Islam & Astrology: Are they really oil & water?

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Goals for this presentation

- To examine and evaluate astrology and Islam in three distinct ways:
  - 1. “Islamic” contributions to astrology: a quick survey of several of the important Islamic scholars in the development of astrology.
  - 2. Islamic thoughts on astrology: how astrology appears in the Qur’an and Islamic thoughts on astrology
  - 3. The astrology of Islam: the charts of important moments and people in the history of Islam, like the Prophet Muhammad or the battle of Karbala.
- To answer whether Islam and astrology are really oil and water.
My story…

- I’ve been a professional astrologer since 2002 after 12 years of study.

- I converted to Islam on October 10, 2011. I’m a muezzin at my masjid (mosque). The muezzin makes the call to prayer.

- I’m a former Christian minister and atheist.

- I spent 10 years challenging both the mechanics and philosophical underpinnings of astrology before “coming out” as an astrologer myself in 2002.
The Golden Age of Islam
& Astrology
How Islam saved astrology
Bayt al-Hikma
(The House of Wisdom)

- Within 150 years of the death of the Prophet Muhammad, Arabs, under the banner of Islam, transformed their historical tribalism into an empire.

- Caliph Harun al-Rashid envisions a gathering of some of the best minds in the Abbasid caliphate, throughout Persia, India, Egypt, Asia Minor, Libya, the Caucasus in Baghdad, the seat of the empire.

- His son, al-Ma’Mun (reigning from 813-833), initiates the actual process and it continues into the mid13th century, until the siege of Baghdad in 1258, effectively ending The House of Wisdom.
Al-Ma’Mun’s Reforms

- A confluence of ancient cultures, brought together by a vigorous & inexperienced Arabic empire, made it ripe for Al-Ma’Mun’s rational approach to learning and Islam called Mu’tazilah.

- Arabs readily accepted the Hindu numeral system and commenced exacting developments in all kinds of mathematical computations, including trigonometry, algebra (itself an Arabic word), geometry, and use of sifr or cypher (zero), and other mathematical tables, like the zij and instruments like the astrolabe.

- Advances in science (including the idea of a scientific method—Al Hazen), graphic design and calligraphy.

- There was a massive project to translate Greek, Latin and Persian texts throughout the Empire, including the libraries of Ptolemaic Egypt.

- The caliph also had court astrologers.

- Al-Ma’Mun was an astronomer himself and developed observatories throughout his vast empire.
Founding of Baghdad
Masha’Allah (Menasseh) ibn Athari (740-815)

- A Jewish native of Basra who studied with Nawbakht the Persian, an astrologer (679-771), during the reign of Al-Mansur, 2nd Caliph of the Abbasid Caliphate.

- He helped to elect the founding chart for Baghdad.

- He drew on his own native tradition and as well as Greek, Sassanian and Indian thought.

- He seemed to advance a 10 orb universe similar to what would be advanced by Kabbalists much later.

- Wrote the first book on using the astrolabe, and more than two dozen astrological books beyond that.

- Earliest proponent of the study of the great conjunctions of Jupiter-Saturn as indications of world shifts.
Al-Kindi (801-866)

- The première Arabic philosopher, especially with Hellenic thought, particularly Neoplatonic & Aristotelian logic.
- In his book “On The Stellar Rays,” he attempts to outline a theory on how astrology works that is based on human perception and sense of the ever-changing interactions of the stars’ (or planetary) rays. It could be called anthropocentric.
- James Holden in his book, A History of Horoscopic Astrology, called him “the Isaac Asimov of the 9th century” since he wrote hundreds of books on a variety of topics.
Abu-Mashar (787-886)

- He was a lifelong scholar and skeptic of astrology until he met his teacher, Al-Kindi. At 47 years old, his fourth Jupiter return, he became an astrologer.

- He greater developed natal and mundane astrology by documenting methods of delineation using Aries ingress, directions (like solar arc directions, chronocrators (time lords) and profections), transits, solar returns, increasing the number of “Arabic” parts or lots used, and identifying the patterns of conjunctions between Jupiter-Saturn by triplicity.

- For instance, the Lot or Part of Fortune, according to Rob Hand, “is one of the signifiers of the body and health, and it is the primary signifier of prosperity, and also career as it relates to prosperity.” The lot of fortune for someone born during the day is calculated using the formula Moon-Sun + Ascendant

- He also worked with the lunar nodes per influences from India.

- He predicted the end of the powerful Abbasid/Bahgdad period within one hundred years of its actual end.
Al-Biruni (973-1048)

- A polymath, well-accomplished in many forms of mathematics, language, cartography, Earth sciences, and astrology.

- His four year journey through India helped him develop a fluency in Sanskrit and to write the definitive book on India, Indian culture and astrology of his time.

- Carried on a lengthy polemical correspondence with Ibn Sina about astrology, among many other subjects.

- He was the first to accurately describe the Milky Way as a nebulous collection of innumerable stars.

- He was also critical of certain practices, like the proliferation of lots or parts for anything and everything, unlike the standard Lots of Fortune or Spirit.

- His magnum opus was *The Book of Instruction in the Elements of the Art of Astrology.*
The Sufis: Ibn Arabi (1165-1240) & Rumi (1207-1273)

- Mystical writers and thinkers like Ibn Arabi and Rumi saw some of the Neoplatonic ideas of astrology as entry points into greater devotion and spiritual understanding.

- The many manifestations of nature, even in the movement of stars, became a way to better appreciate Tawhid, belief in the Oneness of God.

- In the Four Pillars of Spiritual Transformation, Ibn Arabi correlates seven of Islam’s major prophets, as visited by the Prophet Muhammad in a mystical vision, to seven planets & a schema for spiritual development.
Rumi

One of my favorite translations of a Rumi poem captures, I think, a certain essence & Stoic ideal about astrology:

Brother, stand the pain.
Escape the poison of your impulses.
The sky will bow to your beauty, if you do.
Learn to the light the candle.
Rise with the Sun.
Turn away from the cave of your sleeping.
That way a thorn expands to a rose.
A particular glows with the universal.

Rumi also writes elsewhere: “This sky is the astrolabe, and the reality is Love.”
Between January 29-February 10 1258, Baghdad fell to Mongol invaders, ending the Golden Age of Islam and the Bayt al-Hikma.

Islamic-inspired and developed wisdom disseminates into other parts of the Near East, like Egypt or Damascus or in strongholds along the Iberian Peninsula until that ends in 1492 with the fall of Moorish rule.

Within 200 years of the Bayt al-Hikma’s fall, Europe, named after Europa who was stolen from the East by Zeus to the land of the setting Sun, begins to come into its own through translations of Arabic translations of classical works.

However, there are also a lesser known set of reasons.
What went “wrong”?

- The Golden Age began to tarnish from the 11th century on.

- Islamic scholars became increasingly suspicious of “foreign,” non-Arabic philosophy and specifically any reliance more on reason in theological thinking than relying on historical & revelatory interpretation. For example, some of this creeps into Al-Kindi’s thinking about electional & horary astrology & his debates with Ibn Sina.

- One can think of this “Golden Age” as an inverse Enlightenment in the Arabic world. Initially, literalists (those who saw the Qur’an as eternal) were persecuted rather than rationalists (Mu’talizah).
What also went “wrong”?

- As Islam began to lose more of its worldly power, the traditionalist models, which were more reliant on Islam’s early history, gained more ground, leading to the clear ascendancy of Sunni (traditional) Islam.

- One oppositional model to Mu’tazilah is the rise of the Wahhabism or the Salafi tradition. For them, Islam’s future and glory rests with its past, not innovations (bida’a) of religious practice or future.

- Is there a way to bridge reason and revelation?
Revelation and Reason

- Revelation and Reason are both ways to engage the world we know based on how we “see” it.

- **Revelation** “sees” the world through what’s been revealed by inspiration, intuition, analogy or recorded sight that may or may not be historical, like the parting of the Red Sea or Jesus ascending to heaven.

- **Reason** “sees” the world based on what one observes literally with one’s own eyes or instruments (like a microscope or telescope), as historically recorded and documented by others, or what theoretically makes sense based on direct observations.
The worlds of Revelation

- The Cosmos and all we observe about it is an analogue for something much greater than itself.

- This “something” or group of things is largely invisible or imperceptible.

- According to most religions, the moments when we “see” this are rarer and more specialized to particular people, like prophets and saints.

- These revelations are documented, usually, in books that are not normally amended by “regular” folks.

- All revelations are qualified as such from within an existing tradition and valid authorities of that tradition.
The worlds of Reason

- A process of establishing validity based on principles of logic AND experiential observation.
- One strives for an observation that is more objective than subjective. According to Richard Tarnas, in Cosmos & Psyche, “[i]f the object is to be properly understood, the subject must observe and analyze that object with the utmost care taken to inhibit the naïve human tendency to invest the object with characteristics that are properly attributable only to the human subject.”
- We objectify the world. The world shifts from subject to object, just as we learned from Copernicus.
Islamic thoughts on astrology

Reason & Revelation
The Prophet Muhammad

Prophet Muhammad (PBUH)
Male Chart
Apr 26 0570, Sat
6:00 am LMT - 2:39:16
Mecca, Saudi Arabia
21°N 27° 03' 83°E 49'
Geocentric
Tropical
Whole Signs
True Node
The Prophet Muhammad (2)
Who was he?

- He was a uneducated merchant who married his former boss, Khadijah. He was known to be extremely trustworthy and fair in business & personal dealings. In 610, during the month of Ramadan, he was meditating in a cave when he received the first messages from Allah (SWT) through the Angel Jibril (Gabriel) that he would receive over the next 23 years.

- During those 23 years, he went from being a social outcast to the chief leader of Arabs throughout the peninsula and founder of Islam, the path of submission to Allah, the One God.

- 23-24 years is enough for two Jupiter returns.
Uses of astronomy & astrology in Islam

- The Night Journey – Isra and Mi’raj

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<th>In the footsteps of</th>
<th>Heaven</th>
<th>Planet</th>
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<tr>
<td>Abraham (Ibrāhīm)</td>
<td>7th</td>
<td>Saturn</td>
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<td>Moses (Mūsā)</td>
<td>6th</td>
<td>Jupiter</td>
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<td>Aaron (Hārūn)</td>
<td>5th</td>
<td>Mars</td>
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<td>Enoch (Idrīs)</td>
<td>4th</td>
<td>Sun</td>
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<td>Joseph (Yūsuf)</td>
<td>3rd</td>
<td>Venus</td>
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<td>Jesus (‘Īsā)</td>
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<td>Mercury</td>
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<td>Adam</td>
<td>1st</td>
<td>Moon</td>
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- Times of prayer are based on positions of the Sun throughout the day: The noon prayer happens after the Sun passes into the 9th house or passes below the 7th house for the sundown prayer.
Uses of astronomy & astrology in Islam

- Venus is the planet often associated with Islam, as the star with the crescent. The day for services is Friday, a Venus day.

- Prayers are still offered with eclipses.

- #7 & #12 have a lot of merit in Islam, including the number of verses for the equivalent of the Lord’s prayer (Al-Fatihah) or how “la ilahah illa’lllah” (There is no God but Allah) has four words, seven syllables & 12 letters as mirroring four elements, seven visible planets and 12 Zodiac signs.

- Solstice points are used in determining finding the Qibla, orientation toward Makka, May 28/Nov. 28 (morning) vs. July 15/Jan. 13 (night)

- Islam has a very active and visible relationship to Light, from wherever it emanates. There’s even a surah in the Qur’an named for that subject – An Nur.
What the Holy Qur’an & Hadith say?

- Hadith are the recorded, documented sayings of the Prophet and 1st person witnesses. Muhammad has the most documented life in human history.

"Believing in those who foretell the future constitutes Kufr (disbelief). Islam's campaign was not confined to the soothsayers and diviners but included all those who go to them, ask their help, and believe in their superstitions and errors. The Prophet (peace and blessings be upon him) said, "The prayer of one who goes to a soothsayer, asks him something and believes in what he says, will not be accepted for forty days." (Reported by Muslim)

He is also reported to have said, "Whoever goes to a soothsayer and believes in what he says, has denied what was revealed to Muhammad."

- The Prophet Muhammad has reportedly said that soothsayers are insignificant.

- In religious life, diviners are seen as soothsayers because they focus on the future as if humans are in control rather than God. One description might be that diviners are perceived to lack a moral vigor unlike prophets.
What the Holy Qur’an & Hadith say?

- According to the Surah 72 of the Qur’an, it’s believed that knowledge of the Unseen come from species of creatures called the Jinn who eavesdrop on God’s plans in the heavens. No one can correctly perceive the Unseen (Al Ghaib).

- Al Ghaib is a central tenet and idea of Islamic thought because it’s believed that none know the unknown or unseen except Allah.

Yusuf Ali
With Him are the keys of the unseen, the treasures that none knoweth but He. He knoweth whatever there is on the earth and in the sea. Not a leaf doth fall but with His knowledge: there is not a grain in the darkness (or depths) of the earth, nor anything fresh or dry (green or withered), but is (inscribed) in a record clear (to those who can read).
What the Holy Qur’an & Hadith say?

- The key question is what is the Unseen and this becomes a source of contention with any body of knowledge that purports to “see” the future from gambling (forbidden in Islam), to weather forecasting (viewed with suspicion), to…astrology.

- For instance, this is why there is no confirmed date for when a new moon (and month) begins in Islam. It has to be sighted.

- Are all “Unseen” things equal?
What the Qur’an also says...

65:12

Allah it is who hath created seven heavens, and of the earth the like thereof. The commandment cometh down among them slowly, that ye may know that Allah is Able to do all things, and that Allah surroundeth all things in knowledge.

Yusuf Ali
Allah is He Who created seven Firmaments and of the earth a similar number. Through the midst of them (all) descends His Command: that ye may know that Allah has power over all things, and that Allah comprehends, all things in (His) Knowledge.

41:53

We shall show them Our portents on the horizons and within themselves until it will be manifest unto them that it is the Truth. Doth not thy Lord suffice, since He is Witness over all things?

Yusuf Ali
Soon will We show them our Signs in the (furthest) regions (of the earth), and in their own souls, until it becomes manifest to them that this is the Truth. Is it not enough that thy Lord doth witness all things?
What the Qur’ān also says...

And hath made of service unto you whatsoever is in the heavens and whatsoever is in the earth; it is all from Him. Lo! herein verily are portents for a people who reflect.

And He has subjected to you, as from Him, all that is in the heavens and on earth: Behold, in that are Signs indeed for those who reflect.
What questions come up from Revelatory thought?

- “Why would I pay to know the future when I could just have faith in God and wait?”
- Astrology is most significant for terrestrial affairs, but in the world of the soul and eternity, how relevant is it?
- Is it bad to prognosticate all Unseen things or some?
- Is reaching for al-Ghaib modified by a certain attitude.
- Predestination or is the future open to change?
- Where is there room for one’s own personal narrative with revelation?
- How can we be sure the revelation is valid?
The Astrology of Islam

Important astrological charts in Islamic history
Historical moments

- Radical Islam is a flat term because Islam has been radical from the beginning. What it hasn’t always been is intolerant.

- One such moment is The Battle Of Karbala. This moment essentially marks the emergence of a sect of Islam (that always existed but less formally) as the Shia’tu Ali, or just the Shi’a (vs. Sunni).

- The other moment isn’t one moment at all. It could be derived from viewing a shift from the Mu’talizite school of thought to a gradual shift in Islamic tolerance from four different, traditional schools of jurisprudence to form Shari’a (Islamic law & custom) to the political alliance of religious “purity” between Ibn Abd al-Wahhab & Muhammad bin Saud to Sayyid Qutb to Al-Qaeda, ISIS & Boko Haram.

- I will focus only on 5 of those moments, mostly because there are no known dates for some of them.
The Battle of Karbala
Sacking of Baghdad

Inner Wheel
Foundation of Baghdad
Event Chart
Jul 31 0762, Sat
2:30 pm LMT -2:57:40
Baghdad, Iraq
33°21' 04°4'E25'
Geocentric
Tropical
Whole Signs
True Node

Outer Wheel
Siege of Baghdad
Event Chart
Jan 29 1258, Tue
12:00 pm LMT -2:57:40
Baghdad, Iraq
33°21' 04°4'E25'
Geocentric
Tropical
Whole Signs
True Node
Shock & Awe of Baghdad
Sayyid Qutb (1906-8/29/1966)
Chapter 2 of *The 9/11 Commission Report (2004), "The Foundation of the New Terrorism,"* cites Qutb for influencing Osama Bin Laden's worldview in these terms:

- [Qutb] dismissed Western achievements as entirely material, arguing that 'nothing will satisfy its own conscience and justify its existence.'[n. 12] [95]

- Three basic themes emerge from Qutb's writings. First, he claimed that the world was beset with barbarism, licentiousness, and unbelief (a condition he called jahiliyya, the religious term for the period of ignorance prior to the revelations given to the Prophet Mohammed). Qutb argued that humans can choose only between Islam and jahiliyya.

- Second, he warned that more people, including Muslims, were attracted to jahiliyya and its material comforts than to his view of Islam; jahiliyya could therefore triumph over Islam.

- Third, no middle ground exists in what Qutb conceived as a struggle between God and Satan. All Muslim—as he defined them—therefore must take up arms in this fight. Any Muslim who rejects his ideas is just one more nonbeliever worthy of destruction. [96]
Are Islam & Astrology oil and water?

- Astrology’s concerned with the temporality of actions, moral or otherwise, while Islam, like most religions, is concerned with the eternity of righteous action & truth. There’s a dance that can happen between the two because that’s already happened in history. Unfortunately, Islam is only doing a two step now. There’s only always and forever, not much emphasis on NOW. It’s like being cardinal and fixed with no mutability.

- The challenge of shirk (worshipping and partnering anything or anyone with Allah) and “gods.”

- Probability ≠ possibility. For instance, despite the mathematical prowess of the Arabs, it doesn’t seem to have increased the powers of statistics or understanding probability.

- One anecdotal phrase is the idea of trust God, but tie your camel. Astrology might be a good way to double check how well you’re tying up your camel.
Thank you.

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