

ESSAY-REVIEW

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الشيخ الرئيس حسين ابن عبد الله ابن سينا، القانون في الطب، الكتاب الأول، ”في الأمور الكلية من علم الطب،“ دراسة وتحقيق وتعليق الدكتور نجفقلي حبيبي، قدم له الدكتور سيد حسين نصر، الدكتور غلامرضا اعواني (همدان، ايران: بنياد علمي وفرهنگي بو علي سينا، ١٣٩٧ هـ. ش.، ١٤٣٩ هـ. ق.).

Avicenna, *Al-qānūn fī al-ṭibb*, vol. 1, *Fī al-ʿumūr al-kulliyya min ʿilm al-ṭibb*, a critical edition by Najafgholi Habibi, with forewords by Seyyed Hossein Nasr and Gholamreza Aavani (Hamadan, Iran: International Avicenna Scientific and Cultural Foundation, 2018).

That Ibn Sīnā’s “Canon of medicine” figures among the major classics of the history of medicine is doubted by no serious historian of medicine, eastern or western, Islamic or non-Islamic alike. It is therefore all the more surprising that so far no serious critical edition of this text was available. Certainly, a first, very timid step toward a really critical edition (published during the years 1982-1996) was made at the Institute of the History of Medicine and Medical Research (New Delhi), under the direction of Hakeem Abdul Hameed (1908-1999). It compared the four existing editions: Rome 1593; Būlāq (Cairo) 1877; Tehran (lithograph) 1878; and Lucknow 1905. In addition it used (a photocopy of) an ancient manuscript of Aya Sophia, dated 618, i. e. MS Aya Sophia 3686¹. With this new edition a further important step toward a full critical edition is made. Even if it is obvious that it does not yet present a “critical edition” in the full sense of the word, it has important merits.

First of all, and most importantly, its manuscript basis is much larger than that of the Indian. It consists mainly of five manuscripts that are all dated – three in the sixth century AH, one in the first part of the seventh and one at the middle of the eighth, in other words, between the twelfth and fourteenth century CE:

– MS Ayatollah Marʿaṣī Naḡafī, 14770, dated 512 AH (1134/35), hence (a few years) less than a century after Ibn Sīnā’s death. Up to now it is the oldest discovered manuscript of book 1. It therefore rightly has

¹ The number of the manuscript is not mentioned in the introduction to the edition (neither the English nor the Arabic), but based on G. C. Anawati, *Muʿallafāt Ibn Sīnā: Essai de bibliographie avicennienne* (Cairo: Dār al-Maʿārif, 1950), p. 197, one can, given its datation, identify it with MS Aya Sophia 3686.

received a preeminent attention. However, the reader is informed that a few folios are missing near the beginning of the manuscript and that many displacements have happened during its binding – unfortunately, no further precision is offered;

– Tehran, Tehran University Central Library, 1889, dated 538 AH (1143/1144). It is noted, without any further indication in the introductions², that its beginning has been rewritten in another hand – however, in the edition, p. 55, note 5, it is indicated that the script in the original hand starts near the beginning of *faṣl* 2 of *taʿlīm* 3 of *fann* 1 (p. 55, l. 7);

– Istanbul, Carullah 1524, dated 556 AH (1161/1162). Muẓaffar b. ʿUmar b. Muḥammad al-Miyāfaraqī copied it from a manuscript “authorised by the author.” It contains marginal notes by Amīn al-Dawla Abī al-Ḥasan Hibat Allāh b. Sāʿid, i. e. Ibn al-Tilmīd (d. 560/1165);

– Istanbul, Aya Sophia 2687, dated 627 AH (1230/1231). It was in the possession of Sadr al-Dīn al-Qūnawī (d. ca. 673/1274), the famous disciple of Ibn al-ʿArabī (d. 638/1240);

– Tehran, Maḡlis Library, 6268, dated 735 AH (1335/1336). Only one intermediary appears to have existed between it and Ibn Sīnā’s autograph. Moreover, it contains many marginal notes, mainly, although not exclusively, by Quṭb al-Dīn al-Šīrāzī (d. 710/1311).

This choice is briefly argued for, but, all in all, in a convincing way. In addition, an occasional use of three more manuscripts (out of five consulted) is indicated. There is no doubt that this constitutes a solid manuscript basis, especially in view of the editor’s explicit intention to offer a text as close as possible to Ibn Sīnā’s original version. Nevertheless, compared to the hundred of manuscripts that exist, its actual basis remains relatively small. Moreover, it is difficult to tell whether there exists any form of relationship between the chosen manuscripts. Certainly, given that most of them belong to a period that is not too far away from Ibn Sīnā’s death, and, as such, figure among the oldest known manuscripts of the Canon, they clearly are not devoid of inter-

² A survey of the manuscripts is present in the Persian introduction of Najafgholi Habibi, pp. 34-40; in his Arabic introduction, pp. 46-49, and in the English foreword of Aavani (pp. 21-26). However, in the Arabic introduction the MS Istanbul, Nūr Uṭmāniyya, 5731, is, surprisingly, not mentioned; as to the absence of any mention of the MSS Šahid Mutahhari, 807 and Marvi School Library [no number given], it is almost natural insofar as the editor has excluded them for his edition based on the presence of too many variants. As to Aavani’s foreword, it does not specify the *sigla* used when the reference is to marginal notes with regard to MS Tehran, Tehran University Central Library, 1889 (۱د), as well as MS Istanbul, Aya Sophia 2687 (۱ص).

est. However, the editor is clearly not unaware of the fact that a somewhat later manuscript can offer most interesting readings – not the least when it remains close to the autograph text, as seems to be the case with the Mağlis manuscript, which is described as being separated from Ibn Sīnā's original by only one intermediary. But it is obvious that for a really critical edition, one has first to establish a systematic list of all known manuscripts (while distinguishing those that cover all books, those that cover several ones, and those that cover only one) of each of which a full codicological description is given. Only after such list has been fixed according to the highest scientific standards one can try to establish a *stemma codicum*, and, based on that *stemma*, try to fix the existence of different major families and/or the direct dependency of one given manuscript from another³ (so that one can easily eliminate the former for one's edition). However, this kind of project clearly cannot be done by a single scholar, nor even a small team of scholars. It clearly needs an international collaboration, patronised by an international organisation as e. g. ERC or UNESCO.

Secondly, a very positive element is undoubtedly the fact that the editor, in his apparatus of notes, pays now and then attention to which source, either Greek (esp. Galen) or Arabic (esp. ʿAbū Bakr al-Rāzī), Ibn Sīnā uses, as well as to later commentaries or marginal glosses (esp. Quṭb al-Dīn al-Šīrāzī). Even if they are limited in number, they are useful, not the least because they offer a first outline of, and indication for further research, both with regard to the sources and the later reception of the Canon. It might be hoped that other scholars will start to examine in a more detailed way these materials, so that one can determine in a precise, historically correct way what is really original in Ibn Sīnā's med-

³ Of course, in case of such a high number of manuscripts it could come out that almost the whole tradition reveals to be so contaminated that any sharp distinction between families becomes impossible. But even then it will certainly remain possible to eliminate a not neglectible number of manuscripts, insofar as they are clearly copied from one another. The specific problems related to the edition of a work that has been preserved in a very high number of manuscripts formed the specific topic of the international conference "Making the impossible possible: On the methodology for editing medieval works with massive manuscript tradition" (Pisa, 27-29 June 2018), held in the framework of the ERC-project, directed by Amos Bertolacci, "Philosophy on the border of civilizations and intellectual endeavours: Towards a critical edition of the Metaphysics (*Ilāhiyyāt of Kitāb al-šifāʿ*) of Avicenna (Ibn Sīnā)." At that conference a provisory, tentative *stemma codicum* was presented with regard to the *ʿIlāhiyyāt of Kitāb al-šifāʿ*. It might be hoped that it will soon be available in a finalised version since I have no doubt that it will offer a serious guideline for other Arabic works, preserved in many manuscripts, as Ibn Sīnā's "Canon of medicine."

ical thought, or which selection he made, and for which reasons, among the different views available at his time.

Thirdly, on several occasions the editor points to correspondences between passages in the Canon and almost identical passages in the *K. al-ḥayawān* of *Al-šifā'*⁴. Certainly, B. Musallam already in 1987, offered a basic outline of the correspondences between the two works, but the fact that the editor explicitly indicates the places where such correspondences occur, dispenses the reader with searching for the former⁴. It would have been great if the editor had signalled (at least, the most significant) variants, even if, of course, such comparison is not strictly required.

Fourthly, two indices (pp. 777-878 and 878-954) cover an important number of technical terms (mixtures, organs, diseases, etc.), names (of individuals and groups), titles of books. In the former of them, called "general index" (الفهارس العامة), a purely alphabetic list of words of all kinds, without any distinction, is given. The same list, but now classified according to certain topics, is offered in the second "particular index" (الفهارس الخاصة), where one finds, in addition (in the beginning) a small list of four hadiths, a list of subject topics (given under the form of brief beginnings of sentences) and (at the end) a list of technical terms that have received explanation in the notes (the reference given is unfortunately only to a page, without mentioning the precise note). I do not see a great advantage in the publication of the first index. Given that it is anew present in the second index, and then in a specifically ordered way, I am convince that this latter suffices. But permit me to insist that the detailed index is of tremendous help for identifying the key passage regarding a given item.

But, unfortunately, I have to express a small reservation as well. In fact, it strikes me that the number of given variants is relatively low. Most of them are, moreover, related to the two editions that have been consulted in addition to the manuscripts, i. e. Rome 1593 and the Tehran lithograph⁵. Does this mean that all consulted manuscripts are most of

⁴ See B. Musallam, "Avicenna: Medicine and biology," in *Encyclopaedia Iranica*, t. III, pp. 94-99 (originally 1987; updated online August 18, 2011).

⁵ Without surprise, most of them concern the Rome edition. In fact, it was not so much intended as an edition of Ibn Sīnā's text (note, that at the end, the philosophical work *Al-nağāt* has been added in the same printed volume), but, in the first place, as an exercise in printing Arabic (for the first time on a Western press). It is not devoid of many "typos," as can be well illustrated by e. g. the reading *تعد بل* instead of *بل بعد* (p. 692, l. 11). Hence, the Rome edition is, at best, of limited value for establishing a critical Arabic edition. I wonder why the Būlāq edition (by large, still the most

the time in agreement with each other? Certainly, it has to be noted that the specific way of writing Arabic (e. g. middle Arabic), has not been taken into account by the editor. He explicitly indicates in the introduction that he has uniformed all readings to the classical Arabic standard. This option is understandable, insofar as the major interest is the very content of the book. However, as far as the proper content is concerned, and, hence, without regard to any way of writing, one would expect more variants than the actually given ones. In this respect, I would like to refer to the reading *فلسفة* (p. 28, 2). According to the apparatus, the variant *حكمة* (at Ibn Sīnā's time more or less synonymous with *فلسفة*, albeit covering as well a "broader" meaning, namely "wisdom") is present in the sole Rome edition. However, it is attested as well in the Būlāq edition⁶. That the same alternative term is present in these two editions points to the fact that this variant was present in at least one, but, more likely, several manuscripts (representing one family?). Here, the crucial question is when it appeared for the very first time in the manuscript tradition. Is it really absent in the old tradition, as the apparatus of the present edition seems to suggest, and, if this is really the case, when and why has a copyist chosen another term in the later transmission of the text?

Moreover, based on comparisons between the edited text and the photo-mechanical reproductions of the first and last folios of the eight used manuscripts [and of the two editions] (10 pages at the end of the Persian / Arabic introductions), one now and then finds in the apparatus elements of imprecision or error insofar as goes the mentioning of variants. For example, regarding the qualification of flesh as being less hot than blood, the Arabic edition states: *ويقصر عن الدم بما* (p. 55, 10). As to the MS Tehran University Central Library 1889, it reads clearly: *وانما يقصر عنها الدم لما*. In the apparatus (note 9) no mention is made of the additional presence of *انما*. Moreover, it has to be observed that the actual formulation of the variants in that note is quite confusing for the reader. It is as follows:

ن، رم: - ويقصر عن الدم / د، ط، مج: لما / ط: الكبد / ط: ١ الدم / د: عنها.

One would have expected:

ن، رم: - ويقصر عن الدم // ويقصر عن [د: وانما يقصر عنها // الدم] ط: الكبد (١ ط):
الدم // بما [د، ط، مج: لما].

quoted) and/or the Indian, 1982 edition have not been chosen instead of / or together with the Rome edition.

⁶ Unfortunately, no mention is made of this in the Indian, 1982 edition.

In addition, the editor has not noted that the beginning of line 10 ثم وهو أقل حرارة منها has been added (with an indication of this in the text by a small “v” *supra lineam*) by the same scribe in the left margin (but on the image of the reproduction the words أقل حرارة are missing – given that the expression منها appears just beneath وهو, one wonders whether a part of the margin has not fallen out, either during the binding of the manuscript, or in its reproduction⁷). Finally, it is not indicated that the words لأنه كدم جامد, which precede in the edition ويقصر, have been omitted both in the present manuscript and the Rome edition. I may add that the same qualification of “resembling coagulated blood” is absent as well in the Būlāq and Indian, 1982 editions. This is understandable given that the liver (الكبد) has been just before qualified in exactly the same way⁸.

Another case, of much greater significance (because of its doctrinal implications), is – inside a remark (p. 57, l. 6-7) on whether the kidney or the lung is the moistest organ – Ibn Sīnā’s specification of the kidney as the moistest organ, especially from the point of view of “intrinsic moisture,” but that the lungs are (externally) soaked stronger (than the liver). Hereafter, Ibn Sīnā adds وإن كان دوام الابتلال قد يجعله أرتب في جوهره أَيْضًا, according to the edition, which mentions the presence of the variant reading يجعلها ... جوهرها in the Tehran lithograph and in the Rome edition, without adding any manuscript reference, although this reading is clearly attested in the Tehran University Central Library manuscript. Moreover, according to the meaning this latter reading almost imposes itself, since one cannot understand how a duration of soaking might be related to anything else than to the lung, الرئة (a female word by form), which therefore can be considered to be moistest in its substance as well⁹.

Although not so doctrinally important, I wish also to draw attention to the following case: the editor (p. 262, l. 13) does not indicate that the Rome edition reads على الفيلسوف instead of إلى الفيلسوف. That reading is as well withhold, without any variant (hence, in principle present in

⁷ Whatever be the case, it is clearly not the case that the words وهو أقل حرارة منها have been added in the *textus*, as indicated in note 8 (in all likelihood the reference is to the margin [I suspect that the same is the case with respect to the Tehran lithograph], but then one would have expected د instead of د; in addition, it has to be observed that also the words ثم اللحم are only present in the margin).

⁸ However, Ibn Sīnā, in the *K. al-hayawān* of his *Al-šifāʾ*, ed. °A. Montašir, S. Zayed, °A. Ismāʿīl (Cairo, reprint 1970 [in fact, 1980]), p. 198, l. 6, characterises the flesh, not the liver as resembling “coagulated blood.”

⁹ The same reading finds further support in the Būlāq and Indian, 1982 editions.

all known printed editions), in the Indian, 1982 edition, but, above all, appears more natural in view of the fact that Ibn Sīnā a few lines before had affirmed that the veridical establishment (تحقيق) of the (number of) external senses belongs to the philosopher, in the very same way as he does here with regard to the inner senses (see p. 162, l. 5: تحقيق هذا الى الفيلسوف).

Finally, a case worthy of special attention is undoubtedly the editorial choice (p. 791, l. 10-11) for the reading سونوخس, present in the MS Carullah 1524 and the Tehran lithograph (according to the apparatus, but one wonders why this is mentioned since it is the reading offered in the *textus*), thus discarding the variant reading سوناخس, which is attested in the MSS Ayatollah Mar^cašī Nağafi 14770, Tehran University Central Library 1889, and Mağlis Library 6089, as well as the Rome edition (and I can add the Būlāq and Indian, 1982 editions). None of both words constitutes a perfect transliteration of the Greek underlying (Galenic) term συνεχος¹⁰, “unintermittent” (of fevers). In such case it is almost impossible to give preference to one variant over another. Therefore, it is perhaps better to keep both variants inside the *textus* itself. Note, moreover, that this different ways of transliterating a Greek *terminus technicus*, may contribute in a not neglectible, albeit not absolute way to the identification of different families in the transmission of Ibn Sīnā’s text¹¹.

Let me conclude. In spite of the presence of mistakes in the apparatus, this edition reveals nonetheless worthy of serious attention. It offers what I would qualify as a “first crucial step” toward a fully critical edition. But one cannot but appreciate that someone as Najafgholi Habibi has made great efforts to take this first step, and, as such, has tried (and, I would add, largely succeeded) to lay a serious foundation for a trustworthy edition of the Canon.

¹⁰ Even less is the transliteration سونوخوس, which is attested in the MS Malik Library, 4562 (not mentioned by the editor, but honesty obliges one to note that he, in his introduction, explicitly specifies that he will only in exceptional cases refer to it).

¹¹ Although in case of a very contaminated transmission, it might in the long run turn out to be of little help.