

systematically made to it afterwards in the notes to the translation. In contrast, even though the author “share[s] Zonta’s opinion that Balīnūs was one of the most important sources” for this treatise (p. 329, n. 50), oddly enough no parallel or comparison at all is provided in the otherwise well documented footnotes to the Epistle in question—in fact mostly notes address terminological cruces. Concerning Epistle 22, for Aristotle’s authentic *On Animals* only the editions of Kruk and of Brugmann and Drossaart are referred to, but future research may have to pay attention also to the pseudoepigraphical *Nu’ūt*, abundantly documented in its indirect tradition, for which one can still rely on Ullmann’s overview (1972: 8–9, 23).

Unlike the rest of the sections on the natural sciences, Epistle 20, even if not absolutely void of Aristotelian doctrines, reflects rather a preoccupation with Ismailism and angelological matters. Seemingly interpolated into the sequence of chapters, Epistle 20 is, in Baffioni’s words (pp. 4–5), actually more suited to be an *introduction* to these epistles.

With *On the Natural Sciences* Baffioni has taken us one big step further towards the establishment of the first critical edition of the Brethren’s encyclopaedical corpus and has provided historians of

Arabic Islamic science with a refreshed reading of a primary source of first rank.

Theo Loinaz

RAPOPORT, Yossef and Emilie SAVAGE-SMITH (eds. and transs.), *An Eleventh-Century Egyptian Guide to the Universe. The Book of Curiosities, Islamic Philosophy, Theology and Science, Texts and Studies* volume 87, Leiden – Boston, Brill, 2014, xii + 796 pp. (with 51 illustrations and facsimile).

Brill’s unshakeable commitment to the highest standards of academic publishing has combined with the erudite scholarship of two first-rank researchers in order to produce one of the finest contributions to the field of Islamic studies of the last years. Behind this gorgeous volume there lies over a decade of hard work since the acquisition of the manuscript of the *Book of Curiosities* (MS Arab c.90) by the Bodleian Library in 2002—the book was in fact long preceded by a website (on line since 2007). The task of the editors-translators has greatly benefited from the collaboration of a long list of scholars who have contributed with their expertise in the most disparate areas of knowledge (pp. xi–xii).

In a compact introduction (pp. 1–35) some clues are given regarding

the composition of the treatise. The editors track some hints for a Fāṭimī connection of the still unidentified author, give Egypt as a likely place of production of the text, and narrow down its chronological range to between 1020 and 1050. Nor is the reader left without details on the textual transmission: an exhaustive description of all manuscript witnesses is provided (pp. 2–11) and a solid *stemma codicum* reconstructs the probable relationships between all preserved copies (p. 13).

Then, after a high definition facsimile of all forty eight folios of MS A, there comes a full edition of the Arabic text (pp. ٢٨٥–١) that takes also into account the testimony of later copies (all eight known manuscripts have been collated and variant readings are given in an apparatus on the footnotes). We would like to underline two salient innovations introduced by Rapoport and Savage-Smith in their edition. On the one hand, the use of original manuscript images methodically linked to the text through numerical references—which makes the edition all the more serviceable. On the other hand, as the editors themselves acknowledge, the flow of the reading is somewhat slowed down by the admittedly non-standard editorial procedure of giving a diplomatic reading of MS A (even when blatantly wrong)

followed by the corrected readings in brackets. It is a bold choice—a sacrifice done with a view to keeping a perfect correspondence between the text and the facsimile (p. 35). The result is a quite unorthodox yet highly functional edition, the aim of which is “to study a specific manuscript—with its images, maps, and diagrams—as well as the treatise of which it is the earliest copy” (pp. 34–35).

The anonymous eleventh-century treatise (duly rendered into English with almost as much text in the footnotes as in the translation) is divided into two maqālahs discussing, respectively, celestial matters and geography. From a historical point of view, the illustrated ten-chapter exposition of otherwise well-documented astronomical and astrological data found in the first maqālah is not to be undervalued; however researchers will appreciate even more the translators' impressive effort to identify each and every one of the stars, mansions, and constellations mentioned in the text. The fruit of this tour de force is a magnificent glossary of star-names (pp. 529–662) into which the most important data scattered in the footnotes is gathered. There one will find all the names both in transliteration and in Arabic script, alongside their definition and identification (including their Greek names and even Persian ones when

relevant), as well as a selection of precedents and parallels in the Islamicate tradition.

We may dare say that the twenty five chapters of the second maqālah show, in contrast, a more intrinsic value for the historian of science—namely, of Islamicate cartography. This is confirmed by the publication in recent years of a number of papers devoted to the importance of MS Arab c.90 for this field of studies. Figure 2.6 (on pp. ١٥٢ | 447), for example, depicts “the earliest surviving map, in any language, to depict the Mediterranean Sea in such detail” (p. 447, n. 1)—to which one should also add the maps of Sicily and Cyprus. As with the rest of the treatise, illustrations are provided for all the maps present in the basic manuscript and an attempt is made to identify all toponyms with their corresponding Greek and Arabo-Iranian names.

The volume still includes a rich bibliography (pp. 663–677) and six indexes: an Index of animals and plants, an Index of astronomical and astrological terms, an Index of peoples and Tribes, an Index of place names, an Index of persons and treatises cited in the *Book of Curiosities*, and a General index.

On a less erudite note, one of the most attractive features of the volume is its extensive use of illustrations. In addition to the full coloured plates reproducing the

manuscript, it includes a great many black and white reproductions of manuscript folios containing relevant codicological and textual data. Thus, colophons and openings are reproduced (pp. 6, 7, 10, 23–24), as well as astronomical diagrams both in Arabic script and in Karshūnī (pp. 16–20). Rapoport and Savage-Smith have also produced a fine synoptic table of illustrations of eleven comets (p. 21) and seven stars (p. 22) based not only on manuscript A but also on the later copies DBM. Original sketch maps in the diverse copies are provided too (pp. 26–28). The editorial originality of the publication under review is shown once again in the taboo-breaking use of red ink in the Arabic text, by which rubrics regain their primitive appearance and function.

A hitherto unexplored Arabic text of respectable age that certainly has some bearing in the history of Islamicate science, a sheer amount of scholarly information carefully selected and presented in the most profitable way for researchers, and a highly reader-friendly and enticing format—these are some of the assets that make of this book a great contribution to Mediaeval Arabic studies and a model to follow on more than one account.

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