

MUḤAMMAD ZĀFIR AL-WAFĀ'Ī AND MUḤAMMAD RAWWĀS QAL'AHĪ (eds.), *Natījat al-fikar fī 'ilāj amrāḍ al-baṣar. Ta'līf al-ra'īs Abū l-'Abbās Aḥmad b. 'Uthmān b. Hibat Allāh al-Qaysī*. Edited and commented by Muḥammad Zāfir al-Wafā'ī and Muḥammad Rawwās Qal'ah-jī, London: Al-Furqān Islamic Heritage Foundation, Centre for the Study of Islamic Manuscripts, 1998, (254 pp). (Edited Texts Series 5).

Originally issued as the last one within the series of twelve editions of Arabo-Islamic ophthalmological texts mentioned in the preceding review, the publication of al-Qaysī's (d. 1256 CE) monographic *Natījat al-fikar* contributed yet another piece to the historiography of this knowledge particularly during the 13th c. and more generally of the medical art in Ayyūbī Cairo. Although one might easily add a few complementary references (especially from Ullmann's and Sezgin's respective comprehensive surveys), the general readership of this book will gain some contextualisation from the brief biographical sketch and the small bits of information on the four manuscript copies of the text that were consulted for this edition (p. 11–17). With regard to manuscript witnesses, it must be noted that as many as thirteen copies had been located ten years before this publication by Hans-Dieter Bischoff, whose German translation of *Natījat al-fikar* is in fact mentioned and quoted from by the editors but nowhere actually referenced (see *Das Ergebnis des Nachdenkens über die Behandlung der Augenkrankheiten von Fath ad-Dīn al-Qaysī. Übersetzung des arabischen Textes, Kommentar und Indices*, Europäische Hochschulschriften, Asiatische und Afrikanische Studien 27, Frankfurt am Main – New York, Peter Lang, 1988).

The annotated edition of the Arabic text runs from p. 19 through p. 205 and is complemented with a glossary of simple medicines (p. 206–248) and a list of compound drugs (p. 249–250). Here (as elsewhere in this series of publications) the usefulness of the «glossaries» is arguably limited, since they simply include one or more non-Arabic equivalents (generally English, sometimes Latin and English, and in a few instances Latin, English, and French, with no apparent rationale) and minimal references to the pharmacognostic output of al-Shihābī, Ibn al-Bayṭār, al-Khaṭīb, and al-Bīrūnī. None of them does, however, work as a genuine index, for the reader cannot know where in the text any given medicine is mentioned. Leaving aside a few slips (mark a deceptively aristocratic «Lavan Du La Stoechas» on p. 208), the authors' identification on p. 207 of *isrinj* «vermillion»

as «spinach» is certainly shocking, all the more so given that a Persian synonym *sarīqūn* is provided.

The structure and internal arrangement of the text has been overall respected by the editors, with the remarkable exception of some non-original rubrics that are textualised with no typographical marking at all (they are simply marked as such in a footnote). Following a well-established practice in divulgational (rather than critical) editions, footnotes serve a plurality of purposes. They include not only sporadic reading variants (representing an atrophic critical apparatus of a sort) but also some generous—yet far from systematic—remarks by the editors. Besides the explanation of a few less common words, these notes include also some sporadic digressions (see a note on venesection in on p. 39 n. 1). They also reflect a certain preoccupation with diachrony that, while being not only legitimate but also inherently necessary from a historian's perspective, may occasionally devolve into anachronistic appraisal—as seen in the above review. Thus, some readers will commend the effort to interpret the explanations transmitted by the author in the light of present-day medicine (even if this is done mostly through straightforward terminological equivalences), but a certain insistence on noting whenever they are «scientifically unacceptable» (see, for instance, footnotes 23.7, 79.1, 83.4, 131.6, 151.2) adds little to historical research.

That overfocus on retrospection contrasts strongly with the scarcity of contextual and especially intertextual research. Virtually no exploration is conducted on sources and parallels, with the exception of a few recipes for which similar loci are indicated, drawn mostly from books in the same series edited by al-Wafā'ī and Qal'ah-jī themselves. On the other hand, no attempt is made at locating quotations, an analysis of which might enable us to shed some light on the transmission channels through which al-Qaysī's book is connected to the Arabo-Islamic ophthalmological tradition. Some of these borrowings may reflect the author's own readings or, more likely, his indebtedness to previous compilers, see for instance a quote from Galen on p. 107₁₉–108₄, a noteworthy passage on nyctalopy stemming from al-Kindī on p. 143_{11–16}, al-Rāzī's report on the case of a child afflicted with phrenitis on p. 200_{4–7}, and an additional reference to al-Rāzī appended to the formula for the greater collyrium on p. 203_{17–19}. Even with regard to the fortunes of the book the task of identifying the actual bits of secondary transmission remains to be implemented. The editors simply suggest, on chronological grounds and with no material evidence to support their assertion, that al-Ḥamawī's *Nūr al-'uyūn* may be largely indebted to al-Qaysī's *Natījah* (see p. 12–13).

Despite the rather disparaging affirmation that al-Qaysī, being as he was a late and epigonic author, authored a compilation essentially «devoid of novelty» (p. 13), there are a number of passages that, even if not necessarily original, are potentially interesting for those invested in the historiography of Helleno-Islamicate medical traditions. I shall mention just three loci that may be considered quite representative of the diversity of information transmitted in this kind of texts, which are often disregarded a priori as if they were not genuinely unique authorial compilations but rather mere *codices descripti* or, in more contemporary terms, mechanical copy-pasta.

First, on p. 61₉₋₁₀ the author echoes a later reinterpretation of the pharmaconym *malkāyā* (a raw borrowing of Syriac ܡܠܟܝܐ «royal», which in turn mirrors Greek βασιλικόν and was originally translated into Arabic as *mulūkī*) as related to *malā'ikah* «angels»; this interpretation is well attested elsewhere and distinguishes at least two different subtraditions. Then on p. 74₃₋₄ a gloss to *al-thalj al-ṣīnī* includes a quite standard description as «a drug imported from India» with a drastic power to strengthen the eye-sight and to remove leukoma, but the comparison with the whiteness of camphor might be original even in its triviality. Finally, an additional piece of evidence for the phenomenon of professional specialisation can be gleaned from a remark on p. 185₁₁₋₁₅ on the requirement for surgical operations to be supervised by a knowledgeable physician so that they adhere to the *qanūn ṭibbī*.

In sum and in spite of all my quibbles, with their publication of al-Qaysī's *Natījat al-fikar al-Wafā'ī* and *Qal'ah-jī* achieved their primary purpose. Once again (and for the twelfth time) they made available an important source for the study of classical and post-classical Islamicate ophthalmology. Historians of science are not so rich as to discard any text, however marginal or derivative it may appear to be, and gratefulness is in order to those who invested so many years of their life to make this legacy better-known and readier for consultation.

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