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Ibn Zabara’s *Book of Delight* (Barcelona, 1170)
and the Transmission of Wisdom From East to West

The *Sefer Sha’ashu’im* (Book of Delight) was written around 1170 by Ibn Zabara in Barcelona, in other words, in Christian Spain. The language is Hebrew rhyming prose, a literary Hebrew which has a link to classical Arabic. With his book, Ibn Zabara wanted not only to entertain, but also to present a portrait of the knowledge which he had acquired, which constituted his ideological world view. In his book, he married knowledge of religious tradition with knowledge of the science, wisdom and literature of his day. His book is a snapshot of the transfer of knowledge from East to West. The comment of the illustrious scholar Chaim Schwarzbaum, that the book in question shows “the broad erudition of the author, not only in the field of the Bible, Talmud and Midrash, but also in the field of every genre of Classical Arabic literature,” is extremely appropriate in this connection. With the aid of the various genres which Ibn Zabara used in his work, we shall endeavour to determine what position he occupies in the transmission of Eastern culture to the West.

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About Ibn Zabāra’s life, little is known, and the little that we do know is derived more or less entirely from his own work. What is certain is that he became a medical practitioner, since the only other work that can be ascribed to him with certainty, The Verses on the Soul, is about medical subjects. In his Sefer Sha’ashu’im, the first person narrator is a doctor. His Maecenas, Sheshet ibn Benveniste, lived from circa 1131 to 1209. He worked first in the service of the count of Barcelona, and later for the kings of Aragon, Alphonse II and Pedro II. For his medical works and Hebrew verses, he was praised by illustrious contemporaries such as Benjamin of Tudela and Yehuda al-Ḥarfūzi. The last-mentioned also dubbed Ibn Zabāra a poet of the third rank.

Ibn Zabāra’s book, which deals with a journey with the devil, contains various literary genres: besides poems, stories, anecdotes and aphorisms (wisdom literature, stories with ethical maxims for political leaders), we also find scientific and religious quotes which are often intended as literary amusement. For these reasons, the book’s title, Sefer Sha’ashu’im, literally “The Book of Delights”, is also sometimes translated as the “Book of Pleasant Instruction”. In its entirety, the book has the character of a frame-story, in which a journey is undertaken. The journey ends at the maecenas. This is similar to the journey’s end in the Arabic long poem (qasida). The first person narrator Joseph, a doctor from Barcelona, is persuaded by a certain Enan to accompany him on a journey, after a lengthy discussion about whether he should or should not go on the journey, and whether he should not first ask his wife’s advice on the question. In the course of the discussion, stories support the argumentation. Thereupon Enan takes Joseph through several cities, including the city of Tova, probably Cordoba, the centre of learning, whose Arabic name Qurtuba, according to a false etymology was explained as “Good City” (Qirya Tova) in Hebrew. During the journey, Joseph pursues scientific discussions with Enan, and Enan is ultimately found wanting as a scholar. Moreover, he appears to be a descendant of the devil’s family of Asmodeus. On arrival in Enan’s paternal city, Joseph remains some time. However, he finds it terrible there, and wants to flee from the godless materialism of people who are only interested in the yield of their vineyards and cattle, people for whom wisdom, scholarship and literature are of little value. The “poet” finally turns to the Maecenas Sheshet ibn Benveniste, who is described in the terminology of the Arabic panegyric (he is the friend of Generosity and many other virtues). It is striking that the last chapter focuses on calumny and gossip as the greatest sin. It is as if the writer is separated from his Maecenas by the wicked talk of others, and from the depths of the terror

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1 Cf. Israel Davidson, op. cit.; Hebrew title: Batte ha-Nefesh.
3 For a table of contents of the book see Appendix I.
of his difficult journey, turns to his Maecenas as a sort of Redeemer, who can bring him back to his vicinity. However, the story does not have the form of an Arabic poem, but is rather what is known as an Arabic *maqāma*, a genre which might best be described as a story-telling text in rhyming prose. Ibn Zabāra’s frame-story, which is larded with conversation about medical subjects and all manner of aphorisms and sayings of scholars, is one of the types of frame-story which exists in world literature. The stories which are told within a frame-story are sometimes intended as a delay of execution, such as in the frame of the *1001 Nights* (*Arabian Nights*), in which Sheherazade postpones her death sentence; they serve as a way of passing the time, as in the *Canterbury Tales* or during a plague epidemic, as in Boccaccio’s *Decameron*; they may be used for the sake of argumentation, for example for or against a person’s execution, such as in the cycle of the *Seven Wise Masters*, or in *Kalīla wa-Dīnum*, an original Indian fable for rulers. In Josef ibn Zabāra’s frame-story, the stories are used on the one hand as argumentation, such as in the debate about the reliability or unreliability of women, while on the other hand they are told to pass the time during the journey.

A large proportion of the text concerns scientific discussions and proverbs. The learned conversations between Joseph and the devil Enan are important for the development of the story, since their discussions about food arise from Enan’s lack of hospitality. Also, Enan does not have an answer to all of Joseph’s questions, and is thus found wanting as a scholar, which results in a quick end to the story. As to the question of what is the right food, Joseph and Enan have different opinions. Joseph thinks that a person should not go hungry for too long, while Enan is of the opinion that the appetite for food should be curbed, and that reason must have the upper hand over desire.

Knowledge is thus served up in the form of a dialogue. This form is already to be found in antiquity, but was particularly widely used in the Middle Ages. We also see this form applied in the *Disciplina Clericalis* by Petrus Alfonsi (11th century), and in the wise anecdote in general, in which the teacher is often talking to the pupil.

There are Arabic and Hebrew collections which contain aphorisms, such as the collection entitled the *Morals of the Philosophers*, and the classically-inspired *Al-Sirr wa-l-Asrār* (*Secretum Secretorum*), which enjoyed great renown in Western Europe in the Middle Ages. The anecdotes, however, are also to be found in various other Arabic and Judeo-Arabic works such as in the *Kitāb Alif Bā‘* (“The Alphabet Book”) by al-Balawi (1132–1207), or the collection of aphorisms by Solomon ibn Gabirol (1022–1070) entitled *Selected Pearls*, which was later translated into Hebrew by Yehuda ibn Tibbon (twelfth century). Recent research by Ratzaby has shown that the aphorisms used by Ibn Zabāra originate largely from

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*Footnotes:*


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Arabic sources. A large number of the aphorisms stated by Ibn Zahāra are attributed to classical philosophers, such as Aristotle, who was traditionally thought to be the tutor of Alexander the Great. The aphorisms which set out wise behaviour for rulers belong to the genre of stories which contain a moral for rulers. In the later Western-European literature of the Renaissance, we see how wise aphorisms continue to fulfill this function. For example, Machiavelli’s Life of [the prince] Castruccio Castracani concludes with the deathbed scene of the protagonist. In his Testament, he gives a lengthy summing-up of aphorisms, which derive from late-classical sources such as Diogenes Laertius (third century), and also frequently have a character which is not specifically aimed at the ruler, but is applicable to humankind in general.

Greek scholars whom Ibn Zahāra mentions by name are Socrates, Plato, Aristotle and Diogenes, and the medical doctors Galen and Hippocrates. A number of the anecdotes which Ibn Zahāra tells about, for example, Socrates, also have their origins in the Greek writer Diogenes Laertius, who, in his work Lives, tenets and sayings of famous philosophers, provides a treasure house of information about classical Greek thinkers, but Ibn Zahāra probably drew it from contemporary Arabic sources, such as the following anecdotes, which can also be found in the work of the Arabic-Andalusian writer al-Balawī (1132–1207). In a fable a fox tells a leopard sayings and anecdotes about wise men and their negative opinions about women.11

Here some examples are given of Socrates and Diogenes:

“Socrates, the divine philosopher, also, in the abundance of his wisdom and the greatness of his piety, hated women and loathed to look into their countenances. His own wife was spare and short, and when his disciples asked of him, ‘How came it that such a man as thou art should wed such a woman as this?’ he replied, ‘I have chosen the lesser of the evil.’”

“One day as he was walking with his disciples in the cool of the day there passed before him a woman of comely figure and beautiful appearance, and one of his disciples gazed at her. Socrates said to him, ‘Woe is thee, wherefore dost thou gaze upon her?’ The disciple replied, ‘Not for love nor for desire do I gaze, but to behold in her form the craftsmanship of the Creator.’ The master said, ‘Turn her inside out; then you will understand her ugliness.’”

“Another time he was walking upon the way and he saw a woman hanging from a fig tree. He said, ‘Would that all the fruit of this tree were the same.’”

“And once he was walking with his disciples by the banks of a river, where a certain woman was washing clothes. She cried out upon him, and cursed him, and reviled him, and heaped him with

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abuse; then she threw of the water upon him and drenched him. He said: ‘Surely she has cast her lightning and hurled her thunder, and now she brings forth rain.’”

“One of the notables built a new house, and wrote above the door: ‘May no evil enter this house.’ The philosopher Diogenes happened to be passing by, saw what was written, and added in his own hand: ‘So how is your wife supposed to come in?’”

“Further, when one man reported to another, ‘Your enemy has perished,’ he replied, ‘if you would have said, ‘He has taken a wife,’’ I had been better pleased.”

The medical and biological material harks back mainly to Galen (ca. 135–210)

Among the anecdotes which are of medical importance, we find the one concerning the eating of red earth. This goes as follows:

“Warlord al-Hajjaj (d. 714) said to his doctor Tayadun: ‘I am overwhelmed by a desire to eat red earth’, but I am striving to suppress it. Do you have a medicine against this?’

Tayadun answered: ‘My lord, you destroy heroes and extirpate strong men, you make the exalted quake, and your enemies tremble; over all you are powerful, so surely you are master over your longings for earth?’

But the Warlord persisted: ‘Which medicine exists for this?’

‘Promise me, lord, that you will not be angry.’

‘I would not ask if 1 could not promise as much’.

Then Tayadun said: ‘Wise men and heroes do not eat it, only fools.’ Then the commander became ashamed, and swore that he would never eat it again.”

The interesting point about this anecdote is also the habit to which he refers, namely the eating of red clay. This is forbidden in the Talmud, but also occurs with great frequency in Arabic literature, such as the 10th Century Kitâb al-Muwashshâ (“Book of Embroidered Cloth”), while Teresa Garulo in her article on eating mud showed this to be an Andalusian custom, and it turns out to be even a current practice among pregnant women in Egypt, to eat red earth.

Numerous other medical, biological and physical points and physiognomy are dealt with: questions concerning the place of the senses in the brain, the salt...
content of the Dead Sea, and the digestion of food in relation to fluids. To quote an example of physiognomy from Ibn Zabārā:

“Someone with a fiery skin colour is rash and hasty, and often tells lies. A person with deep-set eyes and darting glances is shrewd, cunning and not short of answers. A person with bushy eyebrows is melancholic, sad and laden with cares. A person with a pointed nose but with wide nostrils is touchy, quarrelsome and quick to take offence. Someone with a round forehead, which is wide on the upper side, is excited by everything he says and does. The person with big, thick lips is mad, bad-tempered and quarrelsome. The big-eared individual is stupid and full of foolishness. Someone who has a short neck is treacherous, a layer of ambushes, an enemy to all. Someone who has a large abdomen and a fleshy upper body, his foolishness shall disappear, or at least diminish. Narrow shoulders are a sign of an empty soul, small hands a sign of a lack of knowledge. The tall person is a fool, a sinner in all his deeds, who blindly follows his desires. Because he is too tall, his heart is too narrow, not wide enough for his breast. One of the two ventricles is thus too small to contain the blood that supplies it, and since the brain is therefore only supplied by the remaining blood, both are weak: the heart’s capacity for discernment and the brain’s capacity for thought are both limited. Moreover, the distance between heart and brain is too great, such that both the faculties of discernment and thought cannot quickly join together. This means that his knowledge is always lacking.”

An important passage with respect to the transmission of wisdom from East to West is a discussion between Joseph ibn Zabārā and Enan on harmful food, part of which was literally taken from the Physician’s Dinner by Ibn Butlān. Earlier Schirman stressed the analogy between Zabārā’s harmful food passage and a passage from Cervantes’ Don Quijote (See for this, Appendix II).

Now we turn to the stories as they relate to the transmission from East to West. I believe that there is much evidence for the Arabic transmission of the stories. We are not able to review all fifteen stories, although we may remark that most of the stories are known elsewhere in world literature. However, Ibn Zabārā reworks some of the stories in his own way. Thus, in Ibn Zabārā’s version of two stories which are known elsewhere, women are shown in an even more disgraceful light than in other versions: we refer here, for example, to Ibn Zabārā’s version of the dispute between the king and his counsellors, in which the king proves that even the most virtuous of women is good for nothing, and a virtuous married couple was put to the test, and the wife in Ibn Zabārā’s version comes out of it even worse than in an earlier Judeo-Arabic version: the story is well known from the Judeo-Arabic Kitāb al-Faraj ba’da al-Shiddah by Nissim ibn Shāhīn. It is a king of the Arabs (in Nissim ibn Shāhīn’s work: king Solomon) who utters the following words, when hearing his wise men speak about the virtues of women: “Cut short your talk

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20 Cf. Sherwood in her Introduction to Hadas’ translation of the Book. See also Yehadith Dishon, op. cit.; and Eva Schreiber, op. cit.
21 Nissim ibn Shāhīn (990–1062, Qairuwan and Susa), Kitāb al-Faraj ba’da al-Shiddah ("Relief After Adversity"), edited by J. Obermann, Yale (UP) 1933 and Shraga Abramson, Jerusalem 1965; id., An Elegant Composition Concerning Relief After Adversity, transl. from the Arabic by William Brinner, Yale (UP) 1977, 56ff.
and restrain your words, for never has there been seen or reported a woman who was good and virtuous, endowed with understanding and knowledge. Their love is only for their own benefit and their own pleasure; they have no government over their desires and they sin against themselves.” But the wise men do not agree with him and say: “Let not the king say so, for there are indeed women that are wise and understanding, virtuous and faithful. They love and honor their husbands, find covering for their households and sustenance for their sons and daughters; in them there is neither fault nor disrepute.” But then the king speaks: “See whether you can find [in our city] a single woman endowed with the virtues you spoke of and the qualities you mentioned.” Then his viziers sought and found a chaste and wise woman, beautiful as the sun, the wife of a wealthy merchant. The king puts her husband to the test asking him to kill his wife and children and to marry his only daughter. The husband, however, remains faithful to his wife, whereas the king says: “You are not a man, your heart is that of a woman.” Then his wife is put to trial: if she kills her husband, she will be the queen tomorrow. But she is given a sword of tin. When at night she strikes her husband to kill him, the sword does not work. Then both the husband and his wife have to relate their stories in the palace. And the wise men of the king hear them and have to admit the king’s wisdom about the faithlessness of women. In Ibn Zabara’s version the wife reproaches the king the following day that he gave her a bad sword, while in Ibn Shāhīn’s version the wife immediately tells the whole truth.

The same applies to Ibn Zabara’s version of Petronius Arbiter’s Matron of Ephesus (Rome in Ibn Zabara’s story). In the original version, at a cemetery the matron is bewailing her buried husband. She attracts the attentions of a knight or guard who has to watch over the corpse of a criminal, which was hanged on a tree. Between the guard and the matron a love relationship takes place. But during their love the hanged corpse is stolen. The knight is very much afraid of the consequences. Then the matron substitutes the stolen corpse with the corpse of her recently deceased husband. The widow abused the body of her dead husband in order to save the life of her lover. As far as the difference between the two versions is concerned, Merriam Sherwood describes it as follows:

“In Petronius’ version] the knight who guards the corpse is obliged to exert considerable persuasion, even stratagem, to win the widow to his advances. Although it is the widow who proposes to replace the stolen corpse by that of her husband, she makes the proposal only after the knight has threatened to stab himself. There is no mutilation of the husband’s corpse, and there is no subsequent marriage of the two partners in guilt.”

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22 Davidson, op. cit., 26ff.
23 Petronius, Satyricon, chapter 111.
24 Davidson, op. cit., 32–33.
In Ibn Zabārā’s version it is the widow who plays the bad role: she solicits the favour of the knight, digs up the corpse of her husband and mutilates it to replace the stolen corpse.

The fifteenth and last story of Ibn Zabārā’s book has many parallels in Western European literature, such as the Spanish exempla collection El Conde Lucanor by Don Juan Manuel (fourteenth century). It was so well-known that a proverb arose in many languages: what the devil cannot do himself, he lets an old woman see to it.

In most versions, the tale begins as follows: a devil has tried for a long time, usually several years, to sow strife between a loving husband and wife. Because he has failed, he passes on the job to an old woman. There is even a ninth-century Latin version of this introductory motif. A tenth-century Arabic version, by the name of Humayd at-Tūsī, does not have the same introduction as the versions of the Sefer Sha’ashu’īm and the Conde Lucanor, but contains the main part of the story. Here, it is not the woman with the devil who introduces the story, but the story of a slave who is sold. The new owner is told that the slave only has one fault, namely slandering. Just as with the woman in the other version, as soon as he is in service, he tells the man (the owner) that his wife wants to kill him, and tells the woman that her husband wants to divorce her, but that she can bewitch her husband so that he will return to her, on condition that she brings three hairs from his chin. The woman goes off to cut off the hairs. The man then takes his sword and kills her, not doubting what the slave had told him. Then, the wife’s brothers come and kill the husband. Thus both are killed as a result of the slander of the slave. The Arabic version is economical, not a word too many. Our summary is about the same length as the anecdote itself.

The versions of Ibn Zabārā’s Sefer Sha’ashu’īm and Don Juan Manuel’s Conde Lucanor begin with the scene with the devil and the washerwoman or treacherous foreigner. In Ibn Zabārā’s work, Enan tells his story in the first person, after earlier revealing himself to be a devil. The episodes of the story in the versions mentioned are far more elaborate in comparison with the Arabic version. The last episode of this version puts the emphasis on both the death of the woman and the man, and on their family members and finally the whole town, as a result of a mutual vendetta. In Ibn Zabārā’s version, 220 people meet their deaths, in Juan Don Manuel’s version the majority of the population. The sequence of the episodes in Ibn Zabārā’s version is largely the same as in the Arabic version. In the story of Conde Lucanor, the treatment of the story is even more elaborated.

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26 Davidson, op. cit., 138ff.
28 Ibidem, note 6, mentions a version by Rabanus Maurus (d. 858).
Ibn Zabāra probably based his version of the story on the ninth-century Latin and tenth-century Arabic sources. Ibn Zabāra’s story was until recently considered to be the oldest version, which stood as a model for Castillian versions such as Don Juan Manuel’s El Conde Lucanor, but more recently it appears that – since Ble­cua’s edition and Marzolph’s Arabia Ridens20 – there are older sources on which Ibn Zabāra based his work.

As a general conclusion, when surveying the entire field which Ibn Zabāra deals with – narrative subsections, poems, scientific anecdotes and discussions – it may be stated that it would appear from ever-smaller detailed discoveries, that Ibn Zabāra’s Sefer Sha’ashu’im, despite the fact that it was written in a Christian, partly Romance ambience, mainly has Arab culture and literature as its point of reference, rather than being influenced by Romance culture and mentality. The Romance dialects were, as well as the Arabic dialects, the spoken language of Jews, Christians and Muslims, also in Muslim Spain. But despite this bilingualism, it may be stated that, from a cultural perspective, Classical Arabic culture predominated, and that the Romance languages in Spain (Castillian, Galician-Portuguese and Occitan/Catalan) only gained their cultural identity more gradually, while Latin had ceased to be in the Muslim area a cultural language virtually immediately after the conquest of Spain21.

Appendix I

Contents of Ibn Zabāra’s Sefer Sha’ashu’im

[chapter 1] Joseph sees in his dream an exceedingly tall man, who awakes him and gives him to eat. But first there is a dispute about prayer, food and wine.

[chapter 2] The stranger’s name is Enan ha-Natas: he tries to persuade Joseph to leave his own country and accompany him to a place where his wisdom will be properly recognized. Joseph fears to follow him and tells many parables to show the cause of his fear. Finally, however, he is convinced and will go.

1. The Fox and the Leopard. This story is itself the framework for the five immediately following:

2. The Fox and the Lion
3. The Silversmith of Babylonia
4. The Woodcutter of Damascus
5. A Faithful Husband & Faithless Wife

20 See above.
21 For the language situation, see Otto Zwartjes, Love Songs from al-Andalus, Leiden, 5–22.
6. The Roman Knight & the Widow.

[chapter 3] Joseph and Enan go upon their way, riding upon their asses. Enan tells him story no.7.

7. The Clever Peasant Girl

[chapter 4] Joseph and Enan come to a village and stay there. Food and water are scarce, also their beasts lack provisions. At the break of dawn they rise and continue their way.

[chapter 5] Joseph and Enan pass a city, and Enan tells about the wisdom of a judge who dwelt there of old.

8. The Dishonest Precentor

9. Jacob of Cordoba and the Nobleman

10. The True & the False Son

[chapter 6] Joseph and Enan arrive at the city of Tova, where an old man shows them his hospitality, and entertains them with various stories.

11. The Story of Tobith

12. The Miracle of the Paralytic

[chapter 7] Joseph and Enan arrive at a city where Rabbi Yehuda lives, a friend of Enan. He invites them to his house, and lays the table before them, and rejoices their hearts with 99 pleasant parables.

[chapter 8] Enan brings Joseph to his city and his house, his servant lays the table for them, brings them unleavened bread, lettuce, and a bowl of vinegar. Joseph grumbles because of the meagre food, whereupon the servant is ordered to bring flesh. In the meantime they discuss good health in relation to food. Enan adduces proofs from the ancient philosophers that a man should beware from excess in eating. Finally, the slave brings the meat, but Enan permits Joseph only to eat the bones, because the other members of the sheep are not fit for food. But Joseph does not listen to him, and eats until he is satisfied.

13. The Princess and the Winter-Blooming Flowers

14. The Fox in the Garden

[chapter 9] Enan proves Joseph's knowledge of medicine by 32 questions.

[chapter 10] Joseph tries Enan with 21 questions of various sciences, but Enan fails to answer.

[chapter 11] Joseph wonders why he did not hear a sound from his ass during the night, and discovers that Enan's servant has muzzled its mouth so that it nearly perished of hunger. Joseph reproaches Enan for his inhumanity, but Enan declares that he is no human but a demon from Asmodeus' family. However, Enan assures Joseph that no harm will befall him.
[chapter 12] Joseph stays in Enan’s city during a certain period of time. He considers the inhabitants of the city wicked and sinful. Joseph persuades Enan not to marry the daughter of an unlettered man.

15. The Washerwoman & the Demon

[chapter 13] Joseph does not like the men of that place, and wants to return to his maecenas, Sheshet Ibn Benveniste.

Appendix II

*Ibn Buṭlān’s Physicians dinner and Ibn Zabārā’s Book of Delight*

Geert Jan van Gelder, professor of Arabic at Oxford University, after reading our translation into Dutch of *Sefer ha-Sha’ashu’im*, wrote to me saying that passages from Zabārā’s eighth chapter made him recall the second chapter of Ibn Buṭlān’s *Risālat Da’wat al-Atibbā‘*. (“Physicians’ Dinner Party”)

When I read through the Physicians’ Dinner as edited by Felix Klein-Franke, I indeed discovered some identical passages, literally identical as well as expressing the same general ideas. Felix Klein-Franke himself mentioned Ibn Zabārā in a note in his translation of the book. He mentioned that Schirmann saw parallels between Ibn Zabārā’s *Sha’ashu’im* and Cervantes’ Don Quijote, but did not admit an Arabic source, but this is now rejected by the book of Ibn Buṭlān. However, Klein-Franke does not develop this topic.

Reading Ibn Buṭlān (d. 1066) and Ibn Zabārā (ca. 1140-ca. 1210), we find some remarkable passages which they have in common, e.g. a longer narrative passage, some sayings of philosophers about eating, and some little poems.

A. The longer narrative passage of Ibn Buṭlān’s text (pp. 20–21) goes as follows (translated from the Arabic into English):

“I put my hand forth to the shoulders, but he said: ‘Beware of them, because they receive from the heart the excretions’. So I reached for the breast, but he said: ‘Don’t take care of this, because it delays digestion’. Then I turned toward the kidneys, but he said: ‘They are the source of the urine and the sap of the blood.’ Then I got ready for the two tighs (the shin); but he said: ‘They are very near the bowels and the excrements.’ Then I asked him permission to take [of] the tail, but he said: ‘By God, take care of your soul, because they are filthy and bad and kill the desire and cause diarrhea.’”

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32 Josef ibn Zabara, *Reis met de duivel*, op. cit.
And the text of Ibn Zabāra (p. 96) (translated from the Hebrew into English):

“When I put my hands forth to the shoulders of the mutton, that I might eat of them, he said to me, ‘Beware lest you eat of them, for they do contain the humors of the heart.’ So I reached for the breast, but he said, ‘do not touch it, not even in your dreams, for it delays digestion in the stomach.’ I raised my hands to the kidneys, whereupon he said, ‘They are the source of the urine, and the refuse of the blood.’ I lifted my hands to the knees; but he said: ‘They are very near the bowels, from which the dung comes out.’ So I turned my hand back to take of the tail, which comes after the spine. ‘Of no good is the spine,’ said he, ‘for it is filthy and bad and kills the wicked desire of him who takes it.’”

B. Another longer passage just precedes the mentioned passage and consists of a short saying by Socrates or Hippocrates [Suqrat/ Buqrat] followed by a long saying by Galen. The identical passage by Ibn Buṭlān (pp. 19, 20) and Ibn Zabāra (pp. 95, 96) goes as follows:36

“Therefore, beware of the eating of flesh; as Socrates [Hippocrates] has said, ‘Guard you from eating flesh and] make not your bellies burial places for cattle.’ And Galen hath said, ‘There is no fool as the man who fills his belly with whatever he finds, and relies that the red bile will digest the things that are sour, and the white bile the things that are salt, and the black bile the things that are greasy and fat.’ For red bile is as the little child [the eagle/child*]; a fruit [a stork/date* = temara?] may appease it, yet a word [heron/word* = imra?] may provoke it; and the black bile is as an ox: a mere lad or a woman may lead it, but when it is in rut, he cannot be retained [even a strong man may not stand before it]; and white bile is like the lion: if it be not slain it slays [read Arabic text: in qutila, wa-illā, qatala = when slain, there will be no danger, but when not, he will slay, AS]. Therefore master the white bile as you master your slave, and make your peace with the black bile as you make peace with a friend [an enemy/ a friend*], and humble yourself to the red bile as you humble yourself to your enemy [one who is greater than you]. Refrain from a variety of food, because the combination of many diverse victuals, [inas-much as they are not of a simple sort], confuse the stomach from digesting them, and render it unable to transmute them [into blood]. Eat no hard substances, for they do destroy the teeth and corrupt the digestion. Divide your eating into thirds: a third for food, a third for drink, a third for breath. Refrain from food which causes you to visit often the latrine [Because it is of no avail the belly to be swollen or to visit the latrine many times].”

C. Two poems found in the Arabic work of Ibn Buṭlān (p. 16) as well as in Hebrew work of Ibn Zabāra (p.90), one of them in the respective second and eighth chapters about eating: [metre Wafir in IB; Kamil in IZ; rhyme -r]

IB-Truly when bitter makes happy, it is sweet/ and sweet when it harms, is bitter.//
– Take bitter, then you will encounter benefit from it/ and do not turn yourself to sweet which harms.///
IZ-Bitter when it is useful, is sweet, even when bitter/ truly when sweet harms, it is very bitter//
– Therefore a wise of heart eats the bitter which is useful/ and he refrains from sweet which harms.///

The italics in the text refer to words in Ibn Buṭlān (IB), not in Ibn Zabāra (IZ); [ ] to the published text of IZ; [*] to corrected variants of IZ, mentioned in the notes made by Davidson.
The other poem is a combination of conventional love motives from Ibn Buṭlān’s fifth chapter (p. 35), and Ibn Zabār’s twelfth chapter (p. 135). The poem composed by Isrā’īl al-Kaḥḥāl goes as follows:

**IB**- They said: his eye is suffering, but I said to them: because of the heavy killing the illness has harmed it/
– The redness of it comes from the blood of the ones it has killed/ and the blood on the sword is a marvelous testimony// [metre basit; rhyme -bu]

**IZ**- They said to me: the eyes of the [female] gazelle have become red/ because it is an illness belonging to the nature of destruction/
– I answer them: They [the eyes] shed the blood of lovers, and therefore the blood on the edge of the sword is a faithful testimony// [metre kamil; rhyme -b]