The purpose of this brief note is to generate a broader awareness in the scholarly community of the existence of an important privately owned palimpsest of which the undertext contains the Syriac translation (by Sergius of Rēš ’Aynā, 6th century) of Galen’s treatise *On the mixtures and powers of simple drugs* (hereafter abbreviated as “*On simple drugs*”), and of the ongoing collaborative research being devoted to it.

### SOME BACKGROUND

In March of 2009, the anonymous owner of the Syriac Galen Palimpsest sponsored selective spectral imaging of the bound manuscript, and subsequently, in March of 2010, of all the unbound folios. A team from R. B. Toth Associates led by Michael Toth conducted the imaging and image processing, with support from the Walters Art Museum in Baltimore, Maryland, USA. The results of this imaging have been made available for consultation and study on the internet.

Already in 2009, Sebastian Brock had inspected some of the partly legible passages on one of the leaves of the palimpsest, and subsequently identified the undertext as being derived from a Syriac version of Galen’s *On simple drugs*. Some months later, Siam Bhayro was able to identify two further leaves of the palimpsest, confirming that the particular Syriac translation contained in the palimpsest was the same as that found in British Library MS Add 14661, namely, of Sergius of Rēš ’Aynā. Further details regarding these identifications and their significance may be found in a forthcoming joint article by Bhayro and Brock.

1. *Olim* Hiersemann 500/20. For a fuller description of the manuscript itself, of its 11th century overtext (a collection of Byzantine and Melkite liturgical hymns), and of the 9th century undertext (the Syriac Galen Palimpsest, of concern here), see K. W. HIERSEMMANN, *Katalog 500* : *Orientalische Manuskripte*, Leipzig, Hiersemann, 1922, pp. 13-14, and pl. XI; see also, footnotes 7 and 9 below.
2. The Syriac Palimpsest data (see digitalgalen.net) is released with license for use under Creative Commons Attribution 3.0 Unported Access Rights.
3. In an email, Brock showed that the legible words on the left column of leaf 214v-221r correspond to the paragraph in *On simple drugs* Book VIII devoted to χέλαδόνιον, “celandine” (Kühn XII, p. 156).
4. In 2010, Bhayro noticed that the leaves 034v-034r and 042v-043r of the palimpsest contained the same botanical lists as those present in BL Add 14661: those which Sergius himself supplied as prefaces to his translations of Books VI and VIII, respectively, of Galen’s *On simple drugs*.
5. From the information contained in the *Risāla* of Hunayn ibn Ishāq (9th century, Baghdad), it is known that no less than four different Syriac translations of *On simple drugs* existed at the time of Hunayn’s work (including Hunayn’s own translations); see G. BERGSTRÄSSER, *Hunain ibn Ishāq über die syrischen und arabischen Galen-Übersetzungen*, Leipzig, F. A. Brockhaus, 1925, p. 30 (Arabic text), p. 24 (German translation).
In May of 2012, Peter E. Pormann organized a workshop at the University of Manchester whose objectives were twofold: to bring together Syriacists interested in the history of medicine in order to work collaboratively on the newly discovered Syriac Galen Palimpsest, and to explore the technicalities of collaborating with experts in imaging techniques.

Thanks to the technical assistance provided by Michael Toth of R. B. Toth Associates, the group was introduced to the various multi-spectral images and formats available through the site digitalgalen.net. Unsurprisingly, it proved much easier to read the palimpsest in the gutter region (where no overtext obscured the readings). Different preferences among the readily available formats were observed by the individual participants, and the benefit of working with experts in imaging techniques was clearly felt by all.

**AN EXAMPLE**

Several textual examples resulting from the Manchester Workshop collaborations will be published in a forthcoming joint article in the *Journal of Semitic studies*. In the meantime we present here another example of the type of data which may be gleaned from the study of the images available at digitalgalen.net.

Figure 1 shows the leaf 102r-107v of the palimpsest, with a detail of column A, lines 21-30; the gutter region, as expected, is more legible. The underlying (and erased) text has been made more visible thanks to modern imaging techniques: the superior script has largely been blanked out in order to make the underlying text more legible.

Thanks to the presence of the relatively rare Greek loan words ἄλφιτα (line 24; written ‘LPY’ in Syriac script) and πόλτος (line 27; written, surprisingly, PLWTWS in Syriac), Robert Hawley was able to identify the Greek source text for this passage: the paragraph in *On simple drugs* Book VII devoted to χρίμων, “coarse barley meal” (Kühn XII, p. 45). This, in turn, permits for a comparison with the corresponding Syriac text in BL Add 14661, shown in figure 2.

This textual correspondence allows for a schematic presentation of these two witnesses to Sergius of Rēš ‘Ayān’s translation of this paragraph (figures 1 and 2). The rubrics (written in red ink) are generally not visible in the spectral scans available from the Digital Galen website (notice the apparent “blank space” in line 21 of figure 1); they are here transcribed between square brackets. Textual variants are highlighted. Letters printed between half brackets (the final phrase from the palimpsest) are only marginally legible; they were “read” on the basis of the overall silhouette of the visible portions of the undertext in comparison with the parallel text in BL Add 14661.

*Composite English translation of the Syriac text*

On “χρίμων”. Named thus (viz., “χρίμων”) is that which is (especially) large and thick among flour(s) made from wheat and spelt. It is more nutritious than barley groats, but it does not digest (as well) as they do. The porridge which is made from it is called “πόλτος”. The one made from spelt, however, has a slight settling effect on the belly, especially if roasted.

**PERSPECTIVES**

The importance of possessing a second witness to Sergius’s Syriac translation of Galen’s treatise *On simple drugs* should not be underestimated, especially given the presence of numerous variant readings in the palimpsest, of which a fair number are textually superior to those present in BL Add 14661. The palimpsest represents an independent branch of the textual tradition of Sergius’s translation, and as such deserves full and thorough study.

The significance of the Syriac Galen Palimpsest is not limited to textual criticism, however. Since April of 2012, Grigory Kessel has identified no less than four palimpsest leaves which contain text corresponding to Book IX of Galen’s *On simple drugs*. This is an important discovery, since the other manuscript

8. For example, “pseudo-color”, sharpie monochrome, and color sharpie. For further technical details, see http://digitalgalen.net/0_ReadMe.html.
10. Kühn XII, 45:5-9 [Περὶ χρίμων.] Κρίμων. τὸ παραμερεῖς αὐτὸς ονομάζεται τοῖς τε πυρίνω τοῖς ἀλέσσων ἐπεὶ δὲ προφυτεύειν μὲν ἄλφιτον διασπεστὸν δὲ καλεῖται δὲ τὸ ἐξ αὐτοῦ ρόφμα πόλτος καὶ ἔστων ὁ ἀπὸ τῆς ζεύς στατικὸς χρίμων τῆς κοιλᾶς καὶ μάλλον εἰ φρυγχείτη.
11. “[On kriminal.] Kriminal. The coarse part of wheat flour and spelt flour is called thus. It is more nourishing than barley, but also more difficult to digest. The porridge that one makes with it is called póltos. The póltos made from spelt gently settles the stomach, especially when roasted.”
12. See supra, n. 9.
13. These are: 002r-003v, 049r-052v, 128r-129v, 206r-212v.
Figure 1 - Syriac Galen Palimpsest 102r-107r (“sharpie” monochrome, shown in negative); detail of column A, lines 21-30.

Figure 2 - British Library Add 14661, folio 45r; detail of lines 23-28.
of the Syriac version contains only Books VI-VIII. Furthermore, judging from the total number of leaves in the Syriac Galen Palimpsest and the volume of text contained on each, it would appear that the palimpsest contains considerably more text than does BL Add 14661, perhaps as much as 50% more. Kessel has now shown that some of this “additional” text derives from Book IX, but it is also possible that some leaves contain text from beyond Book IX, or indeed, perhaps even from other works.

Apart from the forthcoming publication of studies already mentioned, 14 it appears useful to us to review here, in list form (Table, below), those leaves of the palimpsest that have been identified thus far, in the hope that this will also help stimulate further research.

Very few Syriac translations of Greek medical texts have survived. 15 Yet Syriac intermediary translations played a crucial role in the transmission of Greek thought into Arabic. Pormann has already attempted to investigate the influence of Sergius’ translation of On simple drugs on the two Arabic versions that survive. 16 Hawley, moreover, has shown that Hunayn ibn Ishāq included quotations from On simple drugs (of which the wording is sometimes remarkably close to Sergius’ translations) in his Syriac (and Arabic) compilation On the faculties of foodstuffs. 17 Since the palimpsest apparently contains additional textual material, it offers further possibilities for such comparative studies.

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<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Palimpsest leaf</th>
<th>Greek source text</th>
<th>Parallel text in Syriac</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>002v-003r</td>
<td>Kühn XII, pp. 204-206</td>
<td>not extant (Book IX not preserved in BL Add. 14661)</td>
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<td>034r-034v</td>
<td>BL Add. 14661 3’ (Sergius’ plant list preceding Book VI)</td>
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<td>042r-043v</td>
<td>BL Add. 14661 55’ (Sergius’ plant list preceding Book VIII)</td>
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<tr>
<td>049v-052r</td>
<td>Kühn XII, p. 186</td>
<td>not extant (Book IX not preserved in BL Add. 14661)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>070v-077r</td>
<td>Kühn XII, p. 9</td>
<td>BL Add. 14661 35’</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>102v-107r</td>
<td>Kühn XII, p. 45</td>
<td>BL Add. 14661 45’</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>128v-129r</td>
<td>Kühn XII, p. 199</td>
<td>not extant (Book IX not preserved in BL Add. 14661)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>206v-212r</td>
<td>Kühn XII, pp. 216-217</td>
<td>not extant (Book IX not preserved in BL Add. 14661)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>214v-221r</td>
<td>Kühn XII, pp. 155-156</td>
<td>BL Add. 14661 73’</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

14. See supra, n. 7 and 9.
15. Several projects devoted wholly or in part to publishing extant but as yet unedited Syriac medical texts are already underway, however. One example is the ERC funded project “Florintial” (ERC-2010-StG-263783), coordinated by Hawley, of which one of the primary goals (see http://www.orient-mediterranee.cnrs.fr/spip.php?article1136&lang=fr) is producing editions of BL Add 14661 and of Hunayn ibn Ishāq’s compilation On the properties of foodstuffs. Pormann is also currently pursuing a major research project entitled “Arabic commentaries on the Hippocratic Aphorisms,” funded by the ERC; one aspect of his project will be to investigate the role that the Syriac version of the Aphorisms, as edited by Pogon, played in the transmission of this text. Kessel, moreover, has shown that it is possible to compare the younger Syriac translation of the Aphorisms with an older one, probably by Sergius of Rēs ʿAynā, contained in the Syriac Epidemics; see his “The Syriac Epidemics and the problem of its identification”, in Epidemics in context : Greek commentaries on Hippocrates in the Arabic tradition, ed. by P. E. PORMANN, Berlin, De Gruyter, 2012, pp. 93-124 (and especially pp. 118-119). Note also the studies of S. BHAYRO, “The reception of Galen’s Art of medicine in the Syriac Book of medicines”, in Medical books in the Byzantine world, ed. by B. ZIPSER, Bologna, Eikamos, 2012, pp. 127-148; Id., “A Judaeo-Syriac medical fragment from the Cairo Genizah”, Aramaic studies 10, 2012 (forthcoming); G. KESSEL, “Manuscript evidence for Galen in Syriac”, in Hunayn ibn Ishāq on his Galen translations, ed. by J. C. LAMOREAUX (Eastern Christian texts 3) Provo, Brigham Young University Press, forthcoming; and Id., “Trisendemond maximus noster sophista: the evidence of one Syriac text for the identification of a source used in John of Alexandria’s In Epid. VT”, in Quarto seminario internazionale sulla tradizione indiretta dei testi medici greci : i commenti (Siena, Certosa di Pontignano, 3-4 giugno 2011), a cura di I. GAROFALO, forthcoming.
16. See the articles of Pormann mentioned supra, n. 6.
17. An example is provided in the joint article by BHAYRO et al., mentioned supra, n. 9.