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Al-Rāzī in the Egyptian countryside: A 9th-/10th-century Coptic archive of medical and alchemical manuscripts and its intellectual background

Five Coptic alchemical manuscripts and two Coptic medical papyri can be assigned to a single archive. This archive testifies to a community of literate persons in a provincial town of 9th/10th-century Egypt who used and produced collections of medical and alchemical recipes, and apparently engaged in healing practice and metallurgical experiment. The language of the texts depends on Arabic technical terminology to a degree as to prove that the Coptic manuscripts bear in fact witness for Arabic alchemical traditions. Likewise has the historical reality of linked medical and alchemical endeavors its earliest representatives in 9th-century Arabic scholars, such as the famous philosopher, physician and alchemist Abū Bakr Muḥammad ibn Zakariyyā' Al-Rāzī (865-925). The proposed paper attempts to examine the intellectual background of the Coptic medical and alchemical archive and its protagonists. 20th-century historians of alchemy had maintained prejudices about the Arabic alchemy of Egypt as a learned *Glasperlenspiel* of merely mystical, hermetic, and allegorical allusions. The Coptic texts shed now a completely different light on the scientific stature and aspiration of alchemists in Upper Egypt in the age of al-Rāzī. They prove the existence of an experiment-based, non-mystical alchemy of the kind known from the contemporary writings of the *Corpus Jabirianum* and Al-Rāzī. As will be seen, *materia chymica*, laboratory apparatus, and technical procedures found in the Coptic medical and alchemical archive overall resemble those known from Al-Rāzī's *Kitāb al-asrār*.