PART ONE

ANALYSIS OF MINHĀJ AL-DUKKĀN
CHAPTER ONE

MINHĀJ AL-DUKKĀN AS A PHARMACEUTICAL TEXT

One of the major literary models available to medical writers in the Islamic world was that of the pharmacopoeia, the formulary of drugs. This was given the name aqrābādhīn, from the Greek graphidion, a list or registry.¹ In these works, which can either be independent books or sections of larger ones, the author presents a compilation of compound prescriptions for many ailments. In its most common form, each chapter is devoted to a particular form of preparation, rather than to a particular illness or to an active ingredient, as one might find in modern pharmacopoeias. Within this basic structure, there is great room for variety: Often, similar preparations, such as syrups (ashriba), robs (rubūb) and jams (murabbayāt) would be placed together in a single chapter; another common feature is a chapter devoted to dentifrices or to eye medicines. Another way of arranging a formulary is in alphabetical order of the simples and compounds. Again, all examples of a particular preparation would appear together. For example, all catapasms (sing. safūf) will appear together under sin, followed by the simple saqamūniyā (scammony, Convolvulus scammonia).²

Medieval formularies, in both the Muslim and Christian worlds, shared the same structure, which had its origin in Galen’s De Compositione medicamentorum. A typical recipe would be composed of the following elements, not necessarily always in this order: The heading or title of the drug; its indications; the ingredients and their quantities; the manner of preparation; recommended dosage or application. Often, the expression mujarrab (tried) or nāfiʿ (effective, beneficial) would appear at the end of the recipe, sometimes together with the pious hope of in shāʾa allāh taʿālā, ‘God willing.’

² Ibn Jazla, Minhāj al-bayān fīmā yastaʿmiluhu ‘l-insān, MS Cambridge P9 (11), fols. 51b, l. 13–53b, l. 6 (catapasms), fол. 53b, ll. 6ff. (simple).