

MAR ISHAQ NINEVITA
AND POSSIBLE MEDICAL CONTEXT
OF EASTERN SYRIAC ASCETICISM

BY
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The emergence of asceticism as a religious and social phenomenon of the Early Christianity has long been a matter exclusively for religious historians¹. Its origin has been traced back to the Essenes fasting or rigorist approach of some apocryphal texts. Syriac asceticism is a special case but it was subjected to the same analysis. It has developed from practice of certain hermits into a highly theoretical discipline based on biblical and antique anthropology² and evolved in close relation to different models, theological as well as social and behavioral. Scholarly and religious interpretations of asceticism – although different in positioning and purpose – were until very recently from a theological or historical viewpoint. Culturology and sociology provided important dimensions for the analysis. One more dimension could also contribute to the understanding of the ascetic phenomenon. This is medicine, more specifically medical science. This area of knowledge has developed a technical language of its own and a special culture connected to it.

Syrians inherited Greco-Roman medicine and adapted to it between the 5th and the 6th cc. Medical science developed a theoretical base for medical care (ιατρική) by Hippocrates in Greece and was then systematized mainly by Roman scientific physicians. The core of it was an opposition of health and disease (ὕγεια / ܘܕܠܐ – νόσος / ܠܘܨܝܐ). The concept of natural health – or to put it in Platonic terms, the *idea* of health – became fundamental. Hippocrates himself was persuaded that health is a natural state of balance of powers (famous ‘four humours’)³, but his main idea was that of natural (physical) health as the initial state and at the same time the objective of

1) V. WIMBUSH AND R. VALANTASIS, *Asceticism*, Oxford, 1995.

2) N. RUSSELL, *The Doctrine of Deification in the Greek Patristic Tradition*, Oxford, 2004.

3) J. JOUANNA, *La notion de nature chez Galien. Galien et la philosophie. Entretiens sur l'antiquité classique XLIX*, Vandœuvre - Genève, 2003, pp. 229-263.

the cure as a complex of medical procedures. Its main component was regimen (διαίτά). Aristotle invented the technical language of medical ethology and Aristotelian anthropology and biology played an important role in the establishing of medicine as a compound technology. Medics got a complex picture of the human organism as a part of the world of animals (ζῷα). Stagirite's syllogistic procedure (proof) greatly influenced medical discourse, making medical proof a norm.

A. GALENISM AND ASCETICISM AS SIMILAR METHODS

I. Roman Galenic science

This particular type of medicine based on observation, prognosis, regimen and restriction was formalized in the Alexandrian medicine. Then Claudius Galen's interpretation of Hippocratic medicine became a golden standard, so J. Jouanna is right to call Galen a 'disciple' of the Wizard of Cos. He made medical treatment a secular procedure, while Hippocratic healing was a sacred one⁴. Galen has left an important corpus of works, which were very popular and laid the foundation of the medieval medicine. Galenus was pagan and his links to heathen practices were obvious, but his Christian contemporaries interested in developing a mystical approach to the religious, used his image as a symbol⁵. Christian belief in salvation as convalescence from sin to a New Life in Christ rooted in Biblical anthropology was consonant with the Galenic theory of disease and care⁶. The soteriological background of the idea of health was even clearer in the ascetic literature, where the disease has become both a mean of divine punishment and a means of perfection. Suffering has changed its place from the negative to a comparatively positive or at least neutral one. Ascetic theory has developed its own language, which borrowed extensively from medical practice and theory. Even in the Gospel we see a stressed parallelism between sinful behavior (sinful life) and disease. It has found its special Aramaic physiognomy in the

4) J. IRIGOIN, *Hippocrate, Galien et quelques autres médecins grecs*. Annuaire du Collège de France 1988-89, Paris, 1989.

5) Nemesius was a rare exception, cf. G. PANTELEAKOS, E. POULAKOU-REBELAKOU, M. KOUTSILIERIS, "Anatomy and Physiology in the work of Nemesius of Emesa 'On the Nature of Man'", *Acta Medico-Historica Adriatica*, 2013, 11(2), pp. 319-328; A. ZANOLLI, "Sur une ancienne version syriaque du *περὶ φύσεως ἀνθρώπου* de Némésius", *ROC* 20 (1915-1917), pp. 331-333; M. ZONTA, "Nemesiana-Syriaca: anthropological and psychological-problems in a patristic Greek treatise by Nemesius, bishop of Emesa-new fragments from the missing Syriac version of the 'De natura hominis'", *Journal of Semitic Studies* 36.2 (1991), pp. 223-258.

6) A.SHEMUNKASHO, *Healing in the Theology of St Ephrem*, Piscataway NJ, 2002.

archaic Greek proverb *ἰατρὲ θεράπευσον σεαυτόν*, in Syriac *ܘܒܝܢܟܘܢ ܕܥܘܠܐ* (Lc 4:23) where the Aramaic reflexive noun could also mean ‘soul’. Thus, the cure of the body has been completed at least metaphorically with the task of soul cure. The system of gelenic cure or Galenism⁷, as V. Nutton observed, had an effect so powerful that George of Pisidia in his *Hexaemeron* (1.1588) could, in a wonderful trope, refer to Christ as a second (and neglected) Galen. D. Amundsen has once argued that on the whole, Christianity looked upon medicine favorably, or at any rate, was not hostile.

Galen’s main deed was the creation of a special *medical mind*. To quote again V. Nutton: The most obvious difference between the medicine of the second and that of the sixth century a.d. can be summed up in one word, Galenism, in both its positive and its pejorative meanings. Instead of the variety of great names that can be cited for the second century – Galen, Rufus, Soranus, Antyllus, maybe even Aretaeus – and the evidence from both literary and epigraphic texts for new interests and ideas on surgery, the fourth and later centuries present us with a dull and narrow range of authors – the summarizes, the encyclopaedists – who have been studied not for themselves but for the earlier sources they happen to encapsulate. Oribasius, Aetius, Alexander, Paul are the medical refrigerators of antiquity⁸.

Galen was later incorporated into Christian tradition as a kind of ‘pagan’ counterpart of Christ, who imitated God by treating those who were in pain. Galenism performed cultural adaptation of medical science – when he presented medicine as *paideia* and referred to a physician as *παιδευόμενος*. Syriac medical tradition adapted it by the 6th c. Basic principles of Galenism could be summarized as follows⁹:

1. The idea of *physis* (kyānā), organic force, which is the base for any cure. In Hippocratic medicine treatment is a reconstruction of the natural state. *Physis* acts as a triad, *dynamis*, *energia*, *ergon*. All the phenomena could be either natural or non-natural, or even against nature;
2. *Humoralism* was a reflection of the famous principle of four elements, the consequence of which was a doctrine of four temperaments, and health – *eukrasia* (mūzzagā), a good mixture of these;

7) O. TEMKIN, *Galenism: Rise and Decline of a medical Philosophy*, Cornell University Press, 1973;

8) V. NUTTON, *Ancient medicine*, London-New York, 2004.

9) P. VAN DER EIJK, *Medicine and Philosophy in Classical Antiquity: Doctors and Philosophers on Nature, Soul, Health and Disease*, Cambridge University Press, 2005; R.J. HANKINSON (ed.), *The Cambridge Companion to Galen*, Cambridge MA, 2008.

3. Body produces spontaneous movements (*aporoī dynamēis*, *zawšē*), i.e. the body has a power (*ḥaylā*) of its own;
4. The idea of innate heat located in the heart (*kardia*, *levvā*), so the anthropological model was cardiocentric;
5. Adverse forces and *dyskrasia* cause irregularities or passions (*pathē*, *ḥaššē*). These produce prodroms or indications (ἔνδειξις, *tahwyātā*) which help a physician to recognize illness (pathological condition). Every disease has its cause.
6. A physician should know well case stories – παραδείγματα or clinical narratives (esp. those from Galen's commentary to the 12-volume *Epidemiai* by Hippocrates) to stand against the disease;
7. Agonism was an important principle of Galenic medicine implying the concurrence of medics as well as their methods (which is an ancestor of modern trial medicine).

To sum up: by the 2nd cent. Graeco-Roman medicine had elaborated its own method of bodily cure, with its own philosophy and terminology¹⁰. Galen was seriously preoccupied with methodology and its connection with praxis or practical training¹¹. That tradition was originally a peripatetic one and Galenism is a consequential application of Aristotelian logic and epideictic to healing practice. Once translated into Syriac, it interacted with the emerging Syriac ascetic and mystical tradition. That conclusion is especially important for the Eastern Syriac ascetical writers.

II. Syriac medical tradition

Biblical anthropological perspective in general provided for Syriac writers a special, therapeutic point of view on human ethics and psychology¹². For the first time the human being was regarded as a complex organism that has to be healed (saved, 'SY, PRQ). The present status of the humankind is an ill one. The theme of Jesus the Healer was very popular in the Early Christian tradition, on Syriac soil especially in Ephrem (S. Brock and other scholars has strongly contributed to this theme in describing healing and medicine as Christological and soteriological themes). In pre-ephremian patristic literature the language of asceticism was less technical, writers used

10) M. FREDE, (1981), *On Galen's epistemology; On the method of the so-called Methodical school of medicine. Essays in Ancient Philosophy* (Oxford, 1987), pp. 261-78.

11) T. TIELEMAN, *Methodology. The Cambridge Companion to Galen*. R. J. Hankinson. Cambridge, 2008, p. 50.

12) A. MURAVIEV, *La médecine thérapeutique en syriaque (IV^e-VII^e siècle). Les sciences en syriaque*, É. VILLEY (éd.), Paris, 2014 (Études syriaques 11), pp. 253-284.

the partly biblical and partly classical Greek language of ethics.

Medicine in the Syrian milieu was based on translations from Greek developed by the 5-6th century. Patriarch Ignatios Barsaum in his *al-Lu'lu'* remarks: “The Syrians had special concern for the science of medicine, which they became famous for in the Orient and which they practiced for more than a thousand years. In his Syriac Chronography Bar Hebraeus mentioned the physicians Sergius of Rish‘ayna, Athanus (or Atanas) of Amid, Phylagrius, Simon Taybutha, Gregory and Theodosius, Patriarch of Antioch, and Hunayn Ibn Ishaq, who along with Simon Taybutha is Nestorian”¹³. All the medics named in that passage lived in the 6th c. or later. The famous Western Syrian physician and theologian Sergius who introduced medicine as a scientific discipline to Syriac culture was certainly the central figure. Sergius’ versions of Galenic works created the Syriac medical mind in all its five main forms: physiology; pathology (theory of disease/epidemy); diagnostic; pharmacopeia; prophylactic¹⁴. Scarce knowledge about the development of medical theory before Sergius of Resh‘aina is counterbalanced by the four main Syriac medical translations of Galenic Corpus. In his famous article Rainer Degen made a catalogue of the translations of Galen into Syriac¹⁵. Abū Zayd Hunayn ibn Ishāq al-‘Ibādī (9 c.) in his ‘Risāla’¹⁶ summary of Syriac medicine also begins with Sergius. Barhebraeus tells us that Sergius was the first to translate Galenus in Syriac:

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ܕܩܠܝܢܘܨ ܕܩܠܝܢܘܨ ܕܩܠܝܢܘܨ ܕܩܠܝܢܘܨ ܕܩܠܝܢܘܨ ܕܩܠܝܢܘܨ

The main manuscripts containing Sergius’ translations (BL Add 17.156 (8th c., excerpts of Galen, edited by Sachau, 1870¹⁷), BL Add 14.661 (6th c., translation of Galen by Sergius [ܩܠܝܢܘܨ ܕܩܠܝܢܘܨ], published by Merx, 1885), Paris syr. 325 (same, published partially by Gottheil in 1899)) are monuments of this adoption. One should add BL Oriental 93) known as ‘Syriac

13) Ignatius BARSAWM, [*Al-lu'lu'*] *The Scattered Pearls*, 2nd ed., Piscataway, 2003, p. 153.

14) R. DEGEN, “Ein Corpus Medicorum Syriacorum”, *Medizinhistorisches Journal* 7 (1972), pp. 114-122. Idem, *Galen im Syrischen. Eine Übersicht über die syrische Überlieferung der Werke Galens*. Galen, Problems and Prospects, V. NUTTON (ed.), London, 1972, pp. 131-166.

15) R. DEGEN, *Galen im Syrischen: Eine Übersicht über die syrische Überlieferung der Werke Galens*, V. NUTTON (ed.), Galen: Problems and Prospects, London, 1981, pp. 131-166.

16) G. BERGSTRÄSSER, *Hunayn ibn-Ishāq über die Syrischen und Arabischen Galen-Übersetzungen*, Leipzig, 1925. رسالة حنين بن اسحق الى علي بن يحيى في ذكر ما ترجم من كتب جالينوس بعلمه. وبعض ما لم يترجم.

17) E. SACHAU, *Inedita Syriaca*, Wien, 1870. (11 هـ-ي.)

Book of Medicines' published by Budge in 1913, a complex collection of different translations from Galen and popular recipes¹¹. The main question is, whether these were witnesses of transmission of the medicine down to the Eastern Syriac tradition (Ḥunayn). Some of the manuscripts are quite early but we have not got that many Eastern Syriac among them. A possible explanation lies in the Western Syrians' particular interest in science and schools¹⁸. The Eastern Syriac tradition developed asceticism as its main achievement and only later with Ḥunayn turned directly to the scientific tradition. In the meanwhile asceticism probably underwent a sort of medicalization.

III. Syriac asceticism as technology

Asceticism has become a theory and practice of the soul cure preparing Christians for the next step of mystical contemplation and union¹⁹. It was based on a particular model of Christian anthropology: 'The new knowledge stimulated appreciation of the human body as a living organism, and turned anthropological speculation aside from aiming at a Platonic $\sigma\omega\mu\alpha\text{-}\sigma\eta\mu\alpha$ conclusion, to pursue optimistic idea of man as the destined king of the phenomenal universe'²⁰. This was a major change comparable to the medical one. Asceticism as a constant teaching based on Christian anthropology has been formulated using a semi-scientific language by Cappadocians, especially Basil and Gregory of Nyssa. Evagrius followed this path; the same could be said about influential Greek writers like Mark the Monk, Nilus of Ancyra or Diadochus of Photice²¹. In his study of interdependence of theology and medicine in Philoponus, R. Todd wrote: "the use of medical ideas represents only a minor aspect of Philoponus' exegetical output, yet its importance in his commentary on the *De anima* lies in the fact, noted at the outset, that it has no equal in the ancient and Byzantine Aristotelian tradition, not even

18) A. BECKER, *Fear of God and the Beginning of Wisdom: The School of Nisibis and the Development of Scholastic Culture in Late Antique Mesopotamia*, Philadelphia, 2006.

19) See G. BLÜM, *Mysticism in the Syriac tradition*, SEERI Correspondence course, Baker Hill, Kottayam, s.a.; G. KESSEL, K. PINNGERA, *Bibliography of Syriac Ascetic and mystical Literature*, Leuven - Paris - Walpole MA, 2011, esp. pp. 2-11; R. BEULAY, *La Lumière sans forme. Introduction à la mystique chrétienne syro-orientale*. Chevetogne, [1987]; S. BROCK, *Spirituality in the Syriac tradition*. Mōrān Eth'ō 2. Baker Hill, Kottayam, 2005; *Les mystiques syriaques*. Études syriaques 8. A. DESREMAUX (ed.), Paris, 2012.

20) W. TEFLER, "The birth of Christian Anthropology", *JThS* 13 (1962), pp. 347-354; esp. p. 349; G. J. REININK, *Man as Microcosm: A Syriac Didactic Poem and its Prose Background*. Calliope's Classroom: Studies in Didactic Poetry from Antiquity to the Renaissance. A. HARDER, A. A. MACDONALD & G. J. REININK (ed.), Leuven, 2007, pp. 123-152.

21) cf. T. ŠPIDLIK, *La spiritualité de l'Orient chrétien. Manuel systématique*. OCA, Roma, 206 (1978), 85-120.

when commentaries were written on medically more suggestive Aristotelian treatises...'²². This early Byzantine commentary on Aristotle's *De anima*, whatever its precise antecedents, is a minor but noteworthy episode in the long history of the interaction between philosophy and medicine. The decisive turn was performed even before Philoponus by so-called praying-monks (mṣalyānē) and their system of asceticism found in Macarian writings"²³. It expressed their belief in the importance of spiritual healing and above all their anthropology, often labelled as 'heretical' because of the idea of a 'demon resident in the soul'. They stressed the importance of body movements and the key role given to the heart (levvā) in the process of healing a person. A recent study of healing in the theology of Ephrem by Aho Shemunkasho²⁴ has shown a certain continuity of the Syriac concept of the heart. Ephremian and Macarian ideas of its central role should be completed with a brilliant example of Šim'ōn de-Taybuṭeh's chapter 'On the Heart' from his ܩܕܝܫܐ ܕܩܕܝܫܐܐܢܐ (‘Book of Therapeutic’). Adam Becker has observed that the two traditions, scholarly and ascetic, were interrelated and even mingled on Syriac soil²⁵. His perspicacious observation was corroborated by Bruns, Reinink and Kessel²⁶.

An interesting case of penetration of medical practices into the ascetic milieu can be observed in the circles of Abraham the Great and of Rabban Šabūr. The main representative of this movement was the monk of Dair Rabban-Shapur Šem'ōn de-Taybuthe, or graceful, who probably made a study of medicine before entering the monastery²⁷. We may simply repeat G.

22) R.B. TODD, "Philosophy and Medicine in John Philoponus' Commentary on Aristotle's 'De Anima' ". *Dumbarton Oaks Papers* (1984), 103-110, esp.; cf. also R. TODD, *Galenic medical ideas in the Greek Aristotelian commentators* 1. Symbolae Osloenses. - 1977. - T. 52. - №. 1. - C. 117-134.

23) K. FITSCHEN, *Messalianismus und Antimesalianismus: ein Beispiel ostkirchlicher Ketzergeschichte*, Göttingen, 1996; C. STEWART, "Working the Earth of the Heart". The Messalian Controversy in History, Texts, and Language to AD 431, Oxford, 1991.

24) A. SHEMUNKASHO, *Healing in the Theology of Saint Ephrem*, Piscataway, NJ, 2002 (Gorgias Dissertations, Near Eastern Studies 1).

25) BECKER, *Op. cit.*, pp. 12-21.

26) P. BRUNS, *Von Bischöfen, Ärzten und Asketen - Schnittpunkte von Christentum und Medizin im spätantiken Sasanidenreich*. G. A. KIRAZ (ed.), *Malphono w-Rabo d-Malphone. Studies in Honour of Sebastian P. Brock*, Piscataway, 2008, pp. 29-42; P. BRUNS, "Schnittpunkte zwischen Christentum und Medizin im spätantiken Sasanidenreich". *OC* 93, pp. 41-58; G. J. REININK, *Theology and Medicine in Jundishapur. Cultural Change in the Nestorian School Tradition. Learned Antiquity: Scholarship and Society in the Near East, the Greco-Roman World, and the Early Medieval West*. A. A. MacDonald, G. J. Reinink, M. Twomey (ed.), Leuven, 2003, pp. 163-174.

27) P. BETTILO, *Simone di Taibuteh. Violenza e grazia. La coltura del cuore*. Collana di testi patristici 102, Roma, 1992. G. KESSEL, *La position de Simon de taibuteh dans*

Kessel's conclusion that in the case of Šem'on: 'malgré sa maîtrise apparemment excellente de la science médicale, on ne peut guère trouver dans l'œuvre de Simon une synthèse élaborée et complète des connaissances médicales et de la doctrine ascétique. Cela peut en partie s'expliquer par le style d'écriture de Simon, qui aimait présenter ses matériaux de manière non démonstrative, sans aller d'un point à un autre suivant un plan donné, mais plutôt en composant des chapitres autonomes (ou des groupements de chapitres) couvrant certains aspects de la pensée de l'auteur'²⁸. However, the 'combinaison unique' of medical competence and ascetic practice seems to be not as local as Kessel seems to think. Different traces of that medical asceticism are to be found here and there in the Syriac tradition²⁹.

Other ascetic writers like Dadišō' Qatraya, Abraham of Nathpar, John of Dalyatā or Joseph Ḥazzayā are much less explicit on medical matters³⁰. We know that in the monasteries of the Church of the East medical knowledge was held in a high esteem. As we see from the quote from Gabriel bar-Bokhtišō' preserved by al-Bīrūnī, medical procedures like bloodletting or the use of leeches were used for both medical and ascetic goals. Medical texts were probably copied by the Eastern Syriac monks together with the ascetical ones. The great library of Beth-'Awē (where mar Iṣḥāq spent quite a time while in Mosul-Nineveh) most probably contained Sergius' translations from the Galenic medical corpus as well as Alexandrian commentaries on Galen.

Both parts of the Syriac mind, medicine and asceticism were technological: knowledge about disease preceded healing and determined healing tactic. This made possible further transfer of medicine and asceticism to Arabic Islamic culture. Syriac asceticism had a technological built method of purification (dukkāyā). It used evagrian division into contemplation (teoryā) and (praxis) and salvation was often called health (ḥullmānā). Ascetic techniques described by Syriac writers were rational, using case-stories from hagiography as diagnostic paradeigmatic. Spiritual pathology was also a well-developed discipline. Ascetic writers used a lot of medical terms like ܩܘܒܘܫܐ (affliction), ܩܘܒܘܫܐ or ܩܘܒܘܫܐ (stupefaction), ܩܘܒܘܫܐ (conduct, behav-

l'éventail de la tradition mystique syriaque. Les mystiques syriaques, ed. A. DESREUMAUX, Paris, 2011, pp. 121-150.

28) *Ibid.*, pp. 145-146.

29) C. PASQUET, "L'homme, lien de l'univers, dans la tradition syro-orientale", *Studia Patristica*. Papers presented at the Fifteenth International Conference on Patristic Studies held in Oxford 2007. J. BAUN, A. CAMERON, M. EDWARDS & M. VINZENT (ed.), Louvain, 2010, pp. 203-210.

30) See corresponding chapters in Kessel-Pingera 2011.

our, also διαίτά, regimen), or **كسب** ([bodily] force), they speak about senses (**كسب** ἰ – **كسب** ἰ) even about custodia sensum (**كسب** ἰ **كسب** ἰ) in the same manner as Galenic medics disserted on the perception. The same could be said about the usage of terms like **كسب** or **كسب** standing for different levels of warmth. Here are some analogies to the principles of Galenism:

- 1) Virtue is natural (kyanāyt), sin is a deviation to the unnatural (d-lā kyanāyt);
- 2) Two forces (elements) of the soul, fast and slow, anger and desiderium (ἐπιθυμία) stay in balance controlled by shame and fear. When disbalance through sin violates the balance, it leads to the spiritual disease.
- 3) Spontaneous movements (zaw‘ē) occur often within the soul. Too much movement endanger the balance within human soul. The monk should control them;
- 4) Heart (καρδία, levvā) plays in the spiritual life a central role;
- 5) Spiritual disease is triggered by an irregularity (ἀμάρτημα, sin) then it gets rooted in the soul and produces illness or passion (πάθος);
- 6) Hagiographic stories (taš‘yātā) as paradigmatic of the struggle;
- 7) An ascetic should ask teacher for advice and make a competition for his goal.

The comprehensive comparative study of both terminological vocabularies is still a desideratum, but at first glance, a striking methodical similitude could not be a simple coincidence, rather it was the fruit of interdependence.

B. ISAAC OF NINEVEH AND MEDICINE IN HIS LANGUAGE

Now we turn to Iṣḥaq Ninwāyā, known in the Western world as Isaac of Nineveh or ‘the Syrian’ (ὁ Σύρος) who learned the Abrahamic monastic tradition probably at the monastery Beṭ-‘Awē³¹. That monastery possessed a

31) S. CHIALA, *Abramo di Kashkar y la sua comunità*, Bose, 2005; Idem. *Dall’ascesi eremitica alia misencoroia infinita Ricerche su Isacco di Ninive e la sua fortuna*. Biblioteca della Rivista di Stona e letteratura Religiosa, XIV. Firenze, 2002 ; *Mēm̄rē*: First collection: P. BEDJAN (ed.), *Mar Isaacus Ninivita. De Perfectione religiosa*. Paris-Leipzig, 1909; Second collection: S. BROCK (ed. et tr.) *Isaak of Nineveh (Isaak the Syrian)*. The Second Part, Chapters IV-XLI. CSCO 554-555 (Script. Syri 224-225), Louvain, 1995. Third collection: S. CHIALÀ (ed. and tr.), *Isacco di Ninive*. Terza collezione, CSCO 637-638 (Script. Syri 246-247).

rich library containing theological and philosophical manuscripts. Isaac should have encountered healing practices used on Mount Izla when he was there, as hirudotherapy and bloodletting mentioned in the documents about Abraham's disciple Rabban Šahpūr³². His detailed knowledge of fasting and sleep, behavior of patients with amputations, his notes about the use of hypo- and hyperthermy show us a well-experienced observer of the capacities of the human body. My suggestion is that it was Abrahamic monastic tradition that combined knowledge about spiritual and bodily cure for the sake of a monk's mystical progress. On the way to perfection (gmiruṭā) he used technology. In the case of Isaac we do not deal with a physician like Šim'ōn but he possibly reflected in his treatises the climate of the Eastern Syriac monastic circles, connected by many ties to the Great schools tradition of Edessa and Nisibis. Isaac describes the practice of brotherly care at the monastery: "Once I went to the cell of a pure (ܩܘܕܫܐ) brother as I fell ill (ܩܘܕܫܐ ܩܘܕܫܐ) and I lay myself down on one part of his cell in order that he take care (ܩܘܕܫܐ) of me for God's sake" (I, 18)³³.

In his treatises (mēmre)³⁴, Isaac was approaching the human from the healing perspective. He used a very clear idea of the human being, according to which human is a complex construction of body (paḡrā), soul (napšā) and its core – the mind (levvā or re'ayānā). Isaac's conclusions on the capacities of the body and soul were based on close observation. He operated with a scheme of functionality of different parts of a man on the way to salvation (ḥayyē or parūqtā). The goal is accordingly to heal the diseases and imperfections of a man. Isaac deals with the spiritual diseases just like Galenic physician deals with the bodily.

C. SOME THEMES IN ISAAK REFLECTING MEDICO-ASCETICAL ANALOGY

- a. ([spiritual] disease) In the Greek ascetic literature, the physical disease is generally regarded from two different angles: as a means to spiritual progress and as a necessary condition of the physical body

Louvain, 2011.

32) Jibrīl b. Bakhtīšū' in his treatise on pharmacology quoted by al-Bīrūnī (Hakim M. SAID, ed. and engl. trad.), *Al-Biruni's Book on Pharmacy and Materia Medica*, Karachi, 1973 (Pakistan Series of Central Asian Studies 1). SAID, 1973, p. 78 [trad.], p. 100* [éd.] provides some examples. Cf. F. JULLIEN, *Rabban-Šapūr: un monastère au rayonnement exceptionnel. La réforme d'Abraham de Kaškar dans le Bēth-Hūzayē*. OCP 2, pp. 333-348. Cf. Kessel 2011, p. 141.

33) Further all notes point to Bedjan's edition of the Syriac text (translations made by myself).

34) On the three collections (or volumes) of Isaac's works, see Chialà 2002, pp. 65-83.

(φθορά, ܩܘܪܐ). Thus, Isaac says that until the soul does not feel drunkenness from the faith in God, it does not heal the disease of the senses (ܩܘܪܐ ܩܘܪܐ ܐܝܢ ܩܘܪܐܢܐ ܕܐܝܢܐ)³⁵. In the treatise I, 2.24 Isaac describes the beginning of spiritual illness in a quite methodical way: “The beginning of the darkening of the intellect could be noticed in the following way... (ܘܥܝܢܐ ܕܥܘܠܐ ܕܥܘܠܐ ܕܥܘܠܐ ܕܥܘܠܐ ܕܥܘܠܐ ܕܥܘܠܐ). In I, 55 Isaac says: One who avoids the medical care (asyūtā), won’t see the light [of perfection]. In I, 35 Isaac states that diseases and passions (ܩܘܪܐܢܐ ܕܥܘܠܐ) are inevitable on the way to God. On another occasion Isaac states that it is impossible that health (ḥullmānā) and illness (kurhānā) coexist in one body without one taking over another (I, 51). I, 56. As a very ill body turns from rich meals, a mind occupied with worldly things cannot approach study of the divine... This is precisely a doctrine of balance.

- b. (indication) In the medical tradition words like ܩܘܪܐܢܐ, symptom, indication, were classical technical terms. One of the treatises from the Second collection has the following passage: ‘Just as a change of place (šunnāyā atrānāyā) for the body affects an alteration in the (balance of) its constitution to correspond to the new localities, so too a mental change effects alterations in the strength of the mind’s stirrings’³⁶.
- c. (nature) In the treatise II,1.12 Isaac gives a striking example of firmness of the heart coming from faith. It is such that even if hands and legs are amputated (ܩܘܪܐܢܐ ܩܘܪܐܢܐ ܩܘܪܐܢܐ) the firmness persists. This case suggests some experimental basis by showing the nervous system of an amputee. Isaac used it on other occasions. He found similar stories in the paradeigmata of medics during war. But then he comforts his readers in a quite medical manner saying that everyone who understands that he is ill will be healed (ܩܘܪܐܢܐ ܩܘܪܐܢܐ ܩܘܪܐܢܐ ܩܘܪܐܢܐ)³⁷. But convalescence (ܩܘܪܐܢܐ) is impossible without fierce bodily labour (ܩܘܪܐܢܐ ܩܘܪܐܢܐ ܩܘܪܐܢܐ: I, 2.22), says Isaac. Further he explains that this healing returns the soul to its nature (ܩܘܪܐܢܐ ܩܘܪܐܢܐ), which is highly reminiscent of the Galenic (Hippocratic in fact) idea of φύσις as the main vital healing force. In the treatise I,5 Isaac says: ‘you should ask the nature (kyānā) [which is] the true witness’.

35) I, 1.7.

36) II,8.13. (Transl. by Brock 1995, II, p. 29).

37) I, 2.2.

- d. (healing / purification) Imitates physicians who cure inflammatory diseases with cooling medicines and vice versa (I, 56).

Ministering to the body (pullhānā d-pagrā) when the mind is idle is useless (II, 24.1).

- e. (physical health, ܪܘܚܝܐ / disease) For Isaac as well as other Syriac ascetic writers the status of physical health was somewhat undermined if not questioned. Isaac noted once that physical health is an obstacle to spiritual progress: (I, 41) they bore with joy serious diseases that fell upon them, from which they could not stand on their feet.

In I, 57 Isaac insists that ‘one should not despise ill and especially mentally ill people’ meaning that the very fact of the disease of a neighbor should point to a vulnerability of the human earthly condition.

- f. (bodily disease is useful) In I, 40 Isaac reminds of the ‘renewal of the diseases and illnesses that arise in your body’ as of a useful mean to stay vigilant. In I, 21 he asks: what should we do to the body (gūšmā) when it is overtaken by illness and heaviness and the will for good things is weakened? Answer: It occurs often with some people that one part of them followed the Lord but another one remained in the world and their heart did not shun worldly things (sbawātā). Likewise, Isaac makes question in one of his treatises: For what reason does God send us illnesses? Moreover, he answers: God is near to the distressed heart which cries to Him in its affliction (ܡܕܝܢܐ ܕܟܘܪܕܝܢܐ ܕܥܘܠܡܐ ܕܡܪܝܬܐ ܕܥܘܠܡܐ). Then Isaac compares God to the surgeon: ܡܪܝܬܐ ܕܥܘܠܡܐ ܕܡܪܝܬܐ ܕܥܘܠܡܐ ܕܡܪܝܬܐ ܕܥܘܠܡܐ ܕܡܪܝܬܐ ܕܥܘܠܡܐ, ‘like a physician who makes an incision in [the case of] grave illness [in order] to propound health’³⁸.

- g. (Liquid in the soul): In the beginning of the treatise I, 3 Isaac exposes the image of liquid (or water) penetrating the source of the soul (ܡܪܝܬܐ ܕܥܘܠܡܐ ܕܡܪܝܬܐ ܕܥܘܠܡܐ) and this image could also be quite physiological.

There is still some uncertainty whether mar Iṣḥaq had some idea of medicinal method. His imagery seems to suggest a vague knowledge of how Galenic medicine works. Isaac followed his *ars medendi*, which paralleled that of the Galenic medicine. This methodological clarity assured the success of both Greco-Syriac Galenism and asceticism through the centuries to come.

38) I, 57 (Bedjan 1909, p. 400).

APPENDIX:

BASIC MEDICAL TERMS OF GALENISM

Disease (νόσος, νόσημα) –	ܢܘܫܘܫܐ, Ar. مرض
Affection (πάθος, πάθημα) –	ܢܘܫܘܫܐ or ܢܘܫܘܫܐ, Ar. ألم, ميل
Pain or disfunction (ώδύνη) –	ܢܘܫܘܫܐ, Ar. وجع
Condition διάθεσις (the object of cure) –	ܢܘܫܘܫܐ, Ar. إدارة
Mixture (κρᾶσις) –	ܢܘܫܘܫܐ, Ar. مزاج
Symptom or type of condition (σύμπτωμα) –	ܢܘܫܘܫܐ
Constitution (κατασκευή) –	ܢܘܫܘܫܐ
Condition change –	ܢܘܫܘܫܐ, Ar. تغيير, تبديل
State (ἔξις) –	ܢܘܫܘܫܐ, ܢܘܫܘܫܐ, ܢܘܫܘܫܐ, Ar. ظاهر
Capacity (δύναμις) –	ܢܘܫܘܫܐ, ܢܘܫܘܫܐ, Ar. طاقة
Function (ἐνέργεια), action (ἔργον) –	ܢܘܫܘܫܐ, ܢܘܫܘܫܐ, Ar. عمل, فعل
Use (χρεία) –	ܢܘܫܘܫܐ, Ar. استعمال
Accord / disaccord (κατὰ φύσιν / παρὰ φύσιν) –	ܢܘܫܘܫܐ / ܢܘܫܘܫܐ
Ἦγεμονικόν (leading principle) –	ܢܘܫܘܫܐ, ܢܘܫܘܫܐ
Mixture, balance / misbalance, desadaptation (κρᾶσις / δυσκρασία) –	ܢܘܫܘܫܐ, ܢܘܫܘܫܐ, ܢܘܫܘܫܐ
Innate heat (ἔμφυτον θερμόν) –	ܢܘܫܘܫܐ, ܢܘܫܘܫܐ, ܢܘܫܘܫܐ
Superfluity (περίττωμα) –	ܢܘܫܘܫܐ
Cure –	ܢܘܫܘܫܐ and also ܢܘܫܘܫܐ (favor, benefit) and cognates, Ar. طبّ
Medicine (ιατρική) –	ܢܘܫܘܫܐ, ܢܘܫܘܫܐ, ܢܘܫܘܫܐ, Ar. طبابة
Incurable, malignant (κακοηθής) –	ܢܘܫܘܫܐ
Theory and praxis (θεωρία) –	ܢܘܫܘܫܐ / ܢܘܫܘܫܐ, Ar. تأمل في الالهيات, توريه

BASIC ASCETIC TERMS USED BY ISAAC³⁹*General medical terms*

ܢܘܫܘܫܐ	– external, apparent
ܢܘܫܘܫܐ	– manifestation (may be used as ‘symptom’)
ܢܘܫܘܫܐ	– form, resemblance
ܢܘܫܘܫܐ \ ܢܘܫܘܫܐ	– mixture, κρᾶσις
ܢܘܫܘܫܐ i – ܢܘܫܘܫܐ iܘܫܘܫܐ – ܢܘܫܘܫܐ i	– senses, perception
ܢܘܫܘܫܐ	– health

39) There is no concordance to the works by Isaac; however, there are very useful indications in the prefaces to the editions by Brock 1995 (II, pp. XXIX, XXXVIII-XXXIX) and Chialà 2011 (II, pp. 165-171). In addition, one may recommend R. BEULAY, “L’Enseignement spirituel de Jean de Dalyata mystique syro-oriental de VIII^e siècle”, *Théologie Historique* 83. Paris, 1990, esp. Index, pp. 515-521.

כַּלְסוּעַ – variation, change
 כֶּסֶם – nature, φύσις
 כְּחִיּוּת – action
 כְּפֹאֵל – analogy
 כְּחִיּוּת – activity, effect
 כְּוִיּוּת – union
 כֶּסֶל – capacity, force
 כְּחִיּוּת – symptom, indication
 כְּוִיּוּת – transformation

Soul and intellect

כְּחִיּוּת – affection
 כְּחִיּוּת – desiderium, wish
 כֶּל – heart, soul, mind
 כְּחִיּוּת – vision
 כְּחִיּוּת – thought
 כְּחִיּוּת – knowledge
 כְּחִיּוּת – recollection, ἀνάμνησις

Body

כְּחִיּוּת – body
 כְּחִיּוּת – bodily, pertaining to the body
 כְּחִיּוּת – composition
 כְּחִיּוּת – movement
 כְּחִיּוּת – capacities

Conditions

כְּחִיּוּת – כְּחִיּוּת purity
 כְּחִיּוּת – כְּחִיּוּת purity
 כְּחִיּוּת – work, toil
 כְּחִיּוּת – aspiration
 כְּחִיּוּת – burning, inflaming
 כְּחִיּוּת – movement
 כְּחִיּוּת – heat, Ar. فتور
 כְּחִיּוּת – heat
 כְּחִיּוּת – sweetness, meekness
 כְּחִיּוּת – tranquility
 כְּחִיּוּת – passion / suffering
 כְּחִיּוּת – fervor

ܕܗܫܬܐ – stupor, Ar. دهشة، دھش

ܩܘܠܘܢܐ – ignition, inflammation

ܩܘܠܘܢܐ ܩܘܠܘܢܐ – labour, Ar. عمل

Disease

ܕܗܫܬܐ – internally, in the occult manner

ܩܘܠܘܢܐ – darkening of the soul

ܩܘܠܘܢܐ – progress (in the process of disease or convalescence).

ܩܘܠܘܢܐ ܩܘܠܘܢܐ – spiritual disease

Healing

ܩܘܠܘܢܐ – behavior, mores, diet, regimen, Ar. تدبير

ܩܘܠܘܢܐ – purification, healing

ܩܘܠܘܢܐ – ܩܘܠܘܢܐ – ܩܘܠܘܢܐ – discipline or regimen

ܩܘܠܘܢܐ – incision, surgery.

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