

## **Māshā'allāh ibn Atharī (or Sāriya) [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 eighth- and early ninth-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 twenty-one 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 used (i.e. Persian, Syriac, and Greek) 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 include: *On Science of the Movement of Spheres* (*De scientia motus orbis*) is preserved in Latin translation. It contains 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 fifth-century Sanskrit texts. *A Book on Conjunctions, Religions, and Communities* (Kitāb fī al-qirānāt wa-'l-adyān wa-'l-milal) is an astrological history of mankind that attempts to explain major changes based on conjunctions of Jupiter and Saturn. There is a work on eclipses that is preserved in a Latin translation by John of Seville and a Hebrew translation by **Abraham ibn 'Ezra**. There is also a work 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. S. Kennedy (1956), Māshā'allāh's son was an astronomer who composed a manuscript unifying the theories of **Khwārizmī** and **Ḥabash**.

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