An Arabic Manuscript of the Hippocratic Letters

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It is a great pleasure for me to present here the first study of a text noticed by Manfred Ullmann and Fu’āt Sezgin in two separate publications both of which came out in 1970. This important piece of Greek literature, a collection of letters attributed to Hippocrates and translated into Arabic by an unknown author will be the object of a separate publication. Therefore I intend to limit this paper to a general presentation of the text. The Greek letters supposedly exchanged between Hippocrates and the Persian king Artaxerxes on the one side, and Hippocrates and Democritus on the other side (among other minor correspondents) have been somehow neglected, although they provide some interesting insights for students of the history of medicine, the history of philosophy, and of Greek literature. At the same time, they remain puzzling both in matters of dating and composition.

Traditionally, the Letters have attracted the interest of readers both for their literary quality and for the biographical information one could gather from them. The existence of an Arabic translation of the Letters adds to the general impression which emanate from the reading of the lists of texts translated by Ḥunayn ibn Ishāq and his circle that the medical corpus was of outmost importance, no doubt because sovereigns wanted to receive the best possible treatment and aspired at the best medical care for their armies. The translators themselves and later on the philosophers were often practicing physicians. Courts and hospitals probably had libraries of some kind, and it should be remembered that in Late Antiquity medicine and philosophy were taught at least partly together.

* This paper has been elaborated within the frame of a Marie Curie fellowship provided by the European Union for my project on ‘Early Arabic Literature in Context: the Hellenistic Continuum’. It was presented at the XXIXth International Conference on the History of Arabic Sciences at the Ma’had al-Turāth in the University of Aleppo on 3rd-5th Nov. 2009.


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I. The London Manuscript of the Arabic Hippocratic Letters (Br. Lib. Or. 12070)

The fact that manuscript Or. 12070 of the British Library (ex-British Museum) has not attracted the attention of researchers can in part be explained by its quasi inaccessibility, due to the absence of an up-to-date catalogue, (roughly, manuscripts after Or. 7500 are to this day uncatalogued except for a handwritten card catalogue accessible only to the curators).

Manuscript B. L. Or. 12070 is a majmū’a containing both literary and philosophical texts. It claims as a date of composition the year 330 AH (= 940-41 AD) but the paper used for the copy does not seem to support this assertion. A table of contents is given on the front page by a late Persian hand which certainly does not attempt to imitate a tenth-century hand. On page 2, an owner has written a prayer which should be recited by every physician before sleeping, and provides his name, “Abū Jaʿfar Hāshim ibn Zayn al-ʿAbidīn al-Maristānī.” and what may be his personal seal.

The epistles contained in the manuscript are the following:

1) Al-Fārābī, “Commentary on Zeno the Elder’s ‘Epistle’ (Sharḥ risālat Zaynūn al-kabīr)”;  
2) Aristotle, “Epistle by Aristotle with questions introduced by ‘How come is it that…’ and their answers (Risālat Arīṣṭāṭīlīs al-ḥākīm fīhā aswīla [fōr asʿīla] muṣaddara bī-lima sāra wa ajwībathī)”;  
4) Plato, “Compendium of the Three Discourses (Jawāmiʿ al-Maqālāt al-thalath)”;  
5) Hippocrates et al., “Letters of the Philosophers (Rasāʾil al-ḥukāmā’);”  
6) Aristotle, “Physiognomony (Risālah fī-l-Firāsah allafahā Arīṣṭāṭīlīs li-l-Iskandar).”

G. Meredith-Owens provided a short and enthusiastic notice of what would become “British Library Or. 12070” when the manuscript was purchased, but he did not offer a full description. The manuscript is a very careful copy with regular writing showing archaic features – both in the letter shapes and in the orthography-, on a rather recent salmon, nearly reddish paper with regular, fine, horizontal wire-
lines which appear very clearly. It consists of 43 folios, and a modern binding has been added when it was purchased. Its size is 27.5 by 18 cm, the writing surface is 23 by 14 cm, and it has 18 lines per page. It has been noted that the writing is quite close to that of the Druze Epistles purchased by the Oxford Bodleian Library. The two manuscripts indeed show some similarities in the writing but it does not look to be by the same hand. The British Library copy gives in the colophon the name of the copyist, an otherwise unknown Muhammad b. ‘Alī Ibn Durustawayh al-Isbahānī (‘of Ispahan,’ with a bā‘, a spelling consistent with the supposed dating of the manuscript). This person does not seem to be any of the famous Ibn Durustawayh but may have been related to this important family of scholars.

All the epistles contained in the majmū‘a seem to have been composed before 330/940-941. One should even notice that both the Pseudo-Aristotle’s Physiognomony and Problemata are said to have been translated by Ḫunayn ibn Ishāq. However, further research is needed as texts such as Zeno’s Epistle and the Pseudo-Aristotelian Physiognomony have not been the subject of a detailed study. The mention of al-Fārābī as being alive is also a hint towards the genuineness of the original from which the London manuscript was copied, as one would expect a careless forger to have claimed a better known Ibn Durustawayh as copyist and to have erred on al-Fārābī’s date of death. Nevertheless, the paper on which the manuscript was copied cannot possibly be a tenth-century paper, and the London B. L. Or. 12070 is considered a fake by codicology specialists. Be it as it may, it might very well be a copy of what it says it is, and our analysis of the text will attempt to show from the contents and the style of the Hippocratic Letters here preserved, that the London manuscript stems from an ancient tradition.

II. The Hippocratic Letters in the Greek context

As many other antique famous scientists, Hippocrates can be considered a somehow shadowy figure to whom many of the ancient medical writings of the 6th-4th c. BC have been attributed. Already in Antiquity, the exact identity of Hippocrates was a subject of discussion. Galen mentions four homonyms bearing the name

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8 Further information on these epistles (except al-Kisā‘ī’s) can be found in H. Daiber, Bibliography of Islamic Philosophy, 2 vol. and 1 vol. of Supplement, Leiden et al., 1999-2006. I intend to publish a complete edition and translation of the Pseudo-Hippocratic Letters shortly.
9 I am grateful to Dr. Colin Baker and Dr Isa Waley of the British Library for sharing with me their insights on this matter.
Hippocrates who are all closely related to each other. Specialists consider today that the most famous of the physicians bearing this name - who was known already to Plato and to Aristotle - lived between ca 460 to 360 or 350 BC, and was originally from the Island of Cos, in Ionia (off today’s western coast of Turkey).

The text which will concern us here is an exchange of letters between Hippocrates and several correspondents: namely Artaxerxes (whether Artaxerxes I or II is not specified, but some of the later Arabic authors point to Artaxerxes I Longimanus), Hystanes/Ostanes, ‘the people of Abdera’, Dionysius, Philopoimen, Damagetus, Democritus. In addition to these correspondents we should also mention, in the Greek Letters only, other addressees such as Demetrius (the rhetor of Phalera?), Gorgias (the Sophist ?), Hippocrates’s son Thessalos, and the late kings Demetrius (Demetrius Poliorcetes ?) and Ptolemy. As J. Jouanna noted in different publications, several elements alluded to in the Letters and treatises (Law, Precepts) have been confirmed by archeology and epigraphy, and it is therefore not possible to leave this corpus aside as a piece of literary fiction.

The attribution of letters to the famous figures of Antiquity had already become fashionable by the end of the 1st c. AD. The Hippocratic Letters are therefore better analyzed when keeping in mind the existence of such important epistolary novels as The Seven Sages and The Alexander Novel. Collections of letters attributed to Pythagoras, Plato, or Aristotle are also widely spread in traditional Greek literature. The third-century Greek author Diogenes Laertius has preserved a

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13 It is often difficult to ascertain with precision the identity of ancient figures. The references works I have consulted are the Realencyclopädie (see note above), the Dictionnaire des Philosophes Antiques, ed. by R. Goulet (Paris, 1989-), and the ancient but useful Ch. Daremberg and E. Saglio, Dictionnaire des Antiquités Grecques et Romaines, Paris 1877-1919, which is available online (http://dagr.univ-tlse2.fr/sdx/dagr/index.xsp).

14 See J. Jouanna, Hippocrate, p. 527-563 (Annexe III: Les Traités de la Collection hippocratique : liste et présentation). Jouanna adds a Regimen to the King Ptolemy and a Letter to King Ptolemy on Human constitution which should be studied with the rest of the corpus, see the ‘Nota Bene’ to p. 542-543, n. 29, and same appendice, n. 63.


number of these in his Lives of the Philosophers, and several manuscripts of (generally spurious) epistolography collections are known to exist. Interestingly for the future study of the Arabic Hippocratic Letters, the recent editor of the Greek Letters, W. D. Smith, points out that they circulate both within the manuscripts belonging to the “Medical tradition,” that is the manuscripts of the Corpus Hippocraticum, and to the “Epistolographic tradition,” i.e. manuscripts containing collections of letters of some famous figures of Antiquity, arranged to the taste of readers.

The Letters can be arranged into two series, which have been titled the ‘Persian’ and the ‘Democritus’ Letters, while some of them are independent and do not refer to either the Artaxerxes story nor to the Democritus one. The Letters clearly have a comic and rhetoric flavor. The extremely mannered style, noted by Littre, makes the Letters show all the signs of an exercice de style. This does not imply that the author of the exercice de style was not using earlier elements already known to historians and men of letters. Dimitri Sakalis provided (in modern Greek) a stylistic study of the Letters and concluded to a date of composition between 40 and 30 BC. Already Littre pointed to some of the features betraying an obvious intention of forgery in the composition of the collection. A number of hypotheses on the dating and the composition have been offered as well and are duly discussed by Sakalis.

Be it as it may, Roman authors such as Varro and Cicero allude to the exchange between Hippocrates and Artaxerxes already in the 1st c. BC, and a papyrus from the 1st AD of this same exchange has been preserved. If we are to follow Plutarch, Hippocrates was quoted already in the 3rd c. BC by Cato the Elder as a man who refused to give his knowledge of medicine to the Persians because he had taken an oath not to let this teaching go out of the Asclepiads’ family circle. In the 1st c. AD, Erotian, a physician and the author of a list of the Hippocratic writings, mentions a treatise usually associated with the Letters in the manuscript tradition and published by both Littre and Smith directly after the Letters, the ‘Presbeutikos’, or

17 It seems impossible therefore to study as a coherent literary piece the corpus artificially gathered by Littre. This is nevertheless attempted by N. Holzberg, “Der griechische Briefroman. Versuch einer Gattungstypologie,” in N. Holzberg and S. Merkle, Der griechische Briefroman. Gattungstypologie und Textanalyse, p. 1-52, (on the Epistolai Hippokratous, which he designates as a “book”, see p. 22-28, though he considers at the same time that Letters 18-24 are not to be considered real letters).
18 E. Littre, Œuvres complètes d’Hippocrate, Paris, 1839-1861, see vol. I, p. 426-434 for his remarks on the style of the Letters. This monumental work (10 vols.) including both the edition and translation of the Hippocratic writings then available, is accessible online at the following URL: http://www.bium.univ-paris5.fr/histmed/medica.htm. Two other editions are the one by D. Sakalis and the one by W. D. Smith.
19 D. Sakalis, Hippokratous Epistolai, p. 85-89.

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‘Embassy of Thessalos,’ but not the *Letters*. Surprisingly, shortly afterwards, the third century Diogenes Laertius who quotes a number of letters by famous figures in his literary biographies does not quote the *Letters*, though he is aware of the supposed contemporaneity between Hippocrates and Democritus, which was also known to Galen, at the end of the 1st c. AD. In turn, some of the motifs present in the Democritean letters appear in a number of Latin authors from the 1st c. onwards. It has been suggested that their date of composition was probably around this period, as would also witness the rhetorical effects used by the author(s). These quotations by the Antique and Late Antique authors show us that at least some of the elements of Hippocrates’ biography as preserved in the *Letters* were common knowledge.

The Contents of the Greek *Letters*²²

1. Artaxerxes to Petos
2. Petos to Artaxerxes
3. Artaxerxes to Hystanes (Gr. *Hustanès*)
4. Hystanes to Hippocrates
5. Hippocrates to Hystanes
6. Hippocrates to Demetrius
7. Hystanes to Artaxerxes
8. Artaxerxes to the Coans
9. The Coans to Artaxerxes (end of the ‘*Persian Letters*’)
10. The Council and the People of Abdera to Hippocrates
11. Hippocrates to the Senate and People of Abdera
12. Hippocrates to Philopoimen
13. Hippocrates to Dionysius
14. Hippocrates to Damagetus
15. Hippocrates to Philopoimen
16. Hippocrates to Crateuas
17. Hippocrates to Damagetus
18. Democritus to Hippocrates on the hellebore
19. The discourse on madness written by Hippocrates in his *Sacred Disease*
20. Hippocrates to Democritus
21. Hippocrates to Democritus on the hellebore (end of the ‘*Democritus Letters*’)
22. Hippocrates to his son Thessalos

²² I use the order and numbering of the *Letters* following Littré and Smith’s edition.
²³ Two versions of *Letters* 4 and 5 exist. The alternative versions are numbered 4a and 5a and show little difference in content. Cf. K. Brodersen, “Hippokrates und Artaxerxes...” on p. 102, n.12.
²⁴ Because of the context, I tend to identify the Hystanes of the *Letters* to the famous magi and alchemist Ostanes (i.e. Artaxerxes’ brother according to Diodorus Siculus, *Library of History*, XVII.5.5) who is mentioned among others by Diogenes Laertius in the introduction to book I of his *Lives and Opinions of Eminent Philosophers* on the origins of philosophy.
²⁵ A doublet of this letter is addressed to a certain Gorgias instead of King Demetrius.
23. Democritus to Hippocrates, on the Nature of Man
24. Hippocrates’ Hygiene for King Demetrius
25. Decree of the Athenians
26. Speech at the Altar (Epibomios)
27. The Ambassadorial Speech of Thessalos, son of Hippocrates (Presbeutikos)

A - The Persian Letters

*Letters* 1-9 narrate the episode of a plague which would have occurred within the ranks of the Persian army. Artaxerxes writes to an otherwise unknown Paitos or Petos requesting his advice on what ought to be done to stop the plague and to send some useful plants. Paitos answers that no natural remedies would be of any help and that only the best physician on earth, Hippocrates, of noble Greek descent (his lineage going back to Asclepius himself), may be of some help. Artaxerxes then writes to Hystanes/Ostanes, his governor in Asia Minor, to require from him the sending of Hippocrates. Hystanes transmits the query to Hippocrates and gets a refusal in which Hippocrates emphasizes his despise for money. Artaxerxes consequently threatens the Coans of destroying their island. The Coans then reaffirm their will not to let Hippocrates leave them.

B - The Democritus Letters and (C -) some Miscellanea

*Letters* 10-21, and 23 constitute a group of letters and short treatises related to Democritus of Abdera, the father of atomism. *Letters* 10-17 relate the expedition of Hippocrates to Abdera, at the request of its people who asked the great physician for his help in curing Democritus from madness. *Letters* 16/18/20/21 form a sub-group related to the use of plants in medicine, particularly of the hellebore. *Letters* 18 and 20 close on the announcement of the sending of a treatise, which follow in *Letters* 19 and 21. *Letter* 17 describes the encounter between Democritus and Hippocrates and sets it in a semi-comic and semi-philosophical tone. It was famously used by Robert Burton in the 17th c. in his writings on melancholy.

*Letters* 19 and 21 stand apart as they are composed of excerpts from two Hippocratic medical treatises. *Letter* 18 announces the sending by Democritus of his treatise on insanity, but what follows is made of excerpts of Hippocrates’s *Sacred Disease*. It

26 In his edition, W. D. Smith has adopted the reading Paitos, against D. Sakalis who argued for Petos as being the most correct form, because of its use in the oldest papyri. Cf. Smith, *Hippocrates. Pseudepigraphic Writings*, p. 18 and p. 19-20, n. 51 and Sakalis, “Beiträge”, p. 503 and p. 504, n. 26. Other possible identifications have been gathered by Fridolf Kudlien in his article Paetus (PW, Suppl. 10, 1965, p. 473-474).


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would seem the forger wanted as it seems to attribute Hippocratic theories to Democritus. 

Letter 22 from Hippocrates to his son Thessalos is propaedeutic, encouraging him to study geometry and arithmetic.

Letter 23 from Democritus to Hippocrates is enjoining the student of medicine to study philosophy. The treatise ends with a short piece on anatomy.

Letter 24 goes together with Letter 23 and is addressed by Hippocrates to a certain king Demetrius dedicating to him a treatise on the hygiene of life complementing the aforementioned anatomy.

In addition to the Letters, we find a group of documents of Hellenistic facture, usually referred to as Letters 25-27: the Decree of the Athenians, the Speech at the Altar, the Ambassadorial Speech of Thessalos, son of Hippocrates. These documents circulate only with the medical writings, and Smith believes they have been part of the Hippocratic Corpus when it was gathered in Alexandria.  

The papyri only attest to the Persian Letters (except Letters 1-2), and again only the elements of this exchange are known to the early Latin authors. The contamination of this “novel” by other popular stories needs to be investigated (in particular, Herodotus’ account of the visit of Ctesias of Cnidus to the Persian court and George Synkellos’s report about the initiation of [Bolus?] Democritus into the Persian and Egyptian mysteries at the hand of Ostanes.)

III. The Arabic Hippocratic Letters

We shall now turn to the contents of the London manuscript. The first thing to notice is that the Arabic version contains only part of the two main groups of letters (i.e. the ‘Persian novel’ and the ‘Democritus novel’), as well as two probably spurious Hippocratic treatises known as the Law and the Testament (or Disciple) and no trace of the miscellanea.

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29 Detailed study of the contents of the earliest witnesses (Greek papyri and manuscripts) and of their implications in K. Brodersen, “Hippokrates und Artaxeres…”, p. 100-110.
31 The Law is different from the celebrated Hippocratic Oath, but they tend to circulate together in the Greek manuscripts of the Hippocratic Corpus. A ‘medical law’ is alluded to by the Oath, and this is probably the reason why they are mentioned together by Erotian (in this order: Oath-Law, see J. Jouanna, *Hippocrate*, p. 543-544.
32 Jouanna considers the Law to have been composed later than the 4th c. BC and the Testament no earlier than the 1st or 2nd c. AD. See J. Jouanna, *Hippocrate*, 543-544 and 557 and V. Nutton, *Ancient medicine*, 156.

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Another point which strikes the reader at first glance is the fact that the two main novels are inverted in comparison to their order in the Greek manuscripts.

The order of the Letters in the Arabic manuscripts using the Greek numbering of the Letters according to Littré’s edition, is the following:

A. [The Democritus Letters]
Letter 10. رسالة أهل أبdera مدينة ديمقراطيس الحكيم يستدعون فيها حضور بقراط...
(Letter from the people of Abdera, the city of Democritus, inviting Hippocrates)
الجواب من بقراط...

Letter 11. رسالة بقراط إلى ديبوسيس...
(Hippocrates’ answer)

Letter 13. رسالة بقراط إلى داماغاطيس...
(Letter from Hippocrates to Dionysius)

Letter 15. رسالة بقراط إلى فيلموس...
(Letter from Hippocrates to Philopoinem [*فیلپوینم])

Letter 17. رسالة ديمقراطيس إلى بقراط...
(Letter from Democritus to Hippocrates)

Letter 18. رسالة عن هذه الرسالة من بقراط...
(Hippocrates’ answer to this letter)

B. [The Persian Letters]
Letter 1. رسالة أرطختست الكبير ملك فارس إلى فهطس...
(From Artaxerxes [should be read Artakhasht]33 to Petos)
الجواب لملك الملوك الكبير أرطحتست من فهطس...
(Petos’ answer)

Letter 3. من ملك الملوك الكبير أرطحتست إلى أوسطانيبوس...
(Artaxerxes to his governor in Cos, Awsṭānīyūs [= Hystanes])

Letter 4. فأفدذ أوسطانيبوس الكتاب إلى بقراط...
(From Awsṭānīyūs /Hystanes to Hippocrates)

Letter 5. فأجاهه بقراط...
(Hippocrates’ answer)

Letter 7. فأفدذ أوسطانيبوس الجواب إلى الملك...
(Awsṭānīyūs /Hystanes’ answer to Artaxerxes)

Letter 8. من ملك الملوك الكبير أرطختست إلى أهل فهطس...
(From Artaxerxes to the people of Cos)

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33 The name of the Persian king is given undotted but one should probably read Artakhasht (just adding a dot on the ḥā’), which is almost a perfect rendering of the pehlevi spelling, also preserved, among other authors, by the tenth-century al-Mas‘ūdī, in his al-Tanbih wa al-Ishrāf.
Very briefly, the following remarks can be made. We intend to develop them in the forthcoming publication of the Hippocratic writings preserved in the London manuscript.

**[The Democritus Letters]**

Letter 10 (Arabic) makes use of two elements which are not mentioned in Letter 10 (Greek). These elements may have been found in Letters 11 and 12 (Greek), but they may as well have been present in an assumed Letter 10 (Greek) which would have served as an original to the Arabic translator. The first of these two elements is the mention of the ten talents (Ar. qintar) of gold (Littré IX, 328/Smith 60.14) prepared by the Abderites for Hippocrates’s service (which in Greek appears only in Hippocrates’s answer where he recalls having refused money from the Persian king himself; the letter seems to imply that he did accept money in some cases, as Plato has it in Protagoras 311b, though we read in the later Arabic biographical tradition that Hippocrates practiced his art for free). The mention of the ten talents is repeated in Letter 11 (both in the Greek and the Arabic version).

As for the second element which I believe is either taken from Letter 12 (Greek) - a letter of Hippocrates to Philopoimen (a personality from Abdera who offered to accommodate him during his stay) - or shows the existence of a novel or collection of letters preceding the version of the Greek letters which has remained to us, it is the mention of the ‘good omens’ with which Hippocrates will hopefully arrive (see the Arabic in B.L. Or. 12070, fol 33b: “… wa tusri’u ilaynā bi-l-bakht al-sa‘id wa al-tā’ir al-maymūn…” and compare Littré, vol. IX, 330/Smith 62.1-2]. These are attributed to Hippocrates in Letter 12 (Greek) while Letter 10 (Arabic) has them in the invitation from the Abderites.

One should mention that Letter 12 (Greek) starts with the acknowledgement by Hippocrates of his being delivered two letters, one from the Abderites and one from Philopoimen. In comparison, Letter 11 (Arabic) opens with Hippocrates receiving the letter brought to him by the Abderites’ envoy. Letter 11 (Greek) does

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34 D. Sakalis assumes the existence of an earlier state of the Letters than the one which has been preserved by the earliest papyrus (Hippokratous Epistolai, pp. 88-89). I am grateful to J. van Ginkel for providing me with a translation of this extract from Sakalis’ introduction.
not contain such acknowledgement but opens rather abruptly with an introduction where the coming of Amelesagoras – whom we understand from the context is an Abderite citizen serving here as an envoy – occurred according to Hippocrates the day of the annual festival of the ‘Assumption of Asclepius’s staff’, during which the Asclepiads were walking in procession to the cypress grove.

**Letter 13** (Greek), from Hippocrates to someone named Dionysius, emphasizes the role of Hippocrates as being in charge of the affairs of Cos, his city, and must be considered as a piece in the voluminous file of the construction of the portrait of the ideal philosopher-king. Nevertheless, it seems to have been written with a clear comic intention when we read that Hippocrates is asking Dionysius not only to delegate him but to stay in his house and to keep an eye on his wife while he is travelling. The beginning of the letter advises Dionysius that he can “as well wait [for Hippocrates] in Halicarnassus,” possibly an allusion to Denys of Halicarnassus, one of the most famous Greek rhetors of the 1st c. BC. In this case, the intention of the author is not to compose a forgery but rather to entertain his reader with a stylistic exercise using different devices as the ‘epistolary novel’ and its setting of famous characters into different situations. In **Letter 13** (Arabic), it is mainly the comments made by Hippocrates on the nature of women (compared to trees) which have been preserved.

**Letter 14** (Greek) is not extent in Arabic, but its purpose seems to be of providing a literary composition about the request for a boat, as well as to bring in some philosophical comments on the ‘middle way’ which should be adopted by the Rhodians in order to live a philosophical life. In **Letter 17** (Greek) will come Hippocrates’s thanks to Damagetus for the boat he provided. These will also appear in **Letter 17** (Arabic), which has an extra sentence, absent from **Letter 17** (Greek) in which Hippocrates explains that the boat arrived to him in due time, brought him steadily to Abdera and how grateful he is.

**Letter 17.** The word ‘[black] poplar tree’ (Gr. aigeiros) is rendered with shajar al-asfīd, while the common Arabic name for ‘poplar’ should be hūr. There is however a Persian name for the ‘white poplar’ (which may also be used for the ‘willow’), the *sapedār*, and one may surmise that asfīd is an erroneous paleographic evolution of *sapedār*. 35 This would be coherent with the eastern transmission of the text (the copyist Ibn Durustawayh being a Persian from Ispahan). Later on in **Letter 17** (Greek), when Hippocrates starts his conversation with Democritus, the latter identifies him as the famous Asclepiad physician while in **Letter 17** [Arabic], Democritus praises Hippocrates as ‘the physician belonging to the best family, that of Heracles the Wise.’ This could very well be a mistake by either the translator or a copyist, since it is common to read in the Arabic biographies that Hippocrates

stemmed from the Heraclid seed, an element which in turn comes either from Letter 2 or from the Hippocrates Vita according to Soranos. In turn, if the Heraclid lineage, rather than the Asclepiad, is what was offered by the Greek manuscript which served as an original, this could bring an important new light on the genesis of the Hippocratic Letters and related materials. Letter 2 and the Vita insist on the double ascendency of Hippocrates as both Heraclid and Asclepiad. It is also surprising to read that Heracles is famous for his wisdom. Pinault remarks the important connection between Hippocrates and Heracles as attested by some surgical instruments produced in the Roman empire between the first and the third century AD. The possible role of Galen in the transformation of some of the references to Heracles into references to Asclepius remain to be investigated.

Letter 18 (Greek) announces at its end a treatise on the ‘Sacred Disease’ (i.e. epilepsy) sent by Hippocrates to Democritus. This Letter, made of excerpts from the Hippocratic writings is considered extremely dubious by the specialists. Using the same proceeding, the answer of Hippocrates to Letter 18, in Letter 20, announces at its end the sending of a treatise on the hellebore, which the translator seems to have been at pains of avoiding mentioning (for fear of being asked to provide some?). As a result, Letter 18 and 20, which are concerned with the hellebore in Greek, have in Arabic a simple allusion to it in Letter 18 as the hariq-beverage (which conforms with that the fact the hellebore is poisonous and burns who attempts to drink it). Letter 20 (Arabic) has no trace of the end of the Greek letter, in which Hippocrates was expressing his wish to continue exchanging writings with Democritus, and announcing the sending of a treatise on the Hellebore which constitute Letter 21 (Greek). About Letter 21, Smith notes that it is a ‘pastiche of statements on treatment with hellebore from the Corpus Hippocraticum and other sources.

[The Persian Letters]

Letter 1 and 2. The ‘Fahiṭos’ given in the Arabic version may stem from a transliteration of Greek ‘Païtos’ with a diaeresis, though this is not what we find in the manuscripts of the Greek Letters, in which the name is spelled Paitos or Petos. It would be tempting here to try to retrieve behind the reading Fahiṭos [= Pahiṭos, since Arabic doesn’t have a P-sound] an original Philatos, which has been preserved in the Arabic version of the Vita and is given as the king of Cos to whom Artaxerxes wrote to ask him to send Hippocrates to the Persian court, but this would need some further

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37 Compare Smith, Hippocrates. Pseudepigraphic Writings, p. 69, n. 2, pointing at the story of Heracles and two figures, one called Virtue and the other one called Happiness, as narrated by Xenophon, Memorabilia, 2.1.21-34, which may have been the model of the encounter of Hippocrates with the goddesses Truth and Opinion in Letter 17.
38 See Smith, Hippocrates. Pseudepigraphic Writings, p. 95, n. 1 and p. 97, n. 1.
A comparison with another Greek name mentioned in Letter 2 (see infra, about Phainaretè) gives a hint as to the possible reading of Fahiṭos as Petos, since the use is attested in Syriac of transliterating a wide range of Greek vowels and diphthongs by using a hé, which in turn is the equivalent of Arabic hā’, both in sound and in shape. This does not imply that the original of the Letters was in Syriac, but the translators seem to have been using changing methods of transliteration according to their epoch and their personal background.

Letter 2 (Arabic) has a genealogy of Hippocrates which is slightly shorter than the one we read in Greek: Hippocrates is the ninth from king Crisamis (ar. Aqrāsāmis); the eighteenth from Asclepius (uncorrectly read Asqlinīyūs, with the dot above instead of downwards, and reading nūn, instead of bā’); and the twentieth from Zeus (Zaws). This is consistent with Letter 2 (Greek), except that the latter also gives the names of the seven ancestors between Hippocrates and Crisamis. Letter 2 (Arabic) gives his mother as Fraksītā (in accordance with the Greek, but supplying the two dots to read a tā’) herself the daughter of Mahanāritī (= Phainaretè, which should be rendered Fahanāritī: the original fā’ has been mistaken for a mīm and hā’ has been used consistently with the Syriac usage of representing Greek diphthong ai or Greek epsilon with a hé).

In Letter 3 (Greek) from Artaxerxes to Hystanes, the latter is given as the governor (in Greek, ‘hyparch’) of the Hellespont while in Letter 3 (Arabic) he is Artaxerxes’s satrap or governor (‘āmiluhu) in Cos.

Letter 4 (Arabic) is summarized and not given in a direct style, while Letter 5, Hippocrates’s answer to Hystanes is given and translated more extensively. Letter 7 (Greek) from Hystanes to Artaxerxes is summarized by the narrator, as an introduction to the last letter given in direct style in the Arabic, from Artaxerxes to the Coans (= Letter 8). The narrator concludes by his own summary of Letter 9 (from

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43 Sebastian Brock, “Greek Words in Syriac: Some General Features” [repr. in: Ephrem to Romanos From Ephrem to Romanos: interactions between Syriac and Greek in Late Antiquity, Aldershot 1999, n. XV, p. 251-262, on, p. 256] remarks that the Syriac letter he was frequently employed to represent the Greek epsilon in the seventh century. I am again grateful to J. van Ginkel for this reference. See Payne-Smith, Thesaurus Syriacus, London 1901, vol. 2, col. 3018, pāhūn for Greek poiôn [also transliterated pahāūn, see col. 3042], pāhūnī for Greek Pauni, and even Pāhūnītāqū for Greek Peripatetikoi. For Syr. he= Gr. ai, see further op. cit., col. 3042, esp. phda for Gr. paida, and for Syr. he= Gr. epsilon, see col. 3044, s. v. phnṭā for Gr. pente. For Syr. he as Gr. alpha, see op. cit., col. 3043, s. v. Phṯāqīlīs for Gr. Patroklès.
the Coans to Artaxerxes), which in Greek is written in literary Doric. *Letter 9* (Arabic) should be compared to the *Athenian Decree* (Littré vol. IX, p. 400-401/Smith, p. 105-106), which seems here to be part of the conclusion of the Persian *Letters*. Hippocrates is said to have been granted by the Athenians (transposed in Arabic as “the king of the Greeks”) some special honours, as well as a crown of gold worth a thousand golden coins (with the Greek, but given in Arabic as *mithqāl*, which according to Hans Wehr’s *Dictionary* would have been in Egypt the equivalent of 24 *qīrāṭ* = 4.68 grammes), and the right for the Coans to be trained in Athens as ephebes.

The Transliteration of the Greek names in the titles of the *Letters*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Greek transliteration</th>
<th>Greek</th>
<th>Arabic translit.</th>
<th>Arabic</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Abdēra</td>
<td>Ἀβδηρα</td>
<td>Abdirā</td>
<td>أبدرا</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dēmocritos</td>
<td>Δημοκρῖτος</td>
<td>Dimuqrāṭis</td>
<td>ديمقرطيس</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ippokrates</td>
<td>Ἰπποκράτης</td>
<td>Buqrāt</td>
<td>بقرط</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dionusios</td>
<td>Διόνυσος</td>
<td>Dhiūnūsīs</td>
<td>ذئنوسيس</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Philopoimen</td>
<td>Φιλοποίμην</td>
<td>Filimūs</td>
<td>فيلموس</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Damagetos</td>
<td>Δαμάγητος</td>
<td>Dhamāghāṭīs</td>
<td>داماغاطيس</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Artaxerxes</td>
<td>Ἀρταξέρξης</td>
<td>Artahast</td>
<td>أرطخست</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Paitos/Petos</td>
<td>Παίτος/Πέτος</td>
<td>Fahitos/Faitos</td>
<td>فهيطس</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ustanès</td>
<td>Υστάνης</td>
<td>Ustānīūs</td>
<td>أوسطانيوس</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

In addition to the comments made above, we may notice that the transliteration is rather faithful except for Philopoimen, which again may be explained on paleographical ground. The quality of the transmission of the Greek names is a proof that our manuscript is at an early stage in the transmission.

IV. Conclusion

In his monumental *Geschichte des Arabischen Schriftums*, Fuat Sezgin pointed to the existence of two Arabic manuscripts of the *Hippocratic Letters*. The manuscript presented above seems to be the unique version of a comprehensive collection of the *Letters* as they were translated in Arabic at an uncertain date. As for the second manuscript pointed at by Sezgin, it is preserved in Tabrīz and contains, according to the description in the library’s catalogue, the letters as part of a medical
commentary by the celebrated astronomer and physician Ibn Riḍwān (d. 1061) who lived at the Fatimid court in Cairo during the first half of the eleventh century.\footnote{45 F. Sezgin, GAS III, 43; Fihrist Kitābhānah Millī Tabrīz, Tabrīz 1354 Solar Hijra/1975, vol. šād-yā’, p. 1129. On Ibn Riḍwān, see EI2, vol. III, p. 906, s. v. Ibn Riḍwān [J. Schacht], I have not been able yet to see the Tabrīz manuscript.}


It is not clear in the Tabrīz manuscripts if what is considered as Letter 1 in the catalogue would actually contain the complete ‘Persian Letters’ (not identified by the author of the catalogue) or a summary, since the description seems to mention only the first letter, immediately followed by the ‘Democritus Letters’. Do we have to consider, as does the author of the catalogue, that the Letters were used by the Egyptian physician Ibn Riḍwān within a commentary on the Hippocratic ‘Law’ or was a general title such as ‘Ibn Riḍwān’s Commentary to the Hippocratic Law’ given later on to this collection of texts? We did point earlier to a possible connection between the Law, which insists on the fact that physicians should not accept money in exchange for the exercise of their art, and Letter 11.\footnote{46 See further O. Temkin, “Hippocrates as the Physician of Democritus,” in Gesnerus (Basel), 42, 1-2, 1985, p. 455-464, on p. 456.}

That the Law and the Testament were known to Ibn Riḍwān is attested by a fragment of his Fi al-tatarruq bi-al-ṭibb ilā al-sa’ādah (On the Progress to True Happiness through Medicine,) published in his time by Franz Rosenthal.\footnote{47 The Tatarruq was edited, translated and fully commented by Albert Dietrich, ‘All ibn Riḍwān. Über den Weg zur Glückseligkeit durch den ärztlichen Beruf, Vandenhoeck and Ruprecht: Göttingen, 1982 (Abhandlungen der Akademie der Wissenschaften in Göttingen, Philologisch-Historische Klasse, Dritte Folge, nr. 129).} There, Ibn Riḍwān gives a list of treatises by Hippocrates transmitted to him by the Christian historian Yahyā ibn Saʿīd al-Antakī who had moved to Antioch after a stay at the Fatimid court. Of the fifty-five items on the list, Ibn Riḍwān says he missed only twelve. Further on, Ibn Abī Uṣaybi’a does mention in the list of Ibn Riḍwān’s works both the ‘Commentary on Hippocrates’ Law’ and the ‘Commentary on the Testament, also known as the Rule of medicine (tartīb al-ṭibb)’.\footnote{48 F. Rosenthal (“An Eleventh-Century List of the Works of Hippocrates,” in Journal of the History of Medicine and Allied Sciences, 28 (1973), p. 156-165, on page159-160) incorrectly identified the Testament, which is absent from the classical Hippocrates’ editions but has since then received more attention (see references in the following note infra).}

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Greek precisely says ‘On How Should Be A Student in Medicine According to Hippocrates').\(^{49}\) The text of the Testament is also given by Ibn Abī Uṣaybi‘a earlier in his book, in the Hippocrates chapter (bāb IV), but the translation he used is different from the one preserved in the London manuscript.

As noted by Dietrich, a good number of Arabic sources know of a passage of Galen’s treatise ‘That the Best Physician is also a Philosopher’ according to which Hippocrates was invited to the court of Artaxerxes I, but Ibn Abī Uṣaybi‘a knows further a Risālah ilā Artakhšast al-kabīr malik Fāris lammā ʿarada fi ayāmihī li-l-Furs al-mawtān\(^{50}\) [= Letter to Artaxerxes the Great, King of the Persians, when the Persians were in his time affected by the plague].\(^{51}\) Directly after this letter Ibn Abī Uṣaybi‘a mentions the Risālah ilā jamā‘a min ahl Abdīra, madīnat Dimuqrāṭ al-ḥakīm, jawāban ʿan risālatihim ilayhi li-istidʿāihi wa ḥuḍūrihi li-ʾilāj Dimuqrāṭis [= Letter to a Group of People from Abdera, the city of Democritus the Wise, Answering their Letter Inviting him to come and cure Democritus], which probably represent Letters 10 and 11).

As is now amply demonstrated, the study of these two manuscripts of the Hippocratic Letters is of crucial importance for the future studies of the Hippocratic Pseudepigrapha and short treatises such as the Law, the Testament/Disciple, and the Oath (since they circulate in triad, as was established by Jacques Jouanna). Further on, both the Letters and the Law show discrepancies with the texts attested by the Greek tradition, and these differences should be investigated by specialists of the Hippocratic Corpus.

Hans Daiber, speaking at the First International Congress on Democritus in 1983, insisted on the importance of the text for the understanding of the biographical information available to the Arab scholars during the Middle Ages but the proceedings of the conference remain of a difficult access in libraries.\(^{52}\) The complete study of the materials compiled by the authors of the Arabic bio-doxyographies is only at a preliminary stage, and many texts remain to be critically edited in order to get a full appreciation of the diversity of the available sources. It will come as no surprise that the continuation of the Greek Bioi-tradition reached the state of an achieved art


\(^{51}\) We don’t know of a letter directly addressed by Hippocrates to Artaxerxes, but the title may have been given broadly to the collection studied above.

among the medieval Arabic-speaking authors for whoever has contemplated the great number of scholarly ṭabaqāt they have left to posterity.  