
Review

F. JAMIL RAGEP and FAITH WALLIS with PAMELA MILLER and ADAM GACEK, eds., *The "Herbal" of al-Ghāfiqī: A Facsimile Edition with Critical Essays*. Montreal and Ithaca, NY: McGill–Queen's University Press, 2014. Pp. x, 750; 545 full-page color plates and many color figures. \$150. ISBN: 978-0-7735-4475-8.
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2 The *Herbal* of al-Ghāfiqī is a key work in the history of science, for two main reasons. Not
3 only is it a comprehensive book on plants, but it also offers a huge amount of philological
4 information (35–50). As it includes the characteristics of each entry (in alphabetical order)
5 and the translation of its name into several languages, it constitutes a genuine multilin-
6 gual glossary of medical plants. The *Herbal* represents a good example of the Andalusī
7 encyclopedic style. It serves as an emblematic exercise of erudition produced in the Is-
8 lamic Occident during the Middle Ages, and was both used locally and exported to the
9 East and to the Latin West. In the prologue (translated by F. Jamil Ragep), the author
10 lists the improvements he has made in relation to previous treatises and also expresses
11 his concerns about the practice of medicine and the kinds of knowledge a good physician
12 should master. In his experience, a certain familiarity with pharmacology is essential for
13 a physician to supervise the treatment prescribed for the patient. As Oliver Kahl points
14 out (44), the concepts of innovation or originality were different from the ones we hold
15 today. The book, then, is a reflection of the circulation of ideas in al-Andalus in the twelfth
16 century and a unique opportunity to follow the trail of the texts the author considered to
17 be authorities (for example, works by Dioscorides and Galen and many Muslims, such as
18 al-Rāzī, Ibn Juljul, al-Zahrāwī, and Avicenna, to name but a few). Leigh Chipman's study
19 of the sources (72–83) notes that although the common practice in the Middle Ages was to
20 quote authorities, we cannot be entirely sure that the quotes actually correspond with the
21 texts cited. A detailed examination of al-Ghāfiqī's book shows some mistaken identities,
22 but it is difficult to establish whether these were the result of an uncritical repetition or
23 inaccuracy on the part of the author himself.

24 But much more than this, the edition of the *Herbal* by F. Jamil Ragep and Faith Wallis
25 represents an excellent approach to the problems posed by a medieval text. What can
26 researchers do with a manuscript of this kind? Years ago, it might well have been locked
27 away in a drawer, far away from prying eyes. Today, though, new techniques and a more
28 democratic sense of knowledge are helping to change this kind of practice. The editors
29 should be congratulated on the way the book is presented and on the groundwork carried
30 out to make it possible. A consultative workshop was held at McGill University in 2010 as
31 a starting point for this multidisciplinary and collaborative project. And this is one of the
32 merits of the present edition: the critical essays included deal with many different aspects of
33 al-Ghāfiqī's work (paleographical, codicological, philological, historical, scientific, literary,
34 and artistic) and describe to the reader the context in which the book emerged, which
35 provides essential background information for a complete understanding. Many scholars
36 took part in the project. Besides the editors (Faith Wallis, F. Jamil Ragep, Pamela Miller,
37 and Adam Gacek) we should mention the names of Oliver Kahl, Leigh Chipman, Alain
38 Touwaide, Jaclyne Kerner, Cristina Álvarez Millán, Mais Kataya, Shigehisa Kuriyama,
39 Efarim Lev, and Raphaela Veit.

40 The *Herbal* of al-Ghāfiqī is preserved in several copies, although only two are illustrated.
41 The present book includes the facsimile edition of manuscript 7508 of the Osler Library
42 of the History of Medicine at McGill University in Montreal, an incomplete copy of the

43 work from the thirteenth century. It is no surprise at all that the manuscript is preserved
 44 in Canada: William Osler (1849–1919) was a prominent physician who taught at McGill
 45 University, Johns Hopkins Hospital, and Oxford. He was profoundly interested in the
 46 history of science, which he saw as a magnificent source of reflection on his profession,
 47 and he was also a dedicated collector. Adam Gacek provides a detailed history of the
 48 manuscript (18–34), which Osler bought in Baghdad or Mesopotamia, even though he
 49 knew no Arabic. This story speaks volumes about the procedures of Western colonization
 50 of Eastern countries as well as the response of the colonized peoples. As the manuscript
 51 was sold with a partial copy of Dioscorides’s *De materia medica*, Osler thought he was
 52 buying the complete text translated into Arabic. The episode provides valuable insights
 53 into the workings of the manuscript market in the Middle East at the beginning of the
 54 twentieth century. The manuscripts were beautifully illustrated but, thanks to Jaclynne
 55 Kerner (121–56), we learn that they were modified in the nineteenth century, and also
 56 that the illustrations were not all the work of a single artist. Moreover, Alain Touwaide
 57 (84–120) establishes that copies with images were very expensive, a luxury object meant
 58 for nonprofessional owners although not as rare as modern literature has claimed. This
 59 fact proves, once more, how dependent we are on textual testimonies associated with the
 60 elites when studying the Middle Ages and how necessary it is to consider new approaches
 61 in order to gain a broad, accurate picture. The papers included in this edition help us
 62 to expand our view. Cristina Álvarez Millán’s essay (51–71), for instance, recalls the
 63 (relatively neglected) difference between practice and theory in medieval Islamic medicine.
 64 Álvarez Millán analyzes the silences in al-Ghāfiqī’s work, a crucial aspect of historical texts
 65 but one that is very difficult to examine. She suggests that al-Ghāfiqī does not mention the
 66 works of his contemporaries because he does not want to draw attention to them, given
 67 that they are his competitors. It would be very interesting to compare this procedure with
 68 scientific writing in the twenty-first century to see whether the academic milieu has become
 69 a more peaceful environment.

70 The history of medicine (or the history of science in the wider sense) clearly shows
 71 that knowledge does not belong to any one culture. The history of humanity has involved
 72 the constant circulation of ideas and it makes no sense to associate modernity or tech-
 73 nology with a particular geographical region. Al-Ghāfiqī, like Dioscorides, belonged to a
 74 Mediterranean Greco-Arabic herbal tradition. After an odysseylike journey (described by
 75 Touwaide, 111) from al-Andalus to Canada, passing through Baghdad and Iran, his text
 76 now reaches the global reader and represents a link in a chain that we hope will never end.

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