



A History of Arabic Astronomy: Planetary Theories During the Golden Age of Islam (New York University Studies in Near Eastern Civilization)

George Saliba

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A History of Arabic Astronomy is a comprehensive survey of Arabic planetary theories from the eleventh century to the fifteenth century based on recent manuscript discoveries. George Saliba argues that the medieval period, often called a period of decline in Islamic intellectual history, was scientifically speaking, a very productive period in which astronomical theories of the highest order were produced.

Based on the most recent manuscript discoveries, this book broadly surveys developments in Arabic planetary theories from the eleventh century to the fifteenth. Taken together, the primary texts and essays assembled in this book reverse traditional beliefs about the rise and fall of Arabic science, demonstrating how the traditional “age of decline” in Arabic science was indeed a “Golden Age” as far as astronomy was concerned.

Some of the techniques and mathematical theorems developed during this period were identical to those which were employed by Copernicus in developing his own non-Ptolemaic astronomy. Significantly, this volume will shed much-needed light on the conditions under which such theories were developed in medieval Islam. It clearly demonstrates the distinction that was drawn between astronomical activities and astrological ones, and reveals, contrary to common perceptions about medieval Islam, the accommodation that was obviously reached between religion and astronomy, and the degree to which astronomical planetary theories were supported, and at times even financed, by the religious community itself. This in stark contrast to the systematic attacks leveled by the same religious community against astrology.

To students of European intellectual history, the book reveals the technical relationship between the astronomy of the Arabs and that of Copernicus. Saliba’s definitive work will be of particular interest to historians of Arabic science as well as to historians of medieval and Renaissance European science.

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