

Historical Introduction

1 The *Regimen sanitatis* Attributed to “Avenzoar”: Its Genesis and Its Organization

The movement to translate Arabic-language texts into Latin, especially medical and scientific ones, was one of the transformative features of the European Middle Ages. It has long held great fascination for historians, and the process by which a typical such translation was produced is well understood in its general outlines. Since few if any of the early translators were fluent in Arabic as well as Latin, they worked with an associate: one member of the team could read the Arabic, and translated it aloud into the European vernacular that he and his partner shared; the other then proceeded to translate that spoken text and write it down in Latin. But the intricacies of that process as it lay behind an individual translation are inevitably opaque and resistant to analysis. Even when we have sound editions of an Arabic text and of its Latin version, all evidence of the intermediation is missing, so that we cannot appreciate the detailed negotiation of syntax and vocabulary that the translation team went through, the specific contributions that each partner made. We believe that we have come upon an exception to that opacity, and that in what follows we can open a window on the details of the way in which one particular team went about translating a medical work from Arabic into Latin—even though, as we will see, the original Arabic text no longer exists.

The work in question is a Latin *Regimen sanitatis* attributed to “Avenzoar.” Though long known to scholars, it has always remained an item of at best casual interest. Historians of Arabic-language medicine and its Latin translation have largely passed it by, since no copy of an original Arabic text has ever been discovered. But it would not have been surprising if a work attributed to an “Avenzoar” had attracted the attention of late thirteenth-century Western physicians.¹ Abū Marwān ‘abd al-Mālik ibn Zuhr (Avenzoar, d. 1162) was a

1 The best and most comprehensive introduction to the lives and works of the three generations comprising the Ibn Zuhr dynasty of physicians (Abū l-‘Alā’, Abū Marwān, and Abū Bakr) is the following suite of articles: Cristina Álvarez Millán, “Abū l-‘Alā’ Zuhr,” in *Enciclopedia de la cultura andalusí. Biblioteca de al-Andalus*, ed. Jorge Lirola Delgado, vol. 6 (Almería: Fundación Ibn Tufayl, 2009), 340–50; R. Valencia, “Abū Bakr Ibn Zuhr,” in *ibid.*, 350–52; and C. Álvarez Millán, R. Kuhne Brabant, and E. García Sánchez, “Abū Marwān ‘Abd al-Malik b. Zuhr,” in *ibid.*, 352–68.

brilliant clinician of twelfth-century Seville whose *Kitāb al-taisīr* was a broad survey of pathology that largely set theory aside as it discussed the symptoms and treatments of diseases drawing extensively on his own experience; his younger Cordovan contemporary, Ibn Rushd (Averroes, d. 1198), concluded his own more theoretically-oriented survey of medicine, the *Kitāb al-kulliyāt*, by referring readers to Ibn Zuhr's work for practical detail.² A Latin translation made the *Kitāb al-taisīr* available to European readers in 1281, and a few years later the Latin translation of Averroes's work under the title of the *Colliget* helped enhance Avenzoar's reputation in the West. A new work by "Avenzoar" would surely have caused a stir c. 1300. To be sure, the author of the presumed Arabic original need not have been the famous Abū Marwān ibn Zuhr: his father Abū 'l-'Alā' Zuhr (d. 1130/31) was also a physician of note, who we are told was distinctly unimpressed by Avicenna's *Qānūn* when it first came into his hands.³ But because there is no independent confirmation that either man ever composed a work of this sort (and no Arabic text to study), Arabists have tended to ignore our *regimen*.⁴

Other communities of scholars have had their own reasons for a lack of interest in the text. Some manuscripts assign the translation to Arnau de Vilanova (d. 1311), but Arnaldian students have concluded that the ascription is apocryphal and have dismissed the work from their attention. Historians of the *regimina*-tradition have indeed given passing notice to it, but it has been a difficult work for them to consult:⁵ while well over a dozen manuscripts of

2 Danielle Jacquart and Françoise Troupeau, *La médecine arabe et l'occident médiéval* (Paris: Maisonneuve et Larose, 1990), 142–44, where Averroes's praise for Ibn Zuhr (at the end of the *Colliget*) is translated. The Latin *Colliget* is less effusive, but it does say "Unicuique volenti ad huiusmodi praeclaritatis scientiam pervenire, bonum est ut libros Abumeron Avenzoar studiose legat, nam illic medicine thesaurus patet manifeste"; ed. Venice, 1562, fol. 175vb.

3 Gabriel Colin, *Avenzoar: Sa vie et ses oeuvres* (Paris: Leroux, 1911), 17–18.

4 The underlying Arabic text is often identified with the *Kitāb al-aghdiya*, or "Book of Foods," which Ibn Abī Uṣaibī'a said that Abū Marwān wrote and dedicated to Abū Muḥammad 'Abd al-Mu'min ibn 'Alī; see, e.g., Danielle Jacquart, "The influence of Arabic medicine in the medieval West," in *Encyclopedia of Islamic Science*, ed. R. Rashed and R. Morelon (London: Routledge, 1996), 3:984 (Table 1). We have not been able to trace the origin of this common identification. The *K. al-aghdiya* as edited by E. García Sánchez (*Abū Marwān 'Abd al-Malik b. Zuhr, Kitāb al-Agdiya = Tratado de los alimentos* [Madrid: C.S.I.C., 1992]), is very different from our *Regimen*, being entirely organized around kinds of foodstuffs and the methods of their preparation. See also below, p. 17 n. 32.

5 The only recent study of the work of which we are aware is that of Wolfram Schmitt, *Medizinische Lebenskunst: Gesundheitslehre und Gesundheitsregimen im Mittelalter* (Munster: Lit Verlag, 2013), 155–62, which is based entirely on the printed edition. (The volume is a revised and updated version of the author's 1973 Heidelberg *Habilitationsschrift*, which we have not consulted.) A précis of its contents is given in the account of medieval *regimina*