

Ziegler, Vicky: *Im Garten der Alchemie. Traditionsgeschichtliche Einordnung des arabisch-alchemischen Werks Kitāb ar-Rawḍa mit deutscher Übersetzung und kritischer Edition.* Baden-Baden: Ergon 2022 (= Mitteilungen zur Sozial- und Kulturgeschichte der islamischen Welt 42). € 114,00. ISBN 978-3-95650-928-5.

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In this work, V. Ziegler offers a comprehensive study, critical edition and German translation of the *Kitāb al-rawḍa* (“Book of the Garden”), attributed to the Andalusī occultist Maslama b. Qāsim al-Qurṭubī (293/906–353/964). This alchemical treatise is divided into twelve chapters, which cover the names of the alchemical stone, its characteristics and parts, and then the alchemical processes. Its content goes beyond alchemy, since it deals with philosophical, cosmological and theological subjects, as well as arithmetic, geometry and astrology.

Let’s be clear from the outset: Ziegler’s book is a monumental work of high quality, wide-ranging and multidisciplinary, in which the young author demonstrates both detailed analytical capacity and a high-flying sense of synthesis. The text she has chosen to publish is long and difficult to access; however, she has succeeded in setting out its history and content clearly, thanks to detailed research covering several disciplines.

Ziegler begins with a general introduction and contextualisation of alchemy, its history and significance, with a particular focus on the Arab-Muslim world (pp. 15–33). She also lists existing editions and works in progress in the field.

The *Kitāb al-rawḍa* is then studied from a historical point of view (pp. 35–87): its title, its division into chapters – two parameters that vary from one manuscript to another – but also its content, the authorship of the work and its dating, its context of production and its reception. The question of authorship, and the closely related one of dating, is a particularly thorny one. V. Ziegler investigates in detail both the style and the content of the text and compares them with those of the *Rutbat al-ḥakīm* (“Rank of the Sage”) and the *Ġayāt al-ḥakīm* (“Aim of the Sage”), attributed to the same Maslama b. Qāsim al-Qurṭubī. She concludes that the work is indeed by the pen of the Andalusī occultist. If correct, this would lead her to date the treatise to the first half of the 4th/10th century, since it would predate the *Rutbat al-ḥakīm*. On the other hand, the text is cited in the *Kitāb al-Shawāhid fī al-Ḥajar al-wāḥid* (“Book of Testimonies on the Unique Stone”) by Abū al-Ḥasan al-Ḥalabī, who lived after the 6th/12th century. She therefore asserts that the *Kitāb al-rawḍa* was written before the 7th/13th century (p. 75).

However, this is incorrect, since she does not give a *terminus ad quem* for this author¹.

The last sub-chapter, on the reception of the work, was somewhat disappointing, since it largely repeats the study of the manuscript tradition and later quotations, already dealt with in the research on dating. A more in-depth study would, of course, be limited by the state of knowledge in the field.

The third and most voluminous chapter deals with the contents of the *Kitāb al-rawḍa* (pp. 89–295). It is divided into several sub-chapters, such as the place of alchemy among the sciences, the theoretical foundations of the treatise, the mysticism of numbers, causality and cosmology, supralunar causes, the alchemical opus – the longest of the sub-chapters –, allegorical representations, and the link between the macrocosm and the microcosm. In the section on the alchemical operation, V. Ziegler discusses transmutation, the stone and its characteristics, practical aspects and the various processes. Each section concludes with a short summary. The content is set out very clearly and generally follows a well-defined structure: summary of this or that doctrinal point with references to the text itself, attempt at interpretation, comparison and parallels with other similar works and search for a possible source or influence. The author has based her interpretations solely on published Arabic texts or those available in translation. Certain attempts at interpretation may sometimes seem, if not risky, at least unjustified by the sources (e. g. p. 229 or 256).

Finally, the author summarises all the conclusions of the various chapters in a separate section (pp. 297–303). Ziegler’s conclusions lead her to place the *Kitāb al-rawḍa* in direct continuity with the *Jābirian Corpus* and the *Rasā’il Ikhwān al-ṣafā’* (“Epistles of the Brethren of Purity”). It also shows the influence of Greek alchemy, Greco-Arabic translations, such as the Arabic dialogues attributed to Zosimus of Panopolis, the *Kitāb mafātīḥ al-ṣan’a* (“Book of the Keys of the Art”) and the *Muṣḥaf al-ṣuwar* (“Tome of Images”), and lastly treatises written by Arabic-speaking authors, such as Abū Bakr al-Rāzī (d. 313/925 or 323/935) and Abū al-Qāsim al-ʿIrāqī (fl. 7th/13th century). Alongside strictly alchemical sources, she highlights a number of non-alchemical sources, as the philosophers al-Fārābī (d. 339/950) and al-Kindī (d. c. 252/870), but also Euclid’s *Elements* or Aristotle’s *De anima*,

¹ It should be noted that this *Kitāb al-Shawāhid* appears in manuscript Istanbul, Süleymaniye, Laleli 2771, dated 726/1326, which would seem to me less questionable as a *terminus ad quem*. It is also found in the witness Istanbul, Süleymaniye, Ragıp Paşa 963, perhaps older and in any case earlier than 826/1423. See Marion Dapsens, *Les Masā’il Khālīd li-Maryānus al-rāhib dans leurs versions arabe et latine*: Éditions critiques et traductions, Firenze, Sismel – Edizioni del Galluzzo, 2024, pp. 190–191.

available in Arabic at the time; she also shows a Neoplatonic influence. Indeed, it has to be said that the *Kitāb al-rawḍa* deals, alongside strictly alchemical operations, with broader subjects such as arithmetic, geometry, theology and cosmology.

Three brief remarks concern the sources of the treatise: on the one hand, like Th. Abt, V. Ziegler regards the *Kitāb mafātīḥ al-ṣanʿa* and the *Muṣḥaf al-ṣuwar* as translations from the Greek (e. g. p. 104: “In gleicher Weise erklärt Zosimos aus Panopolis (fl. 3. Jahrhundert) [...] im *K. Mafātīḥ aṣ-ṣanʿa*”, cf. also pp. 106 and 206), mentioning, however, that the question is not unanimous (p. 32, n. 3 and p. 92). Yet Hallum’s arguments seem to me to be much stronger than those of Abt²; and in any case, it seems to me wrong to speak of a 3rd-century statement by Zosimos, when it appears only in an Arabic text, probably dating from the 3rd/9th century, of which no Greek original has been preserved. Another remark concerns the *Jābirian Corpus*: V. Ziegler repeatedly considers the *Kitāb Uṣṭānis* (“Book of Ostanēs”) and the *Kitāb al-ḥabīb* (“Book of the Lover”) (pp. 100, 110, 231, 276³ and passim), to be an integral part of this corpus. Now, these texts were edited by M. Berthelot and O. Houdas in 1893 among other alchemical texts, most of which do belong to the *Jābirian Corpus*⁴. Their entire edition was then copied by A. al-Mizyādī, under the title *Rasāʾil Jābir b. Ḥayyān* (“Epistles of Jābir b. Ḥayyān”),⁵ but basically, the two texts in question are absolutely not part of this corpus⁶. Finally, Ziegler does not appear to be familiar with G. Lacaze’s recent and

excellent edition and study of the *Turba philosophorum*⁷, and cites the work of J. Ruska, which is almost a century dated⁸.

The principles of translation and the textual tradition are then briefly examined (pp. 305–320), before turning to the text itself (pp. 321–509). Ziegler demonstrates the difficulty of translating a text that straddles philosophy and alchemy coherently and without betraying it. She justifies the translation choices made for several central terms, distancing herself somewhat from her predecessors, J. Ruska, A. Siggel and M. Ullmann. One translation, however, did not convince me: that of *ṭālib* (“seeker”) and *tilmīdh* (“disciple”) by “Adept” (e. g. p. 442, beginning § 2 and 454, 3 lines before the end, and passim). “Adept”, from the Latin *adeptus*, *adipisci* (“to obtain”, “to acquire”) literally refers to one who has already attained science, not to the disciple or one who is still in search of it.

The text is transmitted by six manuscripts, one of which V. Ziegler was unable to access⁹. The oldest witness, preserved in Istanbul, Süleymaniye, Hacı Beşir Ağa 505, is dated 756/1335; she has chosen it as the base manuscript for her edition. Her stemma is succinctly justified, but apart from the order of the chapters and the title, the tradition of the text is relatively stable. She does not take into account for her collation and edition, the long quotation in the *Kitāb al-Shawāhid fī al-Ḥajar al-wāḥid* by Abū al-Ḥasan al-Ḥalabī, which she consulted in the manuscript London, British Library, Or. Add. 23418, dated 1237/1821. However, the *Kitāb al-Shawāhid* is also transmitted by two much older and reliable manuscripts: Istanbul, Süleymaniye, Laleli 2771, dated 726/1326, and Ragıp Paşa 963, without a date but in any case, earlier than 826/1423¹⁰. The former predates then the base manuscript of the edition and is the oldest witness to the text, albeit in the indirect tradition; it would therefore have seemed useful to me to take it into account in establishing the edition and to place it in the stemma.

As far as the edition is concerned, it is appreciable that V. Ziegler has included in the German translation notes on

2 Theodor Abt, *The Book of Pictures. Muṣḥaf aṣ-ṣuwar by Zosimos of Panopolis. Edition of the Pictures and Introduction*, Zürich, Living Human Heritage Publications, 2007; Theodor Abt and Salwa Fuad, *The Book of Pictures. Muṣḥaf aṣ-ṣuwar by Zosimos of Panopolis. Introduction and Translation*, Zürich, Living Human Heritage Publications, 2011; Theodor Abt and Salwa Fuad, *The Book of the Keys of the Work, Kitāb Mafātīḥ aṣ-ṣanʿa, by Zosimos of Panopolis*, Zürich, Living Human Heritage Publications, 2016; Benjamin Hallum, “Zosimos Arabus: the Reception of Zosimos of Panopolis in the Arabic/Islamic World” PhD thesis, Warburg Institute, 2008; Benjamin Hallum, “The *Tome of Images*: An Arabic Compilation of Texts by Zosimos of Panopolis and a Source of the *Turba Philosophorum*” *Ambix*, 56/1 (2009), pp. 76–88.

3 For that passage e. g. the *Kitāb al-ḥabīb*, which is in fact a compilation of quotations from various earlier dialogues and epistles, actually quotes the *Muṣḥaf al-ṣuwar*, which is a far away from the *Jābirian Corpus*!

4 Marcellin Berthelot, Octave V. Houdas, and Rubens Duval, *La chimie au Moyen Âge*, Paris, Imprimerie nationale, 1893, vol. 2.

5 Jābir ibn Ḥayyān, *Rasāʾil Jābir ibn Ḥayyān. Thalāthūn kitāb wa-risāla*, ed. Aḥmad F. al-Mizyādī, Bayrūt, Dār al-kutub al-ʿilmiyya, 2006.

6 Cf. Paul Kraus, *Jābir ibn Ḥayyān, contribution à l’histoire des idées scientifiques dans l’Islam. Volume I, Le corpus des écrits jābiriens*: Vol. 1, *Le corpus des écrits jābiriens*, al-Qāhira, Institut français d’archéologie orientale, 1943.

7 Grégoire Lacaze, *Turba philosophorum. Congrès pythagoricien sur l’art d’Hermès*, Leiden, Brill, 2018.

8 Julius Ruska, *Turba philosophorum: ein Beitrag zur Geschichte der Alchemie*, Berlin, Julius Springer, 1931.

9 I must confess to having recently found, by pure serendipity, two partial manuscripts of the *Kitāb al-rawḍa*: Istanbul, Üniversitesi Kütüphanesi, A 6247, ff. 28v–44r (989/1581 and possibly 945/1538) and Istanbul, Süleymaniye, Bagdatli Vehbi 2273, ff. 14r–35r (before 1323/1905, probably copied from the previous one). These manuscripts bear neither the title of the work nor the name of the author, but only the names of the chapters, making it impossible to find them by searching the catalogues.

10 The quotation appears respectively on f. 35v, l. 17 and ss. and f. 32r, l. 1 and ss.

the major discrepancies in the manuscript tradition; on the other hand, it is a pity not to find more explanations throughout the text, or at least references to her chapter on the content of it, which is so complete and detailed. The system chosen of referencing, using calls for notes (and double calls for entries of more than one word) seems to me to be somewhat detrimental to the readability of the Arabic text itself, but this may be a personal matter; it is also possible that this choice was imposed by the publisher¹¹.

Finally, Ziegler offers two appendices, containing, on the one hand, the works attributed to Maslama b. Qāsim al-Qurṭubī (pp. 529–536) and a glossary of code names used (pp. 537–542). The whole is complemented by indexes of person names, titles of works, place names and Qur’anic quotations.

These few comments and remarks in no way detract from the very high quality of V. Ziegler’s work, which is a comprehensive study, critical edition and translation of a fascinating, hitherto unpublished and little-known text. She has succeeded in shedding light on various aspects of its content and history, thereby filling a fundamental gap in the study of the history of Arabic alchemy and, in a broader sense, of the history of science.

¹¹ In addition, Ziegler has chosen to write her critical apparatus in Latin, whereas the text is in Arabic, but this may be imposed by the publisher as well. There are a few small typos, errors and inconsistencies: for example, she uses the form *scribit* in the present tense (p. 319), whereas other verbs (*omisit*, *addidit*) are in the perfect tense. The form *replitit* (pp. 409, n. 17, and 427, n. 11) does not exist; there is also a typo *alius manus*, instead of *alia manus*, p. 320.