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For the Care of Body & Soul: The Greek Bible and an Arab-Islamic Botanical Text in a 10th-Century Palimpsest Fragment

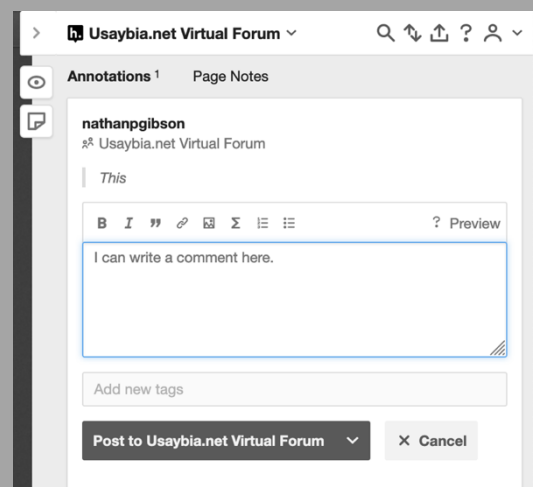
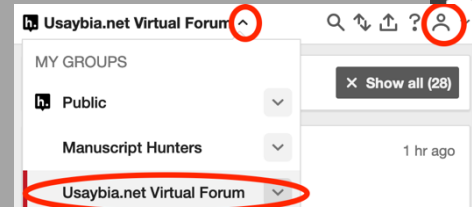
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For the Care of Body&Soul: The Greek Bible and an Arab-Islamic botanical Text in a 10th-century Palimpsest Fragment*

Abū Marwān ‘Abd al-Malik b. Ḥabīb al-Sulāmī was a prominent jurist and scholar who lived at the turn of the 2nd and the 3rd century H. (8th/9th century AD). Born in Ḥisn Waṭ – identified with the Spanish village of Huétor Vega² – about 180 AH/AD 786, he claimed to be descendent of the pre-Islamic tribe of the Banū Sulaym³, even if the Arabic sources argue that he was only their *mawla*⁴. He started his scholarly formation in his mother county, notably in the cities of Elvira and Cordova. Then, in 208 AH/AD 823-4, he decided to accomplish the ritual pilgrimage to Mecca. Before reaching it, he spent some time in certain places of the Islamic empire – especially in Egypt and Medina – where he could increase his intellectual and scientific knowledge, first of all in the Malikite doctrine⁵, which later had a great spread in *al-Andalus* thanks to him. Due to his stunning erudition and the fame he acquired, especially among his students, he has been frequently compared with the well-known jurist Saḥnūn b. Sa’īd⁶. Furthermore, he received an appointment by the ruler ‘Abd al-Raḥmān II as *faqīh mušāwar*, due to which he moved to Cordova where he spent the last part of his life until he died in 238 AH/AD 853⁷.

In the sources, Ibn Ḥabīb is notably known as a jurist. Although, due to his multifaceted character, he was interested in a lot of disciplines, quite different from each other⁸; he dealt with grammar,

* This paper has been written on the basis of my master thesis, entitled: “Due frammenti inediti del *Mukhtaṣar fī-l-ṭibb* di ‘Abd al-Malik b. Ḥabīb (m. 238/853) dalla *Qubba’ al-khazna* di Damasco” – supervisor Arianna D’Ottone Rambach, co-supervisor Serena Ammirati. I wish to thank Arianna D’Ottone for her major help in introducing me in the complex field of the *qubba* studies and for her acute suggestions regarding the edition of the fragment. I also wish to thank Serena Ammirati for the significant observations she provided me about the paper content.

² See Huici-Miranda 1971, p. 798.

³ The Banū Sulaym was one of the most powerful tribes in the Arabic peninsula during the Pre-Islamic period. Their members were very active in the trade activities, organizing lots of expeditions all around the area – especially in the south. They used to be allied with the Qurayš tribe in the first place, but they decided to support the Prophet Muḥammad when he conquered Mecca. Furthermore, they played an important role in the context of the civil war between ‘Alī and Mu‘āwiya, due to which they obtained major roles during the Umayyad administration. For a deeper analysis of the Banū Sulaym tribe see Lecker 1997, pp. 817-818.

⁴ On this question, the Andalusian historian Ibn al-Faraḍī seems quite sure when he states: “wa qad qīl: inna-hu min mawālī Sulaym”, Ibn al-Faraḍī 2008, p. 359.

⁵ The Arabic sources disagree on this topic; for example, al-Ḥumaydī suggests that Ibn Ḥabīb acquired a deep knowledge of the Malikite *fiqh* only in the last part of his life: “inna-hu adraka mālik^{an} fī ākhiri ‘umriⁱ-hi”, al-Ḥumaydī 2008, p. 408.

⁶ For the comparison between Ibn Ḥabīb and Saḥnūn b. Sa’īd – great jurist and scholar, major responsible for the almost total conversion of Maghreb to the Malikite *madhab*, see al-Faraḍī 2008, p. 361. For a biographical profile of Saḥnūn see Talbi 1995, pp. 843-845.

⁷ “wa-tawaffī ‘Abd al-Malik b. Ḥabīb [...] sana ṭamānⁱⁿ wa-ṭalātīn^a wa-mi’atayn. Wa-kānat ‘illat^u-hu al-ḥaṣāṭa, māta wa-huwa ibn^u arbaⁱ wa-sittina sana”, Al-Faraḍī 2008, p. 362.

⁸ See Ibn al-Faraḍī 2008, p. 369, and al-Ḥumaydī 2008, p. 407. Boigues, in his biographical work on Arabian-Spanish historians and geographers claims that: “como hombre de ciencia, la autoridad y renombre de Aben Habib son superiores á toda ponderación. Cultivó los ramos del saber, y en casi todos ellos dejó muestras fehacientes de sus privilegiadas facultades”, F. P. Boigues 1898, p. 30.

poetry, medicine, botany, history, genealogy, besides his main activity as a *faqīh*⁹. Arguably, his major lack was in the field of *ḥadīṭ*¹⁰. Among his scientific works, the *Mukhtaṣar fī-l-ṭibb* plays a major role, even if the sources are completely silent about it; in fact, there is no mention of the composition in the medieval Arabic sources as in the modern ones (such as Boigues)¹¹. However, in addition to the great value of its contents, it constitutes sort of a starting point for the Arabic medicine in *al-Andalus*¹². Regarding the inner structure, the work is divided by De Morales and Irueste into three main groups; the first falls into the so-called “Medicine of the Prophet” (ar. *al-ṭibb al-nabawī*)¹³, the second comprehends the description of a number of plants, fruits, and animals products – together with the indication of their uses in the medical field – while the third group can be ascribed to the world of magic¹⁴. According to the Spanish authors, the second section is the most remarkable part of the entire work by a scientific point of view, considered that “es en este apartado en el que la riqueza de conocimientos botánicos y médico-científicos de Ibn Ḥabīb se muestra en su plenitud”¹⁵. Furthermore, the editors indicate the manuscript 2.640 (D 1442c), preserved in the *Khizāna*^{al-} *‘āmma* in Rabat, as the only existing exemplar of Ibn Ḥabīb’s work¹⁶. Actually, the palimpsest fragment from the *Qubba*^{al-} *al-khanza* in Damascus, which constitutes the main topic of this paper, represents a second textual witness of the *Mukhtaṣar*.

At this point, a brief introduction about the history of the *qubba* and its materials seems quite appropriate. With the definition of *Qubba*^{al-} *al-khazna*¹⁷, we refer to the octagonal dome located in

⁹ Ibn Ḥabīb’s scholarly production was as heterogeneous as quantitatively remarkable. A detailed but incomplete list of Ibn Ḥabīb’s works can be found in Boigues 1898, pp. 31-32. Regrettably, almost none of his works has been preserved. An exception is constituted by a manuscript – stored in the Bodleian Library – of his *Ta’rīkh*. Although, the composition is considered of little value by Dozy, who compares it to an adventure novel, completely unreliable from a historical point of view. He claims: “Ne croirait-on pas lire des fragments des Mille et une Nuits? Et pourtant Ibn-Ḥabīb donne tout cela pour de l’histoire!”, Dozy 1881, p. 29. The Dutch scholar seems to be quite skeptical about the paternity of the work too, which instead he ascribed to a certain Ibn Abī al-Riqā’, probably one of Ibn Ḥabīb’s scholar. For Dozy’s analysis of the work see Dozy 1881, pp. 28-34.

¹⁰ “wa lam yakun li-‘Abd al-Malik b. Ḥabīb ‘ilm^{un} bi-l-ḥadīṭ, wa lā ya’rifu ṣaḥīḥ^a-hu min saqīmⁱ-hi”, Ibn al-Faraḍī 2008, p. 360. See also al-Ḥumaydī 2008, p. 408: “wa fī aḥādīṭⁱ-hi ḡarā’ib^u kaṭīra”.

¹¹ See De Morales-Irueste 1992, p. 32.

¹² According to De Morales and Irueste, who worked on the edition of the text: “Ibn Ḥabīb puede ser considerado como el primer andalusí autor de obras médicas”, De Morales-Irueste 1992, p. 30. It has to be highlighted that, since De Morales and Irueste’s edition is the first and only one so far, it represents the only available source for an analysis of the *Mukhtaṣar*.

¹³ The Arabic definition of *al-ṭibb al-nabawī* is referred to the collection of advices given by Muḥammad to his community in the field of body care - therapeutical advice, diet, rules of hygiene. In particular, the herbs and foods mentioned by the Prophet are grouped in the so-called “Garden of the Prophet” (ar. *al-ḥadīqa al-nabawīyya*). A brief description of the Medicine of the Prophet can be found in Pormann-Savage-Smith 2007, pp. 71-75 and Guardi 2018, pp. 33-38. See also De Morales-Irueste 1992, pp. 19-25, for the question of the Medicine of the Prophet in *al-Andalus*.

¹⁴ For a deeper analysis of the contents of the work, with the division into the three groups, see De Morales-Irueste 1992, pp. 33-36.

¹⁵ De Morales-Irueste 1992, p. 34.

¹⁶ “Se conserva en forma manuscrita entre los fondos de *al-Jizāna al-‘Āmma* de Rabat, con el número 2.640 (D 1442c). [...] Creemos que se trata de un *unicum*”, De Morales-Irueste 1992, p. 32. Another mention of the Rabat manuscript is made by Sterpellone and Elsheikh, who provides also some information about Ibn Ḥabīb’s life and the *Mukhtaṣar*. See Sterpellone-Elsheikh 1995, p. 49.

¹⁷ Actually, it seems that the definition of *Qubba*^{al-} *al-khazna* is quite recent. In fact, in the very beginning of its history, it was known as *qubba*^{al-} *al-māl*, later as *qubba*^{al-} *‘Ā’iṣa* or simply as *qubba ḡarbiyya*. An exhaustive analysis of the terminological question, together with an *excursus* on the history of the dome, can be found in al-Ġūmānī 2020, pp. 53-74.

the courtyard of the Great Mosque of the Umayyads in Damascus which, at the beginning of the 20th century, became the protagonist of an exceptional finding of written materials¹⁸. Even if a certain interest in the *qubba* and in what was supposed to be inside it was already been manifested¹⁹, the beginning of its modern history can be traced back to its official opening on 16 June 1900²⁰. At the event, besides the Ottoman authorities, an emerging German researcher, Bruno Violet²¹, was present. He had been officially designated by the Royal Prussian Academy of Science to conduct the research in Damascus – where he stayed from 1900 to 1901; moreover, he had been trained by Hermann Von Soden to work exclusively on certain manuscripts²². Immediately, the extracted material revealed a high degree of heterogeneity and complexity. The manuscripts found were in Greek²³, Latin²⁴, Hebrew²⁵, Coptic²⁶, Syriac²⁷, Christian Palestinian Aramaic, Samaritan, Georgian, besides the Arabic ones²⁸. Nevertheless, Violet could study only a small group of manuscripts – namely the non-Muslims – and what is more, he worked in difficult conditions, without the proper support of the Ottoman representatives and the locals²⁹. Considering the massive quantity of manuscripts extracted from the *qubba*, Von Soden obtained the permission to ask the Ottoman authorities for a loan of the non-Muslim materials, to proceed with their study; waiting for

¹⁸ It has to be highlighted that, considering the distinctive method of preservation of the material, the *qubba* finding has been properly interpreted as “a clear case of *Genizah*-like practice in an Islamic context”, D’Ottone 2013, p. 63. For an in-depth concerning the phenomenon of the *genizah* and the *genizah*-like practices – with particular reference to the Islamic context – see Sadan 1965, pp. 73-85. See also Cohen 2006, pp. 129-145.

¹⁹ Indeed, certain attention on the *qubba* among the scholars was manifested before 1900. For a short reference to this question see Déroche 2016, p. 62. A detailed analysis is provided also by Liebrecht, who underlines that the accounts talking about the *qubba* as a repository of books had started to affect the scientific community; definitely, the former discovery of the Cairo *genizah* played an important role in such context. See Liebrecht 2020, pp. 75-89, especially pp. 75-80. See also Ioppolo 2020, pp. 91-103.

²⁰ It should be underlined that certainly, it was a favourable moment for the opening of the dome; in fact, in 1893 a devastating fire had destroyed part of the mosque, due to which an operation of restoration became necessary. These particular circumstances made it easier for the sultan Abdul Hamid II to promulgate a decree which commanded the opening of the *qubba*. See Bandt-Rattmann 2020, p. 107.

²¹ A brief biographical profile of Bruno Violet is traced in Bandt-Rattmann 2020, p. 105.

²² The German philologist was working on a new edition of the New Testament, so he was always looking for new manuscript witnesses. With the support of the Emperor of Germany, Wilhelm II, he had strongly promoted the opening of the *qubba*, since – during an official visit in Damascus with the Emperor in 1898 – he had heard from the local population that the dome was a repository of books, especially sacred ones. See Bandt-Rattmann, p. 107. This popular tradition, which is the same heard by Violet later, reported the account according to which some Christian manuscripts had been confiscated by Muslims when they conquered the city. This account is historically unreliable, as already illustrated in Radiciotti-D’Ottone 2008, p. 47.

²³ See Radiciotti-D’Ottone 2008, pp. 50-56 and D’Aiuto-Bucca 2020, pp. 291-320.

²⁴ See Ammirati 2018, pp. 99-122, and Ammirati 2020, pp. 321-329.

²⁵ See Bohak 2020, pp. 223-244.

²⁶ See Suci 2018, pp. 251-277.

²⁷ See Fiori 2017, pp. 200-229, and Kessel 2020, pp. 265-290.

²⁸ See Radiciotti-D’Ottone 2008, pp. 65-74. The stunning eclecticism of the *qubba* material, in terms of languages and scripts as well as in terms of contents, has been already contextualized in the cultural phenomenon known as “absolute multigraphism”. Regarding the Damascene context, it testifies the complex nature of Damascus society, a multilingual reality, accustomed to the use of different languages/scripts and to linguistic adaptation in the different contexts. For an outline on the phenomenon of “absolute multigraphism”, strictly referred to the Damascene environment, see D’Ottone 2013, pp. 63, 78-79.

²⁹ Violet’s period of work in Damascus, with the description of all the difficulties he went through, has been outlined in Bandt-Rattmann 2020, pp. 112-114.

the loan to be accepted, Violet proceeded with photographing the manuscripts³⁰ and making an inventory of what later would have been sent to Berlin³¹. After been photographed in Constantinople by the Ottomans too, the manuscripts reached the German capital, where they would have stayed until 1909 – although the loan period has been fixed at just one year³². During the period between the two World Wars, the interest in the *qubba* material strongly decreased. In 1964, with the publication of an article by D. Sourdél and J. Sourdél-Thomine³³, it was brought back to the scholars' attention and again in 2008 with the article by Radiciotti and D'Ottone³⁴. Recently, a new wave of interest regarding its manuscripts has affected the scientific community, which has led to the publishing of a volume entirely devoted to the topic³⁵.

As mentioned before, the palimpsest fragment, which represents the focus of this paper, belongs to the *qubba* finding. Its palimpsest order consists of: a Greek *scriptio inferior*, which has been identified as a Biblical text, and an Arabic *scriptio superior*, which I identified as a medical-botanical text from the yet mentioned Ibn Ḥabīb's *Mukhtaṣar fī-l-ṭibb*. Here I provide the edition of the Arabic text, divided into *recto* and *verso*, with its translation. In the transcription I tried to stick adherent to the original text as much as I could, in order to preserve the graphic realizations detectable on the fragment. Regarding the use of brackets I followed this system:

- [...] for the missing parts of the text
- (...) for the integrations which are deductible from the context

Concerning the unidentified words, I applied a matching system according to which a single dot is referred to a single letter – basing on what remains visible.

³⁰ Violet's photographs are currently available online; see <https://biblexegese.bbaw.de/handschriften/damaszener-handschriften/>. The photographs taken in Berlin by Von Soden and Von Harnack in the *Königliche Bibliothek* (now *Staatsbibliothek*) in 1909 are accessible online too; see <https://biblexegese.bbaw.de/handschriften/damaszener-handschriften/>.

³¹ The total number of photographs was 214, while the box to be sent in Berlin approximately counted 1500 *folios*; the inventory compiled by Violet was quite accurate for the Syriac and Greek majuscule manuscripts, while less attention was destined to the materials in other languages. See Bandt-Rattmann 2020, pp. 121-122.

³² This analysis of the history of the *qubba* finding, based above all on Western sources, emphasizes the role of the European characters. Instead, an interesting article by Erbay and Hirschler – based on the study of a group of administrative documents belonging to the Ottoman environment – sheds light on the fundamental role played by the Ottomans and the locals in this event. The perspective adopted by the scholars is meant to highlight the strict bond existing between the two parts, whose *fil rouge* was the complete dedication they reserved to the *qubba* material. See Erbay-Hirschler 2020, pp. 151-178.

³³ See D. Sourdél-J. Sourdél-Thomine 1964, pp. 1-25. Indeed, already in 1930 the American theologian William Hatch published an article in which he dealt with the researches he had conducted in the National Museum of Damascus. There he had found some fragments that he considered belonging to the *qubba* finding, although the information he provided about them is extremely poor. Anyway, these fragments didn't receive a proper study later. See Hatch 1930, pp. 149-152.

³⁴ See Radiciotti-D'Ottone 2008, pp. 45-78.

³⁵ I especially refer to the volume *The Damascus Fragments: Towards a History of the Qubbat al-khazna Corpus of Manuscripts and Documents*, edited by Arianna D'Ottone Rambach, Konrad Hirschler and Ronny Vollandt. The work, basically organized in two parts, gives new nuances about the history of the *qubba* as well as providing new elements regarding its written material.

١ - كله والذي ... الحل وحبه والاحمر اغلظ [...] و [...] الذي به د قيل جميع التين

٢ - معدل في الغلظ والطاقة*

العنب افضل قوة واعدل من سائر الفاكهة

٣ - وقد يختلف ايضا بقدر اختلاف انواعه غير ان جميع العنب اذا كان نضيجا رطبا فهو كان

٤ - رطب في الجزء الاول وهو دون التين في الرطوبة والحر وفيه شي من نفحة وما كان منه (اشد)

٥ - حلاوة كان احمر وما حمض منه كان اقل حرا وقد يلين البطن اذا كان حلوا وفيه شي من

٦ - قبض لمكان قشره وحبه ولذلك هو افضل في المعدة من التين*
صفة

٧ - انواع العنب*

من العنب نوع ابيض طويل يسمى قولقاس ولا يكون له شراب

٨ - وهو ابرد العنب كله وابطاه انهضام*

والعنب الغض يسميه الروم انفاقين

٩ - وهو بارد يابس والروم يسمي كل شي غض انفاقين من الزبيب والعنب او سائر الفاكهة*

١٠ - صفة الزبيب*

الزبيب اشد حرا من العنم يميز له الشي اليابس فانه اشد حرا من

١١ - التين الرطب*

واعلم ان اشد العنب قبضا وابرده واجوده في المعدة اذا

١٢ - كانت فيه حموضة وما اشتدت حلاوته كان اشد حرا*

واجدر ان يرخي المعدة

١٣ - اذا كانت فيه حموضة وما اشتدت حلاوته كان اشد حرا واجدر ان يرخي المعدة

- ١٤ – وف [...] (ذلك) بقدر اختلاف انواعه وحب ال... بارد في الجزء الاول يابس
[...]
- ١٥ – [...] صف(ة) الطلا المطبوخ كان ل [...] [...]
- ١٦ – [...] البطن *
- ١٧ – [...] وهو الذ(ي) [...] [...]

1 – ... and its seeds and the red one is the sourest [...] and [...] as

the fig is generally said

2 – comparing to the sourness and energy*

Grape is the most intense and balanced among all fruits.

3 – It can be of different varieties, but all grape is ripe and moist³⁶

when

4 – is moist in the first degree³⁷. It is inferior to fig in its humidity and heat and it is very

fragrant; the sweetest

5 – grape is the hottest while the sour one is the less hot. When it is sweet it can

relieve the constipated stomach,

6 – thanks to its zest and seeds; so for the stomach it is better than fig*

Characteristics

7 – of grape varieties:*

There is a white and long grape type called *qūlqās*³⁸, you can't have

wine from it

³⁶ The parameters of hot-cold (*ḥārr-bārid*) and dry-moist (*yābis-raṭb*), which are adopted by Ibn Ḥabīb as basic criteria for the classification of fruits, recall the four primary qualities of Greek theorization, foundational elements of the four humours (ar. *akhlāt*). Obviously, it all has to be explained considering the four elements (water, air, fire, earth), from which everything is created. So “it is for this reason that we say that human body is composed of the four elements. It originates from them – although through the intermediary of humors – and will return to them when decay sets in”, Savage-Smith 2013, p. 91. The question is briefly analyzed in Savage-Smith 2013, pp. 89-92.

³⁷ Ancient pharmacology used to classify drugs according to four degrees, which corresponded to drug strength compared with the four primary qualities. In the Islamic culture, an important contribution to the matter was given by al-Kindī. He elaborated the principle of the ‘double ratio’ (ar. *nisbaʾ al-ḍiʿf*), according to which drug intensity increases following a geometric criterium; so, “a drug in the first degree is twice as intense as a temperate one, one in the second degree is four times so, one in the third degree is eight times so, and, finally, one in the fourth degree is sixteen times so”, Langermann 2003, pp. 351-352. See also Sterpellone-Elsheikh 1995, pp. 44-45, and Pormann-Savage-Smith 2007, p. 53.

³⁸ It is the *Colocasia* (ar. *qūlqās*) plant, which is to be found in tropical areas. Regarding its use in the medical field, Lane claims that “the decoction thereof increases the venereal faculty, and fattens; but the taking it constantly engenders black bile”, Lane 1872, p. 2560. Looking at the Arabic text, it can be noted that, between the first *qāf* and the first *lām*, an additional *waw* has been placed – a graphic mistake arguably dictated by the foreign nature of the word.

8 – it is the coldest and the less digestible*

The unripe grape which the Byzantines call *omphacium*³⁹;

9 – this is cold and dry and the Byzantines call *omphacium* everything unripe, from grape to raisin, every fruit in general*

10 – Characteristics of raisin:*

it is hotter than 'anam's⁴⁰ (fruits), from which it differentiates for its dry part, and it is hotter

11 – than moist fig*

Be aware that it is the strongest grape for constipation, the coldest and better for the stomach

12 – if it contains some sourness; instead, the sweetest is the hottest*

it is the most appropriate to relax the stomach

13 – if it contains some sourness; instead, the sweetest is the hottest and the most appropriate to relax the stomach

14 – and [...] (this) regarding its different varieties and the seeds of ... are cold in the first degree e dry [...]

15 – [...] characteristic of mulled wine [...]

16 – [...] the stomach.*

17 – [...] and it [...]

• *Verso*, lines 1-17

١ – قشور التوت اذا طبخ [...] الفرغ الذي في الامعاء ويلين البطن

٢ – [...] ع من الحر *

حب [...] يابس قابض في الجزء الاول فيه بعض القوة

٣ – [...] جه شي من الحرارة ويحبس البطن *

المشمش بارد رطب طيب ويولد الفضل

٤ – الغليظ *

³⁹ The term *omphacium* identifies the oil extracted from the unripe olives or grapes. In ancient Rome, it was frequently used for the production of perfumes, which were obtained by its maceration with the essential oils extracted by the aromatic substances. The *omphacium* is mentioned by Pliny the Elder in his *Naturalis Historia*.

⁴⁰ It is described by Lane as “a certain tree of el-Hijáz, having a red fruit, to which are likened the dyed fingers or ends of fingers”, Lane 1872, p. 2178. Ibn Ḥabīb's mention of a plant from Ḥijāz is a clear indication of the fact that he knew its vegetation; arguably, such a knowledge was directly acquired in the field, namely during his journey to Mecca for the pilgrimage.

- التفاح انواع كبيرة وقد يختلف بقدر اختلاف الوانه منه الحلو
- ٥ - ومنه الحامض وفيه بين ذلك ومنه رخو ومنه الغض الحبس وكله بارد ولكن الحلو بارد رطب
- ٦ - وفيه شي من حرارة لمكان الحلاوة والحامض اقل رطوبة واشد بردا والتفاح الشامي اعدل التفاح
- ٧ - واجمده التفاح المائي الصغار قريب الشبه من الشامي*
صفة الا(تر)نج
- ٨ - فيه قوات مختلفة وذلك ان قشره حار يابس في الجزء الاول قريب من الجزء الثاني ولحمه بارد رطب
- ٩ - غليظ وحمضه بارد يابس في الجزء الثالث وحبه حار حديد يابس وفيه شي من لدونة ور(قه) حار
- ١٠ - هضوم وقد ينفع حبه من لدغ العقارب (اذا) شرب ... و.. مثقالين بماء فاتر وطلا مطبوخ
- ١١ - (اذا د)ق فوضع على موضع اللدغة فهو نافع*
الخوخ بارد رطب
- ١٢ - (ب)طي الانهضام ثقيل يولد الغذى (الر)د(ي) وفي ورقه بعض القبض (ود)هنة الذي يصنع من
- ١٣ - [...] فيه حرارة وينفع من ورم الأذن وسائر الاورام الباردة وينفع من ال(شق)يقة*
- ١٤ - [...] النضيج بارد ل[...] والجزء الاول [...] [...]
- ١٥ - [...] وهو التفاح ال[...] [...]
- ١٦ - [...] وبطي [...] [...]
- ١٧ - [...] [...]

1 - Mulberry's zests if cooked [...] the vacuum which is in the intestine and it relieves the stomach

2 - [...] from the heat*

The seeds [...] are dry and constipating in the first degree and there is some energy in them

3 – [...] a lot of heat and it blocks the stomach*

Apricots are cold and moist, they are good and have the benefit to be

4 – sour*

There are a lot of apple varieties and they can differentiate according to their color; there is the sweet,

5 – the sour, plus the smooth and the constipating unripe; they are all cold
but the sweet one is cold, moist

6 – and there is some heat in it due to its sweetness, while the sour one is
less moist and more cold. The Syrian apple is the most balanced among all and

7 – the hardest; the small rose-apple is very similar to it*

Characteristics of cedar:

8 – it has different properties, this is due to its zest which is hot and dry in the first degree,
close to the second; its pulp is cold, moist

9 – and sour and its sourness is cold and dry in the third degree. Its seeds are hot,
biting, dry and very smooth. Its leaves are hot

10 – and digestive. Its seeds can relieve scorpions' bites, if they are drunk with
two *mitqāl*⁴¹ of warm water and mulled wine.

11 – If they are shred and put on a burn they relieve*

Peach is cold and moist,

12 – its digestion is difficult and it is damaging to eat it; its leaves are constipating and
the oil obtained from

13 – [...] there is some heat in it and it is useful for ear cancer, different cold cancers
and for migraine

14 – [...] ripe and cold [...] and in the first degree [...]


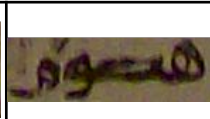


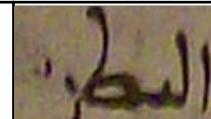
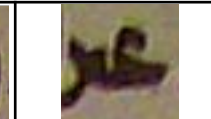
15 – [...] and it is the apple [...]

16 – [...] and

17 – [...]

⁴¹ A unit of measurement used in the Islamic empire, especially for precious metals; it amounted 4.25 gr. – which was the standard measurement for the *dinār* after 'Abd al-Malik's reform. See Miles 1991, p. 297.

The parchment *folio*, which measures 20×16 cm., should be held in the National Museum in Damascus (*Mathaf al-waṭani*), even if there is no certainty about its localization⁴². Its state of conservation is not so good. The parchment appears corroded all around the perimeter; in particular, there is big corrosion on the top – which make a considerable part of the text of the *verso* unreadable – and some missing parts at the bottom of the fragment, due to which portions of the text on the *recto* as well as the *verso* are no longer readable. More specifically, the damages on the *recto* involve the lines from 15 to 17 (only 2/3 words remain readable), while on the *verso* there are damages between lines 13 to 17. In addition, the *verso* presents some stains on the left side of the leaf, particularly between lines 5 and 8. Furthermore, still on the bottom part of the parchment, it can be seen a progressive discoloration of the ink, already visible from line 10, in the central part of the fragment (*ladġ al-‘aqārīb iḍa šuriba*). The text, written in black ink, does not present signs of vocalization, and there is sporadic use of the diacritical signs. From the analysis of the graphic strokes, it can be assumed that the text had been written by a single scribe. Concerning the layout of the page, the script is arranged in one single column, and there are the same number of lines for *recto* and *verso* (that is 17). There is no decoration, except for a strongly marked circular motif at the end of some sentences (for example: *recto*, lines 2, 6, 8, 10, 11, 12 e 16). Considering a monastic environment located in the Sinaitic-Palestinian area as the probable place of origin of the fragment (concerning its Arabic *scriptio superior*) – a question which will be discussed later on the paper – the paleographical examination of the Arabic script has been conducted comparing the *qubba* fragment with some manuscripts belonging to an Arabic-Christian context⁴³. Among the most important graphic peculiarities can be indicated: an extended belly of the *šād* and *ḍād*, the *dal* grapheme wrote in semi-circular shape with an elliptical orientation, the initial *alif* occasionally with a curvy shape (like a sort of inverted “s”), the *tā*’ with its rod inclined to the right and with a hook lightly marked at the top of the rod, the middle ‘*ayn*’ not entirely rounded but ‘broken’ in the upper part (Tab. 1).




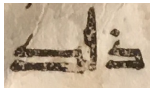
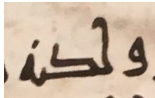
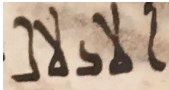


					
<i>al-ṣiġār</i>	<i>huḍūm</i>	<i>bi-qadr</i>	<i>al-mišmiš</i>	<i>al-baṭn</i>	<i>‘abr</i>

Tab. 1 – Graphic peculiarities of the Arabic text

Although, the most remarkable and interesting letter is the *kāf*. In the initial or middle position, its shape resembles quite strongly the model of the ‘early Abbasid scripts’ – basically a *kāf* with two horizontal strokes, together with an oblique top stroke, barely or strongly traced. Instead, in the final position, the letter is written in an intermediate shape, which stands between the third-partite form of the ‘early Abbasid scripts’ and the ‘two-partite’ form of the *New Style* script (Tab. 2).


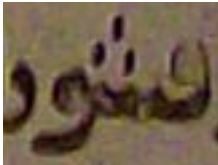
⁴² Indeed, it could be one of the fragments found by William Hatch during his visit in Damascus in 1929, since among them he mentions Arabic fragments as well. See Hatch 1930, pp. 151-152.

⁴³ In the paleographical analysis, I made particular reference to the article by Hjälms, which examines – from a paleographical point of view – some material witnesses of the Arabic-Christian scripts from the first centuries of Islam. See Hjälms (forthcoming).

	initial/middle <i>kāf</i>	final <i>kāf</i>
<i>Qubba</i> fragment		
Sin. Ar. NF Parch. 16 (“early Abbasid script”)		
Sin. Ar. NF Parch. 35 (“New Style”)		
Sin. Ar. 514, fol. 167v (“transitional style”)		

Tab. 2 – *Kāf* graphic realizations comparison (according to its position)

Considering these different types of the *kāf*, the Damascene fragment could be ascribed to a transitional phase, which stretches between the ‘early Abbasid scripts’ and the later *New Style* script. The punctuation of the *šin* as well, represents another element in favour of this interpretation; in fact, we can observe the use of both the ancient horizontal position of the three dots, as well as the more recent and widespread triangular shape (Tab. 3).

<i>Šin</i> with three horizontal dots	<i>Šin</i> with dots in a triangular shape
	
<i>qišr</i>	<i>qušūr</i>

Tab. 3 – Two different graphic realizations of *šin* diacritical dots

Basing on the paleographical analysis just provided and on recents classification of the Arabic-Christian scripts, the Damascene fragment seems to get close to the ‘transitional scripts’ group, which “retain the vertical extension, sharp-corners, an some of the curviness of the New Style, yet tends toward a more simplex script with many straight strokes”⁴⁴. For example, the manuscript Sin. Ar. 514, fol. 167v (Fig. 3) shows a marked resemblance with the *qubba* fragment – especially regarding the *kāf* realization.

⁴⁴ See Hjälms (forthcoming).

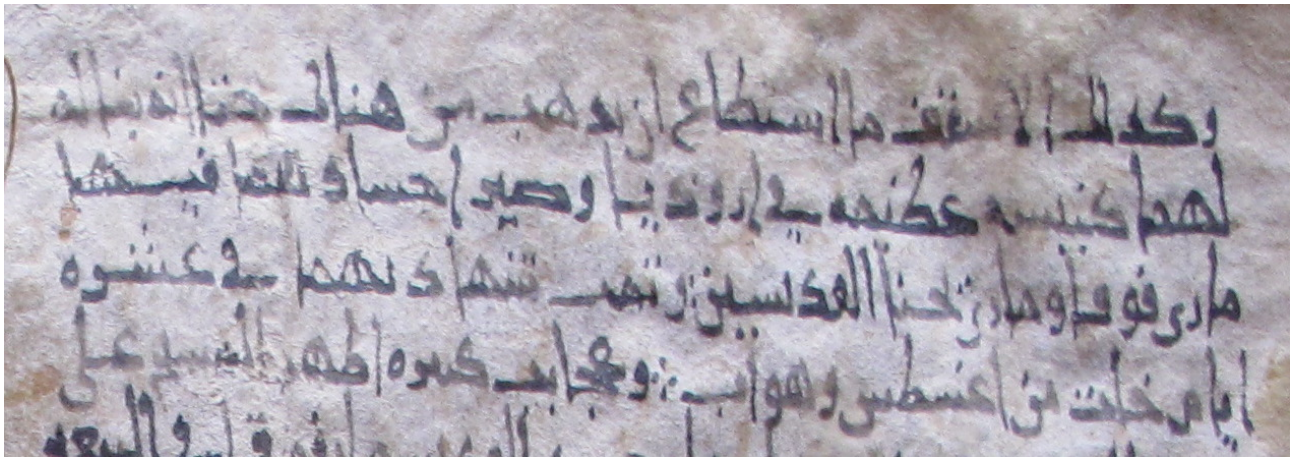


Fig. 3 – Sin. Ar. 514, fol. 167v.

In the light of the datings provided for the two groups mentioned in the comparison – ‘early Abbasid script’, especially groups B and C, which date from the last quarter of the 3rd/9th century to the beginning of the 4th/10th century, and the ‘transitional scripts’, which develops from the end of the 3rd/9th century until the 4th/10th century – it can be coherently hypothesized for the Arabic *scriptio superior* of the Damascene fragment, a time range which goes from the last quarter of the 3rd/9th century to the first quarter of the 4th/10th century.

Considered the palimpsest order – Greek-*scriptio inferior*, Arabic-*scriptio superior* – the contents of the two texts – respectively biblical and botanical – and the Arabic script, all these elements make it plausible to identify the Sinaitic-Palestinian territory as the possible place of origin of the fragment, strictly referring to the Arabic *scriptio superior*. More specifically, the biblical nature of the Greek *scriptio inferior* does not contrast with the idea that we could refer to a monastic environment – a context usually specialized in botany as well⁴⁵.

As far as the connection with Damascus is concerned, it is tempting to pinpoint the *bīmāristān* al-Nūr⁴⁶ – renowned medical school of the Abbasid period – as the *fil rouge* linking the Syrian capital to the palimpsest fragment. It would have represented the temporary place of preservation of the

⁴⁵ Regarding the palimpsest phenomenon, Crisci reports the interesting interpretation provided by Elias Avery Lowe; the idea is that: “La pratica di utilizzare codici già scritti per realizzarne di nuovi vada interpretata come espressione, in varie forme e a vari livelli, di una condizione di disagio, di crisi, di disorientamento culturale nei confronti del prodotto-libro, è ipotesi non priva di fondamento. In questa prospettiva, la ‘ragion d’essere’ storico-culturale del libro palinsesto è stata efficacemente sintetizzata da Elias Avery Lowe: fattori economici (penuria e alto costo della pergamena, spesso in rapporto con un’accresciuta domanda di codici); fattori grafico-codicologici (uso di tipologie grafiche desuete e di difficile lettura; danneggiamento irreversibile dei manoscritti da riutilizzare); fattori contenutistici (testi ‘fuori moda’, o posseduti in più copie, ovvero scritti in lingue straniere non più comprensibili)”, Crisci 2003, p. 74. This analysis, although proposed for the Western witnesses, seems to fit well with the *qubba* fragment case. The mention of the economic factors (high cost of the parchment) and the contents ones – namely the copiousness of Bible copies in a monastic environment – could be interesting hints, useful to a proper interpretation of the phenomenon. The graphic factors can be taken into account as well, considering the fact that in the monastic context, a translation effort from Greek to Arabic – regarding the holy texts – has been started yet in the 8th century AD. This process could have made the Greek copies of the Bible out-of-date, so they would have represented precious material to be reused for the production of new books. The question of the languages of the monasteries, namely in the Palestinian area, in the early Islamic period is examined by Griffith 1997, pp. 11-31.

⁴⁶ Built in 1154 at the behest of Nūr al-Dīn Zangī, it became quite immediately one of the most state-of-the-art hospitals of the Islamic empire, taking the place of the older al-‘Aḡūdī. More interestingly for us, soon it became a renowned school of medicine – supplied with a massive quantity of manuscripts – in which a lot of important scholars studied and researched (such as Ibn al-Nafīs). About the *māristān* al-Nūrī see Hamarneh 1962, pp. 374-375. See also Pormann-Savage-Smith 2007, pp. 98-99.

manuscript, before its following relocation in the near Great Mosque of the Omayyads – namely in the *Qubba' al-khazna* – probably since damaged and no longer usable⁴⁷. In this context, it should be also considered that the fragment analyzed here, do not represent the only case of a medical text belonging to the *qubba corpus* – if we take into account the Syriac *bifolium* edited by Fiori in 2017 (similar to our fragment in terms of contents and ultimate purpose)⁴⁸. Perhaps, it could be hypothesized the existence of a fund constituted by medical manuscripts, arguably preserved in the *bīmāristān* al-Nūrī in the first place, and later moved into the *qubba*. Furthermore, since the material held at the Museum of Turkish and Islamic Arts in Istanbul has not been studied so far, we do not know if there would be other medical manuscripts possibly belonging to this fund. Further investigations, regarding the study of new manuscripts from the *qubba corpus*, seem necessary to verify the reliability of this interpretation.

Regarding the text of the *scriptio superior*, I already mention that it can be identified with an excerpt from the medical work by the jurist Ibn Ḥabīb, *Mukhtaṣar fī-l-ṭibb*. In particular, the actual nature of the excerpt consists of a text with a botanical approach in the first place, corroborated by some medical observations – which give indications about the main uses of the fruits as healing remedies⁴⁹. In order of appearance, the fruits described are grape, raisin, mulberry, apricot, apple, cedar, peach. Probably, between mulberry and apricot another fruit is mentioned; unfortunately, the significant corrosion at the center-top of the parchment makes it impossible for us to identify it. Furthermore, the first two lines of the *recto* are referred to another fruit, the fig, but they represent only the final section of its description, so the text is hardly understandable in its content (especially line 1). Examining the text, Ibn Ḥabīb's in-depth medical-botanical knowledge appears quite clearly; the description of the exemplars is always rich and full of details – concerning the classification, comparisons, identification of the different varieties, and description of the medical uses. In particular, the most interesting element by far is the marked influence of the Greek medical tradition, which is manifested first of all in the classification of the fruits. Ibn Ḥabīb bases his classification upon some basic criteria which directly recall Greek's ones; all fruits are classified according to the concepts of hot-cold and dry-moist, each of them additionally defined by a certain degree of intensity. So, the text is a clear witness of the fact that the Andalusian jurist was well acquainted with Greek humoral pathology theory⁵⁰, a knowledge he probably gained during his

⁴⁷ Indeed, this suggestion results perfectly fitted with the interpretation of the *qubba* as a repository of manuscripts no longer usable, due to their damaged state of conservation, but whose leaves were considered precious material of reuse for the production of new books. According to this interpretation, generally applied for almost all the *qubba* material examined so far, “[...] the Qubba was not a one-way depository, but an integral part of the wider Damascene manuscript culture. Fragments from the Qubba were able to find their way into manuscripts and were reused in a variety of ways”, Hirschler 2020, p. 469. The question of the reuse of fragments is analyzed in great detail by Hirschler 2020, pp. 439-473.

⁴⁸ See Fiori 2017, pp. 200-229.

⁴⁹ The close connection of medicine and botany concretized in many different ways, which often defined and created some specific genres, such as one of herbariums – which give a physiological description of plants, with some indications about their uses as medical remedies. On the herbariums see Stannard 1969, pp. 212-220. Ancient and medieval pharmacology is another example of this narrow bound. With the Arabs, pharmacology gained a proper status of independent science, complementary to medicine, and reached a high degree of development. For a brief introduction to medieval Arabic pharmacology see Guardi 2018, pp. 52-56, and Pormann-Savage-Smith 2007, pp. 51-55.

⁵⁰ For an outline of the humoral theory see Pormann-Savage-Smith 2007, pp. 41-45. An interesting paper by Savage-Smith raises some doubts about the adequateness of the classical definition of ‘humoral pathology’, applied to describe the medical practice in the medieval Islamic world. According to Savage-Smith, the term – introduced by Europeans in the 18th century – is not adequate to define such medical practice, since it was based on the rebalance of the four primary qualities and the six ‘non-naturals’, rather than humours. See Savage-Smith 2013, pp. 103-104.

journey to Mecca⁵¹. These notions, theorized as an attempt to explain the functioning of the human body, were also applied to the reign of plants, defining a scientific sector – i.e. botany – in which the Arab scholars were true masters⁵². In addition to its paleographical and textual value, the Damascene fragment is significant for the fact that it represents the oldest textual witness of the *Mukhtaṣar fī-l-ṭibb* – although in the form of an excerpt. Moreover, comparing the two versions, some small differences in the contents and the text layout emerge; this last consideration could lead to the idea that, at the time, different redactions of the work circulated⁵³.

The case of the palimpsest fragment from the *Qubba' al-khazna*, as examined in this paper, outlines a historical, social, and cultural reality characterized by an impressive degree of complexity and heterogeneity. Indeed, in the restricted space of a single *folium*, different cultures – namely Islam and Christianity – coexist, and what is more, they show a peculiar attitude that allowed them to create a fertile environment of exchanging ideas and knowledge. This perspective, which challenges the classic interpretation that depicts the two cultural systems as definitive opposites, is perfectly ‘personified’ by the monasteries of the Sinaitic-Palestinian area – already defined as the possible place of origin of the Damascene fragment, namely concerning the Arabic *scriptio superior*. Indeed, living at the cross of these two cultures, and constantly tapping into both of them, they represent a clear expression of the open and eclectic environment in which they lived and operated. Therefore, they can be considered part of the cultural mixity, which strongly characterized the relationship between East and West throughout the Middle Ages, plainly depicted in the Damascene fragment.

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⁵¹ Such an interpretation has been already described by De Morales and Irueste. Given the fact that Ibn Ḥabīb does not refer to his sources in any occasion, the Spanish scholars made a suggestive – but almost impossible to prove – hypothesis, according to which the Andalusian jurist could have had some kind of contact with Ḥunayn ibn Ishāq's circle during his stay in the East. It is unknown that he reached Baghdad sometime during his journey; although, he definitely stayed in Medina where, according to De Morales and Irueste, “se conocía la misma medicina que en Bagdad, al menos en un ámbito más o menos restringido al que Ibn Ḥabīb tendría acceso”, De Morales-Irueste 1992, p. 37. It has to be remembered that it was the period of the great translations, whose movement was strongly supported by the reigning caliphs, thanks to which the Islamic empire was acquiring ideas and theories from the ancient cultures – included the Greek's. The period of the Islamic Golden Age is deeply examined by Gutas 1998. What is sure is that, whatever Ibn Ḥabīb learned these notions, he spread them in *al-Andalus* when he came back. Furthermore, he was probably the first to do that: “[The *Mukhtaṣar*] es el primer texto andalusí que recoge los conceptos de la medicina greco-helenística”, De Morales-Irueste 1992, p. 29. According to this interpretation, the *Mukhtaṣar* anticipated some other important, and most renowned works in this field, whose influence is universally acknowledged. For example, it preceded the translation of the well-known *De Materia Medica* by Dioscorides. Actually, it was translated for the first time by Iṣṭifān ibn Bāsil (Stephanos Basilos) from a Syriac copy during al-Mutawakkil's caliphate (d. 247/861) and then revised by Hunayn. Although, its spread in *al-Andalus* was allowed only by a second translation, based on a Greek copy sent in 948 by the Byzantine emperor Constantine VII Porphyrogenitus to the caliph ‘Abd al-Raḥmān al-Nāṣir in Cordova. The question of the primacy of the *Mukhtaṣar* is analyzed by De Morales-Irueste 1992, p. 29. For the history of the Andalusian translation of the *De Materia Medica* see Amar-Lev 2017, p. 62 (who erroneously refer to Romanos I, instead of Constantine VII).

⁵² Known in Arabic as ‘*ilm al-nabāt*’, in medieval Arabic culture botany was conceived as closely linked with its practical side, i.e. agriculture (ar. *filāḥa*). The later development of this science was allowed by a fundamental work of translation, thought to restore the knowledge of Antiquity; among the recovered texts there was Nicolaus of Damascus’ *Fī-l-nabāt*, Theophrastus’ *On the Causes of Plants*, the most influential *De Materia Medica* by Dioscorides and *al-Filāḥa al-nabaṭiyya* by Ibn Waḥšiyya. Medieval Arabic botany has been examined, in its distinctive features, by Carusi 2007. Notably in *al-Andalus*, botany reached its apex, thanks to great scholars – such as Ibn Wāfīd, Ibn Baṣṣāl, Abū al-Khayr al-Ishbīlī or Ibn al-‘Awwām – who, combining an experimental method with theoretical studies, gave a massive contribution for the development of the science, shaping that period of intellectual fervor known as ‘the Andalusian Golden Age’. For an in-depth of botany in *al-Andalus* see Fitzwilliam Hall 2010.

⁵³ There is no information given by De Morales and Irueste about the dating of the Rabat manuscript. Nevertheless, taking into account the indication that it was written in a *maḡribī* script, and considering the dating hypothesis provided in this article for the *scriptio superior* of the *qubba* fragment, it can be assumed that this last exemplar could be older than the Rabat ms.

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