

---

*Hebrew Medical Astrology: David Ben Yom Tov, Kelal qatan. Original Hebrew Text, Medieval Latin Translation, Modern English Translation* by Gerrit Bos, Charles Burnett, and Tzvi Langermann

Transactions of the American Philosophical Society 95.5. Philadelphia: American Philosophical Society, 2005. Pp. ix + 121 with 4 illustrations. ISBN 0-87169-955-9. Paper \$24.00

---

*Reviewed by*  
Mauro Zonta  
Università degli Studi di Roma “La Sapienza”  
maurozonta@libero.it

The main subject of this book, Hebrew medical astrology, is a neglected field of study. Further, in the study of Hebrew medical astrology during the Middle Ages, no books and even almost no articles especially devoted to the particular question of the utility of astrological indications (taken from Moon in particular) for treating various kinds of diseases have been published until now. True, ‘astrology played only a small part’ not only ‘in Arabic medicine’ (see the quotation of the historian of medicine Haskell D. Isaacs found in this book [19]), but also in Medieval Hebrew medical literature. Its role was substantially a marginal one, even in the period and geographical areas in which a greater number of Hebrew medical manuscripts was copied, i.e., in 14th- and 15th- century Spain, Provence, and Italy.

General treatments or at least some traces of this ‘science’ can be found in some manuscripts, as well as in some of the extant fragments of the Cairo Genizah. However, only a few works especially devoted to Hebrew medical astrology are still extant. First of all, there is a very important Medieval Hebrew tract, the *Book of the Luminaries* (*Sefer ha-me’orot*) by Abraham Ibn Ezra, written in 1148 in Béziers (Provence) [Sela and Freudenthal 2006, 20 and 35]; it was published by Meir Baqal in 1971, but is still in need of a really critical edition. Then, there exists the *Concise Summary* (*Kelal qatan*) by David ben Yom Tov Po<sup>o</sup>el, which is the subject of this book. Moreover, there are: a very short tract, apparently a summary (not the complete text [33n69]) of a work on astrological medicine by Pinhas of Narbonne (14th century), found in two manuscripts now in Boston and in Ox-

© 2006 Institute for Research in Classical Philosophy and Science

All rights reserved

ISSN 1549-4497 (online)

ISSN 1549-4470 (print)

ISSN 1549-4489 (CD-ROM)

*Aestimatio* 3 (2006) 113-117

ford; an anonymous medical compendium, found in one manuscript written in Italy in the 16th century, now in Cambridge; some notes about various astrological recommendations, including references to a medical use of astrology, found in two manuscripts at least (one in Oxford, copied in Byzantium around 1430, and the other in El Escorial). Finally, some observations about this ‘science’ were made by a well-known Medieval Jewish physician and translator, active in 13th-century Catalonia, Shem Tob ben Isaac of Tortosa [22–25]. (In any case, this ‘science’ does not include talismanic medicine, i.e., the employment of astrological talismans in medicine, which appears to have attracted some Jewish physicians in the same period and *milieu*.)

David ben Yom Tov Po<sup>o</sup>el, the author of the above mentioned work, should not be confused with the well-known author of a Medieval Hebrew treatise on logic, the Portuguese Jewish philosopher David ben Yom Tov Ibn Bilia. According to Tzvi Langermann [15], the former was a Jewish astronomer living in Provence in the first half of the 14th century. Apparently, he was also the father (not the son) of Jacob ben David ben Yom Tov Po<sup>o</sup>el Bonjorn, an astronomer active in Perpignan (then in Catalonia) in 1361. There are some reports about his life and work, which have been collected in a recent book by José Chabás [Chabàs i Bergon 1992, 40–44]. According to them, his name was David Bonjorn del Barri; he was born in Catalonia at Cotlliure around 1300; and he died after 1352 (probably before 1361) in Barcelona, where he worked as astronomer for the king of Aragon, Peter IV. Surely, Po<sup>o</sup>el was the nickname of his son, Jacob; probably, it was also his family name in Hebrew.

The Hebrew text of the *Concise Summary* is transmitted in four manuscripts, found in Oxford, Saint Petersburg, Paris, and Verona. The ‘base manuscript’, which is regarded as the best one and has been selected here for the edition, is that in Oxford [Bodleian Library, Michael Add. 19], where the text is found on folios 9v–11v; the other three manuscripts have been employed for correcting it in some points. There is also a Medieval Latin translation of the work preserved in an unique manuscript in Barcelona and surely written in Catalonia before 1446. Among the main sources of the *Concise Summary*, there are pseudo-Ptolemy’s *Centiloquium* and in particular Ibn Ezra’s *Book of the Luminaries* [12–15].

Chapter 1 of the book, by Tzvi Langermann [1–34], begins with a historical sketch of astrological medicine in Antiquity and the Mid-

dle Ages; then, it gives information about the author, the extant manuscripts of the Hebrew and Latin texts, and the contents of the work; finally, it outlines a concise history of Hebrew astrological medicine. Chapter 2, by Gerrit Bos [35–61], includes the edition of the original Hebrew text of the *Concise Summary*. Chapter 3, by Charles Burnett [63–82], includes a critical edition of the Medieval Latin translation. Chapter 4, by Gerrit Bos [83–98], includes his own English translation of the work which is based upon a comparison between the Hebrew text and the Latin one. At the end of the book, there are: a glossary of Hebrew terms that is rendered into English and compared with the Latin corresponding terms as found in the translation [99–108], a bibliography [109–112], and an index of key terms [113–121].

This book is a very interesting and very detailed case-study of Hebrew medieval astrology. As stated by Resianne Fontaine on the cover jacket, it ‘will be consulted by all interested in (...) the history of medicine and astrology, the history of Hebrew science, medicine, astronomy, and astrology, or the history of ideas’. I have only to add some very slight observations to it which mostly concern the index of the work, and which might be employed for a future, revised edition. As a matter of fact, the index ends with the word ‘signs—airy’ [121], so that numerous words mentioned both in the book and in the index itself (e.g., ‘summary’, ‘Sun’, ‘tables’, ‘world’) are omitted. Moreover, an index of the many manuscripts (in Arabic, Hebrew, Judaeo-Arabic and Latin) quoted or mentioned in the text, which would probably be of some utility to the scholars, is lacking. Here below, I give a list of these manuscripts in alphabetical order, including citations of the pages of the book where they are mentioned:

Barcelona, Biblioteca de Catalunya

n. 634: 16, 35–59, 63–82

Birmingham, University of Alabama, Reynolds Historical Library

n. 5087: 20

Boston, Countway Library of Medicine

hebr. 2: 22

Cambridge, Cambridge University Library

Add. 1022.2: 23

Chicago, Newberry Library

Or. 101: 18, 34n79

El Escorial, Biblioteca de San Lorenzo del Escorial

n. 913: 9

G IV 9: 24

Jerusalem, Mossad ha-Rav Kook

n. 1317: 19

Munich, Bayerische Staatsbibliothek

arab. 802: 29n23

arab. 816b: 20

New York, Columbia University Library

X 893 M 6857: 19

New York, Jewish Theological Seminary Library

n. 2720: 28n4

n. 16030: 19

Oxford, Bodleian Library

Hunt. Donat. 21 (Neubauer 2130): 22

Marsh. 410 (Neubauer 2091): 24

Michael 88 (Neubauer 2168): 31n47

Michael 551 (Neubauer 1321): 30n29

Michael Add. 19 (Neubauer 2042): 16, 35–59

Opp. 179 (Neubauer 2090): 20

Opp. 763 (Neubauer 2009): 30n33

Paris, Bibliothèque Nationale de France

hébreu 884: 28n9

hébreu 1034: 31n37

hébreu 1051: 21, 25, 33n66

hébreu 1065: 16, 35–59

hébreu 1082: 21

hébreu 1162: 33nn72–73, 75

hébreu 1192: 20

Parma, Biblioteca Palatina

parmense 2919: 28n9

parmense 2637: 34n82

Princeton, Princeton University Library

Garrett Collection, n. 1075: 4

Rome, Biblioteca Apostolica Vaticana

vat. ebr. 348: 19

vat. ebr. 376: 20

vat. ebr. 382: 30n33

Saint Petersburg, Library of the Saint Petersburg Branch of the Institute of Oriental Studies of the Russian Academy of Science  
C 76: 16, 30n32, 35–59

Turin, Biblioteca Nazionale Universitaria

A. III. 12: 19

Verona, Biblioteca Civica

n. 204: 16, 35–59

Vienna, Oesterreichische Nationalbibliothek

heb. 29: 28n9

As Tzvi Langermann [21] points out, some quotations in Judaeo-Arabic taken from a ‘treatise’ (Arabic *maqala*) on astrological medicine ascribed to the well-known Medieval Islamic philosopher, al-Fārābī, are found in a Paris manuscript (hébreu 1082, folio 33v). It should be stressed that a ‘treatise’ (Hebrew *iggeret*) on astrology ascribed to al-Fārābī is quoted by the 14th-century Jewish philosopher Moses Narboni (1300–ca. 1362) in his still unpublished commentary on Averroes’ *De substantia orbis* [Steinschneider 1869, 75–76]. It would be interesting to see if these two references are taken from the same work.

#### BIBLIOGRAPHY

Chabàs i Bergon, J. 1992. *L’astronomia de Jacob ben David Bonjorn*. Barcelona.

Sela, S. and Freudenthal, G. 2006. ‘Abraham Ibn Ezra’s Scholarly Writings: A Chronological Listing’. *Aleph* 6:13–55.

Steinschneider, M. 1869. *al-Fārābī (Alpharabius), des arabischen Philosophen Leben und Schriften*. Saint Petersburg.