Greek-Islamic medicine in India and Pakistan

Presented by Jan Just Witkam
(University of Leiden, The Netherlands)

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Introduction

Greek-Islamic medicine (Yunani tibb, or Unani tib) as it is presently used in Pakistan and India is one of the rare instances in which the manuscript tradition is still very much alive. Handwritten notebooks of medical practitioners form a main source of knowledge in the field.

These notebooks (bayaz) are privately compiled by the hakims, and then collected, excerpted, expanded, photocopied, and sometimes also published, but the manuscript element is its most conspicuous feature.

The study of Greek-Islamic medicine in the subcontinent is part of the history of medicine, but because of the fact that it is still in use, and that even hospitals exist (in Hyderabad, Deccan, among other places) in which this type of medicine is practiced, it occupies a special place and cannot be considered as just one of the many types of popular medicine, which are practiced all over the world.
Components of modern Yunani Tibb:

- Original medical heritage (Hippocrates, Galen);
- Autonomous Islamic (Arabic and Persian) developments in medicine in the pre-modern period;
- Prophetic medicine, a medical approach derived from Qur’an and Hadith;
- Specific sub-continenental contributions to medicine and pharmaceutics;
- Modern additions and techniques, such as Ayurveda and modern western medicine.
Prophetic medicine, a medical approach derived from Qur'an and Hadith, is a typical rural, Bedouin approach to health. It is not practiced by physicians but by doctors in theology.

Example: The canonical Hadith collection al-Jami` al-Sahih, by al-Tirmidhi (died 892). Arabic manuscript, probably from Egypt, dated 1825.

Begins with sayings by the Prophet about fever.

Source: MS Leiden Or. 14.186
Greek medical heritage in an Arabic further development.

Book 2 of Ibn Sina’s *al-Qanun fil-Tibb*, with commentary by Ibn al-Nafis (died 1288). Ibn al-Nafis is known as the discoverer of the smaller blood circulation, centuries before it was discovered again in Europe by William Harvey (1578-1657).

The second book of Ibn Sina’s *Qanun* is a pharmacopoeia which has often been copied separately. Here Hanzal, the colocynth, is treated.

Source: MS Leiden Or. 81

An edition such as this one is not a sign of interest in the history of medicine in mid-19th century Iran. It was meant to be a reference work for doctors in their daily medical practice.

Source: Leiden 8193 A 9
The second part of the *Kitab al-Tasrif* by the Andalusian physician Abu al-Qasim al-Zahrawi (died 1013), treats surgery. The book was immensely popular and was translated in medieval Europe.

However, surgery is a branch of medicine which is alien to Yunani Tibb. In Yunani practice emphasis is laid on environment, good food and herbal medicine. The surgeon’s work would be much more drastic, however.

Source: MS Leiden Or. 2540
The purpose of this presentation is to show that there is a sizeable corpus of indigenous literature on Yunani Tibb. One half of our knowledge about the Yunani Tibb must come from fieldwork (hardly done yet), the other half would come from an analysis of Yunani medical literature. This must be done by collecting and analyzing the notebooks of traditional physicians in India and Pakistan. These hakims, sages, learned, and still learn, their art in special academies of Unani Tib. However, the personal element, from master to pupil, or father to son, is very important in the transmission of this science.

The hakims write their own special reference works in the form of note books and recipe collections, which are usually kept within the family or the chain of succession between master and pupil. These notebooks are called Bayaz (Arabic bayad, ‘neat copy’). This Bayaz literature contain a mixture of traditional medical literature: elements of Greek-Islamic medicine and the result of personal observations with proven success. On the basis of such elements the hakim would write down his recipes and instructions for therapy.
Medical Bayaz, anonymous, 20th century.

Catchwords in Arabic, with explanation in Urdu.

Source: MS Leiden Or. 22.682
Medical Bayaz with text in Persian and Urdu, 20th century.

Much attention is given here to Bah (sexual potency) and Wisal (coïtus).

Source: MS Leiden Or. 22.769.
Dastur al-Adwiya.
Pharmacological *Bayaz* in Persian, by Wilayat Shah b. Qadir Shah Dahri, manuscript dated 1814.

Source: MS Leiden Or. 22.785
Collective volume with texts in Pashto, Persian and Urdu on medicine and nutrition. Source: MS Leiden Or. 22.932.
Misbah al-Tibb.
A medical *mathnawi* poem in Persian, by Muhammad Ashraf Chaharkhabar.

Manuscript dated 1902.

Source: MS Leiden Or. 22.934
Medical Bayaz of hakim Firuz al-Din Lahori, who was the editor of the periodicals Rafiq al-Atibba (‘the doctors’ comrade’) and al-Hakim (‘the Hakim’), which were exclusively devoted to Unani medicine.

Medical notes, recipes, glued together on the page. 20th century.

Source: MS Leiden Or. 22.957
Modern medico-magical *Bayaz*, with texts in Persian and Urdu. This *Bayaz* is not only about medicine, but also contains notes on astronomy, astrology and genealogy.

Late 20th century.

Source: MS Leiden Or. 22.780
Medical Bayaz, in Urdu. Notes collected by hakim `Abd al-Malik. This hakim was a member of the Board of Unani Ayurvedic System of Medicine in Pakistan. Some pages are dated 1989.

Source: MS Leiden Or. 25.200.
Practice of Medicine ya`ni `Ilag al-Amrad, anonymous medical treatise in Urdu, English and Arabic. The list of ailments is in Urdu, the explanation in Urdu, and sometimes also in Arabic and English.

Source: MS Leiden Or. 22.578.
Yunani tibb was also the subject of numerous printed publications. These circulated in the milieu of the hakims. Gujerat, Amritsar and especially Lahore are the places where for more than a century books on the sub-continental variant of Greek-Islamic medicine were published. There have existed even monthly publications on the subject, and an enormous amount of incidental publications. To judge from their shabby outward appearance they must have been rather marginal. To judge from their numbers one would think that the hakims also had to live of the proceeds of their books. Yunani tibb was a branch of medicine that was suitable to self-help (in contrast to surgery) and that fact too may explain the great numbers of publications extant. Many will have found their way into the home-pharmacies of the Indian and Pakistani middle-class. Much may be presumed lost. The analysis of all this material still has to begin. Even the most basic bibliographical control is absent.
Amrad-i Chashm wa-`Ilag. On ailments of the eye and how to treat these. Special number of the monthly *Rahbar-i Tibb* (‘Guide for medicine’) of October-November 1961. The periodical’s language is Urdu. It is/was published in Amritsar, and is/was edited by *hakim* Karshan Baladiyupuri. Lithograph.

Source: Leiden, collection B No. 523
*Ifadat-i Ajmal* (‘The counsels of Ajmal’). A collection of medical texts in Urdu. First an essay on medicine, then a description of therapies and well-tested medicines. It is published under the name of the famous hakim Muhammad Hasan Qurashi. Lahore, undated (20th century). Lithograph.

Source: Leiden, Collection B No. 529.
Tashkhis wa `Ilag-i Blood Pressure wa-Amrad-i Qalb
(‘Diagnosis and treatment of blood pressure and ailments of the heart’) by hakim Muhammad `Abdallah Fazil-i Tibb, who held the post of Principal in the Masih al-Mulk Tibbi College in Lahore. Lithograph.

Leiden, Collection B No. 525.