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Māshā'allāh ibn Atharī (Sāriya)

Ari Belenkiy

Alternate name

Messahala

Died *circa* 815

Māshā'allāh (from mā shā' Allāh, *i. e.*, "that which God intends") was a Jewish astrologer from Basra. Ibn al-Nadīm says in his *Fihrist* that his name was Mīshā, meaning Yithro (Jethro). Māshā'allāh was one of the leading astrologers in 8th- and early 9th-century Baghdad under the caliphates from the time of al-Manṣūr to **Ma'mūn**, and together with al-Nawbakht worked on the horoscope for the foundation of Baghdad in 762.

Ibn al-Nadīm lists some 21 titles of works attributed to Māshā'allāh; these are mostly astrological, but some deal with astronomical topics and provide us information (directly or indirectly) about sources (*i. e.*, Persian, Syriac, and Greek) used during this period. This valuable information also comes from the Latin translations of some of Māshā'allāh's works, some of which are no longer extant in Arabic.

A selection of the works by Māshā'allāh includes *De scientia motus orbis* (On Science of the Movement of Spheres), preserved in Latin translation, containing an introduction to astronomy as well as a study of **Aristotle's** *Physics*, both based on Syriac sources. **Ptolemy** and **Theon of Alexandria** are mentioned, but the planetary models are pre-Ptolemaic Greek and similar to those found in 5th-century Sanskrit texts, *Kitāb fī al-qirānāt wa-'l-adyān wa-'l-milal* (A book on conjunctions, Religions, and communities), an astrological history of mankind, attempts to explain major changes based on conjunctions of Jupiter and Saturn; a discussion of eclipses is preserved in a Latin translation by John of Seville and a Hebrew translation by **Abraham ibn 'Ezra**, and a commentary on the armillary sphere. (For other works, see Sezgin.)

Misattributions have sometimes occurred because of confusion between the works of Māshā'allāh, **Abū Ma'shar**, and Sahl ibn Bishr. Indeed, the authenticity of two treatises on the astrolabe attributed to Māshā'allāh and translated into Latin has been questioned by P. Kunitzsch.

Finally, according to E. Kennedy, Māshā'allāh's son was an astronomer who composed a manuscript unifying the theories of **Khwārizmī** and **Habash**.

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