

special wisdom from the Ruler of the world”.

A German Foreword (i–xii) is followed by an Introduction (pp. 1–56, numerals in English). Weisser discusses briefly problems related to *Sirr al-khalīqa*, and gives a detailed description and an appraisal of sixteen Arabic manuscripts, from which she selected four in order to establish the Arabic text. This Introduction also provides footnotes and an extensive bibliography (pp. 57–66); all this section is in manuscript. Weisser quotes from Julius Ruska that this book, *Sirr al-khalīqa*, is the oldest Arabic text that has preserved the alchemical work entitled “*Lawḥ al-zumurrud*” (*Tabula Smaragdina*).

One would have liked to have seen all this book properly printed, especially as previous Arabic publications of Aleppo Institute for the History of Arabic Science have proved to be of a high standard.

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URSULA WEISSER, *Das “Buch über das Geheimnis der Schöpfung” von Pseudo-Apollonios von Tyana*, (*Ars Medica*, Abt. III, Bd. 2), Berlin and New York, Walter de Gruyter, 1980, 8vo, pp. xl, 258, DM. 180.00/\$15.00.

This is a highly welcome companion to Dr. Weisser’s own edition of the Arabic *Sirr al-khalīqa* (*Liber de secretis naturae et occultis rerum causis*). There are three sections of similar length: an account of the major problems surrounding the origins and transmission of the text; a summary, paragraph by paragraph, of its contents; and a commentary. There is also an extensive bibliography (pp. xv–xl). This is a work of great diligence and clarity. It will be of inestimable value to students of medieval esotericism (hermetism, alchemy, cosmology) in general and the history of Arabic science in particular.

The involved question of the origin of the *Sirr* has exercised scholars for some time. Weisser critically and soberly surveys the literature with admirable succinctness and lucidity. On one or two occasions she allows her own views to obtrude a little. Her preference is for the assumption that a late Greek original was translated into Arabic in the eighth century, and furnished with its initial account of God’s attributes by “the priest Sājiyūs of Nābulus”, more or less as asserted by the text (i.2.4). This is not exactly what the evidence would *prima facie* suggest. The basic facts about the *Sirr*, a rather feeble adaptation of earlier material, are still those established by Ruska, Plessner, and, above all, Kraus: (a) the *Sirr* shares with the Syriac *Book of Treasures* of Job of Edessa (early ninth century) a *problemata physica* source; (b) its longer version – designated *B* by Weisser and regarded as an adaptation, datable to the first half of the ninth century, of the shorter version *A* – includes the larger part of Nemesius’ *De natura hominis*; (c) it shares some material with the hermetic treatise *Iṣṭamāṭīs*; (d) it shares the *tabula smaragdina* with the *Secretum secretorum* (see Ullmann, *Natur- und Geheimwissenschaften im Islam*, p. 171).

Weisser ignores (d); and as the history of the *Secretum* (for which see M. Manzalaoui in *Oriens* 23–24, 1974) is no less obscure than that of the *Sirr*, this may be reasonable. Observation (a) too, for all its suggestiveness, yields no immediate conclusion. As regards (c), Weisser appears to be right in arguing that the *Sirr* depends on

the *Iṣṭamātīs*, but wrong in suggesting that the borrowing took place at a “pre-Arabic” stage (p. 69). The first of the parallels she points out (*ibid.*) is so close in the actual wording of the Arabic texts as to make it far more probable that it was the Arabic version of the *Iṣṭamātīs* which was used in compiling the Arabic version of the *Sirr*.

A similar query, but one of greater consequence, arises in connexion with (b). Weisser observes that there are parallels to Nemesius even in the shorter version *A* (p. 65). The most important of these parallels – let me call it *NS* – occurs at pp. 399.4–400.10 of her edition of version *A*. It is here that version *B* offers its longer extract from the *De nat. hom.*, which I shall call *NL*. It is not entirely clear from her edition, which relegates *NL* to an appendix, whether *B* has *NL* in addition to *NS* or in its stead. The question is crucial, for *NS* is included in *NL* almost verbatim (a fact not sufficiently appreciated by Weisser). Hence if *NS* were duplicated in *B*, the secondariness of the longer version would, of course, be beyond doubt. But if, as one would expect, *A* simply has *NS* where *B* has *NL*, there is no earthly reason why *A* should not be an abbreviation of *B*. Indeed, this would then be the only natural assumption to make: for in no way can *NS* be regarded as anything but a minimally adapted extract from the beginning of *NL* (*contra* p. 65). In either case, the shorter version of the *Sirr* no less than the longer postdates the Arabic version of Nemesius on which they both draw.

Prima facie, therefore, the most reasonable assumption would appear to be that the *Sirr* was first composed in Arabic, from sources including the *Iṣṭamātīs* and a translation of the *De nat. hom.*, by the translator of the latter. For the *Sirr* as a whole shares with *NL* some striking peculiarities of diction (for examples see Ullmann, *loc. cit.*, pp. 172f.). Minor differences (unduly emphasized by Weisser, p. 65) will be explained if we assume that much of the *Sirr* is a product of free composition. This would also go a long way to explain the deviations of *NL* from the text of Nemesius, which are clearly tendentious and cannot (*pace* W., p. 67) be passed off as fortuitous.

The date of the *Sirr* remains uncertain. It must have been put together at the same time, as, or a little later than, the Arabic version of the *De nat. hom.* underlying both *NL* and *NS*. A *terminus post quem* will be provided by the appearance of the *Iṣṭamātīs* – if it can be dated. On general grounds of style, one would be disinclined to consider a date later than the middle of the ninth century. To clarify this and other issues, much further study will be needed. In this the present book will prove immensely helpful.

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FRANZ KÖCHER, *Die babylonisch-assyrische Medizin in Texten und Untersuchungen*. Band V: *Keilschrifttexte aus Ninive 1*, pp. xliii, plates 123, 1979; Band VI: *Keilschrifttexte aus Ninive 2*, pp. xl, plates 175, 1980. Berlin and New York, Walter de Gruyter, DM.360.00.

Professor Köcher of the Institut für die Geschichte der Medizin, Berlin, continues his magnum opus with the collection of Babylonian and Assyrian medical texts now in the British Museum but originally found in the ruins of the ancient capital city of