A Syriac Medical *Kunnāšā* of ʾĪšō‘ bar ʿAlī (9th c.): First Soundings*

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Abstract

A little-known thirteenth-century manuscript preserved in Damascus contains by far the largest Syriac medical work that has survived till today. Despite the missing beginning, a preliminary study of the text allows us to argue that it is the medical handbook (entitled *Kunnāšā*) of ʾĪšō‘ bar ʿAlī, a ninth-century physician and student of Ḥunayn b. Ishāq. The seven books of the handbook appear to follow the model of Paul of Aegina’s *Pragmateia* both in composition and content. The actual significance of the handbook in the history of Syriac and Arabic medicine is yet to be assessed, but there can be no doubt that it will be a pivotal source that illustrates the development of Syriac medicine during a period of four centuries at the moment when it was being translated to lay the foundations of the nascent medical tradition in Arabic.

Keywords

Syriac medicine – medical handbooks – ʾĪsā b. ʿAlī – Paul of Aegina – Syriac translations

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1 Manuscript

The unique manuscript preserved in the library of the Syriac Orthodox Patriarchate near Damascus is not totally unknown but unfortunately it has never received a proper description, and due to its inaccessibility it remained out of scholarly attention and inquiry.¹ At present, codex Syrian Orthodox Patriarchate 238 (hereafter SOP 238, a previous shelfmark was 6/1) consists of 439 folios, but only the first 435 of those belong to the original codex whereas the four last ones were added later. What we find on those supplementary folios (SOP 238, ff. 436–440) seems to be a fragment from an independent Syriac medical manuscript of a later date. The text there is divided into sections that deal with anatomy, the preparation of theriac “according to the opinion of Galen” and “Indian drugs”.² The scribe mentions that he translated the text from Arabic.

The original codex is damaged and lacks some folios. Especially noticeable is the absence of the opening part (the text begins in the middle of the second quire) although five folios (SOP 238, ff. 431–435) from the missing part can now be found attached to the end of the text. Those five folios contain the table of contents (damaged) as well as the very beginning of the original text (first chapter of Mēmṛā i) and a page from the introduction where the author traces the history of the art of medicine and healing back to Asclepius.

According to the colophon (SOP 238, f. 430^v) that follows the text, the manuscript was completed on September 30, AG 1535 [= 1224 CE] by deacon Basil the son of Rabban Yoḥannan, an archpriest of Melitene.³ The manuscript was copied in Mosul at the time when the scribe was disciple of “the archiatros of the East,” Rabban Abu Saʿīd.⁴ The scribe of the manuscript, Basil son of Yoḥannan from Melitene, is known to have copied in 1221 CE an additional important

1 An unspecific catalogue description is available in Dōlabānī, “Catalogue des manuscrits,” p. 586. The manuscript was also mentioned in Barsoum, *The Scattered Pearls*, p. 187 (Barsoum attributes the work to Ḥunayn) and Brock, *The Hidden Pearl*, p. 161 and 133 (information is provided based on the catalogue description). The manuscript does not contain Ḥunayn's treatise *Properties of Foodstuffs*, as assumed in Hawley, “Preliminary Notes,” p. 82 n. 9. To the best of my knowledge the manuscript was not photographed by Arthur Vööbus, who visited that collection and copied some manuscripts. The library of the Patriarchate of the Syriac Orthodox Church contains a few more medical manuscripts, one of which is the so-called *Syriac Epidemics* (Kessel, “The Syriac Epidemics”).

2 Mentioned also are Democritus and Philo of Tarsus.

3 Another scribal note can be found after Mēmṛā vi (SOP 238, f. 361^r), where the scribe indicates the current date as July 16, AG 1529 [= 1218 CE].

4 One wonders if this is the same Abu Saʿīd whose anatomical treatise survived in Armenian

Syriac manuscript with works on secular subjects that has survived in modern apographs.⁵ Furthermore, there is an intriguing possibility to identify the scribe with a scribe Basil Meliteniotes, a Greek Orthodox Armenian, who produced in 1226 CE a famous illustrated Greek manuscript preserved in the Gennadius Library (Athens).⁶

The medical text is written on paper in a very condensed ductus of Serto which makes reading the manuscript a serious challenge despite its overall good condition. The manuscript contains a large number of notes left by its readers that can shed light on its history. Particularly, the notes on ff. 402^v–403^r were penned by the ecclesiastical leaders of the Syrian Orthodox Church; perhaps the two most well-known names are Mas‘ūd of Zāz, a patriarch of Tūr ‘Abdīn (1431–1512) and Severus, a metropolitan of Syria and the future patriarch Ignatius Aphrem Barsoum (1887–1957).

Finally, the presence of the Armenian quire signatures and Arabic glosses hint at wide circulation of the manuscript.

2 Text

2.1 Title

Due to the loss of the beginning of the manuscript we are bereft of priceless information about the title of the work and its author. Nevertheless, while going through the text one’s attention is regularly drawn to the term *Kunnāšā*, as it features, for example, in the opening and closing rubrics of some of the Memrē. Considering that the term *Kunnāšā* was regularly applied to medical handbooks, it is natural to see it as the title of the magnificent work before us.

Moreover, we cannot exclude the possibility that an extended version of that title featured in the work’s original title, that could be, following the practice of that time, quite verbose. For instance, we find at the end of Memrā iv (SOP 238, f. 304^v):

(edition: Vardanian, [*Abu Sa‘id. On the Composition of Man*]). His floruit is however usually placed slightly earlier, in the second half of the twelfth century (Mahé, “La version arménienne”).

- 5 The scribe is mentioned in Barsoum, *The Scattered Pearls*, p. 534 but without additional information. See also Brock, *The Hidden Pearl*, p. 133. A partial facsimile edition of one of the modern copies along with English translation can be found in Mingana, *Encyclopædia*.
- 6 I hope to explore the issue on a different occasion. On Basil Meliteniotes see Korobeinikov, “A Greek Orthodox Armenian.”

ܡܡܪܐ ܝܢܐܢܐ ܕܡܡܪܐ ܕܡܡܪܐ ܕܡܡܪܐ ܕܡܡܪܐ ܕܡܡܪܐ

Kunnāšā on the causes of diseases, their symptoms and treatment.

2.2 *Composition and Content*

The text of the *Kunnāšā* consists of seven Memrē that are further subdivided into chapters. Below I provide a concise summary of their contents.

Mēmra i (SOP 238, ff. 1^r–92^r). 106 chapters. Hygiene, Diet, *Materia Medica*

Complaints of pregnant women, regimen (ܡܡܪܐ) of children, middle-aged, and old people, air, water, wine, regimen fitting to the different seasons, fatigue, purgation, bath (ܡܡܪܐ), food, *materia medica*, simples, purgative drugs, classification of the simples, drugs not mentioned by Dioscorides and Galen (some of those are explicitly marked as Persian and Indian), rules for the preparation of compounds.

Mēmra ii (SOP 238, ff. 92^v–151^v). 47 Chapters. Local Ailments—
Head

Head sicknesses caused by overheating, supercooling, drunkenness, concussion, fall; brain disorders, torpor (ܡܡܪܐ), phrenitis (ܡܡܪܐ), madness (ܡܡܪܐ), delirium (ܡܡܪܐ), lethargy (ܡܡܪܐ), epilepsy (ܡܡܪܐ), insanity (ܡܡܪܐ), apoplexy (ܡܡܪܐ), loss of memory, melancholy (ܡܡܪܐ), spasm (ܡܡܪܐ), numbness (ܡܡܪܐ), trembling (ܡܡܪܐ), afflictions of the hair, alopecia (ܡܡܪܐ), afflictions of the skin, lice (ܡܡܪܐ), nits (ܡܡܪܐ), love-sick people.

Mēmra iii (SOP 238, ff. 152^r–211^r). 81 Chapters. Local Ailments—
Eyes, Ears, Chest

Pus that forms in the eyes (ܡܡܪܐ), ophthalmia (ܡܡܪܐ), eye swelling (ܡܡܪܐ), itching in the eyes (ܡܡܪܐ), inflammation in the eyes (ܡܡܪܐ), eyelids (ܡܡܪܐ) disorders; diseases of sclera (ܡܡܪܐ), ears, nostrils (ܡܡܪܐ), teeth, tongue, mouth, chest; warts (ܡܡܪܐ), cough (ܡܡܪܐ), inflammation of the lungs (ܡܡܪܐ), spitting blood (ܡܡܪܐ), wasting (ܡܡܪܐ), pleurisy (ܡܡܪܐ), heart diseases, swoon (ܡܡܪܐ), humpback (ܡܡܪܐ).

dages (ܡܥܬܪܐ), compresses (ܡܥܬܪܐ), elixirs (ܡܥܬܪܐ) and collyria (ܡܥܬܪܐ). Special chapters are devoted to the ailments of the teeth and eyes. The *Mēmṛā* ends with two auxiliary chapters on measures and substitute drugs.

Both in its composition and content the *Kunnāšā* reminds us of the medical compendia and handbooks that are known from the late antique and early Islamic periods.⁹ The *Kunnāšā* covers all the standard subjects of the medical handbooks: regimen and *materia medica* (*Mēmṛā* i), diseases pertaining to a particular body part are presented by and large following the principle from head to toe (*Memrē* ii, iii and iv), fevers and external diseases (*Mēmṛā* v), poisons (*Mēmṛā* vi), compound drugs (*Mēmṛā* vii). What strikes one perhaps most of all is the author's splendid command of pharmacology (notably, *Mēmṛā* i is the largest) for the treatment of each diseases is replete with various recipes.

However, among the available manuals the *Pragmateia* of Paul of Aegina (7th c.) is most likely to have been the model of this *Kunnāšā*. Indeed, at first glance the two works appear to have much in common. For example, each of the two handbooks is divided into seven parts that begin with complaints of pregnant women and end with measures and substitute drugs; each chapter first presents the aetiology and symptoms of an ailment and afterwards its treatment. Nevertheless, close comparison demonstrates also considerable differences. Thus, whilst Paul's Book Three (local diseases) relates to *Memrē* ii, iii and iv, the other *Memrē* usually cover the material from more than one Book (for example, *Mēmṛā* i covers the material present in Books One and Seven and *Mēmṛā* v merges the subjects from Books Two and Four). Furthermore, whereas some material of Paul's *Pragmateia* is not present whatsoever (for example, therapy of children), in other subjects the *Kunnāšā* demonstrates a higher level of detail and proficiency (see for instance the chapters on ophthalmology in *Mēmṛā* iii). It is therefore may well be that the text of Paul's *Pragmateia* was mediated through another source. The relationship between Paul's compendium and the *Kunnāšā* merits further research because, as we shall see below, the influence of the *Pragmateia* can be traced not only on the level of composition but also in content.

2.3 Sources

The names of medical authorities are sparingly scattered in the text of the *Kunnāšā*. Thus we come across references and citations attributed to Hippocrates, Dioscorides, Rufus of Ephesus, Galen, Philagrius, Oribasius, Aetius of Amida,

9 On the genre see: Dietrich, "ʾAlī ibn Riḏwān," Karmi, "A Mediaeval Compendium," Meyerhof, "ʾAlī at-Ṭabarī's," Meyerhof, "The *Book of Treasure*."

Alexander of Tralles, and Paul of Aegina. Some names escape straightforward identification, for example Theodoretus and Theophilus. As for the native Syriac authors, only two names have been noticed, Ḥunayn b. Ishāq and Abū Zakariyā' Yūḥannā b. Māsawaih. It goes without saying that the explicit indications are nothing more than just the tip of the iceberg and it should be possible to detect the principle sources of the *Kunnāšā*. That issue will undoubtedly be one of the central questions on the agenda for further research. Nevertheless, already based on a brief acquaintance with the text it is possible to argue that Paul of Aegina occupies a very prominent position. A reading of selected chapters of the *Kunnāšā* shows the wide-ranging influence of Paul's *Pragmateia*.

By way of example, let me provide a citation from the beginning of a seven-page long chapter on melancholy (Mēmra ii.26, SOP 238, ff. 124^v–128^r) that, as we shall see shortly, is a faithful version of the opening section on melancholy in Paul's *Pragmateia*.

Paul. Aeg. 3.14.1 (i. 156.9–15 Heiberg)¹⁰

[1] Ἡ μελαγχολία παραφροσύνη τίς ἐστίν ἄνευ πυρετοῦ [2] ἐπὶ μελαγχολικῶ
 μάλιστα χυμῶ γινομένη κατειληφóτι τὴν διάνοιαν, [3] ποτὲ μὲν αὐτοῦ πρωτο-
 παθοῦντος τοῦ ἐγκεφάλου, [4] ποτὲ δὲ τῷ ὅλῳ συμμεταβαλλομένου σώματι·
 [5] καὶ τρίτον δὲ μελαγχολίας εἶδος ἐστίν, ὃ φuscώδές τε καὶ ὑποχονδριακὸν
 καλοῦσιν, [6] ἐπὶ φλεγμονῇ τῶν περὶ τὸν στόμαχον ὑποχονδρίων συνιστάμενον
 [7] ποτὲ μὲν αὔρας τινὰς μοχθηράς, [8] ποτὲ δὲ καὶ τῆς οὐσίας τοῦ χυμοῦ μέρος
 ἀναπεμπόντων πρὸς τὸν ἐγκέφαλον.

[1] Melancholy is a disorder of the intellect without fever, [2] occasioned
 mostly by a melancholic humour seizing the understanding; [3] some-
 times the brain being primarily affected, [4] and sometimes it being
 altered together with the entire of the body. [5] And there is a third type
 called the flatulent and hypochondriac, [6] occasioned by inflammation
 of one of the parts in the hypochondria adjoining to the stomach, [7] by
 which sometimes noxious vapours, [8] and sometimes a part of the sub-
 stance of the humour, is transmitted to the brain.

10 The translation is that of Adams (Adams, *The Seven Books*, p. 383) with slight modifica-
 tions.

[illegible]

[1] Melancholy is a disorder of the brain *accompanied by an injury of the intellect and insanity* without fever, [2] occasioned by a melancholic humour seizing the understanding; [3] sometimes the brain being primarily affected, [4] and sometimes it being altered together with the entire body *when that humour abundantly exceeds*. [5] And there is a third type called the flatulent and hypochondriac,¹³ [6] occasioned by inflammation of one of the parts near the stomach or hypochondria, [7] by which sometimes noxious vapours *are secreted from thick and phlegmatic humour* and are transmitted to the brain, [8] and sometimes a part of the substance of the humour ascends.

A comparison of the original Greek with the version found in the *Kunnāṣā* demonstrates that its author basically reproduced the key passage from Paul of Aegina's discussion of melancholy while providing it with just a few additions that were apparently necessary to ensure the correct interpretation of the text. We should not exclude, however, a possibility that both the text of Paul's treatise and the interpolations might go back to an intermediary source that is of course already lost. Nevertheless, a comprehensive study of *Kunnāṣā* will help to clarify the issue. A comparison with other relevant sources, such as the *Small Compendium* in seven books of Yūḥannā b. Sarābiyūn, may also shed light on the background and sources of *Kunnāṣā* (a chapter on melancholy in the *Small Compendium* differs from its treatment in *Kunnāṣā*).¹⁴

14 Peter E. Pormann kindly provided me with his draft edition of the chapter.

An anonymous Syriac translation (Pognon, *Une version syriaque*, p. 9 lines 1–2):

Pains and fevers occur rather at the production of pus than when it is already produced.

As far as we know, ʾĪṣāc bar ʾAlī was not active as a translator from Greek¹⁷ and for that reason we should assign differences between two translations not to his personal input but rather to the version available to him. If this is indeed the case, he must have had at his disposal the translation of the *Aphorisms* made by his master Ḥunayn b. Isḥāq. Intriguingly, such a conclusion urges the reappraisal of a widely accepted assertion of Rainer Degen, who argued that the translation edited by Pognon should be attributed to Ḥunayn.¹⁸ That small example demonstrates the *Kunnāṣāʾ*'s potential significance for the study of the

18 Degen, "Zur syrischen Übersetzung."

names has been recently clarified by Aaron Butts, who cogently argued that ʾĪšŌʿ bar ʾAlī, the author of the *Lexicon*, has to be identified “with physician ʾĪsā b. ʾAlī, who lived in the second half of the ninth century and was a student of Ḥunayn b. Ishāq.”²² That line of argumentation has the immediate corollary that the ninth-century ʾĪsā b. ʾAlī, a disciple of Ḥunayn, must be divorced from the tenth-century ʾĪsā b. ʾAlī al-Kaḥḥal (d. ca. 1010), a disciple of Abū l-Faraǧ ʾAbd Allāh b. al-Ṭayyib and the author of an influential ophthalmological treatise.²³

If this is indeed so, one wonders if there is any positive evidence of the medical works of ʾĪšŌʿ bar ʾAlī. Unfortunately, despite recurrent mention in the Syriac sources of ʾĪšŌʿ bar ʾAlī as physician (ܡܕܝܢܐ), apart for a fragment (on which see below) none of his works in Syriac is extant.²⁴ As for the Arabic tradition, Ibn Abī Uṣaibiʿa (d. 1270) in his *ʿUyūn al-anbāʾ fī ṭabaqāt al-aṭibbāʾ*, while extolling ʾĪsā b. ʾAlī’s excellence in the science of medicine, mentions that he produced many works (*taṣānīf*) among which two are particularly mentioned, the *Book of the benefits that can be obtained from the parts of animals* (*Kitāb al-Manāfiʿ allatī tustafādu min aʿdāʾ al-ḥayawān*) and the *Book of Poisons* (*Kitāb al-Sumūn*) in two parts (*māqālatān*). Whereas the former work is extant but remains so far unpublished,²⁵ the latter one is lost except for a handful of citations in later sources.²⁶

With all that information in hand, is there a chance to establish a connection between the *Kunnāšā* and the literary output of ʾĪšŌʿ bar ʾAlī? It seems that there is one point of pivotal significance. Namely, Ibn Abī Uṣaibiʿa records that ʾĪšŌʿ bar ʾAlī was the author of a *Book of Poisons* that was composed in two parts. As we have seen, the *Kunnāšā* contains two Memrē that deal with poisons. It is not the Memrē themselves that are important now, though, but an introductory rubric that opens Mēmṛā vi. In it the scribe apologizes for reproducing the original Mēmṛā only partially because “the author composed two other Memrē about poisons” (SOP 238, f. 358^v). It is thus very tempting to see in those “two Memrē” on the subject of poison a treatise that is recorded by Ibn Abī Uṣaibiʿa with attribution to ʾĪšŌʿ bar ʾAlī.

22 Butts, “The Biography,” p. 70.

23 Ullmann, *Medizin*, pp. 208–209, Sezgin, *Geschichte*, pp. 337–340.

24 See, most recently, Debié, “Sciences,” p. 14.

25 Sezgin, *Geschichte*, p. 377. See a brief presentation of the text in Raggetti, “The ‘Science of Properties’ and its Transmission,” pp. 169–171 and Contadini, *A World of Beasts*, p. 8. A critical edition of the treatise is under preparation by Lucia Raggetti (Freie Universität, Berlin).

26 Ullmann, *Medizin*, p. 327, Sezgin, *Geschichte*, p. 259.

solution was to make an abridgement that, however, retains the drugs' original order following the Greek alphabet. Taking advantage of the available Syriac translation of the *Simple Drugs*, ʾĪŠŌʿ bar ʾAlī added his own touch to the list. Namely, the Syriac version of the *Simple Drugs* must have already contained the Syriac equivalents of the Greek drug-names embedded in the text whereas the original Greek terms were reproduced in transliteration. Apparently, ʾĪŠŌʿ bar ʾAlī was trying to keep up with developments in the field of medicine, particularly with the growing role of Arabic, and for that reason it is quite natural that he decided to increase the usefulness of the list by providing it with Arabic equivalents.³¹ Hence, as a rule we find both Syriac and Arabic equivalents for each Greek drug name.

ʾĪŠŌʿ bar ʾAlī's efforts to render Galen's catalogue of drugs more practical and user-friendly were undoubtedly rewarded and the fragment in the Vatican manuscript offers good proof for that. We cannot be sure that there is a direct relationship between the *Kunnāšā* and the fragment, because the list covers only the drug names from *alpha* through *delta* and thus it is possible that it was copied not from the original treatise but from an intermediary version. Whatever the case may be, it is the actual content of the fragment that is worthy of notice. What we find in it is exclusively the Greek terms and their Syriac and Arabic equivalents.

To illustrate the situation let us look at the first three terms in Galen's catalogue. Galen's list begins with discussions of ἀβρότονον, ἄγνος and ἄγρω-στις. The presentation of the drugs' properties is quite lengthy and occupies eight, three and one pages in Kühn's edition respectively.³² ʾĪŠŌʿ bar ʾAlī masterfully condenses all that material into just a few lines (seven, four and three respectively), supplying the Greek terms with Syriac and Arabic equivalents (SOP 238, f. 39^v). The *Lexicon* and the Vatican fragment provide only the drugs' names.

31 It would however be too hasty to attribute the authorship of the Arabic equivalents to ʾĪŠŌʿ bar ʾAlī. Rather, it is more likely that he was following the standard Arabic pharmacological nomenclature of his time. Besides translations of pharmacological treatises, there existed also inventories of (not only medical) synonyms (cf. Ullmann, *Medizin*, pp. 288–292).

32 Kühn, *Claudii Galeni Opera*, pp. 798–811.

L1 *ἀβρότονον* ("wormwood," *Artemisia abrotanum*)

Lexicon (Hoffmann,
Syrisch-arabische
Glossen, p. 9 no. 91)

ܐܒܪܘܬܢܘܢ ܫܝܚ ܐܪܡܝܐ ܩܝܣܘܡ

ABRWṬWNWN—*brāktā d-ḥaqlā—ših Armanī*³³—*al-qayṣūm*³⁴

Kunnāšā (SOP 238,
f. 39^v)

ܐܒܪܘܬܢܘܢ ܫܝܚ ܐܪܡܝܐ ܩܝܣܘܡ
ܐܒܪܘܬܢܘܢ ܫܝܚ ܐܪܡܝܐ ܩܝܣܘܡ

ABRWṬWNWN—*brāktā d-ḥaqlā*, Bar Masawāi³⁵ says that it is *al-qayṣūm*, other
[say that it is] *ših Armanī*.

Vat. sir. 217, f. 226^v

ܐܒܪܘܬܢܘܢ ܫܝܚ ܐܪܡܝܐ ܩܝܣܘܡ
ܐܒܪܘܬܢܘܢ ܫܝܚ ܐܪܡܝܐ ܩܝܣܘܡ

ABRWṬWNWN—*brāktā d-ḥaqlā—al-qayṣūm*, other [say that it is] *ših Armanī*.

L2 *ἄγνος* ("chaste-tree," *Vitex agnus-castus*)

Lexicon (Hoffmann, *Syrisch-arabische Glossen*, p. 11 no. 181)

ܠܒܢܐ ܫܝܚ ܐܪܡܝܐ ܩܝܣܘܡ

AGNWS—*ḥabb al-faqad*

Kunnāšā (SOP 238, f. 39^v)

ܠܒܢܐ ܫܝܚ ܐܪܡܝܐ ܩܝܣܘܡ

AGNWS that is *šunāyā*

Vat. sir. 217, f. 226^v

ܠܒܢܐ ܫܝܚ ܐܪܡܝܐ ܩܝܣܘܡ

AGNWS that is *šunāyā*

33 "Armenian wormwood," *Artemisia armeniaca*.

34 "Southern-wood," *Artemisia abrotanum*.

35 Abū Zakariyā' Yūḥannā b. Māsawayh (d. 857) (Ullmann, *Medizin*, pp. 112–115). Although it is hardly possible to identify the work used by Iṣḥāq bar 'Alī it is worth noting that a number of references to Ibn Māsawayh on wormwood are preserved in al-Bīrūnī's pharmacological treatise *Kitāb al-Šaydana*.

L3 ἄγρωστις ("dog's tooth grass," *Cynodon dactylon*)

Lexicon (Hoffmann, *Syrisch-arabische Glossen*, p. 12 no. 204)

ܐܠܝܬܐ ܕܥܝܢܐ ܕܥܝܢܐ

AGRWSṬYWS Greek *tayyil*

Kunnāšā (SOP 238, f. 39^v)

ܐܠܝܬܐ ܕܥܝܢܐ ܕܥܝܢܐ

AGRWSṬYWS is *yablā* that is *tayyil*

Vat. sir. 217, f. 226^v

ܐܠܝܬܐ ܕܥܝܢܐ ܕܥܝܢܐ

AGRWSṬYWS is *yablā tayyil*.

First of all, if we compare the *Lexicon* with the *Kunnāšā* we observe the following difference: The *Lexicon*'s entries are more condensed and omit the reference to the informants (L₁); the Syriac equivalents feature more as an exception (L₁), whereas normally we find only the Arabic ones (L₂ and L₃) that are the primary focus of the *Lexicon*. The *Kunnāšā*'s approach is different for it tends to provide both the Syriac and Arabic equivalent (with the exception of L₂ where only the Syriac one is indicated). The same procedure is displayed by the Vatican fragment that indicates both the Syriac and Arabic equivalents (with the exception of L₂). There thus can be no doubt that the Vatican fragment is based on the *Kunnāšā* and not on the *Lexicon*.

In terms of possible sources that supplied the necessary information, it can be noted that the Syriac equivalents in L₁ and L₃ were introduced already by Sergius of Rēš'ainā in his translation of the *Simple Drugs*.³⁶ The Syriac term is followed by two Arabic equivalents, the first one provided on the authority of Bar Masawāi (Abū Zakarīyā' Yūḥannā ibn Māsawayh), whereas the source of the second equivalent is not identified. In the case of L₂, Sergius of Rēš'ainā does not provide any equivalent here but the term *šunāyā* must have featured in Ḥunayn's translation of the *Simple Drugs*.³⁷

36 Merx, "Proben der syrischen Übersetzung," p. 249. On that trait of Sergius' translation see Bhayro, "Syriac Medical Terminology," pp. 162–165, and Bhayro and Hawley, "La littérature botanique," pp. 296–297.

37 At least the term is present in Ḥunayn's treatise *Properties of Foodstuffs* (Hawley, "Preliminary Notes," p. 91, entry number 11.84).

Having clarified the relationship between the *Kunnāšā* and the fragment preserved in the Vatican manuscript, we are justified in relying on the authorial attribution of the latter to ʾĪšōʿ bar ʿAlī. After all, the extolling epithet (“admirable and thoroughly precise”) can by all means be applied to the text of the *Kunnāšā*.

It is worth noting in passing that the same Vatican manuscript also contains other fragments that match the text of the *Kunnāšā*. In particular, we find there (Vat. sir. 217, ff. 221^v–224^v) yet another inventory, this time of simples that are classified according to their primary qualities (hot, cold, dry and wet). The classification is followed by a list of substitute drugs (Vat. sir. 217, ff. 224^v–226^r). Both lists are present in the *Kunnāšā*. The classification of the simples is present in Mēmrā i.70–85 (SOP 238, ff. 75^v–77^v) whereas the substitute drugs appear at the very end of the treatise, Mēmrā vii.25 (SOP 238, ff. 429^r–430^v). This disconnected presence of the three fragments supports the assumption that they may not depend directly on the *Kunnāšā* but rather on an intermediary medical compilation that contained selected material from the *Kunnāšā*. That issue requires further study.³⁸

Conclusions

It is hard to overestimate the significance of a thirteenth-century medical manuscript preserved in the Syriac Orthodox Patriarchate. Even in its damaged form, the unique manuscript preserves the most extensive and voluminous Syriac medical treatise known to date and will undoubtedly change the entire field of Syriac medicine.³⁹ In brief, the treatise shows that Syriac medicine at the peak of its development produced an elaborate system of the science of medicine that is intimately related to medieval medicine in both the Arabic and the Latin realms.⁴⁰

38 The same Vatican manuscript also contains one medical fragment (Vat. sir. 217, ff. 220^r–221^v) that deals with the four faculties (attractive, retentive, alterative and expulsive). However, I was unable to find a corresponding place in the *Kunnāšā*. Curiously enough, that entire section—consisting of an unidentified fragment, classification of simples and the inventory of substitute drugs (Vat. sir. 217, ff. 220^r–226^r)—is attributed in the catalogue to Ḥunayn b. Ishāq (Assemanus, *Bibliothecae Apostolicae Vaticanae*, p. 504 and repeated also in Vööbus, “Discoveries,” p. 528), although there is absolutely no indication of this in the manuscript (noticed already in Degen, “Ein Corpus,” p. 121 n. 41).

39 The text is roughly three times larger than the therapeutical part of the *Syriac Book of Medicines*.

40 And as portrayed, for example, Porman and Savage-Smith, *Medieval Islamic Medicine*, pp. 41–67, and in greater detail in Demaitre, *Medieval Medicine*.

A preliminary study of the text allows it to be identified as a medical handbook (*Kunnāšā*) that was written by ʾĪšŌʿ bar ʾAlī, who was a disciple of Ḥunayn b. Ishāq, a personal physician of Caliph al-Muʿtamid (r. 870–892) and the author of the Syriac-Arabic *Lexicon*. This identification is supported by a fragment from the *Kunnāšā* preserved in a Vatican manuscript with an explicit attribution to ʾĪšŌʿ bar ʾAlī as well as by a reference in the *Kunnāšā* itself stating that its author also produced a treatise about poisons in two books. It is that treatise of ʾĪšŌʿ bar ʾAlī that was known in the Arabic medical tradition. A lack of references to the text in Arabic medical works is likely to be indicative of the fact that it was never translated into Arabic.⁴¹

In terms of its composition and content, the *Kunnāšā* appears to be greatly indebted to the *Pragmateia* of Paul of Aegina. Its impact can be traced both on the level of composition and in the discussion of individual ailments. Nevertheless, the author of the *Kunnāšā* was evidently compiling his handbook from multiple sources and his actual engagement with preceding traditions is yet to be determined. ʾĪšŌʿ bar ʾAlī's personal input also deserves special attention for the apparent practical orientation of the *Kunnāšā* indicates that its author was a practitioner with deep expertise in maintaining health and treating diseases.

Being the product of a ninth-century scholar and intellectual who stood right at the centre of the burgeoning of Arabic medicine, the *Kunnāšā* grants us an unprecedented opportunity to scrutinize the state of contemporaneous Syriac medicine that was massively contributing to the formation and growth of the medical sciences in Arabic. Metaphorically speaking, the manual of ʾĪšŌʿ bar ʾAlī stands on the shoulders of the four-century long tradition of Syriac medicine that stems from late antique Galenism inherited from Alexandria. Although the works of Galen and the Alexandrian commentaries constituted the backbone of medicine as studied and practiced by the Syriac Christians, it was also indebted to Persian and Indian medical lore.⁴²

In fact, in the case of the *Kunnāšā* we may even be dealing with one of the latest medical compositions in Syriac⁴³ that postdates the extant medical works of Ḥunayn b. Ishāq. It would therefore be a fascinating task of its own

41 See, for example, besides the standard works of Sezgin (Sezgin, *Geschichte*) and Ullmann (Ullmann, *Medizin*) a recent study on the tenth century medical compendium of Abū al-Ḥasan Aḥmad b. Muḥammad aṭ-Ṭabarī (Ambjörn, "Book-Titles").

42 For a general survey of Syriac medicine see my "Syriac Medicine."

43 If we exclude the elusive medical works of Bar ʾEbrōyō (d. 1286), at least the predominant part of which, if not all, was composed in Arabic (Micheau, "Les traités médicaux," Joosee, "A Newly-Discovered Commentary").

to explore whether the author was able to produce a coherent medical system while being confronted with a massive corpus of medical literature that must have presented many conflicting theories and incompatible practical recommendations. In order to reveal the profile of the *Kunnāšā*, one may also compare it with roughly contemporary Arabic medical manuals, such as the *Paradise of Wisdom* (*Firdaws al-ḥikma*) of ‘Alī b. Rabban al-Ṭabarī and the *Book of Treasure* (*Kitāb al-Dhakhīra*).

Undoubtedly, the *Kunnāšā* will prove a document of major significance with regard to the availability of medical works in ninth-century Baghdad. Citations that range from Hippocrates to Ḥunayn show the *Kunnāšā* to be an indispensable witness to both Syriac translations of the classical Greek sources and indigenous Syriac medical works whose main body is lost.⁴⁴ For instance, due to the direct practical significance of Galen's catalogue of simples, numerous attempts were made to render the treatise first in Syriac and later in Arabic.⁴⁵ The first Syriac translation was made by Sergius of Rēš‘ainā, whereas the last one was perhaps implemented by Ḥunayn. Since the abridged version preserved in the *Kunnāšā* differs from Sergius' translation it becomes an important witness for the later translation history of the *Simple Drugs* in the Syriac tradition.

A study of the *Kunnāšā* is, however, not lacking in serious difficulties, the least of which is a small tight handwriting that presents a challenge even to reading the text. The main obstacle is posed by the underdevelopment of the field of Syriac medicine and particularly by our meagre awareness concerning the translation techniques employed by the eighth- and ninth-century translators and the lexicography of such areas of medicine as anatomy, therapeutics, nosology and pharmacology.⁴⁶ Unless considerable progress is achieved in those two directions, any study of the *Kunnāšā* will be uncritical and premature.

44 For a survey of Syriac medical literature see Habbi, "Textes médicaux". Some Syriac medical works are known to us thanks to the quotations preserved in Arabic medical treatises. The largest number of excerpts can be found in the *Comprehensive Book* (*al-Kitāb al-Ḥawī*) of Abū Bakr Muḥammad ibn Zakarīyā' al-Rāzī (d. 925 or 935) and that have recently become conveniently available in English translation (Kahl, *The Sanskrit, Syriac and Persian Sources*, pp. 160–364).

45 Pormann, "The Development."

46 Syriac pharmacology has recently received a welcome tool (Gignoux, *Lexique*) that is however based on just a limited number of sources. I should also mention that a number of projects are underway that are going to contribute to the progress of Syriac medicine (for example, Robert Hawley's edition of the Syriac and Arabic versions of Ḥunayn's treatise on *Properties of Foodstuffs* and Sergius' translation of Books vi–viii of Galen's *Simple*

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sop 238, f. 39^v (beginning of the inventory of the simples)

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