INTRODUCTION

The manual for pharmacists Minhāj al-dukkān wa-dustūr al-a’yān fī a’māl wa-tarākib al-adwiya al-nāfi’ a li-l-insān (‘The management of the [pharmacist’s] shop and the rule for the notables on the preparation and composition of medicines beneficial to Man’) was composed (according to the colophon of the Gotha manuscript) in the year 658/1260 in Cairo by the otherwise unknown Abū l-Munā Dāwud b. Abi Naṣr al-Kūḥīn al-‘Aṭṭār al-Hārūnī al-Isrā’īlī, apparently a Jewish druggist. The work comprises twenty-five chapters, beginning with an exhortation to al-Kūḥīn al-‘Aṭṭār’s ‘son,’ and including chapters on simples (mufradāt), substitute drugs and weights and measures. Other chapters deal with compound medicines (murakkabāt) according to their methods of preparation. It survives in at least thirty manuscripts, including one in Judaeo-Arabic, and has been printed several times, first at Būlāq in 1870 and most recently in Beirut in 2001.¹ Stein-schneider, in the relevant entry in his Arabische Literatur der Juden,² notes the existence of a manuscript claiming to be a translation into Hebrew of Minhāj al-dukkān, called Abqat Rokhel.

Despite the fact that Minhāj al-dukkān has been a most popular work, and continued to be used at least until the 1960s,³ no in-depth studies of it have been undertaken previously. Earlier studies of Minhāj al-dukkān (Steinschneider’s article on al-Kūhīn al-‘Aṭṭār’s sources,⁴ and the summaries of its contents composed by Nemoy⁵ and Hamarneh)⁶ have emphasised either philological or purely pharmacological aspects

of the work. Given the dates of these articles, this is not surprising: In the same way that much research on medicine in Islam has been more interested in theory than in practice, most of the research on the history of pharmacy in Islam has been philologically or pharmacologically oriented, i.e. emphasising either the names or the active ingredients of drugs. The social history of Islamic medicine is a new field, generally speaking, and up to now discussions of pharmacy as a profession and as part of the fabric of society have (with few exceptions) dealt with the period up to the middle of the thirteenth century CE.

This book is an analysis of Minhāj al-dukkān as a reflection of the position and role of the pharmacist in society. As the vast majority of pharmacological works in Arabic were composed by physicians, not by pharmacists, I believe that since al-Kūhīn al-ʿAṭṭār was a practising pharmacist, writing (as I will show) for other pharmacists, his book reflects the then-current pharmaceutical practice. In order to demonstrate the book’s authorship and readership, I have, on the one hand, undertaken a close reading of Minhāj al-dukkān, looking for clues to al-Kūhīn al-ʿAṭṭār’s professional identity (e.g., practical advice on the good management of one’s shop), and on the other hand, contextualized Minhāj al-dukkān within the Arabic pharmacological literary tradition, asking: What is similar and what is different in the structure and contents of Minhāj al-dukkān as compared to other pharmacological works? Part One of this book has the text as its focus. I begin by studying the way earlier works are quoted in the chapters on murakkabāt (Chapter One), and then compare and contrast the remaining chapters of Minhāj al-dukkān with works composed by physicians (Chapters Two and Three).

Part Two moves from the text to its context. In Chapter Four, the context is the medical-scientific establishment: Where were pharmacists situated within the learned class? How were they seen by physicians and by ʿulamāʾ (learned men of religion)? In Chapter Five, the context is, broadly, the pharmacist’s customers: I examine the image of

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8 A note on terminology: The boundaries between pharmacy and pharmacology are not always clear. I use the former to denote the practice of preparing and dispensing drugs, and the latter to denote the science of drugs and their composition.