

## ABU MANSUR ON AYURVEDA

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*Abstract: - Abu Mansur's Al-Abniya a pioneering work on pharmacological treatise in Persian language, has not received the attention that it richly deserves. This work provides as a starting point to probe into the hitherto neglected field of study regarding the relationship of medical systems prevalent in Central, West and South Asia-Greco-Syriac, Iranian and Ayurvedic medical sciences.*

Kitab al-abniya 'an haqa' iq al-adwiya ('The book of fundamentals regarding the real nature of medicines') is a pharmacological treatise in Persian language. It first gives a general outline of pharmacological theory and then an alphabetically arranged list of 584 remedies, drugs and ailments. Of these, 466 are derived from Plants. 75 from minerals and 43 from animals. These are briefly described their modes of action and therapeutic values are fully discussed and, in most cases, also classified and graded according to their respective humoral action and potency. Like some of his predecessors who wrote in Arabic the author synchronizes Greco-Syriac and Ayurvedic pharmacological knowledge of his times, but unlike them all he avowedly preferred the latter. In this respect he is unique in the history of Greco-Muslim medical literature. He has amply quoted Arab, Greek, Syrian and Ayurvedic authorities, and his quotations from the last-mentioned writers are another unique feature of his work, for they show that many Ayurvedic sources which were accessible to him were unknown to other Arabic and Persian writers on the subject and some are still inaccessible to modern commentators.

The author has given his book another title as well and in keeping with the taste of the time, <sup>1</sup>a more colourful one: Rawda al-'uns wa manfa'a al-nafs ('Garden of geniality and personal well-being').

Not much is known about the author, Abu Mansur Muwaffaq bin 'Ali al-Harawi, except that he belonged to Heart as his nisba (al-Harawi) show, had visited 'Hind' at least once as he himself incidentally states, and that he flourished in the tenth century of the Christian era which has been deduced from his dedication of the book. But recently his date has been much debated and will be discussed later in this study Ch-2).

The copyist of its elegant manuscript (Vienna, A.F. 340) was the famous Persian poet Asadi Tusi who, as its colophon reads completed its transcription in the month of Shawwal A. H. 447/December 1055. It is the earliest known Persian manuscript.

F. R. Seligmann published his Latin translation of the book in two volumes (Vienna, 1830-33), and a beautiful and accurate edition of the original text with an introduction and Notes in Latin (Vienna, 1839). Gustav Flügel reviewed the book in his Catalogue of the Arabic, Persian and Turkish manuscripts in the Royal Library of Vienna.<sup>2</sup> Abdul Chaling Achudow (Adh al-Khaliq Akhundov), a Persian speaking druggist from Baku, wrote a commentary on the book in German for his doctoral dissertation (Institut der Universität, Dorpat, 1892). A year later his German translation of the book with notes prepared by him in collaboration with Paul Horn and Julius Jolly was published in Kobret's *Historic Studien aus dem Pharmakologi*. Jolly had appended to it his observations on the identity of 21 drugs of south Asia Provenance described by Abu Mansur. Later, in his masterly study of Indian Medicine (1901) he admitted the inadequacy of his treatment of the subject and commented,

Very much Indian material is found preserved in the Persian work of Abu Mansur Muwaffaq on pharmacology (10<sup>th</sup> Century). The author himself had made a scientific Journey to India and cites much from Indian works which are indeed unknown.<sup>3</sup>

Jolly's list was subjected to scathing criticism by Bernard Laufer (1919). He believed that Abu Mansur's "Principles of Pharmacology" is a book of fundamental importance, in that, it is first to reveal what Persian-Arabic medicine and pharmacology owe to India, and how Indian drugs were further conveyed to Europe.<sup>4</sup>

He drew up a list of 51 Indian (South Asian) drugs occurring in al-Abinya and identified them with their Sanskrit names.<sup>5</sup> George Sarton (1927) analysed and incisively commented on Abu Mansur's contribution to pharmacology<sup>6</sup> in 1967. Bunyad-i Iran (Foundation for Iranian Culture). Tehran, published the facsimile of the Vienna manuscript with Mujtaba Minuwi's introduction. In the following year the University of Tehran published a critical and annotated edition of the work by Ahmad Bahmanyar, which was posthumously prepared for the press by Aqa-i Husayn Mahbubi Ardakani with the addition of his own supplementary notes, an introduction and extracts from the published reviews of 'Allama Qazwini and Mujtaba Minuwi. Besides the Vienna manuscript and the Seligmann edition. Ustad Ardakani had with him a neatly written but undated and expurgated manuscript, variant readings of which have been listed by him at the end of the book and shall be discussed by us later. In Ch. 2. In all our references to al-Abniya we have used this Tehran edition

It is now a hundred and fifty years when the academic world first came to know about Any Mansur and his treatise on pharmacology. Much good work has been done since then to evaluate

it and to facilitate its study. Nevertheless, we find that some recent commentators have not paid that attention to it which it deserved. For instance, Dr. Shawka al-Shatti who has specialized in the history of Muslim contribution to medical sciences has in his Arabic compendium on the subject (1960) introduced our author as “Abu’l-Mansur al-Muwaffaq, an Arab chemist, who used to prepare and sell drugs and the books that he wrote bore testimony to his vast erudition in practical chemistry”<sup>7</sup>. Dr. Shatti, of course, does not refer to his sources. The disciplines of medicine and chemistry are no doubt, interlinked with that of pharmacology and Abu Mansur’s work shows that, in the words of Sarton, he was “unusually steeped in chemistry”<sup>8</sup>. As we shall discuss later, his contributions in this field and their likely influence on the development of Ayurveda are considerable. Nevertheless, his book remains a treatise on pharmacology and not one on chemistry. We, at the moment know about one book of his that is being discussed in these pages and not of books, in plural, as is claimed by Dr. al-Shatti. By adding the Arabic definite article (al) to his kunya, Ab Manr, name, Muwaffaq, Dr. al-Shatti has Arabized him. It appears that he has confused Abn-Mansr with his contemporary Abu’I-Mansur Muhammed b. Ahmad who was born in 895 in Abu Mansur’s native town, Heart, and after a very eventful life died in 980; was an eminent Arabic lexicographer, the author of one of the main source-books of Arabic lexicography, namely, the Tahdib al-Jugha (‘Rectification of the language’); and was known by his patrimonial nisba, al-Azhari. The confusion has also crept in Dr. Sami Hamarneh’s Commentary on Al-Biruni’s book on pharmacy and materia medica ( Kitab al-saydana) (1973). In one instance the Kitab al-saydana referred to al-Azhari by his kunya<sup>9</sup> which led Dr. Hamarneh to include our Abu Mansur in his appendix on the biographical sketches of authors cited in al-Saydana and to describe him as “a philologist and a medical botanist”.<sup>10</sup>

Professor Hakim Nayar Wasti, in 1974 wrote a monograph in Persian on Iran and Pakistan’s mutual relations in the field of medical sciences but did not make even a passing reference to Abu Mansur.<sup>11</sup> Dr. O. P. Jaggi (1977) was, however, more considerate to him than the venerable Hakim Sahib. Giving the historical background of the development of Greco-Muslim medicine in India he devoted chapters on ‘Pharmacy’ and ‘Indian influence on Arab medicine’. In the former chapter he stated.

Kitab al-Advia (sic) Persian was composed by Abu Mansur Muwaffiq (sic) isof Heart in A. D. 975. This work described 585 (sic) drugs, the date for them being collected from Greek, Syriac, Arabic, and Persian and Indian sources<sup>12</sup>.

As we mentioned earlier, the date of the composition of the Kitab al-abniya is a much debated question. We wonder how Dr. Jaggi arrived at the firm date of A. D. 975.

But the more misleading are the comments made about al-Abniya in the new edition of the authoritative and highly prestigious Encyclopaedia of Islam. They need a detailed study. Writing on Adwiya (mufrada). i. e. the simples, the learned mentions the meritorious efforts of Hunayn b.

Ishaq and his disciples towards the transfer of Greek medicine to the Eastern countries of the Muslim world and the consequent development of Muslim pharmacology. "Serious confusion in terminology inevitably followed from the great influx of Arabic, Iranian, Greek and India names of plants and drugs which were current in theory and practice", he writes. "In the course of time" he continues, "many works were written with the purpose of determining their true significance and of putting together synonyms."<sup>13</sup> In this connection Dr. Lewin mentions the Arab translator of the Syriac Kunnasha ((pandect) of Yuhannab. Syrabiyun, who gave Arabic equivalents to the great numbers of Greek and Syriac names of simple and then, he states,

One of the oldest prose works written in Persian is the al-Abniya 'an Haka, ik al-Adwia of Abu Mansur Muwaffak b. 'Ali al-Harawi explaining, in alphabetic order, the Arabic, Persian, Syriac and Greekname of 584 different simples (ed. F. R. Seligmann, Vienna 1859 German translation by A. C. Ac hundow Dorpat 1893).

But glossaries containing synonyms of simples were composed in South Asia and Syriac independent of the transmission of Hellenic medical traditions to the Muslim East. Ibn abi Usaybi'a recounting the Hindi. i.e. Ayurvedic sources of al-Razi mentions a work called Kitab tafsir asma al-'aqqar bi-asama' (The book explaining i.e., translating names of simples in ten different languages').<sup>15</sup> Apparently, this was the same book o which a greatly mutilated and corrupt version was popular during the days of al-Biruni with Persian title, Dah nam ('Ten names'). Al-Biruni describes another work of this nature which was used by Syrian physicians. He states that in Syriac it was called Pushshaq shamahi ('The exposition of names') while in Persian it was named Chahar nam. ('Four names') and it contained Greek, Syriac, Arabic and Persian names of each drug<sup>16</sup>. According to Ibn abi Usaybi'a, al-Razi wrote a medical glossary 'on the pattern of the books called Pushshaq shamahi' in which his characteristic thoroughness he gave synonyms in Greek. Syriac, Persian "Hindi" and Arabic not only for the simple drugs but also for the parts of the human body. It also contained definitions of clinical weights and measures. This polyglot dictionary of medicine formed Part Seven of the long-lost Medical Encyclopaedia of al-Razo called Kitab al-jami ('The Encyclopaedia') or Hasir sina 'a al-tibb ('the Encompasser of the art of medicine'), which was distinct from his celebrated therapeutic thesaurus, al-Hawi ('the Comprehensive')<sup>17</sup> Al-Biruni does not seem to have come across a complete and accurate copy of this magnum opus of Al-Razi Al-Hawi that he quotes quite frequently is not the one which we now know thanks to the Daira al-ma'arif al-'uth maniya of Haydarabad; it looks very much like a part of the Kitab al-jami' or Hasir. The question is outside the scope of the present study, but certainly needs further investigation. However, as he himself states, he had studied a manuscript of the Syriac Pushsaq shamahi and found it free from inscription errors and omissions. He therefore "copied out several parts from this work" in the Kitab al-Saydana that he composed jointly with Ahmad B. Muhammad al-Nahsha'i<sup>18</sup>

Abu Mansur appears to be cognizant of the danger of confusion in the terminology of drugs that has been referred to by Dr. Lewin. This danger was further aggravated by the propensity of the Arabic script *tashif* (misspelling and distortion) especially in transcribing non-Arabic words. Abu Mansur has pointed out (p. 114) that Masarjawayh, unlike all other writers on the subject, identified *haza* ('a celery-like plant, *Anethum segetum*')<sup>19</sup> with *duqu* ('Cretan carrot, *Athamanta cretensis*, L.)<sup>20</sup> The error seems to have found its way in the writing of the master who was one of the pioneers of medicine as well as of pharmacy in the Muslim world, through inscriptional resemblance between *haza* and *jazar*, meaning 'carrot' *Daucus carota*, L.<sup>21</sup> Some Arab pharmacologists including Hubaysh al-A'sam, the talented nephew and a close collaborator of Hunayn b. Ishaq, became the victims of popular etymology in their attempts to identify *sir amlaj* (emblemic myrobalan'<sup>22</sup> of the best, stoneless, variety) because of its being wrongly transcribed *shir amlaj*. This led Abu Mansur to a philological discussion in the course of which he mentioned his journey to 'Hind' where the plant grows (p. 16).

Standardization of the names of simples could be the best remedy for removing this confusion and that was what Abu Mansur aimed at. Though he wrote in Persian, he gave the names of the simples in Arabic as headings of his respective articles and then while discussing their therapeutic properties and the varying views of the different master-physicians about them he used the name (or names) by which they were known to his Persian readers. In the efforts that he made for achieving this scientific standardization, he was so keen and consistent that even the Arabicized Persian names of simples were put as headings in their Arab garb, eg., *banafsaj* Ar. (p.67) *babafsha*, per. ('violet'); *julnar*, Ar. (96) *gulnar*, Per. ('pomegranate blossoms'); *jass*, Ar. (p. 219) *gach*, Per. ('gypsum'); *narjis*, Ar (p. 232) *nargis*, Per. ('narcissus'); and *fustuq*, Ar. (p. 240) *pista*, Per. ('pistachio'). For this 'Arabicism' Abu Mansur has earned the ire of his modern Iranian editor, Ustad Ardakani (Introduction, p. 8). To make himself better understood he gave in a few places either the Greek (e. g., pp. 12, 23, 31, 42, 44, & 303), or Syriac (e. g., 21, 22, 142, & 165), or 'Hindi' (e. g., pp. 48, & 157), or alternate Arabic (e. g., pp. 31 & 270) synonyms of some simples. It is interesting to note that he differentiated between the 'Rumi' i.e. Byzantine or Hellenic and the 'Yunani', i. e., Greek dialects). There are two instances, however, which do justify Dr. Lewin's description of *al-Abniya*. Abu Mansur gives the Arabic, Persian, Syriac and Greek names of *anjura* ('nettle', *Urtica urens*, L.)<sup>23</sup> and *ushna* ('lichen', 'tree moss', *Muscus arboreus*, Linn)<sup>24</sup> on p 22 and 23, respectively. But these two pages do not make the book. The *Kitab al-abniya* is a work on pharmacology and certainly not a polyglot glossary of synonyms of simples as the Encyclopaedia of Islam would like us to believe.

Abu Mansur's is a pioneering work in its particular field and at the same time it remains unique in certain respects. Our investigations show that it is the first book written in Persian prose that has come down to us, yet it is written lucidly, coherently, precisely and always to the point. It is apparent that its author had mastery over his subject and had access not only to the diverse sources known to his contemporaries, but also to some that were not known to them and, in fact,

are unknown to this day as was referred to by Jolly.<sup>25</sup> Identification of those sources may provide us with satisfactory answers to some of the vexed problems of the history Ayurveda. A preliminary attempt in this direction has been made in this study (Ch. 5).

Our author opens for us a new and highly attractive vista of the history of cultural exchanges that existed, during his time and that of his predecessors, between the Muslim dominions in Central and West Asia, on the one hand, and those in South Asia, on the other as a result of which physicians and writers on medical and bibliographical subjects in the Muslim world preserved the early traditions of Ayurveda and greatly enriched the medical science by assimilating them with those of the Greco-Syriac and Iranian medical systems. It is this contribution of Abu Mansur which is the main subject of our present enquiries.

But this pharmacological treatise also offers many hazards. Little is known about its author from any external source. And what does he mean by 'Hind' which he visited and mentions in his book a number of times? Could it be Pakistan? But Pakistan's own contribution to medical sciences is as unknown entity. We have tried to meet the challenge to these questions. In the course of our attempts to find satisfactory answers to them we were blessed with some new findings namely, the extent of Arabs' knowledge of Ayurveda; and the role of the Vedic Balhika (Banika) – Avestan Bakhdi, Hellenic Bactra (Bactria), and modern Balkh – as a catalyst in the history of medicine, which after the advent of Islam received a new impulse under the Barmakids and the Samanids.

We think that in order to understand better the inter-relationship of Ayurvedic and Greek medical systems the extent and nature of the influence of Ayurveda in Central Asia in general and in Balhika in particular must be re-examined in the context of the history of medicine in the land of the Indus River System-Indusland the bulk of which now constitutes the present State of Pakistan. Similarly, the role that Ayurveda played in the development of Arab (yunani) medicine and, conversely, the influence of the latter on Ayurveda could also be understood better in the above mentioned geo-historical perspective. No doubt, since the Age of the Guptas the Gangetic Valley had a rival claim of being the premier center of Ayurvedic studies and after the Ghaznavids most of the centres in Indusland suffered a nearly total eclipse. For these reasons it is quite understandable that the history of Ayurveda has been uptill now observed in the Indian hthe Gangetic Valley-perspective. But in the annals of Ayurveda the Gupta Age is not an ancient past. We believe that the history of medicine in Indusland must be studied independently to have a more balanced view of the history of Ayurveda especially as regards its relationship with the medical systems prevalent in Central and West Asia in ancient and early medieval times.

We find that Abu Mansur al-Abniya provides us with a convenient point of start to probe into this hitherto neglected field of study.

The question of Arabs' knowledge of the early Vaidyaka literature is vitally related to our subject. Pioneering work done in this regard by Curetone jointly with the Sanskritist Wilson (1841). Flugel (1857), Steinschneider (1870) and Muller (1880) was made upto date by Siddiqi (1959). But the progress recently made in the understanding of the history of Ayurveda with special reference to its early medieval period, as is shown in Dr. Meulenbeld's study of Madhava's Nidana (1974), has necessitated a re-examination of the whole question. We have put the results of our researches on this subject in an Appendix to the present study.

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1. For instance, a monumental work on universal history by al-Mas'udi ((d 956), is called Muruj al-dhahab wa ma'adin al-jawhar ('Meadows of gold and mines of gems') and a compendium of medical sciences by al-Tabari composed in 850 is named Firdaws al-hikma ('Paradise of wisdom').
2. Flugel, 11. 534-6
3. Jolly, 22 and n. 3.
4. Laufer, 580
5. Laufer, 580-5.
6. Sarton, 1, 651, 654 & 678-9.
7. Al-shatti, 167 & 296.
8. Sarton, 1, 649 f.
9. Al-Biruni & al-Nahasha'I, 1, 391 (Arabic text).
10. Ibid; II 117.
11. Ta'rikh-i rawabit-i pizishkiyi Iran-o-Pakistan, Rawalpindi (Iran – Pakistan Institute of Persian Studies). 1974.
12. Jaggi, 66.
13. Lewin in E. I, 2 I, 213.
14. Ibid
15. Usaybi'a, II. 32; Cureton has mistranslated it: "A book in which the names of drugs are explained by names used in common conversation" (Cureton, 108).
16. Al-Biruni & al-Nahsha'i, 14-5 (Arabic Text): Meyerhof, 15 (Arabic text)
17. Usaybi'a, I, 317-8; this statement is now corroborated by the recently published al-Hawi, which we shall discuss later in connection with Abu Mansur's Arabic sources.
18. Same as n. 16, above
19. Leclerc No. 666.
20. Leclerc No. 970; Meyerhot & Sobhy No. 244.
21. Leclerc No. 481; Meyerhof & Sobhy No. 207.
22. Leclerc No. 145; & Meyerhof & Sobhy No. 13. Cf. Laufer, 581. For further details, ch. 2.
23. Leclerc No. 160; Meyerhof & Sobhy No. 74.

24. Leclerc No. 85; Meyerhof & Sobhy No. 3.  
25. See n. 3, above.

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