The Book of Plants of Abū Ḥanīfa ad-Dinawarī, Part of the alphabetical section (j—l)

Edited from the unique MS. in the Library of the University of Istanbul, with an Introduction, Notes, Indices, and a Vocabulary of Selected Words by Bernhard Lewin. —


Abū Ḥanīfa's Kitāb an-Nabāt, well-known by the numerous quotations found in later works, has long been considered lost. On the assumption that no MS. was extant B. Silberberg undertook about 50 years ago to reconstruct the work from the available extracts in Arabic lexicons and in the Câmi' al-Mufradât of Ibn al-Baṭṭār (ZA 24, p. 225-265; 25, p. 39-88. The first part also appeared as an offprint, Strassburg 1910. Another paper, apparently never published, with a similar aim but based on a different source had previously been prepared by P. Brönnle; see Actes du XIIe Congrès international des orientalistes, t. III, partie 2, p. 18). Now two fragments have come to light. The one, containing 40 leaves, was discovered in Medina in 1947, and the existence of the other, found in the University Library, Istanbul, became known to Western scholars about a year later.

The numerous and often extensive excerpts on which Silberberg had based his research did not enable him to draw correct conclusions about the original structure of Abū Ḥanīfa's work. He inferred from chapter headings such as Bāb al-karm, Bāb al-ḥibāl, preserved in the Lisān and the Muxassās of Ibn Sīdā, that the Kitāb an-Nabāt had been a collection of monographs (ZA 24, p. 252-53) similar to those assembled in the respective part of the Muxassās. Silberberg thus maintained that Abū Ḥanīfa had not arranged his work alphabetically.

The Istanbul MS. now clarifies this question. Although it is incomplete, it incidentally contains parts of the two sections into which the Book of Plants had been divided: the first, a series of monographs, as already concluded by Silberberg; and the second, a lexicon of botanical terms in alphabetical order—names of plants, their parts, fruits etc.

The lexicological part, comprising the letters alif to sāy, is contained in the publication under review. The other part is to be published by Dr. Hamidullah of Osama University, Haiderabad, together with the Medina fragment—discovered by this scholar—which also belongs to the monograph section.

The Arabic text was printed at Brill's, Leiden. It has a special title: Ǧīša min al-cūs? al-xāmis min kitāb an-nabāt, whereas an added half-title (p. 1) reads as follows: Al-cūs? at-tāmin min acsā? al-gādī Abī Sa'īd as-Sīrāfī. The editor thinks (p. 4) that the assignation of the first part of the lexicon to the fifth cūs, according to the title of the Istanbul MS., corresponds to the division into six volumes of the copy which the author of the Xīānāt al-Adāb had used. As-Sīrāfī on the other hand "may have divided the entire work into ten parts."

The edition of the text is accompanied by an English introduction (p. 1-16) treating among other things the sources of the Kitāb an-Nabāt and the quotations from it in later works, and by a Vocabulary of Selected Words (p. 17-52), chiefly botanical terms. The footnotes which contain textual emendations, references to extracts and parallels and discussions about the šawāhid are all written in Arabic.

The task assumed by the editor involved a considerable amount of work. He traced the quotations from the Kitāb an-Nabāt and pointed out parallels in quite a number of later and some earlier works, not restricting himself to those available in print alone but utilising also several MSS, (see p. [V], [10]). He paid particular attention to the šawāhid. The long list of pertinent sources used for this purpose (p. [V], [10]) bears witness to his painstaking procedure. MSS. were also used for establishing the dependence of some of the most important Arabic lexicons on the Kitāb an-Nabāt (see p. 8, 10).
There can thus be no doubt that, from the outset, the edition had been carefully prepared. Yet it is to be regretted that not the full fruit of the editor’s labour could actually be incorporated into the publication. Although the text was edited from a unique MS., the original plan of giving a conspectus of the variant readings of the quotations in later works had to be dropped for various reasons (p. 15) and, instead, more references to the works utilised are given in the footnotes, without indicating the variant readings themselves. Moreover, “the aim of all these references was not so much to establish the text itself but to demonstrate the dependence of later writers upon the Kitāb an-Nabāṭ” (p. 15). The old and carefully written MS., copied as it was from the MS. written by the well-known philologist Abū Sa‘īd as-Sirāfī, was in the editor’s judgement “sufficient for establishing a satisfactory text” (p. 15).

Judging from the comparatively few and often insignificant textual emendations which the editor found necessary, the MS. is very reliable indeed. This judgement is moreover corroborated by the fact that a number of these emendations are unnecessary, the original reading being correct (see below).

Yet a single MS., however authenticated and carefully written, cannot, by modern standards, be considered an adequate basis for a scholarly text edition. Parallel texts, as far as available, should systematically be resorted to in order to verify the text of the MS. or, if necessary, to emend it. The various readings, or at least those of importance, as well as authentic additions, unless they have already been incorporated into the text, should find their place in an *apparatus criticus*. This is all the more imperative where the work in question, as is probably the case with the *K. an-Nabāṭ*, had been circulated in more than one recension. Different editions of the same work are not altogether an uncommon feature in Arabic literature. This is reported, for example, about the *Camkara* of Ibn Duraid (*GAL* I, p. 114), a younger contemporary of Abū Ḥanīfa. A clue for a similar assumption with regard to the *K. an-Nabāṭ* is given in *Lisan* 13, p. 352 l. 16: *qāla Abū Ḥanīfata l-iṣḥilu yuṣḥiḥu l-ṭalṭī waṣāfiṣu ḥattā tuttaṣaṣa minhu r-iṣḥilu waṣāla marratān yañṣīṣu kamā yañṣīṣu l-ṭalṭī (= Nabāṭ, p. 11)—for the sake of convenience the pagination of the Arabic text is indicated here and in the following by European numerals—l. 1-2, 13). This passage clearly shows that the copy used by the author of one of *Lisān*’s sources was derived from the recension made by a disciple of Abū Ḥanīfa, while our text which contains all these data in a different arrangement and lacks the remark *qāla marratān*, obviously represents another recension. For a similar instance with the same remark *waṣāla marratān* see *Ṭāq* 1, p. 48 l. 38-40 = *Nabāṭ*, p. 71 l. 2-4. Different recensions would also best explain the considerable divergencies between Nabāṭ, art. *ḥibba* (p. 129), and *Ṭāq* 1, p. 198 l. 22, 25-26. Relevant differences in various MSS. are sometimes pointed out in the dictionaries which contain excerpts from the *K. an-Nabāṭ*; see, for example, **Nabāṭ, p. 35**, note on l. 3, p. 192, note on l. 14.

The possibility cannot be excluded that as-Sirāfī, who changed the division of Abū Ḥanīfa’s work (see above), also re-arranged the text itself.

The variant readings of the Abū Ḥanīfa quotations, it is true, are mostly of no practical significance. One could certainly dispense with such divergencies as concern the sequence of words, the use of strictly synonymous words etc. Yet it is not quite irrelevant whether the leaves of a herb are described as *a‘rād* (*Nabāṭ*, p. 31 l. 7) or *a‘ṣam* (*Lisān* 11, p. 292 l. 9) than those of another one, or whether the wood of a certain tree is said to be *mustaṣīm* (*Nabāṭ*, p. 13 l. 11) or *mustaṭīl* (*Lisān* 13, p. 9 l. 17). For this reason, if no full *apparatus criticus* could be produced, at least a well-considered selection of the variant readings should have been given.

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1 That this expression refers to oral tradition can be seen from the way in which it is used, e.g., in al-ʿAṣmaʾi’s *Fuhūlat al-ṣa‘ara* (ZDMG 65, p. 487-516). Quotations from literary sources, when found in different places of the same work, are usually introduced by expressions such as *waṣāla bi maḍīna ikṣa*. 