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Acquaintance with the Mystery of Heavens in Ancient Arabia

This paper explores the significance of the ancient Arabian astrological views in the mental-spiritual life of pre-Islamic Arabs who divinized the celestial bodies, and endeavored to pierce the veils of the future by the study of motions and relative positions of the planets, the sun, the moon, the their interpretation in terms of human characteristics and activities. First, I discuss the echoes of ancient astrological views in Arabian religious-philosophic system, rituals and mysteries, and in their mythology. Arabs as the other Semitic peoples personified celestial bodies, gave them human characters and told stories about them. Building on these observations this paper aims to identify the traces of astrological notions in the early Arabian tradition — pre-Islamic poetry and early Muslim hagiography. Of particular interest for us is an important role of ancient Sabians in astrological views of pre-Islamic Arabs, particularly in *kāhin* practices.

Key words: Jahiliyya Arabs, astrology, Sabians, *kāhins*, divinations, mythopoetical images.

If there is ignorance related to pre-Islamic Arabia, this is ignorance and misunderstanding about the mental-spiritual life of the so-called Jahiliyya Arabs produced by misrepresentation of the corresponding Qur'anic verses (*'Āl 'Imrān* 154, *al-Mā'ida* 50, *al-Fath* 26, *al-'Aḥzāb* 33) and scarcity of information on the period under review. Living in a few steps away from the ancient civilizations, the Arabs, long before Islam were united and combined into a whole cultural system and familiar with the achievements of the ancient Egyptian and Babylonian mysteries — meditative trainings and esoteric healing practices, ancient Greek mythology and philosophy, as well as Zoroastrian, Christian and Judaic ideas and beliefs. Building on these observations, this paper will explore the important role of ancient Arabian astrological views in the mental-spiritual life of pre-Islamic Arabs who endeavored to pierce the veils of the future by predictions based on the movements of celestial bodies.

The close trade and economic connections of the Arabs with the other Semitic peoples gradually grew up into cultural relations and interactions with the Mesopotamian astrological and divinatory traditions. Arabian ships sailed to India, to the West and to Egypt, thus connecting the three biggest centers of ancient civilizations. The ships and caravans did not merely carry to Arabia merchandise and people, but also books, ideas and religious doctrines. The lack of language barrier also promoted this influence. The Arabs, Chaldeans, Assyrians, Ethiopians, Phoenicians and Copts understood each other easily, without the assistance of interpreters. The people of Arabia were to some degree affected by the civilization of these foreign nations, their trade and their ideas in general, but the influence of mythology and religion, as well as astrological notions also must have been considerable (See: Shumovsky, 1964, p. 56–64; Rezvan, 2001, p. 10, 24; Tisdall, 1905, p. 30).

It was natural that Jahiliyya Arabs' first philosophical speculations related to the perception of *time* were deeply astrological. Constant travels in the nighttime, when one had to be guided by the Moon and the most luminous stars cultivated the mind and attention towards the Heavenly bodies. By rising and setting of celestial bodies they determined the time.

Jahiliyya Arabs, especially, became intimate with the Moon. Watching the phases of the Moon, they observed their changeable character in accordance with constellations, and determined 28 phases of the Moon named *manāzil al-qamar* that corresponded to the notion of *naw'* ('*anwā'*). Each *naw'* had its name and characteristic features (Krachkovsky, 1957, p. 38).

Even the Arabian alphabet maintained the traces of ancient Arabian astrological views. According to *al-Fihrist*, 28 letters corresponded to the phases of the Moon. Arabic words can consist at most of seven letters with the complementary letters (*zawā'id*), in accordance with the number of the seven stars. Complementary letters (*zawā'id*) are twelve, they correspond to the twelve signs of the zodiac. The letters, which are assimilable with the *lām* of the definite article, are fourteen which is the number of the hidden lunar phases, the fourteen others are not assimilable, and correspond to the visible phases of the Moon. There are three vowels (*Ḥarakāt*) of inclination ('*rāb*), which correspond to three types of movement (*Ḥarakāt*): movement in the center, as that of the Fire; movement to the center as that of the Earth; movement on the center as that of the Heavens. Some scholars considered writing a spiritual geometry, which appeared through a material instrument, or said that writing's root goes back to the Spirit, although it emerges as a result of corporeal feelings (Ibn al-Nadīm, 1994, p. 21–22).

Ancient Arabian poetry and astrological notions

Pre-Islamic poetry as a faithful mirror reflected astrological notions. Personification of the Moon is observed in Jahiliyya poetry in the poem ascribed to *Ḥassān al-Sa'di*, in which the phases of the Moon are compared with the periods of human life from childhood to senility (Jayāwuk, 1977, p. 241), and later on, in Muslim tradition, the personification of months has been mirrored, according to Y. Bertels this derived inspiration from Zoroastrian mythology, where every month and every day had its patron among spiritual powers that are represented very frequently in human appearance (Bertels, 1965, p. 103–105).

Ancient Arabian mythological thought breathed the air of the desert life. Inhabitants of desert Arabia, who usually traveled nights to protect themselves from the Sun's burning rays and to find the way guiding by stars, had very developed astrological notions. They believed in the godhead of the sun, moon and stars. Some astral gods had their analogues and hypostasis in the mythological systems of the other Semitic peoples. Due to developed totemic notions of Jahiliyya Arabs, the astral gods, as a rule, had their holy animals. Thus, deer was a sacred animal for *Astar* — the goddess of Venus, wild sheep for *Almahak*, ox for some gods of the Moon (Lundin, 1980, p. 597).

Arabs, like other ancient peoples who personified celestial bodies, gave them human characters and told stories about them. There were mythic stories about the love affair between *Aldebarān* and *al-Thurayyā* (Pleiades), the enmity between *Suheyh* (Canopus) and *al-Jawzā* (Twins). According to a legend, *Aldebarān*, one of the stars in the Hyades group, fell deeply in love with *al-Thurayyā*, the fairest of the Pleiades stars. With the approval of the Moon, he asked for her hand in marriage (Khairt al-Saeh, 1085, p. 28–30). Some charming myths were invented about *al-Jady* (the North Star) and *Banāt al-Na'sh* (Ursa Major), *al-Shi'rā al-Yamaniyya* (Sirius) and *al-Shi'rā al-Shāmiyya* (Procyon) (Zeydān, p. 207). From mythopoetical point of view, of great interest is *al-Thurayyā* — the Pleiades. According to the ancient Greek mythology, combining seven stars, *al-Thurayyā* symbolized seven sisters (Takho-Qodi, 1982, p. 317). Jahiliyya Arabs believed the constellation of *al-Thurayyā* to bestow rain (*Shaikh Inayatullah*, internet version). In one of the versions of '*Imru' al-Qays*'s *mu'allaqa*, which is retained in *Dawāwīn al-Shu'arā' al-Sitta al-Jāhiliyyīn*, we see

the Pleiades — *al-Thurayyā* — tied by a linen rope to the top of the rock. This fragment is depicting the mythic star sparkling on the hub of the Universe — on the mythic mountain:

كأن الثريا علقت في مصامها بامراس كتان الى صم جندل

As if Thurayyā was bound to the rock with the linen ropes. (Dawāwīnu, 1968, p. 17)

By symbolical imageries mentioned in pre-Islamic poetry one could assume that Jahiliyya Arabs were aware of the archetypes of ladder and rope and accordingly of the myths about the ascension. In the *mu'allaqa* of *Zuhayr ibn Abi Sulmā* (ca. 530–627), the ladder is a tool of rising to heavens in order to escape from the claws of death:

ومن هاب اسباب المنايا يئلنه وان يرق اسباب السماء بسلم

*He who dreads the causes of death will be caught by them
Even if he ascend the heavens with a ladder.* (Al-Zawzāni, p. 87)

The rope that ties together the earth and heavens is mentioned in a legend from the biography of *Zuhayr*. According to this legend, *Zuhayr* frequently heard from Jews and Christians that the coming of the Prophet of Allah was approaching. Once he dreamt that a rope was hanging down from the heavens and he vainly tried to catch it, but couldn't until the Prophet Muhammad came up and helped grasp the rope. When *Zuhayr* woke up he told this dream to his sons and persuaded them to adopt Islam (Filshtinsky, 1985, p. 151). In this story the rope seems to be a connecting link between the earth and heavens. In the Qur'an the rope symbolizes Islam (*Al 'Imrān* 103).

The cited below *beyt* from the *mu'allaqa* of *'Imru' al-Qays* depicts a rope as a symbol of ascension:

فيا لك من ليل كأن نجومه بامراس كتان الى صم جندل

Oh, what a night! As if its stars are bound to the rock with the linen ropes. (Al-Zawzāni, p. 26–27).

In some mythological systems, the peak of the cosmic mountain reached the North Star. The rock in the *mu'allaqa* of *'Imru' al-Qays* symbolizes the cosmic mountain. Beyond any doubt the linen ropes tying the rock with the stars are the means of ascension. It is not surprising that these symbolical images are used in the depiction of night, which alludes to the ignorance, evil and darkness. The rope tying the rock and star is the road to light and truth. In other words, genetic memory and ancient ideas about the initial union between the earth and heavens were expressed with the archetypes of rock (mountain), star and rope.

The burning interest is evoked by a *khbar* that before Islam there was a *hanif* in Mecca, who built on the outskirts of the city a very high staged tower with stairs, some kind of pyramidal tower, the so-called *ziggurat* where he communicated with God. This was *Wakī' ibn Salama ibn Zuhayr al-'Iyādī*. He usually went up the tower of this temple and “conversed” with God, after that he usually made predictions. People considered him to be the most truthful among all soothsayers. He always said his predictions on *saj'*. Therefore he was called *kāhin* (al-Jāhiz, *al-Bayān*, II, p. 109, Javād 'Alī, 1993, p. 504).

Another fragment of *'Imru' al-Qays's* poem runs as follows:

إذا ما الثريا في السماء تعرضت تعرض اثناء الوشاح المفصل

When the Pleiades appeared in the sky, they looked like a girdle decorated with precious stones. (Al-Zawzāni, 17).

Some beliefs connected with Sirius were mirrored in Jahiliyya poetry. Desert Arabs believed that Sirius was able to descend from the heavens to the earth and harm people, so

they dreaded even looking at this star and protected themselves against its rays. For this reason, a vagabond poet *al-Shanfarā* (d. about 510) who likened himself to a wolf took pride in looking at Sirius (Suleymanova, 2005, p. 306).

Myths connected with the Sun (*Shams*) also influenced poetry. According to ancient beliefs, the Sun was the divine land which was lost for human beings. By the use of magical and semi-magical means, an ancient man thought about the returning of his soul to this glorious land. Ancient man imagined that the ladder made from fairy arrows which had been shot to the heavens by a bow, could lead him to this glorious land (Spense, 2007, p. 76). Similar views existed among Jahiliyya Arabs too. Arabian soothsayers (*kāhins*) utilized in their mystic practices bow and arrow resembling the sun's rays (See: Ibn Hishām, 1936, p. 222). Al-Jāhīz points to some members of the *sh'uubiyyah* who, through misunderstanding the true meaning of these rites, criticized Arabs for misusing the staff, bow and spear. However, according to al-Jāhīz, the true sense of this use was much deeper. Thereby he alluded to the mystical destination of such attributes (Al-Jāhīz, vol. 3, p. 5–14). According to ancient views, the Sun was united by ropes with Earth. The poem of *Tamīm ibn Ubayy* reflects this recurring mythical motif:

وللشمس اسباب كأن شعاعها ممد حبال في خباء مطنب

The Sun has ropes. These are its rays which are like ropes for binding together the tents. (Quoted: Jayāwuk, 1977, p. 220).

There are some motifs in Jahiliyya poetry that indicate the belief in existence of a Supreme god which was the creator and superior to the Sun and other celestial deities. This belief is reflected in the poem of *'Addiy al-Kalbī*. (Al-Jāhīz, 2002, vol. 7, p. 256).

Ancient Arabs had a developed astrology and foretold the future by stars. The wide spread of astrology (i.e. divination based on celestial bodies) in Arabia suggests its Sabian roots. Such kind of predictions have been mirrored in the Jahiliyya poetry too. *Ṭa'abbata Sharran* felt that he was guided by the Milky Way (Filshtinsky, 1985, p. 69). *'Abīd ibn al-'Abraṣ* mentioned "the Pleiades bringing evil fortune and good":

ولثأتين بعدي قرون جمّة ترعى مخرام أيكّة ولدودا
فالشمس طالعة وليل كاسف والنجم تجرى انحسا وسعود

And there shall surely come after me generations unnumbered,

That shall pasture the precipices of Aikah and Ladud

And the Sun shall rise, and the night shall eclipse it,

And the Pleiades shall circle bringing evil fortune and good (translated by Sir Charles Lyall) (*'Abīd ibn al-'Abraṣ*, 1913, p. 11).

Foretelling by stars is depicted in the famous *khutba* of *Quss ibn Sā'ida* who said that "there is *khavar* (account) in the heavens." (Ibn Kathīr, p. 214).

A meteorite (*shihāb*) is one of the most interesting mythopoetical imageries in Jahiliyya poetry. In all likelihood, they thought that the human race came down to the earth from the heavens with falling meteorites. Gradually these myths sank into oblivion, but their traces were engraved in Jahiliyya poetry. This motif runs through many pre-Islamic verses. This is how *'Imru' al-Qays* depicts a meteorite:

بينما المرء شهاب ثاقب ضرب الدهر مناه فحمد

Human being is like a sparkling meteorite. Fate strikes it and it is extinguished. (Quoted: Jayāwuk, 1977, p. 338).

Labīd indicates this idea as follows:

وما المرء الا كالشهاب وضوئه يحور رمادا بعد اذ هو ساطع

The man is nothing but meteorite. It sparkles just a second, then its brilliant light turns into ashes. (Quoted: Jayāwuk, 1977, p. 338)

All these verses contain unforgettable images which convey hidden reminiscences of ancient Arabian astrological views. Some astrological views retained the traces of ancient Semitic mythology that had arrived in Arabia, probably through the Jewish and Christian sacred books. We can state in conclusion that, indeed, mythopoiesis of astral bodies was one of the richest sides of pre-Islamic poetry.

Sabianism, star worship and astrology in ancient Arabia

Yūsuf al-Sibā'ī Bayyūmī places emphasis on the influence of the Chaldean civilization on Arabian astrological views as a result of activity of Chaldean priests — Sabians in pre-Islamic Arabia. He states that they were remnants of Babylonian priesthood (Bayyūmī, 1958, p. 64). What were the characteristic features of Sabians in Arabia, and what sort of people represented Sabian tenets and practices? *Jorjī Zeydān*, while determining the roots of the institution of *kihāna* (Shamanic institution) in Arabia, states that it had been brought to Arabia by Sabians (Zeydān, 211). *Kāhins* were foretellers. As it appears from the scanty accounts of ancient Arabian *kāhins*, they were a mystical group and experienced ecstasy, even levitation in order to predict the events of the future.

On this point the *khobar* mentioned in the book of Ibn Hishām is very noteworthy:

There was the tribe Janb in Yemen which had a very famous kāhin. When the mission of the Messenger of God became perfectly clear to everybody, this tribe said to its kāhin: "Look, what could you say about the case of this man?" The people assembled at the foot of the mountain. The kāhin himself was on the alp. As soon as the sun raised he went down the descent and reclining to his bow continued to stay having turned his face toward the rising sun. After standing a time he began jumping. Then he said, "Hey people!! Allah gave Muhammad the blessing and made him his messenger. He had cleansed his heart from filth and inflated it with wisdom. But this man will not stay among you for a long time." Then he ascended the mountain (Ibn Hishām, 1936, p. 222).

We are not informed about the psychical state of *kāhins* and our feeble knowledge is surely unable to describe or suggest his feelings of communication with divinity. However the story on the whole — its whereabouts (mountain), some peculiarities (jumping), details connected with the attributes of mystical experience (bow) and at last the typology of similar practices gave us ample grounds to suggest that the case in point is ecstatic experience, i.e. spiritual ascension of an Arabian *kāhin*. The dominant concept in the mystical practice of a *kāhin* is mysticism of the solar myths; for spiritual levitation a *kāhin* uses the bow, which is considered the symbol of the Sun. On the other hand, it is noteworthy, that his levitation occurs at sunrise.

Sabianism as a religion has laid an emphasis on the oneness of God. Thus thoroughly monotheistic, it has also stressed the special magnitude of heavenly bodies. Sabians successfully connected star worship with monotheistic thought. As states *al-Rāzī*, by them God created the heavens and stars, and obliged human beings to worship stars and planets and take them as *qiblah*, because it was stars that conducted the good and evil, health and illness. They are the patrons that manage all the issues in the world (Fakhruddin al-Rāzī, 1988, p. 56). It seems Sabianism's star worship was a main point that explains its wide circulation among various nations.

Sacrificial ceremonies of Sabians were well related to their astrological views. *Al-Mas'ūdī* mentioned that Sabians made predictions during sacrifices. They slaughtered for this purpose a black bull and made divinations by its internals and agony motions (al-Mas'ūdī, 1303h, p. 264–265). In ancient mysteries, the ceremony of sacrifice was frequently used for the purpose of clairvoyance. This kind of clairvoyance named *extispicy* was in common practice in China and in South-Eastern Asia from times immemorial (See: Oppenheim, 1990, p. 163–167). It is said that Alexander the Great believed such divinations (Alexander and Caesar, LXXIII). This sort of foretelling had a wide circulation among Chaldeans as well (Javād 'Alī, p. 789, 803). Unfortunately, we have been given but scanty information about this kind of practice in Arabia (See: al-Kalbī, 1984, p. 21–22), though the available materials allow us to confirm its existence (See: Ibn Khaldūn, 1961, p. 184; Ibn Hishām, 1936, p. 224). The *khbar* mentioned in the book of *Dimashqī* tells us about Sabians who made predictions by the death convulsions of a sacrificed cock (Dimashkī, 1866, p. 56–57). The Sabians paid particular attention to the celestial bodies, especially to the Sun and it is not accidental that they foretold the future sacrificing a bull or a cock, both of which personified the Sun. The fact of motions, i.e. death convulsions is very noteworthy too. Death agony is a peculiar state between death and life. In contrast to their Mesopotamian colleagues, Sabian priests made predictions not by the lifeless organs of dead animals, but used these animals as mediators between the earthly and spiritual worlds; the state of agony is such a state when the spirit seemingly hesitates and vacillates between a body that it has not left completely yet and the world of spirits which it has not joined entirely. So, in a certain sense, it turned into a mediator between the corporeal world and the world of supernatural forces. According to *Ibn Khaldūn*, as this state was always considered to be an important moment for clairvoyance, certain tyrants and ruthless rulers organized executions of their prisoners to hear from their mouth predictions about vital questions (Ibn Khaldūn, 1961, p. 190).

It is noteworthy that Sabians sacrificed bull and cock for predictions. The two-horned bull and cock symbolized the deity of the Sun. In the ancient Egyptian pantheon the sacred bull is called Amon. It seems Amon had a counterpart in the ancient Yemen too, since some Yemenite kings claiming to have supernatural power took the alias *Dhū al-Qarnayn* (Who has two horns). M. Piotrovsky suggests that it was a Yemenite king that has been mentioned by the name *Dhū al-Qarnayn* in the Qur'an (Piotrovsky, 1989, p. 147). Apparently, the totem of bull had special significance in pre-Islamic Arabia. Sometimes the angels were imagined in the shape of bull (Al-Jāhīz, 2002. vol. 6, 220). For us all these accounts are very important to illustrate the ancient Yemen's connection with Sabianism, and with Sun worship in general.

To Sabians has been ascribed the building of some great temples dedicated to celestial bodies. In reality, Sabians worshipped not the celestial bodies themselves, but the spiritual powers that resided in them. On the other hand, it is said that they made difference between stars and planets and considered not the stars but planets the dwellings of spiritual powers. Nevertheless, they trusted in the existence of the One — “Creator and Ruler, Holy and Almighty, the Power and Greatness of whom is never reached” (Islam Ansyklopedisi, 1980, p. 9). Therefore their temples have been connected not only with the heavenly bodies, but also with abstract notions. In his “*Murūju al-Dhahab*” al-Mas'ūdī first mentioned the temple ‘*Illatu al-Ulā*’ (The First Cause). Then he wrote about *Haykal al-'Aql* (The Temple of Intellect), *Haykal al-Ṣūrat* (The Temple of Image), *Haykal al-Nafs* (The Temple of Soul). All these temples were in the form of circle. *Haykal al-Zuḥal* (The Temple of Saturn) was in the form of hexagon, *Haykal al-Mushtarī* (The Temple of Jupiter) in the form of triangle, *Haykal al-Mirrīkh* (The Temple of Mars) in the form of rectangle, *Haykal al-Shams* (The Temple of Sun) in the form of quadrangle, *Haykal al-'Utārid* (The Temple of Mercury) was

in the form of triangle with a rectangle inside, *Haykal al-Zuhrā* (The Temple of Venus) with a square inside, *Haykal al-Qamar* (The Temple of Moon) in the form of octagon (al-Mas'ūdī, 1303h, p. 263). By the testimony of *al-Shahristānī*, Sabians had the temples of the First Cause, of Intellect, Politics, Image, Soul, all these in the form of circle. The Temple of Saturn was in the form of hexagon, the Temple of Jupiter in the form of triangle, the Temple of Mars in the form of rectangle, the Temple of Sun in the form of quadrangle, the Temple of Venus in the form of triangle with a quadrangle inside, the Temple of Mercury in the form of triangle with a rectangle inside, the temple of Moon in the form of octagon (Al-Shahristānī, 1992, p. 363). This disposition towards geometrical figures appeared as a result of sacred meaning given to these configurations. This is the point where Sabianism coincides with Cabbalism.

It is noteworthy to point out the special astronomical significance of the Ka'aba, which was in the form of tetragon, like the temple of the Sun. According to Dr. Tisdall, the pre-Islamic cult of the Ka'aba was honored by ancient Sabians (Tisdall, 1905, p. 53). It became a pilgrimage shrine for them. M. Ruthven states that certain people regarded the Ka'aba as a temple dedicated to the Sun, Moon and the five visible planets (making up the mystical figure of seven, the number of circumambulations required for each *Tawāf*). The story that there were exactly 360 idols placed round the temple also points to an astronomical significance. Among the votive gifts said to have been offered to the idols were golden suns and moons (Ruthven, internet version). Medieval Arab sources contained information of some people from the Mudar tribe which honored the Ka'aba. *Ibn Hishām* says that long before Islam one of the clans of the *Mudar* tribe was called *ṣūfī* (*ṣufāt*, *ṣufwān*). The mother of the chieftain of this clan was childless, and she vowed that, if she bore a son, she would give him to the temple of the Ka'aba as a servant. The son — *Ghauth b. Murr* — was born and, keeping her vow, she gave him up to the Ka'aba. *Ghauth* and his progeny conducted the *Hajj* ceremony and pelted stones at the condemned. They usually stoned the condemned first, then after them other pilgrims began to throw stones (Ibn Hishām, 1936, p. 125). Most likely the so-called *Ṣufāt* were the worshippers of the Sun, because the above-mentioned *khavar* says that they did not throw stones until sunset. It is not known whether or not this group related to Sabians. However, there is another *khavar* where some mystical group from the Mudar tribe is mentioned. (see: Ibn al-Nadīm, 1994, p. 387). On the other hand, it is obvious that this group revered the Sun, which made them close to Sabians. It seems there were several sanctuaries in the form of rectangle called the Ka'aba, and that of *Najrān* was very famous too (Piotrovsky, 1985, p. 108–111). Unfortunately we have scant data about other temples of this name. On the other hand, their connection with Sabianism is unclear.

Sabians had a highly developed astrology. It seems they were the first astrologer-foretellers. They predicted the most important events in the spiritual life of humanity. It will be to the point here to remember an account from the Gospel of Matthew: The twelve verses describe how certain magians from the east were notified of the birth of a king in Judea by the appearance of a star. They brought gifts — gold, frankincense and myrrh — to the child Jesus. (*Matthew 2, 1–12*). There are different opinions about their ethnic origin. The term *magus* usually means priest-ignicolist, which leads to the suggestion that they came from Iran (Myths, 1980, p. 244). However, their concern with star-worship and astrology urged us to think that they were Sabians, and their gifts incline us to suggest that they were from Arabia (Moskalov, 2002, p. 15).

It is also significant that even the earliest references to the Magi in Christian thought claimed that they came from Arabia. *Justin* (AD 160) wrote in his *Dialogue*, “Magi came from Arabia”. In *The Epistle of Clement to the Corinthians* it is written that frankincense and myrrh are associated with “the districts near Arabia” (<http://www.btinternet.com/>).

Helmut Coester in *The Gospel Quotations of Justin Martyr* says that “at the time of the rising of the star, ‘the magi of Arabia’ who had learned from it (from the star about birth) came and worshipped him” (<http://books.google.com>). It should be noticed that if the gifts of the three wise men alluded to their being from Arabia, the magi’s prophecy by stars and guidance with it on their way to Bethlehem inclined us into thinking that they were *Sabians*.

It seems the Sabians first venerated the celestial bodies as means of proximity to God Almighty because of their being the dwellings of angels. It is noteworthy that Sabians’ prophet Hermes was portrayed as a semi-human semi-angel being, and was frequently identified with the angel *Metatron* (See: Gasimova, 2002, 50–55). Subsequently Sabians strayed from this monotheistic belief and fell into idolatry. Nevertheless, one can suggest an opposite opinion; they first venerated these bodies as idols, but then attributed to them such divine characteristics.

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In this article I have briefly reviewed just some problems facing the researchers into *Jahiliyya* Arabs’ astrological views. Considering impossibility of analyzing such an enormous problem within the bounds of one single article I would like to accentuate that spiritual life of pre-Islamic Arabian society, as well as their astrological notions, need comprehensive studies. In dealing with these problems the crucial difficulty appeared to be the scarcity of direct evidences that sometimes urged us to advance our opinions on the basis of circumstantial information. However, thorough studies of pre-Islamic outlooks would doubtless yield interesting results and contribute to a better understanding of their cultural interactions with the other Semitic peoples.

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Summary

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Знакомство с мистериями небес в древней Аравии

Статья посвящена изучению значимости небесных светил в культурно-религиозной системе доисламских арабов, их астрологических мистерий и ясновидений. По мнению автора, особое значение небесных тел в мировоззрении джахилийских арабов возникло, в первую очередь, в результате важной роли планет и звезд в жизни жителей пустыни, предпочитающих путешествовать ночью, чтобы беречь себя от жгучих лучей солнца и найти дорогу по звездам. С другой

стороны, автор уделяет особое внимание влиянию общесемитских астрологических мифов. Центральное место в статье занимает исследование отражения астральных мифов и астрологических предсказаний в древнеарабской поэзии и раннемусульманской агиографии. В ходе работы исследуется особое значение культа Солнца в древнеарабских верованиях и поверьях, которое, прежде всего, выявляется в использовании оракулов связанных с Солнцем (лук, стрела и т.п.) в мистической практике провидцев — хашинов. Исследуется роль сабиизма в развитии астрологии в древней Аравии, дается краткая характеристика сабийских мистерий и ритуалов, которые носили яркий оттенок обожествления Солнца и других небесных тел.