CONCLUSIONS

The long journey that we have made has enabled us first and foremost to elucidate the characteristics of an important branch of the medical profession in all its theoretical and practical aspects, as reflected in the Arabic veterinary treatises of the Mamluk period. It also brought us somewhat closer to the people who were involved in treating and caring for animals, to their cultural and social background and their ways of acquiring their profession. Last but not least, our examination has unfolded the role in Mamluk society of the animals that were the subject of such sophisticated medical methods, as well as their various interactions with their human masters.

It has been observed that some of the older scholarly works that dealt with Islamic veterinary medicine claimed that it merely followed the classical and Byzantine models.1 Yet, a recent study of one section of what is considered to be the oldest available Arabic text on hippology and hippiatry—that of Ibn Akhī Ḥizām (late ninth century)—has revealed that it shows no parallels to texts of late Antiquity and the medieval West, while obvious similarities with later Arabic treatises could be detected. The authors of that study concluded that medieval Arabic hippiatry had its own tradition.2 The present research has revealed a more complex picture in this respect, since it has demonstrated that despite its independent development, based on professional experience, veterinary medicine in the medieval Arabic world also drew substantial elements from earlier traditions, especially the Greek one.

The scrutiny of the veterinary treatises written or rewritten in the Mamluk period does indeed reveal that the Arab veterinary science in that period was influenced by the classical Greek heritage, and even more so by the Byzantine one, but it also drew a great deal from the Indian, Persian and Armenian veterinary heritages. The care of dogs and other non-equine mammals, as well as works on the medicine of hawking and falconry do not occur at all in ancient Greek writings. Moreover, the Arabic treatises are much more detailed and comprehensive compared with the ones included in the Corpus hippiatricorum Graecorum (a compilation of Byzantine

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texts). It is also worth noting that the early Arab heritage, particularly from the Jāhilīyah and early Islamic period, finds significant expression both in content and terminology in veterinary books, where the anatomy of the horse is described in great detail, along with extensive descriptions of all the signs that help in diagnosing animals' diseases.

The fact that veterinary knowledge in the Mamluk period drew from many cultural heritages did not confine the Muslim veterinary surgeons to using only methods and prescriptions inherited from former traditions. This is particularly evident with respect to the way in which the ancient Hippocratic and Galenic theories, which were so dominant among physicians treating human beings, were perceived in the sphere of veterinary medicine. The authors of treatises on human medicine provide an explanation based on the dominant medical theory for almost every disease. In most of the medieval medical sources written in Arabic, such as the comprehensive treatise by the highly authoritative medieval writer on medicine, Ibn Sinā, every illness is explained as the result of an imbalance of the humours. Ibn Sinā also often points to the humoral quality that characterizes the temperament of the disease, which largely dictates the suitable treatment, not only for the disease's temperament but also for the specific temperament of the body part affected.

This attention to the smallest details concerning temperaments has no parallel in the veterinary treatises examined in this book. However, the degree of association between the humours and temperaments theory and animal ailments, their diagnosis and treatment is different, depending on the branch of veterinary medicine concerned. The horse doctors seem to attribute much less importance to the theory of humours and temperaments compared to the ones dealing with birds of prey. True, nobody dared to question openly the validity of the theory of humours, and there was hardly an author who did not devote a few pages to it. Yet, when it came to diagnostic methods and methods of treatment, the pragmatic approach seems to have guided the veterinarians who treated horses. They used medicines and other practical methods, expecting to achieve visible results. Only if these methods were unsuccessful did they turn to the classical theory and seek to restore the balance of the humours. In such cases the technique they adopted was mainly bloodletting, usually performed alongside other treatments. In the veterinary literature (in both branches, but especially so in horse medicine) phlebotomy is generally proposed as a last resort or a supplement to dietary regimes or drugs prepared from plants and minerals; it is rarely recommended as the exclusive treatment, and