

## Book Reviews

a way which might confuse the mind of the average visitor to the Science Museum. Nevertheless, the effect of reading it should be to increase viewers' appreciation of the fourth dimension that lies behind the exhibits. Sir Henry could hardly complain at that.

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URSULA WEISSER (editor), "*Buch über Geheimnis der Schöpfung und die Darstellung der Natur*" von Pseudo-Apollonios von Tyana, Aleppo, Institute for the History of Arabic Science, 1979, 4to, pp. xiii, 66, 702, \$15.00 (paperback).

This book is an Arabic edition of an alchemical work, *Sirr al-khalīqa* (Secret of creation), also known by the title *Kitab al-'ilal* (Book of causes). It begins with a Preface (pp. 7–9) in which the editor, Dr. Ursula Weisser, discusses controversial opinions by historians of science, from the eighteenth century until the present time, about the authorship and contents of *Sirr al-khalīqa*. Weisser also summarizes briefly previous studies in the text of this book. The Arabic Introduction to this edition (pp. 10–18) treats, among other things, of the authorship, commonly attributed to Apollonius of Tyana, a Pythagorean of the first century A.D., whose name appears in Arabic medical and scientific manuscripts as Blīnūs, Blīnās, and other corrupt forms. He was better known among the Arabic-speaking peoples as *ṣāhib al-ṭilasmāt* (makers of talismans). In his time, he was considered divine by some, while others thought he was a sorcerer and a companion of the *jinn*. From studies in the text of sixteen manuscripts, Weisser agrees with the opinion of Professor F. Sezgin (*GAS*, IV, 79 f.), that the Arabic translation of *Sirr al-khalīqa* was made by one Sagiyūs, a priest at Nablus, from a Greek original written in the sixth century A.D., but now lost. (This Arabic edition materialized from a doctoral thesis, supervised by Sezgin, and submitted in 1974.)

The Arabic text, Weisser concludes, was made by a translator who lived around A.H. 200/A.D. 815–816, during the reign of the Caliph al-Ma'mūn (A.H. 198–218/A.D. 813–833).

The contents of *Sirr al-khalīqa* fall into six treatises (*maqalat*): the first is an introductory section, "On the Creator and His creatures"; this is divided into two sections, one attributed to Sagiyūs, the other to Apollonius himself. The second to the sixth, respectively, are: "On celestial bodies and meteorology", "On minerals", "On plants", "On animals", and "On human beings".

The title-page, as well as pages 7–17 (Preface and Introduction), are printed; all the remaining Arabic section is handwritten. The detailed table of contents (pp. i–xii) and the critical edition, including the critical apparatus (pp. 1–525) are followed by Supplement I (pp. 527–532, extracts from the book *K. al-Khilqa*) and Supplement II (pp. 537–633, extracts from the book *Tabī'at al-insān* of Nemesius of Emesa, c. A.D. 400). This is followed by indexes of personal names, places, books, and a subject-index (pp. 634–702); all previous numerals are in Arabic. The text is written in clear *naskhī* script, and the variant readings are adequately recorded. It is worth noting that, according to the text, the author identifies himself, saying: "I am Blīnūs *al-ḥakīm* (philosopher), maker of talismans and wonders; I am the one who is gifted with

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