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The iconographic transformation of the “tail of the dragon of the eclipse” into the “hunting cheetah”¹

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Abstract

Medieval Islamic iconography includes many depictions in which the tail of Sagittarius takes the form of the “dragon of the eclipse”. The current paper examines the gradual transformation of this imagery into that of a quadruped, eventually detached from the body of Sagittarius, and placed on the centaur’s back in the characteristic position of the seated “hunting cheetah”, as can also be seen in images of the chase assisted by this feline.

Keywords: Sagittarius, *jawzahar*, hunting cheetah, Islamic iconography, Islamic astrology.

Islamic iconography includes many depictions of Sagittarius in which the personage of the centaur turns his upper body backwards to shoot at a dragon, or at the head of a dragon in which his own tail terminates.

Such iconography refers to the “dragon”, or *jawzahar*,² in the

1. The current article is a revised and expanded version of a work originally published in Italian (Fontana 2003).

2. The term *jawzahar* (translated “dragon, monster”) is largely Persian origin. Hartner (1938: 120-21, 153-54; 1965) reviews the etymology and meaning in some depth (also Azarpay 1978: 369). The concept referred to is that of an invisible “eighth” planet, or “pseudo-planet”, whose rotation interacts with the nodes of the lunar orbit. With the fusion of mythological and astrological elements there would in fact be the development of two pseudo-planets (cf. Hartner 1938: fig 12; Carboni 1987: fig 15), relating to the two nodes of the lunar orbit: the ascendant, or “head of the dragon” in Gemini, and the descendant, or “tail of the

particular exaltation of the “tail of the dragon”, which is identified with the descending node of the lunar orbit.³ In ancient times there was no distinction between the zodiacal signs of Scorpion and Sagittarius, and this appears to have been a con-

dragon” in Sagittarius. Neither of these two zodiacal signs had been included in the planetary “exaltations” of ancient astrology (cf. Hartner 1938: 117-18, 133). The concept of “exaltation” referred to the moment of maximum power, occurring as the planet entered a specific sign of the zodiac. Thus, the exaltation of the *jawzahar* pseudo-planet occurred in the sign of Sagittarius, and was identified as related to the head and tail of the dragon. It should be noted that Avicenna (d. 1037) rejected the theory of the *jawzahar*, as also summarised by Nallino “It is ridiculous that solely for astrological purposes, two abstract, mathematical points have been linked to planets – the ascending (Caput) and descending (Cauda) nodes of the Moon” (Nallino 1944: 29, translated here from the original Italian).

3. The nodes are the points of intersection of the lunar orbit with the ecliptic. The conjunction or opposition of the sun or moon (respectively new moon, full moon) in or near the nodes brings about the events of lunar or solar eclipses. The nodes are in constant rotation, contrary to the movements of the sun, moon and planets. A full revolution through all the signs of the zodiac requires about eighteen and one half years, during which the eclipses progressively change position with respect to the zodiac. The eclipses, at the nodes of the lunar orbit, were identified with the supernatural phenomenon of the “dragon”: at these moments this ancient monster attained levels of magical power sufficient to overcome those of the gods, and would swallow the sun or moon. A 1515 Venetian reprint, drawn from *De magnis conjunctionibus*, by Joannes Hispalensis (Augsburg, 1489), itself a Latin version of a work by Abū Ma’shar (d. 886), provides an excellent iconographic rendering of the identification of the two nodes of the lunar orbit with the dragon’s head and tail. In the Venetian reprint (also reproduced in Hartner 1938: fig 10) the morphology of the dragon has been westernised. On the *jawzahar* and its significance, in addition to the two articles by Hartner (1938, 1973), see also Bausani (1977: 180-81).

tributing factor in the development of the iconography of the centaur, with the tail of the dragon (cf. Hartner 1938: 147-49, figs. 35-38; 1973-74: 114-16, figs. 15a-c).⁴

The current paper examines the gradual transformation of the tail of the “dragon of the eclipse” into the image of a quadruped, eventually detached from the body of Sagittarius, and placed on the centaur’s back in the characteristic position of a seated cheetah, as also seen in the portrayals of hunters who used such felines for assistance.

The figures of the Sagittarius/centaur and the tail of the dragon – the latter having its exaltation in the zodiacal sign – became combined in the single form of Sagittarius, with tail terminating in dragon-like features.⁵ The subsequent iconographic evolution of the dragon’s head, at the tip of the tail, into the full form of an isolated quadruped, can be identified as occurring between the late 11th and the 13th centuries.

4. “[...] this particular centaur monster consists of three entirely different elements which have been fused together, viz., the original figure of Sagittarius-centaur, Jupiter as the lord of the domicile, and the dragon’s tail having its exaltation in this zodiacal sign” (Hartner 1938: 137).

5. Apart from the sign of Sagittarius, that of the Lion has also sometimes been shown with a tail ending in the jaws of a dragon. See, for example, a ewer in copper alloy inlaid with silver, with fragmentary neck, from Khurasan, 12th-early 13th century, in the Gulistān Museum, Tehran (Hartner 1938: fig. 1): “This combination of the moon and the sun, or their respective animals, the crab and the lion, with the dragon, evidently originates not in a doctrinal astrological conception, but in a purely mythological, or rather metaphysical, one. After a long wandering we thus suddenly find ourselves back at the point from which we started – the antagonism between the celestial luminaries and the terrestrial light-devouring dragon” (Hartner 1938: 138).

The following paragraphs provide some cases exemplary of this transformation, drawing on instances of mixed provenance and so also of varying chronological ordering.

The “simplest” model is that in which the tail terminates in the form of the dragon’s head, with open jaws, as depicted on an incised copper alloy basin formerly in the Kabul Museum (Inv. no. 58.2.56; fig. 1). This particular exemplar indeed represents the earliest known documentation (11th century) of the coalescence of Sagittarius with the tail of the *jawzahar*; moreover, the work represents an iconographic *unicum*, being the only known case in which Sagittarius is shown engaged in barehanded struggle, against the dragon monster. In this case the centaur seizes the dragon by the neck,⁶ whereas

6. This basin was published by U. Scerrato (1981: fig. 1d – detail showing Sagittarius). Concerning the image of Sagittarius, the scholar states: “A centaur galloping to the right, bust turned to the rear, with the extended right arm grasping the neck of a serpentine dragon, merging into the centaur’s hind quarters. This sign is certainly the most interesting of the zodiacal series seen on the basin. The image represents Sagittarius engaged in characteristic struggle with the mythological dragon of the eclipse, the Jawzahar, whose tail has its exaltation precisely in this sign. The tail of the Jawzahar referred to the descending lunar node, in what was a specifically Indian interpretation, which according to al-Bīrūnī (d. 1048) had in his time not yet diffused in the Islamic world. To the best of my knowledge, the Ghazni basin [11th century] presents the earliest Islamic figurative depiction of the struggle between Sagittarius and the monster of the eclipses, not by accident on a product from a workshop situated in eastern Khorassan [...] This iconography, where the struggle between the two beings is represented in such direct manner, could be reminiscent of ancient mythological astronomy, still preserved in at least oral tradition, dating back to when Sagittarius had not yet been differentiated from the adjacent sign of Scorpio: in fact the scorpion was well known to have dragon-like connotations. This was a mythology that among other things

in all subsequent known examples, including those provided in what follows, the centaur attacks the dragon with benefit of a bow and arrow.⁷

The iconography in which Sagittarius' tail terminates in the jaws of the dragon is certainly the most common, occurring quite often on objects and in manuscript illustrations. Particularly notable are some depictions on Artuqid copper coins (from Mārdīn), issued in the name of Nāṣir al-Dīn Artuq Arslān (1201-1239) dated 599H/ 1202-3, known in the following specimens: two in the British Museum, London (Spengler and Sayles 1992: 122-26, no. and ill. 38); one in the Biblioteca Comunale of Palermo (Bernardini 1993, with ill.); two in the Münzkabinett, Staatliche Museen in Berlin (Gierlichs 1993: no. and fig. 33, *here* fig. 2; von Gladiss 2006: cat. 15 and 16), one in the David Collection, Copenhagen (Inv. C191; Eastmond 2016: fig. 8.14). It seems no accident that such iconography would first appear on coins at roughly

gave rise to the Babylonian iconography of Sagittarius, with scorpion-like tail, then transmitted to the Egyptian Sagittarius." (Scerrato 1981: 237-38, translated from the original in Italian).

7. An image seen on a bucket in copper alloy, inlaid with silver, from Ghaznī (Afghanistan), 12th century, Linden Museum, Stuttgart (Inv. no. VL 81-110; Kalter 1982: no. and ill. D 43) depicts Sagittarius with human bust and serpentine body, again with the tail terminating in dragon jaws. The interpretation of the type of struggle is difficult: possibly with bow and arrow, less likely "hand to hand". The iconography of Sagittarius with serpentine body in the act of shooting at his dragon's tail is not as rare as it might seem: see, among others, the image of the zodiac depicted on a page of the mid-14th century manuscript of the *Eskandar-nāme* by Ahmedī, from Edirne (?), preserved in the Biblioteca Marciana, Venice, Ms. Or XC (57), fol. 58r (Fontana 1995: 369, cat. and ill. 141e, "Lo zodiaco e i sette pianeti").

the time as the eclipse observed in the Artuqid region, on 27 November 1201 (Gierlichs 1993: 121, 125). The depiction of Sagittarius with his tail ending in dragon jaws⁸ can also be found on other products in metal, of which, among others: a brass pen box inlaid with gold and silver, the work of Maḥmūd ibn Sunqur, from western Iran, 680H/1281, British Museum, London (Inv. OA 1891.6-23.5; Hartner 1938: figs. 14-15); a fragmentary brass ewer inlaid with copper and silver, from Iran, first half of the 13th century, Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York (Inv. no. 91.1.530; Carboni 1997: 16-17, no. and ill. 5); a brass bowl inlaid with silver, from Shiraz, early 14th century, Royal Ontario Museum, Toronto (Inv. no. 970.268.5; Campbell 1973: 280, pl. 10, fig. 3h).⁹ The iconography of some of these exemplars includes a more evident co-presence of Jupiter in his domicile, that of the sign of Sagittarius (cf. note 4): see for example a centaur bearing a crown, in a medallion of a brass tray, incised and inlaid with silver, of early 14th century Egypt, Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York (Inv. no. 91.1.604; Carboni 1997: 40-41, no. 17 with ill.; cf. also, *here*, fig. 2). In at least

8. In the opinion of Melikian-Chirvani (1994:148) the zodiac cycle, occurring on 13th-century metal candlesticks, bowls, basins and trays, is: “one of the obvious ways of signifying the sky in Middle Eastern cultures”.

9. The upper band of the inner wall of a copper alloy openwork and incised lamp from Eastern Iran, 11th century, held in the Dār al-Āthār al-Islāmiyya, Kuwait (Inv. LNS 1052 M ab; Curatola 2010: 96, fig. 62) displays the zodiacal signs: here, Sagittarius is shown with a split tail whose upper part ends in dragon jaws (in addition, for Babylonian and Egyptian-Hellenistic images of Sagittarius with double tail, cf. Hartner 1938: 147-48 and figs. 35-36).

one case the human (torso or upper) half of the centaur continues directly into the serpentine form of the dragon, forming its hind or lower half, of which the tail still ends in jaws: such an image is found on the lid of a copper alloy inkwell, inlaid with silver, from Gardīz (Afghanistan), late 12th century, formerly in the Kabul Museum (Scerrato 1981: fig. 3; cf. also Melikian-Chirvani 1982, fig. 39).¹⁰

The evolution of the jaws at the tip of the centaur's tail into the form of an entire dragon-like body, and ultimately into the separate configuration of a hunting cheetah, is clearly visible in a group of metalworks from Khurasan, dating to the late 12th-early 13th centuries: a sequence is proposed in the following paragraphs.

10. On the lid of a copper alloy pen box, inlaid with silver and gold, from northern Mesopotamia, 13th century, in the Museo Civico Medievale of Bologna (Inv. no. 2119; Scerrato 1979: figs. 578, 580), an image depicts the body of the dragon covered with scales, and with the wings (formerly belonging to the dragon, cf. below and fig. 4, fig. 5) now assigned to the centaur. The detail of the wings attached to the centaur recurs quite frequently, independently of whether the tail terminates in dragon jaws (cf., for example, Carboni 1987: figs. 30, 32). A work in painted lacquer, in the David Collection, Copenhagen (Inv. no. 10/h 1991; von Folsach 1991: cat. no. 80 and ill. on p. 35) provides a much later example (Iran, 19th century); here the image lacks any representation of struggle, since by this time such meanings had been lost. Instead the centaur stands with bust and bow directed forward, no longer turned on the dragon tail. A detail of a mural painting in the house of Buṭrus al-Samsar in Aleppo, 1009H/1600-1 (Museum für Islamische Kunst, Berlin, so-called "Aleppo-Zimmer"; Gonnella 1996: fig. 64) offers a very particular iconography: here the torso of a centaur emerges from the jaws of a dragon, aiming his bow ahead; the dragon is seen in full, including representation of its hooves in semblance of rooster claws, and a tail ending in jaws (i.e. a "complete" *jawzahar* monster).

An example of the dragon developing from the typical knotted tail of Sagittarius (cf. Hartner 1938: 138ff.) is seen in a cartouche of the so-called “Wade Cup” (Cleveland Museum of Art, Inv. no. 1944.485; Rice 1955: fig. 13a; *here*, fig. 3): here the monster is depicted with bared jaws, but with body barely developed and with front paws “resting” on the back of the centaur.

The image with the tail of Sagittarius terminating in a fully developed dragon, with long curly nose and wings, and front paws resting on the centaur’s back, seems iconographically more advanced. Exemplars are again seen on copper alloy metalworks inlaid with silver, in particular: a vessel in the Walters Art Gallery of Baltimore (Inv. no. 54.453; London 1976: 176, no. and ill. 189) and the lid of the “Vaso Vescovali”, British Museum, London (Inv. OA 1950-7-2511; Lanci 1845-46: pl. II; *here*, fig. 4).

An almost identical depiction (in both posture and iconography) is found in a medallion of a brass ewer, inlaid with copper and silver, from the es-Said Collection (Allan 1982: 46-53, ill. on pp. 47 and 52, detail; cf. also Kuhen 2011, pl. 35.142, with the caption; *here*, fig. 5): here again the dragon emerges from the tail of Sagittarius, complete with wings, but now with a decidedly “muzzled” nose.

The subsequent iconographic passage represents the very interesting first step in the “liberation” of the dragon-like image, and its transformation into a quadruped on the centaur’s back, taking the typically seated pose of the hunting cheetah. This first stage involves the disappearance of the wings, and the muzzle, with closed jaws, assuming a distinctively feline appearance. Thus far only one example of this kind of Sagittarius

has been found, in a medallion of a copper alloy inkwell, inlaid with silver, held in the Dār al-Āthār al-Islāmiyya, Kuwait (Inv. LNS 139 M; Gettings 1989: fig. 7a; *here*, fig. 6).

The final image in this *excursus* derives from a spherical brass incense burner, inlaid with silver, once again from Khurasan or Afghanistan, formerly in the es-Said Collection (Riyadh 1985: 109, no. and fig. 87; *here*, fig. 7). The only readily available photograph is not from the best angle, however it serves to make out the compositional elements:¹¹ a quadruped with head turned to the rear, with the small pointed ears of a canine or feline, poised on all four paws, stands on the back of Sagittarius; the centaur has a normal horse's tail and turns his bow to the rear.¹²

The preceding paragraphs witness the complete transformation from the form of the dragon's jaws into that of a distinct animal, placed on the back of Sagittarius, in the typical seated position of the cheetah as it rides behind a mounted hunter. It is then interesting to note the rare iconography of a gilded and engraved copper alloy decorative plate from Anatolia (Jazīra) or Iran, 12th-13th century, held in the Dār al-Āthār al-Islāmiyya, Kuwait (Inv. LNS 28 M; Curatola 2010: ill. on p. 261; *here*, fig. 8). The depiction is that of a hunting scene, confirmed by the presence of a cheetah in partial *ram-pante* position, perched to the rear of a horseman equipped with a bow, in the act of shooting at a serpent with dragon's

11. This exemplar was not published by James Allan (1982), probably because it had not yet been acquired. Mrs Salma es-Said, widow of Nu-had es-Said, agreed to an exhibition of the collection at the King Faisal Center of Riyadh, in 1985; the photograph provided here is from the exhibition catalogue. I have not yet been able to obtain a better image, or determine where the incense burner is currently held.

12. On the canine features of the cheetah, see Viré (1965a: 757).

jaws; the horseman's steed tramples the coils of the writhing beast.¹³ The work represents a synthesis between the human part of Sagittarius – who shoots his bow at his own dragon tail, now in independent form of a serpent/dragon – and the equine part of the same zodiac sign – bearing a cheetah on his back, from a previous transformation of the dragon tail. This imagery constitutes a connecting link between the original depictions of Sagittarius, linked with the astrological-mythological figure of the *jawzahar*, and those of horsemen equipped with a hunting cheetah.¹⁴

Other objects offer depictions of horsemen with lance as they prepare to kill a lion (domicile of the Sun): another probable

13. Variations on this theme include those where the horseman with cheetah confronts the dragon-jawed serpent not with a bow and arrow, but with a staff. Such depictions are found on at least three copper alloy candlesticks: two exemplars (from Anatolia?, 13th century) in the Museum of Turkish and Islamic Art, Istanbul (Inv. nos. 112 and 114; Rice 1954: figs. 17 and 18), and one in the es-Said Collection, attributed by Allan to Siirt, mid-13th century (Allan 1982: ill. on p. 58).

14. The “separation” between the human figure and dragon is visible in one of the most famous images of Sagittarius and the *jawzahar* itself, suggesting that the dragon does not originate from the tail of the horse. The scene composes one of the eight limestone panels carved on a pillar of the bridge over the Tigris at Jazīrat ibn ‘Umar, near Cizre, in the area of the Turkish border, currently in Syrian territory (fig. 10). The bridge was completed in 1164, very likely sponsored by Jamal al-Dīn Muḥammad Iṣfahānī (d. 1164), vizier of the Zanjid Quṭb al-Dīn Mawdūd of Mosul (1149-1169) (for full historiography see Nicolle 2014). The generally poor and fractured condition of the relief hinders full interpretation, nevertheless the dragon's serpentine body, twisted in the characteristic knot, does not emerge as a “prolongation” of the tail of the centaur, but appears to constitute an independent element – a hypothesis corroborated by the dimensions of the dragon, equal to those of Sagittarius (cf. Hartner 1938: in part. 114).

synthesis, in which the mythological aspect of the *jawzahar* as monster of the eclipse – responsible for devouring the sun – takes precedence over the astrological aspect. Such images are found on some objects of probable Anatolian (Jazīra) provenance: a Seljuq stone slab in the Museum of Ancient Art of Haifa (Inv. no. 2172; Baer 1967: pl. III.2) and a copper alloy candlestick, inlaid with gold and silver, dating to the late 13th-early 14th century (fig. 9), in the Museo Civico Medievale of Bologna (Inv. no. 897; Curatola 1993: no. and fig. 129).

Viré (1965a and 1965b) provides an exhaustive encyclopaedia entry on the practice of hunting with the cheetah, dealing with the origins and diffusion of the tradition, the methods of training, and the relevant literary sources.¹⁵ Although its history is known to extend far into the pre-Islamic period (cf. note 15), no depictions of the practice are known from such early times.¹⁶ Islamic art instead provides extensive documentation, in highly varied media. The two main types of image are those of the seated or “hunting cheetah”, and of the animal on a leash.¹⁷ The practice of hunting with

15. Viré (1974) also provides a sort of summary-critique of Ahmad Abd al-Raziq’s study of the tradition. On the training of the animal and the relative sources see also Mercier (1927: in part. 70-74); also Chapter 5 (“The Hunting”) of a work by Muhammad Manazir Ahsan (1979), which provides interesting details on the practice in the early Abbasid era (in part. pp. 207-10).

16. The practice of hunting with a cheetah was adopted in Chinese regions during the first T’ang period, as testified by some wall paintings (Fujii 1993: in part. figs. 4 and 5).

17. Fontana (2003: 355-59 and related notes) provides a long and detailed listing of objects and manuscripts of Islamic medieval art with depiction of the hunting cheetah.

a cheetah was introduced to Sicily and southern Italy in the medieval era, and it seems proceeded from there to the rest of Europe. According to some scholars this would be due to actions of Frederick II of Swabia, in the first half of the 13th century,¹⁸ but it seems the practice had in fact been introduced at least in the Norman era (cf. Fontana 2011). In any case, scenes with the “hunting cheetah” and chase with cheetah, and with the animal on leash or presented as a gift, soon became standard in the European artistic repertoire.¹⁹

18. Cf. Huillard-Bréholles 1852-61: V, 817; Egidi 1911: 639 and no. 8; Théodoridès 1971: in part. 565 and nos. 36-37. One of the most famous depictions of hunting with the cheetah is doubtless the scene offered in mirror images, on the front of a large rectangular ivory casket held in the Treasure of the Cappella Palatina, in Palermo, which captures the feline in the act of seizing its prey in its jaws (Fontana 2011: fig. 7; see also Armando 2017: fig. 15). For other ivory items see Fontana (2011). A cameo in red chalcedony (*sardonio*), held by the Suermondt-Ludwig Museum of Aquisgrana, attributed to Sicily or southern Italy, first half of the 13th century, shows a running cheetah with collar (Rome 1996: no. and ill. V.21). Marco Polo provides important written documentation of hunting with the cheetah in the East: “*ora vi diviserò delle bestie fiere che tiene lo Gran Cane [...] Ancora sappiate che 'l gran sire ha bene liopardi assai, e che tutti sono buoni da cacciare e da prendere bestie*” (Marco Polo 1954: 96). The Franciscan friar Odoric of Porto Maggiore (Pordenone) again noted the practice of hunting with “*liopardi*” under the control of the “*gran cane*”, during his voyage to the Orient in 1318 (Odorico di Porto Maggiore 1583: 256a).

19. Cf. Soulier 1924: 221ff., in part. 227-29. Other exemplars have been noted, in addition to the listing provided by Soulier, among these: a pen and ink drawing by Pisanello, held in the Louvre Museum, Paris (Inv. no. 2425; Chiarelli 1966: fig. 75); a miniature illustrating the coming of the Magi, from a manuscript produced by the de Limbourg brothers for the Duke of Berry, known as *Très riches heures*, in the Musée Condé in Chantilly (Ms. 1284, fol. 51v; EUA 1972: VIII, pl. 196); a tile from the

The concluding and central knot of the overall question is this: what is the genesis of the iconographic transformation from the tail of the dragon to the cheetah? In his stimulating article, Michele Bernardini (1995) demonstrates the close iconographic-symbolic correlation between the panther/cheetah, with its speckled fur, and some astral conjunctions. In effect, the “spots” of the *jawzahar* and those of the cheetah would appear to be at the origin of a cross-fertilisation. In this regard, Hartner, in his brilliant essay (1938: 153), traces the etymology of the Arabic “*Djawzahr*”, deriving from the New-Persian “*gawzahr*”/”*gāw-čīhr*”,²⁰ in turn originating from the Avestic “*gao-čithra*”,

usually interpreted as ‘forming the origin of the ox’, or perhaps rather ‘having the *sperma bovis*’, which is regarded to be concentrated in the lunar sphere or even on the moon herself, from where it acts as a fecundator of terrestrial regions (*ibid.*).²¹

Of still greater interest for current purposes is the Sanskrit etymological relation, also cited by Hartner (*ibid.*):

In the etymologically corresponding Sanskrit word *citra*, derived from the same etymon as *ketu*, we find still another original signifi-

rooms of the Abbess Maria de Benedetti (1471-1482), in the Convent of San Paolo in Parma (Quinterio 1988: fig. 50). On the use of hunting cheetahs by the Medici family, as early as the 1400s, see Spallanzani (1983: 360).

20. Cf. also Hartner (1965). In addition, Azarpay (1978: 369) states: “The Bundahišn (V, 52:12) describes the *gōčīhr*, as the Dragon that ‘stood in the middle of the sky like a serpent (*mār*), its Head in the Two Images [Gemini] and its Tail in the Centaur [Sagittarius], so that at all times there are six constellations between its Head and Tail.’”

21. On the secondary meaning of “semen” from the Avestic *čiora* see Pisani (1934: 86; with my thanks to Antonio Panaino for this indication).

cance preserved which possibly is resonant even in the [...] Avestan passages: that of “light, clear, brilliant,” frequently occurring as one of the moon’s many epithets. Thus, the astrological *Djawzahr*, whose material identity with *Rāhu* we have established before, finally turns out to be etymologically related to *Rāhu*’s *alter ego*, *Ketu*. That this material identity between *Rāhu* and the *Djawzahr* is of a rather early date, must be considered a matter of fact.

For “cheetah” (*Acinonyx jubatus*) the *Encyclopédie de l’Islam* provides the entry “Fahd”, compiled by François Viré (1965a: 757), with the notations: “anglais: “Hunting-leopard” ou “Cheetah”, de l’ourdou *čītā* (< sanscrit *čitraka* “tacheté”^[22]), persan: *yūz*.” In Persian too, the term *čīta* (or *čīta*)²³ refers to the hunting cheetah. This feline would therefore owe its name in Persian (previously Indian, *čītā*) – *čīta*, *čīta* – to its spotted fur (the Sanskrit terms *čitra* and *čitraka* – from the same root – have various meanings; among these, as Viré noted, is “tacheté/spotted”²⁴).

The Sanskrit *čītra/čitraka* would therefore be thematic for two Persian words: *čīora* (AVESTIC; variegated, semen)/*čīhr* (NEW-PERSIAN; face), from which *zahar* (Ar. *zahar*); and *čītalčīta* (NEW-PERSIAN; hunting cheetah); for both of these, the suggested meaning of “spotted, variegated” seems appropriate. This etymology would therefore be a co-contributor: on the

22. In the English version of *EP* (Viré 1965b: 738): “spotted”.

23. Steingass (1930: 405, 388, *s.v.*) records both “*chīta*, A sort of panther with which they hunt deer” and “*chīta*”, but indicates that the preferred form would be “*chīta*”. Dihkhudā (1334Hsh/1955: 7345, *s.v.*), in specifying the Indian origin of the term, records: “*čīta*, *yūz-i šikārī* [= hunting cheetah]”.

24. “Spotted” also in Monier-Williams (1993: 396-97, *s.v.*), with my thanks to Francesco Sferra for this indication.

one hand to *gao-čiora* (variegated bovine),²⁵ from which *jawzahar*, understood as a metaphor for the moon, whose face (*čibr*) is seen as flecked, “brilliant, light”, but which also contains and diffuses the semen of the bull, “from where it acts as a fecundator of terrestrial regions”²⁶ (cf. again Hartner 1938: 153); on the other hand to *čita* (the cheetah, of spotted fur). Among the illustrated pages of the *Kitāb al-mawālīd* (Book of Nativities) of Abū Mašhar we find some images that are key to the correlation between *jawzahar* – the tail of the dragon, whose exaltation occurs in Sagittarius – of luminous body, rendered variegated by its scales, a “planet” connected to the moon and its “spots” on the one hand; and on the other hand to the cheetah, with its spotted fur. See, for example, fol. 25v of the manuscript, probably dating to the years of the last Jalayirid sultan of Baghdad,²⁷ preserved in the Bibliothèque nationale de France, Paris (Ms. Arabe 2583; Blochet 1929: pl. XXXIII; *here*, fig. 11): the body of Sagittarius is not equine, rather feline – and moreover spotted.²⁸

25. My thanks again to Antonio Panaino, for providing this suggestion.

26. The astrological Moon–Taurus connection is well known; also the pivotal role of the moon in the annual cycle. For the artistic conjunction of the labours (seasons-months) and astrology, cf. Rice (1954).

27. Sultān Aḥmad Jalā’ir (1382-1410); for this attribution cf. Carboni (1988: 95). On an inscription which would refer to the author of the manuscript miniatures (Qunbar ‘Alī Shīrāzi), and on the city of their execution (Cairo), see *ibid.* (cf. also Arnold 1928: 71; Blochet 1929: caption of pl. XXXIII).

28. The Sagittarius with feline and spotted body is found in further instances, among these, illustrated in the same work, the *Kitāb al-mawālīd*, in this case composing part of the manuscript of the *Kitāb al-bulḫān* (Book of Wonder), a collection of Arabic divinatory treatises, probably of Jalayirid production, preserved in the Bodleian Library, Oxford (Ms. Or. 133, fol. 17v; Carboni 1988: 32 and pl. 9). For similar illustrations of later date (cf.



Fig. 1



Fig. 2



Fig. 4

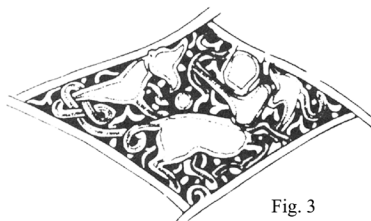


Fig. 3

Figs. 1-4. Sagittarius depicted on: (**Fig. 1**) an incised copper alloy basin, Afghanistan, 11th century, formerly Kabul Museum, Inv. 58.2.56 (after Scerrato 1981: fig. 1d); (**Fig. 2**) a copper coin of Naşir al-Din Artuq Arslan, 599/1202-3, Staatliche Museen, Münzkabinett, Berlin (after Gierlichs 1993: fig. 33); (**Fig. 3**) a cartouche of the "Wade Cup", copper alloy inlaid with silver, Khurasan, late 12th-early 13th century, Cleveland Museum of Art, Inv. 1944.485 (drawing after Rice 1955: fig. 13a); (**Fig. 4**) the lid of the "Vaso Vescovali", copper alloy inlaid with silver, Khurasan, late 12th-early 13th century, British Museum, London, Inv. OA 1950-7-2511 (after Lanci 1845-46: pl. II, detail).

Baer 1968: in part. 533) see a page of a Turkish manuscript of the *Maṭāli' al-sā'ada wa manābi' al-siyāda* (The Ascension of Propitious Stars and Sources of Sovereign) by Ḥasan al-Su'ūdi, 1582, in the Bibliothèque nationale de France, Paris (Ms. Suppl. turc 242, fol. 24v; Berthier and Halbout du Tanney 1987: pl. 79); for a further image of the same dating as this astrological work, and particularly similar (cf. Rice 1954: 4, no. 21), see that of Manuscript 788, fol. 23v, held by the Pierpont Morgan Library of New York, cf. Hartner (1938: fig. 21).



Figs. 5 and 6. Sagittarius depicted on: (**Fig. 5**) a medallion of an ewer, brass inlaid with copper and silver, from Herat (Khurasan), late 12th-early 13th century, es-Said Collection (after Allan 1982: ill. on p. 52); (**Fig. 6**) a medallion of an inkwell, copper alloy inlaid with silver, Khurasan, late 12th-early 13th century, Dār al-Āthār al-Islāmiyya, Kuwait, Inv. LNS 139 M (after Gettings 1989: fig. 7a).



Fig. 7



Fig. 9



Fig. 8

Fig. 7. Sagittarius depicted on a spherical incense burner, brass inlaid with silver, Iran or Afghanistan, late 12th-early 13th century, es-Said Collection (after Riyadh 1985: fig. 87, detail).

Fig. 8. A horseman hunting with a cheetah, depicted on a decorative plate, engraved and gilded copper alloy, Anatolia (Jazīra) or Iran, 12th-13th century, Dār al-Āthār al-Islāmiyya, Kuwait, Inv. LNS 28 M (after Curatola 2010: ill. on p. 261).

Fig. 9. A horseman hunting with a cheetah, depicted on a candlestick, copper alloy inlaid with gold and silver, Anatolia (Jazīra?) late 13th-early 14th century, Museo Civico Medievale, Bologna, Inv. 897 (drawing after Rice 1954: fig. 7).



Figs. 10 and 11. Sagittarius depicted on: (**Fig. 10**) a carved limestone panel, on a pillar of the bridge on Tigris at Jazīrat ibn ‘Umar (sponsored by Jamal al-Dīn Muḥammad Iṣfahānī, d. 1164, vizier of the Zanjid Qutb al-Dīn Mawdūd of Mosul) (after Gierlichs 2001: ill. on p. 381; cf., *here*, n. 14); (**Fig. 11**) an illustrated page from a Jalayirid copy of the *Kitāb al-mawālīd* (Book of Nativities), by Abū Ma‘shar, Baghdad, late 14th-early 15th century, Bibliothèque nationale de France, Paris, Ms. Arabe 2583, fol. 25v (after Blochet 1929: pl. XXXIII, detail).

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