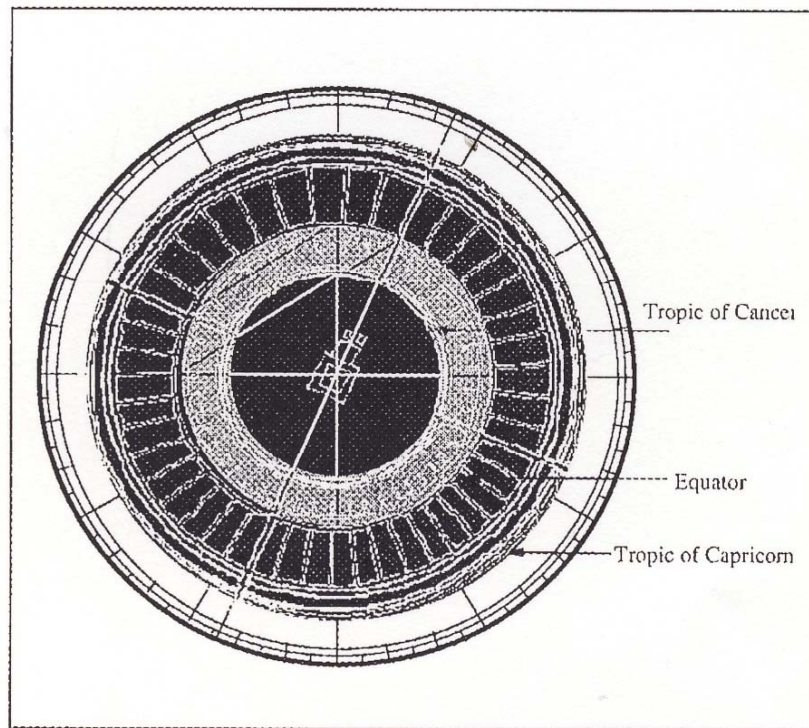
The City

Town-planning in the Islamic world

- First, town-planning in the Islamic world was, in important instances, cosmological and, in this respect based on pre-Islamic examples (of which the most notable is Mecca, the Ka'aba being aligned with the spring equinox) and which have antecedents which may be traced back to Sumerian culture in the third millennium BCE.
- Generally used a quadruple system analogous to the cardinal points, and a hexagonal system which he identified with the many septenary systems in the ancient world, including the seven planets.
- Second, there were two principal models of Islamic cosmopolis;
 - one was the city of Kufa, which had replaced Medina as the Islamic capital under Caliph Ali in 656. the design of Kufa had been essentially open and aligned, like Mecca, with the spring equinox.
 - the second was Baghdad, founded as a replacement for Damascus in 762, under Caliph al-Mansur. When Al Mansur decided to create his new capital he intended it to be, (Allawi 1988, 62) put it, 'the centre of a world empire of power and commerce, and the naval of the whole cosmos'. Baghdad, was essentially closed, and unusually, round, and envisaged as 'a grand cosmic astrolabe' (1988, 62).
- Allawi, Ibrahim. 1988. Some Evolutionary and Cosmological Aspects to Early Islamic Town Planning. In Margaret Bentley Sevcenko (ed.), Theories and Principles of Design in the Architecture of Islamic Societies, Cambridge, Massachusetts, Aga Khan Program for Islamic Architecture.
http://archnet.org/library/documents/one-document.jsp?document_id=3776

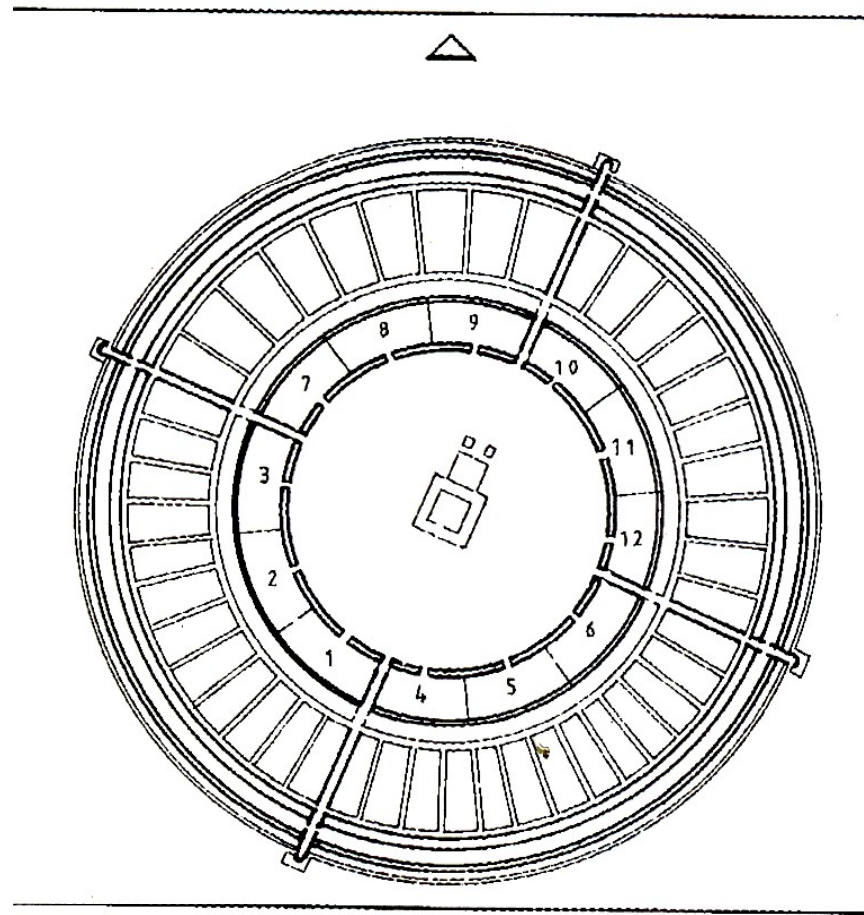
Stereographic projection of the cosmos on Baghdad

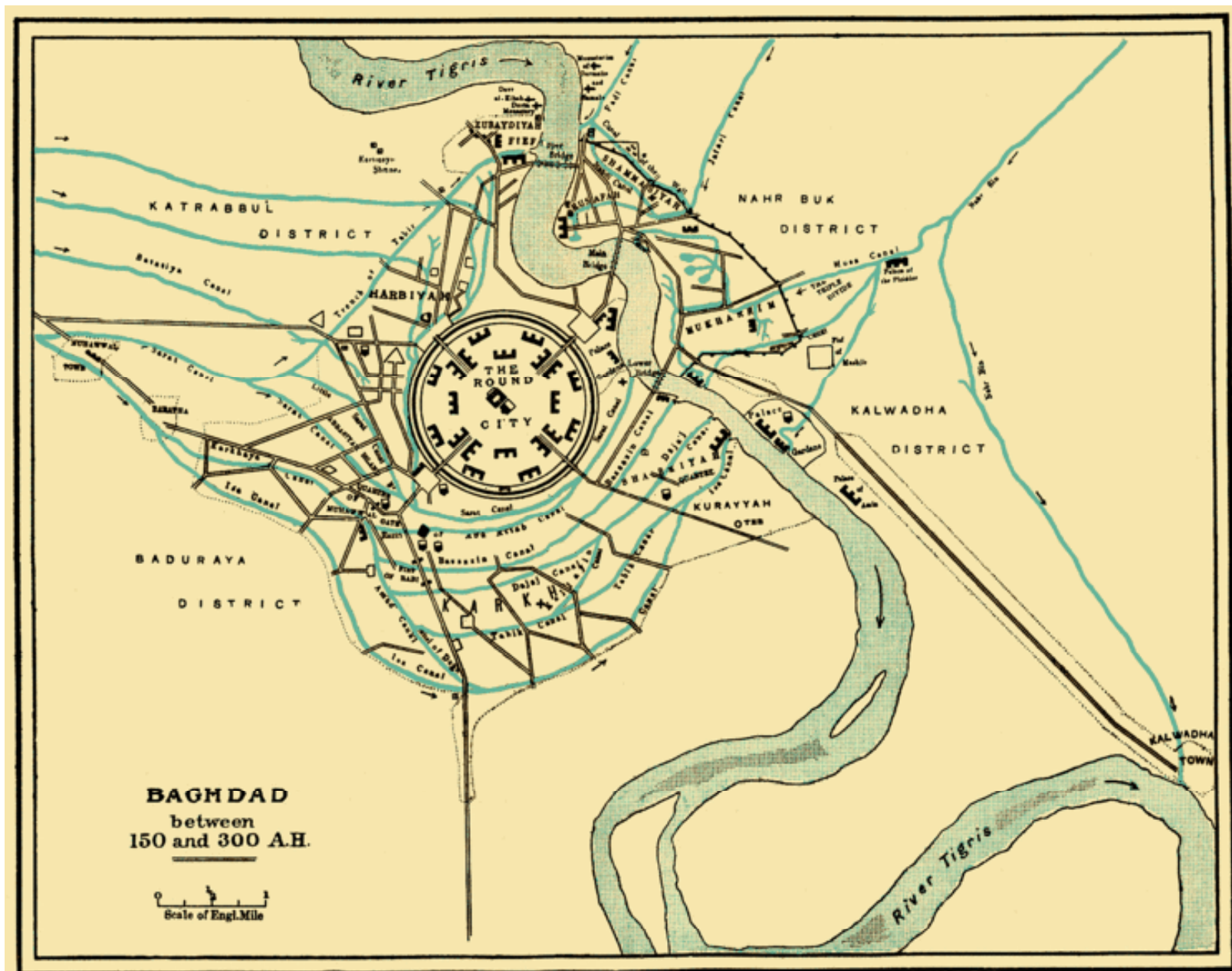
Allawi fig 7 (left) and 6



Allawi's hypothesis for the plan of Baghdad as a cosmogram

Allawi fig 10





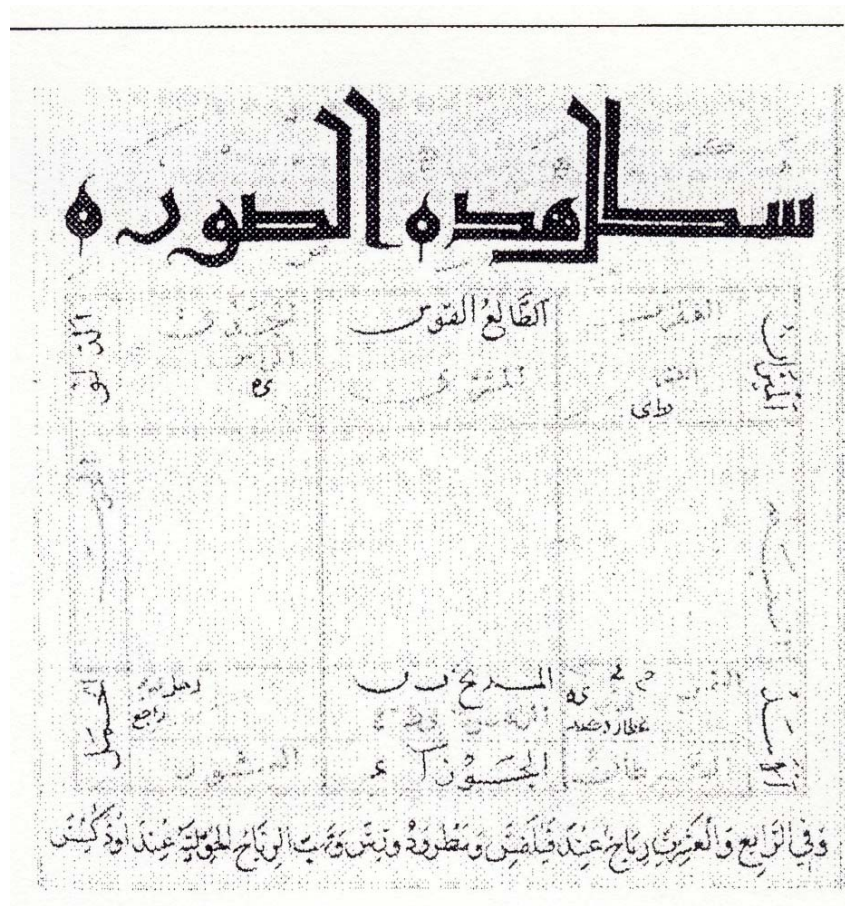
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PRIFYSGOL CYMRU
Y Drindod Dewi Sant
— UNIVERSITY OF WALES —
Trinity Saint David

- Al-Biruni did not analyse the horoscope and gave only the following general commentary:
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- ‘Winterly air on sea, winds (Philippus and Metrodorus); beginning of the blowing of the Etesian winds (Egyptians). On this day ‘Abu Ja’far Almansur began to build Baghdad, that party which is called *Mansur’s town*, on the western side of the Tigris in the present Baghdad. This was A. Alexandri, 1074 [762 CE]. Astrologers are obliged to know dates like this, and must date from such an epoch by means of their knowledge of the *Permutations, Terminations, Cycles, and Directions*, until they find the horoscopes of those people who were born at those times. It was Naubakht who determined the time (for the commencement of building). The constellation which heaven showed at the time, and the stations of the planets which appeared on heaven, were such as are indicated in the following figure’ (1879, 262).
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- Note that he specified that a precise time for the inauguration was chosen, confirming that an ascending degree was specified, but that he records neither a time nor ascending degree.

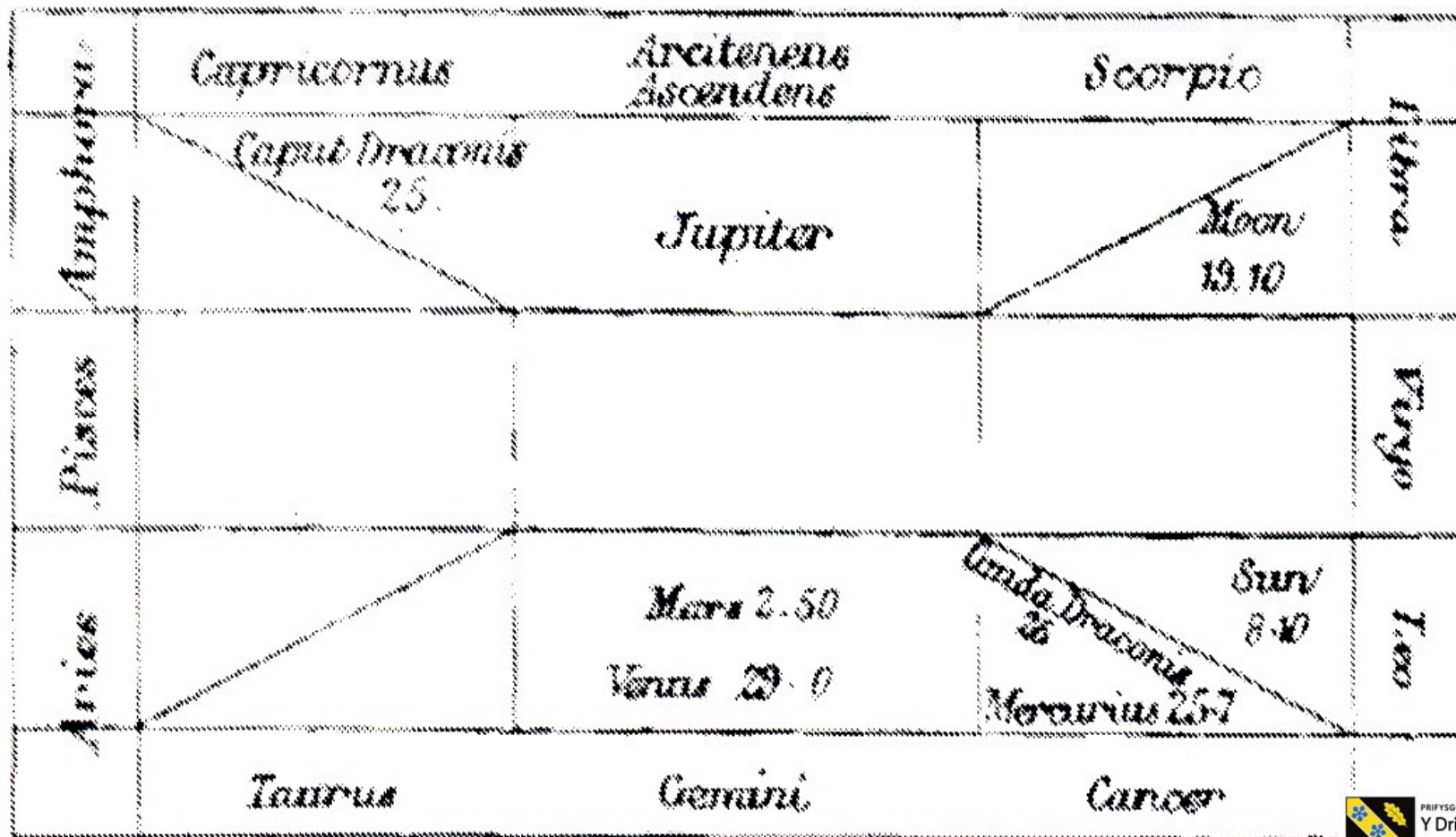
The Horoscope of Baghdad



- Al-Biruni. 1879. The Chronology of Ancient Nations, trans. C.E.Sachau, from the Arabic text 'Athar al-Baqiyah', or 'Vestiges of the Past', London, W.H. Allen, p. 262

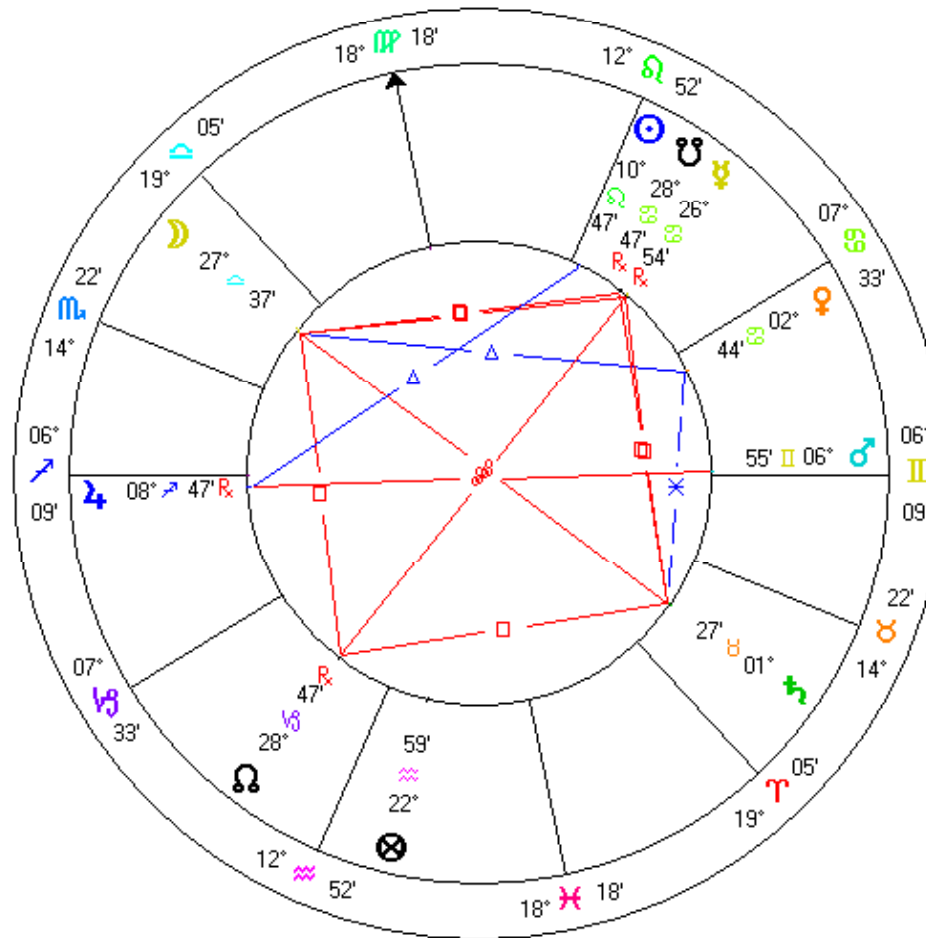
The Horoscope of Baghdad

Indian format (Sachau p. 262)



The Horoscope of Baghdad modern western format

Baghdad-2
Natal Chart (6)
31 Jul 0762
14:28 LMT -2:57:40
Baghdad, Iraq
33°N21' 044°E25'
Geocentric
Tropical
Placidus
True Node



Source Problems: inconsistencies in the documentary evidence

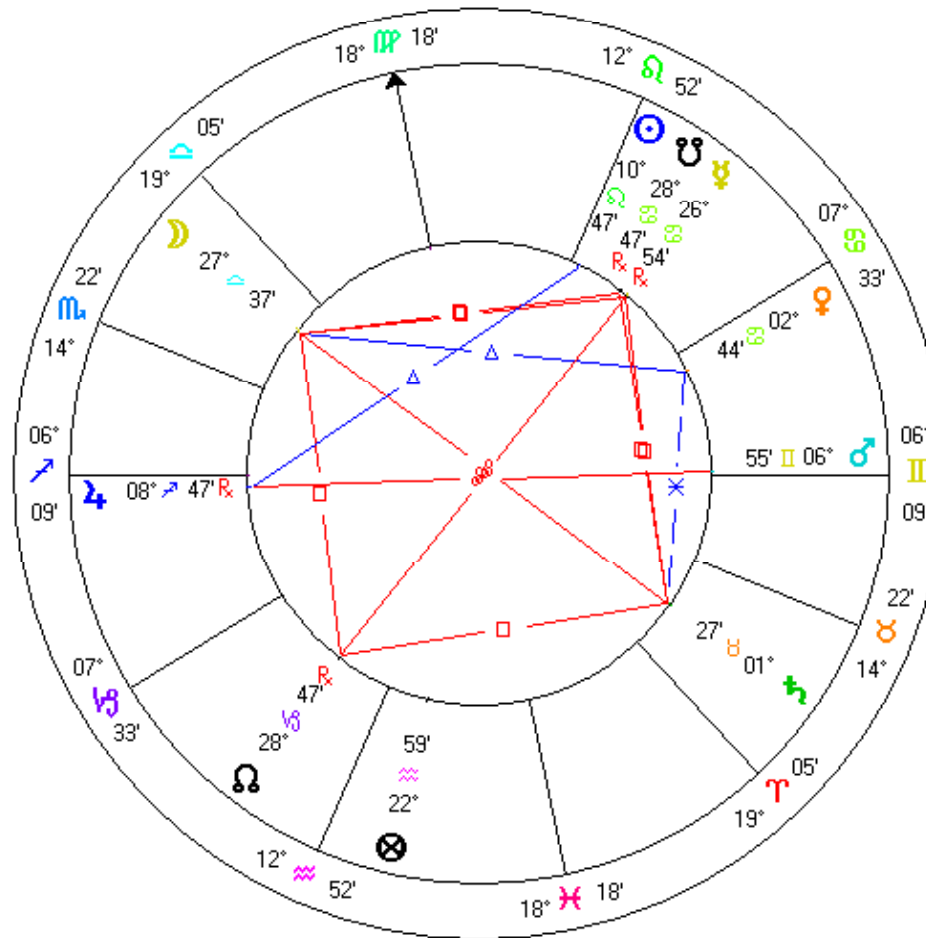
- The horoscope data was given by al-Yaqubi (Pingree 1970, 104) in the ninth century and al-Biruni (1879, 262) in the tenth-eleventh.
- However, there is a contradiction in the data.
- Al-Yaqubi listed the planetary positions on the basis of information from the astrologer al-Fazari. I recalculated the data using Solar Fire software, and the positions of the sun and moon indicate a time of 23.37 LMT on 30 July 762 and an ascendant (rising degree) of 20;45 Taurus.
- Al-Biruni reproduced what Pingree assumed was Nawbacht's horoscope for the city, giving it an ascendant in Sagittarius.
- This, though, is inconsistent with al-Yaqubi's data, for Sagittarius was rising on the afternoon of 31 July.
- The horoscope from al-Biruni's manuscript reproduced by Allawi appears to contain no degree positions for either planets or ascendant (Adams 2011).
- The printed chart diagram created for Sachau's English translation of al-Biruni reproduced al-Yaqubi's degree positions for all the planets except Jupiter (for which al-Yaqubi records no position), but not for the ascendant.
- A tradition then arose, the origin of which I have not been able to trace, that the ascendant was 6° Sagittarius. Allawi assumed that this was correct, and it occurs elsewhere in the modern literature.
- James H. Holden uses this position and assumes a time and date of 14.40 LMT on 31 July 762, on the basis that although 'No cuspal degrees are given...we can assume that the astrologers chose the time when Jupiter was in the ASC degree' (Holden n.d.). The correct calculated time for an ascendant of 6° Sagittarius is 14.28 LMT.
- The result of this uncertainty is confusion even in the date of the city's inauguration; Pingree assumed 30 July, but Allawi and Holden assume 31 July.
- This makes it difficult to retrospectively reconstruct the intentions of al-Mansur's committee of astrologers with any certainty.

A wider issue

- This is astrology in the service of political power.
- Therefore astrology and power is part of the wider discussion.

The Horoscope of Baghdad modern western format

Baghdad-2
Natal Chart (6)
31 Jul 0762
14:28 LMT -2:57:40
Baghdad, Iraq
33°N21' 044°E25'
Geocentric
Tropical
Placidus
True Node



TEXTUAL ANALYSIS

The Problem of Mars

- In standard horoscope interpretation (1) a planet in an 'angle' is powerful and (b) Mars is inherently difficult- 'malefic'.
- If this horoscope was supposed to be auspicious, why was a malefic planet powerful?
- Mars in the seventh: 'business dealing and contention and sexual intercourse with injustice, and harm on account of this, and disarray in every matter, and contention and horribly [so], and grief because of them'.
- Sahl and Masha'allah, *Works*, trans. Benjamin Dykes, Golden Valley, NM: Cazimi Press, 2008, p. 510.
- Mars in the 7th indicates the greatest evils and enormous perils'.
- Maternus, Julius Firmicus, *Mathesis*, translated as *Ancient Astrology: Theory and Practice*, Jean Rhys Bram, Park Ridge, New Jersey: Noyes Press, 1975, III.4.17.
- 'Jupiter and Mars in opposition indicate an unstable life and continual loss of possessions. Hostility of friends is stirred up, and there is the greatest danger from riots rash activities'.
- Maternus, Julius Firmicus, *Mathesis*, translated as *Ancient Astrology: Theory and Practice*, Jean Rhys Bram, Park Ridge, New Jersey: Noyes Press, 1975, VI.VXI.1..

Sahl ibn Bishr al-Israili, (c. 786-845 ?), 'If you wished to elect so that you might build a house...'

- **Pay attention to**
- Moon
- Planet ruling the sign containing the Moon
- Ascendant
- Planet ruling the sign containing the Ascendant
- Lot of fortune
- Mercury
- Avoid Mars but if he is present have Venus strong and with power over Mars.
- He gives other rules which get more complex but do not appear to have been followed.
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- **For Baghdad**
- Moon = strong score, increasing in light
- Planet ruling the sign containing the Moon = Venus in reception with Moon, plus strong score
- Ascendant= Sag
- Planet ruling the sign containing the Ascendant = Jupiter
- Lot of fortune = Aquarius = ?
- Mercury = weak and retrograde = ?
- Mars is strong and not controlled by Venus
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- Sahl and Masha'allah, *Works*, trans. Benjamin Dykes, Golden Valley, NM: Cazimi Press, 2008, p. 199.
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Jupiter

- 1. Ptolemy: the most benevolent of the planets
- 2. Ptolemy: rules Sagittarius, therefore strong.
- 3. On the ascendant = strong.

Jupiter on the Ascendant

- Julius Firmicus Maternus: 'if Jupiter is found exactly on the first angle, that is, on the ascendant, especially in those signs in which he rejoices or in his own house or terms or in his exaltation, he will make the native high-born, famous, always ruling great states, perhaps the first ten of the great states. He will also make him...virtuous, charming, benevolent, cheerful, rich, especially if Jupiter is in this house by day...'
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- Maternus, Julius Firmicus, *Mathesis*, translated as *Ancient Astrology: Theory and Practice*, Jean Rhys Bram, Park Ridge, New Jersey: Noyes Press, 1975, III.3.1.
- Masha allah: 'Jupiter, if he were in the Ascendant, signifies reverence and beauty and he honesty of faith and religion, of teaching also, and reason, and the end of those things in which is involved, will be towards salvation, and sovereignty will be handed to him in this'.
- Sahl and Masha'allah, *Works*, trans. Benjamin Dykes, Golden Valley, NM: Cazimi Press, 2008, p. 507.
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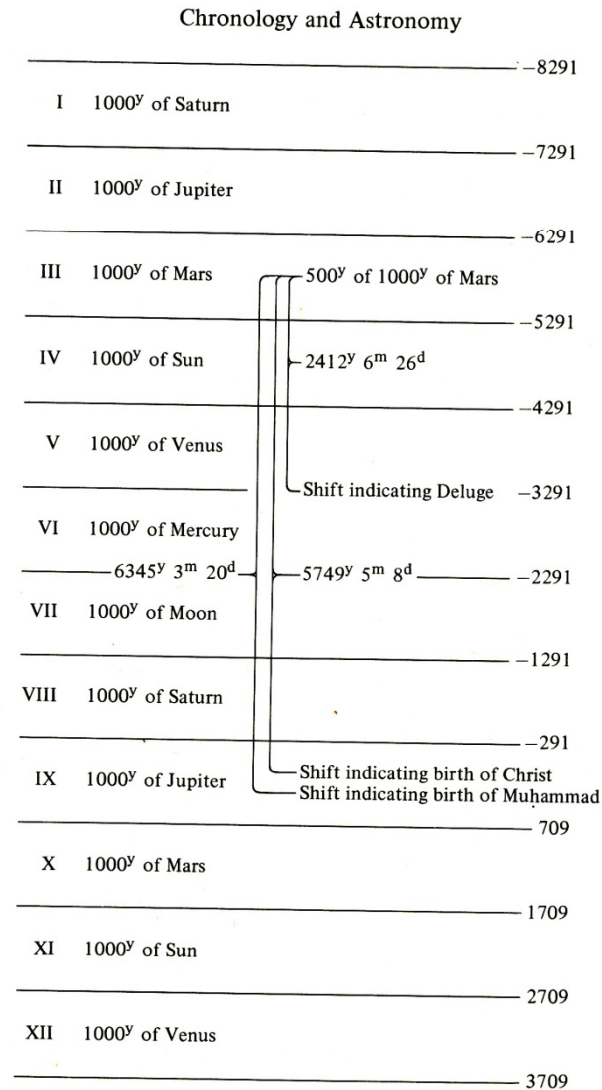
The Sun

- The Sun
- 1. 'Trine' Jupiter. Ptolemy = harmonious.
- 2. The nature of the Sun
- 'the all-seeing Sun, then, being truly fire-like and the light of the mind, the organ of perception of the soul, is significant at birth for a kingly office, hegemony, mind, practical wisdom, outward form, motion, height of fortune, public registration, action, popular leadership, judgment, father, mastership, friendship, persons of high report, the honors of images, statues and crowns of office, arch-priests of the fatherland..'
- Valens, Vettius, *The Anthology*, Book 1, I, trans. Robert Schmidt, Berkeley Springs VA, Golden Hind Press 1993.
- 3. In Leo – the nature of Leo
- Leo: the house of the Sun and kingly.
- Hephaistio of Thebes, *Apotelesmatics*, trans. Robert Schmidt, 2 vols., Berkeley Springs WV: Golden Hind Press, 1994, I.1, p. 11.
- 4. In the 2nd decan of Leo (10 degrees – 19 degrees 59')
- 'he who is brought forth upon the second decan will be a master, a king; he will be declared a plenipotentiary, and he will subject many and found cities, and many will pay tribute to him, and there will be knowledge of god in him, and the discovery of gold, and his mind will be inspired by him, and his honor equal to the gods'.
- Hephaistio of Thebes, *Apotelesmatics*, trans. Robert Schmidt, 2 vols., Berkeley Springs WV: Golden Hind Press, 1994, I.1, p. 12.
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Reception

- Masha'allah: when two planets are in signs in which the other rules or is exalted:
- The Moon and Venus are in reception
- (the Moon is in Libra, ruled by Venus and Venus in Cancer ruled by the Moon)
- Saturn and the Moon are in reception
- (Saturn is in Taurus, where Moon is exalted, and Moon is in Libra, where Saturn is exalted)

Masha'allah: planetary rulers for Zoroastrian millennia



Another solution

- We know of at least one Indian astrologer – Kanka – who worked with the team electing Baghdad.
- The 6th century *Brhat Samhita* by Varahamihira states that when Sagittarius is rising, Mars is not malefic.

Conclusion

- Astrological sources can provide information about wider culture.
- The history of technical and interpretative astrological practice is of interest in itself but, in terms of wider history, should be place in wider contexts, as is any other specialist area.
- We have to recognise the problem of uncertain sources and contested evidence.
- In this case one solution to a source problem points to Indian influence.
- This is a counter to Eurocentrism and a validation of Pingree's theory of Hellenophilia.

Clive Ruggles on Astrology 3

- Three ways in which astrology is applied to the perception of the relationship between heavens and earth:
 - 1.the influence on personal character and destiny,
 - 2.the prediction of future events
 - 3.the connection with current events.
- Ruggles, Clive, *Ancient Astronomy: An Encyclopaedia of Cosmologies and Myth*, Santa Barbara: ABC CLIO, 2005, p. 24
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Extending Ruggles no 3

- Platonic cosmology (*Timaeus*)
- The world of Being: eternal, no time, always present, contains Ideas (later archetypes) of everything that exists in the world of Becoming.
- The world of Becoming: the planets make or mark time – i.e.

- **GENERAL CONTEXTS**
- **Use material from the Introduction module**
- **(and any other module you have studied)**

The Nature of Power in Stoic Cosmology

- Chrysippus; first book of his *De finibus*;
- our individual natures are parts of the nature of the whole universe. And this is why the end may be defined as life in accordance with nature, or, in other words, in accordance with our own human nature as well as that of the universe, a life in which we refrain from every action forbidden by the law common to all things, that is to say, the right reason which pervades all things, and is identical with this Zeus, lord and ruler of all that is. And this very thing constitutes the virtue of the happy man and the smooth current of life, when all actions promote the harmony of the spirit dwelling in the individual man with the will of him who orders the universe.
- Diogenes Laertius VII.88

Astronomy/ology and Power

- Al Mansur was not using astronomy as an external agent to manipulate the people. He was *inside* the system.
- The foundation of Baghdad was designed to create a physical link between heaven and earth, to synchronise human actions with God's will as expressed in the unfolding of planetary patterns.
- Needs to be understood in the context of Platonic theory of time and Stoic theory of nature.
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Theory of space

- ‘A painted landscape is a concrete thing, a signifier’, which signifies an abstract meaning, often a normative conception of the way things ‘naturally’ ought to be if they are to conform to the natural order of things’.
- Kenneth Olwig, ‘Sexual Cosmology: Nation and Landscape at the Conceptual Interstices of Nature and Culture; or What does Landscape Really Mean?’, in Barbara Bender (ed.), *Landscape: Politics and Perspectives*, Oxford and New York: Berg Publishers, 1993, p. 319.
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Mircea Eliade on Sacred Space

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- The sacred is not absolute as once there is a link with a space, there is a limitation to this 'abstract absolute...in order to become manifest'; there is a central absolute fixed point; '...it is the break effected in space that allows the world to be constituted, because it reveals the fixed point, the central axis for all future orientation', creating a cosmology or new world.
- Eliade, *Sacred Profane*, p. 21.

The Theory of Place

- David Harvey: the fundamental importance of time-space relations to social relations.
- Harvey, David, *The Urban Experience*, Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1989, p. 175.
- Vincent Berdoulay: 'a place comes explicitly into being in the discourse of its inhabitants, and particularly in the rhetoric it promotes. Thus the geographers discourse uses the same ways as the people who define their own place'.
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- Vincent Berdoulay, 'Place, Meaning and Discourse in French Language Geography' in Agnew, John A., and James S. Duncan, *The Power of Place*, London: Unwin Hyman, 1989, p. 135.
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Methodological Consideration

- Gumerman and Warburton
- ‘Researchers who have made a study of past cultures’ interest in and conception of the heavens have often treated the topic narrowly, rather than in the context of the entire culture’.
- ‘...to truly comprehend a culture we must have some sense of its cosmology – the group’s conception of themselves in relation to the heavens.’
- Gumerman and Warburton in John W. Fountain and Rolf M. Sinclair, ed., *Current Studies in Archaeoastronomy: Conversations Across Time and Space* (North Carolina: Carolina Academic Press, 2005), p.15.

General Conclusion

- As the pseudo-Ptolemaic Centiloquium (probably composed in eighth century Persia) put it: 'One skilful in this Science may evade many effects of the Stars, when he knows their Natures, and diligently prepares himself to receive their effects' (Ptolemy 1679, 305).
- I would therefore like to suggest that we can identify different perspectives on the use of astronomy/ology in relation to power:
- (1) to harmonise with the divine plan as expressed through celestial cycles,
- (2) to call down the blessing of God through such harmonisation,
- (3) to gain power through correct alignment with history and
- (4) to gain the knowledge necessary to actively manipulate fate, through correct behaviour.