

# Reviews

Murād Tadgūt, *Fihris al-maḥṭūṭāt al-musawwara*, Al-ṭibb-Al-kitāb al-ṭālīṭ, III (Al-Qāhira: Ma‘had al-Maḥṭūṭāt al-‘Arabiyya, 1439/2017).

Microfilms recall an epoch of imaging that seems quite remote from the latest digital developments. But the collection gathered from all over the world by the Institute of Arabic Manuscripts remains an important resource for scholars. Indeed, this collection provides access to rare witnesses that simply would not be available otherwise.<sup>1</sup>

This is the third catalogue dealing with the medical materials in the collection: the first was compiled by Ibrāhīm Šabbūh in 1959, the second ten years later.<sup>2</sup> The need for this new volume arises from the editorial and scholarly history of the Institute. The two previous catalogues were produced at an earlier stage of a large cataloguing project, in which the division of materials resulted organically from the workflow, rather than from a precise plan; the catalogue of 1959, for instance, is labelled as the second tome of the third part. It was deemed necessary to produce a new reference work condensed into a single volume so as to offer researchers a more effective tool. It is left to the reader to guess whether this new catalogue merges the contents of the previous two, perhaps adding the new acquisitions. This latest catalogue includes 300 titles, compared to the 271 recorded by Ibn Šabbūh in 1959. Without

- 1 The Institute of Arabic Manuscripts was founded in 1946 in Cairo (where it can be found today, after changing name and location a number of times), as part of an educational and cultural project of the Arab League. The website (in Arabic) offers a form to request reproductions on different supports (CD-Rom, microfilm, digital images), with different rates (in different currencies) intended for Arab and non-Arab students and researchers (see <<http://www.malecso.org/services/request-filming-manuscript>>, last accessed 17 October 2019).
- 2 A digital copy of the volume published in 1959 is available online (see <<http://www.islamicmanuscripts.info/reference/catalogues/Chabbouh-1959-Cat-Musawwarat-Arab-League-3-2.pdf>>, last accessed 17 October 2019). I could not find a copy of the second catalogue published in 1969. Information about the general editorial criteria and some peculiar features of the volumes are described in preface and introduction. For Ibrāhīm Šabbūh’s introduction to the first catalogue on medical manuscripts, see Ibn Šabbūh, *Fihris al-maḥṭūṭāt al-musawwara – Al-ġuz’ al-ṭālīṭ (al-‘ulūm) al-qism al-ṭānī (al-ṭibb)* (Al-Qāhira: Maṭba‘at al-sunnat al-muḥammadiyya, 1959), 3–4; for the preface by the current director of the Institute, Fayṣāl al-Hafyān, and the author’s introduction to this new catalogue published in 2017, see Murād Tadgūt, *Fihris al-maḥṭūṭāt al-musawwara. Al-ṭibb – Al-kitāb al-ṭālīṭ* (Al-Qāhira: Ma‘had al-Maḥṭūṭāt al-‘Arabiyya, 1439/2017), 7–10.

any further indicators, it is hard to closely compare the entire contents of the different catalogues. Apart from the possible increase in the size of the collection—which is not mentioned or otherwise indicated—it is curious that some titles listed in the catalogue of 1959 are not recorded in the new one. For instance, al-Rāzī's *Kitāb al-ḥawāṣṣ* was recorded in 1959 but did not find its way into the new catalogue.<sup>3</sup>

There is a great emphasis on numbers in this new catalogue (300 titles, 400 manuscripts copies, 75 reference works consulted) and on how these ciphers account for the great variety of medical disciplines that found their way into the collection (141 general works, 56 on pharmacy, 20 on diet, 18 on ophthalmology, 14 on internal diseases, 11 on wounds, six on poisons and plague and smaller numbers—between two and five—dealing with veins and bones, procreation and birth, medicine for children, the influence of climates and more). Compared to the 1959 catalogue, for which only six basic reference works were used (Ibn al-Nadīm's, *Al-Fihrist*, Ibn Abī Uṣaybi'a's *Uyūn al-anbā'*, Ḥāğğī Ḥalīfa's *Kaṣf al-zunūn*, Ismā'il Pāšā's *İdāh al-maknūn*, Brockelmann's GAL and al-Qiftī's *Aḥbār al-hukamā'*), the number of sources and studies consulted in the course of the new catalogue's preparation has increased tenfold, including many Arabic sources and studies that are virtually unknown and rarely read in other scholarly circles.<sup>4</sup>

Like its predecessors, this catalogue is arranged by title in alphabetical order. This arrangement is not unusual in Arabic works, given the composite nature of proper names and the inconveniences deriving from attempts to list them alphabetically. The structure of entries has largely remained the same (title, author, beginning and end of the text, synthetic description of codicological, paratextual and paleographical features, original library shelf mark and the number assigned to the microfilm in the Institute collection) and follows a methodology that was developed and standardized by the Institute for the description of its holdings. Perhaps unwisely, the entries are not progressively numbered as in the catalogue of 1959, but simply marked by a bold dot. Often, titles are attested to by more than one manuscript copy in the Institute's collection, and all of them are listed in a single catalogue entry, whereas other manuscript witnesses from different collections are mentioned in a footnote. The issue of fluidity in Arabic titles is detected and addressed by matching the titles actually attested in the manuscript tradition with those reported by primary sources, printed editions, repertories and studies.

3 See Šabbūh 1959, 79–80, no. 97.

4 These sources and the relevant secondary literature are listed, by title, alphabetically, in the last index attached to the catalogue. Bibliographical references are in a smaller font and contained within round brackets under the title and the name of the author.

The approach to contents is twofold: firstly, just after the title, which is in bold and which marks the beginning of a new entry, a short paragraph summarizes the contents of the text and its subject. Secondly, the entry includes a transcription of the relatively consistent parts of the incipit and the explicit of the text. This is indeed helpful in the work of recension of medical manuscript traditions. In some cases, rather than just the first and last lines, the catalogue records a partial list of paragraphs or section titles, which is a valuable commodity in an initial survey of contents.

The last part of each entry condenses information about material aspects as well as paratextual and paleographical features of the manuscript. This section informs us about the kind of script,<sup>5</sup> the presence of rubrications, the copyist and the attestation of different hands, the presence of ownership, reading, collation and *waqf* certificates, watermarks and the presence of ruling. The identification of the copyist, an important element for the reconstruction of the history of Arabic medicine and, additionally, for the critical evaluation of technical manuscript traditions, receives special attention, including a dedicated index. Among the 80 copyists recorded in the catalogue, about one third is represented by scholars and physicians. This implies that a consistent number of professional copyists was specifically trained as physicians, thus having an expert understanding of the contents of the texts they were copying. This is one of the features that reminds us of the great importance of informative manuscript catalogues in writing the history of medicine as well as other disciplines.

The catalogue concludes with a number of black-and-white plates and some folia from those manuscripts considered to be the most remarkable pieces in the Institute's collection: the oldest ones, an illuminated Dioscorides, the two autographs in the collection, and a small number of luxury manuscripts. Apart from offering an insight into the Institute's outlook on its own collection, the choice of images offers an impression of the limitations imposed by working with microfilmed images that often are of poor quality.

The 19 different indexes are proudly presented as the scholarly signature of this catalogue and, in fact, they are meant to map a number of important aspects: authors; titles (divided by subject); dates;<sup>6</sup> autographs; manuscript

5 The author adopts a threefold macro-classification of the script: 'I have divided the script of the manuscript copies into *nash* script [cursive script of the Mašriq], *fārisī* script [Persian script], and *mağribī* script [North-African and Andalusian script]; but the first one remains the most representative, since the majority of manuscript copies was produced in the East (*Mašriq*)'. Occasionally, his description includes remarks, for example, if a script appears particularly old or is difficult to read. See Tadhūt, *Fihris*, 9.

6 Whether from colophons, reading certificates or death of the author is specified between round brackets associated to each specific entry in this index.

copies containing notes by the hand of the author; copyists; luxury manuscript copies; patrons; an index for readers, donors, authors of eulogies and panegyrics and people who left their signatures; separate indexes for owners, places, titles of printed editions, the libraries that own the original reproduced in the microfilm, the authors of editions and translations, publishers; an index for titles of works that are frequently mentioned in the catalogue; and another for eminent personalities whose name is often quoted; an index of technical terms; and, finally, an index of sources and reference works (this last index also serves as a bibliography arranged by title). Minor redundancies and overlaps<sup>7</sup> aside, this panoply has a major technical fault: in many instances, the page number given in the index is not matched in the catalogue. The empirical solution of leafing a few pages forwards or backwards—based on the assumption that there might have been a slight shift of page numbers in different stages of the proofs—is not always sufficient to overcome the hurdle. The only solution to this is to go back to the alphabetical order of titles, but not all indexes include the necessary information. Regrettably, this makes the use of the catalogue unnecessarily complicated and it could have been avoided simply by numbering the entries and using this as a system of reference for the indexes. Now that the prospective readers have been given some indications to adjust their search in the catalogue, they can look at it as a treasure chest of primary sources and secondary literature for the study of Arabic medicine.

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7 Some authors, for instance Aristotle and Galen, but also many others, appear both in the index of authors and in the one dedicated to eminent personalities.