



Inv. no. 4/1997

CAT. 21. "AT THE DOCTOR'S." MINIATURE FROM A COPY OF KITAB AL-HASHAISH, AN ARABIC TRANSLATION OF DIOSCORIDES'S DE MATERIA MEDICA

IRAQ, BAGHDAD; 1224

THE LEAF H: 32.2; W: 24 CM

*De Materia Medica* (On Medical Material) was originally written by the Greek botanist Pedanios Dioscorides in the first century and translated into Arabic in 860. The work largely describes plants and their medicinal effect on man, but also deals with animal products and minerals. This miniature and the following one (cat. 22, inv.no. 5/1997) come from a manuscript that was copied, and perhaps illustrated, by Abdallah ibn al-Fadl in 1224.

Most of the paintings feature medicinal plants that it was naturally important for physicians and pharmacists to recognize in order to avoid mistakes. What is remarkable about his manuscript is that the painter added a number of animals and people that were unnecessary for the identification of the plants.

This is true, for example, of this scene with doctors in the midst of a discussion. The motif, with doctors debating and gesticulating enthusiastically, is broadly speaking related to the subject of the book, but it does not illustrate the text. The cleverly conceived scene can be viewed more as an amusing comment to a text that is otherwise a bit dry and monotonous.