

In my introduction to my translation of Baha' Allah's Qasida warqa'iyya (Bulletin 2:2, Sept. 1983), I emphasized that it was 'a very tentative personal rendering of a difficult text' and expressed serious reservations about the accuracy of the version I had prepared. Since then I have been both reassured about the overall accuracy of my translation and confirmed in my fears about the existence of errors in it as a result of an extremely able critique forwarded to the Editor of the Bulletin by Juan Cole.

Mr Cole draws attention to the fact that he himself has prepared a more poetic rendering of the qasida but that he has been dissuaded from publication of it by the Baha'i World Centre in Israel. I hope that he will at least forward a copy of this version to me so that I may be able to refer to it in the course of any future studies I may make of the work. I am extremely happy that he feels that 'in most important passages we have agreed as to the basic meaning of these difficult verses' since, as he himself points out, this 'gives some hope that a fairly accurate formal translation can be hoped for, in spite of the work's obscurity'.

I am also extremely pleased that Juan has been able to point out several errors of translation or misreadings of the text of which I have been guilty. In order to assist readers in their understanding of the text, I shall reproduce the gist of his comments here, together with one or two separate comments of my own.

1. I have accidentally skipped line 84 so that all subsequent lines are misnumbered. Mr Cole translates line 84 as follows: 'And with no spirit, heart or inmost self did I abide, till my continuing existence mightily bewildered me'. I would concur with his translation.
2. Mr Cole feels that the words tib al-shamāl in line 7 should be translated, not as 'perfume of the left' but as 'north wind'. I agree that this is a possible rendering and one that readers may consider. But I am not inclined to accept it as preferable, for several reasons. The first lines of the poem contain a number of terms expressive of the idea of 'perfume', 'fragrance', or 'soft breeze' (misk, nafaha; and in the notes nafahāt-i dilkash, fawhāt-i dilynishīn, rā'ihā-yi tayyiba, rā'ihā-yi mahabbat), and I feel that the word ṭayb (which means 'scent' or 'perfume' rather than wind) fits well into this context. Secondly, Baha' Allah's own note to this line speaks explicitly of how the 'perfumed breaths of her hair' (anfās-i tayyiba-yi shā'r-i ū) are the source of 'the perfume of joy and splendour' (ṭayb-i bihjat wa sanā) and 'the musk of bounty and glory' (misk-i marhamat wa bahā'). Not only that, but the following use of the words shamāl and yamīn is, I think, strong evidence that the former must be understood as 'left hand' rather than 'north'. Nor am I entirely happy with the notion that the Beloved's tresses waft the 'north wind' rather than perfume.
3. In line 9, I have committed an elementary misreading of tagallabat for tagaballat. The sense of the line should, Mr Cole suggests, be 'the heart of hearts accepted the arrow of her eyelashes', a reading which is, he says, confirmed by the Persian note, which gives muqābil shuda. I am inclined to accept his reading, but with some reservations. If the Arabic tagaballat be taken straightforwardly as 'it accepted', we are left with the problem of the preposition before its assumed object. Nor is the Persian much help here, since it does not, in fact, confirm a reading of 'accepted' but rather 'faced, placed itself opposite'. I would, therefore, prefer a rendering of 'the heart of hearts faced the arrow of her eyelashes', and I would re-translate the note as follows: 'They call sahm "an arrow", that is, the shining and purified hearts have turned to face the arrow of the lashes of the most exalted Beloved and have sought for it

to reach them'.

4. Mr Cole suggests the phrase ghāyatī al-quswā in line 10 means 'my highest goal', not 'the ends of creation'. That is certainly correct, but I have actually read the phrase, not as ghāyatī al-quswā (or ghayati 'l-quswā), but as ghayatayi 'l-quswā, ('the two furthest ends'). Now, I know, as does Juan, that my reading does not make for very good Arabic, but it is a common difficulty in translating texts by Baha' Allah that one cannot rely on his Arabic to conform at all times to normal grammar. The phrase al-ghāya al-quswā is a fairly standard one for 'the furthest end', and I do not think that one can rule out a dual variation on this, giving 'the two furthest ends' (sc. 'of creation'), which seems to me to make better sense in this verse than 'my highest goal'. If Mr Cole can suggest a meaning for the first hemistich which incorporates his rendering and also balances it in some way with Carsh al-^camā' in the next, I would certainly be happy to accept it as the grammatically better reading. Otherwise I will stick with mine on the grounds of sense.
5. Regarding line 11, Mr Cole writes: 'I think these lines should read "I have wept in every eye for union with her, in every fire I have burned because of our separation". That is, the verbs must be read in the first person. The idea is that the mystical lover is ubiquitous in his grief -- every time someone weeps, that is him weeping for his beloved.' I find this a very attractive reading, particularly since it fits the Persian gloss rather better. It is also grammatically more satisfactory since it avoids the reading of wafa with kullu ^cayn (although this is not impossible).
6. Mr Cole points out that the phrase 'and that shall be the reward of them that love me' in line 15 is a quotation from the Beloved, in which he is perfectly correct.
7. In lines 18 and 22, I have clearly misread the first words as wa minnī rather than wa munnī, which latter makes better sense. The first half of line 18 should, therefore, read: 'Grant me union for my excessive love of you', and the first half of 22: 'Grant the attainment of union with you after exile'.
8. Accepting this above reading, the first words of the second hemistich of verse 22 should read wa habnī rather than wahabānī, even though the latter is more grammatically correct. This being so, the hemistich should be rendered: 'And bestow on me the spirit of intimacy after my grief'. (These last three renderings are those suggested by Mr Cole.)
9. Mr Cole holds that in lines 23 and 79 the word shuhūd should be rendered as 'the world of the seen', rather than as 'witness' or 'contemplation', and this seems to me entirely correct.
10. I am less sure about his argument that the term al-^camā' (line 24 and elsewhere) should not be rendered 'unknowing', since it really refers to the 'unknown essence of God'. This is really a literary point, since my implied reference was to the Middle English mystical treatise The Cloud of Unknowing. The real meaning is, of course, that pointed out by Mr Cole: I simply used a less explicit expression for it. As far as the validity of a rendition of al-^camā' by ('cloud of) unknowing' is concerned, there are some useful references to it in Sayyid Kazim Rashti's Sharh al-khutba al-tutunjiyya, p.16.
11. Mr Cole holds that, in line 25, the word tha'r should be translated simply as 'blood' rather than ('act of) revenge. I confess that I fail to see why he thinks this is the case.

- 12. Mr. Cole points out that gharr in line 28 'means vanity, not just delusion'. I think that my gloss to note 20 does, in fact, make that clear.
- 13. In line 30, Mr Cole would prefer to read 'smoke' as 'dust'. Since the Arabic verb in question can be translated either as 'to rise in the air like dust' or 'to rise in the air like smoke', there can, I think, be no objection to either rendering.
- 14. Mr Cole prefers to read the verbs in line 36 as first person passives rather than third person feminine actives, giving the translation: 'All sorrow has befallen me in every heart, I was gripped by sorrow in every joy (or literally, constricted completely in every expanse)'. This seems certainly entirely plausible, but it does involve the problem of a change of subject from line 35 to line 36 and back again in line 37. On the other hand, Mr Cole's reading does provide a continuity of subject with those prior to line 35.
- 15. On line 61, Mr Cole writes 'khalli does not mean fail, but is an imperative meaning "forsake". In English diction the use of fail to mean anything but the opposite of to succeed is in any case incorrect'. I'm afraid Mr Cole is here finding fault where there is none. Khalli certainly does mean 'forsake'; but it also means 'offend against'; 'infringe, transgress'; 'violate, break'; 'fail to fulfill, fail to meet' -- or so, at least, Wehr's dictionary says. As for the use of the word 'fail' in English, I would recommend that Mr Cole buy a bigger dictionary. The third meaning in the Shorter Oxford is 'to fall short in performance or attainment; to make default; to miss the mark'. It also has a number of other meanings, all of which may be found there.
- 16. Mr Cole correctly points out that, in line 76, the word wahshah means loneliness, not beast (wahsh). He continues to say that 'The hemistich is a play on words -- the author is communing with loneliness'. This seems eminently acceptable, especially since it avoids taking wahaha in a technically incorrect sense. However, it is worth pointing out that I had in mind when translating this line Baha' Allah's reference to this same period in his Lawh-i Maryam, where he speaks of his exile, in which 'the beats of the field (were) My associates' (quoted God Passes By, p.120). The original of this passage is in Persian and reads bā vuhūsh-i 'arā' mujālis gashtam (Mā'ida-yi asmānī, vol.4, p.330), there being a clear parallelism in the use of the term 'arā' beside the root whsh (as well as a parallelism between mu'nis in the previous hemistich and mu'ānis in the immediately preceding sentence in the Lawh-i Maryam).
- 17. Mr Cole raises an important point with regard to line 91 (90 in the translation): 'bi'thah, a technical term in prophetology referring to the sending of the Prophet by God, has been mistranslated as resurrection (ba'th). This is an important point, since the use of the word bi'thah demonstrates that Baha'u'llah already in 1855-56 thought of himself as having a mission. Also, matrud here means ostracized or exiled (whether to Baghdad or Sulaymaniyah), rather than "cast down". The line should read, "No matter if I have been exiled, for I attained the light of exaltation the day I was given my mission".
 Since these remarks are, I think, best commented on in the light of Juan's comments on the succeeding line, it will be best to cite those here as well: 'This line (92; trans.91) has several allusions to the mi'raj story that the translator has missed. al-quds here means Jerusalem, which Baha'u'llah claims mystically to have visited, just as Muhammad did in the mi'raj. The hijrah in Tehran again appears to have been a spiritual analogy to the Prophet's hijrah. The mi'raj theme is reinforced in the next line by the use of the verb from that root. While such imagery in a mystical poem cannot be taken too literally, it might indicate an early claim of prophetic status.'

I think these are extremely interesting remarks and ones deserving of careful consideration. In their light I have re-examined this whole section of the poem, and I will readily admit that something more is going on in these lines than my original translation implied. At the same time, I fear that Juan's comments here, as occasionally elsewhere, suffer by being rather too overconfidently and absolutely stated. Some things may be as he suggests, but I am far from convinced that they must be read as he reads them. To begin with, I fail to see that there are several allusions to the mi'raj story, and I am not wholly sure that there are any. If the term al-quds is a reference to Jerusalem, that might be regarded as a mi'raj reference, although it would by no means necessarily be so. What appears certain is that these lines refer in some way to an exile or exiles. Matrudan in line 92 (91) is, as Juan correctly points out, 'exiled' or 'cast out'. Hajartu in the following line means 'I emigrated' or 'I performed a hijra', while ghurbati at the end of the same line means 'my exile'. All in all, and leaving aside for the moment the use of the verb 'araja in line 94 (93), I am rather inclined to think that we are dealing with the theme of hijra here and not that of mi'raj. It should certainly be pointed out that taking al-quds as Jerusalem is contrary to the grammar of the hemistich, which continues: min nūri unsihi; the pronoun here seems certainly to refer back to al-quds, but since it is masculine it should be taken as belonging to a male person, rather than to Jerusalem, which is properly feminine. I have tried to resolve the question of whether the text here should be read al-quds or al-qudus (as I originally took it) by scanning the line. Unfortunately, although the ode is supposed to have been written in the same metre as Ibn al-Farid's original Naẓm al-sulūk, which is in tawīl, Baha' Allah's poem is virtually unscannable. I admit that scansion is not something in which I am expert, and I would be very happy if Juan or someone else could suggest a method by which the qaṣīda could be fairly scanned. In any case, line 93 (92) does not scan regularly and could be open to a reading of al-qudus, although I will accept that bi 'l-quds matches the subsequent readings of bi 'l-tā, bi 'l-nūr, and bi 'l-rūh.

At this stage, I do not wish to offer any very definite interpretation of these lines; but I would like to make a tentative suggestion as to what they are about. One of the linguistic oddities of lines 92-94 (91-93) is the recurrent but not obviously consistent use of the preposition bi with a variety of verbs before it. The chief problem caused by this is in the second hemistich of line 93 (92), where the text reads something like 'I emigrated with OR to OR in al-tā'. Now, if al-tā be taken (as Mr Cole has taken it) as a reference to Tehran (ard al-tā), the interpretation of this passage becomes problematic. Juan suggests some sort of hijra in Tehran, although I find it hard to guess what this might be. His imprisonment in the Siyah Chāl perhaps? And how does all of this relate to 'the day of my mission' (yawma ba'athatī) or his belief in 'al-nūr'? At the risk of sticking my neck out a little far, may I offer the following for the consideration of readers?

Al-nūr and al-nūr al-'alī are possible references to Baha's half-brother, Ṣubḥ-i Azal. In several of his less well-known works of the Baghdad period, including a letter to Mirza Muhammad Hadi Qazvini and a wasāya in Arabic, Baha' Allah speaks of his brother in terms such as this, usually as tal'at (or wajh) al-nūr (the countenance of light), and expresses his servitude towards him. It is worth comparing a passage in the wasāya with line 119 (118) of this poem. In the wasāya, Baha' Allah writes: 'Is the countenance of light (wijhat al-nūr -- sic) who has sat upon the throne of command and decrees from behind the veil a matter on the part of God? Here he says: 'Recognize the face of light (wajh al-nūr) in the innermost part of the unseen'.

I would continue to argue that al-qudus and al-tā are references to Mulla Muhammad 'Ali Bārfurushi quddus and Qurrat al-'Ayn respectively: there is certainly plenty of evidence for the use of al-tā or 'the letter tā' in reference to the latter. Again, the reference to al-nūr in line 94 (93) is, I think, an allusion to Subh-i Azal. The first hemistich may be compared with the following passage from Baha' Allah's wasāya: 'I am a servant who has

not sufficient for you?

believed in God and in the countenance of light'. The succession of al-nūr and al-rūh in that same line is paralleled by the following passage from the wasāya: 'Say: the light of God has encompassed you from all sides and the spirit of the command assists you at every moment'. Unfortunately, I have no immediate suggestions as to the identity of al-rūh in line 94 (93), if the word is, indeed, to be taken in this way.

I would, therefore, suggest the following translation for these lines:

- 92 What matters it if I am at this moment in exile?
I attained to (the presence of) the exalted light on the day I was given
my mission.
- 93 And I associated with Quddus out of the light of his familiarity,
and I wandered with Tahira at the time when I was a stranger.
- 94 And I believed in the light out of the light of my inner being,
and I ascended with (to?) the spirit in the mystery of my inmost heart.

What is all of this a reference to? I would suggest that it relates in some way to the events of Badasht, when Baha' Allah met with and associated with Subh-i Azal, Quddus, and Tahira, leaving afterwards with Tahira when the Babi contingent was forced to leave the vicinity. It is quite possible that Baha' Allah may have been given some form of mission to carry out by Mirza Yahya, which would be the ba^ctha alluded to in line 92. (It should be noted that, although 'prophetic mission/calling' is a perfectly correct translation of ba^ctha -- or bi^ctha -- it is by no means the exclusive or ordinary meaning of the word.) Of course, something more than a mundane mission may be involved here, a view that would fit in well with the conditions of Babism at this period.

I am as yet uncertain how to understand the possibly related lines 119-20 (118-19) and 123 (122), which refer to 'the countenance of light', 'the beauty of holiness' (jamāl al-quds) and 'the mystery of holiness' (sirr al-quds). (But on the notion of the spirit of Quddus having been reincarnated in Subh-i Azal, see Nuqṭat al-kāf, p.243.)

I realize that the above reading will, in part at least, probably prove unacceptable to most Baha'is since it has implications that do not fit in too well with the standard picture of relations between Baha' Allah and Subh-i Azal. Nevertheless, evidence supportive of such an interpretation does exist and I hope to subject some or all of it to a closer analysis in the course of a paper I plan to write this summer.

- 18 With regard to lines 95 and 96 (94, 95), Mr Cole suggests that the word الله in each be read as mā laki (you have no part of) rather than as the imperative mālik, and I find myself entirely in agreement.
- 19 In line 111 (110), Mr Cole suggests (correctly, I believe) that wat'a must be understood to mean, not 'oppression' but 'footstep'.
- 20 In line 123 (122), the word 'assistance' is a misprint for 'existence'.

May I once again thank Mr Cole for sharing his comments with me and allowing me thus to draw the attention of readers to some alternative readings and interpretations of passages in this extremely recondite poem. There can be no doubt but that further study will lead to considerable progress in our understanding of this important early Babi-Baha'i text.

Denis MacEoin
University of Newcastle
Newcastle Upon Tyne
May 1984