
The 'Uyūn al-axbār of Ibn Qutaiba was partly edited by C. Brockelmann (Weimar & Strassburg 1898-1908). A complete edition was published in Cairo (4 vols., Dār al-kutub 1925-30). An English translation was begun by J. Horovitz (Islamic culture, 4, 1930, 5, 1931). In the present work L. Kopf gives a translation of part of the fourth juz', p. 62-109 of the Cairo edition with some extracts from the other parts of the same juz. In a Philological introduction the translator treats of the literary character of the 'Uyūn without entering deeply into the subject. In a Zoological commentary and analysis of contents Prof. Bodenheimer, the well known historian of science, outlines "the zoological system" of Ibn Qutaiba and aims at pointing out his sources of information.

As is apparent from the title given to this publication, the editor lays stress upon the interest of "The natural history section" of the 'Uyūn for the history of science as "one of the earliest authentic sources for Arab traditions on animals and on animal lore in a concentrated form, in contrast to the abundance of such traditions as are scattered throughout the ancient poetry and the proverbs of the Arabs". He is of the opinion that "this earliest type of an Arabic ‘Book of Knowledge’ forms a markstone in the early development of Arab natural history" and that "none of the later developments can be understood and appreciated without a careful study and analysis of these beginnings".

Most of the material included in the 'Uyūn is, it need hardly be said, drawn from ḥadīṯ, poetry and proverbs, a number of chapters being entirely based on these sources. As to "the Author of the Agriculture" (ṣāḥib al-fīlāḥa) quoted in nine instances, Prof. Bodenheimer supposes some Arabic translation of the Geoponica of Cassianus Bassus or some similar Byzantine works on agriculture. In some six instances where no literary source is referred to, he hints at zoological parallels in the Talmud. There are three direct quotations from "the Author of the Logic" (i.e. Aristotle), a rather limited number, if one considers the strong supplementary evidence that Ibn Qutaiba perused—as is said in the commentary—"a fairly good Arabic paraphrase of the Historia animalium".

According to the editor it is, however, most improbable that the full text of the Historia animalium was available to Ibn Qutaiba. The problem of the translation is not otherwise touched upon in the present work. In the opinion of the editor all that can be said is that the quotations from Aristotle—frequently but not always indicated in the commentary—show that even the earliest Arab writers had contact with the Greek traditions of science. He does not inform the reader that, according to Ibn an-Nadim (al-Fihrist, p. 254, 1. 21), the Historia animalium was translated (or
paraphrased) by Yahyā ibn al-Bītīrq and that, in all probability, this is the translation quoted by Jāhiz in his Kitāb al-ḥayawān (and also by Muḥammā ibn Zuhair in his book on the dove, K. al-ḥayawān, 2, p. 79 f.).

One is indeed rather surprised to learn that, according to the translator, it is "improbable that the Book of animals [of Jāhiz] was directly used by Ibn Qutaiba" and that, instead, it must be assumed "on the grounds of the conditions of learning in those time", that both drew from the same traditional sources. As appears from this, the possibility that Ibn Qutaiba simply drew from the K. al-ḥayawān has not been seriously taken into consideration. The only reason seems to be the fact that the name of the famous writer is not mentioned in this chapter. Of course this reason is not valid, as can be demonstrated beyond any doubt by literary evidence. As far as I can see, Ibn Qutaiba in his works never speaks of Jāhiz in terms used by a disciple speaking of his teacher. In the Uyun he refers some four times to him with the phrase "from one of Jāhiz’s books which he permitted us to narrate on his authority" (awānimā acāza lanā min kutubih). That Ibn Qutaiba drew information from written works without mentioning them holds true also of his historical work, the K. al-maṣārif. As far as Jāhiz is concerned, one must also take into consideration the attitude of Ibn Qutaiba towards the new education of his time. He belongs himself, as is well known, to the old school and refers ironically to the new philosophical tendencies of the mutakallimūn, which he savagely attacked in his Ta’līf muṣṭafal-al-ḥadīq. Nevertheless, as a writer, he had to admit the fact that a book of "adab" could no more be written without the new branches of learning represented by Jāhiz and other mutakallimūn. He puts Jāhiz on a line with the anonymous "Sages" and quotes him, without restraint, just as he avoids any mention of the teachers under whom he studied ilm al-kalām in Basra. Take for instance the chapter on the natural properties of man (p. 34 of the translation, p. 63 of the Arabic text). What is here referred to as sayings of the "Sages" one finds almost word by word in the following passages of the Ḥayawān: i, p. 106 (on castration); i, p. 108 (on baldness), p. 116, 106, 135 (on the eunuch), 5, p. 207; 2, p. 350 (on mules, on sparrows); 1, p. 310 (on a drowned person); 5, p. 117 (on a beheaded man); 4, p. 52 (on 'Abd as-Ṣamad b. 'Ali, who went to the grave with his milk-teeth).

There is clear evidence too that the quotations from Aristotle were drawn from the Ḥayawān and not from a source common to both authors. Two of them are referred to "the Author of the Logic".

XII, 4 (p. 70 of the Arabic text). Wolves leap bitches in the land of Sahāq; whence the Sahāqī dogs.—H. a. 607a 1. In Cyrene wolves and dogs copulate and bring forth young.

Apparently the identification of "the land of Rūmiya" (in the translation of Ibn al-Bītīrq?) with Sahāq in Yemen is due to better correspondence with the Sahāqī dogs.

XVIII, 2 (p. 83). An elephant was observed which lived 400 years.—H. a. 596a, 11. The elephant is said by some to live for about 200 years; by others, for 300.

In a third instance Ibn Qutaiba refers to "the Author of the Logic"; but, in fact, there is no reference to the saying in Aristotle, nor is it ascribed to him in the Ḥayawān.

XXVIII, 3 (p. 69). The Author of the Logic says: If an eagle feels pains in its liver...