



ZĀYČA

ZĀYČA (*zāyčag*), written *z'yc(k)*, Middle Persian term meaning “birth chart, horoscope.” The etymology of the term is not certain, but there is definitely no connection with the MPers. term *zīg*, which denotes both the bonds that tie the planets to the Sun and the Moon and the astronomical tables that were drawn up in Sasanian Iran (on the doctrine of the planetary bonds in Sasanian Iran, cf. Panaino, 1998, in particular pp. 43-50, 145-60 dealing with the etymology of the form *zīg*; on the astronomical tables, see also [ASTROLOGY AND ASTRONOMY i](#)). The hypothesis that would seem to be the most likely one, namely that *zāyč* derives from the theme *zāy-* “to be born,” is controversial, as no other formations in *-č* from the present stem are attested in Middle Persian (cf. MacKenzie, in Panaino, 1998, p. 158 and especially 49-50, in whose opinion this word is connected with the verbal root *zan-* “to bear”).

“Horoscope” is also a meaning of the form *spihr* (cf. *Bd.* 6 F.1 and *Zād.* 2.20, and especially *Bd.* 36.34, where the expressions *nēk spihr* and *wad spihr* “with a good / bad horoscope” occur).

The only passage in a Pahlavi text containing the description of a horoscope is § 2 of *Bd.* 5 (a chapter that is included only in the Iranian redaction of the *Bundahišn*); it refers to the astral situation at the very first moment of the material life (*gētīg*) of the world, at the beginning of the seventh millennium of Zoroastrian cosmography (the title of this chapter is *Abar zāyč ī gēhān kū čiyōn jast* “On the horoscope of the world, how it was”; for the horoscopes in texts deriving from Middle Persian, of which the originals are lost, see [HOROSCOPE](#)).



The description of this horoscope mentions the twelve zodiacal signs and the “houses” that begin in them, and gives several details: the Ascendent, which is the starting point of the first house and of the horoscope, is at 19° of Cancer, in the lunar mansion Azarag; in this sector are situated the celestial bodies Tištar (= Sirius) and Ohrmazd (= Jupiter); Kēwān (= Saturn) is situated in Libra; the Tail of Gōzihr (= the descendant lunar node) is in Sagittarius; Wahrām (= Mars) is in Capricorn; Anāhīd (= Venus) and Tīr (= Mercury) are in Pisces; Mihr (= the Sun) is in Aries, in the lunar mansion Pešparwēz (this name is not given in the manuscripts, but the reference to it can be deduced from textual evidence); Māh (= the Moon) is in Taurus, and the Head of Gōzihr (= the ascendant lunar node) is in Gemini.

In the manuscripts, the description of the horoscope is illustrated by an astrological diagram. This diagram is drawn following the typical banner-style structure of ancient horoscope diagrams: it only gives the names of the planets and the zodiacal signs, without mentioning the houses or giving the degree of the ascendant or of any planet (there are many spelling errors in the names given in the diagram; for a detailed analysis, see Raffaelli, 1999).

In the text each house is called by a name referring to the main department of human life on which it was thought to bear influence in the astrological tradition (with the exception of the name of the tenth house, which refers to its position in the horoscope); on the house system and its meaning, see Bouché-Leclercq, 1899, pp. 276-88; cf. also MacKenzie, 1964, pp. 526-28; [ASTROLOGY AND ASTRONOMY IN IRAN ii](#), p. 867, col. 1; [HOROSCOPE](#)).

On the lunar mansions (*xwurdag*), of which the text only mentions the two that have their starting point in the two most important houses of the horoscope, the first and the tenth, see Henning, 1942, pp. 240-46; [ASTROLOGY AND ASTRONOMY i. HISTORY OF ASTRONOMY IN IRAN](#), p. 859.

A few remarks must be made about the structure of the birth chart: there are some elements in the description indicating that it is divided into twelve sectors of 30° each, beginning with the starting-point of the horoscope, viz. at 19° Cancer (which would make each house begin at 19° of zodiacal sign), while other elements indicate that the houses coincide with the zodiacal signs (that is to say, each house goes from 0° to 30° of a sign). The fact that these two ways of dividing the chart are quite incompatible, probably due to two different interpretations of it, does not seem to have occurred to the person who composed the text, in all likelihood because he was not acquainted with

astrological skills.

As for the celestial bodies that are named in the text, it should be remarked first of all that the mention of Tištar (see [TIŠTRYA](#)), the only fixed star in the chart, is due to the importance of this star in Zoroastrian uranography (the position of this star in the sign of Cancer is consistent with traditional aspects of Zoroastrianism, as well as having parallels in classical texts). The mention of the two lunar nodes (the Head and the Tail of Gōzihr) is also interesting: this implies that the lunar nodes were considered as planetary bodies, which is an innovation that was made in India. In the Indian texts the ascendant node is called Rahu and the descendant one Ketu; Pingree (1997, p. 40; 2004, p. 541) dates this innovation to the late 4th or the 5th century and takes this date as the terminus post quem for the drawing up of the chart (on Gōzihr, see also [GŌZIHR](#); Hartner, 1968). But the most interesting aspect of the *zāyč ī gēhān* concerns the position of the planets: all of them (with the exception of Mercury) are situated in the sign in which the astrological tradition placed their “exaltation” (MP *bālist*). The exaltation was the degree of the zodiac in which a planet was believed to exert an especially strong influence: it is obvious, then, that the intent of the text is not so much to describe the actual position of the stars at the moment when the material life of the world began as to depict an ideal, particularly favorable, situation, in which the planetary bodies are in a position of especially great strength (on exaltation, see Bouché-Leclercq, 1899, pp. 192-99; cf. also MacKenzie 1964: 523-524). Although the exact position of the planets is not specified, it can be logically assumed that they are situated in the degree of exaltation. This positioning is borne out by evidence in the text itself, as well as by remarks made in other Pahlavi texts referring to the astral situation at the beginning of the world’s life, and especially in Islamic texts deriving from Middle Persian texts that describe the horoscope of the world (see below), specifying the position of the planets. It should be pointed that the mention of the lunar nodes in this context seems to indicate that the idea of the exaltation of these celestial bodies originated in Sasanian Iran (the degree of their exaltation, as specified by Islamic sources, is 3° Gemini and 3° Sagittarius).

It is quite likely that the concept of “horoscope of the world” came to Iran from the West: as a matter of fact, several classical sources speak of a horoscope of the world, attributing its origin to the Egyptians (see especially Firmicus Maternus, *Mathesis* 3.1.1 and Macrobius, *Somnium Scipionis* 1.21, 24). In the horoscope that these sources speak of, however, the planets are not in



exaltation but in the sign of their “domicile,” another particularly favorable position.

The difference between the *zāyč ī gēhān* and the classical sources can be understood if it is taken into account that the former coincides with the natal chart of Gayōmard, the first man according to the Zoroastrian tradition (whose earthly life began, like the life of the cosmos, at the beginning of the seventh millennium of Zoroastrian cosmography). The horoscope of Gayōmard is dealt with in *Bd.* 6 F. 1-5 and *Zād.* 2.20-21, which mention the positions in the chart of the planets Ohrmazd and Kēwān (in these passages, and in *Bd.* 6 F.6 and *Zād.* 2.22, the duration of Gayōmard’s life for thirty years is explained on the grounds of the reciprocal position of the two planets). The horoscope of Gayōmard reflects a doctrine that had been elaborated in India, according to which the characteristic feature of the horoscope of an exceptional person is that, at the time of his birth, all the planets are in exaltation. This doctrine is first attested in the 4th-century CE Sanskrit text *Yavanajātaka* 8, 3-5 e 9, 2. In all likelihood, once this doctrine had been taken over in Iran, it was applied to the horoscope of Gayōmard, and subsequently to the world (possibly changing the structure of its horoscope).

The astral chart of the Iranian world was handed down to later Zoroastrian tradition (it is found, in fact, in the New Persian astrological *Rivāyat* of the Dastur Bazru) and to other cultural traditions. The first person to take it into account may have been Stephanus Philosophus, an 8th-century Byzantine author. A description of the world horoscope that is practically identical to the one in the *Bundahišn* was perhaps taken from one of his texts: it is contained in a work by Abū Ma’sar (which has survived only in the Greek translation, entitled *Μυστήρια*). The Iranian horoscope of the world became remarkably widespread in Islamic circles: first and foremost are the descriptions that occur in the *Chronology* of Ḥamza al-Eṣfahānī, and in the anonymous *Ketāb asrār kalām Hormos*, both in Arabic, as well as in the New Persian text *Ta’rīk-e Ṭabari* by Bal’ami. Furthermore, the horoscope of the Iranian world was transmitted to the West through translations of Arabic texts: particularly worth mentioning is its presence in a Byzantine text (of uncertain date) where it is presented as being the exposition of the astronomical doctrine of the “Chaldeans.” This text of indirect Iranian descent backed up Bouché-Leclercq’s opinion that the chart with the planets in exaltation had a “Chaldean” origin, unlike the horoscope with the planets in their domicile, which would be of Egyptian origin (see Bouché-Leclercq, 1899, pp. 185-88; 192, n. 1). This

interpretation was taken up again by MacKenzie in his 1964 article on chapters 5, 5 A, 5 B e, 6 F of the *Bundahišn*). Attention should also be drawn to a mention of this horoscope in the *Ketāb al-bari* by ‘Ali b. Abe’l-Rejāl, a text that was translated into Latin. It is possible that, through the translation of these texts, a doctrine that had set out from the West in the first place returned there in a modified form.

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