

12 Teucros in Nizāmī's *Haft Paykar*

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The Greek author Teucros (first century BC/ first century AD)¹ whose work reached us in fragmentary state, was known in the Islamic world under the name of Tīnkarūs (طينكروس) or Tīnkālūs (طينكلوس)/Tānkālūshā (Persian: تنگلوشا Tāngalūshā). He was considered in the Islamic literature, as for instance in Ibn al-Nadīm's *Fihrist*, among others, as the legendary guardian of planets' temples in Babylon².

Nizāmī refers twice to Tāngalūshā in his *Haft Paykar*, as was already noticed by Humāyūn-Farrukh in his edition of the Persian translation of the text attributed to Teucros:³ first when he describes the dome of the Palace of Khavarnaq as a cosmic cupola⁴, where one can see “a multitude of [hundred thousand(s)] imaginary figures by Tāngalūshā”:

نه فلک را به گرد او گرواز	فلکی پای گرد کرده به ناز
تنگلوشای صد هزار خیال	قطبی از پیکر جنوب و شمال

(HP9,28-9)

He refers to Tāngalūshā for a second time, towards the end of the poem, in order to illustrate metaphorically the superiority of man's power compared to that of the sky. This article will not consider this second occurrence of Tāngalūshā in the *Haft Paykar* since it concerns a different issue altogether.⁵

To come back to the first mention of Teucros, which is linked to the images of the cosmic cupola in the Palace of Khavarnaq [i.e. the representation of the sky inside the dome], the question which arises in this context is the following: what did the images linked to Teucros and referred to by Nizāmī represent? There could be at least three possibilities, known through texts which are still extant today. On the one hand, these images could be the pictorial description of either the thirty-six decans, or the three hundred and sixty degrees of the ecliptic, both known in the astronomy and astrology of the Islamic world. On the other hand, they could also be a reminiscence of archaic pictorial traditions collected in a book attributed to Teucros and apparently known in Nizāmī's time, containing isolated paintings obviously used for the fabrication of talismans.⁶

The link between Teucros and the question of decans is authentic. The representation of thirty-six decans situated near the ecliptic (a system of

Egyptian origin)⁷ and of the stars that rise within each decan exists in Teucros's Greek work, Παρανατελλοντα τοις δεκανοις.⁸ His text was translated into Middle Persian⁹ and from Middle Persian into Arabic. The complete description of the decans (وجه *vajh*, pl. *vujūh*) in Arabic can be found in *Kitāb al-Madkhal al-kabīr ilā 'ilm al-ahkām al-nujūm* by Abū Ma'shar (d. 272H/886),¹⁰ as well as in Ibn Hibintā's (d. ca. 317H/929) *Kitāb al-Mughnī fī al-ahkām al-nujūm*.¹¹ Both authors appear to refer roughly to the same Arabic translation of the original text by Teucros. Among three different series of decans described in these two Arabic works [one decan corresponds to ten degrees of a Zodiacal sign], the first series named "Persian-Babylonian-Egyptian" (also known as *Sphaera Barbarica*)¹², is explicitly linked to Teucros and contains mainly imaginary figures which originally represented Egyptian gods. But Abū Ma'shar's and Ibn Hibintā's works only give a verbal description of the decans and we do not possess any painting representing Teucros's decans in the Islamic world.

The only representation of decans known in the East, which comes close to Abū Ma'shar's description, figures on a Central-Asian painting (of Indian tradition) on a scroll datable to the eighth or ninth century AD. This painting is apparently based on a common Iranian prototype, as must have been the one which Abū Ma'shar used for his description (however, Teucros's sphere is not detailed on it).¹³ In this context, it is important to underline that the decans which appear in the illustrated fourteenth- and fifteenth-century copies of Abū Ma'shar's *Kitāb al-Mawālīd* (Book of Nativities), do not represent the figures of genuine Teucros decans but only of their decan-lords [planets that govern each decan].¹⁴ It should also be noted that the Arabic text describing Teucros's decans was apparently never translated into Persian.

The second literary genre attributed to Teucros in the Islamic world, the description of three-hundred-and-sixty degrees of the ecliptic/zodiacal belt (*suwar-i daraj-i falak* صور درج فلک, pl. درجات), is more problematic since it is probably apocryphal. Ullmann considers this Arabic text¹⁵ as a tenth-century forgery pertaining to Nabatean literature.¹⁶ Fahd, on the other hand, suggests we ought to view it in a more diachronic manner and give an earlier date for this apocryphal text attributed to Teucros.¹⁷ We do not know of any extant authentic Greek text by Teucros on degrees. It is generally considered that the representation of single degrees originated from the decans of *Sphaera Barbarica*. A recent study should provide us with more information on the origin and evolution of degrees in general.¹⁸ Without raising this complex problem, we will simply list here different series of degrees as known in the Islamic world. Beside this tenth-century Arabic copy of the text on "degrees by Teucros," we possess a late illustrated copy of its Persian translation, dated 1074H/1663-4, probably made for the private library of Shāh 'Abbās II.¹⁹ This Persian version might be based on a supposed twelfth-century Persian translation of the Arabic text,

now lost. This then, is the only illustrated manuscript in the Islamic world that is explicitly linked to Tangalūshā and consequently it is a true rarity. The images corresponding to each zodiacal degree – three hundred and sixty in total – are first described verbally in the text, followed by their pictorial representation [see ill. 1 + 2] and also by the astrological specification of the character of the person born under that degree. Interestingly, the technical introduction to the book develops the theory of the influence of celestial bodies and explains how the treatise should be used for talismanic purposes.²⁰

Before discussing the third possible text linked to Teucros, let us examine whether Nizāmī might have been thinking about either decans or degrees, when referring to Tangalūshā in the *Haft Paykar* passage cited above. Part of the answer could be the fact that he mentions the images in regard to the North and the South. This seems to point to the description of decans' position on the sphere of the Fixed Stars, position which is variable and has a complicated evolution.²¹ (The degrees, being closely linked to the zodiacal belt, would probably not need to be defined in this way.) Nevertheless, what is problematic in this interpretation is that in Nizāmī's time the representation of 'genuine' decans (as described by Teucros) seems no longer to have been known in the Islamic world, contrary to what was the case in the Latin West.²² Bīrūnī (d. ca. 442H/1050) discusses in detail in his *Taḥḥīm* (composed in Arabic in 1029), under "decans/faces (*vujūh*)" only decan-lords and Indian decans (*dārījān* داریجان). He treats the problem of genuine decans only briefly – and in a negative manner – under "figures (*suwar*)".²³ These genuine decans are not mentioned in *Rawḍhat al-munajjimīn* (The Garden of Astrologers), written between 466H/1073 and 474H/1081 by Shahmardān,²⁴ neither in two astrological poems, both entitled *Madkhal-i manzūm* because, he says, their meaning/significance was not known in his time anymore. (The Versified Introduction [to Astrology]): the first, dated 616H/1219-20, is written by Khujandī,²⁵ and the second is a later variant, attributed to Nasīr al-dīn Tūsī (d. 672H/1274).²⁶ To all appearances then, the genuine Teucros decans were no longer relevant from a scientific point of view in Nizāmī's time. They were also forgotten in the realm of general culture, in spite of the fact that their complete description was available in Abū Ma'shar's *Madhkal* and Ibn Hibintā's *Mughnī*. This might have been due to the fact that their Arabic text – as far as we may judge – was never translated into Persian, contrary to the literature concerning degrees.

Is Nizāmī's poem then referring to the degrees rather than to the decans? Besides Teucros's tradition, several other 'series' of degrees were known in the Islamic world, both in Arabic and in Persian translation. There were amongst others the traditions attributed to Zoroaster,²⁷ the Indian one (attributed to Tomtom Hendī),²⁸ and another "Babylonian" one (attributed to Abūdhātīs Bābilī this time, not to Teucros).²⁹ Fakhr al-dīn Rāzī (d. 606H/

1210) extensively described the latter two series in his Arabic work on Sabeian beliefs and practices, *al-Sirr al-maktūm fī mukhātabāt al-nujūm*, written between 1179 and 1210.³⁰ There were probably more opportunities for Nizāmī to come across an illustrated copy of degrees than an illustrated copy of genuine decans (always supposing the latter ever existed, since no such copy is extant today). Concerning degrees, we possess, beside the already mentioned copy of Teucros's degrees in the Rezā Abbāsī Museum in Tehran (ills. 1 and 2), two additional illustrated Persian copies on degrees in the tradition of Tomtom Hendi, made in India.³¹ Even though all three extant Persian copies are late, they might nevertheless indicate that in Nizāmī's time illustrated copies on degrees could have been more frequent than copies of genuine decans (of which we have neither various textual traditions, neither Persian translation from the Arabic, nor extant illustrations, as pointed out above).

Another argument favoring a reference to degrees in Nizāmī's poem is the fact that pre-Islamic Iran was familiar with the sexagesimal system and had a year of three hundred and sixty days.³² Also, as already pointed out, a Persian translation of the Arabic version of Teucros's "pictorial" degrees must have probably existed precisely in the twelfth century (as inferred by the editor, Humāyūn-Farrukh). On the other hand it must be underlined that even if degrees are mentioned in Khujandī's and Tūsī's poems,³³ in this particular context they have nevertheless no connection with images.

The third possible explanation of Nizāmī's *bayt* on "Tangalūshā's imaginary images" would be a reference to the "illustrated book by Tangalūshā the Great" on talismanic figures, as mentioned by Fakhr al-dīn Rāzī in his *Sirr al-maktūm* in one of the sections on the making of talismans.³⁴ On the whole, Rāzī doesn't mention genuine Teucros decans in his description of the astronomical and astrological knowledge necessary for the practice of Sabeian (Harranean) star-worship. As did Bīrūnī, Shahrastānī, Khujandī and Tūsī, he briefly lists only various traditions of decans-lords, including Indian decans (*dārījān*).³⁵ In the chapter dedicated to degrees, he heavily insists on the precise descriptions of the different series of degrees known in his time, as already indicated above, but only mentions two additional series of degrees, those by Zoroaster and by Teucros, without describing them.³⁶ He briefly refers to Teucros again in the passage on the talismanic benefit derived from looking towards the Southern Pole and the star Suhayl (Canopus).³⁷ This contrasts with the long section on the fabrication of talismans,³⁸ where Rāzī quotes Teucros throughout. This tends to suggest that some aspects of the aforementioned Teucros's *Sphaera Barbarica* or Teucros's degrees of the zodiac might have survived in talismanic literature, as isolated figures. For instance Rāzī describes, for the making of a talisman, the figure of "a two-winged horse ...from the illustrated book by Teucros,"³⁹ which is precisely the figure present in the depiction of Teucros's degrees in the seventeenth-century

Persian copy (see ill. 2: the horse is depicted in the twenty-first degree of the sign of Capricornus).⁴⁰ Several other figures described in this section by Rāzī present similarities with the extant representations of Teucros's degrees in the above-mentioned Safavid copy, though these comparisons still need to be further studied in detail.

This passage of *al-Sirr* furthermore mentions details on the use of pigments and other materials in the fabrication of paper talismans when copying Teucros's figures. Altogether, this talismanic section somehow reflects the fame of the Teucros's legendary illustrated book, sometimes compared to Mānī's *Artang*.⁴¹ Judging from his reference to Teucros in *al-Sirr*, Rāzī's knowledge is in fact limited to the talismanic field. As already mentioned, he wrote this work between 1179 and 1210, which is contemporary with Nizāmī's *Haft Paykar*, composed in 1197. Could this coincidence be sufficient to indicate that Nizāmī's reference to Teucros originated in talismanic literature alone? And thus, that the images on the cupola representing the sky would not be connected in Nizāmī's poem to the scientific literary genres of decans or degrees at all? The question remains open. At this stage, for the passage in *Haft Paykar*, we can suggest on the one hand the necessary detailed comparison between figures of Teucros's decans and degrees with figures in the purely talismanic book of Teucros as described in Rāzī's *al-Sirr*. On the other hand, we may also mention the comparison between the latter and figures in other known talismanic books, as for instance in *The Book of Images/Figures* [*Kitāb al-suwar al-kabīr*] by Zosimus (third/fourth century AD) containing a description of the constellations of the sky (which would more readily explain Nizāmī's reference to the poles).⁴² The book was much appreciated by the author of the magical treatise *Ghayā al-hakīm* (mid-eleventh century AD) who indicates that constellations are highly significant for the interpretation of talismanic figures (*suwar*) – along with decans and degrees.⁴³ We may conjecture that in the course of time, various talismanic “books of images/figures/forms” of imaginary celestial origin were indifferently attributed to several authors – including Teucros.

Concerning Nizāmī's possible sources in general, it is important to remember that he apparently knew at least one of Abū Ma'shar's works, the *Kitāb al-Ulūf* (The Book of Thousand [Cycles]) which the poet mentions explicitly in the *Iqbāl Nāma*:

ابو کتاب اندر کفاب الوف

دگر گونه گوید جهان فیلسوف

(IN9,9)⁴⁴

This work describes the theory of millenary cycles which determine world history, particularly political and religious events. As Pingree has shown, the explanation of world events depended on the cycles of astral conjunctions, namely of Saturn and Jupiter, of Sasanian origin, combined with the

concept of the “world year.”⁴⁵ Transmitted in particular by Abū Ma‘shar, and summarized among others by Sijzī,⁴⁶ the astrological history was used by the Abbasids to legitimate their power.⁴⁷ Interest for Abū Ma‘shar’s theory of cycles was pursued under Isma‘ilis (possibly in Alamūt),⁴⁸ and, as noticed in a recent study, lasted at least as late as the Safavid era.⁴⁹ On the other hand, it is worth noting that Jalayirids ordered illustrated copies of Abū Ma‘shar’s works towards the end of the fourteenth century.⁵⁰

It is evident that in the passage on the cosmic cupola, Nizāmī refers on purpose to an archaic system of representation of the sky – whether decans or degrees –, or to a famous illustrated book on talismanics. The reference to an ancient author like Teucros undoubtedly suited the poet better in order to characterise Bahrām Gūr’s pre-Islamic Iran, than would have done for instance a reference to the constellations in the Ptolemaic tradition as described in ‘Abd al-Rahmān al-Sūfī’s astronomical treatise *Suwar al-kawākib* (400H/1009-10).⁵¹ As to the hypothesis of an illustrated Iranian pre-Islamic version of the text on ‘degrees by Tangalūshā,’ it still awaits additional evidence.⁵²

In conclusion, it is interesting to remember that Nizāmī truly searched for noble and rare books in order to compose the *Haft Paykar*, as indeed he claims in his introduction to the *mathnavī*.⁵³

که پراکنده بود گرد جهان

باز جستم ز نامه های پنهان

(HP4,27)

This is confirmed by his reference to Teucros/Tangalūshā, a rare author, not only today, but already in Nizāmī’s time.

III.1 = Images of the eleventh, twelfth and thirteenth degree of the zodiacal sign of Leo

III.2 = Images of twentieth and twenty-first degree of the zodiacal sign of Capricornus

Notes

- 1 Panaino (1998) 24; Pingree (1968) 11 n.2; Borissov (1935) 300-5; Sezgin (1979) VII 71-3; Ullmann (1972) 278-9.
- 2 Ibn al-Nadim (1393); Ibn al-Nadim (1970) II. However, Teucros “the Babylonian” stems from Babylon (i.e. Memphis) in Egypt (cf. Ullmann (1972).
- 3 Pseudo-Teucros (2537) 24; new edition: pseudo-Teucros (1383).
- 4 Nizami-Meisami (1995) 38; also Vesel (1995).
- 5 HP37,91; Nizami-Meisami (1995) 262.
- 6 We don’t take into account in this context the existence of treatises on alchemy attributed to Teucros; Monzavi (2000), 2894; also Monzavi (1348) 701.
- 7 For a brief survey: Parker (1970-80).
- 8 *Paranatellonta tois dekanois*. Festugière (1950) I, 114-8.
- 9 Panaino (1978); Nalino (1922).

- 10 Abu Ma'shar (1995-96) III, 6, 372 sqq.
- 11 Ibn Hibinta (1987) 2nd Part, 306 sqq.
- 12 The second series is Indian (described also in the Arabic work on magic, *Ghaya al-hakīm* of Pseudo-Majriti (1933), in chap. II, 2 and II, 11; see note 43 below), and the third is Greek.
- 13 Grenet (1997).
- 14 Carboni (1987); Caiozzo (2003) in particular ills. 9-20.
- 15 See for instance Leiden University Library MS Or. 891 (2), fols. 28v-69v.
- 16 Ullmann, (1972) 328-9.
- 17 Fahd (1971) in particular 989, n°3.
- 18 For example Hübner (1995). I thank Professor Paul Kunitzsch for the rich bibliographical information concerning publications on decans and degrees in general.
- 19 The manuscript is kept in the Rezā Abbāsī Museum in Tehran (MS n° 590, 26 x 15 cm). For the two editions of this Persian version see. n. 3.
- 20 Pseudo-Teucros (2537) 259-61; Pseudo-Teucros (1383) 3-6.
- 21 Parker (1970-80) n.7.
- 22 For a brief survey, Murdoch (1984) 254, ill. 230.
- 23 The difference between “decans/faces” (*vajh* pl. *vujūh*) and *darījān* is the order of appearance of ‘decan-lords’ (*arbāb-i vujūh*), i.e. planets governing each decan. Biruni-Wright (1934) 252-63, § 450 and Biruni-Homa'i (1367) 404, gives the following explanation of ‘genuine’ decans: “Concerning ‘figures’ (*Mā al-suwar*). The so-called ‘figures’ are in reality also the faces [*vajh* pl. *vujūh*], but called so [*suwar*] because the Greeks, Hindus and Babylonians associated with each face as it arose, the figure of a personage human or divine, and in the case of the Greeks, the faces were also associated with 48 constellations ascending at the same time [*paranatellonta*]. But this duplication of constellations is mentioned in connection with affairs, designs and undertakings which are peculiar to the country in question, and is used to obtain degrees with regard to these. We shall not undertake to give an account of it both to save space, and because it would be useless, as the astrological books we have are destitute of any instructions for using it.”
- 24 Shahmardan (1382), Index.
- 25 Published with the Persian text by Tangelūshā on degrees (see n. 3 above, Pseudo-Teucros (1383) 156-212), Khujandī's poem concerns subjects studied by astrological science (various divisions of the sky, interconnections of movements of celestial bodies, foretelling techniques like *ikhtiyārāt*, etc.), but it only mentions decan-lords and *dārījān* (188-9). The poem dates from the period of Mongol attacks on East Iranian cities.
- 26 Tusi (1380), 105; also quoted in Mosaffa' (1366), 825.
- 27 Ullmann (1972) 294-5; Pingree (1968) 22; we do not possess the series attributed to “Persians”, mentioned in (Abū Ma'shar's pupil) Shādān's *Mudhākārāt* (Bibliothèque Nationale de France, Paris /[BnF]: MS Ar. 6680), unless it is identical with Zoroaster's series (Raffaelli (2001) 36, n. 24).
- 28 Ullmann (1972) 298-9.
- 29 Ullmann (1972) 329, 420; this author is regularly mentioned in Persian medieval sources.
- 30 For the Arabic text, see for instance: BnF: MS Ar. 2645, fols. 123v-141v; for the Persian tr. (made for Ilututish in 634H/1236): BnF: MS Suppl. persan 384, fols. 41r-62v.
- 31 Respectively: a) an illustrated copy made for Akbar (end of the sixteenth century) based on the Persian translation of *al-Sirr al-makṭūm* [Schmitz (2006) 20-27; pl. 13-19]; b) an astrological compendium from the seventeenth or the eighteenth century [Tourkin (2003)].
- 32 Panaino (1990).
- 33 See notes 25 and 26 above.
- 34 Rāzī, *al-Sirr*, BnF: MS Suppl. persan 384, fols. 113r.-133r; this talismanic section is followed by the chapter on ‘proprieties of substances’ (*khawāss*).

- 35 Rāzi, *al-Sirr*, BnF: MS Ar. 2645, fol. 117v; BnF: MS Suppl. Persan 384, fol. 48v. The Arabic and Persian versions of the text are roughly similar, as far as scientific content is concerned.
- 36 Rāzī, *al-Sirr*, BnF: MS Suppl. persan 384, fols. 41r-62v. For the knowledge of degrees in the Iranian world, see Vesel (forthcoming).
- 37 Rāzī, *al-Sirr*, BnF: MS Suppl. persan 384, fol. 103r. Teucros is credited of an independant treatise on magic, apparently extant only in Persian [Sezgin (1979) VII, 73] which unfortunately we could not consult.
- 38 See above, n. 35.
- 39 Rāzī, *al-Sirr*, BnF: MS Suppl. persan 384, fol. 113r.
- 40 Interestingly, the image of the horse in this passage is specific, in both verbal description and depiction, and iconographically different from the representation of ‘Salomon’s horse’ or the Pegasus constellation (*al-Faras al-a’zam*).
- 41 Pseudo-Teucros (2537), 26.
- 42 Ullmann (1972) 160-3.
- 43 Pseudo-Majriti (1933) 58 sqq. French transl. by V. Chébiri, «le Livre du But du Sage...», Mémoire de Diplôme, Paris, EPHE-IV (dir. P.Lory), 1998, 55-58. I am grateful to Pierre Lory fort having informed me of the existence of Chébiri’s useful translation of this difficult text. This passage in the *Ghaya* gives some rare information on the talismanic usage of figures of constellations and of genuine decans; it does not specify the usage of figures of degrees, only their relationship with planets. For information on the talismanic use of figures of degrees, Rāzī’s *Sirr* is the best source.
- 44 I owe this reference to Mohsen Ashtiyani.
- 45 Pingree (1968) 21-22; for different theories concering “the world/cosmic year”, see Panaino (1998) 161-79.
- 46 Pingree (1968) 21-3; Ullmann (1972) 294-5; Sezgin (1979) VII, 224-7.
- 47 Gutas (1998) in particular 45-52.
- 48 Pingree (1968) 25 (BnF: MS Ar. 5968).
- 49 Babayan (2002).
- 50 Carboni (1988); Carboni (1987) (see n. 14)
- 51 The numerous extant illustrated manuscripts of ‘Abd al-Rahman Sūfī’s *Kitāb suwar al-kawākib al-thābita*, either in Arabic original or in Persian translation, testify to its popularity in the Islamic world.
- 52 See the introduction by Homayun-Farrokh (Pseudo-Teucros (2537)) and by Reda-zade Malek (Pseudo-Teucros 1383) to their respective editions of the treatise (cf. n. 3).
- 53 Nizami-Meisami (1995) 11.