



## ABŪ SAHL NAWBAQT

**ABŪ SAHL B. NAWBAQT**, 2nd/8th century astrologer and author. The family of Nawbaqt is said to have claimed descent from the Kayanid hero Gēv, the son of Gōdarz, but it is not known from what part of Iran Nawbaqt himself came. Nawbaqt first appears as an astrologer in the entourage of the second 'Abbasid caliph, Maṣṣūr (136-58/754-75), under whose influence he converted from Zoroastrianism to Islam (Mas'ūdī, *Morūj* VII, p. 290). He was associated with Māšā'allāh in selecting the proper astrological moment (30 July 762) for laying the foundations of Baghdad (Ya'qūbī, *Boldān*, p. 228; Bīrūnī, *Ātār al-bāqīya*, pp. 270-71; idem, *Chronology*, pp. 262-63; Pingree, "al-Fazārī," p. 104); and he advised Maṣṣūr concerning the revolt of Ebrāhīm in Ša'bān-Šawwāl, 145/October, 762-January, 763 (Ṭabarī, III, pp. 317-18). Little else is known of Nawbaqt save that his brief *Resāla fī sarā'er aḥkām al-nojūm* ("Epistle on the secrets of astrology") survives in several manuscript copies (Ullmann, *Geheimwissenschaften*, p. 303, no. 3).

Nawbaqt's descendents became eminently successful in astrology, politics, and theology (Massignon; cf. *Fehrest*, p. 177). One of the more prominent members of the family was his son, Abū Sahl, whom he presented to Maṣṣūr as his successor in the post of court astrologer according to Yūsof b. Ebrāhīm, known as Ebn al-Dāya, who heard the story from Abū Sahl's son Esmā'īl (Ebn Abī Oṣaybe'a, *Oyūn* II, p. 85; Ebn al-Qeftī, *Ta'rik al-ḥokamā'*, p. 409; Ebn 'Ebrī, *Ta'rik*, p. 125). From this account we learn that Abū Sahl's original name was Persian: Kvaršād Māh Ṭaymādā Mābādār Kōsrevā Behšād (see Justi, *Namenbuch*, p. 226). The occurrence of the sun and the moon as the first two



elements in his name probably indicates that Abū Sahl was born before Nawbaqt's conversion from Zoroastrianism. Abū Sahl continued to serve Manšūr, accompanying him also, along with the court physician, Laǰlāǰ, on his last pilgrimage to Mecca in 775 (Ebn Abī Oṣaybe'a, *Oyūn* II, pp. 84-85; Ebn al-Qeftī, *Ta'riḳ*, p. 439).

Abū Sahl's career under the next two caliphs, Maḥdī (775-85) and Hādī (785-86), remains obscure; but under Hārūn al-Rašīd (170-93/786-809) he took up a position in the *Ḳezānat al-Ḥekma*, where he was employed in translating Pahlavi books into Arabic. (See *Fehrest*, p. 274; Ebn al-Qeftī, *Ta'riḳ*, p. 255; these sources wrongly name him Abū Sahl al-Faẓl, a mistake which led Ṣā'ed Andalūsī [*Ṭabaqāt*, ed., p. 60; tr., p. 117] to split him into two astrologers.) This translation activity was also pursued by other members of Nawbaqt's family (*Fehrest*, p. 244). Abū Sahl may perhaps be identical with the Sahl b. Nawbaqt who is said to have versified for Yaḥyā b. *Ḳāled* Barmakī, the vizier of Maḥdī and of Hārūn al-Rašīd until Ṣafar, 187/January-February, 803, the Arabic translation of the *Kalīla wa Demna* made by 'Abdallāh b. Hellāl Ahwāzī for the same Yaḥyā in 160/776-77 (*Kašf al-ẓonūn* [Leipzig] V, p. 238). Abū Sahl probably died before the end of Hārūn al-Rašīd's caliphate, as our sources do not mention him again.

Ebn al-Nadīm (*Fehrest*, p. 274), who is copied by Ebn al-Qeftī (*Ta'riḳ*, p. 225), lists seven books on astrology (none now extant) composed by Abū Sahl: 1. *Ketāb al-nahmaṭān fi'l-mawālīd* ("Book of the Nahmaṭān [?] concerning nativities"). A long extract, including an important history of the transmission of science and its preservation in Iran (see Pingree, *Thousands*, pp. 9-12) is preserved (*Fehrest*, pp. 238-39). 2. *Ketāb aḧol al-noǰūm* ("Book of the omens of the stars"). 3. *Ketāb al-mawālīd: moḧrad* ("Book of nativities: solitary"). 4. *Ketāb taḥwīl senī al-mawālīd* ("Book of the revolutions of the years of nativities"). 5. *Ketāb al-madḳal* ("Book of the introduction"). 6. *Ketāb al-tašbīḧ wa'l-tamṭīl* ("Book of allegory and comparison"). 7. *Ketāb al-montaḥel men aqāwīl al-monaǰǰemīn fi'l-aḳbār wa'l-masā'el wa'l-mawālīd wa ḡayrehā* ("Book of the plagiarist from the sayings of the astrologers concerning rumors, interrogations, nativities, etc."). Various citations of Abū Sahl's views on particular points found in astrological compendia presumably are derived from one or another of these works.



## BIBLIOGRAPHY

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