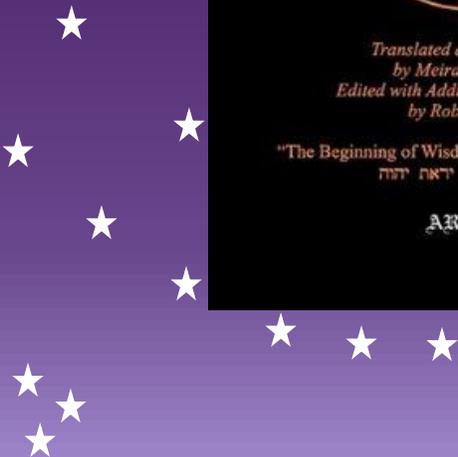
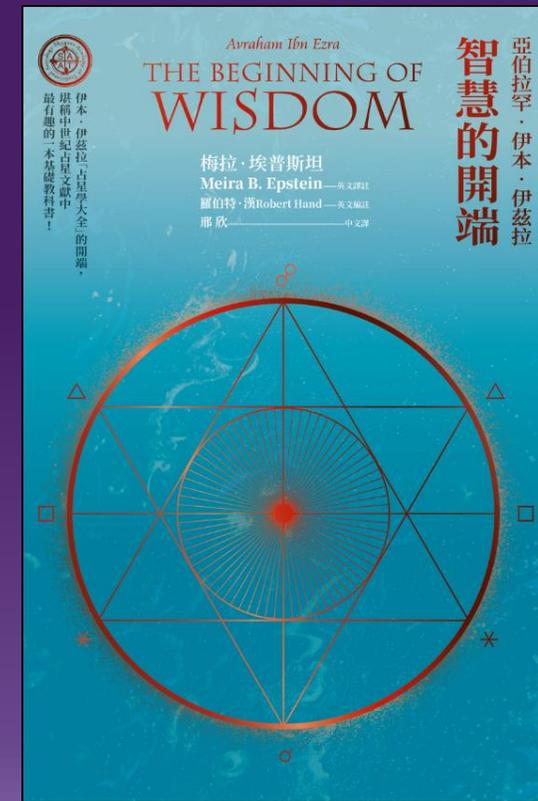
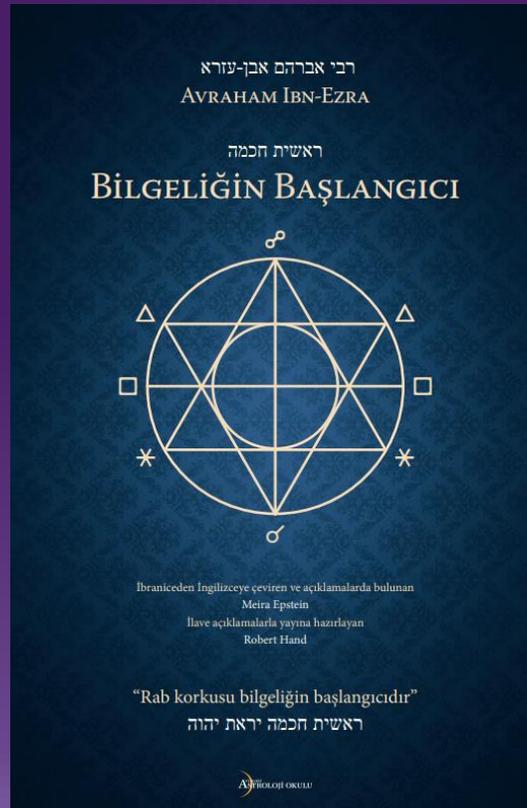
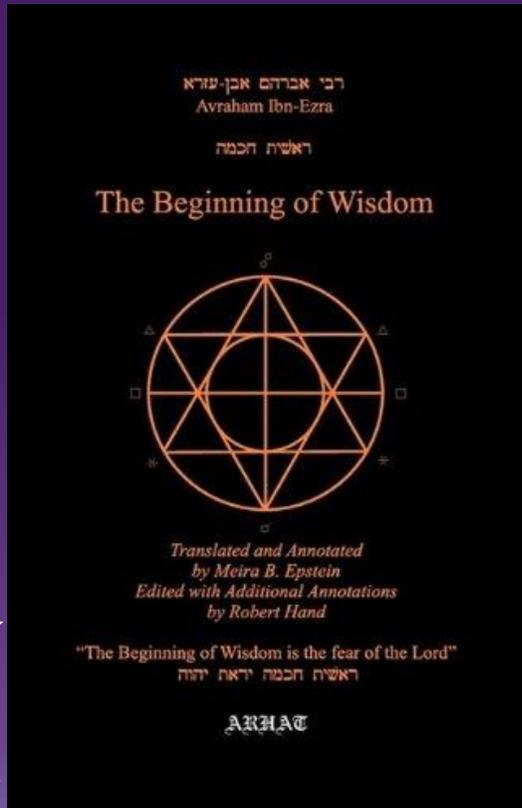


Ibn Ezra's Astrology in Perspective of History

Meira Epstein, C.A., NCGR-PAA

Translator from Hebrew

www.bear-star.com



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“The Beginning of Wisdom” by Abraham Ibn Ezra (1148) is now published in Chinese.



This successful project is due to the dedicated efforts of the highly professional team at SATA (Skygaze Academy of Traditional Astrology) in Taiwan.

On this occasion, I have been asked by my SATA colleagues to participate in a launch event and answer some questions that are of interest to Chinese audience.



I believe that these are very pertinent questions that are relevant, not only to Ibn Ezra and this book, but also to the general study of Classical Western Astrology, and its role in the practice of our time.



THE QUESTIONS

- Q: What brought you to translate this book?
- Q: Which part of this book attracts you most?
- Q: What was the most challenging part of the translation work?
- Q: From whom did Ibn Ezra inherit his astrological theories?
Did he make some innovation or improvement on these theories?
- Q: In this book there are some descriptions of the co-rising constellations related to the Faces, but this seems to disappear in our chart interpretation nowadays. How did ancient astrologers use this concept?
- Q: What kind of specialty or features lies in Ibn Ezra's series?
What role does this book - *The Beginning of Wisdom* - play in his series?
- Q: What value or status did this book achieved in the entire medieval astrological history? How do you comment on the contribution and influence which Ibn Ezra has made to the entire astrological history?

THE QUESTIONS, cont'd

- Q: As this book is quite far from today, there might be some modern astrologers who disagree with the content of this book.
Do you have any suggestion how we can better understand the disagreement, and how to form a point of view?
- Q: Ibn Ezra was one of the most distinguished Jewish Biblical commentators.
The question is: Did any conflict exist for him between religion and astrology?
Or, did he manage to reconcile the two?

How do you see this kind of conflict?

Q: What brought you to translate this book?

I have always been interested in antiquity and history.

From my first day in astrology, I knew the importance of knowledge of our sources, the roots. Wanted to know how and where it began.

I was also guided by love of the classical Hebrew language.

Q: Which part of this book attracts you most?

I would say primarily the Signs, as they occupy the center of the book. The descriptions are very rich and informative.

The Planets – the considerations of strength

The Lots – the thinking behinds the concept.



Q: What was the most challenging part of the translation?⁶

I did not see it as a challenge, but as an incredible opportunity to learn from those sources. It was Research more than translation.

THE LANGUAGE

- * The overall goal was to make the material available to the modern astrologer, in language that is familiar to the modern ear, while preserving the concepts, the tone and style of the original Hebrew text.
- * Working with Medieval Rabbinical Hebrew, required figuring out how Ibn Ezra used it to express the necessary astrological terminologies.
- * His writing style, which is concise and short – needed to be expanded into more particular detailed English sentences and modified syntax.
- * Hebrew syntax is very different from English.

THE MATERIAL

It was also necessary to compare the astrological material with Ptolemy, who was his major source, along with his other Arabic and Hindu sources. All these are quoted extensively in his work.

Q: From whom did Ibn Ezra inherit his astrological theories? Did he make some innovation or improvement on these theories?

Ibn Ezra's time was at the end of the Arabic era. By that time many classical sources were known:

**Hellenistic - Ptolemy / the Tetrabiblos was his major source, Valens too;
Arabic and Persian: Abu Mashar, Al Kindi, Al Biruni, Sahel
Hindu sources, without name are quoted too.**

Ibn Ezra was not an innovator. More like a collector and a TEACHER

★ **He compared sources, evaluated and critiqued them, and even rejected some - All based on sound principles of astrological rationality.**

★
★ **For the most part, Ibn Ezra was a teacher – a fact which is evident in his writing style throughout all his books.**

★ ★ ★
★ ★ **His place in history is in transmitting this extensive knowledge and rational approach to future generations.**

Q: In this book there are some descriptions of the co-rising constellations related to the Faces, but this seems to disappear in our chart interpretation nowadays. How did ancient astrologers use this concept?

Ibn Ezra lists these celestial images co-rising with the Faces, with no further information. The source is unknown, and the images do not resemble anything found in other texts, even where a similar concept is mentioned. Omar of Tiberias has some.

- ★ Observing the rising sign and any other asterism that is co-rising, is very ancient.
- ★ The Faces come from the Egyptian Decans, which served in marking the hours of the night watch, as well as calendar markers.
- ★ They also had minor deities-gods to preside over them.
- ★ ★ ★

Q: What kind of specialty or features lies in Ibn Ezra's series? What role does this book - *The Beginning of Wisdom* - play in his series?

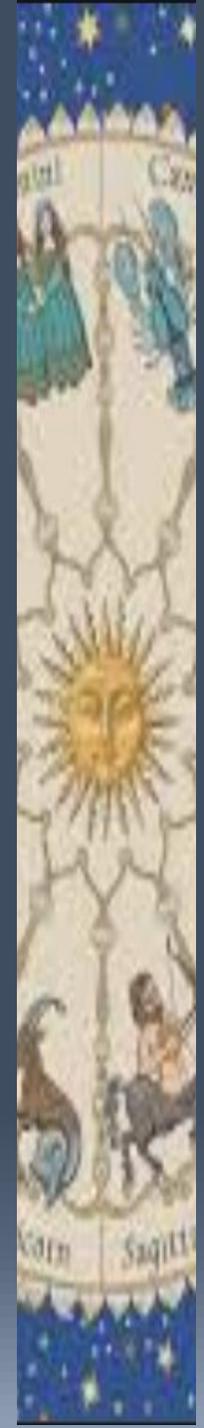
Ibn Ezra's writing on astrology is encyclopedic – his work cover all branched of astrology, personal, horary, electional, mundane, and even medical.

It can also be described as research into his predecessors – quoting and at the same time evaluating all his sources., and even rejecting some...

It is clear that he set out to combine it all in one place for the benefit of the people who wanted to learn it.

From another historical evidence it is clear that he had a specific audience that he wrote for – a Jewish community in the South of France, where he stayed for a while, and was very welcome, during his wandering years.

***Beginning of Wisdom*, appropriately named, is the center-piece of his work. Historically, it is the most well-known of his books. It lays the ground work, the first principles of astrology - the sphere, divisions of the wheel, the motions, the planets, the signs, the aspects, the Lots, and even directions.**



Q: As this book is quite far from today, there might be some modern astrologers who disagree with the content of this book. Do you have any suggestion how we can better understand the disagreement, and how to form a point of view?

This is a most important topic, which touches upon the fundamental philosophical aspects of Life and of Astrology.

In our current times, since the scientific revolution, it is customary to think that New and Modern is better than Old. That we have discovered things the Ancient didn't know. That we are smarter now...

It is true that humanity has changed and evolved since ancient times, But that is mostly on the technological and scientific levels. Fundamental Life experiences have not changed, to the best of my observations, throughout recorded history.

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Continued...

Therefore, it is not about disagreeing - It is about a the approach to the human experience, which is Universal across Time and Cultures.

The real tension is between Predestined Fatalistic approach vs the notion of Free Spirit & Free Will

It is also a difference of focus:

External event and circumstances vs. personality and the inner psychological world. Many astrologers reject the focus on events as fatalistic.

My answer: The external experiences are just as important !
The external and the internal worlds are one continuity.

The fundamental human experiences are Archetypal – at any time in any human society – east-west, north-south...

And the foundations of astrology describe those. They come to us from the Classics and they are true to this day

**Modern time also added New Planets: Uranus, Neptune and Pluto
The Asteroids, and the Uranian TNP's**

**A close examination of the 'new comers' shows that their essence is already
found in the ancient principles.**

ANOTHER POINT OF APPARENT TENSION:

**People have the impression that classical astrology is all about Prediction of
life events.**

**Astrologer who call themselves 'psychological', claim that we can control our
lives through exercising Free Will, with the ability to change the attitude
(thought, mind) – and therefore prediction is wrong – they are not consistent
with themselves!**

- ★ **When the astrologer looks at a nativity and declares that this person will be
wealthy, of travel around the world, or have a much trouble in life – That is
Prediction from the start ! And Every Astrologer does that, even the non-**
- ★ **predictive ones !**
- ★
- ★
- ★
- ★

Continued...

Classical astrology Does Discuss Character. But in terms of Morality, not in terms of parents and environmental influences, as psychology does.

ANOTHER POINT OF DIFFERENCE

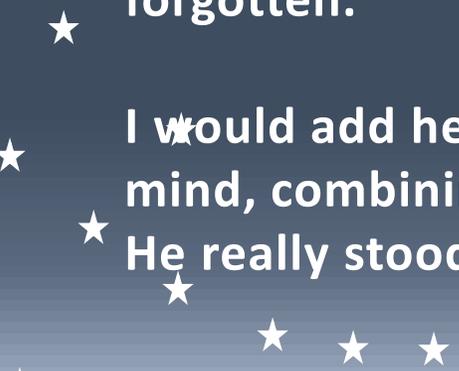
Practice of Classical astrology also appears to students as more demanding, requires better knowledge of astronomy and mathematics.

The modern trends are New Age, spiritual and psychological approach – all of which are an open field – qualitative and symbolic, rather than quantitative.

As a result, valuable techniques and principles have been dismissed, lost and forgotten.

I would add here, that Johannes Kepler is a great example of an inquisitive mind, combining spiritual principles of astrology with quantitative methods.

He really stood at the threshold between the Worlds – the Old and the New.



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במלומים שלג לערב
שיורד בו הנולד כי אם
הנולד ברביעית השש
כי תלדי' הנולד השני
שם וכתב תדין על
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לעולם נמתבן תולדי
הוא מביט ל הפעולה
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המטל תולדות השליט
תולדותו עם תולדות ה
שתיחה הלטה עמו
לה וכפי ערכה ל
הפול היטסח הפירוד
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החוד פחס כחלק ק

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Q: Ibn Ezra was one of the most distinguished Jewish Biblical commentators. The question is: Did any conflict exist for him between religion and astrology? - Or, did he manage to reconcile the two? How do you see this kind of conflict?

A proper answer to this takes a whole lecture, so I will be brief:

This question has always been relevant to the relationship between astrology and all mainstream religions.

Religions are based on the principles of morality, and belief that when you follow the commandments and rules, and lead a righteous life, you will be protected from harm and be rewarded.

- ★ **Religious doctrines require belief in Free Will – the conscious ability to choose between Right and Wrong.**
- ★ **Astrology, by default, by the premise and doctrine of the natal chart - describes the whole course of life from birth, and life circumstances are not a result of choice. The modern ‘compromise’ is calling it ‘Lessons’... and I call it Destiny.**

Ibn Ezra knew all that:

But in his writing, he adheres to the classical Doctrine of the Three Parts of Souls –

- The part that animates the physical life
- The part that governs the senses and the conscious mind
- The Higher Soul – the part that is close to God

This Higher Soul is above the physical realities, and is not subject to the decrees of the stars and the necessities of the material existence.

This is mentioned it in a few places in his writing – astrology and other philosophical texts.

YET: In his other writing – his personal poetry – where he laments the hardship reality of his own life, he does recognize the inevitability of “the power of the stars”.

**LET US ALL NAVIGATE OUR CONSCIOUSNESS,
AND HONOR THE POWERS OF THE HEAVENS**

In Conclusion

Special thanks go to Zora, our Chinese translator, who demonstrated excellent translation skills, coupled with thorough knowledge of astrology.

I am sure that her challenges were similar to mine in terms of moving between languages and concepts, and audience sensibility.

★ And thanks to Cecily and Rose for the decision and the dedication necessary to take this project on.

★
★ We all share the love and admiration of Astrology
★
★ ★ ★
★ ★ ★

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