

Reflection of Babylon Astronomic Thoughts in Quranic Non-Arabic Terminology

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ABSTRACT

Surveys in the present essay indicate that most of non-Arabic Quranic terms are of Babylon and Mesopotamian origin. A good number of such terms lie in an astronomic realm. Using Quranic evidence, this essay indicates how Babylon astronomic thoughts are reflected in the Quran through non-Arabic terms. Results of this survey prove that seven heavens have no reality other than the very observable heaven and introducing the observable heaven as seven-fold heavens refers to astronomical thoughts of Mesopotamian people. They treated seven heavens as strata of the very known heaven in which lie the seven-fold celestial bodies of moon, Mercury, Venus, Sun, Mars, Jupiter, and Saturn.

Key Words: heavens, seven-fold heavens, seven-folds earths, civilization of Mesopotamia, idolatry, star-worshipping, fire-worshipping, astronomy.

1. Introduction

According to most well-known narrators man appeared on the earth in the region of Mesopotamia, i.e., the region between Tigris and Euphrates rivers. That is why the oldest as well as the most compassing human civilization whose oldness goes back to four thousand years before Christ was generated in that region. Achievements of that civilization penetrated into Egypt and Greece on the one hand and into Iran and India on the other (Linton, 381).

Such achievements entered Arabian peninsula as well whose sign is non-Arabic terms of Mesopotamian origin seen in Arabic language and the Quran. Among those terms are such astronomic words as *falak*, *sama'*, and *shams* _ the Arabicized forms of *Pilaco*, *Shimia* and *Shamsh* respectively.

Those who are familiar with that background believe in the reflection of Babylon civilization in the Arabic culture and Quranic language, but those who are influenced by modern scientific achievements and hold that Babylon beliefs contradict some Quranic verses deny such an influence. This

has caused the appearance of different perspectives in this connection.

2. Perspectives concerning Reflection of Babylon Astronomic Thoughts in the Arabic culture and Quranic Language

Neglecting the source of Quranic astronomic terms and assertions rooted in Babylon civilization, the great majority of earlier scholars offered the same Babylon consideration in the interpretation of such terms and assertions. For instance, according to the first and oldest perspective, by “seven heavens” is meant seven strata in which circulate seven-fold heavenly bodies, i.e., Moon, Mercury, Venus, Sun, Mars, Jupiter, and Saturn. Islamic scholars tended to the same perspective up to recent centuries. Ibn Sina (370-428 A.H.), Khawja Nasir al-Tusi (597-672 A.H.), al-Fakhr al-Razi (544-606 A.H.) and al-Majlisi (d. 1111 A.H.) held the same view (Rezaee, 127 & 159). Some such contemporary scholars as Maqbul Ahmad Tashnar (2-3) and Muhammad j. al-Maghniya (under Q., 65, 12) also believe in the same thought.

The second perspective, accepted by some contemporaries under the influence of theory of Copernicus and the exploration of new planets in the solar system, is that sun is excluded from

seven heavens. Some, like al-Shahrestani and Taleghani, included those planets before earth, i.e. Mercury and Venus, in seven heavens (Taleghani, under Q. 65, 12; Rezaee, 130), while others, like Behboudi, excluded those two from them considering only those planets after earth as seven heavens (Behboudi, 13; Rezaee, 131).

The third perspective, again held by some contemporaries, is that by “seven heavens” is meant strata of earth’s atmosphere which are, according to some, Homosphere, Ionosphere, Molecule Nitrogen, atomic oxygen, atomic helium, and void (Rezaee, 130). But it should be noted that the said seven strata are not in conformity with the reality of earth’s atmosphere, since there are no more than five distinct strata recognized for its atmosphere being Troposphere (clouds, thunder, snow, hailstone, rain), Stratosphere (storm), Ozonesphere (ozone), Ionosphere (void), and Exosphere (outward atmosphere).

In order to solve that problem, Qorashi has asserted that either the two other strata are not discovered by scientists yet or the Quran had a certain hidden intention in calling those five-fold strata as seven-fold (Qorashi, under Q.,2,29).

Being the most famous in recent times, the fourth perspective is that the first heaven is our very observable sky and other six heavens are not known to man yet (al-Tabatabaee, under Q.,41,12; Makarem, under Q.,2,29; al-Maghniya, under Q.,65,12).

However, the three last perspectives are not acceptable due to the following reasons and we should accept the first view which is also supported by some nowadays. That is, we should say that by “heavens” or “seven heavens” is meant but the very known sky to the ordinary man. The concept of “heavens” or “seven heavens”, as well as “seven earths”, is derived from Mesopotamian civilization where people could recognize seven planets of Moon, Mercury, Venus, Sun, Mars, Jupiter, and Saturn in the sky through their constant observation on the top of Nimrod tower as well as other towers of the region and could distinguish which one is above the other through the mode of their eclipses (Ibn Kathir, *al-Bidaya wa'l Nihaya*,1,33). Similar to their orbits in the sky, Mesopotamian people assumed some lines on the earth designating thereby seven-fold climates or seven-fold earths.

3. Historical Evidence for Arabic Culture and Quranic Language Being Influenced by Babylon Astronomic Thoughts

The first and most widespread human civilization going back to four thousand years ago appeared in Mesopotamia. Achievements of that civilization penetrated into Egypt and Greece on the one hand and into Iran and India on the other (Linton,381).

People of that region paid special attention to the sky because of its clear whether. They built high towers, stared at celestial bodies from top of such towers recognizing thereby planets from stars, and learned a lot about planets. They realized which orbit is above the other, knew the rise, set, and status of each of them in the sky, found several earthly events in harmony with status of planets treating the latter as having influence upon the former, and hence commenced worshipping celestial bodies.

Planets observable by naked eye recognized by Mesopotamian people were Moon, Mercury, Venus, Sun, Mars, Jupiter, and Saturn respectively on the basis of their distance from the earth. Since those planets were seven, Mesopotamian people built seven temples on the earth, divided a week into

seven days calling each day as one of them, and kindled fire in the temple on any specific day worshipping the respective planet. The inhabited parts of the earth known by that time were also divided into seven climates each one being attributed to one of those seven-fold planets. According to a narration, China was attributed to Moon, Transoxania to Mercury, Rome to Venus, Mesopotamia to Sun, Africa to Mars, Arabia to Jupiter, and India to Saturn (al- Mas'udi, 29-30; al-Y'qubi, 1, 85).

Thus, star-worshipping, idolatry, and fire-worshipping appeared in Mesopotamia penetrating thereby into the whole inhabited parts of that era (Khazaeli, 243-4; 413-4). That is why most astronomical names of idols, and even name of some temples, are rooted in the Mesopotamian civilization (*Ibid.*, 532; al-Biruni, 295; al-Salim, 367).

People of Arabia, who were mostly nomads, had no civilization and therefore were influenced by that civilization due to such various factors as war, commerce, and drought (al-Salim, 367). Arabs being indebted to Mesopotamian people in their terminology concerning astronomy and idolatry, as will be explained, is the best evidence for such an influence.

4. Quranic Evidence of Reflection of Babylon Thought in the Quranic Astronomical Terminology

A good number of astronomic terms and assertions are observed in the Quran whose wording, meaning, or both are rooted in Babylon civilization. Here, we discuss the most important of them:

4.1. *Sama'*

It is said that the term "*sama'*" is derived from *shimiya* which is Babylon (al-Mustafawi, under *sumuww*). In Arabic dictionaries it is said that *sama'* is plural, singular of which being *samawa*, as is the case with *baqar* and *baqara* and *nakhl* and *nakhla* (Ibn Mandhur, under *sumuww*). Invoking that, Quranic commentators have justified use of plural pronoun in this verse, "And He fashioned them (*samawat*: the heavens) into seven heavens" (Q.,2,29).

Anyway, whether the term *sama'* is plural or singular, it has no semantic difference with *samawat* in the Quranic verses. Quranic verses implying their synonymy are as follows:

a. The same thing is attributed to *samawat* in one Quranic verse and to *sama'* in another without any proof designating that by either of them a different, independent meaning is

intended. Also, no Quranic commentator has mentioned any semantic difference between them. Hence, it becomes clear that *samawat* is synonymous with *sama* and these two have no semantic differences.

for instance, sometimes it is said that God knew what is in *samawat* and earth (Q.,29,52), while some other times it is said that God knew what is in *sama'* and earth (Q.,22,70). Also, sometimes it is mentioned that God provides for you from *samawat* and earth (Q.,34,24), while some other times it is mentioned that God provides for you from *sama'* and earth (Q.,35,3). Sometimes it is asserted that We have not created *samawat* and earth in vain (Q.,44,38), while some other times it is asserted that we have not created *sama'* and earth in vain (Q., 38,27). Sometimes it is said that We have raised *samawat* (Q.,13,2), while some other times it is said that We have raised *sama'* (Q.,55,7).

It is evident that in those verses God has intended to express known, sensible signs of His power for Arabs of the time of revelation in order to assist them to realize God Himself. Such people obviously observed that the celestial bodies are moving above them without having any pillars and without falling.

Sometimes it is mentioned that in the Resurrection *samawat* will be rent apart (Q.,42,5), while some other times it is mentioned that *sama'* will be rent apart in that time (Q.,82,1).

Those verses indicate that by *samawat* nothing is meant but the very known, observed *sama'*. There is no proof that *sama'* and *samawat* are two distinct things in those verses, especially when they both have “ل” of definition referring to what was known to Arabs of the time of revelation –and they knew nothing but the very observed sky.

b. In some Quranic verses the very observed things in the sky are attributed to *samawat*. For instance, in some Quranic verses day and night are mentioned alongside *samawat* and earth, as in Q.,3,190, “Indeed in the creation of the heavens and the earth and the alternation of night and day there are signs for those who possess intellects.” Such verses imply that by *samawat* is meant the space where night and day known to man are generated on the one hand, and that *samawat* has been clearly known to man in such a way that God has called their creation as His sign on the other.

In the verse 36 of sura 9, the phenomenon of twelve-fold months is related to *samawat*, “Indeed the number of months with Allah is twelve months in Allah's Book, the day when He

created the heavens and the earth.” It is clear that twelve-fold months are generated through motion of the moon around the earth and that of earth around the sun; thus, by *samawat* is meant the space where moon and sun exist. In some Quranic verses it is even explicitly asserted that sun and moon lie in the seven-fold *samawat*, as in Q.,71,15-16, “Have you not seen how Allah has created seven heavens in layers, and has made therein the moon for a light, and the sun for a lamp?” Also in the story of Abraham, where indication of kingdom of heavens and earth to him is mentioned, Sun, Moon, and one star (probably Venus) are treated as instantiations of that kingdom (Jawad Ali, 6,50; al-Tha’alibi, 2,486).

Therefore, *samawat* is the very sky observed by man and seen by Abraham and his people which is observable for all human individuals. That is why Meccan polytheists are said to look at seven-fold *samawat*, “He created seven heavens in layers. You do not see any discordance in the creation of the All-Beneficent. Look again! Do you see any flaw?” (Q.,67,3). Also it is said that Meccan polytheists looked at divined signs in *samawat*, “How many a sign there is in the heavens and the earth that they pass by while they are disregardful of it!”

(Q.,12,105). It is clear that nothing can be looked at but the very observed sky.

In some Quranic verses it is said that the rain is sent down from *samawat*, "Say," Who provides for you from the heavens and the earth?" Say," Allah! Indeed either we or you are rightly guided or in manifest error" "(Q.,34,24); "Have the faithless not regarded that the heavens and the earth were interwoven and We unraveled them, and We made every living thing out of water? Will they not then have faith?"(Q.,21,30).

Such phrases as "have the faithless not regarded that" and "We made every living thing out of water" in those verses clearly indicate that by "interwoven" and "unraveled" concerning heaven and earth is meant not raining and raining of the sky and not growing and growing of plants on the earth- that is why its interpretation as creation of the sky because of "Big Bang" presented by modern physics is incorrect and contradictory to the appearance of the verse. Doubtless, rain comes down from the very sky known to man, i.e. atmosphere of the earth; hence, by *samawat* is meant the very sky seen by man.

In the verse 29 of sura 42 it is said that in *samawat* there is *dabba* (the moving), "Among His signs is the creation of the

heavens and the earth and whatever *dabba* (the moving) He has scattered in them, and He is able to gather them whenever He wishes.” It is clear that by “the moving”, which exists in heavens and can be considered among signs of God’s power for Arabs of the time of revelation, is meant the very bird; and the bird cannot live outside earth’s atmosphere. It is obvious that *dabba* is a man-made Arabic word used by Arabs for a live existent somehow imagined by them in the time of Quranic revelation – that is why one cannot treat the said verse as referring to life in other celestial bodies in order to introduce it as a scientific miracle of the Quran.

These verses indicate that by *samawat* or seven-fold *samawat* is meant the very sky observed by ordinary man, for such observed things in the very sky like night and day, sun and earth, *dabba* (the moving), and sustenance (rain) are attributed to it. It seems that by *sama’* or *samawat* in all Quranic verses is meant the very observed sky. Even in the verse in sura 6, where *malakut* (kingdom) is added to it, the very observed sky is meant, for in subsequent verses some such evidence as night and day, and observing stars, moon, and sun are mentioned, “Thus did We show Abraham the kingdom of the heavens and the earth, that he might be of those who

possess certitude. When night darkened over him, he saw a star and said, "This is my Lord!" But when it set, he said, "I do not like those who set." Then, when he saw the moon rising, he said, "This is my Lord!" But when it set, he said, "Had my Lord not guided me, I would surely have been among the astray lot." Then, when he saw the sun rising, he said, "This is my Lord! This is bigger!" But when it set, he said, "O my people, indeed I disown what you take as [His] partners" (Q.,6,75-8). Another supporting proof is that in another verse Meccan polytheists are said to look at the kingdom of heavens, "Have they not contemplated the kingdom of the heavens and the earth, and whatever things Allah has created, and that may be their time has already drawn near? So what discourse will they believe after this?" (Q.,7,185). According to this verse, by *malakut al-samawat* (kingdom of the heavens) must be meant the very observable sky, for it was the very sky at which Meccan polytheists had the possibility of looking.

It should be noted that whenever the unseen world is dealt with in the Quran, the term *ghayb* (the Unseen) is mentioned before *samawat*, as in this verse, "Indeed Allah is the knower of the Unseen of the heavens and the earth. Indeed He knows well what is in the breasts" (Q.,35,38).

Let us bear in mind that one cannot consider various meanings for *samawat* and, for instance, say that one meaning of it is the very observed sky and the other is heavens not explored in the time of Quranic revelation; for it is not allowed to attribute such meanings to the Quran whose wordings do not conform to one another and are even contradictory. How can one say that while the Quran has described *samawat* or seven-fold *samawat* visible and observable, it can be in conformity with the meaning which treats it as invisible and unobservable?

4.2. *Falak*

Falak is considered among terms rooted in Mesopotamia. They say that it is probably derived from Acadian term *pilakku* meaning spinning wheel. *Falaka* in Arabic has the same meaning (Jeffry, under *falak*; Nellino, 135). It is probably called so because of the spherical movement they held for seven-fold planets (Khazaeli, under Adam).

Some ancients, like al-Kalbi, believed that *falak* is like accumulated water in which celestial planets circulate (al-Majlisi, 55, 129; Ibn Hajar, 8, 330) – as if they thought that seven-fold planets were moving in the sky like a ship on accumulated water, i.e., the sea. Similarity of color of the sky

and the sea, derivation of terms *falak* (sky) and *fulk* (ship) from the same stem, and appearance of the term *sibaha* (swimming) in the verse “It is He who created the night and the day, the sun and the moon, each *yasbahun* (swimming) in a *falak*” (Q.,21,33), confirm that probability. Thus, it should be said that by *falak* is meant the very sky wherein sun and moon circulate. *Falak* is used in the Quran in the same meaning, one example being this verse, “It is He who created the night and the day, the sun and the moon, each swimming in a *falak*” (Q.,21,33).

Considering what was said, it should be asserted that *samawat* and *falak* are synonymous – as appeared in this hadith of Imam Ali, “By God, if I am given the seven-fold climates and what is under its falaks in order to disobey God in taking a piece of barley from an ant, I would not do it” (*Nahj al-Balagha*, aphorism 215).

4.3. *Tariqa*

It seems that by *sab' tara'iq* (seven ways, *tara'iq* being plural of *tariqa*) in the verse “certainly We created above you seven *tra'iq*” (Q., 23,17) is meant channels in the sky in which the seven-fold planets are moving from east to west. *Sab' tara'iq* is,

therefore, equivalent to *sab' samawat* (seven-fold heavens). This is confirmed by the point that star (*najm*) is called *tariq* in the following verses, “By the sky, by the *tariq*, and what will show you what is the *tariq*? It is the brilliant star”(Q., 86,1-3).

The common point in both suras 23 and 86 is this assertion that “man is under control”. In sura 23 we read, “And We have not been oblivious of creation” (17), and in sura 86, “There is a guard over every soul”(4). This is probably related to the beliefs of Mesopotamian people who considered celestial bodies as conscious (Khazaeli,28).

As will be seen later, they treated celestial bodies as representations of the spiritual, i.e., the angels (Moballeghi, 2, 835), and angels do control and safeguard humans – as we read in the Quran, “Indeed, there are over you watchers, noble writers, who know whatever you do” (82,10-12). This point indicates that Mesopotamian people were followers of the creed of divine prophets such as Noah, Abraham, and John in the beginning and it was only later that they distorted their celestial creed and worshipped stars and Idols (Biazar Shirazi, 80-90).

4.4. *Tibaq*

The term *tibaq* is of Mesopotamian stem derived from Acadian *tubuqtu* meaning stratum by stratum (Jeffrey, under *tabaq*). In the holy Quran once Noah addresses his people saying “Have you not seen how Allah has created seven heavens in layers and has made therein the moon for a light, and the sun for a lamp?” (71, 15-6), and in another sura Meccan polytheists are addressed in this way, “He created seven heavens in layers. You do not see any discordance in the creation of the All-Beneficent. Look again! Do you see any flaw? Look again, once more. Your look will return to you humbled and weary” (67, 3-4). These verses indicate that the background of belief in heavens being seven-fold and stratum by stratum goes back to Noah’s time, i.e., three or four thousand years before Christ. As proved by historical evidence, people of Noah lived in Mesopotamia (Biazar Shirazi, 29ff).

Therefore, heavens being seven-fold and stratum by stratum should be comprehended in a way that Mesopotamian people used to comprehend centuries before Christ. Besides, if Meccan polytheists are told to look at seven-fold heavens with their eyes, then those heavens and their strata must be observable through naked eye.

Thus, it should be said that by *sab' samawat* is neither meant layers of earth's atmosphere nor celestial bodies unknown to man at the revelation time; rather, it means the very seven-fold strata in which seven-fold planets circulate and man knew them from ancient times.

As mentioned earlier, strata of heavens were, according to Mesopotamian people, levels of the observed sky in any of which seven-fold bodies of Moon, Mercury, Venus, Sun, Mars, Jupiter, and Saturn circulate respectively from east to west.

4.5. Seven-fold Planets Being Called Samawat

Although by *sama'* in *samawat sab'* is essentially meant a stratum of the observed sky in which one planet of the seven-fold planets circulates, the very seven-fold planets are sometimes called *samawat* or *samawat sab'* figuratively. In sura 78, Meccan polytheists are addressed in this way, “[Did We not make....] And [We] build above you the seven mighty heavens? And make [the sun for] a radiant lamp?” (12-13).

The phrase “a radiant lamp” in these verses added to such verses in which sun is described as “lamp” (25, 61; 71, 16) indicates that by “seven mighty heavens” is meant seven planets known to man by the time of Quranic revelation.

It seems that *sama'* and *samawat* in the two following verses are used in one meaning and by them, too, is meant celestial bodies, "And He sustains the sky lest it should fall on the earth, excepting [when it does so] by His leave" (22, 65); "It is Allah who raised the heavens without any pillars that you see, and then presided over the Throne. He disposed the sun and the moon, each moving for a specified term" (13, 2).

Doubtless, what can possibly fall is a celestial body; as in the following verse the fall of celestial bodies is considered among accidents happening before the Resurrection, "When the stars are scattered" (82,2).

4.6. *Al-Sama' al-Dunya*

In the holy Quran it is three times said that We embellished *al-sama' al-Dunya* with stars and lights (41,12; 37, 6; 67, 5).

As for the meaning of *al-sama' al-Dunya*, there is a dispute among scholars. According to some, like Gorashi, by that is meant the first layer of earth's atmosphere, called Troposphere, in which cloud, thunder, snow, hailstone, and rain are generated (Ghorashi, under Q.,2,29). According to others, like al-Tabatabaee, Makarem, and al-Maghniya, by that is meant the very observable sky, other six heavens being unknown to

man (al-Tabatabaee, under Q.,41,12; Makarem, under Q.,2,29; al-Maghniya under Q.,65,12).

The first opinion is clearly untrue, for neither people of the time of revelation knew a layer called Troposphere nor did stars lie in earth's atmosphere. The second one cannot be true either, for seven heavens were known to the people of revelation time; that is why in the Quran 2 times *al-samawat al-sab'* (23,86; 17,44) and 190 times *al-samawat* are used – with “ال” of definition which indicates that the seven-fold heavens have been known to them. Previously some other evidence for the seven-fold heavens being known to that people were mentioned, including the seven-fold heavens being observable and sun and moon being among them.

Should we intend to interpret the verses in question in their historical context, we should say that by seven heavens is meant heavens of Moon, Mercury, Venus, Sun, Mars, Jupiter, and Saturn respectively recognized by ancients through apparent comprehension and naked eye. According to this, the first heaven is the very heaven in which moon circulates.

It seems that Mesopotamian people and Arabs considered stars as being in the first heaven due to their superficial thoughts. The reason was that they saw the stars alongside the

moon most nights (al-Majlisi, 55, 231 the footnote, and 251). Their belief was contrary to that of Ptolemy which treated stars as being above the seventh heaven (Rezaee, 127 & 159).

It might be said that the verses in question convey to some extent the real, primary meaning of seven heavens rooted in Mesopotamian civilization. But in other verses, where the term *samawat* and the like are not used with *sab'*, the real, primary meaning is not meant that much; rather, by both *sama'* and *samawat* is meant one meaning being they very observable heaven. The evidence is that in the holy Quran there is no detailed report about heavens containing characteristics of each of them.

Among most significant verses in which the phrase *al-sama' al-Dunya* is mentioned are verses 11 and 12 of sura 41, "Then He turned to the heaven, and it was smoke, and He said to it and to the earth, 'Come! Willingly or unwillingly!' They said, 'We come heartily.' Then He set them up as seven heavens in two days, and revealed in each heaven its ordinance. We have adorned the lowest heaven with lamps, and guarded them. That is the ordaining of the All-Mighty, the All-Knowing."

In those two verses there are some evidences indicating that by *sab' samawat* is meant the very observable heaven:

First, the pronoun هن (them) in ففضييهن (He set them up) refers to *al-sama'* in the previous verse meaning that God changed the very observable heaven, which was a smoke (*dukhan*) in the beginning, into seven heavens – as in another verse it is said, “Then He turned to the heaven, and fashioned it into seven heavens”(2,29). The seven heavens, therefore, should be searched in the very observable heaven.

Secondly, should by *samawat* be meant heavens other than the very observable heaven, there should be some explanation in the Quran concerning them so that the Quranic audience can become familiar with those heavens as well, while in no Quranic verse exists any explanation concerning other heavens. It is not even said briefly that there are also some other unobservable heavens; rather, it is asserted that people should look at the seven-fold heavens (Q.,67,3) and that moon and sun lie in the seven-fold heavens (Q.,71,15-6).

It should be noted that in the Quran there are some descriptions attributed to *sab' samawat* in general, such as their being divine signs, their being observable, and the like, while there is no evidence for designating them to *al-sama' al-Dunya*

in particular. Thus, such descriptions cannot be specified to *al-sama' al-Dunya*.

4.7. Seven-fold Earths

In sura 65 it is implicitly spoken of seven earths like seven heavens, “It is Allah who has created seven heavens, and of the earth [a number] similar to them” (12). Al-allama al-Tabatabaee understood from the appearance of the phrase “and of the earth similar to them” the numeric sameness, meaning that earths are seven as heavens. Concerning seven earths, he proposed three possibilities as follows:

- a) Seven bodies of the earth kind,
- b) Seven strata of the earth, and
- c) Seven climates on the earth.

It seems, however, that he did not prefer any of them (al-Tabatabaee, under Q.,65,12).

Among such probabilities, the first and the second are not acceptable; for, as referred to in the rest of the verse, God has willed to clarify His power through drawing attention to creation of seven-fold heavens and earths, “That you may know that Allah has power over all things”(65,12). Therefore, what the attention is drawn to should be known to the Quranic

audience in the revelation time through which they could realize God's power, while they were aware of neither the earths nor the seven layers of the earth. Doubtless, they were aware of nothing but the very known earth; therefore, by seven-fold earths is meant nothing but the very "seven climates". It is narrated from Ibn Abbas that the earth exists in seven spread divisions, none of which being above others, among which seas exists, and over which the sky is spread (al-Rastegar al-Juibari, under Q.,65,12). According to Ibn Abi l-Hadid, the verse means the very "seven climates"(Ibn Abi l-Hadid,1,90).

It is said that اقليم (climate) is derived from the Greek term *Klima* meaning leaning, which is conventionally used for the angle of a part of earth with regard to the sun (Dehkhoda, under اقليم). The thought of dividing earth into seven parts from north to the equator is rooted in Mesopotamia, but it did not remain limited to that land and penetrated into Greece on the one hand and into Iran and India on the other. For each of the seven-fold planets, Mesopotamian people put one part of the inhabited earth known by that time (Ibn Khaldun, 2,189). In fact, seven-fold climates have been the earthly equivalent of seven-fold heavens (Gharachanloo,1,19-20).

It should be said, therefore, that as there is in fact no seven earths other than the very known earth and by “seven earths” is meant nothing but the parts of the very usual earth, in fact there is no seven heavens other than the very known heaven and by “seven heavens” is meant nothing but the strata of the very known, usual heaven.

4.8. *Sab'*

In the holy Quran, the term *sab'* or *sab'a* is used both literally – as in, “They will say,”[They are] seven, their dog is the eighth of them” (18,22) – and figuratively – as in, “If all the trees on the earth were pens, and the sea replenished with seven more seas [were ink], the words of Allah would not be finished”(31,27).

It seems that the term *sab'* is originally used for the real meaning and then, through familiarity of Mesopotamian people with seven-fold planets and worshipping them, became sacred and hence so many things such as weekdays, earth, sea, and the like were considered *sab'*(seven). Thus, the seven of something indicates its perfection (Mr. Hacks, under هفت). Of course, philologists consider the figurative meaning of *sab'* as being numerous (Ibn Mandhur, under *sab'*).

Nonetheless, it seems that the primary consideration has been that the whole heavens are seven. They considered stars in the first heaven, i.e., heaven of moon, and other planets in the second to the seventh ones respectively. The number seven was gradually neglected and by seven heavens they meant the whole heaven; that is why in the Quran seven heavens (*sab' samawat*) are mentioned only nine times and in 190 other cases merely heavens (*al-samawat*), without seven, are found.

Therefore, although *sab' samawat* was used in the beginning in the real meaning of seven heavens, i.e., seven strata of the very observable heaven, its real meaning was gradually neglected due to the passing of time so that in the time of Quranic revelation it was mostly used in the meaning of the very observable heaven.

4.9. Reflection of Babylon Astronomical Thoughts in Arab's Idols

Idolatry in northern Arabia was an imitation of Babylon idolatry. A sign of such imitation is that the term *sanam* (idol) is originally *salam* which is of Babylon root. Besides, due to lack of civilization and non-familiarity with the art of sculpture, Arabs did not sculpt idols themselves but brought them from outside of Arabia (al-Salim, 367).

Jeffrey considers *sanam* a term borrowed from Aramaic language and adds that this term has a common Semitic stem and is *salmu* in Acadian. He asserts that *salam* (صلم) means sculpture in Arabic meaning statue in Aramaic, Syrian, Hebrew, and Phoenician (Jeffrey, under صنم).

Among idols was *Hubal* which is identified with Babylon *Ba'l* (al-Salim, *ibid.*). It is said that Nimrod built Babel where he established a very big temple for *Ba'l*, and that Babel is attributed to that idol being composed of *bab* and *ba'l* (Dehkhoda, under بابل). The name of idol of Babel is narrated in various kinds: *Ba'l*, *Bal*, *Beel*, *El*, *Eil*, *Ba'lus*, and *Bilus* (*ibid.*; Moballeghi, 2,256). “*Ba'l* Nimrod” is a phrase indicating the attribution of *Ba'l* to Babylonians. It's worshipping, however, was not exclusive to Babel and had penetrated into various regions (Moballeghi, *ibid.*). *Ba'labakk* is another phrase which shows some parts of expansion of worshipping that idol (al- Birouni, 295).

That idol was the goddess of sun according to some and that of Jupiter according to others – the latter not being reliable. There existed a fire in the temple of *Ba'l*, apparently as a symbol of the sun. Hence, worshipping idol, sun, and fire are considered various facets of one fact (Khazaeli, 255).

Lat was another idol identified with the Babylon *Lato* (al-Salim, 367). In old Mesopotamian works name of that idol is recorded in such various forms as *Allato*, *Allat*, and *Hallat* (Al-Darwaza, 1,294). *Lat* was treated as the daughter of *Ba'l* and the sister of *Manat* and *Uzza* being considered as the goddess of Saturn according to some and that of sun according to others (Khazaeli, 532; Moballeghi, 2,876 & 881; al-Biruni, 295).

Some consider the Babylon *ال* as the stem of *اله* and hold that *الله* or *هلا* are taken from it (Moballeghi, 2,875), and that *اللات* is the feminine of *الله* (Al-Darwaza, 1,294).

Another idol was *manat* called *Mamanato* by Babylonians being considered the the goddess of death and destiny (*ibid.*, 2,876; Kahazaeli, 614). *Manat* was probably the symbol of Mars, for they treated it as the goddess of war (Khazaeli, 244). As mentioned earlier, Babylonians considered *Manat* the sister of *Lat* and *Uzza* and the daughter of *Ba'l* (*ibid.*, 532; Moballeghi, 2,876 & 881).

Another idol was *Uzza* identified with Babylon *Uzuser*, *Ushtar*, or *Ishtar*. It was treated as the the goddess of fire or love and the symbol of Venus (Khazaeli, 452 & 243; al-Salim, 367). As mentioned above, it was called the sister of *Lat*

and *Manat* and the daughter of *Ba'l* (Khazaeli, 532; Moballeghi, 2,876 & 881).

Mesopotamian people, including star-worshippers of Harran, treated idols as earthly and stars as heavenly symbols of angels considering the latter as daughters of *Ba'l*, and worshipped angels for their intercession with *Ba'l* in solving their this-worldly problems (Wondeferden, 65; Moballeghi, 2,835).

Exactly the same belief was held by Meccan polytheists. Consideration of verses 19 to 27 of sura 53 would testify to this truth. According to those verses, Meccan people from ancient times up to the time of the holy prophet considered *Lat*, *Manat*, and *Uzza* as symbols of angels and the angels as daughters of God worshipping angels for their intercession with God in order to solve their this-worldly problems.

Such an astronomical-religious term-borrowing as well as cultural-doctrinal similarity clearly indicates that Arab people have been influenced by Mesopotamian culture and civilization, and as a result have taken from them this idea that the observable heaven is seven-fold.

5. Quranic Tolerance for Babylon Astronomical Thoughts

It should be known that reflection of Babylon astronomical thoughts in Arabic and Quranic terminology does not mean

confirmation of Babylon non-scientific beliefs by the Quran and penetration of the untruth into it; for God does not intend scientific explanation in such verses: He wishes to draw the attention of people of revelation time to such a divine sign as heaven in order to guide them to His power. Some such great Quranic commentators as al-Allama al-Tabatabaee (*al-Mizan*, under Q.,36,37- 40), Makarem (*Tafsir Nemuneh*, under the same verses), and al-Maghnyia (under Q.,65,12) hold that the speaking on the basis of what was known to the people of revelation era does not imply penetration of the untruth into the Quran.

There is no dispute that the Quran is the Book of Guidance. However, there are two different perspectives concerning the realm of Quranic guidance. Some hold that the Quran presents doctrines in all realms whether religious or non-religious – such as experimental sciences – and expect this Book to correct people's beliefs in those realms as well believing that the Quran is a scientific miracle in the sense that it has spoken of truths whose understanding was impossible for the people of revelation era but later, due to scientific achievements, people became able to perceive them (Rezaee, 49 & 81). Contrary to that perspective, a good number of scholars maintain that the

Quran is sheer religious guidance; therefore, it is dependent upon apparent information of people of revelation era in the realm of experimental sciences, even though such apparent information may contradict human recent explorations – like the apparent motion of the sun and thereby generation of night and day, as can be seen in these verses, “And a sign for them is the night, which We strip of daylight, and, behold, they find themselves in the dark! And the sun runs on to its place of rest: That is the ordaining of the All-Mighty, the All-Knowing. As for the moon, We have ordained its phases, until it becomes like an old palm leaf. Neither it behooves the sun to overtake the moon, nor may the night outrun the day, and each swims in an orbit” (36,37-40).

In those verses it is indeed asserted that the very phenomenon of night and day being generated due to the motion of sun around earth in your opinion is among signs of God’s power (al-Tabatabaee, Makarem, and al-Tayyib under those verses).

Doubtless, should God wish to speak of motion of earth around itself and thereby generation of night and day contrary to what was known to and observed by the people of revelation era, the main divine purpose, i.e. drawing their attention to

God's power, would be overshadowed by that assertion and thus be neglected. In that case, instead of causing them to believe in God's power, it would make them follow the way of denial and infidelity – as Ibn Abbas asserts (al-Rastegari al-Juibari, under Q.,65,12; Ibn Hajar,6,209). They would say, “How this Mohammad is lying! While we clearly see that night and day are generated due to the motion of sun around earth, he says that they are generated due to the motion of earth around itself!”

It is clear that in those verses, the company of the phenomenon of night and day with the motion of sun is the best evidence for denotation of those verses for sun's apparent motion and thereby generation of night and day. It is clearly evident that those verses are to expound the phenomenon of night and day as one divine sign, and mentioning motion of sun and moon is for the same reason. What is appropriate to this situation is to hold that those verses are to explain the apparent motion of sun and moon which is related to the phenomenon of night and day and not the motion irrelevant to it – which cannot be understood by people of revelation era. Therefore, to say that those verses are speaking of motion of sun in the Milky Way Galaxy, and the like, is contradictory to the

appearance of them and would harm Quranic eloquence; especially when we consider that in those verses sun's motion is treated as a divine sign for the people of revelation era, and it is evident that divine signs, which are preliminaries to the reasoning, cannot be unknown to and unperceivable for those people.

6. Conclusion

As became clear, the Quranic astronomical terminology is adopted from astronomical thoughts of Mesopotamian people, among which being the treatment of heavens as seven which goes back to the development of astronomy among that people and their familiarity with seven-fold planets. Since people of Arabia had no civilization, they adopted symbols of civilization from Mesopotamia among which being astronomical expressions such as *sama'*, *sab' samawat*, *falak*, and *buruj* as well as names of most idols like *lat*, *manat*, and *uzza*.

In the opinion of Mesopotamian people, *sab' samawat* (seven-fold heavens) was nothing but the very observed and known heaven, that is why Arabs meant nothing by that expression but the very usual sky. In accordance with the apparent comprehension of those people, by *sab' samawat* or *samawat* in the Quran is meant the very observable heaven.

Although *sab' samawat* had the real meaning in the beginning, by which being meant seven distinct strata of the very known heaven, the number *sab'* (seven) was gradually neglected due to the passing of time. Hence, in the holy Quran the term *samawat* is used 190 times without the company of *sab'*, and *sab' samawat* is also not explained in detail.

It may be said that only in a few Quranic verses (9 ones), in which the term *samawat* and otherwise is accompanied by the term *sab'*, the very real, primary meaning of seven heavens strikes the mind to some extent. But in other verses, in which the term *samawat* and otherwise is not accompanied by the term *sab'*, the real, primary meaning is not considered that much and by both *sama'* and *samawat* one meaning is meant; that is, the very observable heaven. In the Quran, whenever *samawat wa ard* (heavens and earth) or *sam' wa ard* (heaven and earth) is used the whole universe is meant.

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