

Kūshyār ibn Labbān’s Glossary of Astronomy

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Kūshyār ibn Labbān is an Iranian astronomer and mathematician who wrote his major astronomical work *al-Zīj al-Jāmi‘* (lit. “The comprehensive astronomical handbook with tables”, abbreviated here as *ZJ*) between 1020 and 1025 C.E. [Kennedy 1956, pp. 125, 156-57; Bagheri 2006, p. 1]. This Arabic treatise consists of four Books: I) Elementary calculations, II) Tables, III) Cosmology, and IV) Proofs. I have prepared an edition of Books I and IV with English translation and commentary as my PhD dissertation at Utrecht University. I am now working on Books II and III of *ZJ* in order to complete the work for publication.

We know very little about Kūshyār’s life [Bagheri 2006, pp. 1-2], however, there is an interesting quotation from him which was not noticed before. In MS Cairo, Dār al-kutub Mīqāt no. 691 (Books I and II of *ZJ*), fol. 24v, there is a note by the scribe at the end of Book I as follows:

Kūshyār said:

“<I> observed the conjunction of Mars and Saturn with <my own> eyes in nightfall of Thursday 21 of Tirmāh of the year 362 of Yazdigird (=11 July 993 C.E.). Then I found their true longitudes for the <local> meridian. <According to the result,> Saturn was in Pisces 0;59° and Mars in it (i.e., in Pisces) 1;50°, at the beginning of its retrogradation, by subtracting two degrees from its mean longitude and adding two degrees to its mean anomaly. <I did this> in order to make it sure for myself that one may not rely on observational *zīj*es. Because if they turn out to be correct in one <case> by some tricks, they are erroneous in ten <cases>. There is no way to correcting them by the scientists of our time and by efforts of our rulers. And greetings (i.e., that’s all).”

This is his (i.e., Kūshyār’s) saying quoted from a manuscript in his hand.¹

قال كوشيار قران المريح وزحل برأى العين عشية يوم الخميس الحادى والعشرين من تيرماه سنة اثنين وستين¹ وثلاثمائة ليزدجرد فقومتها لنصف النهار فكان زحل في الحوت • نط المريح فيه ان في اول رجوعه بنقصان درجتين من وسطه وزيادة درجتين على خاصته ليتحقق عني ان الزيجات الرصدية لا اعتماد عليها لانها ان اصاب في واحد ببعض الخيل اخطأت في عشرة ولا سبيل على تصحيحها بعلماء زماننا وهم ملوكنا والسلم هذا قوله ومنقول من نسخة بخطه