



## EBN BOQTĪŠŪ

**EBN BOQTĪŠŪ**, prominent family of physicians of Gondēšāpūr at court during the early ‘Abbasid period. Notwithstanding their continued oral competence in Persian and the Persian aspects of their identity, the Boqtīšū family used Syriac and Arabic in their medical writings. Eminent members of this family are the following:

1. Jewarjīs b. Jebrā’īl (d. after 171/787), the first member of the family to be called into caliphal service and thus to move from his home town Gondēšāpūr to Baghdad (Ebn Abī Oṣaybe’a, I, p. 149). This momentous event took place in, or slightly earlier than, 150/767, and is treated in a rather anecdotal way (idem, p. 123), plausibly projecting back into the past conditions which developed only in the course of the 3rd/9th century in Baghdad. Jewarjīs is called “head of the physicians of Jondēšāpūr” (idem, p. 148; Pethion-Qeḏī, p. 158) and was in charge of its hospital (*bīmārestān*). Jewarjīs’ appointment as physician-in-ordinary to al-Manṣūr (136-58/754-775) marked the beginning of his and his descendants’ prominence in Islamic medicine and Baghdad society. They were instrumental in the transfer of the institution of *bīmārestān* from the Nestorian community to Islam, even if only because they, rather than somebody else, happened to have the required influence at the caliphal court. Jewarjīs is represented as a man of worldly manners and fluent in both Persian and Arabic (Ebn Abī Oṣaybe’a, I, p. 124), besides using Syriac as a literary idiom. Only during the lifetime of Ḥonayn b. Eshāq (d. 260/873) did the balance begin to tilt in favor of Arabic in scholarly writing (Ḥonayn b. Eshāq, *Resāla...elā ‘Alī b. Yaḥyā*). Thus Jewarjīs composed his *Konnāš*, “medical



pandects,” in Syriac, possibly at the behest of his grandson Jebrāʾil b. Boḳtīšūʾ (see below), and Ḥonayn translated them into Arabic (Ebn Abī Oṣaybeʾa, I, p. 125). Indeed, this is the only work attributed to Jewarjīs by the bibliographers of the 7th/13th century (Ebn al-Qeḫṭī, p. 158; Ebn Abī Oṣaybeʾa, I, p. 125). It appears highly doubtful that Jewarjīs translated “books of the Greeks” into Arabic, as Ebn Abī Oṣaybeʾa or his source claims elsewhere (idem, pp. 123, 203).

2. Boḳtīšūʾ b. Jewarjīs (dates of birth and death unknown). He attended Hārūn al-Rašīd as of 171/787 and was succeeded in 177/794 by his son Jebrāʾil. Boḳtīšūʾ’s career and profile as a medical author resemble those of his father quite closely, if the sources are to be trusted. In particular, he is also said to have eloquently addressed the caliph in both Arabic and Persian (Ebn Abī Oṣaybeʾa, I, p. 126). Like his father’s *Konnāš*, his own *Moḳtaṣar* and *Tadkera*, the latter expressly written for his son Jebrāʾil, were simple, practice-oriented manuals. Even if Boḳtīšūʾ’s colleagues did not hold him in such respect for his superior learning as Pethion asserts (Ebn Abī Oṣaybeʾa, pp. 125-28), his works may fairly represent the—truly modest— standard of medical scholarship of the day.

3. Jebrāʾil b. Boḳtīšūʾ and Boḳtīšūʾ b. Jebrāʾil. During the generations of Boḳtīšūʾ’s son Jebrāʾil (died in or shortly after 215/830; Yūsuf b. Ebrāhīm apud Ebn Abī Oṣaybeʾa, I, pp. 173-74, 135; Pethion ’s date of 213 thus corrected) and grandson Boḳtīšūʾ b. Jebrāʾil (d. 22 Ṣafar 256/30 January 870, idem, p. 144; Ebn al-Qeḫṭī, p. 104), and with their energetic support, professional horizons broadened and ambitions rose. Both commissioned translations of Greek works and thus contributed to the developing “movement” of the massive appropriation of Greek learning into Syriac first and subsequently into Arabic (Ḥonayn b. Eṣḫāq, index, s.vv. Ġibrīl b. Boḫtīšōʾ, Boḫtīšōʾ b. Ġibrīl). While in this process the non-Hellenistic, especially Persian, elements of the learned heritage tended to be overshadowed by magisterial Greek works, the Boḳtīšūʾ family’s everyday culture retained certain Persian features: Jebrāʾil is still represented as thoroughly versed in the language and as citing approvingly the pre-Islamic, i.e., Sasanian, injunction against people aspiring beyond their inherited station in life (Ebn al-Qeḫṭī, p. 140; Ebn Abī Oṣaybeʾa, I, pp. 131, 175). Above all, it was the Syro-Persian tradition of the Gondēšāpūr Nestorians which presumably gave Baghdad and Muslim society at large its first hospital (idem, p. 174); whether or not Hārūn al-Rašīd acted upon a suggestion by Jebrāʾil, he put him in charge of establishing this *bīmārestān*. This was



succeeded by a long series of distinguished institutions of this type which combined the theoretical and clinical study of medicine with the charitable purpose of providing health care for the needy. By comparison, Jebrā'il's profile as the author of yet another "pandect" and of tracts on dietetics, fumigations, and sexual medicine appears undistinguished (Ebn Abī Oṣaybe'a, p. 138); considering that two of them were dedicated to the caliph al-Ma'mūn, they must have been written in, or at least translated into, Arabic, even though Ḥonayn's testimony clearly implies that Jebrā'il's language of choice still was Syriac (Ḥonayn b. Eshāq, index, s.v. Ğibrīl b. Boḥtīšō'). However, Ḥonayn also credits him with discernment as a reader of medical works and a sustained interest in Galen's great exposition of "scientific method," *borhān* (Ḥonayn b. Eshāq, pp. 40, 47). By composing an introduction to logic (Ebn Abī Oṣaybe'a, I, p. 138), Jebrā'il may have wished to follow the Galenian model himself. In Islam, he certainly represents one of the earliest examples, if not the first, of the Hellenistic combination of medical and philosophical study.

Jebrā'il's son Boḳtīšū' marks the apogee, and subsequent catastrophe, of the family's career at the 'Abbasid court (Ebn Abī Oṣaybe'a, I, pp. 138-44). Beyond the anecdotally romantic, though, he continued his father's support for Ḥonayn (Ḥonayn b. Eshāq, index, s.v. Boḥtīšō' b. Ğibrīl), no doubt contributing more in this indirect way to the spread of medical knowledge than through his own treatise on cupping (Ebn Abī Oṣaybe'a, I, p. 144).

4. Jebrā'il b. 'Obayd-Allāh. The last-mentioned Boḳtīšū's grandson Jebrā'il b. 'Obayd-Allāh b. Boḳtīšū' (b. 311/923, d. 8 Rajab 396/11 April 1006; Ebn Abī Oṣaybe'a, I, p. 147), had, after difficult beginnings, a brilliant career in the Buyids' orbit, and as a septuagenarian received an invitation by the Kurdish-Marvanid Mōmahhed-al-Dawla (387-401/997-1010) to his court at Mayyāfāreqīn (idem, pp. 144-48; Ebn al-Qeḏī, pp. 146-47). One of his medical teachers in Baghdad was a physician "known as Hormozd" (Ebn al-Qeḏī, p. 147), and he rose to prominence in Shiraz, where he caught, before long, the attention of the young Abū Šojā' Fannā Ḳosrow, the future 'Azod-al-Dawla (d. 372/982), and henceforth was retained in his service. Eventually, after a sojourn in Shiraz of nearly three decades, he returned to Baghdad in 'Azod-al-Dawla's entourage, most probably in 367/978, and was appointed to the Buyid's new hospital. Physicians in Baghdad, unhappy to be outshone by Jebrā'il, tried to rid themselves of him by naming him as the only competent candidate to attend to Šāḥeb Esmā'il b. 'Abbād in Ray; one of the reasons they proffered was his command of the Persian language (Ebn Abī Oṣaybe'a, I, p.



145). In the event, ‘Azod-al-Dawla dispatched him to Ray, where he treated Şāḥeb successfully and composed his lesser pandect for him; eventually, he dedicated his greater pandect, *al-Konnāš al-kabīr*, to Şāḥeb as well and named it *al-Kāfi* in his honor (idem, p. 146). According to his son ‘Obayd-Allāh, it fast became a basic reference tool at the hospital of Ray, to which the author himself had donated a copy; at Baghdad, he gave a copy to the famed Dār-al-‘Elm (idem, pp. 146-47). Needless to say, all of Jebrā’īl’s literary output was in Arabic. His fluency in Persian, highlighted in the above-mentioned anecdote, cannot but have furthered his career in the Buyid orbit; thus during an illness of the Daylamite prince Ƙosrowšāh b. Manāḡer, his services were again deemed indispensable. During the two decades following ‘Azod-al-Dawla’s death in 372/982, Baghdad remained his home, notwithstanding several extended periods of attendance to princes elsewhere and of perhaps privately motivated travel to Damascus, and a pilgrimage to Jerusalem (idem, p. 146). Jebrā’īl declined an invitation by the Fatimid caliph ‘Azīz (365-86/976-96), but eventually he accepted, as indicated above, employment as court physician to Momahhed-al-Dawla, and died in Mayyāfāreqīn. In addition to his above-mentioned medical works, he wrote on subjects of, broadly speaking, theological interest. His refutation of Judaism and his treatise on the agreement between prophetic and philosophical teachings, both regrettably lost, deserve special mention (idem, p. 148; Paul Sbath’s highly dubious *Fehrest*, which lists manuscripts of the two works, cannot qualify as reliable testimony for their preservation, cf. Graf, II, p. 111, no. 6). The latter, entitled *Moṭābaqa* (Agreement) reportedly a very erudite work, is reminiscent of analogous endeavors by Fārābī and his circle on the Muslim side.

5. ‘Obayd-Allāh b. Jebrā’īl. Jebrā’īl’s son Abū Sa’īd ‘Obayd-Allāh (d. in the decade of 450/1058-68) apparently spent all his life in Mayyāfāreqīn, succeeding in actual fact, if not formally, to his father’s position at court. Momahhed-al-Dawla was followed by his able nephew Naşr-al-Dawla (r. 401-53/1010-61), whose long reign marked the Marwanids’ apogee. The major local historian, Ebn al-Azraq, records the construction of a hospital in 414/1023 and mentions ‘Obayd-Allāh’s responsibilities as *kāteb* and *kāzen*, administrative and financial official, in this context, but leaves unmentioned ‘Obayd-Allāh’s possible medical responsibilities (Aḡmad b. Yūsof, p. 123). ‘Obayd-Allāh’s closeness to the amir may also be reflected in the fact that his friend Ebn Boṭlān dedicated his famous *Da’wat al-aṭebbā’* (p. 3, tr., p. 47), to Naşr-al-Dawla in 450/1058. ‘Obayd-Allāh presented his master with the *Ketāb ṭabā’e’ al-ḡayawān wa ḡawāşşehā wa manāfe’ a’żā’ehā*, a treatise on animals and their



occult “medicinal” properties, which is largely based on the pseudo-Aristotelian *Ketāb no‘ūt al-ḥayawān* (Ullmann, 1971, pp. 23-24, 28; cf. Sezgin, GAS III, pp. 351f., no. 2; for Pers. tr. of this work dated 698/1298, see Yohannan, pp. 381-89; Gray, pp. 20-25; cf. M. S. Simpson, “The Role of Baghdād in the Formation of Persian Painting,” in Adle, pp. 91-116). His *al-Rawzat al-ṭebbīya* (ed. P. Sbath, Cairo, 1927) presents definitions of fifty philosophical and medical terms, and in his *Resāla fi’l-ṭebb wa’l-aḥdāt al-naḥsānīya* (ed. F. Klein-Franke, Beirut, 1977) he engages in the much-discussed argument about love passion as an ailment of the mind (Biesterfeldt and Gutas, pp. 23, 24, 47-48, 55). His book of anecdotes and biographies of physicians, *Ketāb manāqeb al-aṭebbā’*, has survived only through ample quotations by Ebn al-Qeṭṭī and Ebn Abī Oṣaybe‘a, who depend on him for their account of earlier members of his family. ‘Obayd-Allāh’s interests also included problems of “physics” as understood in medieval Aristotelianism. These works convincingly demonstrate ‘Obayd-Allāh’s broad-based education, which included competence in Syriac; thus he translated a work by Elias Nisibenus (975-after 1049) on the laws of inheritance (Graf, II, pp. 186-87, no. 11). It would not seem exaggerated to give his father credit for ‘Obayd-Allāh’s careful schooling and to see Jebrā’īl’s wide-ranging interests continued in his son’s literary production, although the northern Jazīra itself remained a fairly congenial environment for indigenous Christian communities long after the end of the Marwanid dynasty.

See also [BĪMĀRESTĀN](#); [BOḤTĪŠŪ](#).

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