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# Albumasar in Sadan

By Lynn Thorndike \*

FOR both friends and foes of astrology in the middle ages and early modern centuries, Albumasar (Abū Ma'shar Ja'far ibn Muhammad ibn 'Umar al-Balkhī), who died in 886, was the leading exponent of that art among writers in Arabic. His works were eagerly translated into Latin in the twelfth century, sometimes in more than one version,<sup>1</sup> and a number of them appeared in print in incunabula<sup>2</sup> and in sixteenth century editions. But the treatise cited as *Albumasar in Sadan*, notably by Peter of Abano,<sup>3</sup> has never been printed. It is of importance not only as a specimen of Arabic astrology, and for the light which it sheds upon the personality of Albumasar, but also in the history of science, since it correctly represents comets as celestial phenomena, more distant from the earth than the planet Venus, or even Jupiter and Saturn. In the printed works of Albumasar only the astrological significance of comets is considered. Another noteworthy point is the acknowledgement of debt to the astrologers of Persia and India, and the employment of Albumasar by rulers of both those countries. The present paper gives for the first time a full account of its content, amounting practically to a paraphrase or free translation based directly upon manuscripts.

Two manuscripts have been used, which, aside from slight variants, offered the same text. One, at the Bodleian, Oxford, was Laud. Misc. 594, of the fourteenth century, at fols. 137ra-141va. The other, at the Bibliothèque Nationale, Paris, was Latin manuscript 7302, of the fifteenth century, at fols. 109ra-130va. In both the text of *Albumasar in Sadan* opened, "Dixit Sadan. Audivi Albumasar dicentem quod omnis vita vivencium post deum est sol et luna . . ."; and closed, ". . . Et naturam signi pronunciarum de qua est interrogatio." Although the Oxford manuscript is the earlier of the two, in the case of variants the Paris codex usually has the preferable reading, either because it is a copy made from a superior earlier manuscript or because it is the work of a more careful and intelligent scribe.<sup>4</sup>

Moritz Steinschneider regarded this Latin version as a shortened or incomplete rendition of an Arabic original entitled *al-Mudsakaret* (Memorabilia) by

\* Columbia University.

<sup>1</sup> For a list of them and their incipits see Thorndike and Kibre, *A Catalogue of Medieval Scientific Writings in Latin*, 1937, col. 791.

<sup>2</sup> M. B. Stillwell, *Incunabula in American Libraries*, 1940, 17-18.

<sup>3</sup> *Conciliator differentiarum philosophorum et precipue medicorum*, Diff. 156.

<sup>4</sup> These MSS will henceforth be cited as BLm 594 and BN 7302. Other MSS are: Naples, Oratoriana XV, xi (XLIX), fols. 176va-182rb (disguised in Mandarin's Catalogue as "Albuaris, Exempta de secretis"), "Dixit Sadan. Audivi Albumasarem dicentem. . . Expliciuont exempla de secretis Albumasaris" (this colophon

also follows the desinit in BLm 594); Munich, cod. lat. 826, 14th century, written and illuminated in Bohemia, fols. 27-33, Tractatus de nativitatibus (*sic*), opening, "Dixit Zadan. Audivi Albumazar dicentem . . ."; Erfurt, Amplon. Q.352, 13-14th century, fols. 11v-17, "Dixit Sadan. Audivi Albumazar dicentem . . . pronunciarum de qua est interrogatio." Wilhelm Schum, *Beschreibendes Verzeichniss der Amplonianischen Handschriften-Sammlung zu Erfurt*, 1887, p. 591, repeated a marginal ascription, "Albategni tractatus de planetis et ascendente," but Steinschneider recognized it as our treatise. For Greek versions of it, see *Catalogus codicum astrologorum Graecorum*, 5, 1, 142.

Abu Sa'ïd Schâdsân, who wrote down the answers of his teacher to his questions.<sup>5</sup> It may be more accurately described as a miscellaneous collection of astrological teachings, anecdotes, and actual cases of Albumasar, gathered up by his disciples in a form and fashion somewhat analogous to the Table-Talk of Luther. Among the interlocutors or authorities cited, in addition to Sadan and Albumasar, are Aposaites or Aposaytes, as the name is variously spelled in our manuscripts, Stephanus, Syxyres, John son of Almusour or Musur, Muchinnet son of Zahac, John son of Talec, Ysaac son of Salomon, Selech, Salmas or Selimas, Zegedes, and Thesimes or Thesmies. When the work was composed and when or by whom it was translated into Latin we are not informed. No doubt, as in the case of Luther's Table-Talk and other ". . . ana," there is a considerable fabulous element, but it seems a not insignificant document in intellectual history.

As has already been intimated, the discussion is devoted primarily to the finer points of astrological technique, and the usual conclusion reached is that, where other astrologers were wrong, Albumasar was invariably right. The opening paragraphs deal with horoscopes indicative of longevity and the contrary; and with the rule that when Mars is *almutam* (i.e., lord) of the nativity and is not joined to any benevolent planet, it indicates that the person born will be burnt, while Saturn as *almutam* portends no good unless coupled with a favorable star. Sadan asked Albumasar why some scientists say that Saturn signifies the metal iron and great tall trees. The master responds that it does so in junction<sup>5a</sup> with other planets. It signifies iron when joined<sup>5b</sup> with Mars or in trine or diametrical aspect to Mercury and Jupiter. It signifies tall trees when it is in the sign Gemini or Libra and is in aspect to Venus and Mercury.

We come next to the theme of travel (*De peregrinatione*).

Said Albumasar: Once with some travelers I went to Baldac and I stayed with a friend of mine who knew a little astronomy, and he asked me how the moon would be next day, and I said, "In quartile aspect with Mars." And he said to me, "Then don't you leave"; and I said to him, "I have no intention of departing on such a day, but the other passengers won't listen to us." He said, "Let's test them." So I said to them, "Tomorrow is an unfavorable day, wait, and I'll feed your animals." They would not acquiesce, so I let them go and stayed on with my friend. When they would be leaving, I observed the horoscope and it was Taurus and Mars in it. And the moon was in Leo in quartile aspect to Mars. I said to them, "For God's sake don't go at this hour," but they laughed at me and went off. I said to my friend, "I'm sorry for those senseless men." And we sat down and ate and drank. While we were still drinking, there came in some of the company who had been saved. For they had fallen among thieves and some were slain, others wounded, and the thieves made off with whatever they carried. Moreover, those who had escaped came at me with sticks and stones, saying, "These things happened because of your superstition, in order to confirm what you said."

<sup>5</sup> Steinschneider, "Die europäischen Uebersetzungen aus dem Arabischen," *Vienna Sitzungsberichte, Philos.-Hist. Klasse*, 151 (1906), 36-38. Possibly it was the colophon quoted above, "Expliciunt excerpta de secretis Albumasar," which led Steinschneider to think that the Latin

version was a shortened or incomplete translation.

<sup>5a</sup> BN 7302, per commixtionem astrorum; BLlm 594, per consignificationem astrorum.

<sup>5b</sup> BN 7302, quando configuratur Marti; BLlm 594, quando consignificatur Marti.

And I barely escaped. And then and there I swore that I would never discuss the science of astronomy with the man in the street.

After a brief statement by Albumasar to the effect that great conjunctions<sup>6</sup> of Saturn and Jupiter involve great secrets, and that one born on the day of the conjunction, with his ascendent the sign in which the conjunction occurs "or mid sky,"<sup>7</sup> will publish his name abroad, comes another anecdote.

A friend told Albumasar that he went to King Ma'mun<sup>8</sup> and there were many wise men there and one who claimed to work wonders. The king asked his astrologers to determine whether he was telling the truth. They found sun and moon concurring in the ascendent to the degree and minute,<sup>9</sup> with the *pars fortunae* (lucky place) and *pars futurorum* in the first minute of the ascendent. The ascendent was Capricorn, Jupiter was configured with it in Virgo, Venus and Mercury in Scorpio. So all the wise men said that he was telling the truth. "But I alone was silent." When the king noticed this, Albumasar's friend said that this man practiced the art of Venus and Mercury, in which wonders are promised but not performed. For while true problems belonged to Jupiter, if it was in aspect with the ascendent, it operated to the contrary.

The king said, "God bless you." Later the king said to me, "Do you know this man?" I said, "No." The king said, "This man calls himself a prophet." I said to the king, "Ask him if he can give us some sign."

When the king did so, he replied that he had a ring carved with two images which he wore without anything happening, but that if another person put it on, he would keep laughing, even if he did not wish to do so, and would be unable to stop until he removed the ring from his hand. And he had a pen with which he could write at will, but if another person tried to use it, his hand would become paralyzed.

I told the king that one of these tricks was of Venus and the other mercurial, and that the man had found such arts in stichiomatic books. And he owned up and ceased to call himself a prophet. So the king gave [him]<sup>10</sup> a thousand minas.

On talking with the man afterwards, Albumasar's friend found him very skilled<sup>11</sup> in all sciences. Albumasar's comment was that he too would have pronounced the self-styled prophet a liar, because the ascendent was a tropical sign and Jupiter was in a contrary sign and under the rays of the moon. Furthermore, Venus and Mercury were in Scorpio, which is the sign of falsehood.

Returning to the theme of great conjunctions, Albumasar said that he had never seen one nor met anyone who had,<sup>12</sup> but that he had heard old sages

<sup>6</sup> Here the reading, *coniunctiones . . . habent* in BLIm 594, is superior to that of BN 7302, *coniunctio . . . habent*.

<sup>7</sup> BN 7302, "aut medium celi"; BLIm 594 omits *aut*. Since the ascendent cannot be in the zenith, the meaning is probably that the conjunction occurs there.

<sup>8</sup> BN 7302, Mamun; BLIm 594, in anno.

<sup>9</sup> BN 7302, minuta; BLIm 594, econtra.

<sup>10</sup> BN 7302 has *ei*, but BLIm 594 omits it. It would seem more reasonable for the king to give the money to Albumasar's friend.

<sup>11</sup> BN 7302, peritissimum; BLIm 594, perfectissimum.

<sup>12</sup> A surprising statement, considering the celebrity of his work on great conjunctions.

say that it produced great kings. John, son of Almusour,<sup>13</sup> said that when the three superior planets met and the sun was in aspect with them, there was a great conjunction and it produced great kings.

The discussion turns to the nativity of Mohammed. Aposaytes said that Albumasar told him that the son of a Moses investigated the nativity of "our prophet" and found Libra in the ascendent. Albumasar said that he found no horoscope signifying so great a religion except Libra. Albumasar had heard someone say that when Mercury at its *aux* (apogee) was in a nativity it signified foreknowledge of the future. But Mercury in the nativity of the false prophet was in the tenth degree of Scorpio. "And on this account his kindred and friends were against him."<sup>14</sup> Albumasar added that Venus was in his nativity in Scorpio and Spica in the ascendent, and the preceding conjunction of Saturn and Jupiter was in Scorpio, and the sun was again in Scorpio and Mars in Taurus. Such a nativity indicated that his kingdom would increase with his successors for 220 years, after which it would not increase. It would remain in his family for 320 years after his death. "I therefore asked Albumasar, 'Don't you know when that religion will be changed into another religion?'" He said, "No," but that there would be great wars, and that an apostate would obtain rule at the end of a thousand years.

After citation of Messahala as to the signification of small conjunctions, the question is raised whether the stars or the signs of the zodiac are more efficacious, and Albumasar answers that the signification of the sign exceeds that of the stars as gold coin does silver. Sadan objects that, even if the horoscope is a regal sign, if the planet which is lord of it is declining (*cadens*), it does not signify a kingdom. But Albumasar replies that he is injuring the art by this opinion. Aries normally signifies the head, but it may signify the feet, when Libra is the ascendent and Aries occupies seventh place. When it is in the twelfth place and unfavorable, it always affects the feet and shins or produces impotency. If Aquarius is favorable and Pisces unfortunate, it makes the feet sweat.

If anyone has Aries as horoscope, and if its lord Mars is setting, or if the sun is lord of its exaltation, even if there is nothing good in the <celestial> figure, yet he will be of good character and good countenance, liked by all and having royal manners.

Moreover, the signification of the signs is regular (*mansiva*), while that of the stars varies.

After detailing the nativity of Jacob, son of Isaac, Albumasar said that when the moon was in a watery sign and in conjunction with a superior planet which was retrograde in a watery or feminine sign, it indicated rain in winter time. Next comes the passage quoted by Peter of Abano<sup>15</sup> and others, that the kings of the Greeks, when praying for divine aid in some undertaking, had the head of the Dragon in mid-sky with Jupiter in friendly aspect and the moon in conjunction with Jupiter or receding from it and seeking conjunction with the

<sup>13</sup> BN 7302, Almuson.

<sup>14</sup> A marginal note in BN 7302 runs, "Nota de

Machometa."

<sup>15</sup> *Conciliator*, Diff. 156.

lord of the ascendent, or the lord of the ascendent seeking conjunction with Jupiter and in friendly relation with the head. "And then, they said, their petition was heard."

When Mercury is in the ascendent, the new-born will be eloquent, a rhetorician and versifier, and the same when it is in Sagittarius. Albumasar also said that when Saturn was in conjunction or aspect with favorable stars in its own house or exaltation, the new-born would be very fortunate, frequently as long as he lived, and often it would extend to his children and parents.

He said to me in Baldaq that, if the king summons you to serve him in astronomical science, don't give judgment when Scorpio is the horoscope or the receding angles are turned down<sup>18</sup> or Mars is in an angle. For the judgment would be false, for Scorpio is the sign of mendacity.

In undertaking travel, one should have the lord of the second house above the horizon, moving away from any unfavorable star and in conjunction with a benevolent planet.

For there will be the greatest prosperity, and I proclaim it. But let not the lord of the second house be in its own unlucky spot, or under the rays, or retrograde. For such things impede.

*Putei* (certain degrees of the signs) are a difficult matter. Many say that when benevolent stars are in them, they give good fortune at first, but bad at last. Albumasar said that whatever Mars bestows it also takes away, unless a benevolent planet prevents this by its configuration with Mars. When Mars is evening star in Cancer and not joined with Jupiter or Saturn or the sun or Venus, the offspring will be a windbag (*ventosater*). If in Capricorn, a world destroyer and shedder of blood. He also said that when Saturn was in Libra and Jupiter in Cancer, they always effected great changes in the world. He further observed that, when Venus was in Pisces and the moon in conjunction with it, this was invariably a good time for traveling. When Sadan asked him where the *pars fortunae* was, when the sun was diametrically opposite the horoscope and the moon in the horoscope, Albumasar replied that the *pars fortunae* under those circumstances had no virtue and was negligible.

Albumasar said that the Chaldeans first discovered astronomy, then the Indians, then the Egyptians, then the Persians, then the Romans or Greeks, then the Syrians, and then the Sarracens.

After Albumasar had agreed that in nativities the sun and moon ruled over the eyes, Sadan asked him how it was that in many nativities the sun and moon were unfortunate (*lesos*), yet the offspring had sound eyes. Albumasar replied, "Haven't I told you again and again that some judgments are universal, others particular?" If the horoscope and sun and moon are not in nebulous degrees, and a benevolent planet is in aspect with horoscope and *pars fortunae*, and the lord of lunar partition or lord of the horoscope is not in a nebulous place, the newborn will never be blind. Albumasar volunteered the further information that he had proved in many nativities a rule which was never

<sup>18</sup> Referring to the *figura coeli*.

false: when the sore spot in the horoscope was in a nebulous sign, it always meant injury to the eyes.

A prince who was in love came to Sadan with a figure of an interrogation concerning the affair equated by perpetual canons. Capricorn was the ascendent, Mars in it, and Venus in Scorpio configured with Mars. Saturn and Jupiter were in Sagittarius, one in the last degrees, the other almost in the ascending degree. Albumasar was occupied with other matters and told Sadan to pass judgment on it. Sadan concluded from the fact that Mars was in the horoscope and signified adultery and fornication and that Venus was configured with it, that the prince would attain his end. But when Albumasar saw his judgment, he said that it was all wrong and wrote another based on the canon of Ma'mun which was more certain than the perpetual canons. Jupiter was in the ascendent and it always opposed fornication and adultery. Mars did not signify possession but separation and enmity. Although Venus was close to Mars, there was no reception between them. The figure signified rather a long journey for the prince and impediment to his love affair for fifteen or sixty-six months. Sadan suggested that Albumasar had known that the prince was going away, but the latter denied this, and told Sadan never to take Mars as a sign of delight but rather Venus, especially if in Taurus, and considering the relation of the moon to Venus. Albumasar also condemned another interrogation as to a love affair, in which the astrologer had told his client that he would have intercourse with an old woman of dark color but not that he would die soon after, as Albumasar foresaw. Albumasar also confided an excellent rule as to astrological direction to Sadan on condition that he would not tell it to anyone.<sup>17</sup>

Aposaytes asked Albumasar why in writing about *hyleg* (point of life)<sup>18</sup> he had omitted the opinions of John son of Musur, Muchinnet son of Zahac, Fizerus, and another sage from Arabia Felix. Albumasar responded that he had given the views of the ancient sages, and those whom Aposaytes mentioned were younger savants whose arts had been used by the kings of Arabia Felix, who did not know of the dicta of the ancients. Aposaytes then inquired if Albumasar would be offended, if he introduced their opinions and disputed with him, and Albumasar said, "No." A discussion ensued why Albumasar sought for *hyleg* in the eighth and not in the twelfth house. Aposaytes further objected that Albumasar had said that *alcocoden* (ruling planet), when retrograde, did not bestow years and months equal in number but left off some part because of the retrogradation, but did not state how much. Albumasar replied that this theorem is one of the secrets of science, and it varies in the case of the superior and inferior planets, and also if the superior planets are at the end of their retrogradation, and whether Venus and Mercury are under the rays or not. If they are, they are not accepted as *alcocoden*. The Indians say that Saturn is not always malevolent but sometimes benevolent, and their region is attributed to Saturn.<sup>19</sup>

<sup>17</sup> At this point I omit description of the text in BN 7302 from fol. 114rb to the middle of fol. 116ra; in BLM 594, from the middle of fol. 138rb to the fifth line of 138vb.

<sup>18</sup> As to the difficulty of discerning the exact

meaning of *hyleg* (Greek ἀφέρης) and *alcocoden* (Greek οἰκοδεσπόρης) in Arabic astrologers, see Bouché-Leclercq, *Lastronomie grecque*, 1899, pp. 406-7, note 2, and 411, note 1.

<sup>19</sup> Here I make another omission from fol.

Asked what the word *kint* meant, Albumasar replied that some sages called it something unknowable<sup>20</sup> and invisible, others said it was a small cloud, some said it was a southern star, and others said that it was the connection of certain spheres. He himself could elicit nothing certain concerning it from the ancients.<sup>21</sup>

Aposaites said that, although Albumasar was very rational and supreme in science, whenever the moon was diametrically opposite to the sun, he fell down and shook. He had no record of his nativity but had made a universal interrogation. Virgo was the horoscope of the interrogation, while the moon was in Scorpio diametrically opposite to the sun and configured with Mars. And such a figure signified epilepsy. He had the custom of having fruit and anything he liked set before him, and ate once a day and drank wine for the rest of the day, and he had a marvelous thirst.<sup>22</sup> "He told me, 'If I could stop drinking wine for one year, I would be cured of epilepsy.'"

Albumasar was asked whether a certain woman was a man's mistress or his legitimate wife.

He said, "Observe the hour and what the horoscope is." I found Gemini ascending. He said to me, "Take the mean degrees between Jupiter and Venus and project from the ascendent." I did so and the lot fell in Virgo and was in friendly aspect with Mercury. And Albumasar said, "She is his legitimate wife." And again he said, "Take the mean degrees between Mars and Venus and project them from the ascendent." I did so and the lot fell in Libra. Then he inquired whether the lord of the ascendent was in aspect. I replied, "No." He said, "The first lot signified that the first case was legitimate, but the second indicates that the second case was illegitimate."

A man who came to consult Albumasar was fearful of a certain year in his nativity. Albumasar asked him if he knew how long his father had lived, and, when he replied in the affirmative, asked if he had yet reached that age and was told that he had already passed it. After a similar query concerning his mother, Albumasar inquired as to his grandfather and learned that he had not yet outlived him. Albumasar then informed him that if the year of his life in which *hyleg* became unfavorable equalled the age of his grandfather, he would certainly die, but if not, there was some hope of safety.

When Aposaytes sent to Albumasar the nativity of a son of the king of the Indies, the master judged that he would live as long as there are mean years of Saturn. Yet his *alcooden* was very retrograde and declining, and the tradition of the ancients was to subtract two-fifths of the minimum years for retrogradation. Aposaytes and others present therefore reproached Albumasar, saying that by such a judgment he would lose his great reputation with the king and wise men of India. But he asked them if they did not know how long-lived the Indians were, and that it was thought a great wonder if anyone died there before attaining the mean years of Saturn, and that India was under the rule

117rb-118ra (middle) in BN 7302, and 139ra-vb in BLm 594.

<sup>20</sup> BN 7302, indiscibile; BLm 594, iudiciale.

<sup>21</sup> "Dicunt enim quod movetur per annum

duos medios gradus et per singulos dies secunda minuta 9 et per singulos menses prima minuta

12."

<sup>22</sup> "Et habuit mirabilem appetitum ad bibendum."



of Saturn, so that it did the Indians little harm unless it was declining in their nativities. Aposaytes objected that it was declining in this case, but Albumasar denied this and further pointed out that the reason why he had not subtracted the two-fifths was that Saturn was *in putheo*. This time *puthei* or *putei* are defined as fixed stars which fortify the evil and dull the benevolent planets, which does not seem to justify Albumasar's previous argument.

Sadan inquired what method of projecting rays was true. Albumasar replied, Ptolemy's, but that Messahala's, "which we use," was surer. When told that some used equal degrees and did not resort to projection, he said that that was permissible at the equator, but that projection was required "in our regions."

Passing over a section of the text with the rubric, Of rumor (*De rumore*),<sup>23</sup> we encounter a noteworthy paragraph on comets:

Said Albumasar, "The philosophers say, and Aristotle himself, that comets are in the sky in the sphere of fire, and that nothing of them is formed in the heavens, and that the heavens undergo no alteration. But they all have erred in this opinion. For I saw with my own eyes a comet beyond Venus. And I knew that the comet was above Venus, because its color was not affected. And many have told me that they have seen a comet beyond Jupiter and sometimes beyond Saturn."

But after this remarkable antedating of the views of Tycho Brahe, our text lapses into astrology again, stating that comets are a great<sup>24</sup> prodigy and that their significations are proportionate to their size.

A "theorem from the secrets of philosophy" is that Jupiter has great virtue in Aries, far more than when in Sagittarius, and greatest in the beginning of Aries in its *termini*. For equinoxes occur in the beginning of Aries, and Jupiter is moderate and rejoices in moderate places such as the equinoctial points are. Stephanus is then introduced as a speaker.

There soon follows a list of books of judgments kept in the palace, not given to anyone to read but kept secret.<sup>25</sup>

Albumasar said that Aomar Tyberiadis,<sup>26</sup> or Omar, was very wise and he followed John, son of Talec, and then Phador, and Phador showed him his nativity. The moon was a few degrees distant from Mars, and Omar multiplied these by twelve to find the term of Phador's life. And he died that very year.

When Albumasar denied that Saturn was declining in the nativity of the Indian prince, though it was in the second house, he had added that the second house had great mysteries. He now repeats this thought and says that only a perfect sage can fathom them. He has observed in many nativities that when the second house and its lord were unfavorable, the newborn never prospered.

<sup>23</sup> I omit in BN 7302 from the middle of 120va to the middle of 122ra; in BLlm 594, fols. 139vb (near the top) to 140ra, ninth line.

<sup>24</sup> BN 7302, magnum; BLlm 594, malum.

<sup>25</sup> "Alexandri astronomi Stephani Aristotilis Theophili filii Thome, Libri expositoris Pylchi et libri Damasi et libri Chaleg, libri Ysaac filii Salomonis, libri Iohannis filii Chaleg et libri alius (Hali?). Et libri Iohannis filii Mansur de retrogradationibus et humiliationibus. Et libri eius qui Asselcoe arabice dicitur. Et liber

continens utilitates astrorum in versibus cuiusdam Babilonii non intitulati. Et liber Artasesi continens cooriencia singulis gradibus, et inventus est per experimenta verus. Et liber secretorum Hermetis. Et liber Carenioce qui apud Hebreos invenitur. Liber Pharas (Farag) Babilonii. Liber de secretis astronomie. Et liber Valentis de coorientibus singulis gradibus. Et liber Messehalla de secretis et meditationibus." BN 7302, fols. 122vb-123ra; BLlm 594, fol. 140ra.

<sup>26</sup> BN 7302, Tybaidus; BLlm 594, Tyberias.

Sadan asked him why he did not mention this in his writings, "when we were in Baldach." The master replies that a sage who writes down all that he knows is like an empty vessel. No one needs him and his reputation declines. He should keep some secrets to himself and communicate them only to his closest friends.

Asked if what Isaac, son of Solomon, wrote about the *pars demonis seu futurorum* is true, he answers, "Yes," and states that in his *Introduction* he assigned it greater significance than the *pars fortunae* in nocturnal nativities. It is so called because it signifies hidden things and secrets and foreknowledge of the future, prophecy and true revelations. Messahalla took it as *hyleg* and told his disciples that this was a great secret and that at night it was equivalent to the *pars fortunae*. But he was the only one to say this. Sadan suggested that Messahalla had taken what he had found written in the book of the Persians, and Albumasar said that his (or, this?) talk was ridiculous and never true.<sup>27</sup> Asked what he himself thought about the *pars demonis*, he said that he never took it as *hyleg*, nor night and day from the moon to the sun, but by day from moon to sun, and by night *vice versa*. Asked which *pars* was stronger, he said, *Pars fortunae*, and gave reasons. Asked if any *pars* could be compared with that of fortune, he said that those of injury and nuptials had great significance, as did that of the tenth house. The part of injury (*pars lesure*) was taken by day from Saturn to Mars, at night conversely.

Presently Albumasar repeats the statement which he had made previously that all the good fortune which Mars gives, he afterwards takes away. Later on Stephanus says that just as there is no bad star but Mars, so there is no benevolent one except Jupiter. Albumasar agrees that Saturn is not malevolent, for it brings evil tardily, and Mars suddenly. In the meantime Albumasar has been telling a disciple a secret, "and don't you forget it." Also how to worm a secret out of another person.

Several successive paragraphs are then concerned with the subject of interrogations. In one case Selech remarks that if the interrogation had come to him, he would not have answered it as Albumasar did, but would have said that the person hoping for an inheritance would obtain it.

Said Albumasar, "We were with the army of the Cumans and many of us astronomers were sitting in a tent and someone was approaching. One of the astronomers said, 'Let's see what he is going to say.' So we observed the ascendent which was Sagittarius in the *termini* of Mercury. And the moon was there at that hour in empty course. And I said, 'He is full of idle talk and is a useless fellow.' And we questioned him when he arrived and he talked a lot of nonsense. And all the astronomers marvelled at my great experience."

Albumasar and Salamas and Zegedes and Thesmies<sup>28</sup> went to court, and Zegedes was at that time master of the astrologers. The king<sup>29</sup> asked him what

<sup>27</sup> "Dixit Albumasar, Ridiculus enim (eius?) sermo est et numquam verus." It is barely possible, however, that Albumasar was denying that Messahalla borrowed from the book of the

Persians.

<sup>28</sup> BLIm 594, Selimas et Regedes et Thesimes.

<sup>29</sup> His name is in too abbreviated form in both MSS to decipher. Possibly it is Animum.

he was thinking about and he said, "Of kingdom and honor." The king said, "You lie." Selmias, as the name is now spelled,<sup>30</sup> said he was thinking of a pressing matter in a high place. The ruler said, "You have not spoken plainly and are deceived." When Thesmies said that he could say no more than they had, the king turned to Albumasar, who had found the head of the dragon in mid-sky in the higher degrees of the whole circle in 29° Gemini and configured with it the lord of the ascendent. Since the head of the dragon shows its virtue but is not apparent, he told the king he was meditating concerning God who is supreme over all and does not appear. "And the king marveled how I said this. And I told him that I had not said it myself but had found it in the secrets of the Persians."

Upon the heels of this anecdote follows one more instance of the skill of Albumasar in answering interrogations. He found that the ascendent was the tenth degree of Scorpio. The moon was in its fifteenth degree, Jupiter in the sixteenth, and *pars fortunæ* in the twenty-ninth degree. Saturn was in the second house; Venus, lord of the seventh, was in twenty-six degrees of the eleventh in conjunction with Mars.<sup>31</sup> Albumasar concluded that the questioner was asking for himself, because *pars fortunæ* was in the ascending sign, and the lord of the seventh house and lord of the ascendent were in conjunction in the eleventh house. Also Venus was there. Albumasar said that the questioner wished to marry; that the woman was far from chaste — because of the conjunction of Mars and Venus; that they would be married and the man prosper, but the woman would be in peril because her husband would devour her property. And he said that the reason why the man would prosper through the woman was Venus as lord of the seventh, with the ascendent in sextile aspect, while the woman would be injured and deprived of her property because of Mars, lord of the ascendent, being in quartile aspect with the eighth house, which was the place of a woman's money, just as the second house is that of a man's money.

Kings were not always pleased by the responses of Albumasar. Lenies, king of the Persians, once was so angered that he cast the astrologer into prison, promising to liberate him, if his prediction came true, and to kill him, if it did not. "And it turned out true in all respects."<sup>32</sup>

Ibn Khallikān, in the brief account of Albumasar (Abū'l-Maashar al-Balkhi) in his biographical dictionary written in the thirteenth century, states that "he was singularly fortunate in his divinations," but gives only a single example. An official who had gone into hiding to escape arrest and who knew that the prince would ask Albumasar to discover his place of retreat, tried to hamper

<sup>30</sup> BLIm 594, Selimas, as before.

<sup>31</sup> Our text reads, *solī*, but the subsequent discussion shows that this should read, *martī*.

<sup>32</sup> This brings us to fol. 129vb. At fol. 130ra

the ancient astrologer Dorotheus (Dorotheus) is cited; at fol. 130va, the work ends as indicated above. The three passages occur in BLIm 594 on fol. 141va.

the investigation by sitting for days on a golden mortar placed in a vessel which contained blood. Albumasar, on consulting the stars, reported that the fugitive was on a mountain of gold in a sea of blood, but that he did not know of any such place in the world, and the prince was able to lure the official from his hiding-place only by a promise of amnesty. When the official returned and told of the trick which he had employed, the prince marveled both at the artifice "and the skill of Abû'l-Maashar in making the discovery."<sup>33</sup>

Such was the picture of Albumasar, in part legendary, in part true to life, which was handed down to future generations. And such were the intricacies of astrological technique, mingled however with some sparks of scientific knowledge, among Arabic writers and Latin readers of the middle ages. Moreover, discrepancies appear between the utterances of *Albumasar in Sadan* and his printed works, notably in regard to comets and to planetary conjunctions. A further study of the manuscript texts of other works by or connected with Albumasar probably would similarly broaden and diversify our knowledge.

<sup>33</sup> *Ibn Khallikan's Biographical Dictionary*, English translation by De Slane, Paris, 1843, I: 325.