



‘ISĀ B. YAḤYĀ MASIḤI JORJĀNI

‘ISĀ B. YAḤYĀ MASIḤI JORJĀNI, Abu Sahl, physician, philosopher, mathematician, and astronomer (d. after 925). Little is securely known about the life of this Christian scholar, since the surviving biographies and anecdotes are inconsistent and contradictory. Zahir-al-Din Bayhaqī (q.v.; *Tatemmat Šewān al-ḥekma*, pp. 90-91), for instance, claims that he was born in Jorjān, studied in Baghdad, and wrote his *Ketāb taḥīr al-ro’yā* (Dream interpretation) for the Kvārazmšāh Ma’mun b. Moḥammad (r. 995-997). But the testimony of Ebn al-Qeftī (pp. 408-9) and Ebn Abi Oṣaybe’a (col. 1, pp. 327-8), supported in part by Bar Hebraeus (col. 1, p. 176; see [EBN AL-‘EBRI](#)), is that ‘Isā taught Ebn Sinā (Avicenna, q.v.) medicine, presumably at Bokhara in the 990s, though Ebn Sinā in his autobiography does not acknowledge him as his teacher (Gutas, p. 27). He is also said by the same sources to have been in Khorasan, presumably after the fall of the Samanids in 999, where he became prominent at the ruler’s court. Ebn Abi Oṣaybe’a attributes this story to ‘Obayd-Allāh b. Jebrā’il (d. 1058); from 997 Khorasan was under the control of the Ghaznavid Sultan Maḥmud. However, ‘Isā must have been at the court of the Kvārazm-šāh at Gorgānj with such luminaries as Ebn Sinā and Abu Rayḥān Biruni (q.v.) in the early eleventh century, since he wrote his *Ketāb al-ṭebb al-kolli* (Complete medicine; Ullmann, p. 151) and his *Ketāb fī aṣnāf al-‘olum al-ḥekmatiya* (Categories of the philosophical sciences) for Abu’l-Ḥosayn al-Sohayli, the minister of ‘Ali b. Ma’mun (r. 997-1009; Gutas, p. 150), and his *Resāla fī taḥqīq so’āl al-mezāj* (On the determination of the questions of health) and, according to Ebn Abi Oṣaybe’a, his *Resāla fī taḥqīq amr al-wabā’* (On the determination of the matter of infectious diseases) (Sezgin, *GAS* VII, p. 389) for Abu’l-‘Abbās



Ma’mun b. Ma’mun (r. 1009-17).

The second tradition also reports that ‘Isā died at the age of forty; Eilhard Wiedemann claims that Ebn al-Qeftī and Ebn Abi Oṣaybe’a place his death in 400/1009-10, but in fact such information is not found in their biographies of ‘Isā. Others (e.g., Sezgin, *GAS* III, p. 326) place it in 401/1010-11, without citing any sources. We shall see below, however, that he was still alive when Biruni completed his *Ketāb taḥdid nehāyat al-amāken* in 1025. Neẓāmi ‘Aruẓi (tr. Browne, pp. 119-21) relates a curious anecdote, according to which Maḥmud of Ghazna demanded that the Ḳvārazmšāh send him the philosophers at his court. Several, including Biruni, were eager to go, but Ebn Sinā and ‘Isā evidently refused; for Ma’mun dispatched them for refuge to Māzandarān in Ṭabarestān. They lost their way in a sandstorm, and, due to the excessive heat, ‘Isā expired in the desert. There seems to be no merit in this story, since Biruni stayed at Gorgānj until 1017, since Ebn Sinā and ‘Isā are both incongruously represented as practicing astrologers who predicted their own difficulties, and since Biruni refers to ‘Isā as still living in a book he completed in 1025.

‘Isā’s acquaintance with Biruni is confirmed by the list of twelve works that ‘Isā wrote in Biruni’s name listed by the latter in his *Resāla fī fehrest kotob Moḥammad b. Zakariyā’ al-Rāzi* (Kraus, pp. 45-46):

1. *Ketāb fī mabādi’ al-handasa* (On the foundations of geometry). The only mathematical work mentioned in Sezgin, *GAS* V, pp. 336-37.
2. *Ketāb fī rosum al-ḥarakāt fī’l-ašyā’ dawāt al-waẓ’* (On drawings of the motions in things having position).
3. *Ketāb fī sokun al-arḻ aw ḥarakatehā* (On the immobility or motion of the earth).
4. *Ketāb fī’l-tawassoṭ bayn Arestuṭālis wa Jālinus fī’l-moḥarrek al-awwal* (On the intermediate position between Aristotle and Galen concerning the Prime Mover).
5. *Resāla fī dalālat al-laḻẓ ‘ala’l-ma’nā* (On a word’s indication of meaning).
6. *Resāla fī sabab bard ayyām al-‘ajuz* (On the cause of the coldness on the Days of the Old Woman).
7. *Resāla fī ‘ellat al-tarbiyat allati tosta’mal fī aḥkām al-nojum* (On the



deficiency of the education which is used in astrology).

8. *Resāla fi ādāb ṣoḥbat al-moluk* (On manners for companionship with kings).

9. *Resāla fi qawānin al-sĀnā'a* (On the rules of the crafts)

10. *Resāla fi dastur al-kaṭṭ* (On the rules of calligraphy[?]).

11. *Resāla fi'l-ḡazaliyāt al-šamsiya* (On the risings of the sun).

12. *Resālat al-narjesiya* (On narcissism).

These works, some of which reflect Ebn Sinā's interests, illustrate 'Isā's commitment to non-medical topics. Unfortunately, there exist no manuscripts of any of them.

Biruni's appreciation of 'Isā's work in mathematics is indicated by his citing in the *Taḥdid* (p. 170) a letter from him in which he claims that the number of arrangements of combinations of the times of the observation of a lunar eclipse in two cities is 128,450,560,000; Biruni adds that 'Isā had written to him recently to claim that he had found that some extra arrangements make the total a multiple of his previous result. Biruni began to write the *Taḥdid* at Ghazna in 1018 and completed it in 1025. In *al-Āṭār al-bāqiya*, written in 1000, Biruni (p. 63) quotes three verses of 'Isā naming the months of the pre-Islamic Arabs (Ṭamud). Ebn Abi Oṣaybe'a reports that he also wrote a *Ketāb eḳteṣār ketāb al-Majestī* (Compendium of the *Almagest*). Brockelmann (*GAL* I, pp. 273-74) mentions three other non-medical works by 'Isā; a *Ketāb al-arkān al-'ālam* (The basic elements of the world), a *Ketāb mabaāde' al-mawjudāt al-ṭabi'iya* (Foundations of the natural creation), and a *Ketāb talkiṣ ketāb al-samā' wa al-'alām li Aristutālis* (Abridgement of Aristotle's *On Heaven and the World*). Nothing more is known of any of these.

Nor is much known of his medical works other than those previously mentioned beyond their manuscripts and a synopsis of the first item in the following list, even though 'Isā's biographers unanimously agree that he was the best physician among the Christians. The medical works are listed in Sezgin, *GAS* III, pp. 326-27:

1. *Al-Ketāb al-mi'a fi'l-ṣenā'at al-ṭebbiyya* (Book of one hundred [sections] on the



medical art; see G. Karmi, 1978).

2. *Ketāb ezhār ḥekmat Allāh ta‘ālā fī kalq al-ensān* (Demonstration of the wisdom of God with respect to the physical constitution of men).

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