

Abū Sa‘īd Shādhān, *Discourses with Abū Ma‘shar on the Secrets of Astrology* (excerpts)

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In the ninth century, Abū Sa‘īd Shādhān ibn Baḥr composed a work, titled “The Book of Discourses with Abū Ma‘shar on the Secrets of Astrology” (*Kitāb mudhākarāt / mubāḥathāt Abī Ma‘shar fī asrār ‘ilm al-nujūm*), in which he recorded the anecdotes of his teacher, the renowned Persian astrologer Abū Ma‘shar Ja‘far ibn Muḥammad ibn ‘Umar al-Balkhī, and the answers he gave to his questions. *Discourses* paints a vivid image of a knowledgeable but sometimes self-important master, who was well-versed in all the branches of astrology, and the theoretical instructions are often interspersed with actual case examples. All in all, this work is a unique report of the professional milieu of the ninth-century. Fortunately, it survives in a number of manuscripts, although it has not been edited or translated so far.

Around the year 1000 CE, about half of *Discourses* was translated to Byzantine Greek and incorporated into a collection titled “Abū Ma‘shar’s *Book of the Secrets of Astrology*” (Ἀποτελεσματικὴ βιβλὸς τῶν μυστηρίων τοῦ Ἀπομάσχα) as the first, greater part of book II. It is available in three primary manuscripts: in mss Rome, Biblioteca Angelica, gr. 29 (**E**, ff. 42–54v) and Milan, BA, B 38 sup. (Martini–Bassi 88; **A**, ff. 35–49v), where the collection is accompanied by the *Book of Astrology* of “Balchus”; and in ms Vatican City, BAV, Vat. gr. 1056 (**V**, ff. 194–206), where the text appears slightly revised. My translation is based on the version of **E**, but I also examined **V** and used it when it provided better readings; in a future revision, I will collate the readings of **A** as well. Fewer than half of the chapters were edited in the various volumes of CCAG from different primary and derived manuscripts. I also consulted with these editions.

Before 1266 CE, a selection from a Greek version was translated to Latin, probably by Stephen of Messina, who translated Abū Ma‘shar’s *Book of the Judgments of the Revolutions of the Years of Nativities*, as well as compiled the Latin version of *The Hundred Aphorisms of Hermes*. This Latin version was published in a critical edition by Graziella Federici Vescovini (“La versio Latina degli *Excerpta de secretis Albumasar* di Sadan – una edizione,” *Archive d’histoire doctrinale et littéraire du moyen age* 65 [1998], 273–330); for the translation, I also consulted with this edition.

In the translation, I imitate the word usage of the Arabic original, and therefore do not translate the expressions according to their Hellenistic meanings. For the terminology, I follow the standards set in Benjamin Dykes’s translation of Abū Ma‘shar’s work on the solar revolutions.

1. When no releaser or house-master is found in a nativity, but the natives are long-lived¹

(1) Shādhān said, “I heard Abū Ma‘shar say that ‘Beyond God, the entire life of the living creatures is the Sun and the Moon. For we find nativities that do not have releasers, but we do find the Sun and the Moon look at the Ascendant in the configuration of a trine or a sextile, then, provided the Ascendant is not harmed, the natives born with this fashion of nativities will live an exceptionally long life.’ (2) Indeed, I have seen many nativities that had neither a releaser nor a house-master. Still, I saw these natives lived an exceptionally long life.”

When (the natives) do not live until the smallest years of Venus

(3) “If you should find a nativity in which the ascending degree is the releaser, and the Ascendant is Gemini while Mercury is in Taurus and the benefics are in a bad house, and you should find Saturn in Scorpio and Mars in Aquarius, the native will not live until the smallest years of Venus.”

¹ The chapter titles are missing from **V**. For this very chapter, I divided the lengthy chapter heading and the main text itself into three shorter sections.

When the nativity indicates nothing good

(4) “He also told me when Mars was the victor over the nativity, and he did not apply to a benefic, he indicated that the one who had this sort of nativity would suffer from burns. On the other hand, when Saturn was the victor over the nativity, and he did not apply to a benefic, he indicated nothing good.”

2. When Saturn indicates iron and when he indicates tall trees

(1) Shādhān said, “I told Abū Ma’shar that certain wise people say Saturn indicates both iron and big and tall trees. (2) He replied to me, ‘He indicates this by his configuration with the stars: for Saturn indicates iron when he is configured with Mars, or he is in square or opposition with Mercury or Jupiter; (3) but he indicates tall trees when he is in Gemini or Libra, and he is looked at by Venus or Mercury.’”

3. When the Moon was in square with Mars, the traveler, to whom an inception was made, met robbers

(1) Abū Ma’shar said, “Once I was traveling to Baghdād with some fellow travelers, and in Ray, I met a friend having some knowledge of astrology, who asked me how the Moon was the following day. I told him she was in square with Mars. He replied, ‘Then you will not depart tomorrow.’ (2) I told him, ‘Believe me, I am not at all eager to depart on a day like that, but my cattle-drivers will not listen to us.’ (3) He suggested we test them, (4) so I said to the drivers, ‘Men, tomorrow it is a bad day. Be patient—I shall feed you animals.’ (5) They were not convinced, so I let them depart and stayed with my friend.

(6) As they were about to leave, I took the Ascendant and found it was Taurus, and Mars was in it while the Moon was in Leo in square with Mars. So, I told them, ‘For God’s sake, do not leave in this hour!’ but they laughed at me and left. (7) I told my friend, ‘Believe me, I feel sorry about these foolish people,’ and we sat down to eat and drink.

(8) We were still drinking when certain men of the caravan arrived wounded: they had encountered robbers, who killed some of them and wounded the others, and the robbers had driven away all the animals they were driving. The survivors attacked me with stones and staffs, saying ‘these things happened because of your superstition so that you can confirm your utterance.’ (9) I barely survived the attack, and I swore I would never disclose any astrological wisdom to an ignoramus.”

4. When Saturn is in conjunction with Jupiter, if someone is born who has the sign of this conjunction in the Ascendant or Midheaven, this one will be a great king

(1) Abū Ma’shar said, “The conjunctions of Saturn and Jupiter bear great mysteries: if someone is born on the day of the conjunction, and his Ascendant or Midheaven happens to be in the same sign as the conjunction, a great king will be born whose name will be known all over the world.”

5. The knowledge if someone is telling the truth or lying when calls himself a prophet

(1) Abū Ma’shar said that a friend had told him “I went to Caliph al-Ma’mūn. There were many wise people, and there was also someone with him who said he could make miracles. (2) It was, in fact, this man because of whom al-Ma’mūn had summoned these judges.

The Caliph said to the astrologers: ‘Take the hour and see from the Ascendant if this man is telling the truth or lying.’ (3) The wise people looked at the Ascendant: the Sun and the Moon were conjunct in the Ascendant by degree and minute, (4) and the Lot of Fortune and the Lot of the Absent were on the same minute as the Ascendant. The Ascendant was Capricorn, (5) Jupiter was in Virgo, in configuration with the Ascendant, and Venus and Mercury were [in Scorpio]². (6) The wise people all said whatever the man asserted was true. (7) I was the only one who did not say a word, so the Caliph said to me, ‘You are not speaking.’ (8) Then I said that man had Venusian and Mercurial arts by which he could tell fantastic stories, but all in all, he was not doing miracles. (9) The Caliph asked how and for what

² Supplemented with the Latin version and the chart in **V**.

reason I had said that. (10) I told him that Jupiter indicated valid claims on condition he looked at the Ascendant, but here he was in his detriment. (11) The Caliph replied, 'God bless you!'

(12) Then the Caliph asked us if we knew that man. We answered we did not. (13) He then told us that the man called himself a prophet. (14) I told the Caliph to ask him to make a sign. (15) Therefore, the Caliph asked if he could make a sign so that we believed he was a prophet. The man replied, 'I have a ring with two engravings. I wear it and never took it off. If someone else were wearing it, he would be incessantly laughing even if he did not mean to, and he would not stop laughing until he removed the ring from his hand. I also have a pen, with which I write if I want to, but if someone else wanted to write with it, he could not: his hand would grow stiff.' (16) I said to the Caliph, 'This is the performance: one is Venusian, the other one is Mercurial. This man met with these devices in astrological books.' (17) The man admitted this was the case and desisted from calling himself a prophet onward.

(18) The Caliph gifted him with a thousand minas. After the Caliph dismissed us, I talked to the man and found he was very well-versed and knowledgeable in every science: (19) he would cast horoscopes for copyists in Baghdād."

(20) Abū Ma'shar added, "If I had been there with the wise men, I would have revealed what remained unknown to them: that the man was lying by calling himself a prophet since the Ascendant was in a movable sign, Jupiter was in his detriment, and the Moon was under the Sun's rays; furthermore, Mercury and Venus were in a mendacious sign such as Virgo."

7. The religion of the prophet of the Muslims one can only know from Libra of the astrological indications

(1) Abū Sa'īd, "I told Abū Ma'shar that Muḥammad ibn Mūsā al-Khwārizmī had told me, 'I made some calculations in hindsight and cast the horoscope for the night when our Prophet was born. The only Ascendant I found to indicate such great power was Libra.' (2) Abū Ma'shar replied, 'I also investigated the same and the only Ascendant I found to indicate such a great religion was Libra indeed.'"

8. No one knows the end of this religion

(1) Abū Ma'shar said that he had heard Muḥammad ibn Abdallāh³ say, "I found in (your) *Secrets of Astrology* that when in one's nativity, Mercury is found in its apogee, it indicates the foreknowledge of the future. In the nativity of the Prophet,⁴ Mercury was found at 10 Scorpio by computation according to the *Eternal Tables*, and this was the reason why his family and friends opposed him." (2) Abū Ma'shar added that in this nativity, Venus was in Scorpio, Spica was in the Ascendant, and the previous conjunction of Saturn and Jupiter had occurred in Scorpio, while the Sun was again in Scorpio and Mars in Cancer.⁵ (3) He said this nativity indicated that his empire would flourish through his successors for 220 years but not afterward, and he also added that his empire would last in its form until 330 years had passed after his death. (4) I asked Abū Ma'shar, "But do you also know when this religion will change to another religion?" He answered he did not, (5) except that there will be great wars, and the citadels of the Muslims will be subdued.

³ Either Ibn al-Bāzyār, Abū Ma'shar's pupil and the dedicatee of a few of his works, or Ibn Sim'ān, another pupil of his.

⁴ The Greek version and the Latin derived from it speak about the 'false' prophet (ψευδοπροφήτης in V, *falsus propheta* in Latin) but it is only the result of Christian zealotry.

⁵ Using the given positions, Muḥammad's nativity can be dated to 25 October 572, about 3h 40m local apparent time in Mecca; this is Abū Ma'shar's reconstruction. Muḥammad died on 8 June 632 and therefore the 220 and 330 years counted from his death correspond to the years 852 and 962, respectively.

14. The indications of the signs are stronger than of the stars. If the twelfth house is afflicted by a malefic present, the feet are harmed even if the signs indicating the legs and the feet are in good condition. When Aries also indicates the feet

(1) I asked Abū Ma'shar which of the signs and the stars have stronger indications. He replied that the signs do, and the indications of the signs outweigh the indications of the stars as much as (the value of) the gold dīnār outweighs that of the silver dirham. (2) I then asked him, "If you entertain this idea, why does it happen that when a royal sign is in the Ascendant but its lord is cadent, it does not indicate a good reign?" (3) He replied, "You misrepresent the craft by this objection. Aries indicates kings that love justice and act for the benefit of their subjects indeed, but this is a particular indication; in general, it indicates newborn babies, children, and the beginning of the birth as well as the head and the face of a human, and in certain horoscopes, even the feet." (4) I asked him, "What fancies are you talking about? How should Aries indicate the matters related to the feet?" He replied to me that when the Ascendant is Libra, the seventh house is Aries, and as the seventh house indicates the matters related to the feet in every nativity, in this manner, Aries indicates the matters related to the feet. "Watch what I will show you," he said, "which is infallible: when a malefic is found in the twelfth house of the native, it always causes pain or weakness in the feet or legs, no matter Aquarius, which indicates the legs, or Pisces, which indicates the feet, is in good condition. But if even these are impeded by having the malefics in the twelfth house, it causes the paralysis of the feet. But even if someone is found to have his Ascendant in Aries, and Mars or his lord or his exaltation lord is cadent, and there is no good aspect in the horoscope, he will be still well-disposed, fair-faced, loved by everyone, and having a royal character: and the indication of the sign is constant whereas that of the stars is fickle."

16. A judgment deemed incredible

(1) He said, "I knew a wise man called Sind⁶, who judged the nativity of Ya'qūb ibn Ishāq⁷ and gave an unusual judgment. The house-master⁸ was Mercury in Scorpio, and Jupiter was at the 22nd degree of Cancer.⁹ He directed Mercury to the degree in opposition with Jupiter,¹⁰ which was his fall, and also directed the releaser to the degree in square with Mercury.¹¹ The connection was timely, and it promised a crisis as he said."

19. The Tail is cold and putrid

(1) I told him I had heard him say that the Tail is cold and dry but also that it is moist and having the look of a woman. He replied it is not entirely dry but cold and putrid.

20. When God listens to the supplicants according to the opinion of the Greeks, which is profane

(1) Abū Ma'shar said that when the kings of the Greeks wanted to ask God for some purpose in prayer, they made the Head be in the midheaven with Jupiter or regarded by him in an acceptable configuration, and the Moon apply to Jupiter, or separate from him and apply to the lord of the Ascendant, or the lord of the Ascendant apply to Jupiter and also to the Head in a friendly configuration. And they said their supplication was heard then.

21. Mercury in the Ascendant

(1) Abū Ma'shar said, "If Mercury is eastern and direct in the Ascendant, the native will be learned, eloquent, and talented in writing poems, and the same if he is in Sagittarius in the same condition."

⁶ This is my guess from the Greek *Sintos*. Perhaps identical with the astronomer Sind ibn 'Alī.

⁷ Al-Kindī, the famous philosopher, astrologer, and polymath of the ninth century.

⁸ Reading with the Latin version for the ἀφέτης, 'releaser', of **EV**.

⁹ Al-Kindī is thought to have been born in al-Kūfa around 800, but this configuration corresponds to late October 792.

¹⁰ It must have happened around the 75th year, that is, around 867, roughly. Al-Kindī died around 873, so this direction may have been the indication of his death.

¹¹ If we presume the two directions were active at the same time, Al-Kindī's releaser must have been either the Ascendant or the Lot of Fortune. I believe the reconstruction of his nativity would be possible by carefully investigating the astronomical parameters and the astrological reasoning used.

23. When you are about to go to the Caliph, who wants to use your knowledge of astrology

(1) He also told me in Baghdād, “If the Caliph takes you so that you serve him with your knowledge of astrology, do not make a judgment when the Ascendant is Scorpio, or the angles are in movable signs, or Mars is angular, because the judgment will be mistaken, (2) and because Scorpio is a sign of falsity.”

24. If someone wants to travel for his profit, how the horoscope should have its configurations

(1) He also told me another secret: when you want to travel for profit, make the lord of the second house be above the earth, separate from a malefic star, or a star made infortunate, or a declining star, and apply to an angular benefic in mutual reception, because the trip will be of the greatest profit. I add the following: the lord of the second house must not be in his fall, burned up, or retrograde because these conditions cause hindrance.

26. In the wells, the powers of the benefics are blunted

(1) Abū Ma’shar said that the so-called ‘wells’ constitute one of the secrets of astrology, and the experts disagree on them. Still, most experts say when a benefic happens to be in them, its power gets blunted, while others assert when a benefic is in them, (first) they offer good fortune but later misfortune.

28. It causes great changes when Saturn is in Libra and Jupiter in Cancer

(1) He said when Saturn is in Libra and Jupiter is in Cancer, they always effect great changes in the world.

30. Opponents

(1) He said, “If someone asks you about opponents, and if the lord of the Ascendant is found retrograde or burned up, the querent will be defeated by his opponent. But if the lord of the seventh house is found in the same condition, his opponent will be defeated.”

31. The Lot of Fortune does not have power when it is measured to be in the opposition of the Sun and [the conjunction of] the Moon

(1) I said to Abū Ma’shar, “Tell me, master, when the Sun is in opposition with the Ascendant and the Moon is in the Ascendant, and you take the intermediate degrees between the Sun and the Moon, and project them from the Ascendant, where does the Lot of Fortune fall?” (2) He replied to me that this kind of lot does not have power when it is in opposition with the Ascendant, and it does not have any effect either.

32. Which religion invented astrology the first and which the second

(1) Abū Ma’shar said it was the Chaldeans who first invented astrology, and they were followed by the Indians, the Egyptians, the Persians, the Romans, the Syrians, and the Arabs.

(32a. A big sack-like star that appears in the regions of Zanj)¹²

(1) He said, “In the regions of Zanj,¹³ there appears a big sack-like star.¹⁴ A man who has seen it told me it has little light, like a piece of a cloud, and it is always southern.”

33. When the eyes are not harmed even though the Sun and the Moon are harmed in a nativity

(1) I told Abū Ma’shar, “We find in the books on nativities that the Moon and the Sun show the matters related to the eyes.” (2) He said, “That is right.” (3) I then asked him, “So, how does it happen that in many nativities, we find the Sun and the Moon harmed, but the native has healthy eyes?” (4) He replied, “Have I not told you many times that the general effects are different from the specific effects? Therefore, when you see that in whatever nativity, the degree of neither the Ascendant nor the Moon nor the Sun is on a nebulous star, and a benefic looks at the Ascendant, the

¹² This chapter is only found in **V** and the Latin version. I added a suitably-looking title.

¹³ ‘Zanj’ refers to Sub-Saharan Africa, especially the southeastern coast.

¹⁴ This must be either of the Magellanic Clouds, probably the larger one.

Lot of Fortune, and the lord of the governing light, and the lord of the Ascendant also happens to not be on a cloud, the native will never become blind.”

35. How to judge the failure or success of love

(1) Shādhān said, “A magistrate who was in love with someone came to me (2) and showed me the interrogation cast on this issue. (3) In it, the Ascendant was Capricorn, and Mars was in it, (4) while Venus was in Scorpio, configured with Mars. (5) Saturn and Jupiter were in Sagittarius, Saturn at the latest degrees and Jupiter almost partilely conjunct with the Ascendant. (6) The horoscope was cast according to the Eternal Tables.¹⁵

(7) The magistrate took the horoscope to Abū Ma’shar first, but he was busy with a slave¹⁶. (8) So, he told me, ‘I am busy. You look at the interrogation and judge it.’ (9) I inspected the horoscope of the interrogation and saw Mars, which star indicates matters related to adultery and prostitution, in the Ascendant and that Venus was configured with him, so I wrote to the magistrate that he would attain his goal.

(10) Abū Ma’shar then asked me to show him what I had written. I showed him the judgment, and he said, ‘You are gravely mistaken.’ (11) And he wrote down in a formal letter, ‘According to the Tables of al-Ma’ mūn,¹⁷ which are more accurate than the Eternal Tables, Jupiter was in the degree of the Ascendant, and Jupiter always hinders and stops prostitution and adultery, and Mars, even though he is the lord of the eleventh house, which indicates the matters related to friends, does not show success but rather separation, enmity, and hatred. (12) And even though Venus is connected to Mars, there is not reception between them. (13) This configuration indicates that a long trip will befall the querent, and his love will last during the trip, but he will be delayed for as many months as the lesser years of Mars, which are 15. If his love has not been satisfied by this time, he will be delayed for as many months as his greater years, which are 66.”

(14) Shādhān said, “I marvel at this judgment.” (15) And I told Abū Ma’shar, “You are cunning¹⁸: I suspect you have heard that this man is about to travel, and he will not be able to reach the man he loves because of the trip, and this is the reason why you give that judgment.” (16) He replied that he did not know that, and he had judged in accordance with what the science dictated. (17) He added, “Never take Mars as an indicator of affection. For the matters related to affection and love, take the indications from Venus and the Moon’s configuration to her, especially if Venus is in Taurus.”

(18) Abū Ma’shar also added, “When you are looking at a nativity, and Saturn is the victor of the Ascendant of the nativity, and Venus is in a masculine sign in the root, then whenever Saturn transits the degree where Venus is located, it effects excessive love toward men, but if Venus is in a feminine sign in the root, it causes love of women. (19) And if Mars or the Tail is configured with that place, it indicates hindrances and separations.”

(35a. Another interrogation about love)¹⁹

(1) There was another interrogation about an affair with a woman, asked by an old man. (2) The Ascendant of the interrogation was Taurus 23, and the lady of the Ascendant, Venus, was found at the 15th degree of Sagittarius, while Saturn was at Sagittarius 16 and Jupiter conjunct with Saturn.²⁰ (3) I told the querent that he would have an

¹⁵ I date this interrogation to 5 December 869, about 8 am local apparent time for Baghdad, but there is a serious problem: Mars appears to be in Aries, and Venus in Scorpio cannot be configured with him. In any case, I have been unable to find a date that corresponds with the given positions more convincingly.

¹⁶ This is the reading of **E**; the Latin version writes *negotia*, ‘business’, and **V** omits the keyword when it abbreviates the story.

¹⁷ Most likely the *Al-Zīj al-Ma’ mūnī* compiled by Yaḥyā ibn Abī Maṣṣūr around 810.

¹⁸ Translating *deceptor* of the Latin version. **E** has μλιωτής and **V** μηλιωτής, neither of which are found in the lexicons; possibly they are corrupted from δολιωτής, which is also not in the lexicons, but a nominal derivation from the adjective δόλιος, ‘deceitful’.

¹⁹ This chapter is only found in the Latin version.

²⁰ The positions correspond with early November of 868, but it is not possible to date it more exactly. Even so, the proximity of the dates of this and the previous interrogation prove that this chapter also belonged to Shādhān.

intercourse with a black and somewhat aged woman. (4) He was delighted because of this (judgment) for many days although I did not notice that the lady of the Ascendant, Venus, was in the eighth sign, that is, in the house of death, conjunct with a malefic, Saturn, and with the lord of the eighth, Jupiter.

(5) When the querent heard the judgment, he left delighted, but after a few days, he died, as it had been foretold by Abū Ma‘shar. (6) For Abū Ma‘shar denounced my judgment stating that the querent would not only reach what he had intended but he would also die. (7) And it happened as Abū Ma‘shar had said.

37. The release of an incarcerated person

(1) Abū Ma‘shar said, “Aḥmad ibn Ḥabash²¹ was incarcerated and had a very accurate universal interrogation. The reason for this interrogation was this imprisonment since the direction of the degree of its Ascendant arrived at the opposition of the degree of Saturn then. (2) He had a knowledgeable friend there, and they were detained together for two years. (3) His educated friend told him that he would not be released before four years because the direction will change bounds then. (4) So, he sent me his universal interrogation. I examined it and saw that Jupiter was about to aspect the degree being left behind and that he would enter (the next bound) after two months and become stationary in it, first retrograde and then direct. (5) I informed him that he would be released within two months and find happiness instead of sorrow. (6) And what I judged took place; I have often had this judgment and found it very truthful indeed.”

38. Adversaries²²

(1) He said, “If you are asked about adversaries or those in enmity with each other, look at the lord of the Ascendant and the lord of the seventh house, and if they are found in the one house and are configured with a benefic, it indicates they will make peace; but if they are configured with a malefic, they will not reconcile with each other, especially if the configuration is a square or an opposition, since the trine and the sextile are easier. (2) And if the lord of the Ascendant and the lord of the seventh house are under the rays, their contestation will be much prolonged, and they will never reconcile. (3) And if the lord of the Ascendant is direct but the lord of the seventh house is retrograde, it indicates the victory of the querent over his enemy.

(4) In these interrogations, you will know the outcome of this contestation from the pivot of the Lower Midheaven. (5) For if its lord has a share in the Ascendant, the querent will win; but if it has more shares in the Descendant, his enemy will win. (6) And if you find a benefic in the Ascendant or in the second house while you find a malefic in the seventh house or in the eighth house, declare that the querent will win; but if the benefic is found in the seventh house and the malefic in the Ascendant, the querent will be defeated. (7) And if you find the Moon in the Ascendant or in the second house harmed, the querent will be condemned; but if you find it in the seventh house or in the eighth house in the same condition, the adversary will be defeated.

(A malefic in the Ascendant)

(8) I said to Abū Ma‘shar “When a malefic is found in the Ascendant, we say the querent will be defeated, and when a malefic is found in the seventh house, the adversary will be defeated – and this is taken for granted.” (9) I then asked him,²³ “When a king has mounted a campaign against the enemy, and the Ascendant is Taurus, and Mars, the lord of the seventh house, is in it, how will be the judgment?” (10) Abū Ma‘shar said, “Certainly, it will harm the cause of the king: he will be disgraced by the enemy (as) they will attack and chase him away.” (11) I asked Abū Ma‘shar, “And if this configuration should be found in an interrogation, what shall I judge?” (12) He replied to me, “I have a differing opinion as regards this configuration, because I say the querent will be harmed since the outcome of the affairs pertaining to the querent will happen according to the power of the Ascendant and according to how the

²¹ Aḥmad ibn ‘Abdallāh Ḥabash (died after 869), the Persian astronomer and mathematician.

²² I divided the title and the main text into smaller chapters, which reflects the structure of the original Arabic better.

²³ Reading with **V**; in **E** and the Latin version, it is Abū Ma‘shar who asks, but in this case, he would answer his own question.

benefics and the malefics are configured with it. (13) Nevertheless, nearly all the professors preceding me judged that the querent would win in such a configuration.”

39. The Sun is a malefic indeed and Mercury is benefic with the benefics and harmful with the malefics

(1) I said to Abū Ma’shar, “Some people say the Sun is a benefic, but you assert it is a malefic. How is this?” (2) He told me the Sun is a malefic indeed and worse than the other malefics. For when the malefics apply to the lord of the Ascendant, they partially blunt its power, but when the Sun applies to the lord of the Ascendant, it completely destroys its power.

(3) I asked him, “If you assert the Sun is a malefic, how could you say it does not harm in Leo or Aries? Also, when it is in Capricorn, and Saturn is with the Sun, or in Scorpio, and Mars is with it, what happens?” (4) Abū Ma’shar replied, “You assume that I have neither noticed these issues nor explored it accurately. (5) So, when the lord of the Ascendant is a malefic and it is in the Ascendant, it causes troubles, distress, hardship, and fears. When the malefic is in the second house, it disperses the wealth and there will be many things to pay for and debts.” (6) I asked Abū Ma’shar, “You assert the Sun is a malefic indeed. So, how can you say that it does not harm in Aries and Leo, (especially if) you claim Saturn harms in Capricorn?” (7) Abū Ma’shar replied, “Because the Sun dominates the other stars and it becomes similar to a king: when a king is in his own land or in his own palace, he rules over everybody. (8) But a malefic star is similar to a lion, fire, or annihilation: where these happen to be, they make damages. For a lion is dwelling in a grass field²⁴ or woodland that is its habitat, harms the passing animals.”

(9) Then I asked Abū Ma’shar what he says about Mercury. (10) He replied to me that when it is configured with the malefics and received by them, it extends their (malefic) power, but when it is configured with the benefics and received by them, it extends their (benefic) power. (11) And when the Mercury is in Aquarius while Saturn is in Libra, and Mercury is configured with Saturn, it becomes a second Saturn. But if Mercury looks at Jupiter while Jupiter is in Taurus or Scorpio, or if it looks at Venus while Venus is in Scorpio or Leo, it harms them²⁵ severely.

(12) I asked Abū Ma’shar, “And when Mercury is the lord of the Ascendant, and it is in Gemini, where it applies to Saturn, what shall I judge?” (13) He replied, “Nothing good. Such a star is severely harmed in its own domicile.” (14) I asked Abū Ma’shar, “And if Saturn applies to Mercury in Gemini while both are direct, and Jupiter is in Sagittarius, what will you judge?” (15) He replied that even such a figure effects nothing good.

²⁴ The text writes “reed bed” (καλαμῶν in Greek, *calami* in Latin) but I substituted it with a more suitable descriptor of lions’ habitat.

²⁵ Reading αὐτὰ with **E** for “her”, referring to Venus, of **V** and the Latin version.