The Herbal of al-Ghafiqi is a key work in the history of science, for two main reasons. Not only is it a comprehensive book on plants, but it also offers a huge amount of philological information (35–50). As it includes the characteristics of each entry (in alphabetical order) and the translation of its name into several languages, it constitutes a genuine multilingual glossary of medical plants. The Herbal represents a good example of the Andalusi encyclopedic style. It serves as an emblematic exercise of erudition produced in the Islamic Occident during the Middle Ages, and was both used locally and exported to the East and to the Latin West. In the prologue (translated by F. Jamil Ragep), the author lists the improvements he has made in relation to previous treatises and also expresses his concerns about the practice of medicine and the kinds of knowledge a good physician should master. In his experience, a certain familiarity with pharmacology is essential for a physician to supervise the treatment prescribed for the patient. As Oliver Kahl points out (44), the concepts of innovation or originality were different from the ones we hold today. The book, then, is a reflection of the circulation of ideas in al-Andalus in the twelfth century and a unique opportunity to follow the trail of the texts the author considered to be authorities (for example, works by Dioscorides and Galen and many Muslims, such as al-Rāzī, Ibn Juljul, al-Zahrāwī, and Avicenna, to name but a few). Leigh Chipman’s study of the sources (72–83) notes that although the common practice in the Middle Ages was to quote authorities, we cannot be entirely sure that the quotes actually correspond with the texts cited. A detailed examination of al-Ghafiqi’s book shows some mistaken identities, but it is difficult to establish whether these were the result of an uncritical repetition or inaccuracy on the part of the author himself.

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

The Herbal of al-Ghafiqi is preserved in several copies, although only two are illustrated. The present book includes the facsimile edition of manuscript 7508 of the Osler Library of the History of Medicine at McGill University in Montreal, an incomplete copy of the
work from the thirteenth century. It is no surprise at all that the manuscript is preserved in Canada: William Osler (1849–1919) was a prominent physician who taught at McGill University, Johns Hopkins Hospital, and Oxford. He was profoundly interested in the history of science, which he saw as a magnificent source of reflection on his profession, and he was also a dedicated collector. Adam Gacek provides a detailed history of the manuscript (18–34), which Osler bought in Baghdad or Mesopotamia, even though he knew no Arabic. This story speaks volumes about the procedures of Western colonization of Eastern countries as well as the response of the colonized peoples. As the manuscript was sold with a partial copy of Dioscorides’s *De materia medica*, Osler thought he was buying the complete text translated into Arabic. The episode provides valuable insights into the workings of the manuscript market in the Middle East at the beginning of the twentieth century. The manuscripts were beautifully illustrated but, thanks to Jaclynne Kerner (121–56), we learn that they were modified in the nineteenth century, and also that the illustrations were not all the work of a single artist. Moreover, Alain Touwaide (84–120) establishes that copies with images were very expensive, a luxury object meant for nonprofessional owners although not as rare as modern literature has claimed. This fact proves, once more, how dependent we are on textual testimonies associated with the elites when studying the Middle Ages and how necessary it is to consider new approaches in order to gain a broad, accurate picture. The papers included in this edition help us to expand our view. Cristina Álvarez Millán’s essay (51–71), for instance, recalls the (relatively neglected) difference between practice and theory in medieval Islamic medicine. Álvarez Millán analyzes the silences in al-Ghāfiqi’s work, a crucial aspect of historical texts but one that is very difficult to examine. She suggests that al-Ghāfiqi does not mention the works of his contemporaries because he does not want to draw attention to them, given that they are his competitors. It would be very interesting to compare this procedure with scientific writing in the twenty-first century to see whether the academic milieu has become a more peaceful environment.

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