



## EḲTĪRĀT

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**EḲTĪRĀT** (choices, elections), a term used in Islamic divination and astrology in at least four principle meanings:

1. It refers to hemerologies in which each of the thirty days of a month, either synodic or conventional (e.g., the Persian hemerology), is characterized as being good (*sa'd*) or bad (*naḥs*) for undertaking specified activities. 2. The goodness or badness of the time for activities depends on the lunar station (*manzel al-qamar*) occupied by the moon. 3. The goodness or badness of the time for activities depends on the zodiacal sign occupied by the moon. 4. The type of astrology usually denominated catarchic (*ḥokm al-nojūm*) is often associated with the word *eḳtīārāt*; in Islamic astrology, following a Sasanian precedent, this is confounded with interrogations (*masā'el*).

1. The earliest hemerologies are those of Mesopotamia, in which each day of each month is usually given a religious significance as well as a number of activities to be undertaken or avoided (Labat, 1939). There also exists a far simpler form in which each day in each month is either favorable or unfavorable, or is associated with a single activity (Labat, 1943; for further Mesopotamian sources see Reiner, pp. 111-12). A Persian hemerology that may be related to this Mesopotamian tradition is found in the *Andarz ī Ādurbād īMahraspandān* (secs. 119-48, I, pp. 58-71, tr. in Zaehner, pp. 101-10). In this text the thirty days of a Persian month are identified by their associated deities, and one or two activities are advised to be engaged in or avoided on each. Perhaps related to a Persian tradition, though not to the *Andarz* of Ādurbād, is the Mandaean hemerology in chapter 8 of *The Book of the Zodiac*



(Drower, pp. 88-92). This is a combination of three sources, excerpted for each of the thirty days of a month, and listing activities to be undertaken or avoided and prognostications for one who becomes ill and for one who is born on that day. Close to this is a Greek text published in *Catalogus Codicum Astrologorum Graecorum* (XI/1, pp. 134-44; this text cites Melampus, for whom see the lunarium conflated from Melampus and another “Egyptian” book in VIII/4, pp. 105-07).

Reflecting to some extent the contents of the *Andarz* of Ādurbād is an Arabic book attributed to Imam Ja‘far al-Šādeq (see Sezgin, *GAS* VII, pp. 323-24, 373). It is also very close in content to the chapter of the Mandaean *Book of the Zodiac* referred to above; but in addition contains parts of the associations of the thirty days of the month with stories from the Old Testament found in many similar Byzantine hemerologies (*Catalogus* III, pp. 32-39, X, pp. 121-26, ascribed to David and Solomon, 196-200, 243-47, XI/2, pp. 157-62). The Mandaean and the Byzantine hemerologies along with Ja‘far al-Šādeq’s *Ketāb* all share a common source.

Also attributed to Ja‘far al-Šādeq are the short hemerologies which, like the second Mesopotamian text (Labat, 1943), do little more than indicate that the day is favorable or unfavorable (see, e.g., Ruska, II, pp. 35-36; for similar works in Syriac and Greek, see Budge, II, pp. 557-59; *CCAG* 8/4, pp. 102-04). Ebied and Young (p. 296, n. 3) mention a long hemerology in Arabic attributed to Daniel, Salmān the Persian, and Ja‘far al-Šādeq, which, they say, has a number of features reflecting Zoroastrian concepts. They state that they are preparing an edition; it seems not yet to have appeared.

2. The second type of elections originated in India, where it is the basic form of their science of catarchic astrology (*muhūrtaśāstra*); there the operative variable is the *nakṣatra* in which the moon is located (Pingree, *Jyotiḥśāstra*, chap. 6, pp. 101-09). In Sasanian Persia there seems to have been an adaptation of this methodology in which the *nakṣatras* were given Persian names (for these names, see Henning, esp. pp. 242-46). Later, they were identified with the Arabic *manāzel al-qamar*; and there exists in the *Ketāb al-bāre’fī aḥkām al-nojūm* of ‘Alī b. Abī’l-Rejāl (Sezgin, *GAS* VII, pp. 186-87), a chapter (21 of book 7) in which for each *manzel* (station) occupied by the moon are given the elections according to the Indians, to Dorotheus (in part concocted from the fifth book of his work), and to the Persians, as well as the fates of male and female natives and a description of the *manzel*’s image for use in astral magic; there is a Byzantine translation of this astrological text



(*Catalogus* IX/1, pp. 141-56). Such a text also appears in the *Ġāyat at al-ḥakīm* ascribed to Abū Maslama Majrīṭī (ed. H. Ritter, Leipzig, 1933, bk. 1, chap. 4, pp. 14-26; Byzantine texts are found in *Catalogus* V/3, pp. 90-93, VIII/1, pp. 218-19).

3. The judgement that it is or it is not propitious to begin a specified activity when the moon is in a designated zodiacal sign occurs first in Akkadian texts of the Seleucid period (Reiner, pp.108-11). The principal Greek source of such teachings was the astrological poem of Dorotheus of Sidon (bk. 5 passim), which had been translated into Pahlavi in the third century, and from that language was translated into Arabic by ‘Omar b. Farroḳān Ṭabarī (*Dorothei Sidonii Carmen Astrologicum*, ed. D. Pingree, Leipzig, 1976) and, at least in part, by Māšā’-Allāh (D. Pingree, “Māshā’allāh”). Other elements of this form of elections are found in the *Apotelesmatica* of Hephaestio of Thebes (ed. D. Pingree, Leipzig, 1973, bk. 3, chap. 5, pp. 240-51; cf. also *Catalogus* V/3, pp. 94-96). Hephaestio was read by Theophilus (Ṭawfīl b. Ṭūmā) of Edessa, and introduced by him to Māšā’-Allāh (both were at the ‘Abbasid court during the last half of the 8th century). From these Greek sources—Dorotheus and Hephaestio—, as filtered through Māšā’-Allāh, elections based on the zodiacal sign occupied by the moon became an integral part of astrology as practiced in the Islamic world. Thus, for example, Naṣīr-al-Dīn Ṭūsī came to write in Persian an *Eḳtīārāt masīr al-qamar*, otherwise known as the *Eḳtīārāt-e qamar fī borūj-e eṭnay ‘ašar* (Storey, II, pp. 54-55).

4. Dorotheus of Sidon initiated a more complex method of practicing catarchic astrology in which the astrologer must search for the most propitious moment for undertaking an activity, basing his judgment on the full horoscope of that time. After this form of catarchic astrology reached India in the second century, it was paralleled by the Indian development of interrogational astrology (*praśnajñāna*), in which the judgment concerning an activity was based on the horoscope of the moment at which the question was posed to the astrologer. Both Indian *muhūrtaśāstra* and *praśnajñāna* were transmitted to Persia during the Sasanian era, and there blended with the Pahlavi translations of Dorotheus and Vettius Valens into an ambiguous science of elections, which was partly catarchic, partly interrogational. To the subject normally addressed by the Greek astrologers, the Indians added military astrology, by which kings and generals may be advised. To the subjects addressed by both Greek and Indian astrologers, the Persians added political astrology, by which both the governors and their potential or actual rivals may be advised (this dangerous aspect of astrology had long been banned in the



Roman empire; see Cramer).

The Pahlavi books on elections are now all lost, but we know of them through the Greek works of Theophilus of Edessa, the Arabic translations of Dorotheus and Valens (Wālīs), the writings attributed to Zoroaster and to Bozorgmehr (q.v.), and the Arabic works of a number of astrologers of Persian background who wrote in the late eighth and ninth centuries, notably Māšāʾ-Allāh, ʿOmar b. Farroḳān Ṭabarī, and Sahl b. Bešr (*Ketāb al-eḳtīārāt ʿalaʾl-boyūt al-eṭnay ʿašar*). Based on this early Arabic tradition are several treatises written in Persian. None of them has yet been published or studied, so that little more can be done here than to name them. The earliest is a *Ketāb-e eḳtīārāt* composed at the order of Sultan Sanjar Saljūqī (r. 511-52/1117-57; Storey, II, p. 46). In the first decade of the thirteenth century Faḳr-al-Dīn Moḥammad b. ʿOmar Rāzī (d. 606/1209) composed a *Ketāb al-eḳtīārāt al-ʿalāʾīya fiʾl-eḳtīārāt-al-samāʾīya* for Sultan ʿAlāʾ-al-Dīn Moḥammad Ḳvārazmšāh (r. 596-617/1200-20). Rāzī himself later translated this into Arabic (Storey, II, p. 49). And on either 20 Rajab 663/8 May 1265 or 9 Jomādā I 670/13 December 1271 Naṣīr-al-Dīn Ṭūsī completed, at Marāḡa, a Persian translation of and commentary on the *Ketāb al-ṭamara* of pseudo-Ptolemy; he had undertaken this work at the request of Bahāʾ-al-Dīn Moḥammad Joveynī (Storey, II, pp. 36-37).

See also [ASTROLOGY AND ASTRONOMY](#); [DIVINATION](#).

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