

MUḤAMMAD RAWWĀS QAL'AH-JĪ AND MUḤAMMAD ZĀFIR AL-WAFĀ'Ī (eds)., *Amrāq al-'ayn wa-mu'ālaġatuhā min kitābay al-Mu'ālaġāt al-buqrāṭiyyah, allafahū Abū 'l-Ḥasan Aḥmad b. Muḥammad al-Ṭabarī t. ba'da 366 h. – 976 m. wa-Firdaws al-ḥikmah allafahū 'Alī b. Sahl Rabban al-Ṭabarī t. 247 h. – 861 m.* Compiled, arranged, edited, and commented by Muḥammad Rawwās Qal'ah-jī and Muḥammad Zāfir al-Wafā'ī, London: Al-Furqān Islamic Heritage Foundation, Centre for the Study of Islamic Manuscripts, 1998, (368 pp). (Edited Texts Series 4).

The *Hippocratic therapeutics*, the great medical compendium authored by the tenth-century Iranian physician Abū 'l-Ḥasan al-Ṭabarī al-Turunjī still awaits a critical edition and the riches contained therein remain furthermore quite undeservedly underexplored even to this day. So far the most remarkable exceptions to this protracted neglect have been an early compact study by Julius Hirschberg in his *Geschichte der Augenheilkunde* (volume 13, book 2, Leipzig, Verlag von Wilhelm Engelmann, 1908, p. 107–114), which was limited to ophthalmology, and more recently a number of publications on several different aspects of this text by Lena Ambjörn and Elvira Wakelnig. One could not but welcome, therefore, any contribution intended to improve our knowledge of al-Ṭabarī's therapeutical doctrines and practice.

The present partial edition was published within a book series devoted to the Arabo-Islamicate medical legacy focusing especially on ophthalmology (*'ilm al-kiḥālah*) and addressed primarily to an Arabic-speaking public. Within that series Muḥammad Zāfir al-Wafā'ī and Muḥammad Rawwās Qal'ah-jī joined efforts to produce twelve different editions of Arabic texts spanning over four centuries (from the 10th through the 13th c). and dealing specifically with ophthalmological matters. That they decided to include four partial editions of the eye-centred chapters and sections of far more comprehensive books (namely al-Majūsī's *Kāmil al-ṣinā'ah*, Ibn Sīnā's *Qānūn*, al-Ṭabarī's *al-Mu'ālaġāt al-buqrāṭiyyah*, and the later's country-man's *Firdaws al-ḥikmah*, in order of publication) is certainly praiseworthy yet not entirely unproblematic. While a wider public will no doubt appreciate such handy selections of material (conveniently arranged and commented), those preoccupied with ecdotics may have some qualms with the degree of editorial manipulation to which the original texts have been subjected.

The book opens with a brief prologue (p. 9–15) in which a few remarkable passages in al-Ṭabarī’s book are highlighted by the editors in a quite symptomatic manner. They comment, retrospectively rather than contextually, on some alleged flaws and identify what they consider to be conceptual mistakes in al-Ṭabarī’s doctrines, then they turn their attention to several subjects in which the author is presented, with little or no discussion at all, as a likely pioneer. Thus, an incidental reference by al-Ṭabarī to light seen through different objects (an inverted mirror, a *mahā* stone, or a bottle) prompts the editors to wonder whether he might have anticipated Kepler’s findings by several centuries—to which they add an emphatically wishful «perhaps!!» (see p. 268 n. 4). This commitment to the we-found-it-first agenda is, to be sure, one of the goals of the editors’ footnotes as explicitly stated on p. 21, and there is no need to insist here that such an uncritical kind of appraisal often leads to highly disputable claims—to little or no advancement in the actual historiography of science. As a matter of fact, intra-Islamic diachronical analysis is, on the contrary, virtually missing from the book and intertextual research is limited to the indication of the chapters that were borrowed from, more or less extensively, by Khalīfah for his *al-Kāfi*.

The edition of the Arabic text of Book 4 of the *Mu‘ālahajāt* is to be found on p. 31–288, to which the editors add a glossary (not and index) of the simple medicines mentioned in the text (p. 289–318) and a list (likewise unindexed) of compound drugs described or alluded to (p. 319–322). The editors accessed the text through four reproductions obtained from the King Faysal Centre, three of which correspond to as many copies held at the Bodleian Library. Those four manuscripts are cursorily referred to on p. 16–21, but no catalogue references are provided (manuscripts B and J are moreover incorrectly ascribed one single shelf-mark, namely MS Marsh 547) and the reader ought to bear in mind that, while the collation of four different copies may be enough to control a relatively stable text, Ullmann had already listed no less than twelve different copies of al-Ṭabarī’s compendium (see *Die Medizin im Islam*, Leiden – Köln, E. J. Brill, 1970, p. 140 n. 3). To this partial edition of *Mu‘ālahajāt* 4 a reprint is appended on p. 323–368 containing the epigraphs in the older al-Ṭabarī’s *Firdaws al-ḥikmah* that are related to the eye and its ailments. The text reproduces, with no editorial intervention whatsoever (except for a new numeration of epigraphs), chapters III.ii.7 and IV. iii.1–5 of al-Siddīqī’s edition (Berlin, Buch- und Kunstverlag, 1928).

It is only fair to presume that, as stated above, the book under review will certainly satisfy the needs of a wide readership. I hope nevertheless that it will not be considered too unfair to raise a few objections to the editorial criteria applied

here. At the higher level, the original contents of *Mu'ālaḡāt* 4 are redistributed according to an altogether new criterion. Chapters and subchapters are splitted (less often merged) and new rubrics are consequently added. This breaking up of the integrity of the book («*kharaqnā ḡurmat al-naṣṣ*», p. 19) is intended, in the editors' words, to produce a book that should be friendlier to the reader and easier to consult. Such manipulative freedom, however, goes as far as to inspire the two editors to add their own colophon at the very end of the text, with no typographical indication whatsoever.

That low threshold of respect for the authorial organisation of the text is paralleled by a disregard for basic principles of philology. The editors' express aim is to produce a text «most correct» both scientifically and linguistically (p. 20), and this focus on correctness extends to both al-Ṭabarī's Arabic and his medical doctrine. The anachronistic nature of «conceptual emendation» is all too obvious and the reader might possibly grow wary of footnotes including remarks in the vein of «this is scientifically unacceptable» (see, for instance, 31.5, 32.115, 227.3–4, 239.3, and an especially emphatical remark in 286.1). As for the Arabic text itself, in the absence of a genuine critical apparatus and in view of the free resort to silent emendation, there may be little to gain from quoting from it instead of any of the manuscript copies available to the researcher. Moreover, well-intentioned philological emendations and clarifications may here and there mislead the reader. Thus, the word edited as *tadruj* on p. 281<sub>11</sub> need not be understood as *durrāj* as suggested by the editors on p. 281 n. 6 (they are two different species of birds). A mere glance at al-Ḥamawī's dictionary or at the *Encyclopaedia of Islam* s.v. *Shāsh* would have persuaded the editors that the choronym *al-Šāš* corresponds to modern Tashkent and is entirely unrelated to the Chechens (see p. 281 n. 3). The explanation of the Persian loanword *dastkāriyah* (singular *dastkāri*) on p. 60 n. 3 is likewise not entirely accurate.

Let me seize the occasion of this review to draw the reader's attention to a few loci in *Mu'ālaḡāt* 4 that would deserve a closer look. There is on p. 268<sub>13</sub> an apparent synonym for pure lead (*usrub ṣāf*) that may be of some import if its reading could be ascertained (it is *الدفري* in the edited text, but *الرقوي* in MS A, *الموقري* in B, and *الوقري* in J). The interest of al-Ṭabarī's intertextual references has been duly underscored by Ambjörn (see particularly her contribution to *Galenos* 5 [2011], p. 103–112) and I myself have called attention to the exceptional testimony that the *Mu'ālaḡāt* bear to the Arabic transmission of Alexander of Tralles' works (in an unpublished paper presented in 2013 at the 23th ICHSTM held in Manchester). Here on p. 257<sub>18</sub>–258<sub>3</sub> one can find a reference to figures 1–2 of

Euclides' *Optics* in Arabic translation (*Manāẓir*) and the allegedly excellent explanation (*tafsīr*) thereof by an enigmatic al-Mahānī. The existence of this relatively early echo of the Euclidean text appears to have been unknown to Kheirandish at the time of the publication of his impressive two-volume *The Arabic version of Euclid's optics* (New York, Springer, 1999). Some insight into the actual medical praxis of tenth-century Mesopotamia is also to be gained from such passages as the one on p. 266<sub>18</sub>–267<sub>10</sub>, where the author reports having seen Mūsā b. Sayyār at work, then he echoes the practice of oculists from both Basrah and Baghdad.

All in all, Qal'ah-jī and al-Wafā'ī's edition made available to a wide readership the original Arabic text of the ophthalmological section of one of the main sources for the Islamicate medicine of the classical period. This is no small merit in itself and it will be perhaps only a few reluctant readers that shall keep waiting for a different edition that might fulfill the requirements of a different kind of historiographic research.

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