Exploring Persian Lore in the Hebrew *Book of Asaf*

ABSTRACT The Hebrew medical text referred to as *Sefer Refu'ot* or *Sefer Asaf* has long been one of the greatest mysteries of Hebrew science with regards to fundamental questions such as the date and place of its composition and the identity of its author or authors. It has been dated anytime between the third and the eleventh centuries, with its composition located anywhere between Persia and southern Italy. This paper explores some of the Persian lore in *Sefer Asaf*: the figure of Asaf himself, the similarity with other Persian or Persian-influenced accounts of the origins of the sciences, the appearance of the Indo-Iranian motif of the trees of medicine, the central importance given to Indic medical knowledge, and the form and use of the Persian months in the text.

Previous important contributions to the study of *Sefer Asaf* have argued for a Syriac connection; several other studies have linked the text to a Persian cultural milieu. The information presented here links those two and argues for dependence on material deriving from the Church of the East in Persia.

The Hebrew text referred to as *Sefer refu'ot* ("Book of Remedies") or *Sefer Asaf* ("Book of Asaf") is very important not only in the history of the Hebrew medical sciences, but also in that of medicine as a whole. The text is an extensive medical compendium, with a kind of "medical history," sections on anatomy, embryology, diagnosis based on the pulse and urine, a seasonal regimen, a

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medical oath, and a long *materia medica* section. It has long been one of the greatest mysteries of Hebrew science with regards to fundamental questions such as the date and place of its composition and the identity of its author or authors. It has been dated anytime between the third and the eleventh centuries, with its composition located anywhere between Persia and southern Italy.¹ These questions remain largely unanswered.

Ludwig (Lajos) Venetianer, the Hungarian rabbi who published the first study of *Sefer Asaf* more than a hundred years ago, noted the possible Persian links. Thanks to the advances in Persian studies over the past century we can now say much more about these possible connections.

Below I analyze some of the Persian lore in *Sefer Asaf*, and specifically the figure of Asaf, some Indo-Iranian traces, and the references to Persian months. I will also demonstrate links with medical texts deriving from the Church of

- 1 The most important studies of *Sefer Asaf* include: Ludwig Venetianer, *Asaf Judaeus: Der aelteste medizinische Schriftsteller in hebraeischer Sprache* (Strassburg: Karl J. Tübner, 1916–17); Isidore Simon, *Asaph Ha-Iehoudi* (Paris: Librairie Lipschutz, 1933); Suessman Muntner, *Introduction to the Book of Asaf the Physician* (Jerusalem: Geniza, 1957) [Heb.]; Aviv Melzer, “Asaph the Physician: The Man and His Book: A Historical Philological Study of the Medical Treatise, The Book of Drugs,” doctoral dissertation, University of Wisconsin, 1972; Elinor Lieber, “Asaf’s *Book of Medicines*: A Hebrew Encyclopedia of Greek and Jewish Medicine, Possibly Compiled in Byzantium on an Indian Model,” *Dumbarton Oaks Papers* 38 (1984): 233–249; Ariel Bar-Sela and Hebbel E. Hoff, “Asaf on Anatomy and Physiology,” *Journal of the History of Medicine and Allied Sciences* 20 (1965): 358–389; Shlomo Pines, “The Oath of Asaph the Physician and Yohanan Ben Zabda: Its Relation to the Hippocratic Oath and the Doctrina Duarum Viarum of the Didache,” *Proceedings of the Israeli Academy of Sciences and Humanities* 5(9) (1975): 223–264; Joseph Shatzmiller, “Doctors and Medical Practices in Germany around the Year 1200: The Evidence of *Sefer Asaph*,” *Proceedings of the American Academy for Jewish Research* 50 (1983): 149–164; Tamás Visi, “Medieval Hebrew Uroscopic Texts: The Reception of Greek Uroscopic Texts in the Hebrew ‘Book of Remedies’ Attributed to Asaf,” in Y. Tzvi Langermann and Robert Morrison, eds., *Texts in Transit in the Medieval Mediterranean* (University Park: Pennsylvania State University Press, 2016), pp. 162–197; Vivian Nutton, “From Noah to Galen. A Medieval Latin History of Medicine,” in Ildikó Csepregi and Charles Burnett, eds., *Ritual Healing: Magic, Ritual and Medical Therapy from Antiquity until the Early Modern Period*, (Florence: SISMEL edizioni del Galluzzo, 2012), pp. 53–69.

the East in Persia and suggest a reconciliation of the two main approaches to this text, which highlight Persian and Syriac influences, respectively. I propose that this material may hold the key to solving some of the problems raised by the text.

The Manuscripts

The most complete extant manuscript of *Sefer Asaf* is Munich, Bayerische Staatsbibliothek, MS Munich 231,² assigned to Italy of the thirteenth or fourteenth century by Judith Olszowy-Schlanger, on the basis of preliminary paleographical indications.³ This manuscript has 277 folios. A similar, but shorter text, with 188 folios, is Oxford, Bodleian, MS Opp. 687 (Neubauer 2138; hereafter: Bodl. 2138).⁴ Joseph Shatzmiller recounts that he examined a microfilm of this manuscript together with Prof. Malachi Beit-Arié, who dated it to around 1150 and as from Germany.⁵ Judging by its orthographic errors, it is a copy of an earlier manuscript. Another important manuscript is Florence, Laurenziana, MS Florence Plut. 88.37, which has been dated to the fourteenth or fifteenth century. In addition to these three, 16 other manuscripts contain various sections of the work.⁶ The library of the Jewish Theological Seminary owns what appears to be the oldest extant fragment of *Sefer Asaf* (JTS 10160): two folios from the Solomon Schechter Collection, probably from the Cairo Genizah and dated to tenth to twelfth centuries.⁷

The text as we have it appears to be a composite—a collation of several

2 Moritz Steinschneider, *Die Hebraeischen Handschriften der K. Hof- und Staatsbibliothek in Muenchen* (Munich, 1875), pp. 82–83 (pp. 106–107 in the 1895 edition).

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

4 A.D. Neubauer, *Catalogue of the Hebrew Manuscripts in the Bodleian Library and in the College Libraries of Oxford* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1886), p. 738; Malachi Beit-Arié, R.A. May, eds., *Catalogue of the Hebrew Manuscripts in the Bodleian Library: Supplement of Addenda and Corrigenda to Vol. I (A. Neubauer's Catalogue)* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1994), pp. 397–398.

5 Shatzmiller, “Doctors and Medical Practices.”

6 For a listing and discussion of manuscripts, see Muntner, *Introduction*, pp. 14–21.

7 The JTS online catalogue gives an estimated date of 900–1150, whereas the online catalogue of the Institute for Hebrew Manuscripts at the Hebrew University gives the 11th–12th centuries.

different texts that were copied together. Munich 231 and Bodl. 2138 are entire codices that have been identified as *Sefer Asaf*, although their structure—rather, their lack of structure—makes it clear that they are compilations of different texts joined together. An examination of the three main manuscripts—Munich 231, Bodl. 2138, and Florence Plut. 88.37, along with the possible Cairo Genizah fragment, JTS 10160, has allowed me to begin reconstructing something akin to an *urtext*: the common source to which later additions seem to have been made.

A comparison of Florence Plut. 88.37 as a whole with Munich 231 and Bodl. 2138 reveals something of the process of the compilation of the texts considered to be *Sefer Asaf*. The Asaf text in Florence Plut. 88.37 is the first in the codex (fols. 1–26r), and is followed by six other medical texts.⁸ The second text, clearly marked as a separate text in Florence Plut. 88.37, is a head-to-toe list of illnesses (fol. 26r–30v), all with Greek names. The list is incomplete, ending abruptly on fol. 30v, after illness 15, אמוטואיקיס (*amotoikis*, Greek αἱμοπτῦκός, “spitting blood”).⁹ It appears that a quire (perhaps more than one?) is missing here. In any case, this section was already missing when the codex was paginated. Although the list of diseases is not part of the Asaf text in Florence Plut. 88.37, it appears at the end of Munich 231 (fols. 267r–287r) and has been treated as part of *Sefer Asaf*. The list in Munich 231, too, is incomplete, although longer: eighteen sections rather than the fifteen in Florence Plut. 88.37. The text is unmistakably the same.

There is still no scientific edition of the text. Muntner published a text based on a collation of several manuscripts, but moved freely from one manuscript to another, for a result that is very confusing indeed.¹⁰ I am currently producing an edition and translation of the sections I consider to belong to the *urtext*.

8 (1) Fols. 1v–26r: *Sefer Refu'ot*; (2) fols. 26r–30v: Head-to-toe list of illnesses (incomplete; missing quire at the end); (3) fols. 31r–58r: ספר הראשון של פסיקא; (4) fols. 58v–73v: הספר השלישי: צירלוגואה היא מלאכת (Antidotarium); (5) fols. 73v–84r: הספר הרביעי: ספר ביאתקו (Viatico). For a description of the codex, see Antonio Maria Biscioni, *Bibliothecae Ebraicae Graecae Florentinae sive Bibliothecae Mediceo Laurentianae* (Florentiae, 1757), vol. 2.

9 I would like to thank Petros Bouras-Vallianatos for discussing this term with me.

10 Suessman Muntner, ed., “Assaf ha-rofe’, *Sefer Refu'ot*” (Asaf the Physician, *Book of Remedies*), *Korot* 3 (1965): 396–422, 533–560; 4 (1968): 11–40, 170–207, 389–443, 531–572, 691–730; 5(1) (1971): 27–68, 160–187, 295–330; 5(2) (1971–1972): 435–473, 603–649, 773–807; 6(1) (1972): 28–51.

The Introduction of the *Book of Asaf*

The introduction of the *Book of Asaf* is an intriguing text on the origins of medical knowledge, identifying its knowledge as derived from the medical systems of India, Greece, Egypt, and Aram.¹¹ It is an example of an “origin narrative” that recounts the origin(s) of a field of knowledge, the motivation for “inventing” or “establishing” that kind of knowledge, and the subsequent development of the field.¹² Here Asaf takes his place alongside Hippocrates, Dioscorides, and Galen:

6 ויכתוב נח את הדברים האלה על
ספר ויתנהו לשם בנו הגדול ומן הספר הזה
העתיקו חכמי הראשונים ויכתבו ספרים הרבה
איש ואיש כלשונו ותרבה דעת הרפואה בארץ
10 בכל הגוים אשר בחנו את ספרי הרפואות
בחכמי הודו וחכמי מקדון וחכמי מצרים כי
חכמי הודו הם שוטטו למצוא כל עצי רפואות
והבשמים וחכמי ארם מצאו העשבים לכל
מיניהם וזירועיהם לרפא ואת פשר דברי
15 הספרים העתיקו ארמית וחכמי מקדון החלו
ראשונה לרפא בארץ וחכמי מצרים החלו
לחבר ולנחש במזלות ובכוכבים ללמד את ספר
מדרש הכשדים אשר העתיק קנגרבון אור בן
כשד לכל מעשה החרטומים ותגדל להם חכמתם
20 עד קום אסקלפינוס אחד מחכמי מקדון וארבעים
איש עמו מן החרטומים מלומדי הספרים הנעתקים
וילכו הלך בארץ ויעברו מעבר להודו אל ארץ

17 במזלות] Munich 231: מזרות

- 11 For a fuller analysis of the introduction to the *Book of Asaf* see Ronit Yoeli-Tlalim, “Exploring Eurasian Transmissions of Medical Knowledge: Cues from the Hebrew *Book of Asaf*,” in Lennart Lehmhaus ed., *Defining Jewish Medicine: Transfer of Medical Knowledge in Jewish Cultures and Traditions* (Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz, forthcoming in 2018).
- 12 On origin narratives in Islamic sources, see Keren Abbou HersHKovitz, “The Historiography of Science between the 10th and the 14th Centuries,” doctoral dissertation, Ben-Gurion University of the Negev, 2008 [Heb.]; Sonja Brentjes, “Narratives of Knowledge in Islamic Societies: What Do they Tell us about Scholars and their Contexts?,” *Almagest* 4:1 (2013): 74–95.

- 1 קדמת עדן למצוא מקצת עצי החיים למען
 תגדל תפארתם על חכמי הארץ ויהי בבואם
 אל המקום ההוא וימצאו את עצי המרפא ועצי
 עץ החיים וישלחו את ידם לקחתם ויברק ה'
 5 עליהם להט החרב המהפכת וילהטו כולם בשביבי
 הברק ולא נמלט מהם איש ותעזב הרפואה מן
 הרופאים ותשבת חכמת הרופאים שש מאות
 ושלושים שנה עד מלוך ארתחשסתא המלך
 בימיו קם איש נבון וחכם ומלומד דעת ספרי
 10 הרפואות ומבין לכל דבר ושמו איפוקרט המקדוני
 ושאר חכמי הגוים אסף היהודי ודיסקרדיוס
 הבעלתי וגליינוס הכפתורי וחכמים הרבה מאד
 ויחדשו עטרת הרפואה ותהי עד היום הזה

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, among all the peoples who studied the books of medicines – [i.e.] among the sages of India and the sages of Macedonia and the sages of Egypt. The sages of India went exploring in order to find medicinal and aromatic trees, and the sages of Aram discovered every species and strain of medicinal herbs in order to cure. And they translated the content of the books into Aramaic [i.e. Syriac]. The sages of Macedonia were the first to heal on earth, and the sages of Egypt began to perform and use divination of the stars and constellations, to teach the book of Babylonian (Chaldean, כשדים) wisdom, copied by Kangar son of Ur son of Kesed (כשד)¹³ as well as all the deeds of the magicians (*ḥarṭumim*).¹⁴ And their wisdom grew until the advent of Asclepius, one of the Macedonian sages and with him forty men, magicians (*ḥarṭumim*), learned in the translated books. And they traveled through the land, passing beyond India to the land (fol.

13 “Kesed” is mentioned in Gen. 22:22.

14 The *ḥarṭumim* are mentioned in Genesis 41, when they are unable to decipher Pharaoh’s dream; in Exodus 7–9, in magic competition with Moses; and in Daniel 1–2 and 4, where Daniel and his Jewish companions’ wisdom exceeds that of the local *ḥarṭumim* and interpreters of Nebuchadnezzar’s dreams.

2v) east of Eden, to find some of the trees of life in order to increase their glory among the sages of their land. And when they came to that place, they found the medicinal trees and the trees of the tree of life. And they reached out their hand to take them. But God struck them with the flaming sword that turns every way.¹⁵ And they were all burned by the sparks of lightning and not one escaped. And medicine was bereft of physicians. And the knowledge of physicians lay dormant for 630 years, until the reign of King Artaxšaça (אַרְתַּחֲשַׁצָּא, Artaxerxes). In his time there rose a clever and wise man, learned in the lore of the medical books and understanding it all; his name was Ippocrat (Hippocrates) the Macedonian. So too the other gentile sages, and Asaf the Jew and Diskardios (Dioscorides) of Ba'al (or Ba'alat)¹⁶ and Galenos of Caphtor¹⁷ and many other sages and they renewed the glory of medicine, which survives to this day...¹⁸

Asaf

We know nothing about *Sefer Asaf's* author or authors. Elinor Lieber has argued that the attribution to Asaf is pseudonymous.¹⁹ I support this view, particularly in light of the newly available first volumes of the English translation of the Persian *Dā'irat al-Ma'ārif-i Buzurg-i Islāmī* (*Great Islamic Encyclopaedia*). Its long and fascinating entry on Āṣaf b. Barakhyā, paints a picture of an extensive

15 Gen. 3:24. The context there is close to the present text: God is said to have appointed the cherubim and the “flaming sword that turns every way” to guard the way to the Tree of Life.

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

17 A biblical island, usually identified as Crete. In the Septuagint and in the Syriac tradition, Caphtor was identified as Cappadocia. See Gerald Avery Wainwright, “Caphtor-Cappadocia,” *Vetus Testamentum* 6 (1956): 199–210; Roger Le Déaut and Roger Jacques, *Targum des Chroniques* (Rome: Biblical Institute Press, 1971). On this identification in the Peshitta and in the Syriac geographical tradition, see Witold Witakowski, “The Division of the Earth between Descendants of Noah in Syriac Tradition,” *Aram Periodical* 5 (1993): 635–656, on pp. 637; 639, and 647.

18 Munich 231, fols. 2r–2v; my translation.

19 Lieber, “Asaf's ‘Book of Medicines.’” This view has been supported by Visi, “Medieval Hebrew Uroscopic Texts.” I would like to thank him for sharing this paper with me.

Persian tradition that links a legendary figure by the name of Āṣaf b. Barakhyā to knowledge.²⁰

The links between “Asaf” and Persian lore can be traced back to the biblical book of Nehemiah, where a person by that name appears as the warden of the royal park (*pardes*) of King Artaxerxes (Neh. 2:8).²¹ Artaxerxes is also mentioned in the introduction to *Sefer Asaf*, quoted above.

The reference to a Persian king in the history of medicine is significant. Artaxerxes (Persian Artaxšaça) was the throne name of several Persian kings of the Achaemenid dynasty: Artaxerxes I (465–424 BCE); Artaxerxes II (404–358 BCE), and Artaxerxes III (358–338 BCE). Venetianer suggested that Artaxerxes IV (226–240 CE), better known as Ardašīr I, the founder of the Sasanian Empire, is the king referred to in Asaf’s introduction.²² While we should probably leave aside the issue of which Artaxerxes is intended, the important point is that the mention of the name establishes a possible Persian political-cultural milieu for *Sefer Asaf*.

In Islamic legend, Asaf b. Barakhyā was an exemplary vizier, known for his wisdom, rectitude, and relentless protection of the people’s interests. He appears in Persian-Islamic narratives as a minister, scribe, or companion of King Solomon (Sulayman), who had “knowledge of the book.” Tales about King Solomon were circulating in the Arabian Peninsula even before Muhammad. The themes found in the Islamic King Solomon narratives go well beyond anything we find in Jewish sources.

Almost all of the numerous accounts in Muslim commentaries and *Stories of the Prophets* (*Qiṣaṣ al-anbiyāʾ*) that mention his name refer to a surah in the Quran (*Surat al-Naml*) in which Sulayman asks his courtiers to bring him the throne of the Queen of Sheba (Bilqis) before her arrival. One of the courtiers, who is said to have “knowledge of the Book” responds, “I will bring it to you in the twinkling of an eye” (Q 27:40).²³ Commentators were divided over this

20 Farhad Daftary and Wilferd Madelung, eds., *Encyclopaedia Islamica* (Leiden: Brill, 2008–2011). This is a selection of articles translated from Kāẓim Musavī Bujnūrdī, ed., *Dāʾirat al-Maʾārif-i Buzurg-i Islāmī* (The great Islamic encyclopaedia) (Tehran, 1996). The entry on Āṣaf b. Barakhyā is in Vol. 3 (2011), pp. 829–831.

21 For other biblical mentions of this king, see: Ezra 4:7–8, 7:1,7,11,12,21; Neh. 2:1.

22 Venetianer, *Asaf Judaeus*, p. 8.

23 *The Qurʾan: a New Translation by Muhammad A.S. Abdel Haleem* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004).

person's identity. In many Islamic commentaries the courtier is identified as Asaf b. Barakhyā, who had “knowledge of the Book.” There are also many Islamic tales that mention Asaf b. Barakhyā as King Solomon's chief counselor, who made use of the King's magic ring (*ḥatam Sulayman*).²⁴

The continuing going popularity of Asaf b. Barakhyā in Persian culture is reflected in visual representations as well. Serpil Bağcı has noted that in Shirazi manuscript frontispieces of the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries, Asaf b. Barakhyā never fails to appear alongside King Solomon.²⁵ Bağcı suggested that these scenes were the products of a collective image, long in the making and with wide currency, shared by artists and readers.²⁶

All this suggests that particularly in the Persian and Islamic traditions, Asaf b. Barakhyā is not to be regarded as a historical personage, but rather as a legendary figure who is associated with “knowledge of the book.”

While we cannot read hagiographies and mythical accounts as straightforward historical narratives, we can—and probably should—take some cues from such texts. They often serve as pointers to identify strata otherwise forgotten or else rewritten by later historical accounts.²⁷ The study of hagiographies and transmission lines teaches us the importance of observing points of transition from the legendary or chronologically remote to a more historically concrete

24 Roberto Tottoli, “Āṣaf b. Barakhyā,” *Encyclopaedia of Islam*, 3rd, ed. (Brill Online, 2013); Haim Z'ew Hirschberg, “Solomon: In Islam,” *Encyclopaedia Judaica*, 2nd ed. (Detroit: Thomson Gale; Jerusalem: Keter, 2007), vol. 18, pp. 760–761; Max Seligsohn, “Solomon in Rabbinical Literature and Legend,” *Jewish Encyclopedia* (New York: Funk and Wagnalls, 1905), 11: 438–444; David Sidersky, *Les origines des légendes musulmanes dans le Coran et dans les Vies des Prophètes* (Paris: Geuthner, 1933), pp. 112–126. For the *Qīṣaṣ al-anbiyā'* see, e.g., Muḥammad ibn 'Abd Allāh al-Kisā'i, *Tales of the Prophets (Qīṣaṣ al-anbiyā')*, trans. Wheeler Thackston, Jr. (Boston: Twayne, 1978), pp. 314–316. For more sources, see the bibliography in Tottoli, “Āṣaf b. Barakhyā”.

25 Serpil Bağcı, “A New Theme of the Shirazi Frontispiece Miniatures: The Dīvān of Solomon,” *Muqarnas* 12 (1995): 101–111. Asaf is depicted to the left of Solomon (i.e., seated to his right), both in those from the Aqqoyunlu era, where Solomon shares the throne with Bilqis (the Queen of Sheba) (figs. 1 and 2 in Bağcı's article) and in those from the Safavid era, where the two monarchs occupy separate thrones (ibid., figs. 3–6).

26 Indeed at this time, Asaf was such a popular figure that a sixteenth-century Ottoman vizier, Lütü Paşa (d. 1563), entitled his book on the qualities of a good vizier *Asafnâme*.

27 See Ronit Yoeli-Tlalim, “Revisiting ‘Galen in Tibet’,” *Medical History* 56:3 (2012): 355–365.

time. I suggest that here the transition to the reign of Artaxerxes is significant. When corroborated by other types of data, some of it discussed below, hagiographies and mythical accounts may have historical value too.

Persian Months

Highly significant, but hitherto ignored, are the references to the Persian months in *Sefer Asaf*. This part appears in the three main manuscripts mentioned above—Munich 231, Bodl. 2138, and Florence Plut. 88.37, but is illegible in the second of them. The text below is based on Munich 231, compared in some places with Florence Plut. 88.37. In the section on seasonal behavior we read as follows:

19 ...²⁸ ואלמדך לדעת את מבואות התקופות
לתוצאותיהם לזמניהם למיני מחלקותיהם כי הגוף נכון
על ארבעת יסודותיו לפי ארבעת תקופות השנה המנהגות
את השנה ולפי ארבעת הרוחות המנהגות בכל העולם
והראשון לימי השנה ולחדשים ולמועדים ולתקופות
הוא חודש ניסן מנהגו מזל טלה ראש המזלות והוא נקרא
25 בלשון פרס בהמין מה הוא תחילת האביב ותחילת
התקופות היא תקופת ניסן...

24 המזלות] MS Florence Plut. 88.37: המזרות 25 תחילת] Munich 231: תחילת

15 [fol. 9v] ...ואלה שמות החדשים
בלשון פרס אדור מה דיימה בהמיןמה אספנדר מידמה
פרורדון מה ארדבה ישתמה כורדאר מה תירמה
מורדארמה שהרירמה בהמיזמה אבאןמה אלה
שמותם בלשון חכמי פרס והם אמרו²⁹ בזמן שיתחילו הניצנים

16 מה] Munich 231: ארור מה | בהמיןמה] Munich 231: בהמיומה 17 ישתמה] Munich
231: אדרבא ישתמה | כורדאר מה] Munich 231: כורדאר מה 18 מורדארמה] Munich
231: מורדארמה | שהרירמה] Munich 231: שהדירמה

28 This is more or less where Bodl. 2138 begins, although this first folio is extremely damaged and hard to read.

29 This is the first legible word in Bodl. 2138 (fol. 1v). The names of the Persian months appear in the MS, but are hardly legible.

20 להראות בארץ ויבוא השמש במזל טלה הוא ירח ניסן הנקרא בלשון פרס בהמיןמה במועד הזה יחלו הרופאים להשקות כל מיני תרופות לכבס המיעים למען יינפש וינוח הגוף

21 בהמיןמה] Munich 231: בהמיומה; Bodl. 2138: בהמיו מה | במועד הזה] Bodl. 2138: בעת הזאת 22 המיעים] Bodl. 2138: לכבס המיעים | וינוח] Bodl. 2138: יניח

And I shall teach you to know the influence of the seasons and their outcomes [according to] their time and their divisions, because the body is founded on its four elements according to the four seasons of the year that rule the year and according to the four winds that rule the entire world. And the first of the days of the year and the months and the fixed times and the seasons is the month of Nisan. It is ruled by Aries, the first sign of the zodiac and in the language of Persia it is called Bahmen mah—the beginning of spring and the beginning of the seasons—this is the season of Nisan.... (fol. 9v).... And these are the names of the months in the language of Persia: Adur mah,³⁰ Daymah, Bahmenmah, Asfandir midmah,³¹ Farwardun mah, Ordbh yshtmah,³² Khurdād³³ mah, Tīrmah, Murdādmah,³⁴ Shahrīrmah,³⁵ Bhamīzmah, Abānmah. These are their names in the language of the sages of Persia. They said [that] in the time that the blossoms begin to appear in the land, and the sun is in Aries, which is the month of Nisan which is called in the language of Persia Bahmenmah—in this time the physicians would begin to prescribe all kinds of medicine to cleanse the intestines so as to let the body rest and restore itself.³⁶

30 Munich 231: Arudma. Here and in a number of cases below, the *dalet* and *resh* have been exchanged due to what seem to be scribal errors.

31 Munich 231: Mirma.

32 Munich 231: Odrbhesma.

33 Munich 231: Khurdar.

34 Munich 231: Murdārma.

35 Munich 231: Shahdirma.

36 Munich 231, fol. 9r–9v; MS Florence Florence Plut. 88.37, fol. 4r–4v.

In my attempts to make sense of this section I consulted François de Blois, who is a world-renowned authority on ancient Persian calendars³⁷ and a member of the ancient calendars research group at UCL, led by Prof. Sacha Stern. He made several very interesting observations. First, the names of the months are in post-Sasanian Middle Persian. The first on this list, for example, “Adur mah” (אדור מה) is closer to Middle Persian than to the New Persian “Adar.” Shahrīrmah (שהירמה), on the other hand, is closer to the New Persian Shahrīr mäh than to the Middle Persian Shariwar mäh. On balance, however, de Blois is of the opinion that these forms reflect the late Umayyad or early Abbasid period.

Table 1: Persian Months in Sefer Asaf

Persian name	Hebrew form in <i>Asaf</i> , Florence Plut. 88.37 (fol. 4v)	Hebrew form in <i>Asaf</i> , Munich 231
Ādur mäh	אדור מה	אדורמה ³⁸
Day mäh	דיי מה	דיימה
Bahman mäh	בהמין מה	בהמיןמה ³⁹
Isfandārmud mäh (or: Espandarmed mäh)	אספנדירמור מה	אספנדיר מידמה
Farwardīn mäh ⁴⁰	פרורדין מה	פרורדון מה
Urdībehesht mäh	אדרבה ישת מה	אדרבה ישתמה ⁴¹
Khurdād mäh	כורדר מה	כורדאר מה ⁴²
Tīr mäh	תור מה	תירמה
Murdād mäh	מורדרא מה	מורדארמה ⁴³

37 See, e.g., François de Blois, “The Persian Calendar,” *Iran* 34 (1996): 39–54.

38 Munich 231: אדורמה.

39 Munich 231: בהמיומה.

40 Persian lists of the months usually begin with this month.

41 Munich 231: אדרבה ישתמה.

42 Munich 231: כורדאר מה.

43 Munich 231: מורדארמה.

Hebrew form in <i>Asaf</i> , Florence Plur. 88.37 (fol. 4v)	Persian name	Hebrew form in <i>Asaf</i> , Florence Plur. 88.37 (fol. 4v)
שהרירמה	Sharī(wa)r mäh (or: Šahrewar mäh)	שהריר מה
בהמיזמה ⁴⁴	Mihr mäh (Bih-Mir mäh?)	בהמין מה
אבאןמה	Ābān mäh	אבאן מה

Alongside the analysis of the form of the months, it is important also to consider the purpose of this list. The mention of the months has a concrete practical use here. The overall context concerns a person's regimen: when to eat what, and how to act or not act in each season. This contrasts with other Hebrew references to the Persian months, where their mentions seem to be more of a scholarly enterprise focused on the study of calendars.⁴⁵

An important question raised by this section is thus the provenance of this calendar. According to de Blois, the westernmost location where this calendar would have been used is the area of modern-day Iraq.

Lastly, and most importantly, this section reveals something even more intriguing. The last part of the passage equates the Hebrew month of Nisan with Bahman: "They said [that] in the time that the blossoms begin to appear in the land, and the sun is in Aries, the month of Nisan which is called in the language of Persia Bahmenmah ..."

De Blois pointed out that only rarely does the Persian month of Bahman coincide with Nisan.⁴⁶ Thanks to *KAIROS*, new software for computing ancient calendars, it is possible to calculate when this occurred. According to de Blois, Bahman and Nisan correlated in the mid-eighth century—but not again for more than 1200 years.

These two items—the coincidence of the Persian and Hebrew months in the eighth century and a westernmost geographical location where this calendar would have been in use of modern-day Iraq, make an important contribution to the Persian hypothesis of the origin of *Sefer Asaf*.

44 The form בהמיזמה is oddly different from Mihr ma.

45 See, e.g., Ilana Wartenberg, "The Zoroastrian Persian Calendar in a Medieval Hebrew Treatise on the Jewish Calendar by Abraham bar Ḥiyya," *Tarikh-e Elm: Iranian Journal for the History of Science* 12 (2013): 31–53.

46 François de Blois, personal communication.

As noted above, the section in question appears in the three most complete manuscripts, namely Munich 231, Bodl. 2138, and Florence Plut. 88.37. The first folio of Bodl. 2138 is badly damaged and hard to read, but enough is legible to see that the section discussed above is more or less where Bodl. 2138 begins. Its integration within the text, dealing with a topic that is then further developed—the seasonal regimen—suggests that the inclusion of this part in the text is significant.

Indo-Iranian Traces

The Persian hypothesis also provides a good explanation for some other features of the text that have long puzzled scholars. The Persian connection would explain *Sefer Asaf*'s numerous intriguing references to India, both explicit and implicit.

These references appear both in the introduction to *Sefer Asaf* as well as in the discussion of various *materia medica*. Lieber suggested that the overall structure of the text is based on an Indian or even a Tibetan model.⁴⁷ This is an important and interesting hypothesis, but requires further research. We can now categorically reject the Tibetan hypothesis, however: it is clear that the *Gyushi* (Tibetan: *rgyud bzhi*), the *locus classicus* of Tibetan medicine, dates from the twelfth century, and not from the eighth century as some had suggested in the past, and the dating on which Lieber's argument is based.⁴⁸ But while we lay to rest the Tibetan connection, there remains the task of explaining the features of *Sefer Asaf* that show its affinity with Indic medical knowledge.

India as a Source of Medical Knowledge

India appears in *Sefer Asaf* as a source of superior medical knowledge and as a place where wondrous medicinal plants grow. In addition to the mentions in the introduction, quoted above, India also appears in the *materia medica* section.

India as a source of knowledge is a well-known topos in diverse cultural

47 Lieber, "Asaf's 'Book of Medicines.'"

48 For a new and important study of the origins of the *Gyushi*, see Yang Ga, "The Origins of the *Four Tantras* and an Account of Its Author, Yuthog Yonten Gonpo," in *Bodies in Balance: The Art of Tibetan Medicine*, ed. Theresia Hofer (New York: Rubin Museum of Art and Washington University Press, 2014), pp. 154–177. For a summary of the main debates over the dating of the text, see Ronit Yoeli-Tlalim, "Yuthog Yonten (the younger)," in W.F. Bynum and H. Bynum, eds., *Dictionary of Medical Biography* (Westport: Greenwood Press, 2007), Vol. 5, pp. 1342–1344.

contexts.⁴⁹ It can be found already in a work by Palladius, the fifth-century bishop of Helenopolis, *On the Peoples of India and the Brahmins*. Palladius's text is interpolated in some versions of the *Alexander Romance*. A version of the *Alexander Romance* was interpolated into *Sefer Yosippon*, completed in southern Italy or Sicily around the end of the ninth or beginning of the tenth century.⁵⁰ The *Alexander Romance* (as found in some versions of *Sefer Yosippon*) includes the well-known dialogue between Alexander the Great and the sages of India.⁵¹

In this episode, the Indian sages are described as “very wise” and “having books.”⁵² Some of the wisdom associated with the Indian sages in the *Alexander*

49 See Abraham Melamed, *The Myth of the Jewish Origins of Science and Philosophy* (Jerusalem: Magnes Press, 2010) (Heb.), also in n. 52. On Jewish variations on this topos, see: Richard Marks, “Hindus in Medieval Jewish Literature,” in Nathan Katz et al., eds., *Indo-Judaic Studies in the Twenty-First Century* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2007), pp. 57–73; Abraham Melamed, “The Image of India in Medieval Jewish Culture: Between Adoration and Rejection,” *Jewish History*, 20:3/4 (2006): 299–314.

50 David Flusser dated *Sefer Yosippon* to 953 CE; but as Dönitz has pointed out, this dating has been questioned several times. An earlier date—the end of the ninth or beginning of the tenth century—is generally accepted today. See Saskia Dönitz, “Historiography among Byzantine Jews: The Case of *Sefer Yosippon*,” in Robert Bonfil et al., eds., *Jews in Byzantium: Dialectics of Minority and Majority Cultures* (Leiden: Brill, 2012), pp. 951–968; Saskia Dönitz, *Überlieferung und Rezeption des Sefer Yosippon* (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck 2013). See also: Eli Yassif, “Hebrew Traditions about Alexander the Great: Narrative Models and their Meaning in the Middle Ages,” *Tarbiz* 75 (2006): 359–407 [Heb.]; Saskia Dönitz, “Alexander the Great in Medieval Hebrew Traditions,” in *A Companion to Alexander Literature in the Middle Ages*, ed. Z. David Zuwiyya (Leiden: Brill, 2011), pp. 21–39. For editions, see Wout Jac. Van Bekkum, *A Hebrew Alexander Romance according to MS London Jews' College no. 145* (Louvain: Peeters, 1992); Wout Jac. Van Bekkum, *A Hebrew Alexander Romance according to MS Hébr. 671.5 Paris, Bibliothèque nationale* (Groningen: Styx, 1994).

51 Luitpold Wallach, “Alexander the Great and the Indian Gymnosophists in Jewish Tradition,” *Proceedings of the American Academy for Jewish Research* 11 (1941): 48–52; Steven Bowman, “Alexander and the Mysteries of India,” *Journal of Indo-Judaic Studies* 2 (1999): 71–111. On Megasthenes' theory of the connection between the wisdom of the Jews and the wisdom of the Indians as reported by Clemens of Alexandria, see Melamed, *The Myth of the Jewish Origins*, p. 61.

52 David Flusser, *The Josippon [Josephus Gorionides], edited with Introduction, Commentary and Notes* (Jerusalem: Bialik Institute, 1978–1980), vol. 1, p. 474 [Heb.].

Romance is knowledge of wondrous drugs. It might be noted here that there is a version of this episode in the Babylonian Talmud, tractate *Tamid*. In this version, the sages with whom Alexander has a similar dialogue are identified as the “sages of the south” (חכמי הנגב).⁵³

The specific way in which India is identified as a source of knowledge in the introduction to *Sefer Asaf*, however, is most reminiscent of the Sasanian texts on the origins and transmission of knowledge studied by Dimitri Gutas and Kevin van Bladel.⁵⁴ One of these is the account of the history of the sciences by Abū Sahl ibn Nawbakht (fl. 770–809), which has recently been studied by van Bladel. As he has shown, Abū Sahl’s account of the history of the sciences, the earliest extant history of science in Arabic, is based on pre-Islamic Persian sources. It preserves a claim that the peoples of India, Babylonia, and Egypt already possessed scientific knowledge in the prehistoric era, a claim similar to what appears in the introduction to *Sefer Asaf*. Indeed, the overall structure of Abū Sahl’s account is very similar to that of *Asaf*, with the following parallels: a prehistoric flourishing of knowledge; the advent of the Macedonians, who discover the ancient knowledge; the disappearance of knowledge due to moral decline, followed by a revival of knowledge under the Sasanian Empire, which involves the collection of knowledge from Babylonian, Syriac, Greek, and Indian sources.⁵⁵ The view of Persian science—including medicine—under the Sasanians as an integration of knowledge from India and Byzantium also appears in the fourth book of the *Dēnkard*, a tenth-century Pahlavi summary of knowledge of the Mazdean religion.

This famous passage has been studied and translated many times:

Shapur, the King of Kings, son of Ardašīr, further collected nonreligious writings on medicine, astronomy, movement, time, space, substance,

53 B *Tamid* 31b–32b.

54 Dimitri Gutas, *Greek Thought, Arabic Culture: The Graeco-Arabic Translation Movement in Baghdad and Early ‘Abbāsīd Society (2nd–4th/8th–10th centuries)* (London: Routledge, 1998), pp. 34–40; Kevin Van Bladel, “The Arabic History of Science of Abū Sahl ibn Nawbakht (fl. ca 770–809) and Its Middle Persian Sources,” in Felicitas Opwis and David Reisman, eds., *Islamic Philosophy, Science, Culture, and Religion: Studies in Honor of Dimitri Gutas*, (Leiden: Brill, 2012), pp. 41–62.

55 Van Bladel, “Arabic History.” See also Kevin Van Bladel, “The Bactrian Background of the Barmakids,” in Anna Akasoy, Charles Burnett, and Ronit Yoeli-Tlalim, eds., *Islam and Tibet: Interactions along the Musk Routes* (Farnham: Ashgate, 2011), pp. 43–88.

accident, becoming, decay, transformation, logic, and other crafts and skills, that were scattered among the Indians and in Rome (and) other lands, and collated them with the Avesta.⁵⁶

The imperial Sasanian ideology at the heart of these texts, which saw itself as one of hoary antiquity and matchless civilization, as described by Gutas, has been given a Jewish twist in *Sefer Asaf*. Just as in his analysis the imperial Sasanian Zoroastrian ideology promoted a “culture of translation,” presenting all knowledge as deriving from the Avesta, so too *Sefer Asaf*’s narrative has medical knowledge being given to Shem and finding its way to the sages of India before ultimately being returned to humanity under the auspices of a Persian king—an intriguing Jewish variation on the narratives of the *Dēnkard* and Abū Sahl’s account. The *Asaf* narrative, like the *Dēnkard* and Abū Sahl ones, promotes a culture of translation in which translation is a cultural good. The role of the Persian king as collating and harmonizing foreign knowledge, a key feature both in the *Dēnkard* and Abū Sahl, is also clearly present in *Sefer Asaf*.⁵⁷

Trees of Life and Trees of Medicine

The reference in *Sefer Asaf* to the trees of medicine and “trees of the tree of life,” which are to be found “beyond India,” alludes to an important motif common in the Indo-Iranian traditions.⁵⁸ This Iranian concept of a huge tree that is the

56 *Dēnkard*, Book 4, translated in Jason Sion Mokhtarian, *Rabbis, Sorcerers, Kings, and Priests: The Culture of the Talmud in Ancient Iran* (Oakland: University of California Press, 2015), p. 86. For a detailed study, see Mansour Shaki, “The Dēnkard Account of the Zoroastrian Scriptures,” *Archiv Orientalni* 49 (1981): 114–125. Shaki (p. 123) also mentions astronomy as another example of non-religious knowledge discussed in the *Dēnkard* and presented as a collation of Indian, Greek and Persian knowledge. For other translations of this passage see H.W. Bailey, *Zoroastrian Problems in the Ninth-Century Books: Ratanbai Katrak Lectures* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1943), p. 81; Shaul Shaked, *Dualism in Transformation: Varieties of Religion in Sasanian Iran* (London: School of Oriental and African Studies, 1994), pp. 100–101 and Shai Secunda, *The Iranian Talmud: Reading the Bavli in its Sasanian Context* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2014), p. 60. See also Alberto Cantera, *Studien zur Pahlavi-Übersetzung des Avesta* (Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz, 2004), pp. 106–113.

57 For the role of Ardašīr in these narratives, see Van Bladel, “Arabic History.”

58 Ronald E. Emmerick, “Indo-Iranian Concepts of Disease and Cure,” *Journal of the European Ayurvedic Society* 3 (1993): 72–93.

source of renewal for all plants on the earth has been studied by Mary Boyce.⁵⁹ As she points out, in Yašt 12.17⁶⁰ this tree is called the Tree of All Remedies, since it bears the seeds of all healing herbs. In Pahlavi texts it has various names: the Tree of All Seeds; the Tree of All Healing; the Tree Opposing Harm. The other great tree of Iranian mythology, the Gōkarn (or Gōkart), is described as surrounded by healing plants. The Pahlavi sources explain that this tree is the “White Hōm,” the “chief of plants,” which gives long life to whoever eats from it, as well as making bodies immortal after resurrection. Boyce has pointed out that there seems to be some confusion in Persian mythology between this Tree of Life and the Tree of All Seeds, since they grow close together and are both associated with healing plants.

The same concepts appear in India.⁶¹ Boyce suggested that these tree myths derive from an old Indo-Iranian concept. The common Indian tree myth speaks of a huge tree, Jambū, which was associated with *soma*, the sacrificial drink, as well as with healing herbs and immortality.⁶² In both the Avestan and Vedic civilizations we have a tree of life, placed at the centre of the world, on firm land or in the sea, in which divine winged creatures nest. The sap of this tree nourishes the plant of immortality.

Medical Content

Ascertaining the possible sources of the medical content of *Sefer Asaf* is clearly the most intriguing as well as the most complex aspect of the study of this text. There are several reasons for this complexity: first, as discussed above, the work known as *Sefer Asaf*, as attested in the extant manuscripts, is a composite text. This in itself could explain the different positions scholars

59 Mary Boyce, *A History of Zoroastrianism* (Leiden: Brill, 1996), Vol. 1, pp. 137–138. Boyce refers to Friedrich Windischmann, *Zoroastrische Studien* (Berlin, 1863), pp. 165 ff.

60 The Yašts are a group of 21 hymns and form an important part of the Zoroastrian sacred texts collected in the Avesta. See Almut Hintze, “YAŠTS,” *Encyclopædia Iranica*, online edition, 2014, at <http://www.iranicaonline.org/articles/yashts> (accessed July 1, 2015).

61 Odette Viennot, *Le culte de l'arbre dans l'Inde ancienne* (Paris: Presses universitaires de France, 1954), pp. 26–32. On the Indo-Iranian link, see pp. 29–30.

62 This is only one of the meanings of *soma*. For an in-depth analysis of this term in classical Indian medicine, see Dominik Wujastyk, “Agni and Soma: A Universal Classification,” *Studia Asiatica* 4 & 5 (2003–2004): 347–370.

have taken regarding the origins of the text. This is the conclusion recently reached by Tamás Visi.⁶³

The second problem is that all three medical traditions suggested as possible sources of the medical knowledge found in *Sefer Asaf*—Syriac medicine, Byzantine medicine, and Persian medicine—are marred by extensive lacunae. Recent innovative research in these fields has revealed the composite nature of these medical traditions, which only further complicates the question at hand.⁶⁴

While much of the scholarship on Syriac medicine has focused on its role as a transmitter of Galenic medicine and as bridge between Greek and Arabic,

63 See Tamás Visi, “The Book of Asaf and Shabatai Donolo’s Hebrew Paraphrase of Hippocrates’ *Aphorisms*,” in Lehmann, ed., *Defining Jewish Medicine*, forthcoming in 2018.

64 For recent work on Persian medicine, see Paolo Delaini, *Medicina del Corpo, Medicina dell’anima: La circolazione delle Conoscenze Medico-Filosofiche nell’Iran Sasanide* (Milan: Mimesis, 2013). For recent work on Syriac medicine, see the many publications by Grigory Kessel (a full list is available on his academia.edu page); Alexey Muraviev, “La médecine thérapeutique en syriaque (IV^e-VIII^e siècle),” in *Les sciences en syriaque*, ed. Émilie Villey (Paris: Geuthner, 2014), pp. 253–284; Siam Bhayro and Robert Hawley, “La Littérature botanique et pharmaceutique en langue syriaque,” in *Les sciences en syriaque*, pp. 285–318. See also: Gerrit J. Reinink, “Theology and Medicine in Jundishapur. Cultural Change in the Nestorian School Tradition,” in Alasdair A. MacDonald, Gerrit Jan Reinink, and Michael Twomey, eds., *Learned Antiquity: Scholarship and Society in the Near East, the Greco-Roman World, and the Early Medieval West*, (Leuven: Peeters, 2003), pp. 163–174; Gerrit J. Reinink, “Man as Microcosm: A Syriac Didactic Poem and its Prose Background,” in Annette Harder, Alasdair A. MacDonald, and Gerrit Jan Reinink, eds., *Calliope’s Classroom: Studies in Didactic Poetry from Antiquity to the Renaissance* (Leuven: Peeters, 2007), pp. 123–152; Adam Becker, *Fear of God and the Beginning of Wisdom: The School of Nisbis and the Development of Scholastic Culture in Late Antique Mesopotamia* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2006). See also Stefanie Rudolf, “Die astraldivinatorischen Passagen des Syrischen Medizinbuchs: Neu übersetzt und kommentiert,” doctoral dissertation, Freie Universität Berlin, 2015. The groundwork for this field was laid by the many works of Philippe Gignoux. As Bouras-Vallianatos has pointed out, Byzantine medical literature remains largely unexplored. See Petros Bouras-Vallianatos, “Case Histories in Late Byzantium: Reading the Patient in John Zacharias Aktouarios’ *On Urines*,” in Georgia Petridou and Chiara Thumiger, eds., *Homo Patiens: Approaches to the Patient in the Ancient World* (Leiden: Brill, 2016), pp. 390–409, on p. 390.

the significance of medical texts composed by members of the Church of the East, based in Persia,⁶⁵ is increasingly coming to light. Although these texts were influenced by Greek science, they also reflect significant differences.⁶⁶ Hence, while we acknowledge that comparing medical melanges with one another is infinitely complex, it is possible at this stage to say something about the grand question of the medical content of *Sefer Asaf*.

First, there are several markers that distinguish the medical content of *Sefer Asaf* from Galenic medicine: its *pneumata* (רוחות); its theory of embryology; its discussion of the 248 bones; its inherent link with astrology; its reference to “red bile” (מרירה אדומה), as well as the abundance and linguistic forms of Indic *materia medica*. All of these—except for the *pneumata*—have clear parallels in Syriac medical texts deriving from the Eastern Church in Persia. The *pneumata* of *Sefer Asaf* remain an open question with three possible hypotheses: we simply have not yet found their Syriac parallels; or this is an original contribution by *Sefer Asaf*; or it reflects influence from elsewhere. That said, however, the elaborate discussion of soul and spirit with reference to medical aspects is prevalent in the medical and medically related texts of the Church of the East.⁶⁷

The Structure of *Sefer Asaf* and a Syriac Parallel

Having reconstructed what appears to be a *Sefer Asaf* urtext, I have found that it is quite similar to a Syriac medical text of debated authorship, edited by Jean-Baptiste Chabot in 1943. The similarity between these two texts is apparent not only with regards to their medical content but also with regards to their overall structure.

Visi has noted the similarity between the embryology sections of this text

65 Previously referred to as “Nestorians.” On why in this context “Nestorian” should be replaced by either “Church of the East” or “Church of Persia,” see Peter L. Hofrichter, “Preface,” *Jingjiao: The Church of the East in China and Central Asia*, ed. Roman Malek (Sankt Augustin: Monumenta Serica, 2006), pp. 11–14. For the role of the Eastern Church in transmitting medical knowledge further east, see Yoeli-Tlalim, “Revisiting Galen.”

66 See the discussions in Delaini, *Medicina del Corpo* (esp. pp. 7–120); Reinink, “Theology and Medicine”; Becker, *Fear of God*.

67 For an overview and discussion of related literature, see Henri Hugonnard-Roche, “La question de l’âme dans la tradition philosophique syriaque (VI^e–IX^e s.),” *Studia Graeco-Arabica* 4 (2014): 17–64.

and of *Sefer Asaf*.⁶⁸ This Syriac text, which has been discussed by Philip Gignoux, Gerrit Reinink, Grigory Kessel, and Paolo Delaini,⁶⁹ appears to be a composite text as well. Chabot and Gignoux attributed it to Aḥūdemmeḥ, the bishop of the Church of the East in Nisbis in the mid-sixth century; but this identification is problematic, given that there is no agreement among scholars about the identity of Aḥūdemmeḥ. Furthermore, this attribution has been questioned by Reinink and Kessel.⁷⁰ Delaini has suggested that the first part of the text is by a (pseudo-) Aḥūdemmeḥ Antipatros.⁷¹ Kessel has shown that the second part of this text (pp. 70–73 in the Latin translation) is derived from the so-called *Book of Medicine* by Shemʿon d-Ṭaybutēh, a seventh-century Christian mystic who lived in the monastery of Rabban-Shabur in southwestern Iran.

Both texts, the Syriac and *Sefer Asaf*, begin with the same structure:

	<i>Sefer Asaf</i> (Munich 231)	Shemʿon d-Ṭaybutēh and (pseudo-) Aḥūdemmeḥ Antipatros (ed. Chabot; reference to Chabot's Latin trans- lation)
Narrative on the “history of medicine”	1v–2v	pp. 63–4
Description of the 248 bones of the body	2v–3r	p. 64

68 Visi, “Medieval Hebrew Uroscopic Texts.” Visi and I have also discussed the similarities in the sections dealing with the 248 bones of the body, although this is a more complex issue, as it is also attested in the Mishnah. I have discussed this in a paper presented at the *Defining Jewish Medicine* workshop, UCL, 28–29 July 2014. A revised version is due to be published as Ronit Yoeli-Tlalim, “Counting Body Parts: Views from the Hebrew *Book of Asaf*,” *Journal of Jewish Studies* (Special Issue), ed. Mark Geller (forthcoming).

69 Jean-Baptiste Chabot, “Notice sur deux manuscrits contenant les oeuvres du moine Isaac de Rabban Isho et du métropolitain Ahoudemmeh,” *Notices et extraits des manuscrits de la Bibliothèque nationale et autres bibliothèques* 43 (1943): 43–76; Reinink, “Man as Microcosm”; Grigory Kessel, “La position de Simon de Taibuteh dans l’éventail de la tradition mystique syriaque,” in *Les mystiques syriaques*, ed. Alain Desreumaux (Paris: Geuthner, 2011), pp. 121–150; Delaini, *Medicina del Corpo*.

70 Reinink “Man as Microcosm,” esp. pp. 130–131; Kessel “La position de Simon de Taibuteh.”

71 Pp. 53–61 in Chabot’s edition; 63–70 in his Latin translation.

	<i>Sefer Asaf</i> (Munich 231)	Shem'on d-Ṭaybutēh and (pseudo-) Aḥūdemmeḥ Antipatros (ed. Chabot; reference to Chabot's Latin trans- lation)
Description of the "canals" of the body	3r–3v	pp. 64–5
The seats of blood, bile, black bile, and phlegm	4v	p. 65
Embryology (four seats of the semen and characteristics of those born as a result of those different locations of the semen)	5v–6v	pp. 65–67
The role of parts of the body (brain, eyes, nose, lungs, kidneys, bladder, intestine)	7v	pp. 67–68

The texts are clearly not identical, but the similarities are substantial indeed. A detailed comparison between the text edited by Chabot, Kessel's reconstruction of *Book of Medicine* by Shem'on d-Ṭaybutēh, and the relevant sections of *Sefer Asaf* would help answer many of the open questions concerning the links among these three texts.

Conclusion

The form of the Persian months as they appear in *Sefer Asaf* points to Persian influence—direct or indirect. The hypothesis of Persian influence is corroborated by other Persian input: the character of Asaf himself, the similarity with other Persian or Persian-influenced accounts on the origins of the sciences, the appearance of the Indo-Iranian motif of the trees of medicine, and the key importance of Indic medical knowledge. The Persian influence hypothesis can also explain the numerous references to the “sages of Persia,” to Persian plant names, and indeed to entire Persian recipes.

Another question that the hypothesis of Persian influence could answer relates to the influence of the Apocrypha on the introduction to *Sefer Asaf*. Its similarities with Jubilees and 1 Enoch have been noted before.⁷² The question of

72 See Martha Himmelfarb, “Some Echoes of *Jubilees* in Medieval Hebrew Literature,” in *Tracing the Threads: Studies in the Vitality of Jewish Pseudepigrapha*, ed. John C. Reeves (Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1994), pp. 115–141, esp. pp. 127–136.

how and when such input would have been possible remains open. A possible solution, in line with my overall argument here, derives from Erder and Ben Shammai's work, which has shown that the apocryphal books were well known in Babylonia and Persia in the mid-eighth century.⁷³ The Eastern Christian origin also explains certain particularities of the text, such as the use of "Macedonians" for Greeks—a usage confined to the Septuagint, and specifically Esther and Maccabees.⁷⁴

The Syriac influence on *Sefer Asaf* was suggested by Steinschneider,⁷⁵ Löw,⁷⁶ and Lieber,⁷⁷ and recently analyzed by Visi.⁷⁸ The material presented here now allows us to locate this Syriac influence as deriving from the Church of the East, somewhere in Persia. *Sefer Asaf*, or at least some of its basic text, seems to have been derived from Syriac medical literature of the Eastern Church in Persia.

There is a good reason why *Sefer Asaf* has remained an enigma for so long. It is indeed a very complex work and requires expertise in several languages. The passages analyzed here are only a tiny extract from a very long text. More research into the medical knowledge that is presented in *Sefer Asaf* needs to be conducted in order to say more about its building blocks. The working paradigm outlined here can support collaborative work to analyze the text and its sources in a thorough manner. What is clear in any case is that *Sefer Asaf* is an important piece in the great puzzle of the history of Eurasian medical knowledge. *

73 Yoram Erder, "When did the Karaites First Encounter Apocryphic Literature akin to the Dead Sea Scrolls?" *Cathedra* 42 (1987): 54–68 (Heb.); Haggai Ben-Shammai, "Some Methodological Notes Concerning the Relationship between the Karaites and Ancient Jewish Sects," *Cathedra* 42 (1987): 69–86 (Heb.)

74 The point has been raised by Nutton ("From Noah to Galen"), though he suggested this indicates a Jewish source.

75 Moritz Steinschneider, *Die hebraeischen Übersetzungen des Mittelalters und die Juden als Dolmetscher* (Graz: Akademische Druck- u. Verlagsanstalt, [1893] 1956), p. 667.

76 Immanuel Löw, *Die Flora der Juden* (Vienna, 1824–1834), vol. 4, pp. 167–169.

77 Lieber, "Asaf's 'Book of Medicines.'"

78 Visi, "Medieval Hebrew Uroscopic Texts."

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