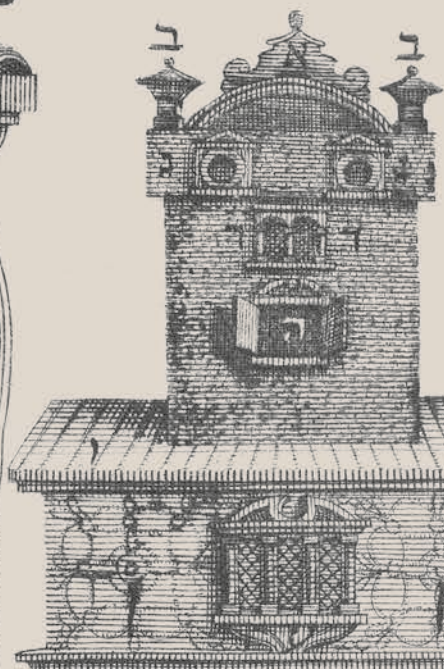
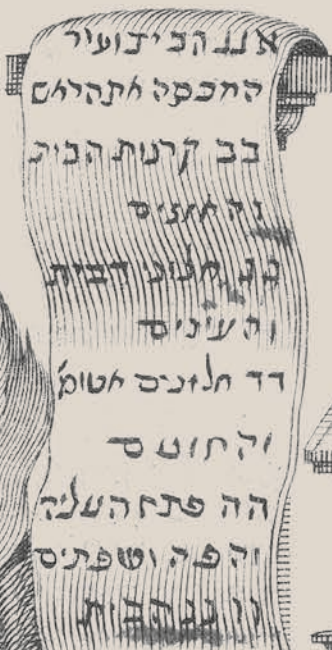
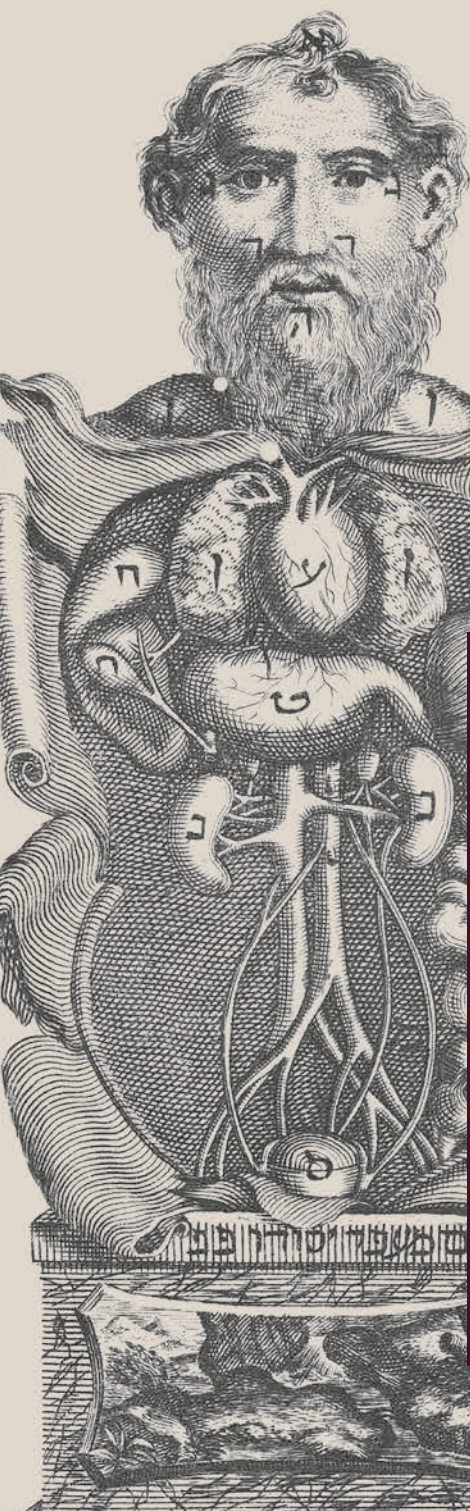


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ד קו

בית חדש



DEFINING JEWISH MEDICINE

Transfer of Medical Knowledge in
Premodern Jewish Cultures and Traditions

Edited by
Lennart Lehmhaus



HARRASSOWITZ VERLAG

Defining Jewish Medicine

Episteme in Bewegung

Beiträge zu einer transdisziplinären Wissensgeschichte

Herausgegeben von Gyburg Uhlmann
im Auftrag des Sonderforschungsbereichs 980
„Episteme in Bewegung.
Wissenstransfer von der Alten Welt
bis in die Frühe Neuzeit“

Band 8

2021

Harrassowitz Verlag · Wiesbaden

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in Premodern Jewish Cultures and Traditions

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Die Reihe „Episteme in Bewegung“ umfasst wissenschaftliche Forschungen mit einem systematischen oder historischen Schwerpunkt in der europäischen und nicht-europäischen Vormoderne. Sie fördert transdisziplinäre Beiträge, die sich mit Fragen der Genese und Dynamik von Wissensbeständen befassen, und trägt dadurch zur Etablierung vormoderner Wissensforschung als einer eigenständigen Forschungsperspektive bei. Publiziert werden Beiträge, die im Umkreis des an der Freien Universität Berlin angesiedelten Sonderforschungsbereichs 980 „Episteme in Bewegung. Wissenstransfer von der Alten Welt bis in die Frühe Neuzeit“ entstanden sind.

Herausgeberbeirat:

Anne Eusterschulte (FU Berlin)
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Andrew James Johnston (FU Berlin)
Jochem Kahl (FU Berlin)

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Gefördert durch die Deutsche Forschungsgemeinschaft (DFG) –
Projektnummer 191249397 – SFB 980.

Abbildung auf dem Umschlag:

Anatomical diagram explained with a diagram of a house; from Ma'aseh Tobiyah
(*The Work of Tobias*, in Hebrew), by Tobias Cohen; Venice: ‚Stamp Bragadina‘, 1708.
Wellcome Library, London (L0021883).



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Bibliografische Information der Deutschen Nationalbibliothek

Die Deutsche Nationalbibliothek verzeichnet diese Publikation in der Deutschen Nationalbibliografie; detaillierte bibliografische Daten sind im Internet über <https://www.dnb.de> abrufbar.

Informationen zum Verlagsprogramm finden Sie unter

<https://www.harrassowitz-verlag.de>

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Verlegt durch Otto Harrassowitz GmbH & Co. KG, Wiesbaden 2021

Gedruckt auf alterungsbeständigem Papier.

Druck und Verarbeitung: Memminger MedienCentrum AG

Printed in Germany

ISSN 2365-5666

eISSN 2701-2522

DOI: 10.13173/2365-5666



ISBN 978-3-447-10826-3

eISBN 978-3-447-19606-2

DOI: 10.13173/9783447108263



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Exploring Eurasian Transmissions of Medical Knowledge: Cues from the Hebrew *Book of Asaf*

Ronit Yoeli-Tlalim*

Dedicated to the memory of Asaf Ha'rofeh Hospital, Israel

The Hebrew text referred to as *Sefer refu'ot* (“Book of Remedies”) or *Sefer Asaf* (“Book of Asaf”) is a very important text not only in the history of the Hebrew medical sciences, but also in the history of medicine as a whole.¹ The text is an extensive medical compendium, containing a kind of ‘medical history’, sections on anatomy, embryology, pulse and urine diagnosis, seasonal regimen, a medical oath and a long *materia medica* section.

This paper examines the narrative on the origins of medical knowledge as found in the *Book of Asaf*. This narrative presents the medical knowledge which follows it as deriving from Eurasian input. Narratives on the origins of knowledge such as this one both reflect and construct views on medicine and hence are important in providing a more poly-vocal history of medicine, taking into account local cultures of historiographies. More broadly, taking such accounts seriously can help to write *histories* of medicine rather than *the history* of medicine. As Nappi has pointed out, such attempts require taking local diversities in historiography seriously, and translating local differences into a meaningful common conversation.²

Narratives on the origins and history of medicine—and the history of knowledge more generally—are important within this scope for a number of reasons. Firstly, an analysis of how and why they were constructed can reveal important political, religious, economic and cultural factors at play at the time of construction. Secondly, narratives of this sort raise the large and complicated question of whether and to what extent such accounts actually reflect the nature of the knowledge they describe. In other words, they raise questions like: when and why does a culture/religion/state ideology choose to present/construct itself as multicultural? Are there correspondences between *being* multi-cultural and of *declaring* a culture as such?

The preface of the *Book of Asaf* has been known to scholars for a century and a half, although in ways which have caused a fair amount of confusion.³ The preface was first

* Research for this paper was funded by the Wellcome Trust (grant no. 088251). I would like to thank Tamás Visi and Lennart Lehmann for their comments on a previous version of this paper.

1 For two recent publications, see Visi 2016 and Yoeli-Tlalim 2018.

2 As called on by Nappi in regards to the history of science at large, see Nappi 2013.

3 The following overview of the history of the study of the Introduction is based on Nutton 2012.

printed by Adolph Jellinek in his *Bet Hamidrash* in 1853, from the Munich ms 231. Jellinek appended the beginning of *Sefer Raziel* and the opening of *Sefer Ha'razim* to the Asaf preface and gave them the title: ספר נח (*Book of Noah*).⁴ Jellinek's text was subsequently translated to German, again with the title *Book of Noah*, by A Wünsche.⁵ Both Jellinek and Wünsche did not clarify that these were three separate texts. Louis Ginzburg in his *Legends of the Jews* began the process of clarification at the beginning of the 20th century.⁶

Also helping to clarify the confusion was the important study by the Hungarian Rabbi and scholar Ludwig [Lajos] Venetianer of the *Book of Asaf*, which appeared in 1916, *Assaf Judaicus: Der älteste medizinische Schriftsteller in hebraischer Sprache* (Strassburg: Karl J. Tübner 1916). In that same year, Karl Sudhoff published a Latin text which was copied in the 15th century and which Sudhoff identified as deriving from the Introduction to the *Book of Asaf*.⁷ The Introduction to the *Book of Asaf* was also discussed by Muntner.⁸

Versions of the introduction to the *Book of Asaf*

The manuscripts

The introduction to the *Book of Asaf* appears in the following manuscripts:

Munich Bayerische Staatsbibliothek Cod. hebr. 231; Firenze Laurenziana Plut. 88.37; British Library add.27018; Bodleian Oxford, Ms. Laud. Or. 113; Frankfurt Ms. hebr. Oct. 185; Institute of Oriental Manuscripts, Russian Academy of Sciences, St Petersburg Ms. A 170; Institute of Oriental Manuscripts, Russian Academy of Sciences, St Petersburg Ms. B 449.

Of the *Sefer Asaf* manuscripts which do not include the Introduction, mention should be made of Bodleian Oxford Ms. opp. 687 (OL 1645) (no. 2138 in Neubauer's Catalogue), which is one of three main *Asaf* manuscripts.⁹

4 Jellinek 1853, vol. III, xxx–xxxiii & 155–160. *Sefer Ha'razim* is a work of magical character dated to the first millennium CE, probably towards the middle of that millennium. It has survived in fragments from the Genizah and was published with many variants by Mordechai Margalot in 1966. An English translation was prepared by Michael Morgan and published in 1983. *Sefer Raziel* is a much later work published in Amsterdam in 1701.

5 Wünsche 1909, vol. III, 201–210.

6 Ginzburg 1913, vol. 1, 154–157, 172–174. The book itself was published in 1913, but the notes which clarified the sources appeared only in 1925 (vol. 5, 172–175, 196–197).

7 Sudhoff 1916.

8 Muntner 1965, at pp. 396–407; Muntner 1957, 65–72.

9 This manuscript has been dated by Langermann to the 12th or 13th century. See Langermann 2009. On this manuscript see also Shatzmiller 1983. The manuscript includes 188 folios. Judging by its orthographic mistakes, it seems to be a copy of an earlier manuscript.

Munich Bayerische Staatsbibliothek Cod. hebr. 231

Munich Bayerische Staatsbibliothek hebr 231 is a codex of 277 folios.¹⁰ It has been dated by Judith Olszowy-Schlanger based on preliminary paleographical indications to the 13th or 14th century and originating from Italy.¹¹ Previous references and studies of the *Asaf* Introduction are based on this version.

Florence Laurenziana Plut. 88.37

Florence Laurenziana Plut. 88.37 has been dated to the 14th–15th century. The *Asaf* text in Florence Laurenziana Plut. 88.37 is the first text in this codex (Fol. 1–26r), followed by six other medical texts.¹²

Bodleian Libraries, Oxford, Ms. Laud. Or. 113 (Neubauer catalogue: 2142/20)

Provence, 16th century, paper.¹³ This codex is a collection of medical texts, which are numbered. The *Book of Asaf* text is four folios long (fol. 97a–98b). It includes the introduction (97a–97b) followed by the general description of the structure of the body.

British Library add.27018

This is a medical codex, which includes four separate texts. Margoliouth has dated it to the 15th century. It is written on paper and includes 22 leaves with 27 lines to a page. Leaves are missing after fol. 6, 11, and 12. Most extant leaves are slightly damaged. The last word of each folio is repeated at the beginning of the next. Margoliouth has suggested that the text is written in a peculiar Rabbinic hand of what appears to be of oriental origin.¹⁴

The codex includes four texts. The first text is ספר אגור – (fol. 2a–14a) based on the aphorisms of Hippocrates (See Steinschneider HU, pp. 660–1).¹⁵ The second text

10 Steinschneider 1875, 82–83 (pp. 106–107 in the 1895 edition).

11 Prof. Olszowy-Schlanger kindly examined a reproduction of the manuscript at my disposal. I would like to thank Prof. Olszowy-Schlanger for sharing her profound knowledge with me.

12 1. Fol. 1v–26r: *Sefer Refu'ot*;

2. Fol. 26r–30v: Head to toe list of illnesses (incomplete; missing quire at the end);

3. Fol. 31r–58r: ספר הראשון של פסיקא.

4. Fol. 58v–73v: הספר השני אנטיאטריאו: (*Antidotarium*).

5. Fol. 73v–84r: הספר השלישי: צירלוגיאה היא מלאכת יד.

6. Fol. 84v–86r: ספר היקר.

7. Fol. 86r–110r: הספר הרביעי : ספר ביאטקו ספר: (*Viatico*).

For a description of the codex see: Biscioni 1757, Vol. 2.

The second text, a head to toe list of illnesses (fol. 26r–30v), which is clearly demarcated as a separate text in Florence Laurenziana Plut. 88.37, appears at the end of Munich 231 (fols.—267r–287r) and has been treated as part of *Sefer Asaf*. This is but one indication that what has been alluded to as *Sefer Asaf* is a composite text, which in different codices comprises of different collections.

13 Neubauer 1886 and Beit-Arié 1994.

14 Margoliouth 1965, Part III, 348.

15 Margoliouth says on the other copy of *Sefer Agur* (Harley 5527), that it is based on Constantinus Africanus' Latin version of the aphorisms of Hippocrates.

is also ascribed to Hippocrates, is titled: מידות אבוקרט (fols. 14b–16a) and is a brief treatise on signs of approaching death. The third text specifically refers to Asaf, and is titled: אסף מספר אסף להשכיל באותות הדפק מספר אסף (fols. 16a–17b)—“I shall teach you the signs of the pulse from *Sefer Asaf*”.

The fourth text is titled: ספר עץ החיים (fols: 18b–22a, “The Book of the Tree of Life”). The title is followed by a further title: למען תגדל תפארתם על חכמי הארץ (“So that their glory shall increase among the sages of the land”). It is here we find an abbreviated version of the *Sefer Asaf* Introduction:

ויהי בבואם אל המקום ההוא וימצאו את עצי המרפא ועץ החיים וישלחו ידיהם לקחתם
ויברק עליהם להט החרב המתהפכת ויתלהטו כלם בשביבי הברק ולא נמלט מהם איש
ותעזב הרפואה מהגוים ותשבת חכמת הרופאים שש מאות ושלשים שנה עד מלך
ארתחשסתא המלך
בימיו קם איש נבון וחכם ומלומד דעת ספרי הרפואות ומבין כל דבר ושמו אפוקראט המקדוני
ושאר חכמי הגוים
ואסף היהודי ודיסקורדיאוס הבעלכותי וגאליאנוס הכפתורי וחכמים הרבה מאד ויחדשו
עבודת הרפואה
ותהי עד היום הזה

This abbreviated Introduction is followed by the *Sefer Asaf* account of the structure of the body (fols. 19a–22a).

Frankfurt 185, St Petersburg A 170 and St Petersburg B 449 are all modern (19th and 20th century) copies:

Frankfurt 185—has been dated to the 19th century. It is titled: *Sefer ben Noah* and contains only the Introduction (Fols. 1–7).¹⁶

St Petersburg A 170 has been dated to the 19th century. It consists of 11 folios. The Introduction appears on fol.1 (with no mention of India).

St Petersburg B 449 has been dated to the 20th Century and appears to be a copy of St Petersburg A 170.

Commentary of Rabbi Elhanan ben Yakar of London to Sefer Yetsirah

Zvi Langermann has brought to our attention a quote from another version of the Introduction to *Sefer Asaf*, that of Rabbi Elhanan Ben Yakar of London, probably from the year 1200, which was discussed by Yehudah Arieḥ Vajda:¹⁷

והחכמה הזאת היא גדולה ועמוקה ובארץ הינד קמו פילוסופים גדולים ודרשו וחקרו
וניסו בזאת החכמה ובימי ארתחשסתא קמו אחרים תחתם ואלה שמותם איצפוקר ההינדי
תיאופילוס המישעי מארץ מואב וגליינוס הכפתורי מארץ כפתור ואסף הירחי. ותרב חכמת
הרפואה בימים ההם כי עד הימים ההם לא ריפא אדם את חברו. והם שלחו בארץ הינד לקח
משם עצי הרפואה ודשאי הרפואה וחיות הרפואה ותגדל חכמתם והמה עשו ספרים אין קץ

¹⁶ According to the dating of the Jerusalem catalogue and also Roth and Priejs [1855] 1990, 58–59. See also: Jellinek 1855, 155.

¹⁷ Langermann 2009; Vajda 1966.

לבד מספר שם בן נח אשר היה להם לפנים כי ספר שם היה סתום והיה כתוב בו לזה החולי זה
הסם ולא היה בו פירוש הדברים ועלילות החלאים מאיזה יסוד ובמה ירפא בכח חם וקר ולא
יישב והמה הוסיפו ופירשו כל מסיבות וענייני היסודות והגידיים כמה הם ואני לא באתי לפרש
כי אם כפי הצורך לזה הספר.¹⁸

And this wisdom is great and deep and in the land of Hind there were great philosophers who enquired, analysed and tried this wisdom. And in the days of Artaxšaça (Artakhshashtah, ארתחששתא, Greek: Artaxerxes), others rose in their place, and these were their names: Itspocar the Hindu, Theophilus of Mesha in the Land of Mo'ab, and Galenos the Caphtorite, of the Land of Caphtor and Asaf Ha'yerekhi (the astrologer?). And the wisdom of medicine increased in those days, since till those days no man cured another. And they sent to the Land of Hind to take the trees of medicine from there, and the herbs of medicine and the animals of medicine, and their wisdom increased and they made endless books in addition to the Book of Shem son of Noah, which they had from before, because the Book of Shem was obscure and it said: for this illness, that drug, but it did not explain the meaning and how illnesses develop, from what element, and how to cure—in the power of heat or cold, damp or dry. And they added and explained all the reasons and issues of the elements and the *gidim*¹⁹, how many there are, and I have come but to comment as needed for this book.²⁰

The Hebrew text below is based on Munich Bayerische Staatsbibliothek Cod. hebr. 231 with variant readings from Bodleian Oxford, Ms. Laud. Or. 113, Florence Laurenziana Plut. 88.37 and British Library add.27018:

Fol. 1v

ספר רפואות נקרא אסף היהודי²¹

זה ספר רפואות

אשר העתיקו חכמים²² הראשונים מספר שם²³

בן נח אשר נמסר²⁴ לנח בלובר ההר מהררי²⁵

18 Vajda 1966, 172, lines 316–327.

19 *Gid* can mean either sinew or blood vessel.

20 My translation.

21 Plut. 88.33 begins:

בשם יי נעשה ונצליח

ספר רפואות חשוב ובדוק מרופאי הקדמונים

ספר רפואות אשר העתיקו חכמים הראשונים

In the name of God we shall proceed and be prosperous

An important book of medicine, tested by the ancient physicians

A book of medicine copied by the early sages.

22 OX Or 113 החכמים.

23 OX Or 113 בן שם בן נח.

24 OX Or 113 שנמסר.

25 OX Or 113 מהררי.

אררט אחרי²⁶ המבול כי בימים ההמה²⁷ ובעת ההיא החלו רוחות הממזרים להתגרות בבני נח להטות ולהטעות ולחבל ולהכות בחלאים²⁸ ובמכאובים ובכל²⁹ מיני מדוה הממיתים ומשחיתים את בני אדם³⁰ אז באו כל³¹ בני נח ובניהם³² יחדו ויספרו את³³ נגעייהם לנח אביהם ויגידו לו על אודות המכאובים הנראים בבניהם ויבעת נח וידע כי מעון האדם³⁴ ומדרך פשעם יתעאנו³⁵ בכל³⁶ מיני תחלואים ומדוים אז קידש³⁷ נח את בניו³⁸ ואת בני ביתו וביתו יחדו ויגש אל המזבח³⁹ ויעל עולות ויתפלל אל האלוקים⁴⁰ ויעתר לו וישלח מלאך אחד⁴¹ ממלאכי הפנים מן הקדושים⁴² ושמו רפאל לכלה⁴³ את רוחות הממזרים מתחת השמים לבלתי השחית עוד בבני האדם ויעש המלאך כן ויכלאם אל בית המשפט⁴⁴ אך אחד מעשרה הניח להתהלך בארץ לפני שר המשטמה⁴⁵ לרדות בס במרשיעים⁴⁶ לנגע ולענות בהם בכל מיני מדוה תחלואים⁴⁷ ולנגע מכאובים ואת רפואות נגעי בני אדם וכל מיני רפואות הגיד המלאך לנח לרפא בעצי הארץ וצימחי

26 OX Or 113 אחר.

27 OX Or 113 ההם.

28 OX Or 113 בחליים ומכאובות.

29 OX Or 113 ולכל.

30 OX Or 113 האדם.

31 OX Or 113 – no כל.

32 OX Or 113 – no ובניהם.

33 OX Or 113 – no את.

34 OX Or 113 וידע נח כי מעון בני האדם.

35 Plut. 88.33 יתענו.

36 OX Or 113 כל.

37 OX Or 113 קדש.

38 OX Or 113 בניו ובנותיו.

39 OX Or 113 אשר בנה.

40 Plut. 88.33 האלהים.

41 OX Or 113 מן הקדושים שר הפנים.

42 Plut. 88.33 מלאך אחד מן הקדושים ממלאכי הפנים.

43 OX Or 113 לכלות.

44 OX Or 113 בבית המשפט.

45 Plut. 88.33 המשטמה no. For *mastema* see also the Genizah version of the Damascus Document. The Damascus Document refers to Jubilees.

46 OX Or 113 להכות המרשיעים.

47 OX Or 113 מדוה ותחלואים / ויגד המלאך לנח לרפא.

Fol. 2r

האדמה ועיקריה וישלח את שר⁴⁸
 הרוחות⁴⁹ הנותרים מהם להראות לנח⁵⁰ ולהגיד לו
 את עצי הרפואות עם כל דשאייהם וירקיהם
 ועשבייהם ועיקרייהם⁵¹ וזירועיהם למה נבראו⁵²
 וללמדיהו כל דברי רפואתם עד פלט למרפא
 ולחיים ויכתוב נח⁵³ את הדברים האלה על
 ספר ויתנהו לשם בנו הגדול⁵⁴ ומן הספר הזה
 העתיקו חכמי הראשונים⁵⁵ ויכתבו ספרים הרבה
 איש ואיש כלשונו ותרבה דעת הרפואה בארץ
 בכל הגוים⁵⁶ אשר בחנו את ספרי הרפואות
 בחכמי הודו⁵⁷ וחכמי מקדון וחכמי מצרים כי
 חכמי הודו הם שוטטו למצוא כל⁵⁸ עצי רפואות
 והבשמים וחכמי ארם מצאו⁵⁹ העשבים לכל
 מיניהם וזירועיהם⁶⁰ לרפא ואת פשר דברי
 הספרים⁶¹ העתיקו ארמית וחכמי מקדון החלו
 ראשונה לרפא בארץ וחכמי מצרים החלו⁶²
 לחבר ולנחש במזרות⁶³ ובכוכבים⁶⁴ ללמד⁶⁵ את ספר
 מדרש הכשדים אשר העתיק קנגרבו⁶⁶ אור בן
 כשד⁶⁷ לכל מעשה החרטומים⁶⁸ ותגדל להם חכמתם⁶⁹
 עד קום אסקלפיוס אחד מחכמי מקדון וארבעים

48 Plut. 88.33 שר.

49 OX Or 113 הרוחות הנותרים מהם.

50 OX Or 113 נח.

51 OX Or 113 עיקרייהם.

52 OX Or 113 למה נבראו.

53 OX Or 113 ויכתוב נח כל הדברים האלה.

54 Plut. 88.33 הגדול.

55 OX Or 113 החכמים הראשונים.

56 OX Or 113 בארץ ובכל הגוים אין חכמים אשר.

57 OX Or 113 וחכמי מצרים וכחמת ארם כחכמי הודו.

58 OX Or 113 כל.

59 OX Or 113 את.

60 OX Or 113 זרועיהם.

61 OX Or 113 את פשר הדברים.

62 OX Or 113 ראשונה.

63 OX Or 113 במזלות.

64 Plut. 88.33 וכוכבים.

65 OX Or 113 וללמד ספר.

66 Plut. 88.33 קנגר בן אור.

67 OX Or 113 קינן בן כשד.

68 OX Or 113 לכל החרטומים.

69 OX Or 113 ותגדל חכמתו.

איש עמו⁷⁰ מן החרטומים מלומדי הספרים הנעתקים
וילכו הלוך בארץ ויעברו מעבר להודו אל ארץ⁷¹

Fol. 2v

קדמת עדן למצוא מקצת עצי החיים⁷² למען
תגדל תפארתם⁷³ על חכמי הארץ⁷⁴ ויהי בבואם
אל המקום ההוא וימצאו את עצי המרפא⁷⁵ ועצי
עץ החיים⁷⁶ וישלחו את ידם לקחתם ויברק ה⁷⁷
עליהם להט החרב המהפכת⁷⁸ וילהטו⁷⁹ כולם בשביבי
הברק ולא נמלט מהם איש ותעזב הרפואה מן
הרופאים⁸⁰ ותשבת חכמת הרופאים⁸¹ שש מאות
ושלשים שנה עד מלוך ארתחשסתא⁸² המלך
בימיו קם⁸³ איש נבון וחכם ומלומד דעת ספרי
הרפואות⁸⁴ ומבין לכל דבר⁸⁵ ושמו אפוקרט⁸⁶ המקדוני
ושאר חכמי הגויים אסף⁸⁷ היהודים⁸⁸ ודיסקרדיוס
הבעלת⁸⁹ וגלינוס⁹⁰ הכפתורי וחכמים הרבה מאד
ויחדשו עטרת⁹¹ הרפואה⁹² ותהי עד היום הזה

70 OX Or 113 no עמו.

71 OX Or 113 אל ארץ נוד קדמת עדן.

72 OX Or 113 עצי הרפואה ועץ החיים.

73 OX Or 113 רפואתם.

74 BL add. 27018 (hereafter: BL) introduction text begins here. OX Or 113 הארץ.

75 OX Or 113 ואת עץ החיים הרפואה.

76 BL ועץ החיים.

77 Plut. 88.33 omits ה'.

78 OX Or 113 & BL: ויברק עליהם להט החרב המתהפכת.

79 OX Or 113 ויתלהטו.

80 Plut 88.33 מהגויים; BL ומן הגויים.

81 OX Or 113 מן הגויים ותשבות הרפואה.

82 Plut 88.33 ארתחשסתא.

83 OX Or 113 עמד.

84 OX Or 113 הרפואה.

85 OX Or 113 ומבין דבר מתוך דבר.

86 OX Or 113 אפוקרט BL אפוקרט המקדומי.

87 BL ואסף.

88 OX Or 113 אסף וחכמי היהודים והרבה חכמים אחרים.

89 BL ודיסקורדיאוס הבעלכותי.

90 BL וגאליאנוס.

91 BL עבודת.

92 OX Or 113 ויחדשו את עבודת הרפואה.

(fol. 1v)

The Book of Medicine [by the so-] called Asaph the Jew

This is the Book of Medicine translated by the first sages from the Book of Shem son of Noah, which was given to Noah at the Luvar Mountain, one of the Ararat Mountains⁹³ after the flood.

Since in those days and in that time, the evil spirits began to torment the sons of Noah, to deviate and terrorise and blow with illnesses and pain and all sorts of destructive and deadly ailments.

Then all the sons of Noah came together with their offspring and told their father Noah about all their ailments.

And they told him about the sicknesses visible in their offspring.

And Noah was terrified and he knew that it is due to human iniquity and the path of misconduct that they would contrive all sickness and ailments.

Then Noah blessed his sons and their offspring [and his household?] together.

And he went to the altar and brought sacrifice and prayed to God.

And He granted his wish and sent him one of the Angels of Presence (אחד ממלאכי הפנים), of the holy ones, and his name—*Rafa'el*,

to extinguish the evil spirits under the heaven, so as not to harm humans any longer. And the angel did so.

And he locked them up in the house of justice.

But one out of ten—he let go in the land before the Prince of Animosity (שר המשטמה)

to reign them, the evil ones, to cause illness and pain.

And the angel told Noah about the remedies for human ailments and all sorts of ailments—

how to heal with the trees of the land and the plants

(fol. 2r) of the earth and its roots (ועיקריה).

And he sent the remaining Princes of Spirits (שרי הרוחות) to show Noah and instruct him regarding the trees of medicine along with their grass and their herbs and their vegetables and their seeds and their roots—the reason for their creation, and to teach him every detail of their healing properties.

And Noah wrote all these things in a book, and gave it to Shem, his older son.

And from this book, the early sages translated and wrote many books, each one in his own language. And the knowledge of medicine increased in the land, amongst all the peoples who studied the books of medicines—[i. e.] amongst the sages of India and the sages of Macedonia⁹⁴ and the sages of Egypt.⁹⁵ The

93 Luvar as one of the mountains of Ararat appears also in *Jubilees* 7:1.

94 The Eastern Christian origin of *Sefer Asaf* for which I argue in Yoeli-Tlalim 2018 also explains the use here of “Macedonians” for Greeks— a usage confined to the Septuagint, specifically to *Esther* and *Maccabees*. This point has been raised by Nutton, though he suggested this indicates a Jewish source. See Nutton 2012. I would like to thank Mark Geller for raising this question.

95 OX Or 113 adds: “and the wisdom of Aram”.

sages of India took to wandering in order to find the trees of medicines and perfumes, and the sages of Aram discovered the herbs—[i. e.] all their kinds and their seeds—in order to cure. And they translated the meaning of the books into Aramaic [i. e. Syriac]. And the sages of Macedonia were the first to cure in the land, and the sages of Egypt began to calculate⁹⁶ and perform divinations with the stars and constellations, to teach the book of Babylonian wisdom, copied by Kangar son of Ur son of Kesed⁹⁷ as well as all the deeds of the magicians (*khartumim*).⁹⁸ And their wisdom grew until Asclepius came, one of the Macedonian sages and forty men with him among the magicians (*khartumim*), learned in the translated books and they went in the land, passing beyond India to a land (fol. 2v) east of Eden to find some of the trees of life in order to increase their glory among the sages. And when they came to that place, they found the healing trees and the trees of the tree of life.

And they stretched their hand to take them and God thrust upon them the flame of the swirling sword.⁹⁹ And they all burnt in the sparks of lightning and no one escaped.

And medicine was deserted by the doctors. And the wisdom of doctors ceased for 630 years, until the reign of Artaxšaçā (Artakhshastah, ארתחשטתא, Greek: Artaxerxes) the King. And in the days of Artaxšaçā the King, there rose a clever and wise man, who studied the knowledge of the books of medicines and his name: *Ippocrat* (Hippocrates) the Macedonian and the rest of the gentiles' sages, and Asaf the Jew and Dioscorides of Ba'al¹⁰⁰ and Galenos of Caphthor¹⁰¹ and many other sages and they renewed the glory of medicine, and it is living till this day...¹⁰²

96 לַחֲבַר—can also mean: compose.

97 Kesed is mentioned in *Genesis* 22:22.

98 The *khartumim* are mentioned in *Genesis* 41, when they are unable to decipher Pharaoh's dream; in *Exodus* 7–9—in magic competitions with Moses; and in *Daniel* 1–2 and 4– when Daniel and his Jewish companions' wisdom exceeds that of the local *khartumim* and as interpreters of Nebuchadnezzar's dreams.

99 The expression appears in *Genesis* 3:24. The *King James Bible* translates this expression as: "the flaming sword which turned every way". The context in *Genesis* 3: 24 is similar to here: God is said to have appointed the *cherubim* and the flame of the swirling sword to guard the way to the tree of life. Biblical commentators have discussed whether the deterrent refers to the sword or the flame. Rabbi David Kimkhi explains for example that it is the sight of the flame that is meant to frighten, i. e.: not the physical aspect, but the sight of it.

100 Perhaps referring to the mythical association of the god Ba'al with northern Syria, or sometimes more generally: the mythical 'Mountain of the north'.

101 Biblical island; usually associated with Crete. In the Septuaginta and in the Syriac tradition, Caphthor was identified with Cappadocia. See: Wainwright 1956; Le Déaut and Jacques 1971. On this identification in the *Peshitta* and in the Syriac geographical tradition, see: Witakowski 1993, 637, 639, and 647.

102 Munich heb 231, fols. 2r and 2v, my translation.

Links with *Jubilees* and *Enoch*

The close similarities between the introduction of the *Book of Asaf* and *Jubilees* 10:1–14 as well as *I Enoch*, have been noted down before.¹⁰³ In *Jubilees*, a biblical apocryphal book dated to the mid–second century BCE, we find the same notion of medical knowledge as being derived from Noah and subsequently passed on to his son Shem.¹⁰⁴ The *Asaf* introduction also alludes to the book of *I Enoch*, in which Enoch—recounted in *Genesis* as going to heaven and not dying—transmits his divine wisdom to Methuselah.¹⁰⁵ There have been two main views on the connection between the introduction to the *Book of Asaf* and *Jubilees*. One is that the *Book of Asaf* was partly based on *Jubilees*. The other is that they both preserve an older text/s known as the *Book* (or: *Books*) of *Noah*.¹⁰⁶ The *Book/Books of Noah* do not survive intact in any language. There are also no mentions of such a text in the canon lists, which suggests that the work was not widely circulated among Christians. Michael Stone has concluded that there were such literary work(s) in existence, preserved in bits in other texts such as the *Aramaic Levi Document*, *Jubilees* and the *Genesis Apocryphon*.¹⁰⁷

The narratives as they appear in the introduction to *Book of Asaf* and *Jubilees* are generally similar, but there are some important differences. Firstly, in the *Book of Asaf* there is a far greater emphasis on the medical aspects of the story and the afflictions described are medical in nature. This medical terminology is repeated several times in the description. By comparison, in *Jubilees* 10:10 it is only when the remedies are introduced that it becomes clear that the afflictions involve illness at all. The *Book of Asaf* describes the remedies in much greater detail than in *Jubilees*. Himmelfarb has noted the difference in the angels to which the knowledge of medicine is attributed: in *Jubilees* they are anonymous angels whereas in *Sefer Asaf*, medical knowledge is attributed to a single angel: Rafa'el the arch-healing angel ('*rafa'*' derives from the root 'to cure'; '*el'*' means 'God'). The topos of archangels as a source of knowledge is common in *Hekhalot* literature.¹⁰⁸ Overall however, the introduction to *Sefer Asaf* is a more medicalised reworking of narratives found in other early Jewish sources—primarily as it serves—unlike *Jubilees*, *Enoch* or the *Hekhalot* literature—as an introduction to a substantial medical text.

The introduction to the *Book of Asaf* is an example of an “origin narrative”: it recounts the origin/s of a field of knowledge, the motivation for “inventing” or “es-

103 See Himmelfarb 1994, particularly pp. 127–136. See also Stone 1972. The link between *Sefer Asaf* and *Jubilees* and *Enoch* has also been pointed out by Muntner 1965.

The book of *Jubilees*, a second century BCE retelling of *Genesis* and *Exodus*, which has come down to us in Ethiopic, preserved by Ethiopic Christians. The original language of *Jubilees* was Hebrew. There is no manuscript evidence at all for the Greek version, which was the basis for the Latin and Ethiopic, although there are numerous allusions and citations. See: Bhyaro 2005.

104 See *Sefer Hayovlot*, chap. 10, verses 12–14. Hartum 1969.

105 *Genesis* 5:24.

106 See Himmelfarb 1994, particularly 127–136.

107 Stone 2006.

108 Swartz 1996.

tablishing” that kind of knowledge and the field’s subsequent development.¹⁰⁹ Narratives of this sort have not yet made the impact they deserve in the historiography of medicine. One main reason for this is the way they appear to intertwine what is conventionally termed “mythical” and “historical”. While we cannot read hagiographies and mythical accounts as straightforward historical narratives, we can—and should—take some cues from such texts as they often serve as pointers to strata otherwise forgotten or else rewritten by later historical accounts.

Narratives of universal histories and of universal histories of knowledge exemplify different ways of managing relationships between foreign and local knowledge as well as ways of negotiating cultural differences. The organization of knowledge from and about different peoples has been a powerful tool for articulating claims of empire, uniting multiplicities of locales in harmonious singularity, mirrored by a claim for comprehensiveness.¹¹⁰ The *Sefer Asaf* origin narrative situates itself vis-à-vis medical knowledge deriving from other cultures. As a Hebrew text with clear Jewish characteristics, which appears to be derived from a Persian cultural milieu, transmitted via Syriac,¹¹¹ it is interlaced within a web of cross-cultural, religious, economic and political traces.

Universality

The universality constructed in *Sefer Asaf* is created through the superimposition of the notion of a universal antediluvian knowledge on the one hand together with concrete references to the known world. The correlation between the *Book of Sefer Asaf* and *Jubilees* and *Enoch* help us to unravel the nature of this universality. These sources reflect two types of universality. The first is an antediluvian one. *Enoch*, *Jubilees* and *Sefer Asaf* all refer to a panhuman knowledge, predating language and culture divisions. The other notion of universality is the description of the known world as found in the *Book of Jubilees*.¹¹² The areas of the world as described in *Jubilees* correspond to references we find in *Sefer Asaf*.

Wisdom from before the flood has fascinated humankind for as long as flood narratives existed in ancient Babylonia. “I studied inscriptions from before the flood”, wrote the king of Assyria in the seventh century BCE.¹¹³ Claims that before the flood humankind possessed precious knowledge, lost in the flood and subsequently available only to some fortunate few, were rampant in antiquity. Alien to our own notion of progression of science and knowledge, origin narratives such as these reveal rather an emphasis on priority. In the Hellenistic period, claims of priority played a major role in the cultural battle between nations on the origins of the arts and sciences. The

109 On origin narratives in Islamic sources, see Abbou-Hershkovitz 2008 and Brentjes 2013.

110 For Gutas’s analysis of similar Sasanian texts on the origins and transmission of knowledge, see Gutas 1998, esp. 34–40. See also: van Bladel 2012. For a discussion of the Jewish case, see Reed 2014. On Pliny’s *Natural History* as Roman imperial building, see Murphy 2007. I would like to thank Lennart Lehmann for supplying this reference.

111 See Yoeli-Tlalim 2018.

112 See Scott 2002.

113 Van der Horst 2002, 139.

Babylonian scholar Berossus, writing in Greek about Babylonian culture in the late fourth or early third century BCE, claims to have ‘found’ the ancient writings hidden before the flood on Cronos’ order to Xisutros (the “Sumerian Noah”).¹¹⁴ There is also a Hermetic topos of stelae containing primordial wisdom, inscribed in a sacred language from before the flood, translated after the flood, reminiscent of what we find in the *Book of Asaf*.¹¹⁵ Amongst Jews, Josephus, the first century Jewish historian, also speaks about a stele which preserves ancient knowledge, otherwise lost, located in a mysterious place in the East (perhaps China?).¹¹⁶ Indeed, the inscription of tablets and stones to preserve the world’s ancient wisdom and to withstand future world destructions by water or fire is a common topos in many Jewish and Christian sources of the first centuries CE.

As has been argued with respect to the origins of Jewish science as it emerges in the *Book of Enoch* and *Book of Jubilees*, in the *Book of Asaf* too, we find a cross-cultural, inter-cultural assembly of knowledge, domesticating, as Philip Alexander has put it with regard to Enoch, ‘a body of alien wisdom within Jewish tradition’.¹¹⁷ Like the *Book of Jubilees* and the *Book of Enoch*, the compiler of the *Book of Asaf* is constructing a direct link between a divine antediluvian knowledge and the *Book of Asaf*: the medicine in this text is presented as a *renewal* of a lost *universal* knowledge—the medical book that follows it extends Jewish writings into new domains.

Another key topos found in the introduction to the *Book of Asaf* is the notion of travel to the orient as a means of acquiring knowledge. Though this topos appears already in Greek sources on the sciences, there are a number of significant differences between the Greek accounts on one hand and the *Asaf* one on the other. Most interesting for our discussion here is that in Greek sources, Greek medicine is not presented as being a synthesis of many traditions, nor do they emphasize India as a source of medical knowledge.¹¹⁸ As Karttunen has noted, while Indian physicians were known in Greek general literature, Greek classical works on medicine do not mention them.¹¹⁹ Specifically on Indian medicine, Herodotus notes that certain Indians make no attempt to cure and have no medical skill at all.¹²⁰

The social purpose of the narrative

The introduction to the *Book of Asaf* presents itself as fulfilling an ancient Jewish role of preserving and disseminating knowledge. The purpose of the introduction, as found in parallel cases of ancient science is—in the words of Charlesworth: “an

114 Ibid, 146. On Berossus and Greek perspectives on Babylonian sciences and culture see also: Haubold 2016; Haubold 2014; and Haubold 2013. I would like to thank Lennart Lehmhaus for supplying these references.

115 Van der Horst 2002, 144–5.

116 Ibid, 150–1.

117 For natural sciences see: Alexander 2002. For geography, see: Scott 2004.

118 See Zhmud 2006, 40–41.

119 Karttunen 1997, 232.

120 Thomas 2000, 29.

attempt to say that all the things that the Greeks revere were earlier invented by, or at least known to Jews.¹²¹ Hence, the introduction appears to address the issue of ambivalence towards medical knowledge in early Judaism—as a defence of medicine practised by Jews.¹²² This ambivalence is also found in many other early Jewish sources on healing. The *Mishnah*, for example, recounts that one of the three deeds held in favour of King Hizkiyahu was the concealment of the *Book of Medicine* (*Sefer Refu'ot*).¹²³ In *3 Enoch*, for example, Metatron brings down to earth secrets of healing in spite of the objection of other angels. He then passes them on to Moses, from whom the knowledge passes through Joshua, the Elders, the Prophets etc.¹²⁴ It should be noted here that a figure by the name of Asaf is mentioned as the secretary of the King Hizkiyahu (*2 Kings* 18:18 and 37; *Isiah* 36:3 and 22).¹²⁵

A similar ambivalence reflective of an ongoing discourse between supporters of science and those who rejected it is also apparent in the Islamic sources analysed by Abbou-Hershkovitz.¹²⁶ In the Jewish case, just like in the Islamic one, we can see the construction of these narratives as reflecting attempts of the medical authors to define a place for themselves within a larger intellectual context.

Conclusion

The *Book of Asaf* is an important ‘bridge of knowledge’ in ancient medicine. Its compiler/s is/are in conversation with a breadth of foreign ideas, situating its knowledge as deriving from the medical systems of the Indians, the Greeks, the Syrians and the Persians. The text reveals the value of looking at the ‘bridging’ languages and cultures of Eurasia, in this case: Hebrew and Syriac. The Hebrew *Book of Asaf* presents us with an interesting case study on which we can attempt a contemplation on the relationship between a medical tradition and its histories. It demonstrates the importance of looking at the early histories of the history of medicine and analysing the correspondence, if any, of *being* multicultural and of *declaring* yourself as such.¹²⁷

121 Charlesworth 1977, 190

122 VanderKam 1997, 20–22.

123 *Mishnah*, Pesakhim, chap. 4. Also: *Talmud Bavli*: Berakhot, chap. 1; Pesakhim, chap. 4; *Talmud Yerushalmi*: Nedarim, chap. 6; Sanhedrin, chap. 1.

124 Swartz 1996, 174–181.

125 On the figure of Asaf not necessarily being a specific historical person, but probably a legendary one associated with “knowledge of the book”, see Yoeli-Tlalim 2018.

126 Abbou–Hershkovitz 2008.

127 For similar questions with regards to early Tibetan medicine see Yoeli-Tlalim 2012, and Yoeli-Tlalim 2019.

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