

NEW LIGHT ON THE TEXTUAL TRADITION
OF BAR BAHLŪL'S *BOOK OF SIGNS*

Bar Bahlūl was a tenth-century Nestorian who spent most of his life in Baghdad¹. He is primarily remembered today for his remarkable lexicon of the Syriac language². In the early 1970s Fuat Sezgin discovered in Istanbul another work by Bar Bahlūl, his *Kitāb al-Dalā'il* or *Book of Signs*. This new text is not unlike a modern almanac³. It presents first chronological synopses of the various feasts and festivals of the eastern churches, as well as of the Jews, Muslims, Ḥarrānian pagans, and others. It then turns its attention to other matters — how to determine the health of slaves, poisons, physiognomy, dream divination, and so on. Joseph Habbi has now published an edition of this text⁴.

The only complete manuscript of the *Book of Signs* known to Habbi is that discovered by Sezgin: *Süleymaniye Ktp., Hekimoğlu Ali Paşa* 572.1, ff. 1a-291a, 556/1161. Another short excerpt of the text is preserved in *Süleymaniye Ktp., Fâtih* 5411.4, ff. 113a-136b, 688/1289⁵. Habbi was aware of the existence of the latter but was unable to utilize it in his edition⁶. In this note I would like to call attention to yet another, fairly extensive excerpt of Bar Bahlūl's *Book of Signs*.

Vatican ar. 1304 consists of a number of works on the interpretation of dreams. Two of these are well known: the dream manuals of Ibn Ghannām (ff. 2a-167a) and Kharkūshī (ff. 230a-314b)⁷. Sandwiched between these is another (ff. 174a-229b) that Giorgio Levi Della Vida has

¹ Little is known of his life. For an overview, see J. HABBI, *Le Livre des Signes de al-Ḥasan b. Bahlūl*, in *Oriens Christianus*, 68 (1984), pp. 210-12. His *Book of Signs* must have been composed between 942 and 968. See J.-M. FIEY, *Sur le calendrier syriaque oriental arabe de Bar Bahlūl (942/968 A.D.)*, in *Analecta Bollandiana*, 106 (1988), p. 271.

² R. DUVAL, ed., *Lexicon syriacum auctore Hassan Bar Bahlul*, Paris, 1886-1903.

³ For an overview of its content, see J. HABBI, *Les sources du Livre des Signes d'al-Ḥasan ibn Bahlūl*, in *Orientalia Christiana Analecta*, 226 (1986), pp. 193-204.

⁴ *Kitāb al-dalā'il li-l-Ḥasan b. al-Bahlūl*, Kuwait, 1987. In 1985 F. SEZGIN published a facsimile "edition" of the text: *The Book of Indications (Kitāb al-Dalā'il) by al-Ḥasan ibn al-Bahlūl (Tenth Century A.D.)*, (*Publications of the Institute for the History of Arabic-Islamic Science, C10*), Frankfurt am Main, 1985. But cf. J.M. WITKAM, *Arabic Manuscripts in Distress. The Frankfurter Facsimile Series*, in *Manuscripts of the Middle East*, 4 (1989), pp. 174-80.

⁵ Corresponding to Chapter One of HABBI's edition (pp. 57-67).

⁶ See the comments in the introduction to his edition (p. 24).

⁷ For Ibn Ghannām (d. 674/1294), see T. FAHD, *La divination arabe*, Leiden, 1966, pp. 338-9. For Kharkūshī (d. 405/1015), see my forthcoming study, *Dream Interpretation in the Early Medieval Near East*.

described as the “*Taʿbīr ar-ruʿyā* di Abuʿl-Ḥasan Alī b. Saʿīd al-Ḥawlānī”⁸. It is a question here of Ibn al-Qaṣṣār al-Qayrawānī, a North African jurist who flourished in the early 5th/11th century⁹. Qayrawānī was a prolific author of dream manuals: three others are known¹⁰, with *Vatican ar.* 1304.2 now making a fourth¹¹.

Della Vida’s description of *Vatican ar.* 1304.2 is not entirely accurate. He seems not to have noticed that the work of Qayrawānī ended on folio 198a (not 229b). There follows Qayrawānī’s dream manual a miscellany of other texts on dreams. These were drawn from a number of different sources: (1) ff. 198a-204b, a section entitled *Baqīyah min taʿbīr al-aḥlām*, containing a collection of traditions on dreams, the source of which I have been unable to determine; (2) ff. 204b-206a, selections from Baghawī’s (d. 516/1122) *Sharḥ al-sunnah*¹²; (3) ff. 206a-b, two

⁸ *Elenco dei manoscritti arabi islamici della Biblioteca Vaticana. Vaticani, Barberiniani, Borgiani, Rossiani (Studi e Testi, 67)*, Rome, 1935, p. 199.

⁹ Qayrawānī seems to have escaped the notice of the medieval Muslim biographical tradition, including that devoted to the Mālikī school of jurists and to the city of Qayrawān. Indications contained in his *Mumattīʿ* (see next note) suggest that he flourished in the early fifth century A.H. In particular, at fol. 169b he dates his reception of a prophetic tradition to the year 420/1029. Qayrawānī’s oneirocritic labors are treated at length in my *Dream Interpretation in the Early Medieval Near East*.

¹⁰ The first is an enormous dream manual arranged by subject, entitled *Kitāb al-mumattīʿ fī taʿbīr al-ruʿyā wa-sharḥ uṣūlihā*, extant only in *Sül.*, *Carullah* 1571, 194ff., 1049/1640. Although the ms. is not terribly old, it has suffered much due to water, worms, and coal dust. There are also a significant number of lacunae in the text. It is thus fortunate that there are two anonymous dream manuals that made extensive use of Qayrawānī’s *Mumattīʿ*: *Sül.*, *Hekimoğlu Ali Paşa* 590, 343ff., undated, and *Sül.*, *Bağdatlı Vehbi Efendi* 941, 121ff., 1005/1596, the latter being basically a *mukhtaṣar*. — The second is a shorter dream manual arranged by subject and divided into 30 chapters, the order of which follows closely that found in his *Mumattīʿ*. This work is extant in five mss.: (1) *Sül.*, *Reşit Efendi* 1003.17, ff. 302b-319a, undated, (2) *Top.*, *Ah.* III 1458.3, ff. 126a-154b, 868/1463, (3) *Paris*, *BN ar.* 2746, 44ff., undated, (4) *Rabat*, *Ḥasanīyah* 4536, 30ff., 1159/1649, and (5) *Milan*, *Bib. Amb. ar. n.s.* 1031.7, ff. 111a-129a, 1050/1640. — The third is another shorter dream manual that Qayrawānī arranged not according to the objects that appear in dreams, but according to their meaning, so that, e.g., all dreams meaning that the dreamer will have political power are grouped in a single chapter. This work is extant only in *Rabat*, *Ḥasanīyah* 5596, 57ff., undated.

¹¹ This text is divided into 58 chapters, the order of which diverges sharply from that found in his other dream manuals. Apart from a rather generic praise of God, the work has no preface. Qayrawānī begins immediately with his introduction, the themes of which and even at times its wording closely parallel what is found in the first of his shorter dream manuals. — There may be another copy of this work in Cairo. I have not yet been able to examine the relevant ms., but have had to rely on F. SAYYID, *Fihrist al-makhṭūʿāt. Nashrah bi-l-makhṭūʿāt allatī iqtanathā al-Dār min sanat 1936-1955*, I, Cairo, 1961, p. 243. SAYYID records that *Dār al-kutub, Shanqīḥ* 57, 45ff., 1255/1839, contains a dream manual entitled *Kitāb fī taʿbīr al-ruʿyā*, which is ascribed to Abū al-Ḥasan ʿAlī b. Saʿīd al-Khawlānī al-Qaṣṣār. The *incipit* appears to be identical with that of the Vatican ms., although SAYYID gives only the first six, rather generic words of the *dībājah*. SAYYID states, however, that this dream manual contains 60 chapters (rather than 58).

¹² Shuʿayb AL-ARNĀʾUT ed., *Sharḥ al-sunnah*, XII, Beirut, 1983, p. 202-53 *passim*.

short poetic excerpts on dream interpretation, the first treating dreams of people, the second, dreams of marriage¹³; (4) ff. 206b-207a, a passage derived from an unnamed work (not a dream manual) in which it is explained that the interpretation of a dream can vary with the month in which it is seen; and (5) ff. 207a-229a, an untitled and unscribed dream manual, which is in fact a copy (nearly complete) of the last chapter of Bar Bahlūl's *Books of Signs*, that treating of dream interpretation¹⁴.

Although *Hekimoğlu* 572.1 is a well written and relatively early copy of Bar Bahlūl's *Book of Signs*, it is not without faults. The chapter on dreams, in particular, is often obscure. This is due in part to its extremely laconic style. In part it also stems from what can only be scribal errors. (These problems are compounded by occasional misprints and misreadings in Habbi's edition). There is no need to give a complete collation of this new manuscript witness. To establish its importance, a small sample should suffice (corresponding to the first section of this chapter in Habbi's edition, pp. 382-5)¹⁵.

Page 382 — 4. جميعا : om. V. — **Page 383** — 2. ال : الى H : om. V. — 8. اشبهها : اشبههما V. — 11. لما : ما V. — 11. يحدث : يحبس V. — 12. وادام : تقدم V. — 13. يتقدم : يتقدم H. — 13. وسابع يجعلونه V. — 13. وادوم : يتقدم V. — 13. يحرس : يحدث V. — 17. والسابع : والثامن V. — 15. وتراه : فتراه V. — 17. المعفنة : om. V. — 18. المنحرة : المنحزة H. — **Page 384** — 3. وفي : وفي V. — 5. الصالح العفيف : trans. V. — 4. ستة : خمسة V. — 5. ابانه : منام : نبات V. — 6. وايام : وامام V. — 5. المقبل : المقتبل H. — 8. فاذا اتفق : فاذا كان : فاذا كان V. — 8. وزيادة : وفي زيادة V. — 6. فانه اذا اتفق : ان لا : لا V. — 15. ما : مما V. — 15. اكثر منها : اكثرها V. — 9. فانها اذا اتفق : ان لا : لا V. — 17. التغييرها : تعبيرها V. — **Page 385** — 2. ولتعبير الرويا : ولتعبير الرويا HV. — 3. تعبر : يعبر V. — 2. وادام : وادام HV. — 4. ومرة بالضد و الخلاف add. والنظير post. — 5. وار ادهم : وار ادهم V. — 5. يصرف : تصرف V. — 5. ونظيره : ونظيره V. — 6. ويعبر : وتعبر V.

Where H and V differ in ways that affect the sense of the text, V often offers better readings. Note, for example, the following instances: (i) in H, at 383.15 and 17, the ordinal *al-thāmin* is repeated, while at 383.13, *al-sādis* and *al-sābi'* refer to just one type of dream; V offers a consecutive numeration; (ii) at 383.18, the reading of H and Habbi's tacit cor-

¹³ I have been unable to identify the provenance of these verses.

¹⁴ It corresponds to pp. 382.4-439.9 of HABBI's edition.

¹⁵ H = *Hekimoğlu* 572. V = *Vatican ar.* 1304.

rection make little sense; V does (“food that sends vapors to the brain”); (iii) at 384.3, V’s *sittah* is superior to H’s *khamseh* (there is an allusion here to a well-known *ḥadīth* in which Muḥammad defined the true dream as “one of the 46 parts of prophecy”); (iv) at 384.5, V’s *ayyām* is clearly demanded by the sense of the passage (“and when the trees blossom”); and (v) at 385.4, V’s *adabihim* appears to fit the context better than H’s *irādihim*. Other examples could be noted. Enough have been cited, however, to suggest the value of V for establishing the text of Bar Bahlūl’s *Book of Signs*.

This new witness to Bar Bahlūl’s chapter on dream interpretation is valuable for yet another reason. I have argued elsewhere that this chapter is an abbreviated, but extremely accurate rendering of the dream manual of Ibn Qutaybah (d. 276/889), the earliest extant Muslim dream manual¹⁶. Ibn Qutaybah’s text rests on an extremely slight manuscript basis¹⁷. The parallels between the two texts are so strong that any future edition of Ibn Qutaybah’s text would have to take into account the witness of Bar Bahlūl. This can be done with far more confidence now that an additional manuscript of the latter has come to light.

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¹⁶ *The Sources of Ibn Bahlūl’s Chapter on Dream Divination*, in *Studia patristica*, vol. 33, Louvain, 1996, pp. 553-57

¹⁷ *Hebrew University of Jerusalem, Yah. ar.* 196, 67ff., 845/1441, is the only complete copy of Ibn Qutaybah’s dream manual, although a version of its introduction can be found in *Ankara Üniv. Dil ve Tarih-Coğrafya Fakültesi Ktp., İsmail Sâib* 4501.2, ff. 180a-217b, undated.