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Ibn al-Ṣalāḥ: Najm al-Dīn Abū al-Futūḥ Aḥmad ibn Muḥammad ibn al-Sarī ibn al-Ṣalāḥ

Paul Kunitzsch

Born Sumaysāt (Samsat, Turkey) or Hamadan (Iran)

Died Damascus (Syria), 1154

Ibn al-Ṣalāḥ was famous for his acute understanding and critique of several Greek scientific texts that had been translated and were circulating in Arabic. By profession, Ibn al-Ṣalāḥ was a doctor. After studying and beginning his career in Baghdad, he is said to have been appointed court-physician in Mārdīn at the court of the local ruler. He later settled in Damascus, where he died.

Especially of astronomical interest is his critique of the transmission of the coordinates in [Ptolemy's](#) star catalog (*Almagest* VII.5–VIII.1, dating from *circa* 150). He knew and used five different translations of the *Almagest*: one in Syriac and four in Arabic. For 88 of Ptolemy's 1,025 stars, Ibn al-Ṣalāḥ notes the mistakes in the transmitted coordinates and proposes, for most of them, better values found by him by observation and by comparison with the celestial globe. Another text relevant for astronomy is his *Treatise on Projection*. Projection here refers to the projection of the surface of the sphere on to a plane, a procedure that was of fundamental importance for the development and the construction of the astrolabe; Ptolemy's text on this topic, the *Planisphaerium*, had also been translated into Arabic. Other critical works of Ibn al-Ṣalāḥ deal with mathematical and philosophical problems. But most of his writings are still unpublished and unstudied.

Selected References

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