

The Firdar

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From astrology's beginnings, it is evident from virtually all sources (e.g. Persian, Greek, Hindu and Egyptian) that quantum-like divisions of time and space were given to the planets and signs. Since time is nothing more than a counting system, why can we not use arc allotments or the years allotted to signs and planets to count time or vice versa? What could be more natural than to create some kind of scheme for relating them? Something like this sort of reasoning must have given rise to chronocrators and directions, as we know them. Thus, in primary directions a degree of the celestial equator equates to a year; in profections a sign (30 degrees of longitude of the ecliptic) equates to a year, a month a day, or group of days. Like the Indian Dasas, or Valens chronocrators based on the ascensional times of the signs, or the decennials of Firmicus, and the "Ages of Man": the Firdar are a certain number of years ruled by the planets in a certain order depending on the sect of the chart, i.e. whether the chart is a diurnal or nocturnal birth.

There were *chronocrators*, i.e. general time lords where a specific length of time was allotted to a sign or planet based on the ascensional time of the sign or the planetary period ruled by the planet. And then there were lords of a specific time indicated by some arc measurement, whether of the ecliptic or the celestial equator. The Firdar are of the first category, that of chronocrator.

The Firdar are introduced by Abu Ma'shar. There is no reference to them prior to him. There is nothing in the historical record that either confirms or denies their existence prior to Abu Ma'shar. They are one technique of assigning *chronocrators* (time lords) amongst many techniques taught throughout the Hellenistic and Arabic Era. There is no written record of the astrology practiced by the middle Persian era (the Sassanian) but we find certain doctrines introduced in the Arabic era by astrologers with a foot in both schools. These astrologers were Kankah al-Hindi, Masha'allah, 'Umar ibn al-Farruhan at-Tabari and of course Abu Ma'shar who came from Persia (Balh). E.S Kennedy in his book "*The Sassanian Astronomical Handbook*", quotes Al Biruni as saying that Masha'allah and 'Umar are "*half-way between the Persians and Abu Ma'shar*"

It is supposedly in Abu Ma'shar's book, "*The Thousands*" that the Firdar are discussed in much detail; both concerning their origins and use. However, that Book is no longer extant except in extracts in the writings of others. Abu Ma'shar mentions the Firdar in his "*Great Introduction*", however the specific use and guidelines for their use is most clearly presented in his work "*On Solar Revolutions*"

It will be useful for us to examine this teaching at the source, Abu Ma'shar,¹

"Each of the seven stars, and the Ascending and Descending Nodes, has certain determinate times, and each star administers to the native in accordance with its proper firdar. The firdar of the Sun, then, is 10 years; of Aphrodite, 8; of Hermes, 13; of the Moon, 9; of Kronos, 11; of Zeus, 12; of Ares, 7; of the Ascending Node, 3; of the Descending Node, 2 – altogether, they are 75.²

In the case of a diurnal nativity, then, the Sun takes the governorship³ of the first firdar, whether it should be present, then Aphrodite, then Hermes, then the Moon, then Kronos, in accordance with the order of their zones.⁴ In the case of nocturnal nativities, the Moon takes the first firdar, then Kronos, then Zeus, then Ares, in accordance with the prior order.⁵ Except that when one of the stars is governor, it itself manages⁶ a seventh of its proper years; then the remaining stars participate with it in a signification for good or bad things in accordance with a seventh of its own firdar. And the beginning will be from the star that has the firdar, while the star lying next under it will participate first, then the star following that one. ---the reason for the participation of the remaining stars with the one star is that the years of the firdar of each star has been extracted from those that have a relation to the twelve *zoidia*; but in a peculiar manner, the Ascending and Descending Nodes, since they do not further participate with any star, assume the management only

¹ Treatise IV – "*On Solar Revolutions*" – by Abu Ma'shar, translated and annotated by Robert Schmidt and published by Project Hindsight ©1999

² It is worth noting that 70 years (the sum of the planetary firdar without the nodal firdar) equals 3650 regular weeks, or a "years" worth of "weeks" consisting of 70 days each.

³ *kebernēsis*. The Latin text translates this as *disposito*.

⁴ That is, in descending Chaldean order.

⁵ As is clear from the final paragraph in this treatise on firdar, the nodes are still placed last in sequence in nocturnal nativities.

⁶ *diepō*. In the Hellenistic tradition, this verb is also used for the rulership of an hour of a day according to the system of planetary hours. The Latin text translates this Greek word as *dispono*, making no distinction between this and the verb *kubernaō* that usually applies to the lord of the firdar, not the lord of one of its subdivisions.

after the completion of the years of the seven stars and after the native has completed seventy years, because they do not have domiciles.⁷”

At the end of this Treatise in Section 7, Abu Ma’shar continues his instruction in their proper distributions by adding;

“And in the case of diurnal nativities, the nodes distribute after Ares; but in the case of nocturnal nativities, after Hermes. When the seventy-five years are finished, the division of the firdar returns to the light from which it began at the beginning of the nativity, in accordance with the order of which we spoke earlier. In the second period [of life], the effects will issue forth just as we explained before for the first period. But whether the native’s life should go beyond seventy-five years or should be less than seventy-five years, his death will be in the firdar of the star at which [the distribution] arrived according to the method set out before.⁸ And the significations of the stars in their firdars are both peculiar to themselves and in partnerships with others. In addition to these matters, it is necessary to examine whether the significations of these stars at the fixing of the nativity were either bonified or corrupted, and to also give an opinion concerning the particular effects in relation to the disposition of the stars in the inception.”⁹

⁷ The nodes thus have a somewhat special role. They have determinate time periods or firdar associated with them just like the planets. However, they cannot assume the management of the subdivisions of planetary firdar – that is, they cannot participate with the planets that govern the firdar; nor are their own periods subdivided and shared by the other planets. At the end of the series of upcoming delineations, the nodes are in fact appended at the end of the list of planets participating and distributing times in the firdar of Ares without separate chapter headings or special announcement, though without saying that they are distributing times within the firdar of Ares. So Abu Ma’shar here regards them as having a role like the participating planets, only they have no planet with which to participate; on the other hand, they are treated as if they could have governorship (*kebernäsis*) of a firdar like the planets, yet here he says that they have management (*diepō*) for a period of time, which is the verb that seems to be reserved for the role of the participating planets.

⁸ The verb *katëntēse* here does not have an obvious subject in this sentence. On the assumption that “the method set out before” refers to the directive procedures laid out in the preceding Treatise III, I have supplied “the distribution” as the subject, the idea being that if a distribution and distributor indicate death at a certain time, the death will not be certain unless the distributor for that time is also in its own firdar.

⁹ This last sentence tells us how to specify the firdar lords and their participating planets for a given natal chart, examining both the factors that bonify or corrupt them, as well as their house positions and rulerships in order to make the general firdar delineations more specific.

Firdaria¹⁰ According to Abu Ma'shar		
Diurnal		
Period - Sub Period	Years	Days
Sun	1	156
Sun - Venus	2	313
Sun - Mercury	4	104
Sun - Moon	5	260
Sun - Saturn	7	52
Sun - Jupiter	8	208
Sun - Mars	10	0
Venus	11	52
Venus - Mercury	12	104
Venus - Moon	13	156
Venus - Saturn	14	208
Venus - Jupiter	15	260
Venus - Mars	16	313
Venus - Sun	18	0
Mercury	19	313
Mercury - Moon	21	260
Mercury - Saturn	23	208
Mercury - Jupiter	25	156
Mercury - Mars	27	104
Mercury - Sun	29	52
Mercury - Venus	31	0
Moon	32	104
Moon - Saturn	33	208
Moon - Jupiter	34	313

Firdaria According to Abu Ma'shar		
Nocturnal		
Period - Sub Period	Years	Days
Moon	1	104
Moon - Saturn	2	208
Moon - Jupiter	3	313
Moon - Mars	5	52
Moon - Sun	6	156
Moon - Venus	7	260
Moon - Mercury	9	0
Saturn	10	208
Saturn - Jupiter	12	52
Saturn - Mars	13	260
Saturn - Sun	15	104
Saturn - Venus	16	313
Saturn - Mercury	18	156
Saturn - Moon	20	0
Jupiter	21	260
Jupiter - Mars	23	156
Jupiter - Sun	25	52
Jupiter - Venus	26	313
Jupiter - Mercury	28	208
Jupiter - Moon	30	105
Jupiter - Saturn	32	0
Mars	33	0
Mars - Sun	34	0
Mars - Venus	35	0

¹⁰ This table is courteously provided by Paulo Silva, <http://astrologiamedieval.com.sapo.pt/> and by Peter J. Clark, <http://www.classicalastrologer.com/>

Moon - Mars	36	156
Moon - Sun	37	156
Moon - Venus	38	260
Moon - Mercury	40	0
Saturn	41	208
Saturn - Jupiter	43	52
Saturn - Mars	44	260
Saturn - Sun	46	104
Saturn - Venus	47	113
Saturn - Mercury	49	156
Saturn - Moon	51	0
Jupiter	52	260
Jupiter - Mars	54	156
Jupiter - Sun	56	52
Jupiter - Venus	57	313
Jupiter - Mercury	59	208
Jupiter - Moon	61	104
Jupiter - Saturn	63	0
Mars	64	0
Mars - Sun	65	0
Mars - Venus	66	0
Mars - Mercury	67	0
Mars - Moon	68	0
Mars - Saturn	69	0
Mars - Jupiter	70	0
Caput Draconis (North Node)	73	0
Cauda Draconis (South Node)	75	0

Mars - Mercury	36	0
Mars - Moon	37	0
Mars - Saturn	38	0
Mars - Jupiter	39	0
Sun	40	156
Sun - Venus	41	313
Sun - Mercury	43	104
Sun - Moon	44	260
Sun - Saturn	46	52
Sun - Jupiter	47	208
Sun - Mars	49	0
Venus	50	52
Venus - Mercury	51	104
Venus - Moon	52	156
Venus - Saturn	53	208
Venus - Jupiter	54	260
Venus - Mars	55	313
Venus - Sun	57	0
Mercury	58	313
Mercury - Moon	60	260
Mercury - Saturn	62	208
Mercury - Jupiter	64	156
Mercury - Mars	66	104
Mercury - Sun	68	52
Mercury - Venus	70	0
Caput Draconis (North Node)	73	0
Cauda Draconis (South Node)	75	0

When these techniques are introduced into Europe in the 13th century, they come via Abu Ma'shar's "*Greater Introduction*" and Alchabitius' "*Introduction to Astrology*" which was first translated into Latin by two translators in medieval Spain in the 12th century. It is via these translations that Bonatti explains the Firdar in his "*Liber Astronomiae*". "*On Solar Revolutions*" was not translated until later in the 15th century.

The reason I'm explaining this is because there are two schools of thought that exist concerning the order of the nocturnal series of Firdar. There exists some ambiguity in Bonatti's explanation of the nocturnal order of the Firdar. Bonatti, in paraphrasing Abu Ma'shar explains the Firdar in this fashion;

“The ancient wise men considered certain years in nativities which are not called major or middle or even minor,¹¹ but they called them the years of the Firdaria, that is, disposed years. For each planet disposes its own part of the life of the native according to its part of the years of the Firdaria in this method.

Whatever kind of nativity it is, the disposition of the years of the Firdaria begin from the luminary whose authority it is¹² and that luminary disposes the life of the native according to the authority of its years of the Firdaria, however not without the participation of the other planets.

For if the nativity was diurnal, it will begin from the Sun, which is the diurnal luminary, which disposes the life of the native according to the quantity of the years of the Firdaria, which are 10, with the participation of all the other planets, but he himself will obtain the authority and especially in the first seventh part of those years.”

Bonatti then gives the order of the disposition of the planets exactly as Abu Ma'shar does for the diurnal series of Firdar. I will not repeat them. When it comes to the nocturnal series, Bonatti continues,

“But if the nativity is nocturnal the disposition will begin from the Moon which is the nocturnal luminary and will be in all respects as was explained when it began from the

¹¹ This is of course referring to the major, middle, and minor years associated to the planets. E.g., the major years of the Sun are 120 years, its middle years are 69,5 years, and its minor years are 19 years.

¹² I.e., the luminary of the chart determined by whether the nativity is diurnal (daytime) or nocturnal (nighttime). The Sun rules nativities of the day and the Moon the night.

Sun both regarding the participation of the planets with the Moon and regarding the succession of them in the order of the circle.

And all of the aforesaid significators or dispositors dispose accordingly as they are well disposed by increasing the good and by decreasing the evil.

And if they are evilly disposed by increasing evil and degreasing the good. And this is a laborious matter, although, it ought to be well observed because some astrologers, avoiding the labour, do not ever consider this [the Firdaria] in their judgments whence they fall into deception.”¹³

I would direct the readers attention particularly to these words by Bonatti, “*But if the nativity is nocturnal the disposition will begin from the Moon which is the nocturnal luminary and will be in all respects as was explained when it began from the Sun both regarding the participation of the planets with the Moon and regarding the succession of them in the order of the circle.*”

The ambiguity of this statement is that the firdar of the Moon should follow “in all respects” the order of the Sun’s firdar. Although Bonatti qualifies that by saying “*regarding the succession of them in the order of the circle*”, in which he is clearly referring to planetary succession of the Chaldean order. However, the vague ambiguity led some modern contemporary medieval astrologers, to place the Moon's nodes following Mars Firdar in the nocturnal series; exactly as the order of the diurnal sequence. According to this understanding of Bonatti, one must put the nodes in the same place in both the diurnal and nocturnal series, after Mars' Firdar.

It must be said that this same ambiguity does exist in Abu Ma’shar’s short introduction when he says, “*In the case of nocturnal nativities, the Moon takes the first firdar, then Kronos, then Zeus, then Ares, in accordance with the prior order.*” If all one had was this statement to work from it raises many questions and much ambiguity as to just what Abu Ma’shar is saying.

¹³ Tractus de nativitatibus, Chapter III – “*Liber Astronomiae*” – by Guido Bonatti, translated by Robert Zoller and published in “*Tools and Techniques II*” 3rd edition © Robert Zoller and New Library Limited 2003

The Firdar¹⁴

As understood from Bonatti: Tail and the Head after Mars in the nocturnal series

Diurnal				Nocturnal					
Period		Sub-Period	Years	End	Period		Sub-Period	Years	End
☉	-	☉	10 Years	0 - 10	☽	-	☽	9 Years	0 - 9
☉	-	♀			☽	-	♁		
☉	-	♃			☽	-	♂		
☉	-	☽			☽	-	☉		
☉	-	♁			☽	-	♀		
☉	-	♂			☽	-	♃		
♀	-	♀			8 Years	10 - 18	♁		
♀	-	♃	♁	-			♂		
♀	-	☽	♁	-			☉		
♀	-	♁	♁	-			♃		
♀	-	♂	♁	-			♀		
♀	-	☉	♁	-			☽		
♃	-	♃	13 Years	18 - 31			♂	-	♂
♃	-	☽			♂	-	☉		
♃	-	♁			♂	-	♀		
♃	-	♂			♂	-	☽		
♃	-	☉			♂	-	♁		
♃	-	♀			♂	-	♁		
♂	-	♂			9 Years	31 - 40	♂	-	♂
♂	-	♁	♂	-			☉		
♂	-	♂	♂	-			♃		
♂	-	♂	♂	-			♀		
♂	-	☉	♂	-			☽		
♂	-	♀	♂	-			♁		
♂	-	♁							

¹⁴ This table is courteously provided by Paulo Silva, <http://astrologiamedieval.com.sapo.pt/> and by Peter J. Clark, <http://www.classicalastrologer.com/>

Ꭰ	-	Ꭱ		
Ꭲ	-	Ꭲ	11 Years	40 - 51
Ꭳ	-	Ꭳ		
Ꭴ	-	Ꭴ		
Ꭵ	-	Ꭵ		
Ꭶ	-	Ꭶ		
Ꭷ	-	Ꭷ		
Ꭸ	-	Ꭸ		
Ꭹ	-	Ꭹ	12 Years	51 - 63
Ꭺ	-	Ꭺ		
Ꭻ	-	Ꭻ		
Ꭼ	-	Ꭼ		
Ꭽ	-	Ꭽ		
Ꭾ	-	Ꭾ		
Ꭿ	-	Ꭿ	7 Years	63 - 70
Ꮀ	-	Ꮀ		
Ꮁ	-	Ꮁ		
Ꮂ	-	Ꮂ		
Ꮃ	-	Ꮃ		
Ꮄ	-	Ꮄ		
Ꮅ	-	Ꮅ		
Ꮆ			3 Years	70 - 73
Ꮇ			2 Years	73 - 75

Ꭰ	-	Ꭱ		
Ꭲ			3 Years	39 - 42
Ꭳ			2 Years	42 - 44
Ꭴ	-	Ꭴ	10 Years	44 - 54
Ꭵ	-	Ꭵ		
Ꭶ	-	Ꭶ		
Ꭷ	-	Ꭷ		
Ꭸ	-	Ꭸ		
Ꭹ	-	Ꭹ		
Ꭺ	-	Ꭺ	8 Years	54 - 62
Ꭻ	-	Ꭻ		
Ꭼ	-	Ꭼ		
Ꭽ	-	Ꭽ		
Ꭾ	-	Ꭾ		
Ꭿ	-	Ꭿ		
Ꮀ	-	Ꮀ	13 Years	62 - 75
Ꮁ	-	Ꮁ		
Ꮂ	-	Ꮂ		
Ꮃ	-	Ꮃ		
Ꮄ	-	Ꮄ		
Ꮅ	-	Ꮅ		
Ꮆ	-	Ꮆ		
Ꮇ	-	Ꮇ		
Ꮈ	-	Ꮈ		

However, in *“On Solar Revolutions”*, Abu Ma’shar does not limit his explanation to this brief and ambiguous statement. Instead, he clearly says, *“...but in a peculiar manner, the Ascending and Descending Nodes, since they do not further participate with any star, assume the management only after the completion of the years of the seven stars and after the native has completed seventy years, because they do not have domiciles... And in the case of diurnal nativities, the nodes distribute after Ares; but in the case of nocturnal nativities, after Hermes.”*

Whether Bonatti meant the nocturnal firdar should in all respects follow the diurnal except that they start from the Moon instead of the Sun is in itself questionable. It is not with Abu Ma’shar who is the one introducing the firdar into medieval practice. If Bonatti is erring here because there could exist some ambiguity in Abu Ma’shar’s words, it can be forgiven him since he was not around when *“On the Solar Revolutions”* was translated after his death. Montulmo most likely did have Abu Ma’shar’s latter work for in the 15th century he does reiterate Abu Ma’shar’s correct order.

Those following this ambiguous understanding from Bonatti’s words have found some justification since many nocturnal nativities have suffered things in this age from 42 years old that could easily be attributed to the South Nodal period. However, recent investigation also reveals other possible causes of this period which most relate to the “middle age crisis”. Robert Zoller for example has suggested a relationship of this period to “the Critical Years” such as is explained in the *Liber Hermetis*. Of course there is the fact that 42 is half of 84 (Uranus' cycle) and also 3.5 Jupiter cycles. It is the seventh house Profecion of the Ascendant and relates to the Saturn-Mars conjunction cycle and the nominal 2 year cycle of Mars oppositions. Abu Ma’shar suggests that the harshness and trials of these years are the result of Mars assuming the natural rule of this period starting at 41. These were called “the Ages of Man” where each planet had a natural signification to a certain number of years in the development of a native.

The point is, that while this accidental misunderstanding of Bonatti’s text could be an “accidental” fortune and correct, it could just as likely be “not” since there are equally interesting indicators which can explain this period even better than the nodal period misplaced in the nocturnal series.

When working with the Firdar, it is perhaps wise not to cast anything in stone yet, but to use both series of nocturnal Firdar, maintain an open mind and test them both. We need to approach these ancient predictive techniques, whether Firdar, profections, primary directions, the Solar Return etc. with humility and leave ourselves open to the possibility that our understanding may at times be faulty or even lack full council on the subject. We are still in the process of learning and recovering a good many things from the past and it is therefore very dangerous to cast something into stone.

Slowly we learn,

Steven Birchfield