

For the Care of Body and Soul: A CPA Bible and an Arab-Islamic Medical Text in a Tenth-Century Palimpsest Fragment

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This paper studies a palimpsest fragment from the Qubbat al-khazna in Damascus, which presents a very interesting composition. The Christian Palestinian Aramaic (CPA) *scriptio inferior*, already identified as a biblical text (Genesis 19.1-5, 7-10), coexists with the Arabic *scriptio superior*. This latter, except for the identification of its general content, has not been studied so far. The Arabic text is an excerpt belonging to the medical work entitled *Mukhtaṣar fī l-ṭibb* (Compendium of medicine) – otherwise known from just one manuscript witness, Rabat, Al-Khizāna al-‘amma, 2640 (D 1442c) – written by the Andalusian jurist ‘Abd al-Malik b. Ḥabīb (d. 238 AH/853 AD). This paper, focused on the textual analysis of the excerpt, provides its edition and translation. The study of the text is integrated with a palaeographical and codicological examination of the Arabic script. These multidisciplinary investigations represent the starting point for some insights related to the history of the fragment. Specifically, a Sinaitic-Palestinian origin, linked to a monastic environment, is suggested, in consideration of some peculiar features: the botanical-pharmaceutical knowledge displayed in the Arabic text of the *scriptio superior*, the palimpsest order of the fragment, as well as the significant phenomenon of the discard of the religious text (the Bible in CPA) of the *scriptio inferior*, which can be contextualised within the »arabisation« process that characterised the monastic *milieu* of the area from the second/eighth century onwards.

Keywords: Arabic, palimpsest, Ibn Ḥabīb, Qubbat al-khazna, botanical-pharmaceutical

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Abū Marwān ‘Abd al-Malik b. Ḥabīb al-Sulāmī was a prominent Maliki jurist and scholar who lived at the turn of the second or third century AH/eighth or ninth century AD.¹ Born in a village probably just outside Elvira (Granada) in approximately 180/786,² he claimed to descend from the pre-Islamic Banū Sulaym tribe.³ However, the Arabic sources argue that he was only their *mawlā*.⁴ Ibn Ḥabīb started his scholarly formation in his home country, notably in the cities of Elvira and Cordova. In 208/823 or 824, he decided to undertake the ritual pilgrimage to Mecca. Before reaching it, he spent time in various places in the Islamic empire – especially in Egypt and Medina – where he could increase his intellectual and scientific knowledge, starting with the Maliki doctrine.⁵ Once back in al-Andalus, he received an appointment as *faqīh mushāwar* («counsellor jurisconsult») from the ruler ‘Abd al-Raḥmān II, at which point he moved to Cordova where he spent the rest of his life, dying in 238/853.⁶ Due to his stunning erudition and the fame he acquired, especially amongst his students, he was frequently compared to the well-known jurist Saḥnūn ibn Sa‘īd.⁷

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- 1 Among the major sources for Ibn Ḥabīb’s life, we can pinpoint Ibn al-Faraḍī, *Ta’riḫh*, ed. Ma’rūf, 359-362; al-Ḥumaydī, *Jadhwa*, ed. Ma’rūf, 407-409; al-Qāḍī ‘Iyād, *Tartīb al-madārik*, 381-382; al-Ḍabbī, *Bughyat*, ed. Ibyārī, 490-493; al-Dhahabī, *Siyar a’lām*, ed. ‘Abd al-Mannān, 2564-2566; Ibn Farḥūn, *Kitāb al-dībāj*, ed. al-Jarbū’ and al-Uthaymīn, 8-15; al-‘Asqalānī, *Tahdhīb*, 390-391; al-Maqqarī, *Nafḥ al-ṭīb*, ed. ‘Abbās, 5-8. An in-depth description of Ibn Ḥabīb’s life can be found in Aguadé, *Kitāb al-ta’rīj*, 15-56.
 - 2 There is major uncertainty regarding Ibn Ḥabīb’s actual place of birth. The issue is well outlined in Aguadé, *Kitāb al-ta’rīj*, 24-26.
 - 3 For a deeper analysis of the Banū Sulaym tribe, see Lecker, Sulaym, 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, *Ta’riḫh*, ed. Ma’rūf, 359.
 - 5 The Arabic sources disagree on this topic; for example, al-Ḥumaydī suggests that Ibn Ḥabīb acquired a deep knowledge of Maliki fiqh only in the last part of his life: »inna-hu adraka mālikan fi ākhiri ‘umri-hi«; al-Ḥumaydī, *Jadhwa*, ed. Ma’rūf, 408.
 - 6 »wa-tawaffi ‘Abd al-Malik b. Ḥabīb [...] sana thamānin wa-thalāthina wa-mi’atayn. Wa-kānat ‘illatu-hu al-ḥaṣata, māta-wa-huwa ibnu arba’a wa-sittina sana«; Ibn al-Faraḍī, *Ta’riḫh*, ed. Ma’rūf, 362.
 - 7 For the comparison between Ibn Ḥabīb and Saḥnūn ibn Sa‘īd, the great jurist and scholar primarily responsible for the almost total conversion of the Maghreb to the Maliki *madhhab*, see Ibn al-Faraḍī, *Ta’riḫh*, ed. Ma’rūf, 361. For a biographical profile of Saḥnūn, see Talbi, Saḥnūn, 843-845.

Despite being generally known as a jurist,⁸ Ibn Ḥabīb was interested in many diverse disciplines, quite different from each other;⁹ he dealt with grammar, poetry, medicine, botany, history, and genealogy.¹⁰ Arguably, his major lack of knowledge was in the field of hadith.¹¹ 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 it by medieval authors.¹² However, in addition to the great value of its contents, the *Mukhtaṣar fī l-ṭibb* constitutes a kind of starting point for Arabic medicine in al-Andalus.¹³ In terms of its inner structure, the work is divided by Álvarez de Morales and Girón Irueste into three main sections: the first falls into the realm of what is known as the »Medicine of the Prophet« (*al-ṭibb al-nabawī*);¹⁴ the second describes numerous plants, fruits, and animal products and their intended medical uses; and the third can be ascribed to the world of magic.¹⁵ According to the Spanish editors, the second section is the most remarkable part of the entire work from a scientific

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- 8 For instance, see his entry in the *Encyclopaedia of Islam* by Huici Miranda, Ibn Ḥabīb, 775.
- 9 See Ibn al-Faraḍī, *Ta'riḫh*, ed. Ma'rūf, 369; al-Ḥumaydī, *Jadhwa*, ed. Ma'rūf, 407. Pons Boigues, in his biographical work on Arabian-Andalusian 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«; Pons Boigues, *Ensayo*, 30.
- 10 Ibn Ḥabīb's scholarly production was as heterogeneous as it was quantitatively remarkable. A detailed but incomplete list of Ibn Ḥabīb's works can be found in Pons Boigues, *Ensayo*, 31-32; see also Aguadé, *Kitāb al-ta'rij*, 57-66. Regrettably, almost none of his works have been preserved. An exception is constituted by a manuscript of his *Ta'riḫh* preserved in the Bodleian Library. 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-ou pas lire des fragments des Mille et une Nuits? Et pourtant Ibn-Ḥabīb donne tont cela pour de l'histoire!«; Dozy, *Recherches*, 29. Moreover, he argues that the entire work should be ascribed to one of Ibn Ḥabīb's students, whom Dozy identifies in an unknown Ibn Abī al-Riqā' – especially considering that it mentions events that happened during the reign of 'Abd Allāh b. Muḥammad (d. 219 / 912), that is, after Ibn Ḥabīb's death. For Dozy's analysis of the work, see Dozy, *Recherches*, 28-34. Makki takes a different perspective on the issue; see Makki, *Egipto*, 189-200. He claims that the *Ta'riḫh* was composed by Ibn Ḥabīb himself, and only the final section was redacted by his favourite disciple al-Magāmī, together with some other students, at the end of the fifth / eleventh century. But above all, he suggests that the Bodleian manuscript must be considered just a compendium of the *Ta'riḫh*, compiled by the students of the Andalusian jurist. So, according to him, »los juicios acerca de la *Historia* del autor ilibertiano formulados por Dozy y otros investigadores, son precipitados y están afectados *a priori* por un perjuicio peligroso al tratar de estimar el verdadero valor de tales obras históricas«; Makki, *Egipto*, 196.
- 11 »wa lam yakun li-'Abd al-Malik b. Ḥabīb 'ilmun bi-l-ḥadīth, wa lā ya'rifu ṣaḥīha-hu min saqīmi-hi«; Ibn al-Faraḍī, *Ta'riḫh*, ed. Ma'rūf, 360. See also al-Ḥumaydī, *Jadhwa*, ed. Ma'rūf, 408: »wa fī aḥādīthi-hi gharā'ibu kathīra«.
- 12 See Álvarez de Morales and Girón Irueste, *Mujtaṣar fī l-ṭibb*, 127.
- 13 According to Álvarez de Morales and Girón Irueste, who worked on the edition of the text, »Ibn Ḥabīb puede ser considerado como el primer andalusí autor de obras médicas«; Álvarez de Morales and Girón Irueste, *Mujtaṣar fī l-ṭibb*, 30. It must be highlighted that, since Álvarez de Morales and Girón Irueste's edition is the first and only one so far, it represents the only available source for an analysis of the *Mukhtaṣar*. See also Álvarez de Morales and Girón Irueste, *La faceta médica*, 125-137, for a synthesising summary of their work on the text.
- 14 *Al-ṭibb al-nabawī* refers to the collection of advice given by Muḥammad to his community regarding bodily care: therapeutic advice, diet, and rules of hygiene. In particular, the herbs and foods mentioned by the Prophet are grouped in the »Garden of the Prophet« (*al-ḥadiqa al-nabawiyya*). A brief description of prophetic medicine can be found in Pormann and Savage-Smith, *Medieval Islamic Medicine*, 71-75; and Guardi, *Medicina Araba*, 33-38. See also Álvarez de Morales and Girón Irueste, *Mujtaṣar fī l-ṭibb*, 19-25, for the question of prophetic medicine in al-Andalus.
- 15 For a deeper analysis of the content of the work, with the division into the three sections, see Álvarez de Morales and Girón Irueste, *Mujtaṣar fī l-ṭibb*, 33-36.

point of view, considering that »es en este apartado en el que la riqueza de conocimientos botánicos y médico-científicos de Ibn Ḥabīb se muestra en su plenitud«.16 The manuscript Rabat, Al-Khizāna al-ʿamma, 2640 (D 1442c) was thought to be the only extant example of Ibn Ḥabīb's work so far discovered.17 Nonetheless, the palimpsest fragment from the Qubbat al-khazna in Damascus (referred to as the »Qubba« for short), which constitutes the main topic of this paper, represents another witness of the *Mukhtaṣar*, although in the form of an excerpt.

At this point, a brief introduction of the Qubba's history and its materials seems appropriate. With the epithet Qubbat al-khazna18 we refer to the octagonal dome located in the courtyard of the Great Mosque of the Umayyads in Damascus which, at the beginning of the twentieth century, became the site of an exceptional discovery of written materials.19 Although a certain interest in the Qubba and in what was supposed to be inside was manifested earlier,20 the beginning of its modern history can be traced back to its official opening on 16 June 1900.21 In addition to the Ottoman authorities, the emerging German researcher Bruno Violet was present at the event.22 The Royal Prussian Academy of Sciences officially appointed him to conduct the research in Damascus, where he stayed from 1900-1901, after the instruction provided to him by Hermann von Soden to work exclusively on certain manuscripts.23 Immediately, the extracted material revealed a high degree of heterogeneity and

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- 16 Álvarez de Morales and Girón Irueste, *Muḥtaṣar fī l-ṭibb*, 34. For the Rabat manuscript's indication, see Allouche and Regragui, *Catalogue*, 332.
- 17 »Se conserva en forma manuscrita entre los fondos de *al-Jizāna al-ʿamma* de Rabat, con el número 2.640 (D 1442c). [...] Creemos que se trata de un *unicum*«; Álvarez de Morales and Girón Irueste, *Muḥtaṣar fī l-ṭibb*, 32. Another mention of the Rabat manuscript is made by Sterpellone and Elsheikh, who also provide some information about Ibn Ḥabīb's life and the *Mukhtaṣar*; see Sterpellone and Elsheikh, *Medicina araba*, 49.
- 18 It seems that the term »Qubbat al-Khazna« is quite recent. At the very beginning of its history, this construction was known as *qubbat al-māl*, and later as *qubbat ʿĀ'isha* or simply as *qubba gharbiyya*. An exhaustive analysis of the terminological question, together with an excursus on the history of the dome, can be found in Aljoumani, *Ta'rikh qubbat al-māl*, 53-74.
- 19 It must be highlighted that, given the material's distinctive method of preservation, the Qubba finding has been properly interpreted as »a clear case of *Genizah*-like practice in an Islamic context«; D'Ottone Rambach, *Manuscripts*, 63. For an in-depth treatment of the *genizah* phenomenon and *genizah*-like practices, with particular reference to the Islamic context, see Sadan, *Genizah and genizah-like*, 73-85. See also Cohen, *Geniza for Islamicists*, 129-145; and D'Ottone Rambach, *Frammenti*, 261-287.
- 20 Indeed, scholars devoted some attention to the Qubba before 1900. For a short reference to this issue, see Déroche, *In the beginning*, 62. A detailed analysis is provided also by Liebreuz, who underlines that the accounts talking about the Qubba as a book repository had started to affect the scientific community; definitely, the earlier discovery of the Cairo *Genizah* played an important role in this context. See Liebreuz, *Fire*, 75-89, especially 75-80; see also Ioppolo, *Sister*, 91-103.
- 21 It should be underlined that it was certainly a favourable moment for the dome's opening; in fact, in 1893 a devastating fire had destroyed part of the mosque, resulting in necessary restoration. These circumstances made it easier for the sultan Abdul Hamid II to promulgate a decree which commanded the opening of the Qubba. See Bandt and Rattmann, *Bruno Violet*, 107.
- 22 A brief biographical profile of Bruno Violet is traced in Bandt and Rattmann, *Bruno Violet*, 105.
- 23 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 after hearing from the local population during an official visit with the emperor in Damascus in 1898 that the dome was a repository of books, especially sacred ones; see Bandt and Rattmann, *Bruno Violet*, 107. This popular tradition, which Violet later heard, reported an account according to which some Christian manuscripts were confiscated by Muslims when they conquered the city. This account is historically unreliable, as has been illustrated in Radiciotti and D'Ottone, *Frammenti della Qubbat al-khazna*, 47.

complexity. In addition to manuscripts written in Arabic,²⁴ others written in Greek,²⁵ Latin,²⁶ Hebrew,²⁷ Coptic,²⁸ Syriac,²⁹ Christian Palestinian Aramaic (CPA),³⁰ Samaritan, and Georgian were found. Nevertheless, Violet could study only a small group of manuscripts – namely the non-Muslim ones – working in difficult conditions.³¹ Considering the massive quantity of manuscripts extracted from the Qubba, von Soden asked the Ottoman authorities for the loan of the non-Muslim materials to proceed with their study. While waiting for the loan to be approved, Violet photographed the manuscripts,³² and he made an inventory of the material to be sent to Berlin.³³ After being photographed in Constantinople by the Ottomans as well, the manuscripts reached the German capital, where they stayed until 1909, although the loan period was originally fixed at just one year.³⁴ During the period between the two world wars, the interest in the Qubba material sharply decreased. It was brought back to scholars' attention in 1964 with the publication of an article by Dominique Sourdél and Janine Sourdél-Thomine,³⁵ and again in 2008 with Paolo Radiciotti and Arianna D'Ottone's article.³⁶ Recently, a new wave of interest in its stunning written heritage has affected the scientific community, which has led to the publication of an entire volume devoted to the topic.³⁷

24 See Radiciotti and D'Ottone, *Frammenti della Qubbat al-khazna*, 65-74; and Hjälms, *From Palestine*, 245-264. The stunning eclecticism of the Qubba material, in terms of languages and scripts as well as content, has been contextualised within the cultural phenomenon of »absolute multigraphism«. Given the Damascene context, it testifies to the complex nature of Damascus society, a multilingual reality, accustomed to the use of different languages and scripts and to linguistic adaptation in the different contexts. For an outline of the phenomenon of »absolute multigraphism« in the Damascene environment, see D'Ottone Rambach, *Manuscripts*, 63, 78-79.

25 See Radiciotti and D'Ottone, *Frammenti della Qubbat al-khazna*, 50-56; D'Aiuto and Bucca, *Some Greek hymnographic fragments*, 291-320.

26 See Ammirati, *Latin fragments*, 99-122; Ammirati, *Reconsidering the Latin fragments*, 321-329.

27 See Bohak, *Jewish texts*, 223-244.

28 See Suciú, *Bohairic fragment*, 251-277.

29 See Fiori, *Hitherto unknown*, 200-229; Kessel, *Fragments*, 265-290.

30 See Schulthess, *Christlich-Palästinische Fragmente*.

31 Violet's period of work in Damascus, with the description of all the difficulties he went through, is outlined in Bandt and Rattmann, *Bruno Violet*, 112-114.

32 Violet's photographs are currently available online; see biblexegese.bbaw.de/handschriften/damaszenerhandschriften/. The photographs taken in Berlin by von Soden and von Harnack in the Königliche Bibliothek (now Staatsbibliothek) in 1909 can be found at digital.staatsbibliothek-berlin.de/werkansicht/?PPN=PPN685013049.

33 There were 214 photographs in total, while the box to be sent to Berlin contained approximately 1,500 folios; the inventory compiled by Violet was quite accurate for the Syriac and Greek majuscule manuscripts, while less attention was devoted to the material in other languages. See Bandt and Rattmann, *Bruno Violet*, 121-122.

34 This analysis of the history of the Qubba discovery, based above all on Western sources, emphasises the role of the European characters. In contrast, Erbay and Hirschler's study – based on a group of administrative documents from the Ottoman environment – sheds light on the fundamental role played by the Ottomans and the locals in this event. Accordingly, they stress the similar attitude adopted by all the parties involved – European characters, Ottoman authorities, and Damascene locals – who, despite their differences, shared a complete devotion to the Qubba material. See Erbay and Hirschler, *Writing Middle Eastern agency*, 151-178.

35 See Sourdél-Thomine and Sourdél, *Nouveaux documents*, 1-25. In fact, the American theologian William Hatch had already published an article in 1930 in which he dealt with the research he had conducted in the National Museum of Damascus. There he had found some fragments that he considered to belong to the Qubba discovery, although the information he provided about them is extremely poor. In any case, these fragments did not receive a proper study. See Hatch, *Uncial fragment*, 149-152.

36 See Radiciotti and D'Ottone, *Frammenti della Qubbat al-khazna*, 45-78.

37 D'Ottone Rambach *et al.*, *The Damascus fragments*. The work, basically organised in two parts, nuances the history of the Qubba in fresh ways, besides providing new elements and perspectives regarding its written material.

As briefly mentioned before, the palimpsest fragment examined in this paper (Figures 1-2), belongs to the Qubba discovery. Its palimpsest order consists of a CPA *scriptio inferior*,³⁸ which has been identified as Genesis 19.1-5 and 7-10,³⁹ and an Arabic *scriptio superior*, which I have identified as an excerpt from the previously mentioned *Mukhtaṣar fī l-ṭibb* by Ibn Ḥabīb. The parchment folio, which measures 20 × 16 cm, is believed to be held in the National Museum in Damascus (*al-Mathaf al-waṭani*), although this cannot be confirmed.⁴⁰

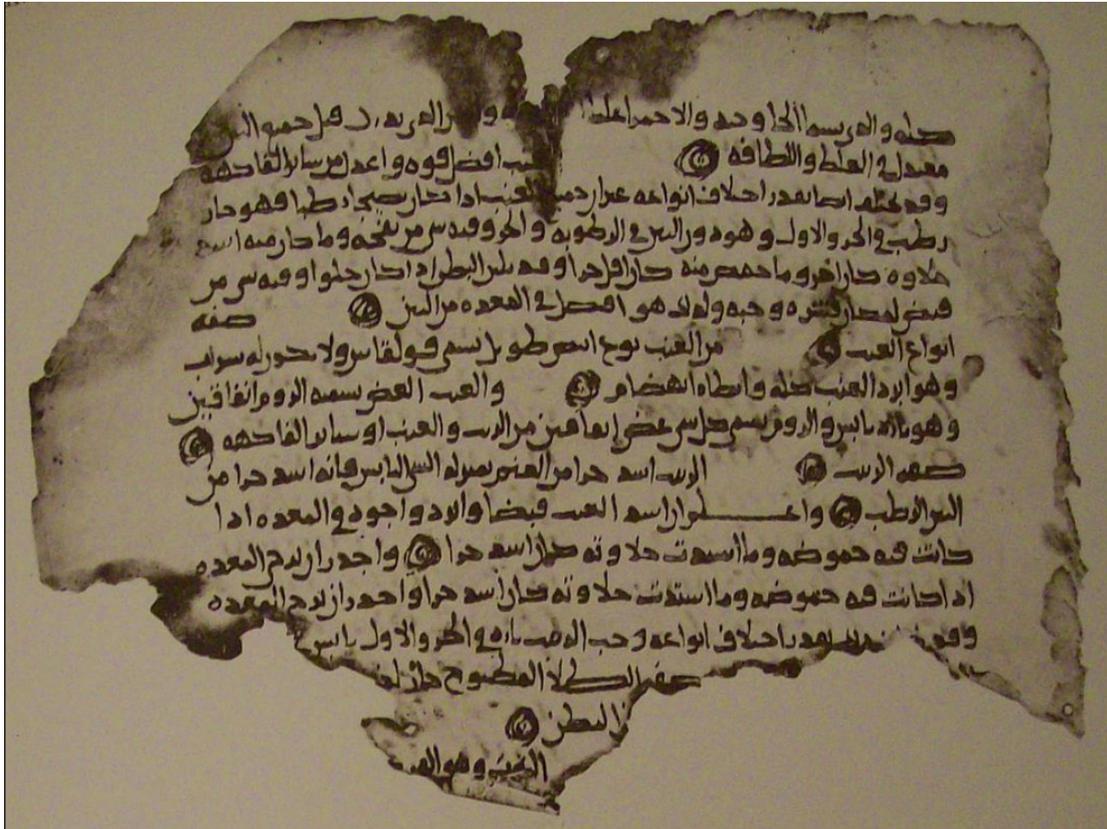


Figure 1: Recto – Schulthess, *Christlich-Palästinische Fragmente*, plate Ia. Collotype by Albert Frisch

38 As a matter of fact, the great majority of preserved CPA material is in the form of palimpsests (cf. Morgenstern, *Christian Palestinian Aramaic*, 630). Indeed, Vollandt interestingly stresses that 53% of the Qubba palimpsests display CPA as *scriptio inferior* – almost equal to the percentage in the Cairo Genizah (55%); see Vollandt, *Palimpsests* (forthcoming). As widely acknowledged, CPA was the language used by the Melkite Christians of Palestine from the fifth to the eighth century CE. The rapid arabicisation attested from the ninth century onwards resulted in its progressive decline – witnessed by the high number of palimpsests. All the manuscripts recovered so far contain translations of Christian texts in Greek (Old and New Testaments, hagiographies, and patristic and liturgical texts). See Griffith, *From Aramaic to Arabic*, 16-24; Morgenstern, *Christian Palestinian Aramaic*; and Burkitt, *Christian Palestinian literature*.

39 For the edition of the CPA *scriptio inferior*, see Schulthess, *Christlich-Palästinische Fragmente*, plate I; see also Goshen-Gottstein, *The Bible*, 11-12; Müller-Kessler and Sokoloff, *Christian Palestinian Aramaic Old Testament*, 17-18, 219; compare also the appendix in Vollandt, *Palimpsests* (forthcoming). For the photographs of the fragment, see Berlin, Staatsbibliothek, Sim. or. 6, fols. 11r-12r (digital.staatsbibliothek-berlin.de/werkansicht?PPN=PPN685013049&PHYSID=PHYS_0023&DMDID=DMDLOG_0001).

40 Indeed, it could be one of the fragments found by William Hatch during his visit to Damascus in 1929, since among them he mentions Arabic fragments as well; see Hatch, *Uncial fragment*, 151-152.



Figure 2: Verso – Schulthess, *Christlich-Palästinische Fragmente*, plate Ib. Collotype by Albert Frisch

The state of conservation of the fragment is poor. The parchment appears corroded all around the perimeter; in particular, there is much corrosion on the top, making a considerable part of the *verso* text unreadable. Further, some parts at the bottom of the fragment are missing and therefore portions of the text on the *recto* and the *verso* are no longer readable. More specifically, the damage on the *recto* involves lines 15-17 (only two or three words remain readable), while on the *verso*, there is damage between lines 13 and 17. Additionally, there are some stains on the *verso*'s left side, particularly between lines 5 and 8. Furthermore, a progressive ink discoloration can be seen on the bottom part of the parchment, also already visible in the central part of the fragment, from line 10 (*ladgh al-'aqārib idha shuriba*). The text, written in black ink, does not present signs of vocalisation, and there is sporadic use of diacritical signs. An analysis of the script leads to the conclusion that a single scribe wrote the text. Concerning the layout of the page, the script is arranged in a single column, and the *recto* and *verso* have the same number of lines (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, 16). Since – as will be discussed below – the fragment's Arabic *scriptio superior* might be linked to a monastic environment in the Sinai-Palestine area, the Arabic script's palaeographical examination was conducted by comparing the Qubba fragment with some

Christian Arabic manuscripts.⁴¹ The most important graphic peculiarities are: an extended belly of the *ṣād* and *ḍād*; the *dāl* grapheme written in a semicircular shape with an elliptical orientation; the initial *alif* written occasionally with a curvy shape (similar to an inverted »s«); the *ṭāʾ* with its rod inclined to the right and with a hook lightly marked at the top of the rod; and the medial *ʿayn* not entirely rounded but »broken« in the upper part (*Table 1*).

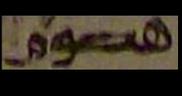
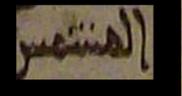
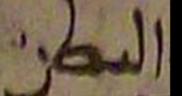
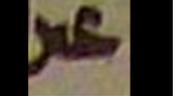
					
<i>al-ṣiḡār</i>	<i>huḍūm</i>	<i>bi-qadr</i>	<i>al-mišmiš</i>	<i>al-baṭn</i>	<i>ʿabr</i>

Table 1: Graphic peculiarities of the Arabic script

However, the most remarkable and interesting letter is the *kāf*. In initial or medial position, its shape strongly resembles the model of the Early Abbasid scripts – a *kāf* with two horizontal strokes, together with an oblique top stroke, lightly or strongly traced. In final position, the letter is written in an intermediate shape, which stands between the tripartite form of the Early Abbasid scripts and the bipartite form of the New Style script (*Table 2*).

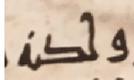
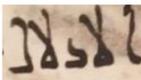
<i>Qubba fragment</i>		
Sin. Ar. NF Parch. 16 ('early Abbasid script')		
Sin. Ar. NF Parch. 35 ('New Style')		
Sin. Ar. 514, fol. 167v ('transitional style')		

Table 2: Comparison of kāf graphic realisations

Considering these different types of *kāf*, the Damascene fragment could be ascribed to the »transitional phase« that occurred between the Early Abbasid scripts and the later New Style script. The *shīn*'s punctuation represents another element in favour of this interpretation: we can observe the use of both the ancient horizontal positions of the three dots and the more recent and widespread triangular shape (*Table 3*).

41 In the palaeographical analysis, I made reference to Hjälms work, which examines Christian Arabic scripts from the first centuries of Islam; see Hjälms, *Paleographical study*, 37-77.

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

Table 3: Two different graphic realisations of the shin diacritical dots

Based on this palaeographical analysis and on recent classifications of the Christian Arabic scripts, the Damascene fragment seems to closely resemble Hjälms »transitional scripts« group, which »retain the vertical extension, sharp-corners, and some of the curviness of the New styles, yet tends toward a more simplex script with many straight strokes«. ⁴² For example, the manuscript Sinai, St. Catherine's Monastery, Ar. 514, fol. 167v (Figure 3) shows a marked resemblance to the Qubba fragment – especially in the way the *kāf* is written.



Figure 3: Sinai, Saint Catherine's Monastery, Ar. 514, fol. 167v. © Saint Catherine's Monastery, Egypt. Photo courtesy of Fr. Justin

42 See Hjälms, *Paleographical study*, 71.

The dates provided for Early Abbasid script manuscripts, especially groups B and C, range from the last quarter of the third/ninth century to the beginning of the fourth/tenth century, while the »transitional scripts« developed from the end of the third/ninth century until the fourth/tenth century. In light of this, it can be coherently hypothesised that the Arabic *scriptio superior* of the Damascene fragment was written between the last quarter of the third/ninth century or the first quarter of the fourth/tenth century.

Considering the palimpsest order (CPA *scriptio inferior* and Arabic *scriptio superior*), the content of the two texts (biblical and medical, respectively), and the Arabic script, it seems plausible to identify the Sinai-Palestine region as the place where the fragment's Arabic *scriptio superior* may have been written. More specifically, the fragment so described could fit with a monastic environment.⁴³

As far as the connection with Damascus is concerned, it is tempting to point to the *bīmāristān* al-Nūrī,⁴⁴ a renowned medical school of the Abbasid period, as the common thread linking the Syrian capital to the palimpsest fragment. According to such an interpretation, the hospital would have been where the manuscript was temporarily preserved, before its relocation to the nearby Great Mosque of the Umayyads – namely the Qubbat al-khazna.

43 Regarding the phenomenon of palimpsests, Crisci reports the interesting interpretation provided by Elias Avery Lowe, who takes into consideration a set of different factors in order to explain the phenomenon; see Crisci, *Ratio delendi*, 74. This analysis, although proposed for Western witnesses, seems to fit well with the case of the Qubba fragment. Specifically, graphic factors should be taken into account, considering that in the monastic context the effort to translate sacred texts into Arabic had already started in the second / eighth century. This process could have made CPA copies of the Bible superfluous, such that the precious material on which they were written could be reused to produce new books. The question of the languages of the monasteries in the Palestinian area in the early Islamic period is examined by Griffith, *From Aramaic to Arabic*, 11-31. Furthermore, the monastic origin of CPA texts is clearly stated by Griffith, *ibid.*, 19, 23. As far as the content of the *scriptio superior* is concerned, the importance of medicine within the monastic context has to be stressed. The case of Monte Cassino is exemplary at this regard, specifically if we take into consideration the translation efforts of Constantine the African (d. 1098 or 1099), active in the Cassinese *scriptorium* during the »golden age« of Abbot Desiderius (d. 1087); see Newton, *The Scriptorium*, 128. What is more, according to Kwakkel and Newton, who thoroughly analyse the productive process of the »team« of copyists centred around Constantine, medicine was part of the teaching curriculum at the Italian monastery; Kwakkel and Newton, *Medicine at Monte Cassino*, 170-171. As a matter of fact, an interest in medicine within the monastery of Monte Cassino can be traced back to, at least, the ninth century, if we consider the manuscripts Montecassino, Archivio della Badia, cod. V. 69, 97; see Beccaria, *I codici di medicina*, 293-303 (cf. also Glaze, *Constantine the African*, 21). The connection between monastery and medicine can be broadened to the Syriac tradition too; in this regard, see Kessel, *Syriac medicine*, 441. The case of the Qubba fragment, as far as its complexity is concerned, sheds light on the fundamental importance of studying a palimpsest manuscript in its entirety, in an attempt at providing a proper reconstruction of its history, by trying to identify the links among its (sometimes apparently disconnected) constitutive elements. Such an all-encompassing approach is strongly advocated by D'Ottone Rambach, *Graeco-Arabica*.

44 Built in 548/1154 at the behest of Nūr al-Dīn Zanjī, it quite rapidly became one of the most state-of-the-art hospitals of the Islamic empire, taking the place of the older al-'Aḏūdi. More interestingly for us, it soon became a renowned school of medicine – supplied with a massive number of manuscripts – where many important scholars studied and researched (such as Ibn al-Nafīs). For instance, in Ibn Abī Uṣaybi'a's *'Uyūn al-anbā'*, particularly in the biography of the Syrian physician Abū l-Majd ibn Abī l-Ḥakam, we can read: »Finally, he [Abū l-Majd] would go and sit in the great hall of the hospital, which was abundantly furnished and carpeted, and engage in study; for Nūr al-Dīn – may God have mercy upon him – had donated a large number of medical works to the hospital, and these were kept in cupboards in the wall at the rear of that hall«; Ibn Abī Uṣaybi'a, *'Uyūn al-anbā'*, ed. Savage-Smith *et al.*, 15.9. About the *bīmāristān* al-Nūrī, see Hamarneh, *Development*, 374-375; see also Pormann and Savage-Smith, *Medieval Islamic Medicine*, 98-99.

The latter move was arguably due to its being damaged and no longer usable.⁴⁵ In this regard, it also needs to be taken into account that the fragment analysed here does not represent the only case of a medical text belonging to the Qubba corpus, with both a Syriac bifolium edited by Fiori in 2017 (whose content and ultimate purpose are similar to our fragment)⁴⁶ and another, Greek-Arabic, palimpsest fragment.⁴⁷ So, the existence of a cache of medical manuscripts, possibly preserved in the *bīmāristān* al-Nūrī and later moved into the Qubba, might be hypothesised. Furthermore, since the material held at the Museum of Turkish and Islamic Arts in Istanbul has not so far been studied, we do not know if there might be other medical manuscripts belonging to this collection. Further investigations regarding the study of new manuscripts from the Qubba corpus would be necessary to verify the reliability of this hypothesis.

The *scriptio superior*, as mentioned above, can be identified as an excerpt from the *Mukhtaṣar fī l-tibb*, a medical work by the Andalusian jurist Ibn Ḥabīb. Here, the botanical description of the fruits is accompanied by pharmaceutical observations about their main uses as healing remedies.⁴⁸ In order of appearance, the fruits described are grape, raisin, mulberry, apricot, apple, citron, and peach. Another fruit is probably mentioned between mulberry and apricot; unfortunately, the significant corrosion at the top-centre of the parchment makes it impossible for me to identify. Furthermore, the first two lines of the *recto* refer to another fruit, the fig, but only the final section of its description is represented, so the text is indecipherable (especially line 1). When the text is examined, Ibn Ḥabīb's in-depth botanical-pharmaceutical knowledge is apparent.⁴⁹ The classification and comparison of examples, identification of varieties, and description of medical uses are rich and detailed. Here, the most interesting element by far is the marked influence of the Greek medical tradition. Indeed, Ibn Ḥabīb bases his classification on fundamental criteria, directly recalling

45 Indeed, this suggestion fits perfectly 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 a precious material to be reused to produce 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, *Books within books*, 469. The question of the reuse of fragments is analysed in great detail by Hirschler, *Books within books*, 439-473.

46 See Fiori, *Hitherto unknown*, 200-229. Despite the limited access to primary sources, the fundamental importance of the Syriac tradition as regards the moulding process of the Arabic medical culture in its initial phases – first and foremost as an intermediary for the acquisition of Greek knowledge, but also through original works – has to be emphasised. In this regard, see Dols, *Syriac into Arabic*, 45. Interestingly for us, there was a major influence from Syriac texts within the field of pharmacology, specifically the compendia for daily use; see Bhayro and Hawley, *La littérature botanique et pharmaceutique*, 292-293.

47 See Schulthess, *Christlich-Palästinische Fragmente*, plate IV.

48 In describing this excerpt from the *Mukhtaṣar* as a botanical-pharmaceutical text I have followed the considerations brought forward by Bhayro and Hawley, *La littérature botanique et pharmaceutique*, 287-288.

49 The extent of Ibn Ḥabīb's botanical knowledge could also be explained by taking into account the information provided by al-Qāḍī 'Iyād, according to which Ibn Ḥabīb was a pharmacist (*attār*), like his father – who was known as Ḥabīb al-*attār*. See al-Qāḍī 'Iyād, *Tartīb al-madārik*, 381-382; see also Aguadé, *Kitāb al-ta'rij*, 26.

Greek concepts: all fruits are classified according to the parameters of hot/cold and dry/moist, additionally defined by a degree of intensity. Thus, the text attests that the Andalusian jurist was acquainted with the Greek humoral system,⁵⁰ knowledge he likely gained during his journey to Mecca.⁵¹ In addition to its palaeographical and textual value, the Damascene fragment is also significant because it represents the *Mukhtaṣar fī l-ṭibb*'s oldest textual witness – although only as an excerpt.⁵² Furthermore, in comparing the two versions, major differences emerge. In general terms, the Qubba fragment is far more detailed in terms of its content. Also, a number of discrepancies regarding the sequence of fruits can be identified; for instance, the Qubba fragment does not present the dissertation on the plum (*ʿuyūn al-baqar*, lit. »cow eyes«), displayed in the Spanish edition between mulberry and apricot. The latter, on the other hand, does not present the (brief) dissertation on the apricot, found in the Qubba fragment immediately after the mulberry.

Below I provide an edition and translation of the Arabic text of the fragment. In the transcription, I have tried to adhere to the original text as much as possible, in order to preserve the original orthography of the fragment. Ellipses in square brackets [...] indicate missing parts of the text. Parentheses (...) indicate my contextual inferences. Where words are unidentified, a single dot indicates a single remaining, visible letter. Asterisks (*) indicate the circular textual dividers that appear in the fragment.

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- 50 For an outline of the application of the theory of humours in health and disease in the Galenic system of physiology, see Siegel, *Galen*, 196-359; see also the brief introduction provided in Pormann and Savage-Smith, *Medieval Islamic Medicine*, 41-45. Savage-Smith raises some doubts about the adequateness of the classical definition of »humoral pathology« when applied to describe the medical practice in the medieval Islamic world. According to Savage-Smith, the term – introduced by Europeans in the eighteenth century – is inadequate to define such medical practice, since it was actually based on rebalancing the four primary qualities and the six »non-naturals«, rather than humours; see Savage-Smith, *Were the four humours fundamental*, 103-104.
- 51 Such a possibility has been already described by Álvarez de Morales and Girón Irueste. Given the fact that Ibn Ḥabīb does not refer to his sources on any occasion, the Spanish scholars presented a suggestive – but almost impossible to prove – hypothesis, according to which the Andalusian jurist could have been in contact with Ḥunayn ibn Ishāq's circle during his stay in the East. It is unknown whether he reached Baghdad at some point during his journey; however, he definitely stayed in Medina where, according to Álvarez de Morales and Girón Irueste, »se conocía la misma medicina que en Bagdad, al menos en un ámbito más o menos restringido al que Ibn Ḥabīb tendría acceso«; Álvarez de Morales and Girón Irueste, *Muḥtaṣar fī l-ṭibb*, 37. It has to be remembered that it was the period of the great translations, a movement strongly supported by the reigning caliphs, thanks to which the Islamic empire was acquiring ideas and theories from the ancient cultures – including the Greeks; the period of the Islamic Golden Age is deeply examined by Gutas, *Greek Thought*. What is certain is that, wherever 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«; Álvarez de Morales and Girón Irueste, *Muḥtaṣar fī l-ṭibb*, 29. According to this interpretation, the *Mukhtaṣar* anticipated some other important and more renowned works in this field, whose influence is universally acknowledged. For example, it preceded the translation of Dioscorides's well-known *De Materia Medica*. The latter was translated for the first time by Iṣṭifān ibn Bāsīl (Stephanos Basilos) from a Syriac copy during al-Mutawakkil's (d. 247 / 861) caliphate and then revised by Ḥunayn. However, its spread in al-Andalus was allowed only by a second translation, based on a Greek copy sent in 336 / 948 by the Byzantine emperor Constantine VII Porphyrogenitus to the caliph ʿAbd al-Raḥmān al-Nāṣir in Cordova. The question of the primacy of the *Mukhtaṣar* is analysed by Álvarez de Morales and Girón Irueste, *Muḥtaṣar fī l-ṭibb*, 29. For the history of the Andalusian translation of the *De Materia Medica* see Amar and Lev, *Agriculture*, 62 (who erroneously refer to Romanos I, instead of Constantine VII).
- 52 Neither Álvarez de Morales and Girón Irueste nor the catalogue of Arabic manuscripts from Rabat edited by Allouche and Regragui give any information about the dating of the Rabat manuscript. Nevertheless, the indication that it was written in a *maghribī* script, and the dating hypothesis provided in this article for the *scriptio superior* of the Qubba fragment suggest that this last exemplar could be older than the Rabat manuscript.

Recto, lines 1-17

- ١ - كله والذي ... الحل وحبه والاحمر اغلظ [...] و[...] الذي به د (?) قيل جميع التين
- ٢ - معدل في الغلظ والطاقة*
- ٣ - العنب افضل قوة واعدل من سائر الفاكهة وقد يختلف ايضا بقدر اختلاف انواعه غير ان جميع العنب اذا كان نضيجا رطباً فهو كان
- ٤ - رطب في الجزء الاول وهو دون التين في الرطوبة والحر وفيه شي من نفحة وما كان منه (اشد)
- ٥ - حلاوة كان احر 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*
- ٨ - من العنب نوع ابيض طويل يسمى قولقاس ولا يكون له شراب وهو ابرد العنب كله وابطاه انهضام*
- ٩ - والعنب الغض يسميه الروم انفاقين وهو بارد يابس والروم يسمي كل شي غض انفاقين من الزبيب والعنب او سائر الفاكهة*
- ١٠ - صفة الزبيب*
- ١١ - الزبيب اشد حرا من العنم يميز له الشي اليابس فانه اشد حرا من التين الرطب*
- ١٢ - واعلم ان اشد العنب قبضا وابدرا واجود في المعدة اذا كانت فيه حموضة وما اشتدت حلاوته كان اشد حرا*
- ١٣ - واجدر ان يرخي المعدة 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 coarsest [...] and [...] as the fig is generally said
- 2 – to be balanced in its coarseness and energy*
Grape is the most intense and balanced among all fruits.
- 3 – It can be of different varieties, but all grape when ripe is moist,⁵³ and it

53 As noted above, the parameters of hot/cold (*ḥarr/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 theorised by the Greeks, foundational elements of the four humours (Ar. *akhlāṭ*). In this system, everything must be explained with the four elements (water, air, fire, earth) of which everything is composed. Thus, «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 humours – and will return to them when decay sets in»; Savage-Smith, *Were the four humours fundamental*, 91. The question is briefly analysed in Savage-Smith, *Were the four humours fundamental*, 89-92. For a brief sketch on the basic physiological, anatomical, and pathological tenets characterising the humoral system, as adopted by the Arabs, see Ullmann, *Islamic Medicine*, 55-72.

- 4 – is moist in the first degree⁵⁴. It is inferior to fig in its humidity and heat, and there is some fragrance in it; the sweetest
- 5 – grape is the hottest while the sour one is less hot. When it is sweet, it can relieve the stomach, if there is some constipation in it,
- 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 variety called *qūlqās*⁵⁵, you cannot get wine from it;
- 8 – it is the coldest and the least digestible.*
The unripe grape which the Byzantines call omphacium⁵⁶;
- 9 – this is cold and dry, and the Byzantines call everything unripe omphacium, whether raisin or grape or other fruits.*
- 10 – Characteristics of the raisin:*
it is hotter than *'anam*'s⁵⁷ (fruits), from which it is distinguished by its dry part, and it is hotter
- 11 – than moist fig*
Know that the strongest constipating grape, the coolest and best for the stomach
- 12 – is the one that contains some sourness in it. Instead, the sweetest is the hottest;*
it is the most appropriate to relax the stomach
- 13 – is the one that contains some sourness in it. Instead, the sweetest is the hottest; it is the most appropriate to relax the stomach

54 Ancient pharmacology used to classify drugs according to four degrees, which corresponded to drug strength compared with the four primary qualities; for an overview of the Galenic tenets regarding this matter, see Nutton, *Ancient Medicine*, 248-251. In Islamic culture, strongly influenced by Galenic ideas, an important contribution was made by al-Kindī (d. 185-252 / 801-866). He elaborated the principle of the »double ratio« (Ar. *nisbat al-dīf*), according to which the increase in the intensity of drugs followed a geometric ratio; 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, *Another Andalusian revolt?*, 351-352. See also Sterpellone and Elsheim, *Medicina araba*, 44-45; Pormann and Savage-Smith, *Medieval Islamic Medicine*, 53.

55 This is *Colocasia esculenta*, 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, *Arabic-English Lexicon*, 7:2560. The Arabic word is *qulqās*: an additional *waw* appears in the Arabic text between the first *qāf* and the *lām* – a graphic peculiarity arguably stemming from the foreign nature of the word.

56 The Arabic term is borrowed from the Greek *ὀμφάκιον*, or *ὀμφάκιον*, which identifies the omphacium, the oil extracted from unripe olives or grapes; see Ibn Janāḥ, *Kitāb al-talkhīṣ*, ed. Bos *et al.*, 499 (entry 319). Both *qulqās* and omphacium are absent in the dissertation about the grape in the Spanish edition.

57 This is described by Lane as »a certain tree of el-Ḥijāz, having a red fruit, to which are likened the dyed fingers or ends of fingers«; Lane, *Arabic-English Lexicon*, 5:2178. Ibn Ḥabīb's mention of a plant from Ḥijāz is a clear indication of the fact that he knew its vegetation; arguably, such knowledge was directly acquired in the field, namely during his journey to Mecca for the pilgrimage. Interestingly, the Spanish edition presents the comparison with the grape (*'inab*), which would make more sense considering its treatment just before the raisin; see Álvarez de Morales and Girón Irueste, *Muṣṣar fī l-ṭibb*, 63. However, the *ductus* of the final *mim* in the Qubba fragment cannot be confused with the final *bā'* of *'inab*.

- 14 – and [...] (this) regarding its different varieties, and the seeds of ... are cold in the first degree, dry [...]
 15 – [...] recipe of the 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*
 ٣ - حب [...] يابس قابض في الجزء الاول فيه بعض القوة
 [...]جه شي من الحرارة ويحبس البطن*
 ٤ - المشمش بارد رطب طيب ويولد الفضل
 الغليظ*
 ٥ - التفاح انواع كثيرة وقد يختلف بقدر اختلاف الوانه منه الحلو
 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
 الشامى يعدل التفاح
 ٧ - واجمده التفاح المائى الصغار قريب الشبه من الشامى*
 صفة الا(تر)نج
 ٨ - فيه قوات مختلفة وذلك ان قشره حار يابس في الجزء الاول قريب من الجزء
 الثانى ولحمه بارد رطب
 ٩ - غليظ وحمضه بارد يابس في الجزء الثالث وحبه حار حديد يابس وفيه شي من
 لدونة و(رقه) حار
 ١٠ - هضوم وقد ينفع حبه من لدغ العقارب (اذا) شرب ... و.. مثقالين بماء فاتر وطلا
 مطبوخ
 ١١ - (اذا)دق فوضع على موضع اللدغة فهو نافع*
 الخوخ بارد رطب
 ١٢ - (ب)طى الانهضام ثقيل يولد الغذى(الر)د(ي) وفي ورقه بعض القبض
 (ود)هنه الذى يصنع من
 ١٣ - [...]فيه حرارة وينفع من ورم الأذن سائر الاورام الباردة وينفع من
 ال(شق)يقة*
 ١٤ - [...]النضيج بارد ل[...]والجزء الاول [...]]
 ١٥ - [...]وهو التفاح ال[...]]
 ١٦ - [...]وبطى [...]]
 ١٧ - [...]]

- 1 – Mulberry's peel if cooked [...] the vacuum which is in the intestine and it relieves the stomach
 2 – [...] from the heat*
 The seeds of [...] 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 generate an excess of
 4 – coarseness*
 There are many varieties of apple, and they can be differentiated according to their colour;
 there is the sweet,

- 5 – the sour, then 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 least moist and coldest. The Syrian apple is the most balanced among all
- 7 – and the hardest; the citron⁵⁸ is very similar to it.*
Characteristics of citron:
- 8 – it has different faculties, this is due to its peel which is hot and dry in the first degree, close to the second degree; its pulp is cold, moist
- 9 – and coarse, and its sourness is cold and dry in the third degree. Its seeds are hot, biting, dry, and a little smooth. Its leaves are hot
- 10 – and digestive. Its seeds can relieve scorpions' stings if they are drunk with two *mithqāl*⁵⁹ of warm water and mulled wine.
- 11 – If they are shredded and put on a burn they relieve it.*
Peach is cold and moist,
- 12 – its digestion is difficult, and it is harmful to eat it; its leaves are constipating and its oil obtained from
- 13 – [...] there is some heat in it, and it is useful for ear inflammations, different cold inflammations and for migraine
- 14 – [...] ripe and cold [...] and in the first degree [...]
- 15 – [...] and it is the apple [...]
- 16 – [...] and
- 17 – [...]

As examined in this paper, the case of the palimpsest fragment from the Qubbat al-khazna outlines a historical, social, and cultural reality characterised by an impressive degree of complexity and heterogeneity. Indeed, in the restricted space of a single folio, different religious traditions – namely Islam and Christianity – »coexist« and, moreover, show a particular attitude that allowed them to create a fertile environment for exchanging ideas and knowledge. This perspective, which challenges the stereotypes of these two cultural systems as definitive opposites, is perfectly »personified« by the monasteries in the Sinaitic-Palestinian area. Indeed, living at the crossroads of these two cultures, and constantly tapping into both, the monasteries represent a clear expression of the open and eclectic environment where they lived and operated. Therefore, they can be considered part of the cultural blend that strongly characterised the relationship between East and West throughout the Middle Ages, plainly depicted in the Damascene fragment.

58 According to Ibn Janāḥ, *al-tuffāḥ al-mā'ī* corresponds to citron (*al-utrūnj*) – whose description is right after apple in our text. Furthermore, the editors suggest that *al-tuffāḥ al-mā'ī* could be a mutilation of *tuffāḥ māhī*. See Ibn Janāḥ, *Kitāb al-talkhīṣ*, ed. Bos *et al.*, 1128 (entry 1011).

59 A unit of measurement used in the Islamic empire, especially for precious metals; it was equivalent to 4.25 grams – which was the standard measurement for the *dīnār* after 'Abd al-Malik's reform. See Miles, *Dīnār*, 297.

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