Some Noteworthy Arabic and Persian Manuscripts in the Osler Library, McGill University

by Adam Gacek

The Osler collection of Arabic and Persian manuscripts occupies a special place in the libraries of McGill University. Except for a few titles, it is composed of works dealing with a variety of medical topics, ranging from large compilations of materia medica to short compositions on the treatment of various diseases. Collected originally by Sir William Osler himself, these early acquisitions represent in many ways the best of the collection. With significant additions made later, thanks to Casey A. Wood, today the collection is a good representation of the progress made through the ages by Arab, Persian, and Indian physicians.

"Is this, think you, a time for MSS? What a heartless brute to mention them! But I do love Dioscorides – even in Arabic!"

The above words, written by William Osler and addressed to the Oxford Arabist Dr. A. Cowley in December 1910, are a good reflection of Osler’s genuine passion for the history of medicine that found its expression in his well-known catalogue Bibliotheca Osleriana. They also show his appreciation of medical works produced in the Muslim world, a fact that is reflected in the collection of books and manuscripts that he donated to McGill.

The collection of Islamic manuscripts in the Osler Library numbers 132 volumes, written mostly in Arabic and Persian but containing also four texts in Ottoman Turkish (nos. 389/7 and 389/18) and one work in Urdu (no. 7785/1). Three of the volumes (nos. 7785/40, 7785/86 and 7785/87) contain both Arabic and Persian texts, while another is a mixture of Arabic and Turkish material.

As is well-known, early Arabic medicine was to a large extent based on Hellenistic and Byzantine theories and practices. It was primarily thanks to the Christian physicians of 3rd – and 4th/5th – century Baghdad that many Greek works were translated into Arabic. Hippocrates (Ibbaqrat or Buqrat), the “Father of Medicine” (fl. 5th century B.C.), Dioscorides (Diyüşgürdi) (1st cen-
tury A.D.) and Galen or Galenus (2nd century A.D.) became household names among the educated Arabs from that time onward. Beginning in the 5/11th century, Arabic medical works started to filter into Europe and by the mid-7/13th century most of these had been translated into Latin. It was therefore important for Osler to include at least a sampling of these works in his collection in order to illustrate this crucial period in the history of medicine.

Some of the purchases in this field were made by William Osler from his Persian admirer, a physician by the name of Dr. M. Sāeed. Here is a description of Dr. Sāeed’s visit to Oxford in September of 1913:

“And among other pilgrims to 13 Norham Gardens who appeared at this time was a foreign-looking physician, Dr. M. Sāeed, who bore under his arm an illuminated MS. of the Canon of Avicenna, wrapped in a Persian shawl almost as old, together with two other books without which, as he said he never moved – his Bible, and Osler’s Practice of Medicine.”

The acquisitions made by Osler are featured in his Bibliotheca Osiaria and are enumerated under the heading “The Arabsians” and in the section “Manuscripts.” These include the works by Rhazes (Abū Bakr Muhammad ibn Zakariyā al-Rāzi, d.313/925), Haly Abbas, properly known as ‘Ali ibn al-Abbas al-Majūsī (fl.4/10th century), Avicenna (Abū Ali al-Husayn ibn Sīnā, d.428/1037), and the celebrated Moorish (Andalusian) scholar Ahmad al-Ghāfiqi (d.560/1165). Osler’s admiration for Avicenna was quite genuine. He went as far as to take steps to repair his tomb in Hamadan but unfortunately the occupation of Iran by the Turks (October 1916) put an end to this noble venture.

Al-Rāzi is represented in the Bibliotheca by two of his outstanding compilations, namely his Kitāb al-hawī al-kabīr (no. 449) – a great medical work assembled from his papers after his death – copied in the 11/17th century, and al-Kawsāk al-Fikhrī or simply al-Fikhrī (no. 450), transcribed in the 12/18th century.

Al-Majūsī’s Kāmil al-sīnā’ah al-shbīyāh (the famous Liber Regius) is found under no. 7571 (copied in the 11/17th century) and Ibn Sīnā is represented by four copies of his famous Canon of Medicine or al-Qanūn (nos. 462-465). Furthermore, there is the famous Herbal or Book of Simple Drugs, properly known as Kitāb fī al-adwiyyah al-muḍrīdah (no. 7508), of al-Ghāfiqi (see below).

Not selected for inclusion in the Bibliotheca are a good number of other titles by the above-mentioned and other scholars, which in terms of coverage and
quality are quite impressive. Among the earliest works in Arabic there are:

a copy of a book attributed to Hippocrates (Buqraṭi) and entitled Muhktaṣar fi
al-tibb (no. 147); two commentaries on his Aphorisms (Fāṣal, no. 207) and the
so-called "Tomb treatise" (al-Riṣālah al-qabārīya, no. 197), respectively; and
a composition on the diseases of the eye by the celebrated Johannitius or
Hunayn ibn Isḥaq (d.260/873) (no. 128), the most prolific translator of his age.
Even though copied at the beginning of the 20th century, this codex is based on
an exemplar dated 869/1466.

To this list should be added another popular work of the above-mentioned al-
Rāzi, Bur’ al-waṣl (Cure within the Hour) (no. 19, and 7785/11 – missed in
the original investigation), Ibn Sīnā’s didactic poem (Marṣūmāt-lišīsah sh al-tibb)
(no. 121), and a treatise on cures for the heart, Maqālah fi aḥkām al-adwiyah
al-qabārīya (no. 122). Furthermore, there are three abridgements of Ibn Sīnā’s
Qānūn (nos. 106, 145, 243) and three commentaries on its most popular
abridgement entitled al-Majīz (nos.144, 213, 214).

Other major figures are also represented, for instance: ʿHasan al-Qumrit (nos.7
and 38) and ʿAbd al-Rahmān ibn ʿAbd ʿṢādiq, known in
Arabic circles as the Second Hippocrates (no. 207); and the oculist Jusūs Ḥāli, i.e.
ʿAlī ibn Ṣāli al-Kabīr (no. 227), all three active in the 8/14th century.

Notable figures of later centuries include Ibn Baytār (d.666/1268) (no. 143),
 ḑurāj ibn ʿAbd al-Samarrāq (d.619/1222) (nos. 8, 162, 258), Muhammad al-
Aqfānī (d.749/1348) (no. 236) and Naṣās al-Kirmānī (d.853/1449) (nos. 192,
213).

In terms of the rarity and/or high quality of the codices in this collection the
following should be singled out:

• A 6/12th century copy of a commentary on the Aphorisms of Hippocrates
(Sharḥ Fāṣal Buqraṭ, no. 207) (Fig. 1) by the above-mentioned ʿAbd al-
Rahmān ibn ʿAbd ʿṢādiq (fl. 5/11th century). This copy carries a number of
ownership statements and study notes on the front of the textblock.

• al-Muṣālaṣṣa al-Buqraṭīya (The Hippocratic Treatments) (no. 141) by ʿAbd
al-Ḥasan ʿAbd al-Ṭabar (fl. 10th century), transcribed in May (Marv)
(northern Khurasan, today Turkmenistan) in 611/1215, an excellent and the
oldest dated Arabic codex in this collection (Fig. 2).

• Kitāb fi al-adwiyah al-mufraḍah (no. 102) of ʿAbd al-Ḥāfaẓ (d.560/
1165). This work, undoubtedly the most famous in the collection, was ex-
cuted most probably in 654/1256 in Baghdad (Fig. 3). Like several of the other Arabic manuscripts in the collection, the codex of al-Ghāfūqī was purchased from Dr. Sāveed. It was acquired together with a copy of an Arabic version of Dioscorides (De Materia Medica) for only £25.

The Ghāfūqī codex, which represents one half of the original work, contains 367 coloured drawings and 475 entries arranged alphabetically according to the alpha-numerical system (abjad). About one quarter of the drawings are not to be found in Dioscorides and a large number of them represent Oriental plants which, according to Meyendorf, had never been drawn by an Arab artist. Furthermore, the descriptions of plants known to Dioscorides always and in the first place indicate the name of the plant in Greek in Arabic transliteration, followed by the equivalent name in Arabic, Persian, Berber or Spanish.6

Meyendorf, writing to W.W. Francis in 1957, speaks of Ahmad al-Ghāfūqī as "the best pharmacologist and perhaps botanist of the Arabs". Later, in his Études de pharmacologie arabe, he states that "his study of the two manuscripts confirms of all that al-Ghāfūqī was the greatest botanist and pharmacologist of the Arab era".7

Among the numerous illustrations of plants there are six drawings of *Ranunculus asiaticus* (little Asiatic frog), known as *kahkaj* (also *kahkjek* or *kaaf al-

• An important copy of the commentary/gloss on Ibn Sinā’s philosophical work al-İdārāt wa-al-tanbihāt by the celebrated Nasīr al-Dīn al-Ṭūsī (d.672/1274), dated 761/1360 (Fig. 4). Described as the Aviscenza manuscript, it was acquired in July 1913 from Dr. M. Sāveed.8

• A commentary on an abridgement of Ibn Sinā’s *Qānin* (Sharh Māqīz al-Qānin, no. 213) by Naṣīr al-Kirmānī (d.853/1449), copied in Shiraz (Iran), in 893/1488 (Fig. 6).

• The afore-mentioned Qānin of Ibn Sinā (d.428/1037) (no. 161/3), copied in 975/1567 from a 8th/12th century exemplar, which in turn (at least partially) may have been copied from the author’s holograph9 (Fig. 7).

Figure 4
The end of the text, colophon and other notes and corrections from Nasīr al-Dīn al-Ṭūsī’s work on Ibn Sinā’s al-İdārāt wa-al-tanbihāt, dated Ramadān 761/1360.

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A rare copy of a work on medicine and natural sciences, entitled Dhakhah al-
kussaf fi 'ilm al- tinha wa-al-tahwh (389/11) by 'Abd Allah ibn 'Aziz al-
Marrakushi al-Susi (d.1178/1766) (Fig. 8). This manuscript, missed in the
original investigation and therefore not included in my Arabic Manuscripts,
has 270 pages, curiously paginated (1-91) using the word numrah (number)
or its logograph with superscript numbers. The manuscript measures 31.5 x
22.5 / 22.5 x 12.5 cm, and has 25 lines per page. It was copied on Italian paper
made by Andrea Galvani's paper mill in Perdonone, and carries its charac-
teristic watermark, 'moon face in shield'. This rubricated copy was executed
in Egyptian nasib hand by Yusuf al-Dab' al-Khanfar in the mid-13/19th
century.

Two works of as yet unknown authorship, entitled Minhaj al-bayan fi
mishradat al-aqibah (no. 135) and Mishrib al-adwiyah wa-misbah al
sharibah (no. 136).

For the Osher Library, however, the task of collecting Arabic and Persian man-
uscripts on medicine did not stop with the original collection donated by
William Osher. The Library subsequently acquired two additional manuscript
collections.

The first of these collections was transferred from the McGill Medical
Library. Known as The Casey A. Wood Ophthalmic Collection, this body of
material was acquired by Casey Wood, an ophthalmologist and ornithologist,
in the years leading up to 1947. All 41 volumes in this collection contain the
bookplate "Casey A. Wood Ophthalmic Collection McGill Medical Library"
and bear the initial 389 accession number. A good number of these items
came from Dr. Max Meyerhof (d.1945). A German physician and scholar,
Meyerhof practiced medicine in the 1930s in Cairo. The Meyerhof manu-
scripts carry his Arabic bookplate and many useful content and bibliographical notes.
Several of these manuscripts were copied by Mahmud al-Nasrakh in 1908
and 1909 from rare manuscripts preserved in the Khedivial Library (Cairo)
(now Egyptian National Library and Archives). Apart from the manuscripts,
the collection contains several typescripts and photostats.15

The second collection, very briefly enumerated under no. 7785 of Bibliotheca
Oderiana, was also donated by Casey A. Wood.16 This collection, consisting of
87 volumes of Arabic and Persian manuscripts (including one manuscript in
Urdu), was collected by the Russian scholar Vladimir Ivanov (d.1970) in India.
Figure 6
The last page of Sharḥ Mūjz al-Qāmūn by Naffis al-Kirmānī, transcribed in Shiraz in 933/1525.
(DL 7785-42)

Figure 7
The last page of the Qāmūn of Ibn Sīnā copied in 775/1567 featuring a decorated tailpiece.
(DL 462)
between 1926 and 1927. Ivanow was at that time librarian of the Royal Asiatic Society of Bengal, and judging from his notes in the manuscripts, had collected them mainly in Lucknow, Amritsar and Sandila.

The Persian manuscripts in the Osler Library are for the most part of Indian provenance and even though some of the items are in poor condition, this collection is very important as it contains a good number of compositions written by Indian physicians or physicians who practiced medicine in India. The collection includes two translations from Sanskrit or Hindi (nos. 164 and 314) as well as translations of Galen’s work on urine (Risālah fī al-bawilī) (no. 313) and al-Bāzī’s Burū‘ al-sā‘ah (no. 80).

From the codicological and palaeographical point of view, this collection reveals a great amount of information that still needs to be properly evaluated and classified. Most of the manuscripts were written on paper of local or Persian provenance. This paper is laid, showing irregular laid lines running horizontally. In a number of cases, however, some chain lines are clearly visible, grouped in twos (nos. 89 and 121/2) or in threes (no. 209/2).

In terms of handwriting, the majority of manuscripts are written in hands which exhibit many features common to nasta‘ī‘q and shikāstah scripts. They number some 80 individual compositions contained in 69 volumes, comprising such subjects as māteria medica or simple drugs (mufraddî‘), pharmacopeias (qarabā‘īn), therapeutics (ī‘lā‘, mā‘a‘alah), drugs (ṣawā‘īsh), diseases (‘arā‘ā‘at), prescriptions (ṣawā‘īsh), prophylaxis (ḥijf-i ṣibhāt), diet (ma‘āl al va‘sa‘ir), anatomy (tashrī‘), ophthalmology (‘ilm-i kabhāli), and surgery (‘ilm-i jarrā‘ah). Some individual compositions deal with such matters as the examination of urine (bawil, qarā‘ah, safā‘ah), pulse (nahl) and stool (hī‘rāt), as well as the treatment of fever (ta‘a‘hum), measles (ḥashāh), blisters (ahlā‘ah) and scab (jarā‘ah). Among the best represented writers are Yūsuf ibn Muhammad Harawī Khurāsānī, known as Yūsuf (d.950/1543 or 4)18 and Muhammad Akbar ibn Muhammad Muqīm Arrānī (d.1134/1722). Yūsuf’s works include: Dalā‘il al-bawil (no. 29), Dalā‘īl al-nakhī‘ (no. 30), Fawā‘id al-akhrāj (no. 67), ġāmî al-fawā‘id (no. 99), Qāṣidah dar ḥijf-i ṣīhāt (no. 213) and Sīrat-i ā‘lāwī‘ah (no. 296). These writings deal with urine, pulse, therapeutics and health preservation.

Arrānī, the other hand is represented by: Tibb al-Akbâr (no. 320/1-3) – an amplified translation of Sharh al-ashbâb wa-al-‘alâmât by Na‘īf al-Kirmānī (d.853/1449) (Fig. 9) and its abridgement, entitled Khayr al-tajā‘āb (no. 115/1-2).
Qarābādīn-i Qādirī (no. 208), an elaborate work on compound medicaments; Mufarrīḥ al-quṣūb (no. 169), a Persian commentary on the Qāmūṣah or Little Canon by Muḥammad ibn ʿUmar al-Jaghmini (d. after 618/1221); and ʿĀṭāʾ al-ṣabīb (no. 165), a work of medicine for beginners.

Among the more interesting codices is a volume containing three compositions (no. 389/31), the first one being a copy of ʿAyn al-dawāʾ (no. 17) (on the diseases of the eye) by Shams al-Dīn Muḥammad ibn al-Ḥasan al-Ḳabīḥī, known as Bāvārī, dated 1102/1690. Nothing so far is known about this author. This is the earliest dated copy in the collation and appears to be an unicum. The other two works, possibly by the same author, but lacking their incipits, deal with the diseases of the head, as well as with fevers and poisons.

The Persian work on anatomy by Maḥmūd ibn Yūsuf ibn lIyās (d. after 826/1422), Taṣbīḥ al-badāʾīn (Taṣbīḥ-i Baṣāʾīrī (no. 316), is represented here in two copies, which contain twelve and five diagrammatic manuscripts respectively. There are also three illuminated manuscripts with headpieces (nos. 82/1, 209/1, 328/2), of which the most outstanding example is Ṭīḥfet al-muʿāmmātīs (no. 328/2), an Indian pharmacopoeia by Muḥammad Muʿāmmār Tunkābūnī Daylānī (fl. 11/17), copied in Bāburgūz by Qiyām al-Dīn (aḵḵīn) Akbarābādī in 1775/1775. This copy has an unusual illuminated headpiece containing some architectural features surrounded by palm trees. In addition, there are three copies of Bāṭīṣrātī ḏ-Bāṭīṣrātī (materia medica) by Zayn al-Dīn ʿAlī al-Ansārī, known as Ḥājī Zayn al-ʿĀṯār (d.806/1403-4) (no. 82/1-3) (Fig. 10).

Although several of the Persian codices are datable to the 10/16th century, most of them are from the 12/18th and 13/19th century. There are five dated manuscripts from the 12/18th century (nos. 79, 208, 320/1, 328/1, 328/2), the oldest dated copies being the work of the above-mentioned Bāvārī and another by ʿIsaʾī al-Ḥurājī (d.531/1136), entitled Zakkhirātī Khvānaṣīb (a thesaurus of medicine, no. 337). Both were transcribed in 1102/1690.

Additionally, of special interest here are compositions by Dr. Jakob Eduard Polak (Ḥakīm Puḷāk Nāmavār), an Austrian physician, who practiced medicine at the court of Ẓahīr al-Dīn Qāẓīr between 1851 and 1860, and by Dr. Johanan L. Schlimmer (Ḥakīm Shāliṭ Flamankī), a Dutchman. Both Polak and Schlimmer taught at the Ẓār al-Funūn College in Tehran. The Osler collection includes Polak’s Risālah dar bayān-i iṣlaḥ-i ḏarābāt (no. 245) and two copies of Schlimmer’s Ṣafāʾ al-iʿṣārān (no. 86), dated respectively 1278/1861 or 2 and
1280/1863. To Schlimmer are also attributed two other compositions: Miftāḥ al-khawāṣṣ (no. 160), dated 1285/1668, and Qawā'id al-annārāğ (no. 215).

Finally, among the non-medical codices, there is a copy of a translation of the famous Wonders of Creation (Ajāʾib al-makhlūqāt) by Zakariyyāʾ al-Qazwīnī (d.692/1293) containing copious, although sometimes crude, illustrations (miniatures), copied in India in 1891 (no. 5/4), as well as a composition on weights and measures entitled Risālah-i mīqātāyyāh (no. 231) by Muhammad Mu'min Astarābādī (d.1033/1624).
Notes

1 An earlier and longer version of this article, containing a list of all Persian manuscripts, appeared originally in "Arabic and Persian Medical Manuscripts in the Osler Library, McGill University," Nāman: l'Artsanis, 2003, 3, 2: 143-184.


3 By this term I mean here manuscripts produced in the areas where Islam was a predominant religion.


5 Cushing, Life, 2: 376.


7 Cushing, Life, 2: 805 (in particular).

8 The numbers given in round brackets refer to my Arabic Manuscripts.


11 For more information see Adam Gacek, "The Use of 'kabīka' in Arabic Manuscripts," Manuscrits of the Middle East, 1986, 1: 49-53. For a translation of the entry on kaffāl al-sūr see Meyerhof, "Etudes," 22-23. See also my "Drugs for Bodies...and Books," 75 Books from the Osler Library, ed. Faith Wallis and Pamela Miller, Montreal, 2004: 76-77.

12 This happy event is described in Cushing, Life, 2: 368.

13 This information, as a result of intensive investigation, corrects and supplements the data given in my Arabic Manuscripts, 32. Buḥārīn al-Dīn al-Ḥiesī died in 743/1342, i.e., three years after the date on the certificate. His proper name (ism) is sometimes given as 'Abd allāh, instead of Ubayd allāh. He authored a number of works including a commentary on Jāmīlī al-esāwar (a work on philosophy/theology) by 'Abd al-Ḥayyān al-Rāghī (d. ca. 685/1286) (see C. Brockelmann's Geschichte der Arabischen Litteratur (GAL), II, 254 and II, 271).


15 Osler Library MSS and Archives. (Type script, 1972): 28.

16 Osler, Bibliotheca Osleriana, 791-792.

17 The numbers given in round brackets refer to my Persian Manuscripts.

18 This name was originally recorded in the Bibliotheca Osleriana (no. 7785/2, 17, 84, 85) as Muhammad Ibn Yusuf Harītī (sic). In C. Brockelmann's Geschichte der Arabischen Litteratur (GAL), III, 591 he appears as Muhammad Ibn Yusuf al-Labīb (read al-Labīb) al-Harmī; moreover his two Arabic works are recorded under this form of his name in Gacek, Arabic Manuscripts, nos. 11 and 12. He appears to have been the father of Yusuf, known as Yusufī (see C. Elgood, Safavid Medical Practice, 1970, 113-115). It is also possible that the confusion arose as a result of the widespread custom among Shīʿite Muslims of prefixing first names (ism) with the name Muhammad. This is visible in the colophons of his Fara'i al-asbāb (no. 67), where his name is given as Muhammad Yusuf.
Sir William Osler: The Man and His Books

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For many generations of medical students and for myriad international scholars, the Osler Library of McGill University, with its fine collection of master works in medicine and science, has been a magical treasure-trove. The Library's special ambiance has served also as an enduring reflection of the persona of Sir William Osler, one of the greatest of medical humanitarians.

In September 1999, a symposium under the auspices of the James McGill Society and the Osler Society of McGill University celebrated the 150th Anniversary of Osler's birth and the 70th year of the opening of the Osler Library. Held in the presence of Principal Bernard Shapiro, Dean of Medicine Abraham Fuks; Director of McGill Libraries, Frances Groen, and Dr. Stanley Frost, our venerable McGill historian, the topics presented by the speakers sampled the unique holdings of the Osler Library and emphasized also the enthusiastic role of Sir William in the creation and well-being, not just of his own collection, but of many other libraries, here and abroad.

In the interval elapsed since the symposium, the authors, with patient forebearance, have edited and enhanced their respective manuscripts for publication. Several of the essays in the meantime have appeared elsewhere and the editors appreciate the permission of the publishers to include these in this volume. We were pleased to update our essay on the Osler Niche to reference Dr. David Williams, one of McGill's three astronauts, who in the meantime, rocketed into outer space, taking with him the iconic photo-card of the Osler Niche – an unforeseen space-age extension of Osler's "Astral Self".

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