

**Lesson Objective: Students will examine the horoscope of Iskandar Sultan (1384-1415) cast in Medieval Persia to learn about the role of astrology in the socio-political life of the elites**

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### **Studies on Persianate Manuscripts, Arts, and Literature**

Illustration: Courtesy of The Wellcome Library.

Source: The horoscope of Iskandar Sultan as a cosmological vision in the Islamic world in Horoscopes and public spheres, essays on the history of astrology.

### **The horoscope of Iskandar Sultan**

During the medieval era, astrology was used to determine the health of a ruler or other socio-political happenings. Casting horoscopes were among common practices for princes and other elites. To cast a horoscope, one needed to know the position of the stars at a particular moment of ascending or descending of the moon, along with the latitude and the longitude. Casting horoscopes before making decisions for any court-related event, like sending envoys, building a city or monument, funeral processions, or auspicious ceremonies, like pilgrimage and wedding festivities, were all the responsibility of court astrologers. In addition, astrologers cast horoscopes to determine when a disease was likely to occur and identify the planetary aspects that had brought about the prevalent disease. Many learned physicians used the position of stars and planets to calculate the best time for bloodletting or use other remedies. Using predictive arts such as judicial astrology was a way to emphasize the power and strength of the ruling elite. Therefore, astrology was skillfully exploited in political circles and played an essential role in shaping history.

The horoscope of Iskandar Sultan اسکندر سلطان was cast in Shiraz on the 22<sup>nd</sup> of Dhu-Hijja 813 Hijri/ 18 April 1411 C.E. by the court astrologer al-Kashi (Imad al-Munajjim) . Iskandar Sultan, a grandson of Timur Leng (Tamerlane), was a great patron of illuminated manuscripts. The horoscope includes the planets in a circular composition surrounded by all the zodiac signs. Four angels, depicted in the corner of the frame, are the guardians of the planisphere. Thus, the

horoscope of Iskandar Sultan shows the zodiac, planets, and angels. The horoscope celebrates the apogee of the reign of Iskandar Sultan during the Timurid era. The Sun, the planet of kings and princes, was placed in Taurus, while Mars, the planet of war and victories, was placed in Scorpio, and Venus, the protector of arts and leisure, was placed in Pisces. Thus, the horoscope as a traditional icon indicates that all planets were Prince Iskandar's servants, Saturn offering him power, Mercury offering intellectual faculties, Jupiter showing piety and justice, Mars submitting warfare, and Venus providing leisure.



A fold out page from the 'Iskandar Horoscope' showing the position of the planets at the moment of Iskandar's birth on 25th April 1384 in the form of a planisphere. [Wellcome Library reference: MS Persian 474.](#)

Among the historiographies left from ancient times, the works of Masha'llah ibn Athari from Basra, which determined the propitious moment for founding the city of Baghdad for al-Mansur Abbasid in 762, explained various branches of the art of astrology. Masha'llah's writings were influenced by *Zij-i Arkand*, translated from Sanskrit to Arabic, and *Zij-i Shahryaran*, which was used by Anushirwan's astrologers to cast a horoscope for the king's coronation. Other prominent writings on astrology include al-Hashimi's *Kitab fi 'ilal al-zijat* (Book on the Reasons behind Zijes), composed circa 890, and al-Biruni's *Kitab al-qanun al-mas'udi* (Masudic Canon) circa 1030.

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## Zodiac Man انسان منطقه البروج



Create your planisphere according to your birth date by using your imagination and creativity, adding various features like zodiac signs, constellations, or any other elements you think your planisphere may need. Explain the planisphere in class.

Terms:

Zodiac Man  
Planisphere  
Zodiac signs  
Constellations  
Horoscope

Timurid Era  
Horary astrology  
Judicial astrology