Al-Bishāra wa-l-Nidhāra fī Taʿbīr al-Ruʿyā
(The Glad Tidings and Warnings in the Interpretation of Dreams)


In most Muslim households, certain books are commonplace. Alongside the Qurʾān, one might think of Riyāḍ al-Ṣāliḥīn, compiled by al-Nawawī, or Taṣfīr al-Aḥlām, attributed to Ibn Sīrīn, which unquestionably falls into this category. Memories from high school linger where, during breaks, classmates would open this book and discuss the previous night’s dreams. Having delved into the broader issue of pseudepigrapha (texts falsely attributed to authors) in the Islamic context and the ‘ulamā’ in Morocco during the Protectorate era, a quote from one of the most emblematic figures, ʿAbd al-Ḥayy al-Kattānī (d. 1962), caught my attention.1 In his seminal work al-Tarātīb al-Idāriyya, published for the first time in 1927, he focused on the organization of the high administration during the time of the Prophet.2 al-Kattānī dedicated a section to the Companions who interpreted dreams, even during the Prophet’s lifetime. Renowned for his extensive knowledge and rich library, the author mentions a generation of dream interpreters (Ṭabaqāt al-Muʿabbīrīn) attributed to al-Khallāl (d. 439/1047), categorizing them into fifteen groups, including the Companions, the Tābiʿīn, jurists (al-fuqahāʾ), admonishers (al-mudhakkrīn al-wuʿāẓ), and more.

However, ʿAbd al-Ḥayy al-Kattānī issued a warning to the reader, stating, “The books of dream interpretation attributed to Ibn Sīrīn are among the most malicious fabrications against the Salaf. It is inconceivable that this was the first subject the Tābiʿūn documented in writing, considering that written production emerged later, and God knows best.” This skepticism echoes sentiments expressed by a 19th-century scholar, the Tatar al-Shihāb al-Marjānī (d. 1889). Long before them, as cited by al-Kattānī, Ibn al-Qayyim (751/1350) noted that Ibn Sīrīn was of the opinion not to put ḥadīths in writing, let alone

dream interpretation. al-Kattānī humorously concludes that interpreting such a dream would be challenging. It becomes evident that the discovery of the actual author’s identity and, more importantly, a genuine critical and scientific edition of the text, to which flawed commercial publications may not necessarily do justice, had been eagerly awaited. This edition presents the text under its authentic title and authorship, thereby asserting that the dream has become a reality.

*al-Bishāra wa-l-Nidhāra fī Ta‘bīr al-Ru‘yā* (The Glad Tidings and Warnings in the Interpretation of Dreams) is an important Islamic dream manual written by the Sufi Abū Sa‘d ʿAbd al-Malik b. Muḥammad al-Khargūshī (d. 407/1016). This scholarly endeavor, edited by Bilal Orfali and Lina Jammal, not only marks the first critical edition of the text attributed to its real author but also thoroughly studies the book and this prominent figure from Nīshāpūr. This reattribution holds considerable importance. As the editors aptly point out (p. 12), the text evolves from a simple interpretation manual to a witness of the literary symbolic constructions of al-Khargūshī’s era. It provides valuable insights into the symbolic frameworks that characterized that period.

Following the acknowledgments (p. 9) and the prologue (p. 11–12), the edition is preceded by a critical introduction (p. 13–49). It addresses, in a rather conventional manner, the author and his work (p. 13–17), then explores the significance of this book both as a subject of study in modern Western research and as a work belonging to a specific literary field, that of dream interpretation (17–18). Two pages (p. 19–20) examine the connections between Sufism and dream interpretation. The subsequent part of the introduction is more directly focused on the text: its references (p. 21–22), its title (p. 22), and finally, its structure (p. 23–29). The text is structured around an introduction and fifty-nine sections, which the editors suggest classifying into six main categories (p. 11); I) visions of God, angels, prophets, sacred books, visions of paradise, hell, and the vision of an emblem of Islam or one of its ritual practices (sections 1–21); II) visions involving human beings (p. 22–32); III) visions of fauna and flora (p. 33–44); IV) visions of inanimate objects (furniture, utensils) (p. 45–49); v) visions of situations and states (hunger, sleep, marriage) (p. 50–58); VI) mutual visions of the virtuous (p. 59).

Following brief paragraphs summarizing the state of research on dream interpretation (p. 29–30) and the general importance of editing such manuals (p. 31), the introduction concludes with an extensive section discussing the methodology employed for the critical edition (p. 31–49). This section effectively demonstrates that the edition is substantial, relying on the analysis of eight manuscripts intricately connected through a well-established *stemma codicum* (p. 38). The critical edition (p. 53–482) is succeeded by a bibliography...
(p. 483–491) and diverse indices (sources, studies, verses, hadith, proper names, locations) (483–574). Following two pages on the editors and the table of contents (573–578), these sections effectively conclude the work.

However, a few observations need to be made. The passage from ‘Abd al-Hayy’s Tarātīb, previously mentioned, eloquently demonstrates that the question of attributing the text to Ibn Sirin was already contested in Muslim scholarly circles in the early 20th century, the 19th century, and even much earlier, as evidenced by the citation from Ibn al-Qayyim. Unfortunately, none of this is evident in the introduction. Furthermore, certain passages (p. 17) may give the misleading impression that the misattribution arose due to the 1867 Bulaq edition.

Subsequently, al-Kattānī underscores the distinct connection between ta‘bīr (dream interpretation) and fatwā (legal opinion), keeping in mind the verse from Sūrat Yūsuf, where the King of Egypt requested the interpretation of his dream: “Interpret for me my vision (Aftūnī fi ru‘yāya).” The discussion on the significance of visions in Sufism (p. 20) could have benefited from an enriched exploration of its “legal” aspect, as the mu‘abbir (interpreter of dreams) is equated with a muftī (legal jurist). This likely reflects the reaction of fuqahāʾ (jurists) to the emergence of Sufi literature centered around dream interpretation, and this is one of the factors that led some jurists to prohibit the interpretation of dreams solely based on this book.

The text is written in classical Arabic and features technical vocabulary, particularly regarding fauna and flora, which may not be fully accessible to a broad Arabic-speaking audience. The editors have been aware of this and have provided definitions at the bottom of the page from Lisān al-ʿArab. Hence, the definition of the dung beetle (ju‘al) as dābba sawdāʾ min dawābb al-ard (p. 319) does not effectively differentiate this creature from an ant or a scarab beetle, for example. It might have been more appropriate to rely on more recent dictionaries and, if possible, to offer, for instance, one or two equivalents in dialect for each “exotic” animal name. Let’s take the example of banāt wardān (p. 319, 871). An Arabic reader might not necessarily be aware that it refers to a cockroach. In contrast, a note indicating that it corresponds to the term “ṣarsūr” could have clarified any confusion, as this term is widely known, including among Moroccans who refer to it as sarrāq al-zāt.

Furthermore, there are some regrettable typographical errors or unjustified spelling choices, such as writing ru‘yat al-nabi specifically with a tā marbūta (p. 12), while all other occurrences of the passage in question (ru‘yā l-lāh, ru‘yā l-islām, ru‘yā l-bashar) do not have it. Other examples include the Arabization
of the English name Melchert into German (Malkhart) (p. 16); “Ehèse” (instead of Ephèse) (p. 19); “al-aqdam” instead of “al-qudmā” (p. 22) (the superlative adjective defined by al- agrees in gender with the feminine noun); “al-salam” instead of “al-salām” (p. 24).

In conclusion, notwithstanding the highlighted technical intricacies, it is crucial not to lose sight of the overarching significance of *al-Bishāra wa-l-Nidhāra fi Taʿbīr al-Ruʿyā*, a substantial contribution to the field of Islamic dream interpretation. The publication of this work represents the culmination of the assiduous efforts of Bilal Orfali and Lina Jammal. Their commitment to crafting a publication that strikes a balance between accessibility for a broader readership and scholarly expertise ensures its appeal to both the public and researchers alike.

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