



BRILL

NUNCIUS 34 (2019) 155–182



Documenta Inedita



Apollonius of Tyana's *Great Book of Talismans*

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Abstract

The *Great Book of Talismans* (MS Paris BnF Ar. 2250) composed by Apollonius of Tyana is one of the Greek texts that have reached us in its Arabic recension. The Arabic not only preserves a part of the text lost in Greek, but it may bear witness to a more ancient layer of the textual tradition than the Byzantine one, along with the clues to a refined intellectual operation to recontextualize the whole work in the cultural milieu of reception. The kind of public talisman prepared by Apollonius – a metallic plaque or statue inscribed with magical names, either buried or placed on an elevated spot, sometimes protected by a shrine – became a model for talisman making. Some of Apollonius' talismans, moreover, circulated as erratic textual blocks, entering the Arabic Hermetic literature and, more generally, texts on natural sciences and the technical literature. This paper reconstructs the transmission of the *Great Book of Talismans*, and offers an anthology of the talismans that Apollonius realized for a number of Near Eastern cities (Alexandria, Antioch, Emesa, Ephesus, Edessa), along with three *comparanda* that concretely exemplify the fluidity in the transmission of these materials.

Keywords

talismans – Apollonius of Tyana – technical literature – Graeco-Arabic transmission



A classic is the term given to any book which comes to represent the whole universe, a book on a par with ancient talismans.

ITALO CALVINO, *Why Read The Classics?*



1 Apollonius and His Talismans in the Greek and Arabic Traditions

The figure of Apollonius of Tyana, the wandering Pythagorean philosopher of the first century of the Christian era, had a great impact on the literary imagination of opposite cultural factions – on one side, the rising Christianity; on the other, the retreating Paganism.¹ He became a hero for both parties, and his character was shaped by the two opposing sides of this major historical watershed.

First, late pagan thought made of him its Pythagorean champion. Then, early Christianity claimed him under its banner, conferring on Apollonius the status of an ascetic figure and a precursor of Christ. A text from the Christian side of the barricade, the *Vita Apollonii* – composed by Philostratus in the 3rd century in order to show that Apollonius was not a *Magos*² – is the main source for his life. In the Arabic tradition, the polyhedric authorship of Apollonius (*Balī-nās* or *Balīnūs* in Arabic) is connected with alchemy, magic, astrology, and the “science of properties.” Many authors, however, simply referred to him as the “Master of talismans” (*Sāhib al-ṭilasmāt*) par excellence.³

1 This article is being published within the framework of the *AlchemEast* project, which has received funding from the European Research Council (ERC) under the European Union's Horizon 2020 research and innovation programme (G.A. 724914).

2 The classical study about the *Magoi* in the Greek sources is Joseph Bidez, Franz Cumont, *Les mages hellénisés. Zoroastre, Ostanès et Hystaspe*, 2 vols. (Paris: Les Belles Lettres, 1938). The hypothesis that the *Magoi* were groups of Zoroastrians who settled in Asia Minor has been integrated with and partially modified by more recent research. See, for instance, Roger Beck, “Thus Spake Not Zarathustra: Zoroastrian Pseudepigrapha of the Greco-Roman World,” in *A History of Zoroastrianism*, edited by Mary Boyce, Frantz Grenet, 3 vols., Vol. 3, *Zoroastrianism Under Macedonian and Roman Rule* (Leiden: Brill, 1991), pp. 491–565. Regarding the polysemic status of the word *magos*, see Markham Geller, “The Last Wedge,” *Zeitschrift für Assyriologie und Vorderasiatische Archäologie*, 1997, 87:43–95.

3 Philostratus, *The Life of Apollonius of Tyana*, translated by Frederick C. Conybeare, 2 vols. (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1969). On the role of Apollonius in late antique

Several works are attributed to Apollonius,⁴ the focus here, however, will be on the *Kitāb al-talāsīm al-akbar* (“The Great Book of Talismans”), the Arabic version of the Greek βίβλος σοφίας καὶ συνέσεως ἀποτελεσμάτων Ἀπολλωνίου τοῦ Τυανέως ὃς ἔγραψε καὶ ἐδίδαξε Σούστουμον Θάλασσον τόν αὐτοῦ μαθητήν (“Book of the knowledge and understanding of the *Apotelesmata* of Apollonius of Tyana, that he has composed and taught to his own disciple Sustumon Thalasson”).⁵

The Greek text has been edited twice on the basis of different manuscripts. In 1907, François Nau published the text in the *Patrologia Syriaca*, relying on four different Greek manuscripts in Paris. In the following year, Franz Boll published the version of MS Berlin, Phill. 1577 in the *Catalogus Codicum Astrologorum Graecorum*.⁶ The two editors had differing ideas about the attribution of the text: Boll considered it an impudent fiction, while Nau was inclined to consider it genuine.

Greek literature and its later reception, see Christopher P. Jones, “Apollonius of Tyana in Late Antiquity,” in *Greek Literature in Late Antiquity: Dynamism, Didacticism, Classicism*, edited by Scott Fitzgerald Johnson (Berlin: De Gruyter, 2015), pp. 49–64. In 2005–2006 Christopher P. Jones also published a new English translation in three volumes of Philostratus’ biography of Apollonius for the Loeb Classical Library. One of the first studies on the Arabic Apollonius was published by Steinschneider at the end of the 18th century: see Moritz Steinschneider, “Apollonius von Thyana oder Balinas bei den Arabern,” *Zeitschrift der Deutschen Morgenländischen Gesellschaft*, 1891, 45:439–446. For more recent studies, see Martin Plessner, “Hermes Trismegistus and Arab Science,” *Studia Islamica*, 1954, 2:45–59. For Plessner’s article in the *Encyclopedia of Islam*, see Martin Plessner, “Balinūs,” in *Encyclopaedia of Islam, Second Edition*, edited by Peri Bearman, Thierry Bianquis, Clifford E. Bosworth, Emeri van Donzel, Wolfhart P. Heinrichs, consulted online: http://dx.doi.org/10.1163/1573-3912_islam_SIM_1146 (accessed 1 Oct. 2018). For the legendary biographies of Apollonius in antiquity and the Middle Ages, see Jean-Marc Mandosio, “Les vies légendaires d’Apollonius de Tyane,” *Micrologus*, 2013, 21:115–143.

4 The most famous text attributed to Apollonius in the Arabic tradition is probably the *Sirr al-halīqa*; for its edition and translation, see Ursula Weisser, *Das „Buch über das Geheimnis der Schöpfung“ von Pseudo-Apollonius von Tyana* (Berlin: De Gruyter, 1980).

5 See Manfred Ullmann, *Die Natur- und Geheimmwissenschaften im Islam* (Leiden/Köln: Brill, 1972), p. 380. The vocalization of the Arabic *ṭilasm* is based on the tacit assumption that this word is a calque on the Greek (τελέσμα). In the Greek text of Apollonius, however, the expression used is ἀποτελεσμα, which means “event” or “result.” In astrology, assumes the more specific connotation of the result of certain positions of the stars on human destiny. The word τελέσμα – a Byzantine form from a later period – seems to have been the actual mould for the Arabic calque.

6 For the two editions, see François Nau (ed.), “Apotelesmata Apollonii Tyanensis,” in *Patrologia Syriaca, Appendix, VII* (Bruxelles: Lamertin, 1908), pp. 1362–1392; and Franz Boll (ed.), *Catalogus codicum astrologorum graecorum VII. Codices germanicos* (Paris: Firmin-Didot, 1907), pp. 174–181.

What the Greek tradition preserves can be described as an astrological *Book of the Hours*,⁷ which systematically lists the correspondences between the hours of the day and night, the days of the week, the months, the seasons, etc. with the zodiac constellations, the planets, and the spiritual entities that preside over them. The text is addressed to Apollonius' disciple, *Dustumos/Sustumos Thalassos* (Δούστουμος/Σούστουμος Θάλασσος).⁸

In the Byzantine sources – up to the 6th century with the *Chronographia* of Johannes Malalas – we read that the wise Apollonius travelled far and wide in Byzantium and Asia Minor, making *telesmata* (τελέσματα) to protect different cities from pests and other dangers. These *telesmata* are described as small statues or effigies moulded in different metals.⁹

During the reign of the Emperor Domitianus lived the most wise Apollonius of Tyana, who wandered around in all regions and cities, and made *telesmata* everywhere he went. Then he went to Byzantium, and also made *telesmata* in other cities. He came from Tyana in Syria, and went to the great Antioch, where he was asked by the first citizens to make different *Telesmata* there as well, against the things that were troubling the city. He made one against the North wind, which he placed at the Eastern gate of the city. There he made another *telesma* against the scorpions, which chased them away from the region. After he had moulded a copper scorpion, he had it buried in the middle of the city, and a small column was placed on that spot. Once he had done this, the scorpions disappeared, and did not infest the town or the neighbouring areas ever again. Then the citizens of Antioch asked him for another one against an infestation of mosquitos; he obliged, and never again was a mosquito seen there.

Only in Nau's edition, based on the Berlin manuscript, is the *Book of the Hours* followed by the description of a talisman to gather together pigeons and a magic mirror that can show even the most remote corners of the earth and skies. The presence of these two elements and the abrupt end of the text suggest that the work has been transmitted in an incomplete form in Greek.

7 The *Book of Hours* certainly deserves further analysis, also in relation to other Arabic texts referring to the talismanic tradition and to Apollonius, such as al-Qurṭubī's *Ġāyat al-ḥakīm*, and Faḥr al-Dīn al-Rāzī's *al-Sirr al-maktūm*. Hereafter this first section of Apollonius's book on talismans will be referred to as *Book of Hours*.

8 In the Berlin codex, Boll reads *Sustumos Thalassos*, see Boll (ed.), *Catalogus* (cit. note 6), p. 175; whereas the Paris codices consulted by Nau agree on the reading *Dustumos Thalassos*, see Nau (ed.), *Apotelesmata* (cit. note 6), p. 1372.

9 For the Greek text, see Nau (ed.), *Apotelesmata* (cit. note 6), pp. 1366–1367.

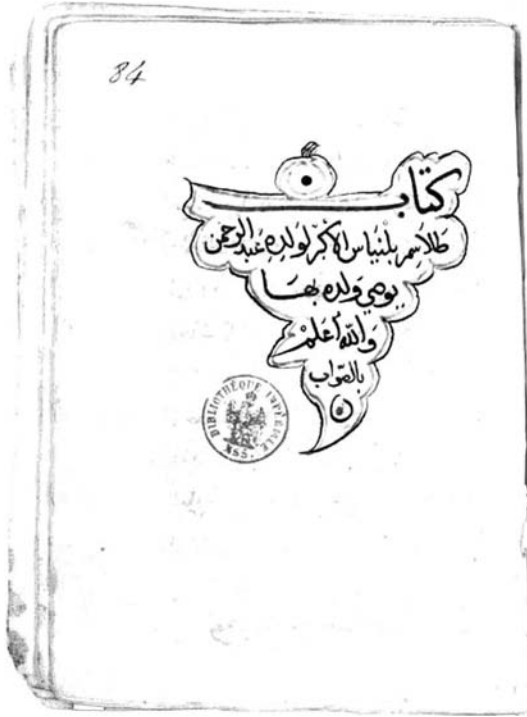


FIGURE 1

MS Paris BnF Ar. 2250, f. 84^r, title page: “The great book of talismans of Balinās for his son, ‘Abd al-Raḥman, [Apollonius] entrusted his son with these.”

The Arabic tradition seems to preserve in full this second part of that text, whose contents are described by the Byzantine sources and barely preserved in the direct textual tradition in Greek. The technical introduction – or *Book of Hours* – is followed by the actual record of some thirty talismans, whose making Apollonius describes in the first person. The text is transmitted only by MS Paris BnF Ar. 2250 (ff. 84^r–134^v) (Fig. 1).¹⁰ Kraus and Ullmann identified a second manuscript witness to this tradition, MS Berlin Pet I 66 (ff. 41^v–74^v) (Fig. 2).¹¹ In this manuscript, however, the explicit title (“This is the book of talismans of Apollonius for his son”) is not matched by the contents. In fact, we only find the first part of Apollonius’ introduction, followed by a different body of materials:

10 William McGuckin de Slane, *Catalogue des manuscrits arabes* (Paris: Imprimerie Nationale, 1883–1895), p. 394.

11 See Paul Kraus, *Jābir ibn Ḥayyān. Contribution à l’histoire des idées scientifiques dans l’Islam*, 2 vols. (Le Caire: Imprimerie de l’Institut Français d’archéologie orientale, 1943), vol. 2, pp. 293–295; and Ullmann, *Natur- und Geheimwissenschaften* (cit. note 5), pp. 379–380.



FIGURE 2
MS Berlin Pet I 66 (Ahlwardt 5908), f. 41^r;
the rubricated title “This is the book of
talismans of Apollonius for his son” is
actually followed by pseudo-Aristotelian
astrological contents.

a set of associations of planets and zodiac constellations with body parts and diseases, quotations from the “first astronomers” (f. 44^v), and many passages from pseudo-Aristotelian astrological works. There is no sign of Apollonius’ *Apotelesmata*. In order to read Apollonius’ empirical record, we are bound to rely on MS Paris BnF Ar. 2250.

The Greek introduction mentions four books written by Apollonius and the prophecy (*ex post*) about the Saviour and real miracle maker, who will be born from a virgin in Bethlehem (who, however, will not be able to wipe away the fame of Apollonius’ deeds).¹²

12 Nau (ed.), *Apotelesmata* (cit. note 6), pp. 1372–1373.

Listen, my son, because I will show you the mystery of wisdom, that is unknown, and hides many things about propitious moments and times, hours, days and nights, along with their names and virtues, and about the true wisdom that is hidden in them. I will reveal to you, from a knowledge that God gave me, those *Apotelesmata* with which everything that God created on earth can be enchanted (περι στοιχειώσεως).

This consists of four books that I wrote – more precious than gold and gems: one on astronomy, another on astrology, the third on rhetoric (σχολαστική), and the fourth – the most precious of them all – in which there are great and fearful signs, wonders and mysteries of power; in other words, about the enchantment of all the creatures created and moved by God. If someone, approaching this book, wants to be successful in these wonders, he must abstain from any bad actions, as well as from conversation and intercourse with women. [...]

And, indeed, the One who will be born in Bethlehem from a virgin will be a great master; he will save humankind and destroy the temples of the idols, but he will not destroy the art of the *Apolesmata* that I am able to do. In fact whatever virtue he will have, I have already accomplished everything that his power will do, and I have produced *Apolesmata* and enchantments (ἀπετέλεσα και ἐστοιχείωσα).

The Arabic introduction is radically different from the Greek one: Apollonius receives a revelation directly from God, and the sublime status of Apollonius' knowledge loses its comparative dimension with Christ.

Introduction – MS BNF Par. Ar. 2250 (ff. 84^v–85^r)

In the Name of God the Merciful, the Compassionate. This is the *Great Book* of Apollonius, with which he advises and instructs his disciple.

“Listen to what I instruct you about, opening your mind and strengthening your heart. In fact, I am your teacher in a science whose value is not surpassed by gold or silver, because this is a kind of wealth that never fades away. It is a sublime and perfect gift; it is the perfect spiritual gift that no other man has ever attained before me. For this reason, pay great attention to what I say to you!”

[...] This is a noble science with which I have obtained the favour of the kings and the mighty ones, with which I have obtained what I wanted, and it is a gift from God the Mighty, the Sublime. It was said to me in this way: “Oh Apollonius, receive this gift that nobody has ever received before, because God the Highest is pleased to teach you all the secrets.”

The Greek introduction also contains a set of strict ritual prescriptions that must be followed by the one who wishes to practice this art. The strong misogynistic character of these prescriptions reminds us of Apollonius' Pythagorean background.¹³

If you want to successfully operate the wonders that you are going to find in this book, then you have to abstain from every evil action, and above all from the conversation and the company of women.

In the Arabic version, Apollonius receives these prescriptions in a dream, not mentioned in the introduction but in the description of a talisman prepared against evil spirits and demons.¹⁴

The instructive dream – MS Paris BnF Ar. 2250 (f. 97^r)

You should know, my son, that the skies and the earth stand on this talisman, and it was said to me in a dream: “Oh Apollonius, nobody else has ever received this science. So fear God the Highest, and do rightly in this.”

I said in my sleep: “And which are the right things to do?”

He said: “Fast, prayer, compassion, chastity, sincerity, and good opinion, in the name of God, the Mighty, the Sublime.”

2 The Cities and the Talismans

The Arabic recension of Apollonius' *Great Book of Talismans* preserves a lively account of the actual talismans that the wandering magician produced for different cities in the Near East.

The purpose of these talismans covers a set of objectives that is typical of this literature on talismans and divination intended as manipulations of nature: protection for people and their environment against obnoxious animals and pests, the favour of the king, turn an enemy into a friend (and vice versa), and the discovery of hidden secrets and treasures. Apollonius' talismans seem to have a monumental character (statues mounted on a pillar and protected by a

¹³ Ibid., p. 1373.

¹⁴ This talisman takes the form of a metallic plate engraved with magical signs. A similar talisman (*haraz*) was revealed to Apollonius again in the context of a dream; see MS Paris BnF. Ar. 2250, ff. 95^v–96^r.

shrine-like architectural structure), and mark the landscape of the city that has requested them.¹⁵

The talismans dealing with animals usually have a double declination: one version of the talisman chases the animal away, while the other gathers all the specimens in the same place, implying perhaps different approaches to disinfection.

The services of Apollonius were requested by many different cities he visited in his wanderings: Antioch, Emesa (f. 122^v) and Edessa (f. 106^r) in the Great Syria, Byzantium (f. 127^v), Persia (f. 124^v), Alexandria *apud Aegyptum* (ff. 115^v–117^r) and Nubia (f. 125^v). Apollonius gives the waypoints of his peregrinations without any relative chronology, and so drawing a line of his route is impossible.¹⁶

The social context that can be inferred from the text confirms the presence of a city authority that hires Apollonius in order to solve some kind of issue or emergency that affected the whole population (an infestation, for instance, or the level of the local river).¹⁷ There is no hint, however, that Apollonius received any form of economic compensation in exchange for his services. The silence on this aspect might be due to the fact that Apollonius is a wise and ascetic man, not a common rat-piper, and therefore it would not have been appropriate for him to record the more trivial and material of aspects of his activity.

2.1 *The Magic Mirror and the Link with the Greek Tradition – Ms Paris BnF Par. Ar. 2250, ff. 115^v–117^r*

Although it is an adaptation rather than a translation, the Arabic text preserves the same constitutive narrative elements of the Greek recension published by Nau: a mirror moulded from different metals, with seven stones on the frame, which shows everything on earth and in the sky, a different corner of the world on each of its polished sides. This parallel attestation of the mirror provides

15 See Jean-Charles Coulon, *La magie en terre d'Islam au Moyen Age* (Paris: Comité des travaux historiques et scientifiques, 2017), pp. 92–98.

16 For a more inclusive list of the cities mentioned in connection with Apollonius in Arabic geographical sources, see *ibid.*

17 On talismans as an important defensive asset in mediaeval Arabo-Islamic sources, see Giovanna Calasso, “Les remparts et la loi, les talismans et les saints: la protection de la ville dans les sources musulmanes médiévales,” *Bulletin d'études orientales*, 1992, 44:83–104, pp. 87–92. The commissioning of a talisman for the city was considered to be one of the responsibilities of a good ruler. Johannes Malalas as well in the *Chronographia* refers to local elites who requested Apollonius' services.

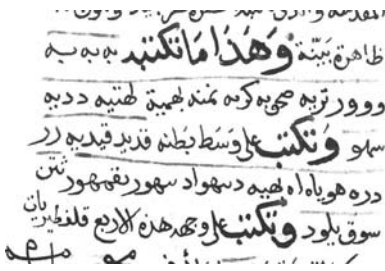


FIGURE 3
MS Paris BnF Par. Ar. 2250, f. 115^r (detail), strokes
above the lines with magical names

us with the possibility to check for the presence of any resemblance between the Greek and Arabic names of the spirits. Even with tentative restorations of the scarce dotting of the Arabic names, they do not seem to show any direct connection to the Greek names.¹⁸ The Arabic text specifies that this is a Syriac talisman, meaning that this copy (*nusha*) is from the Arabic.¹⁹ The strokes over the magical names are an interesting palaeographic feature related to the technical character of the text. They are meant to mark a clear separation of this peculiar component from the rest of the text: as words that were, like the rest, written in the Arabic alphabet, but that should not be read in the same way (Fig. 3).²⁰

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- 18 The names of the angelic entities mentioned in the Arabic Great book of talismans seem to have a Semitic origin. Some of them are reminiscent of angels in the Hebrew tradition, and a few are attested in Arabic treatises on magic. A more precise identification of these names, however, goes beyond the purposes of this paper, which focuses more on the technical component of the text. For the identification of the magical names, see Moïse Schwab, *Vocabulaire de l'angéologie, d'après les manuscrits hébreux de la Bibliothèque nationale* (Paris: Imprimerie Nationale, 1897); see also Sébastien Moureau, Cécile Bonmariage, *Le cercle des lettres de l'alphabet: un traité pratique de magie des lettres attribué à Hermès* (Leiden, Boston: Brill, 2017).
- 19 This remark can be interpreted as a hint at a multilingual tradition and transmission of the text, though its meaning remains partially unclear.
- 20 As for the edition of the Arabic texts, I have opted for making it available to a broader scholarly audience, largely by adapting the orthography to modern usage and by adding the punctuation.

Another talisman, to see what is surrounded by the secret, far or near, close by or at the end of the lowest of the low and the highest in the height of the skies, of the constellations of the Zodiac and of the fixed stars, to the highest sublimity, to the angels, the jinns, and the demons, to the farthest part of the world, and to the other places that will become visible to you, with the permission of God, may He be exalted.

When you want this, take copper, iron, lead, black lead, silver, gold, *qartūlas*²¹ – that is, crushed glass – mould everything, and make a single mirror out of them, then polish it very well.

Then write these noble names on it, on a Friday in the eighth hour.

Write the name of Venus, the name of the Angel that presides over her, and the name of the angel that presides over the month in which you are.

This is what you will write along with the names of the Angels.

طلسم اخر تنظر الى سائر ما هو مستور مخفى بعد او قرب والى نهاية اسفل سافلين والى الاعلى عليين من السموات والبروج والافلاك العالية والى حلا اقدر اسميه والى الملائكة والجن والشياطين [116^f] والى اقاصى الدنيا والى سائر المواضع التي تطلع عليها باذن الله تعالى.

فاذا اردت ذلك نغذ نحاس وحديد وانك وورصاص اسود وفضة وذهب وقرطولس وهو الزجاج المفتت واسبك الجميع واعمل منه مرآة واحدة ثم اجلوها جلا جيدا حسنا.

ثم اكتب عليها هذه الاسماء الشريفة في يوم الجمعة في الساعة الثامنة.

واكتب اسم الزهرة واسم الملك الموكل بها واسم الملك الموكل بالشهر الذي انت فيه.

وهذا ما تكتبه مع اسماء الملائكة:

ردومح وعمر وعفور ومعرمح علعر بلبلن بسوونخرشورمر وصبير

They have to be written on the external surface of the mirror; set seven stones in relief on its surface.

يكتبوا على بدنهما من خارج واعمل على وجهها سبعة اججار مرتفعة.

21 This name for crushed glass may be a calque of *chartula*, which refers to a folded paper envelope or cone containing a powder, as a metonym for its content, and may have entered the Arabic lexicon via the Greek. See also Reinhart Dozy, *Supplément aux dictionnaires arabes*, 2 vols, Vol. 2, p. 339a (Leyde: Brill, 1881).

(cont.)

And so, when you want to see the whole earth, mount the gems on gold leaves, and on these noble names.

فاذا اردت ان تنظر الى الارض كلها ركبت
الفصوص على صفائح ذهب وهذه الاسماء الشريفة.

Underneath the gold leaf, along with these names, under every gem one of these names has to be written on the golden leaf.

وصير تحت صفيحة ذهب [١١٦٧] مع هذه الاسماء
يكون تحت كل فص اسم مكتوب في الصفيحة من
هذه الاسماء

These are the names that must be written on the leaves:

وهذا ما يكتب على الصفائح من الاسماء:

ركوز فلوكر سمسسر فقوش منهش صعر اشيت كعرصر

The gems must be precious stones.

وتكون الفصوص من جواهر كريمة.

When you want to see the earth and everything that is on it, every climate and its country, look into this mirror, and you will see everything in the seven climates.

فاذا اردت ان تنظر الى الارض وكل شيء فيها وكل
اقليم وبلاده انظر في تلك المرآة فانك ترى كل شيء
في السبع الاقاليم.

When you want to look up into the air, in the direction of the place that it is not necessary to mention, then look into the middle of the mirror, after tracing in its middle one of the four letters that cover the four corners of the world.

وان اردت ان تنظر الى فوق في الهوى الى الموضع
الذي لا يجب ذكره انظر في وسط المرآة وليكن قد
رسمت في وسطها احد الاربع احرف التي بها تلبس
اربع زوايا الدنيا.

The same when you want to look down, that is, to the lowest of the low.

وكذلك اذا اردت ان تنظر في سفلى اي اسفل
سافلين.

I have already made this mirror in Alexandria, and this is the representation of the magical drawings (*qalḥaṭīriyyāt*)²² of the mirror.

وقد عملت هذه المرآة بالاسكندرية وهذه صفة
القلفطيرات الذي كان للمرآة.

22 *Qalḥaṭīriyyāt* may assume slightly different meanings in Arabic (magical signs and talismanic drawings). In this case, it seems to indicate the whole set of inscriptions on the surface of the mirror.

(cont.)

And this is this Syrian talisman, and it indicates that this copy is from the Arabic.

وهو هذا الطلسم السرياني وهو يدل [117^r] على هذه النسخة من العربي.

2.2 *Scorpions in Emesa – MS Paris BnF Ar. 2250, fff. 122^v–123^r*

The talisman against scorpions made for the inhabitants of Emesa is a simple red copper effigy of a scorpion, with magical names engraved on all its limbs.

Talisman to banish the scorpions, that I made for the city of Emesa.

طلسم لنفى العقارب ايضا مما عملت بمدينة حمص

If you do not want to see a scorpion in your country anymore, make a scorpion of mineral red copper, and write these names on its extremities:

اذا اردت ان لا ترى في بلادك عقرب ابدا اعمل عقرب من نحاس احمر معدني واكتب [123^r] على اطرافها هذه الاسماء:

ممعط فلح

Write on its back:

واكتب على ظهرها:

سيورس

Write on its abdomen:

واكتب على بطنها:

بهرويل بورك

Write on its head:

واكتب على رأسها:

بشلسلح

Write on its side:

واكتب على جنبها:

ليوح

Write on the other side:

واكتب على الجنب الاخر:

(cont.)

شليل

together with the name of the Angel that governs this hour – that is the hour in which you want to shape the figure and make the engravings.

مع اسم الملك الذي يخدم تلك الساعة اي ساعة اردت وكان العمل فيها التصوير والنقش.

Then bury it wherever you want, and scorpions will never be seen again after this talisman.

ثم ادفنها حيث شئت فانهم لا يروا بعد هذا الطلسم.

2.3 *The River in Antioch – Ms Paris BnF Ar. 2250, ff. 102^v–103^v*

The citizens of Antioch asked Apollonius to enchant the river, and they had to take active part in the ritual by building a small construction and a pond. Their role in the preparation of this talisman is reminiscent of the construction of hydraulic structures (canals, basins, and even mills). Once the citizens of Emesa had completed their part of the work, Apollonius had a vision of the underground ‘roots’ of the mountain, and then performed a complex ritual involving the use of reeds and special recitations in particular directions.

Then the people of Antioch asked me, fearing that the water of the river would not be favourable.

ثم ان اهل الانطاكية سألوني وشكوا الى في ان ماء النهر لا يوافق.

I told them: “Leave the city, going in the direction of the West for a few miles, erect a building there, and dig a canal.”

فقطعت لهم اخرجوا الى مغارب المدينة على اميال منها وابنوا فيها بيتا واحفروا فيه قناة.

Then they went to the foot of the mountain, and erected a building for the water; they dug inside it, and made a small pond outside.

نفرجوا الى سفح الجبل فبنوا بيتا للماء وحفروا فيه وعملوا بركة خارج.

(cont.)

Once they had completed all this, I observed it. Then I made a statue of mineral red copper. I took four clean reeds, placed them on the shoulder of this statue; I mentioned the powerful names, and then I saw the earth underneath the mountain, which opened up until I could see everything that was in it.

فلما فرغوا من ذلك خرجتُ فنظرتُ اليه فعملتُ
صنم من نحاس احمر [103^f] معدني واخذت اربع
قصبات نقيه وجعلتها على كتف ذلك الصنم وذكرت
الاسماء العظام ورأيت الارض من تحت الجبل
تنفتح حتى رأيت كلما فيها.

Then I invoked these powerful names in the direction of the East and everything that is contained in it. These names are:

ثم اني دعوت بهذه الاسماء المسلطة على الشرق وكلما
فيه وهي هذه:

وهي وهي هو هو يهورهيه درده بنجو اهليقيه سهوهمه

Then I invoked these powerful names in the direction of the West.
These are the names:

ثم دعوت بهذه الاسماء المسلطة على الجهات الغربية.
وهي هذه الاسماء:

شهووش نكره هوو هو بوهده بيوبهن حشيعهو

Then I invoked these powerful names in the direction of the town and what is in it. They are these:

ثم دعوت بهذه الاسماء المسلطة على البلدة وما فيها.
وهي هذه:

وزهورتو هو كهمه تفهفص هاره

Then I wrote on the reed that governed the wind of the West:

ثم كتبت على القصبة التي تلى الريح الغربية:

سسبعص صاو ه ارارص

Then I placed this on the neck of this statue without any fear; and then I wrote on the reed that governed the wind of the East:

ثم جعلت على عنق ذلك الصنم بلا خوف وكتبت
[103^v] على القصبة التي تلى الريح الشرقية:

(cont.)

مهلهورش

I placed this reed in a cylinder of reeds, and wrote these names and placed them on the four reeds, then I set them adrift [in the river], and they went with the water.

وجعلت هذه القصبة في انايب قصب وكتبت هذه الاسماء وجعلتها في اربع قصبات وارسلتهن يذهبن ويحين بالماء.

They went, and I remained watching them, after I had mentioned and uttered these names, then I sent them away. These are the names:

فذهبن وانا اراهن وذلك بعد ذكر قولي هذه الاسماء ثم ارسلتهن. وهي هذه الاسماء:

أشليموت ونوريق تريق معصمق العرمل

“Go and bring my blessing to your elevated land.”

اذهن وبلغن سلامي الى ارضك المرتفعة.

You should know, my son, that with these names I have brought forth all the talismans, and with them I have offered my services to kings, with them I have brought water to the land of Antioch with great canals, and they [the inhabitants] built mills for this purpose inside the city.

واعلم ان يا ابني ان بهذه الاسماء اقت جميع الطلسمات وبها استخدمت الملوك وبها جبلت الماء الى ارض انطاكية بالقني الكبار وبنوا عليها الطواحين في جوف المدينة.

2.4 *Bugs and Flies in Ephesus – MS Paris BnF Ar. 2250, ff. 105^r–105^v*

The talisman against bugs for the city of Ephesus is one of the few instances in the text in which an astrological entity – the planet Saturn – is the crucial aspect of the technical indications for the making of the talisman. In this case, the talismanic object is a jar decorated with the figure of a bug, which has to be buried deep with an engraved stone inside it. In astrological lapidaries, black stones are generally associated with the planet Saturn.²³

23 For instance, in the case of the text of planetary engravings on stones attributed to ‘Uṭārid ibn Muḥammad, see Lucia Raggetti, “The ‘Science of Properties’ and its Transmission,” in *In the Wake of the Compendia: Infrastructural Contexts and the Licensing of Empiricism in Ancient and Medieval Mesopotamia*, edited by Justin C. Johnson (Berlin: De Gruyter, 2015), pp. 159–176; see also Julius Ruska, *Griechische Planetendarstellungen in arabischen Stein-*

To chase bugs away

طرد البق

I did this also in the city of Ephesus
against the bugs.

وعملت ذلك ايضا بمدينة افسس للبِق.

And this was that I made a jar of mineral
red copper, I engraved the figure of a bug
on it on a Saturday in the first hour of
Saturn, and I also engraved the name of
Saturn, the name of the Angel that gov-
erns this hour, and his name is *Şūrāyābīl*.

وذلك اني عملت جرة من نحاس احمر معدني
ونقشت عليها شبه البقعة في يوم السبت في الساعة
الاولى لرحل [105^v] ونقشت اسم زحل واسم الملك
المدير لتلك الساعة واسمه صورايابيل.

I also wrote on a black stone – that had
on it something that resembles eyes –
and on the carnelian in the jar.
These are the signs to write on the stone:

وكتبت ايضا على حجر اسود يكون فيه شبه العيون
والعقيقة في الجرة.
وهذه اما تكتب على الحجر:

كركن ويسسق قرشعدرم يزير كحى

I ordered that the jar be buried in the
centre of the city, many arms deep under-
neath the surface of the ground.

وامرت ان تدفن الجرة في وسط المدينة على اذرع
كثيرة في عمق الارض.

And then the bugs did not appear any-
more in this city.

فان البق لا يظهر في تلك المدينة.

2.5 *Warming the Furnace in the Bath of Edessa – MS Paris BNF Ar. 2250, ff. 106^r–106^v*

More than one of Apollonius' talismanic adventures is connected to the public baths, an important component of daily life in imperial times, and a tradition that survived longer in the Eastern part of the Roman Empire than in the Western one. A lantern with three different wicks, and shaped in a human form, makes it possible to heat the large furnace of the bath in Edessa without any fuel. The Pythagorean substratum that remained connected to Apollonius emerges in the ritual prescription: if this talisman enters into contact (even a purely visual one) with a woman, then it will be devoid of all its power.

büchern (Heidelberg: Carl Winter's Universitätsbuchhandlung, 1919); and David Pingree, "Indian Planetary Images and the Tradition of Astral Magic," *Journal of the Warburg and Courtauld Institutes*, 1989, 52:1–13.

In the city of Edessa I made a bath talisman. I reached [the inhabitants] in the building of the baths, and this had a large furnace.

وعملت بمدينة الرهاء طلسم حمام تقدمت اليهم في بناء حمام وله قمين واسع.

I made a lantern of mineral copper with three wicks, then I wrote these names on the wicks, and I placed them inside the lantern. These are the names:

وعملت سراجا من نحاس معدني وله ثلاث فتل وكتبت على الفتل هذه الاسماء وورضتها في السراج. وهي هذه الاسماء:

كششن عينتيا يعمل دبق ششخ زهونعل

These names have to be written on every wick, write on the bottom of the lantern these well-guarded, concealed names that work with everything, along with the Great Name. These are the names:

تكتب هذه [106^v] الاسماء في كل فتيلة واكتب على اسفل السراج هذه الاسماء المصونة المخزونة الجارية في كل شيء والاسم الكبير. وهي هذه الاسماء:

أشليليموت بززربرت كرك برق رحر طلعق بلغر بقن بعقير فقص ضير كول

Make the lantern similar to a man made of copper, who has in his hand a skin purse – made of copper as well – that has to be filled with oil, which must not be spilled on the hand.

واعمل على السراج مثل انسان من نحاس في يده زق من نحاس مملؤ زيت لم يعصر باليد:

Pour it in the lantern, then write on the face of this statue, place it inside the furnace, shut its opening, and then the furnace will warm up without any fuel for the fire, and this will last without being spoiled as long as a woman does not look at the lantern.

ثم تصب منه في السراج ثم اكتب على وجه ذلك الصنم واجعله في القمين وتسد باب القمين فانه يحمي بلا وقيد نار الى الابد ما لا يرى السراج امرأة لا يفسد ابدا.

If, however, a woman looks at it, then it will be become void and spoiled. So write on the face of the statue, so that my operation is complete:

فان رايت امرأة بطل وفسد وتكتب على وجع الصنم فتم عملي:

(cont.)

واشتمر جماد ن يه ر قيل

You must help this work, my son, by
fasting and praying to God, may He be
exalted, and you must also be clean dur-
ing the rest of your operation.

وينبغي لك يا ابني ان تستعين في هذه الاعمال
بالصوم والصلاة لله تعالى والنظافة في سائر عملك.

2.6 *The Rat King in Antioch – MS Paris BnF Ar. 2250, ff. 132^v–133^r*

Apollonius describes several talismans that share the purpose of chasing rats away. This particular one is a richly embellished effigy – encrusted with precious stones that serve as anatomical details of a mouse, filled with honey – that has the power to summon the Rat King.²⁴

The Rat King will crawl out from its hole supported by other rats, limping like a man.²⁵ Apollonius warns his disciple not to laugh at it, otherwise the whole operation will fail miserably. Indeed he records an occasion when this talisman failed because of laughter.²⁶ In this case, the citizens, and not Apollonius, were

24 The expression “Rat King” indicates a number of rats whose limbs and tails are joined and intertwined for various possible reasons. It is usually associated with Germany, where there have been high number of sightings since the 16th century. Some alleged specimens are preserved in museums of natural history and curiosities. The Rat King was introduced as an evil literary character by E.T.A. Hoffmann in his *Nussknacker und Mausekönig* (“The Nutcracker and the Mouse King”), published in 1816. In this story, the evil Mouse King has many heads, though usually this detail is omitted in productions of the Tchaikovsky ballet *The Nutcracker*, based on this story. Terry Pratchett, in one of his Disc World novel *The Amazing Maurice and his Educated Rodents* (2001), is convinced of the existence of the Rat King, but not of its origin. He is afraid, however, that “down the ages some cruel and inventive people that have had altogether too much time on their hands” could ultimately be responsible for this phenomenon. See Terry Pratchett, *The Amazing Maurice and his Educated Rodents* (London: Random House Children’s Publishers, 2001), p. 279.

25 The group of rats supporting their king may give the impression of an entangled mass of rats, believed to constitute a Rat King. In any case, moving around would be a complicated matter for a bunch of interlocked rats.

26 That sometimes Apollonius could be irritated by the citizens who hired him is a *topos* that is also attested in the geographical literature. In Isfahan, Apollonius reacted to and even punished the inhabitants by making a talisman that would bring a plague upon their city. See Coulon, *La magie en terre d’Islam* (cit. note 15), pp. 96–97. The revenge of a magician over citizens who have summoned him to save their city but who then behave badly is a well-known literary theme, as in the story of the “Pied Piper of Hamelin” (*Der Rattenfänger von Hameln*), which was borrowed from German folklore by Goethe and the Brothers Grimm, among others, and then passed into the German and European literature.

to be blamed for spoiling the ritual. In order to avoid this, Apollonius suggests that his pupil perform this ritual in a solitary place, in the very late or very early hours of a Wednesday, which is a generally propitious moment.

Talisman to chase away rats

If you want to achieve this, make a rat of black lead, and stuff its belly with honey.

Then, put inside it any food of choice. Then add eyes to the rat made of pure crystal (*mahā*), and a tail made of red carnelian.

Then, on a Wednesday, write on the rat, as previously explained, the names of the hours, and the other names of the Angels that preside over the hour and the month in which you are, and the name of the Angel presiding over it is *Karsā'il*.

Then write these names on the head of the mouse These are the names:

طلمس لطرد الفأر

إذا اردت ذلك اعمل فأرة من رصاص اسود واحشوا بطن الفأرة عسل.

ثم اجعل فيه من اي طعام شئت. ثم اجعل عيني الفأرة من مها نقي وذنبها من العقيق الاحمر.

ثم اكتب على الفأرة يوم الاربعاء كما قدمت لك من اسماء الساعات وغير ذلك من اسماء الملائكة الخدم للساعة والشهر الذي انت فيه [133^f] واسم ملك الساعة الموكل بها كرسائل.

ثم اكتب هذه الاسماء على رأس الفأرة. وهي هذه:

سيكل سيكا طارصا طلا موش بيرنا ناطب قيطيايل شروجع

Place the talisman anywhere you want, and then the mice will crawl out from their holes, and the people will witness this wonder.

You should know, my son, that the king of the rats limps like a man; and so, when he comes towards you, you should not laugh at it, since he appears to be carried by the other mice.

If you laugh or smile at it, then the rats will crawl back into their holes. If you laugh or smile, then your operation will be spoiled, so understand this.

ثم ضع الطلمس في اي مكان اردت فان القيران تخرج من المنازل سعيا ويرى الناس من ذلك العجب.

واعلم يا ابني ان ملك القيران اعرج مثل الانسان فاذا خرج عليك فلا تضحك عليه فانه يخرج محمول على فأرة

فان ضحكت او تبسمت رجعت القيران الى مواضعهم وفسد العمل فافهم ذلك.

(cont.)

You should know, my son, that I did this once for the city of Antioch, and everything went very well for them; then, I did it another time, but it could not be completed because the people laughed, and did not follow my instructions.

واعلم يا ابني اني كنت عملته لاهل انطاكية مرة وصح
لهم وعملته مرة اخرى فلم يتم لانهم ضحكوا ولم يقبلوا
وصيتي.

When you want to do this, do it where nobody can see you, during the fourth hour of the night, in the early morning of a Wednesday, because this is an hour that grants a quick fulfilment of all that you desire. So understand this, and God knows best.

واذا اردت عمله فاعمله من حيث لا يعلم بذلك احد
ويكون في الليل في ساعة الرابعة منه في صبحه يوم
الاربعاء فانها ساعة شريفة سريعة الاجابة في كل ما
تريده فافهم والله اعلم.

3 Echoes in the Hermetic Tradition and the Natural Sciences

Manfred Ullmann stresses the geographical component in Apollonius' *Great Book of Talismans*.²⁷ Jean-Charles Coulon provides an extensive overview of the geographical literature, and uses it to sketch a portrait of Apollonius as a Hellenistic source for Islamic magic.²⁸ Many other texts on astrology, alchemy, and the "science of properties" (*manāfiʿ* and *ḥawāṣṣ*) remain to be sifted in search of more examples of Apollonius' indirect tradition. Many of these texts can literally be called "Hermetic," since either Hermes is explicitly mentioned as the author, or the text is inscribed in his line of transmission, which includes Apollonius, Aristotle, and Alexander.²⁹

The three texts used as *comparanda* in this paper present talismans that can be compared to Apollonius' on the basis of their shape and construction – a distinct typology of talismans – though the origin of their power might be different, or even left unsaid. These also are representative examples of the way

27 See Ullmann, *Natur- und Geheimwissenschaften* (cit. note 5), p. 380.

28 See Coulon, *La magie en terre d' Islam* (cit. note 15), pp. 92–98.

29 See Kevin van Bladel, *The Arabic Hermes. From Pagan Sage to Prophet of Science* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009), and Coulon, *La magie en terre d' Islam* (cit. note 15), pp. 92–98, for the link between talismans and the Hermetic tradition. See also Lianna Saif, "From *Ġāyat al-ḥakīm* to *Šams al-ma'ārif*. Ways of Knowing and Paths of Power in Medieval Islam," *Arabica*, 2017, 64/3–4:297–345.

in which materials stemming from Apollonius were received and transformed in the context of a fluid tradition.

3.1 The Treasure of Alexander – *MS London BL India Office 673*, ff. 41^r–42^r

In its frame story, *The Treasure of Alexander* is described as a body of knowledge stemming from Hermes and antediluvian times, and then handed down to – in this order – Apollonius, Aristotle, Alexander, and eventually to the Abbasid Caliph al-Mu'tašim. The narrative that recounts this also provides the framework for ten heterogeneous chapters dealing with alchemy, poisons and antidotes, the properties of animals, wondrous cucurbits, and talismans. Three chapters are devoted to talisman making: one for planetary talismans, the second for medical talismans, and the third with miscellaneous materials that do not fit in either of the other two chapters.³⁰

This last chapter contains several talismans explicitly attributed to Apollonius; for instance, the one he prepared for the city of Emesa against scorpions (Fig. 4). In this case, the talismanic object is much more elaborate – a figure that is half man and half scorpion, rather than the simple red copper scorpion – but is still meant to be consigned to a covered shrine.

The magical names – the component designed to give power to the talisman – are substituted with a complex and detailed set of astrological configurations, all related to the zodiac constellation of Scorpio, and which must be observable in the sky at the moment of the engraving.

This passage also includes a note of interest to historians of ancient pharmacology, regarding the medical applications of the soil on which the talisman stood. Not only does this earth absorb and retain the power of the talisman, even after the talisman has been removed from its place, but it can also be prepared as *terra sigillata*, and used as a prophylactic *theriaca*.³¹

30 For the translation of the frame story and the table of contents of *The Treasure of Alexander*, see Julius Ruska, *Tabula Smaragdina. Ein Beitrag zur Geschichte der hermetischen Literatur* (Heidelberg: Carl Winter's Universitätsbuchhandlung, 1926), pp. 68–106; and Lucia Raggetti, "The Treasure of Alexander. Stories of Discovery and Authorship," in the section *Syllabi and the Distribution of Texts in Manuscripts* in the volume *Manuscript and Education* (Berlin: De Gruyter, forthcoming).

31 The Arabic text given here is based only on the London MS. This text, however, is attested in other manuscript witnesses as well: MS Escorial 947, ff. 43^v–44^r, and MS Berlin We 11 1209, ff. 31^v–32^r. The digital reproduction of the latter is available in the *Digitalisierte Sammlungen der Staatsbibliothek zu Berlin*: http://digital.staatsbibliothek-berlin.de/werkansicht?PPN=PPN645083135&PHYSID=PHYS_0001&DMDID=DMDLOG_0001 (accessed 29 Oct. 2018). The preparatory work for a critical edition shows that the degree of variance is not very high in this tradition.

Talisman that chases scorpions away from the city, and prevents them from causing harm

This is the talisman that Apollonius made for the Syrian people in the city of Emesa, and it has remained there until now.

Observe when Saturn descends in Scorpio, the Moon is in Scorpio, and the rising of Scorpio is about to begin.

Begin in that moment with the making of this image, from the moment that the rising of the first part of the Scorpio is over; the making of the effigy must be finished by the time the rising of the whole constellation is complete.

The figure is half man, while the lower part is a scorpion. This is the image:

طلسم العقارب يدفعهن عن المدينة ويمنع ضررهن
فيها

وهذا الطلسم الذي عمله بليناس لاهل سورية في
مدينة حمص وهو باق الى الان.

انظر اذا انزل زحل العقرب وصار القمر بالعقرب
وترصد طلوع برج العقرب.

[41^v] وابتدئ حينئذ بعمل هذه الصورة منذ طلوع
اخر جزء اول من العقرب بحيث يفرغ من عمل
الصورة عند تكامل طلوع البرج جميعه.

والصورة نصفها على نصف انسان ونصفها السفلى
نصف عقرب. هذا المثل:



FIGURE 4
MS London BL India Office
673, f. 41^v (detail), figure to be
engraved on Apollonius' talisman
against scorpions, as transmitted
in *The Treasure of Alexander*

Then mount it on an iron pillar, and fix it with a very strong nail. It is also necessary for it to be mounted when the constellation of Scorpio is rising, that is from its beginning to the end [of the ascension], and the same goes for the making of the pillar. If it is not completed by the end of Scorpio's rising, abandon it.

Then, resume the operation on the following day, since it must be stopped when the rising of Scorpio is complete.

Fix the pillar, in the middle of the town, on the ground amidst heavy stones, and build a small structure around it, covered with a roof, so that the talisman remains protected in the middle of the town.

All the scorpions will flee or perish, and no scorpion will enter [the town] where this scorpion has been placed, and no scorpion will be born there either.

If some of the earth from this city is taken and brought to another city – and remains there – it will continue to keep the scorpions at bay.

If a bit of the earth of this city is kneaded with water, then made into small discs to be placed on the wall of the building [protecting the talisman], around the pillar, at the moment of Scorpio's rising, and they are left there until they have dried and detach by themselves, this is medicine for a scorpion sting. I am not saying that it directly cures a bite on the spot, but rather that it fully protects the one who [regularly] drinks it from being killed by a scorpion.

ثم تركيبها على عمود من الحديد وتوثقها بمسمار قوى محكم وينبغي ان يكون تركيبها ايضا وعمل المسمار في وقت طلوع العقرب اعني من اوله الى اخره وكذلك عمل العمود فان لم يتم يترك اذا اكمل طلوع برج العقرب.

ثم يعاود الى العمل من الغد وقت طلوع العقرب ويكمل عند كمال طلوع البرج.

ويركب هذا العمود على الارض وبين حجارة قوية وبني حولها بنية ويجعل عليها سقفا ليكون حفظا للطلسم في وسط القرية.

فانه لا يبقى عقرب الا هرب او هلكت ولا تدخل اليها بعد ذلك عقرب ولا تتكون بها [42^r] عقرب

واذا اخذ من تراب تلك المدينة شيء وحمل الى مدينة اخرى فبقي في موضع منع من ان يقصده العقارب.

واذا عجن شيء من تراب تلك المدينة بالماء وعمل اقراصا والصق على حائط البنية حول العمود وقت طلوع برج العقرب وترك حتى يجف ويقع لنفسه كان دواء للدغة العقرب. لست اقول يبرئ من وجعه ولكنه امان من ان يقتل شاربه العقرب اصلا.

3.2 *The Kitāb al-ḥawāṣṣ of Abū al-ʿAlā ibn Zuhr – MS Istanbul, Saray Ahmet III 2068*

MS Istanbul Saray Ahmet III 2068 is one of the witnesses to the tradition of the *Kitāb al-ḥawāṣṣ* by Abū al-ʿAlā ibn Zuhr (d. 1130), a member of the great medical family known in Latin Europe as the *Avenzoars*.³² This text as well has a fluid tradition, and this particular witness preserves the echo of an archaeological and antiquarian interest in Alexander the Great. In the half-buried ruins of Egyptian temples in Syria, Alexander found a small metallic effigy that, together with hellebore and sulphur, was used to keep flies away; and another one in the shape of a hedgehog, which could be prepared as a fetish against bugs.

Flies

(MS Istanbul Saray Ahmet III 2086, f. 35^r)

Alexander said: “I found among ancient Egyptian ruins in Emesa two buried temples. I explored them and found a talisman that chases flies away. It was standing on a table, and kept the flies away from it. It is made of hellebore and realgar [red arsenic].”

قال الاسكندر وجدت في بربة حمص هيكلين من
دفن افلا وسطره طلسم ينفع للذباب يضع على المائدة
فهرب منه الذباب. وهو كندس وزرنيخ احمر.

Kafalahās [name of the source]: if equal parts are ground and kneaded with sea onion water, a small effigy can be made with this, and placed on the table, then the flies will not approach it, as long as it remains there.

وكفلهاس اجزاء المتسوية يسحق ويعجن بماء بصل
الفأر ويدهن به ويعمل تمثال منه يوضع على المائدة
فلا يقربه الذباب ما دام عليه.

32 See Lucia Raggetti, “Tracing the Sources. A Rare Case of Explicit Scholarly Practice in an Arabic Manuscript Tradition,” *Comparative Oriental Manuscript Studies Newsletter*, 2014, 8:28–32.

Saker falcon

Talisman to chase bugs away: make the figure of a bug, take a hair from the tail of a mare at the very moment that the stallion is mounting her, tie every bug with the hair, and give them the shape of a hedgehog, then put it into a new pot made either of clay or of copper, seal its opening, and bury it in the centre of the doorway; then, not a single bug will enter it for any reason.

(MS Istanbul Saray Ahmet III 2086, f. 50^v)

طلسم لطرده البق يعمل صورة بق ويؤخذ شعرة من
ذنب رمكة ساعة يطرقها الفحل ويربط كل بقة في
شعرة ويجعل مقل القنفذ ثم تجعل في كوز جديد من
نغار او نحاس ويسد رأسه ويدفنه في وسط باب فما
يدخل بقة بوجهه ولا بسبب.

3.3 *Hermetic Talismans Circulating with al-Rāzī's Kitāb al-ḥawāṣṣ*

For this third *comparandum*, the focus will be on a collection of fourteen talismans ascribed to Hermes and used against obnoxious animals, transmitted along with a short treatise by al-Rāzī on those properties of natural substances whose causality is not clear (*Kitāb al-ḥawāṣṣ*). Al-Rāzī wrote extensively on simple drugs, but the three volumes of the *Liber Continens* do not exhaust the topic.³³ The long alphabetical list in the *Continens* has its main sources in Dioscorides and Galen, but those properties that cannot be explained within the Galenic framework of humoral theory are not featured. It is not by chance, then, that in MS Cairo DAK *Ṭibb Taymūr* 264, along with al-Rāzī's learned compilation of *ḥawāṣṣ* (occult properties, that is, properties with a hidden cause), we find a section featuring fourteen talismans designed to protect against insects and pests.

The four talismans presented here – two against flies and two against mice, respectively – are statues fashioned from different metals and then filled with some *Dreckapotheke* ingredient (i.e., “disgusting ingredients” or “filthy pharmacy” consisting of animal secretions, which could be code names for straightforward and less controversial ingredients).³⁴ The combination of the shape

33 Some non-Galenic materials are actually included in the *Continens* and have been explicitly attributed to Apollonius; see Coulon, *La magie en terre d'Islam* (cit. note 15), pp. 73–74. In the text transmitted by MS Cairo DAK *Ṭibb Taymūr* 264, Apollonius is explicitly cited as the source eleven times, though only twice with specific reference to one of his own writings, i.e. *Kitāb al-ṭabī'yyāt* (Book of natural things); see MS Cairo DAK *Ṭibb Taymūr* 264, p. 14 and p. 22.

34 See Lucia Raggetti, “Cum grano salis. Some Arabic Ink Recipes in Their Historical and Literary Context,” *Journal of Islamic Manuscripts*, 2016, 7/3:294–338, p. 320.

given to the statue and the corroborant animal ingredient seem to be sufficient to trigger the effect, and there is no hint of powerful names or astrological indications as sources of the talisman's power.

Talismans against flies

(MS Cairo DAK ṬT 264, pp. 43–44)

The one that gathers them from ten miles away.

Place a copper statue that is empty inside, put the testicle of a wolf inside it, and these should be brought together in that place [where you want to gather the flies].

طلسم الذباب

يجتمعن من مسيرة عشرة ميلا يضع تمثالا من نحاس مجوف ويدخل فيه خصية ذئب فانهم يأتوك جميعا الى ذلك الموضع.

Talisman to make the flies flee

Make the copper statue of a wolf that is empty inside, place some wolf excrement inside it, then bury it wherever you want, and then the flies will flee from it, with the permission of God, may He be exalted.

[44] طلسم للذباب حتى يهرين

يتخذ تمثال ذئب من نحاس مجوف ويجعل فيه خروا الذئب وادفنه حيث شئت فانه يهرين باذن الله تعالى.

Talisman to gather rats

(MS Cairo DAK ṬT 264, pp. 44–45)

Make the statue of a rat with copper, with another mouse on top of it, whose face is flayed, lace this onto something elevated, then the rats will gather there, with the Permission of God.

طلسم يجمع الفيران

يتخذ تمثال فأرة من نحاس وتصير فوقه فأرة مسلوخة الوجه ويجعلها فوق شيء مرتفع فانها يجتمع باذن الله.

Talisman to make rats flee

Make the statue of a rat, which must be empty inside. Fill it with some chameleon burnt on the fire, but do not bury it, and then the rats will flee, with the permission of God.

[45] طلسم يهرب الفيران

يتخذ تمثال فأرة من نحاس مجوف ويدخل فيه جمل اليهود ويسخنها على النار ولا يدفنه فانها يهرين باذن الله.

4 Concluding Notes

The Arabic recension of Apollonius' *Great Book of Talismans* not only preserves a part of the text lost in Greek (a considerable number of "talismanic experiences" that circulated together with the *Book of Hours*), it also bears witness to a different – and probably more ancient – layer of tradition than the one witnessed by the Byzantine sources.

The text is structured as a handbook for the talisman maker. It is written in the literary forms of admonishments and instructions to a disciple, and its structure is shaped by this didactic purpose. In the first part, the technical introduction (*Book of Hours*) provides basic knowledge of the fixed association between time and astrological or spiritual entities. The second part is a record of Apollonius' personal experience with talisman making, meant for the more practical instruction of his pupil. Here the teacher focuses on what can be learnt from practical experience, confident that his disciple (and the reader) have by now acquired the basics of the theory and technique of talisman making from the first part, to which he briefly refers rather than repeating them.

The inclusion of Apollonius in the Arabo-Islamic tradition was a smooth transition. He was perceived as a figure of wisdom from the Greek past, often closely connected to the Hermetic tradition, where the line of prophecy and the antediluvian knowledge overlap. Christian elements in the Greek original could easily be replaced by equivalent expressions relevant to – and acceptable for – the context of reception.

The materials circulated quite fluidly in the Hermetic stream of tradition and within the natural sciences in general, as witnessed by the line of transmission drawn in *The Treasure of Alexander*: Hermes before the flood, then Apollonius of Tyana, Aristotle, Alexander, and the Abbasid Caliph in Baghdad.

The *Apolesmata*, as material talismanic objects, belong to a particular typology: sometimes metallic plates, but mostly statues moulded and engraved with powerful names under particular astrological conditions. Sometimes they must be buried; sometimes placed on a pillar or in a shrine. In their fluid circulation, the different constitutive elements attracted other materials (e.g., the *Dreckapotheke* substances placed inside the statue, or the prominence of the astrological aspects over magic names). These talismans were meant for public use, to protect a certain space or a specific city from some calamity. In spite of these evident common traits and structural analogies, in the Arabic manuscript tradition the objects called *Apotelesmata* in Greek can be referred to using a number of different technical terms: *šanam*, *tamtīl*, *ṭilasm*, *ṣūra*.