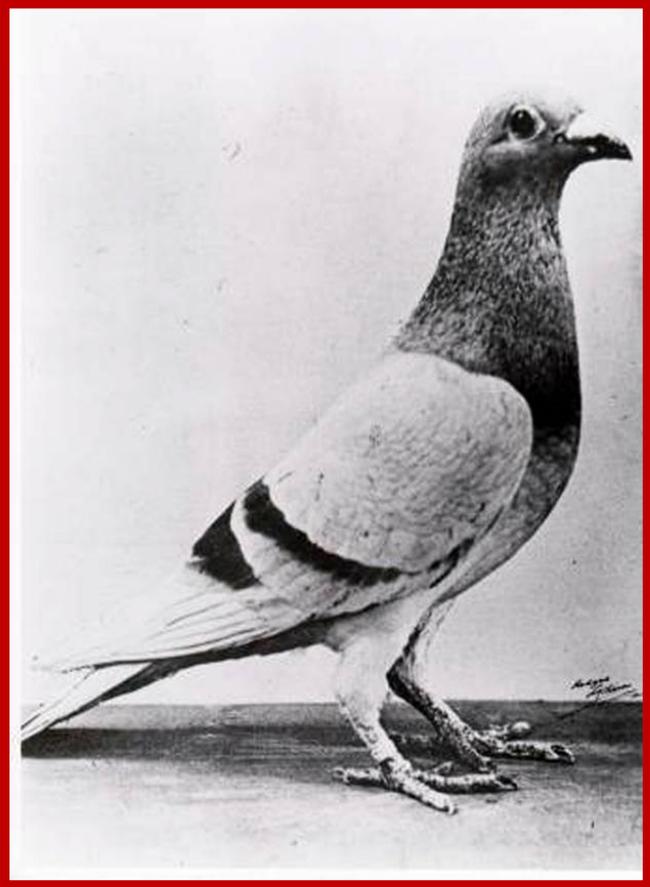


BabMed Seminar WS 2016/17 — Physiognomy — Knowledge Traditions & Transfers  
15th November 2016 — Lucia Raggetti (FU Berlin)

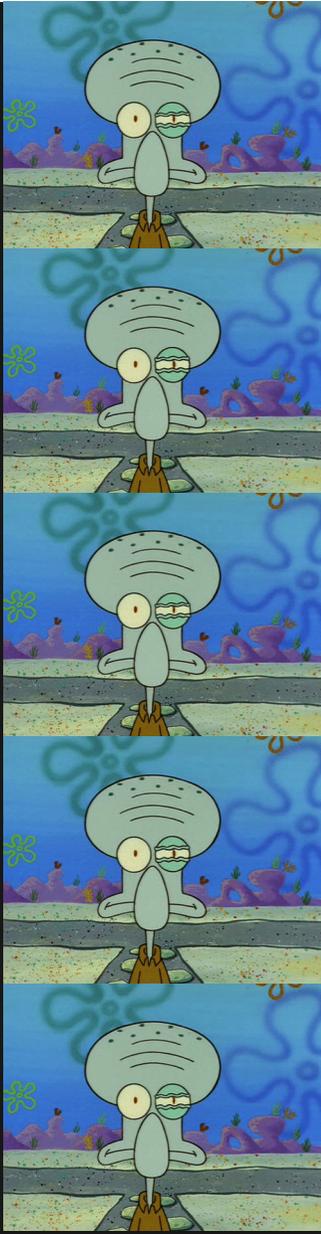


PIGEON DOTS,

HORSE SPOTS,

AND TWITCHING LIMBS

IN MEDIEVAL ARABIC PHYSIOGNOMY



## 1. TWITCHING LIMBS

## GREEK TWITCHING & ARABIC TWITCHING

### Greek Melampus

- *A capite ad calcem*
- Social position:
  - Free man
  - Slave
  - Unmarried Woman
  - Widow



Futurama (S5, ep. 11) *Three hundred big boys*

### Arabic Twitching

- *A capite ad calcem*
- Five 'schools':
  - Ğa'far
  - Daniel
  - Alexander
  - Persians/Indians
  - Byzantines

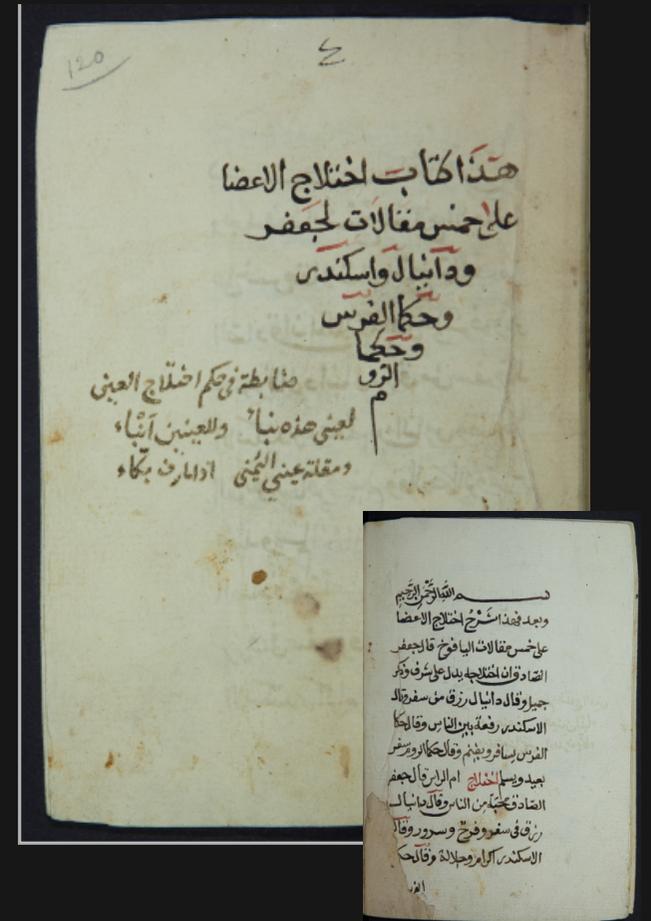
IBN AL-NADĪM, *FIHRIST* (Bayard Dodge II 8.3, pp. 736-737)

The Books Composed about Freckles, Twitching, Moles, and Shoulders, and the Books Composed about [Good] Omen, Augury, Conjectural Prediction, and Similar Things, [by] Persians, Indians, Greeks, and Arabs

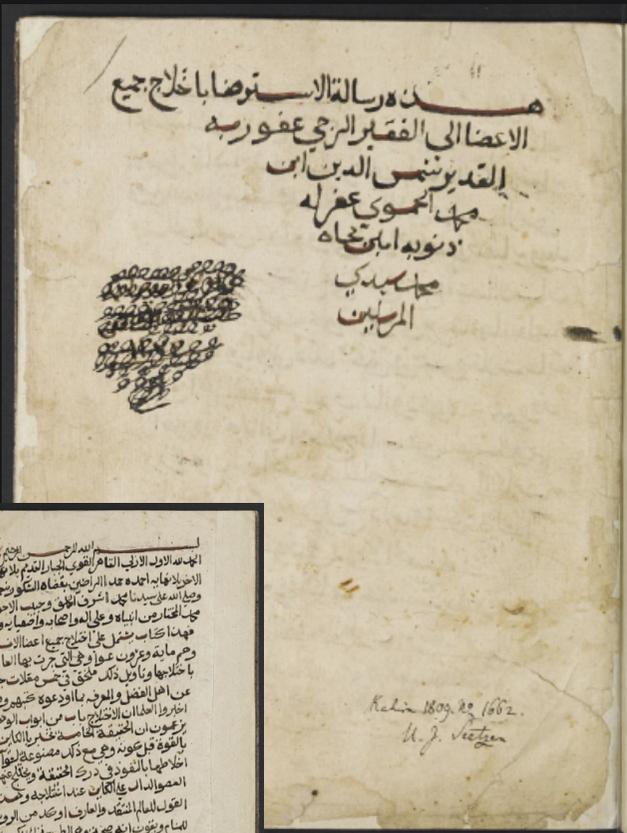
Physiognomici by *Aristotle*; Physiognomici by *Philemon*; **The Physiognomy of the Pigeon**; Augury of the Perians; Augury of the Greeks; Augury of the Indians; Augury of the Arabs; Freckles, by Menes the Greek; Moles, by Menes the Greek; [Good] Omen, by the people of Persia; The Lines of the Palm and Examination of the Hand, by the Indians; **Twitching in three aspects, by the Persians**; Augury by Birds, [Good] Omen, Divination, Observing Traces, and Soothsaying, by al-*Madā'inī*; [Good] Omen by Celestial [Observation], by al-*Kindī*; **Twitching and Augury, What One Sees in His Clothing and Body, a Description of Freckles, the Medical Treatment of Women, and Knowledge of What Snakes Indicate**; the great [book], Drawing of Lots, by Ibn al-*Murtaḥil*; the small [book], Drawing of Lots, by Ibn al-*Murtaḥil*; of Pythagoras on the drawing of lots, by which one can decide by lot for every need; The Drawing of Lots, as composed by Christians; The Drawing of Lots, related to *Daniel*; The Drawing of Lots with Arrows, related to *Alexander*.

# THE ARABIC MANUSCRIPT TRADITION

MS Berlin We II 1826, f. 59r



MS Berlin We II 1782, ff. 120r-120v



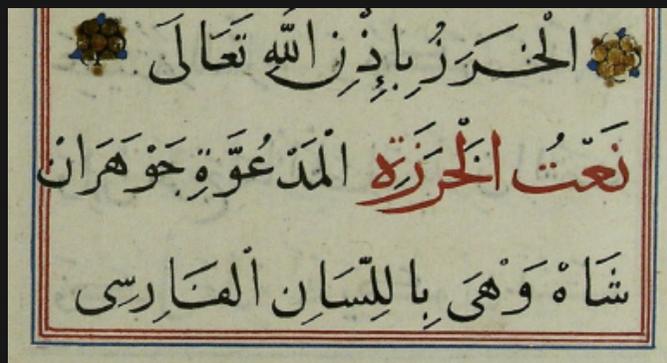
MS Gotha UB Or. A 1324, ff. 1r-1v



## OTHER TWITCHINGS

### Description of the talismanic stone called *ğawhrān šāh* in Persian

It is said that it has seven colours, and no colour resembles the other, it has the colour of the *ħalanğ* flower; the one who wears it will not cease to be lucky wherever he goes, and he will be honoured among the people.



MS Istanbul Aya Sofya 3610, f. 137r

And if he has to do with the Sultan, then he will fulfill his needs.

And if he is mentioned for the good, then his right side will shake; whereas if he is mentioned for the bad, his left side will shake violently.



## 2. HORSE SPOTS

HORSE OMENS FOR RIDERS — MS Berlin We II 1728, ff. 37r-52v

بِسْمِ اللَّهِ الرَّحْمَنِ الرَّحِيمِ  
 الحمد لله رب العالمين والصلاة والسلام  
 علي سيد الاولين والاخرين سيدنا محمد  
 وعلي اله وصحبه اجمعين **وبعد** فهذا  
 كتاب في علم الفروسية ومعرفة الخيل  
 الجياد وامايرهم واشباههم وما يحدث  
 لراكبهم من الخير والشر وهو من دقاير  
 الملوك فلا تعطيه الا لمستحق فانه عن  
 امرأ القيس فاستحفظ به جهده فانه  
 يخبر عن القتالات والبرامات وعن  
 الالوان والعلامات والتجويل العراني  
 والقدم

MS Berlin We II 1728, f. 37v

37  
**كتاب السيلة في علم**  
 الفراسة عن سيدنا الامام علي  
 كرم الله وجهه واشائهم  
 وامايرهم وادوية الخيل  
 وغير ذلك والله تعالى  
 اعلم بالصواب  
 وهو عن امرأ القيس سدا عن سيدنا  
 الامام علي ابن ابي طالب  
 رضي الله عنه

MS Berlin We II 1728, f. 37r

الفراسة	→ <i>Farāsa</i>	Horsemanship
	→ <i>Firāsa</i>	Physiognomy
الفروسية	→ <i>Furūsīya</i>	Horsemanship

HORSE OMENS FOR RIDERS — AUTHORSHIP

وهذه عدة البندود والله سبحانه وتعالى أعلم  
**البند الأول من الجزء الثاني في الحارون**  
 وهو بند حارون المهراز **البند الثاني** من الكتاب  
 وهو بند المارون الوقاف **البند الثالث** من الكتاب  
 وهو بند المارون الفراز **البند الرابع** من الكتاب  
 وهو بند المارون السياج والامه **البند الخامس** من الكتاب  
 وهو بند حارون اليباب **البند السادس** من الكتاب  
 وهو بند حارون الملاكس **البند السابع** من الكتاب  
 وهو بند حارون المواخر **البند الثامن** من الكتاب  
 وهو بند حارون الموقوف **البند التاسع** من الكتاب  
 وهو بند حارون الشنخاخ **البند العاشر** من الكتاب  
 وهو بند حارون الرداء **البند الحادي عشر** من الكتاب  
 وهو بند حارون الصلاد **البند الثاني عشر** من الكتاب  
 وهو بند حارون القهاش **البند الثالث عشر** من الكتاب  
 وهو بند حارون العصطل **البند الرابع عشر** من الكتاب  
 وهو بند حارون القاطع **البند الخامس عشر** من الكتاب  
 وهو بند حارون القوم **البند السادس عشر** من الكتاب  
 وهو

MS Gotha UB Or. A1324, ff. 51v

50  
 فتلوع من ... وعمله فتكون سريعة  
 بها ويتقنطس واذا كانت الفرس  
 ونرأسها غليظه واذا انها طول لا تقربها  
 ولدتها ولدتها والله سبحانه وتعالى  
 اعلم بالصواب ثم الكتاب بعون الله الملك  
 الوهاب وصلي الله علي سيدنا محمد  
 وعلي اله وصليبه وسلم تسليما  
 والحمد لله رب  
 العالمين  
**الجزء الثاني من كتاب السياسة في علم الفراسه**  
**عن سيدنا الديرمام علي كرم الله وجهه**  
 وادوية الخيل وغير ذلك وحسبنا الله ونعم الوكيل  
 ولا حول ولا قوة الا بالله العلي العظيم

MS Gotha UB Or. A1324, ff. 50r

والوراني للفرس والله اعلم وهذه فوائد  
 في معرفة الخيل عن امم القيس فاذا  
 اردت المجاهد في سبيل الله تعالى فاركب الحصان  
 الاثقف مطلق اليمين وكذلك الأجر

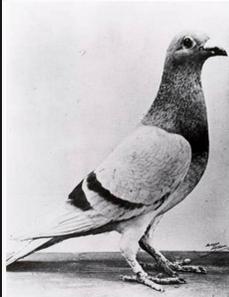
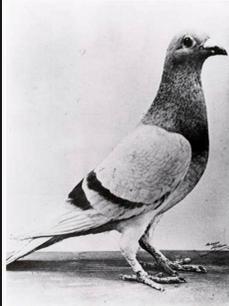
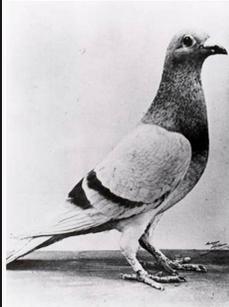
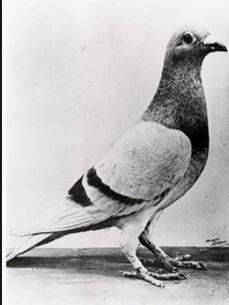
MS Gotha UB Or. A1324, ff. 43r

## HORSE OMENS FOR RIDERS — EXAMPLES

If the animal has a **white spot on the left foot instead of a leg free of white**, then the horse will get injured.

The horse whose **muzzle and nose are black** —and the external part of the lip likewise— indicates the defeat of its master, and that he will have little luck.

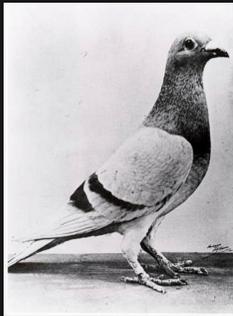
If the the **cream grey stallion has speckles similar to dinars**, and between its nostrils there is a **black drop similar to a dinar**, then its master will be dressed in a robe (of honour).



### 3. PIGEON DOTS

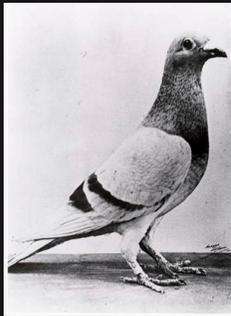
### 3.1 THE PRICE OF PIGEONS (KH III.212)

Among the qualities and the boasts of the pigeon, there is the fact that a single pigeon is sold for **five hundred dinars**; and neither a hawk, a falcon, an eagle, a peacock, a francolin, a rooster, nor a camel, a donkey or a mule is sold for this price. **And if we wanted to hear the story that a plow horse or a stallion have been sold for five hundred dinars, we would be able to find it only in bed time stories.**



### 3.2 ASPECTS IN WHICH PIGEONS AND MEN ARE SIMILAR (KH III. 163-164, 165)

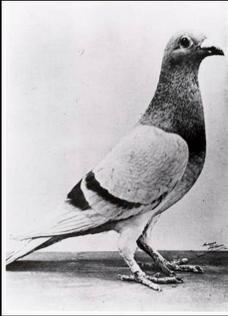
The aspects in which pigeons resemble men is the fact that **the female broods for the most of time, whereas the male only broods for a short while in the middle of the day**; and the fact that the female like the woman feeds the youngs, weans them, and tends to them when they are sick, watch them closely with sollicitude, until the moment in which the brood is over and the time is finished, and the egg becomes a chick that —like the children in the house— needs to eat and drink. Then the male takes care of the feeding for the most of time, as the female used to brood for the most of time.



**Muṭannā ibn Zuhayr said: 'I have never seen among men and women something that I had not already observed among male and female pigeons.** I saw a female that did not want anyone but her male, like a woman who does not desire anybody but her husband and lord...

### 3.3 SIMILARITIES BETWEEN PIGEONS AND MEN (KH III.211)

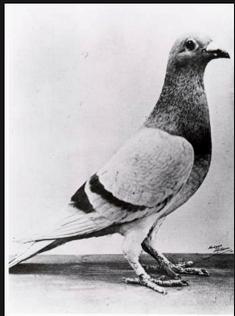
Pigeons resemble men in the figure, in the good natural qualities, in the meekness of their nature, the swiftness of the hearts and of the change. In fact, **if you were an expert in physiognomy, and there were with you some men from Kufa, some from Basra, some from Medina, others from Syria, and other from Yemen, you would recognise the characteristic features of their aspect, of their natural qualities, of their voices,** whether they are either from Kufa, or from Basra, or from Syria, of from Medina, or from Yemen. **The same goes for pigeons:** you will never see an expert in pigeons who ignores their genealogies, their variety, or their place of origin when he sees them.



### 3.4 CHAPTER (KH III.244)

The Master of pigeons said: there is no species that does not happen to have basic feature and marks, among these the main colours are the unmixed one and the jet-black. Among the qualities that make pigeons beautiful there are unmixed green, unmixed red, unmixed black, unmixed white, and nuances of these colours, all of them pure, unless (the coloration) tends to a green hue or to speckles.

**If the pigeon is completely white then it is like the Slavic people —in fact Slavic people are sort of ‘unleavened’ and have a foul pungent smell because their internal organs are not properly ‘baked’— since they happen to be in a country that is not sunny.**



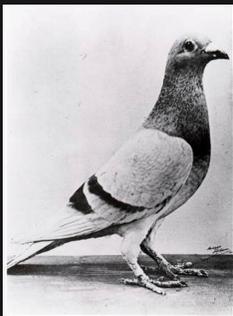
**If the pigeon is black, than this is just because it is burnt, as a result of an excess beyond the limit of ripeness. The black of pigeons is the same of the negros, since their internal organs surpass the limit of ripeness until they almost burn, since the sun burns their hair, and so they become frizzy. In fact, if hair is put close to fire, it become frizzy, but if you prolongue the exposition to fire, then it becomes black like pepper.**

### 3.5 THE SELECTION OF PIGEONS (KĤ III.270)

The whole of physiognomy does not extend beyond four aspects: the first is the **figure** (*taqṭīʿ*), the second is the **touch** (*mağass*), the third are the **good natural qualities** (*šamā'il*), and the fourth is the **movement** (*ḥaraka*).

The figure (*taqṭīʿ*): the conjunction between the neck and the body, a round shape for the head neither too big nor too small, ...

As for the signs related to the touch (*mağass*): the robustness of the constitution, the strength of the flesh, the solidity of the sinew, ...

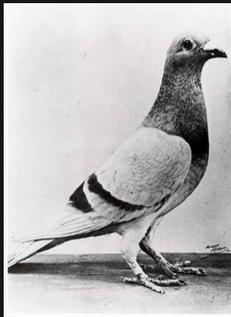


As for the signs related to the good natural qualities (*šamā'il*): little pride, clearness of the eyesight, the steadiness of the gaze, ...

As for the signs related to the movement (*ḥaraka*): the capability of flying at great height, the stretching of the neck when it flies high, stability during the flight, ...

### 3.6 ANOTHER STORY ATTRIBUTED TO POLEMON ABOUT THE USEFULNESS OF PIGEONS (KH III-287-289)

He said: 'I will tell you another story about pigeons that deals with the issue of women, men, their voluptuousness and the positive aspects of their actions.' He said: 'Once a man came to me to complain about his situation with a young woman whom he had liked and married. The young woman was beautiful, an intelligent and lively virgin, but she had no experience of the things that arouse men's desire —and that usually women master— nor of the acceptance of her share of women's voluptuousness.

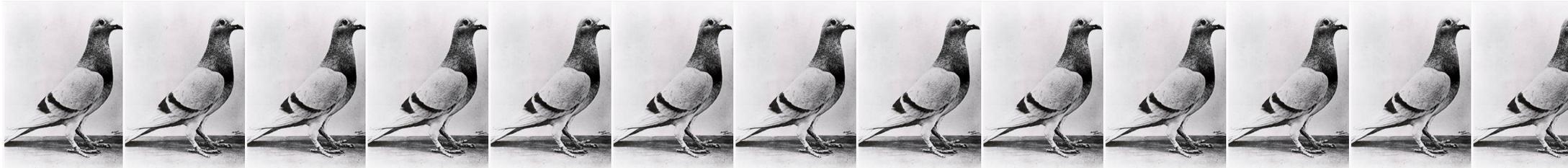


I told him to take apart and segregate the young woman from the other people, so that nobody could reach her; I also told him to limit his kindness towards her, as well as the presence of food, drinks, clothes, parfumes, and of all the other things in which a woman finds her delight and pleasure. I also ordered to give her a foreign maid with whom she could not communicate verbally.

And I also ordered to give her some pairs of pigeons —beautiful, capable of triggering her fancy, cooing— put them into a clean pigeon house, give them dovecots in the house, and a clean separated cell in front of the pigeon house for the woman, then make for her a small opening so that the pigeons could be directly in front of her eyes so that their observation could be her only distraction.

## CONCLUDING REMARKS

- Fluid and pseudo-authorial traditions and their role in the transfer of knowledge.
- Success of omens as structural elements of the text.
- The impact of Polemon in the early Abbasid period.





**“I believe that people  
should marry for life, like  
pigeons and Catholics.”**

Woody Allen

[http://luciaraggetti.info/wp-content/uploads/2016\\_Pigeon\\_Dots\\_Horse\\_Spots\\_Twitching\\_Limbs.pdf](http://luciaraggetti.info/wp-content/uploads/2016_Pigeon_Dots_Horse_Spots_Twitching_Limbs.pdf)