Greek-Islamic medicine in India and Pakistan

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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 practicioners form a main source of knowledge in the field.

These notebooks (*bayaz*) are privately compiled by the *hakim*'s, 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-continental contributions to medicine and pharmaceutics;

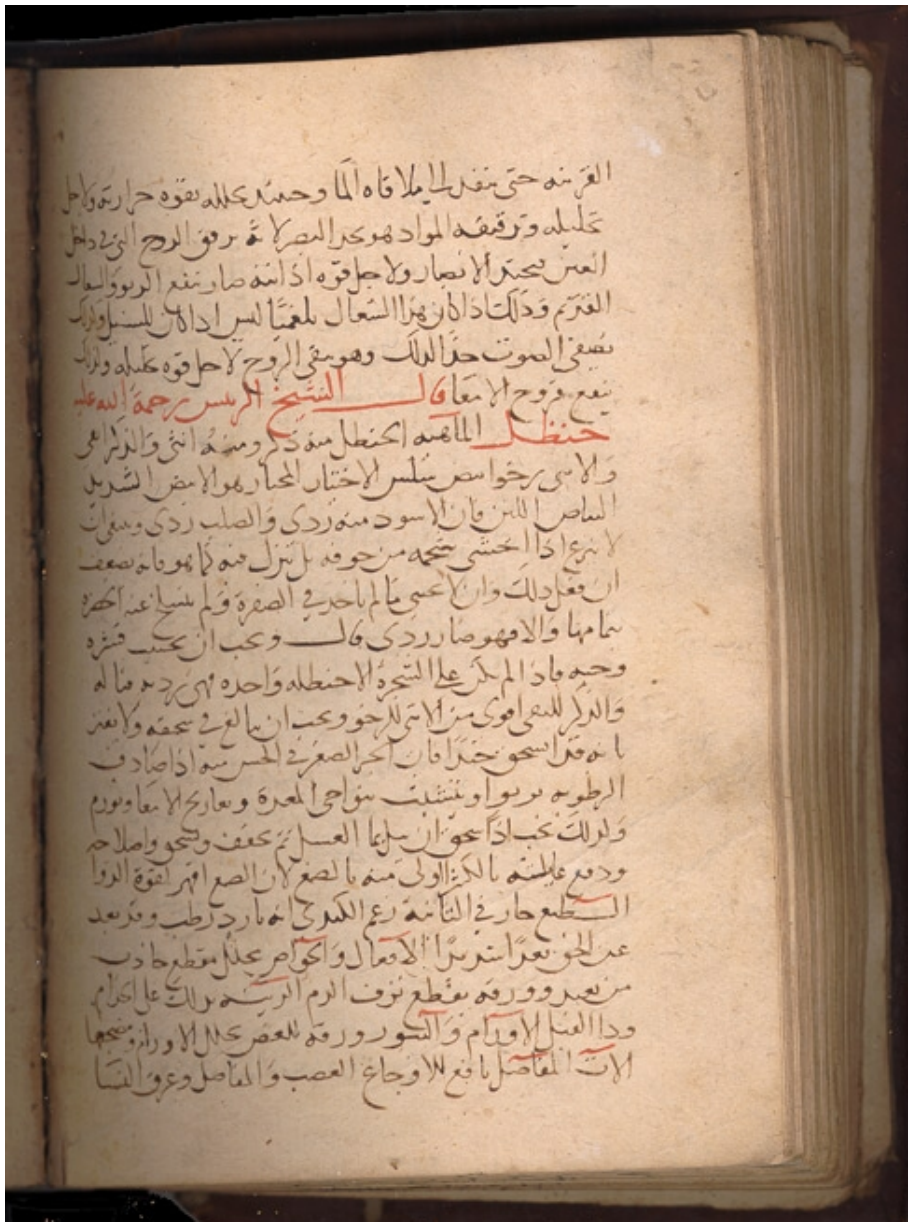
- Modern additions and techniques, such as Ayurveda and modern western medicine.

-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

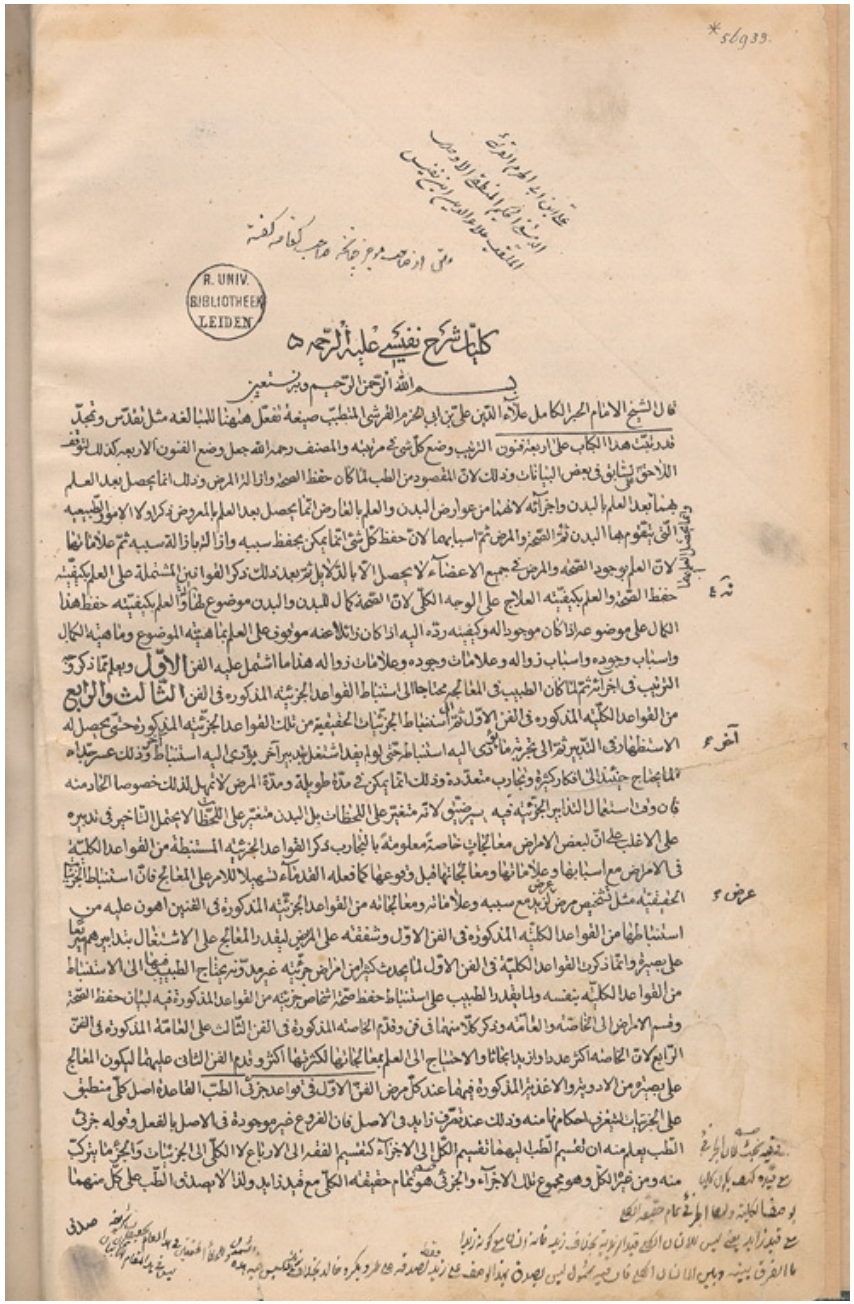


Greek medical heritage in an Arabic further development.

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.

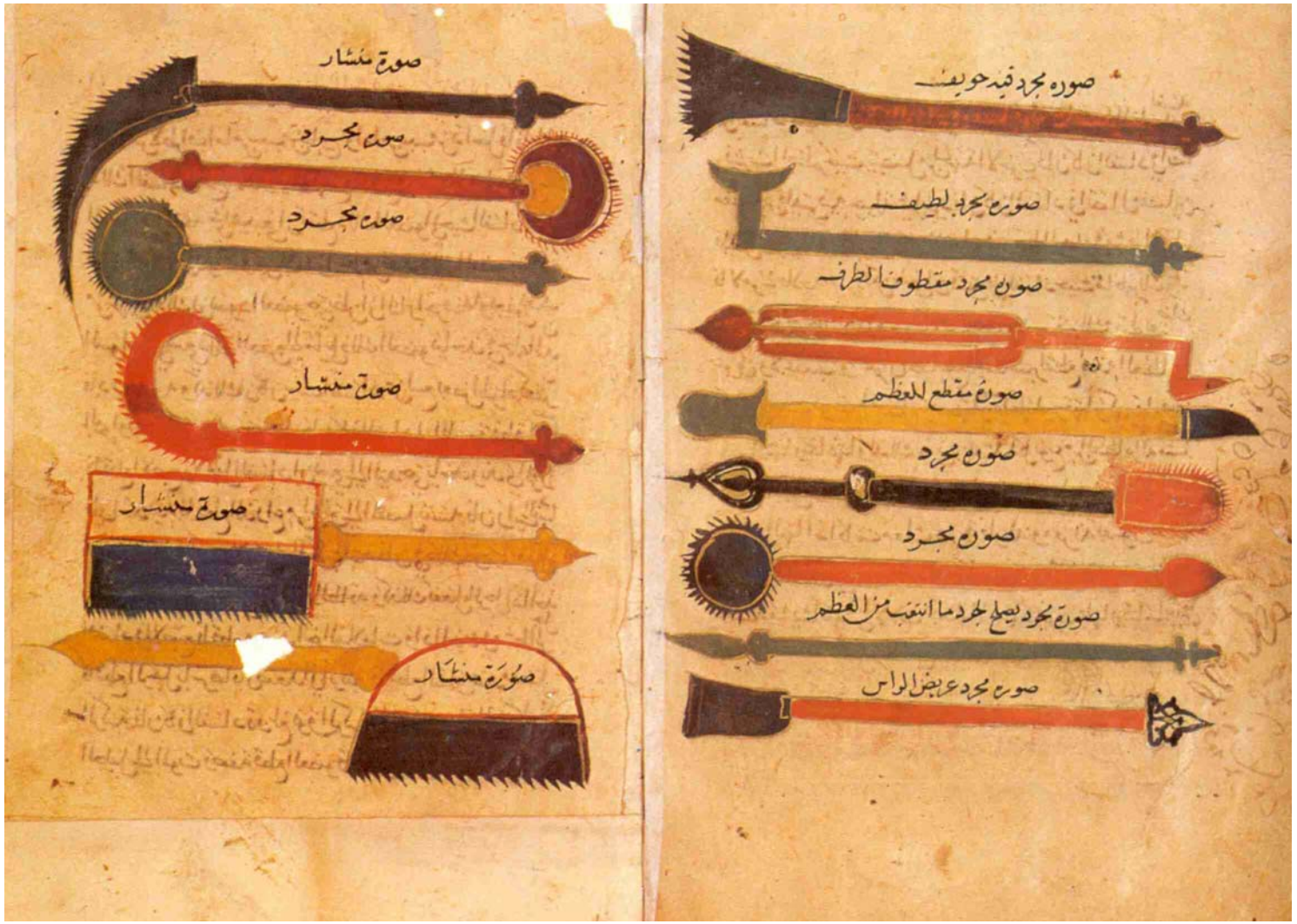
Source: MS Leiden Or. 81



A “modern” edition of the commentary by Ibn al-Nafis (died. 1288) on Ibn Sina’s Qanun, published in Tehran in 1856.

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



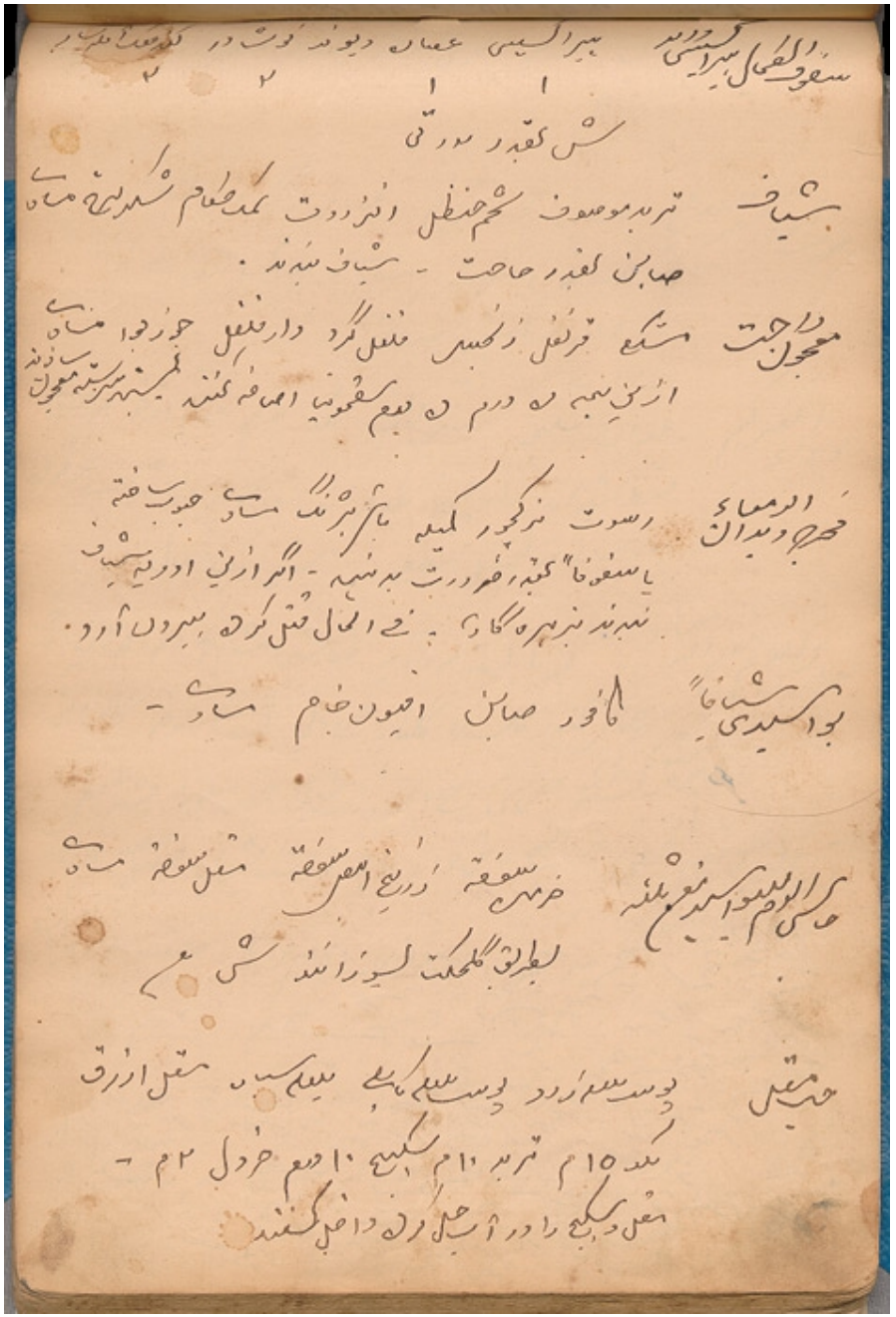
The second part of the *Kitab al-Tasrif* by the Andalusian physician Abu al-Qasim al-Zahrawi (died 1013), treats surgery. The book was immensely popular and was translated in medieval Europe.

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 *hakim*s, 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.

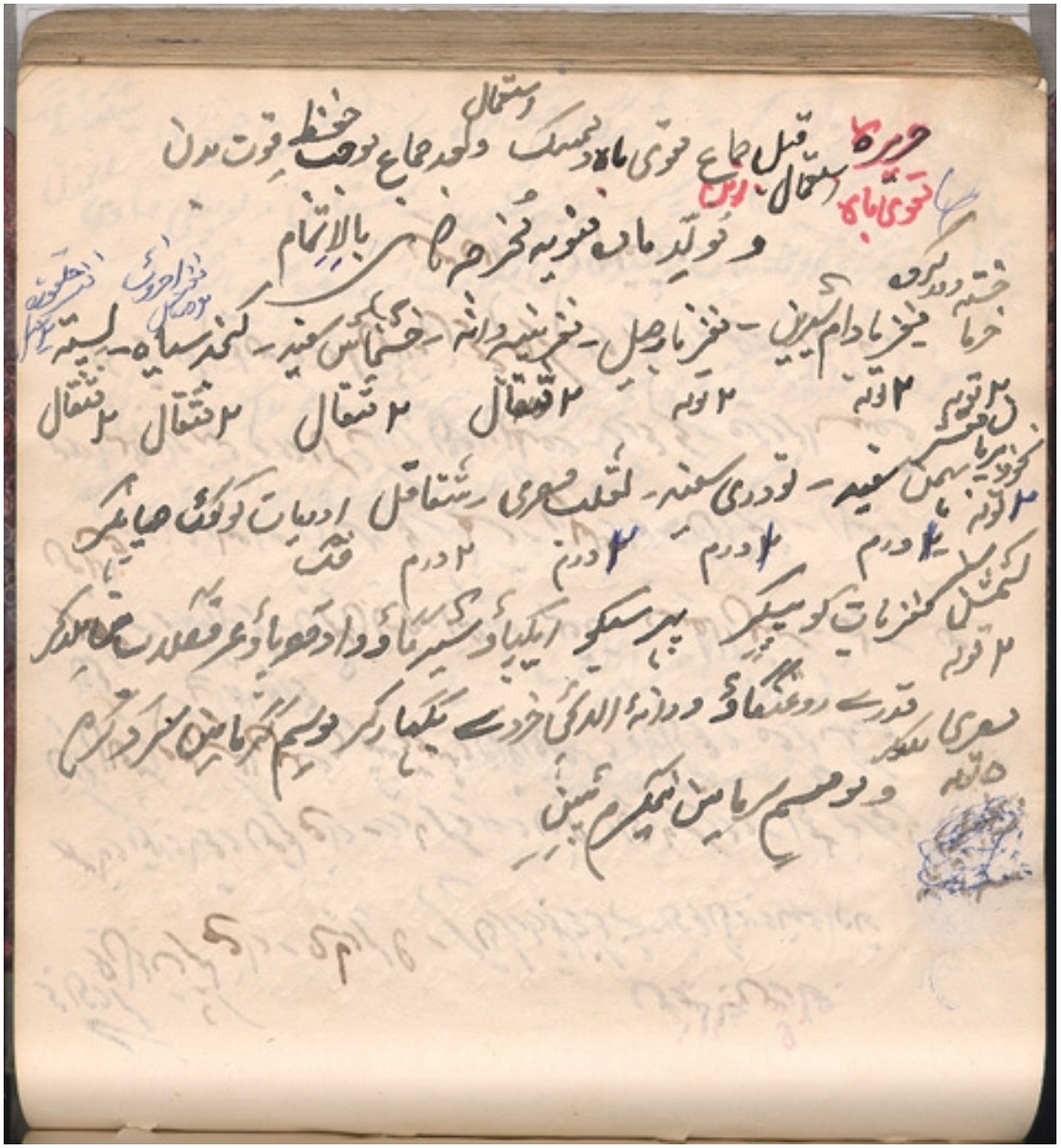
The *hakim*s write their own special reference works in the form of note books and recipe collections, which are usually kept within the family or the chain of succession between master and pupil. These notebooks are called *Bayaz* (Arabic *bayad*, 'neat copy'). This Bayaz literature contain a mixture 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.

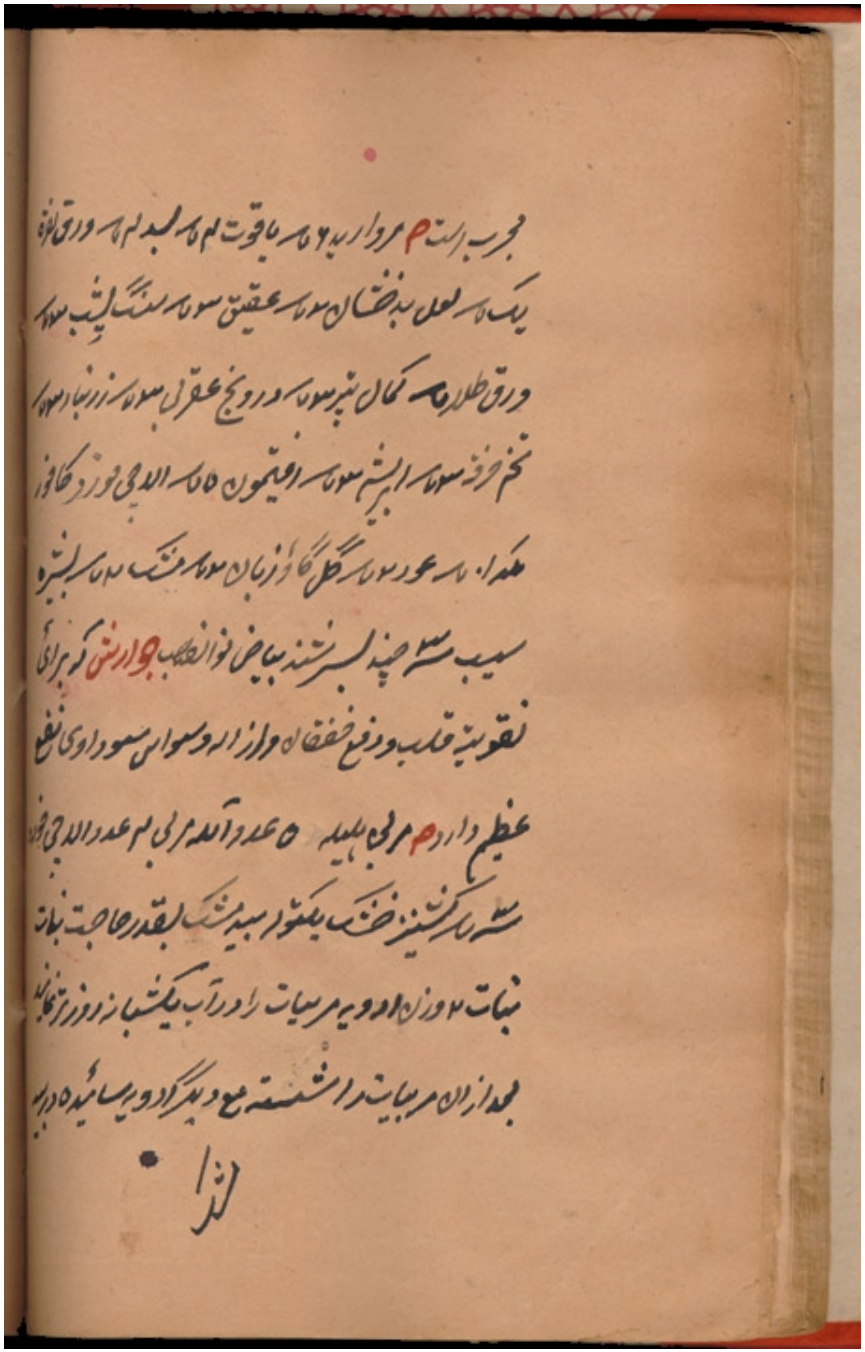
Source: MS Leiden Or. 22.682



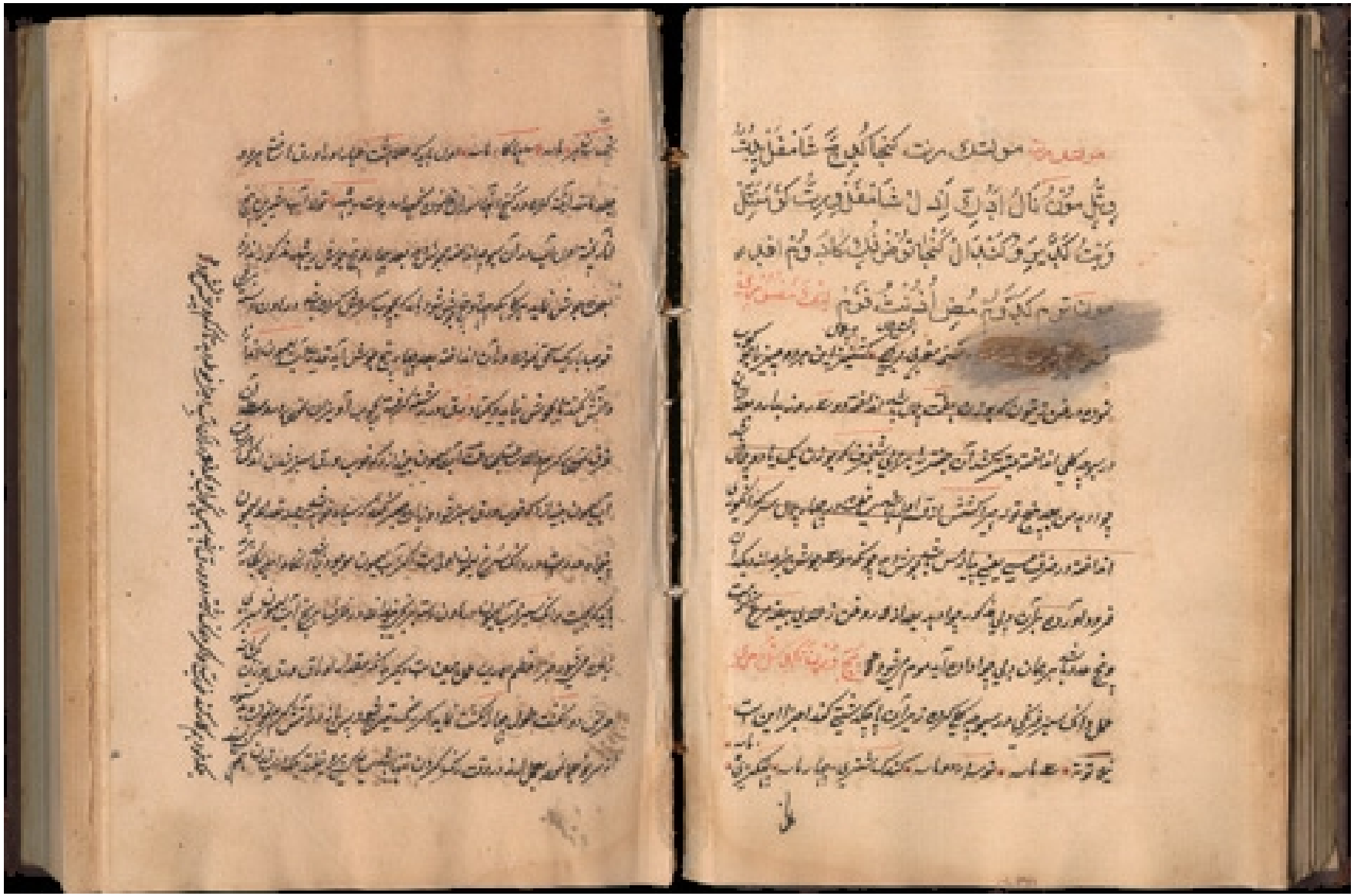
Medical *Bayaz* with text in Persian and Urdu, 20th century.

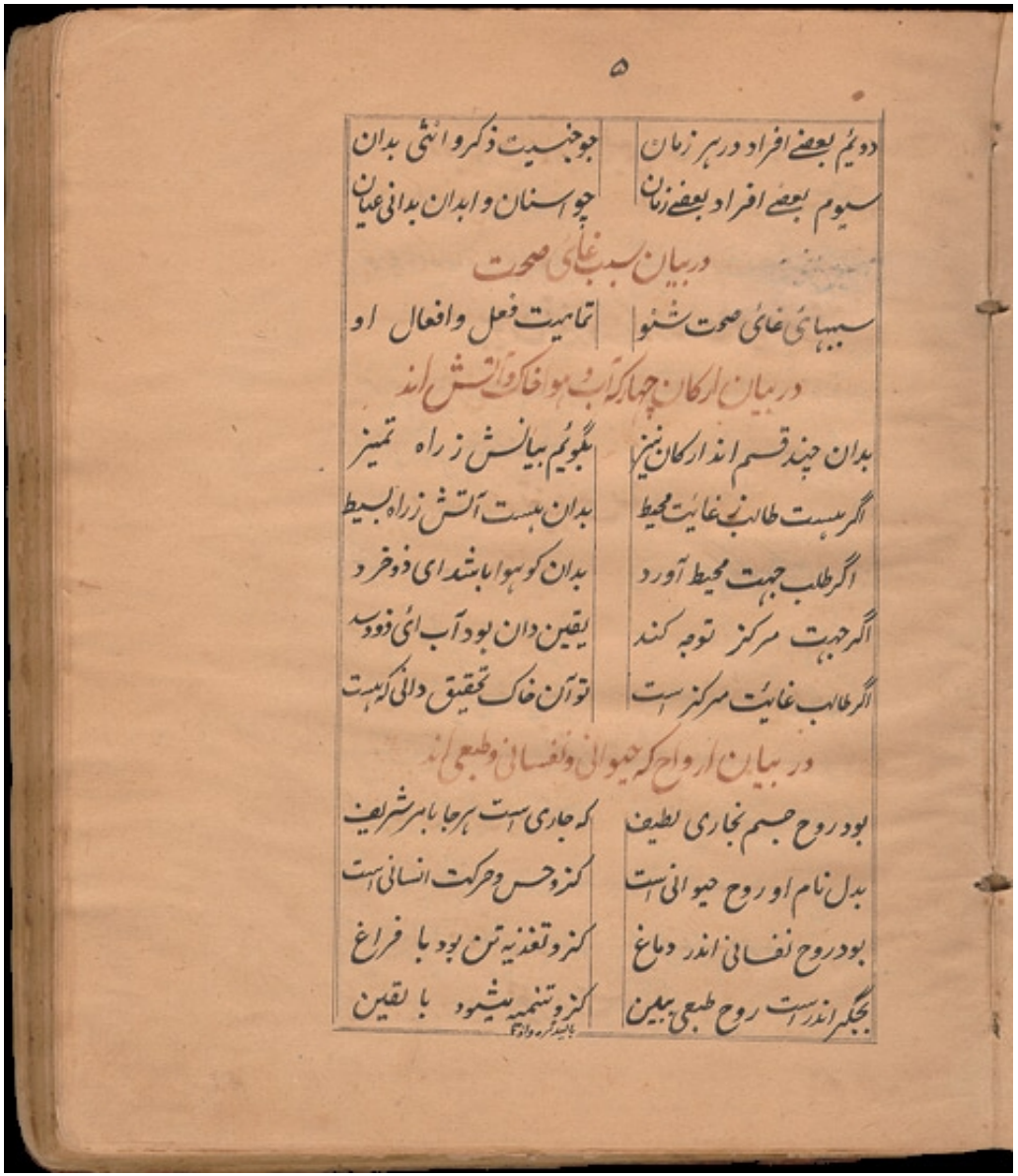
Much attentention is given here to *Bah* (sexual potency) and *Wisal* (coïtus).

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.



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دویم بعضے افراد در ہر زمان | جو جنسیت ذکر و انثی بدان
سیوم بعضے افراد بعضے زمان | چو سنان و ابدان بدانی عیان

در بیان سبب غائی صحت

سببہای غائی صحت شنو | تمامیت فعل و افعال او

در بیان ارکان چہار کہ آب و ہوا خاک و آتش اند

بدان چند قسم اند ارکان نیز | بگویم بیانش ز راہ تمیز
اگر ہست طالب نہ غایت محیط | بدان ہست آتش ز راہ بسیط
اگر طالب جہت محیط آورد | بدان کو ہوا باشد ای ذو خرد
اگر جہت مرکز توجہ کند | یقین دان بود آب ای ذو سدد
اگر طالب غایت مرکز ہست | تو آن خاک تحقیق دانی کہ ہست

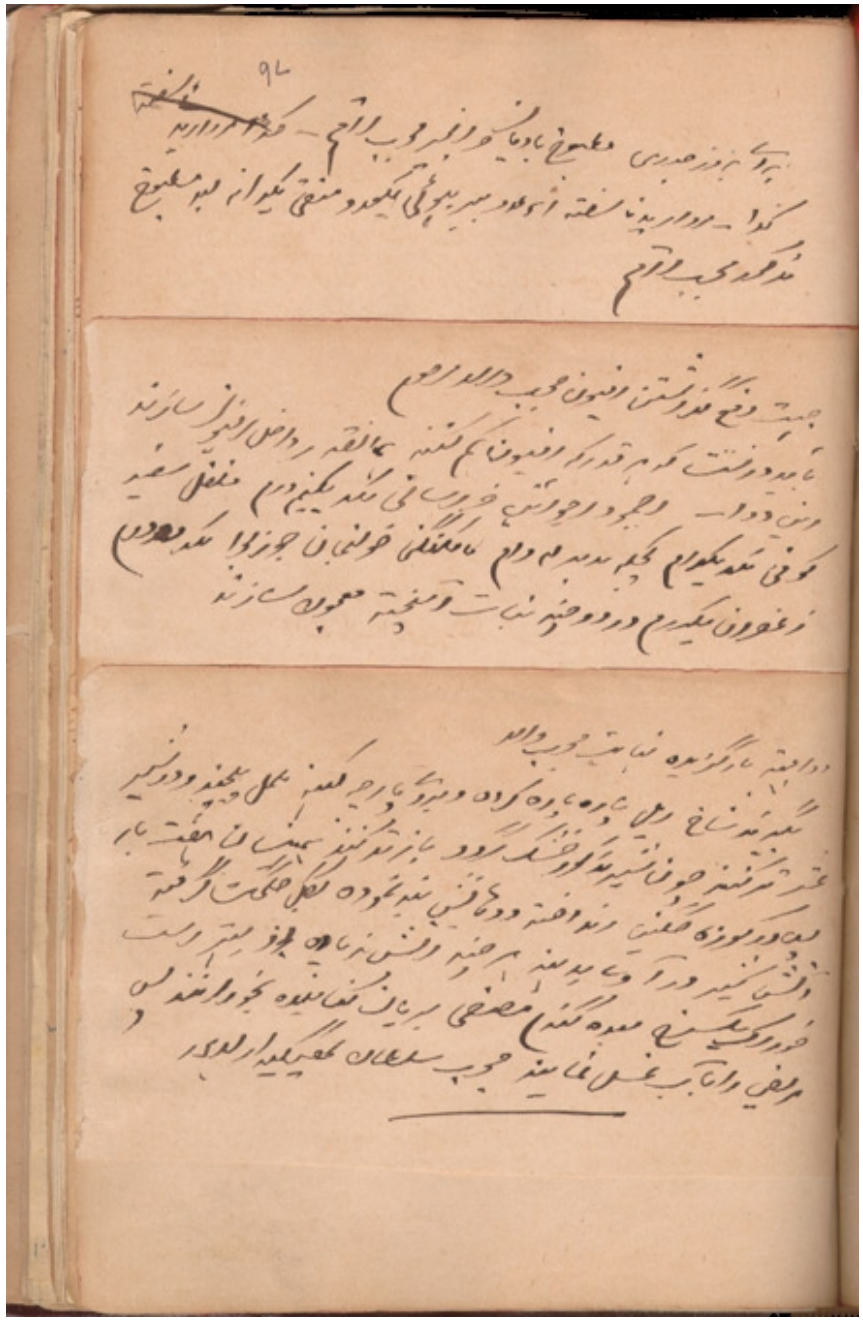
در بیان ارواح کہ حیوانی و نفسانی و طبعی اند

بود روح جسم بخاری لطیف | کہ جاری ہست ہر جا با ہر شریف
بدل نام او روح حیوانی ہست | کہ زو حس و حرکت انسانی ہست
بود روح نفسانی اندر دماغ | کہ زو تغذیہ تن بود با فراغ
بجگر اندر ہست روح طبعی ہمین | کہ زو تنمیہ میشود با یقین

Misbah al-Tibb.
A medical *mathnawi* poem in Persian, by Muhammad Ashraf Chaharkhabar.

Manuscript dated 1902.

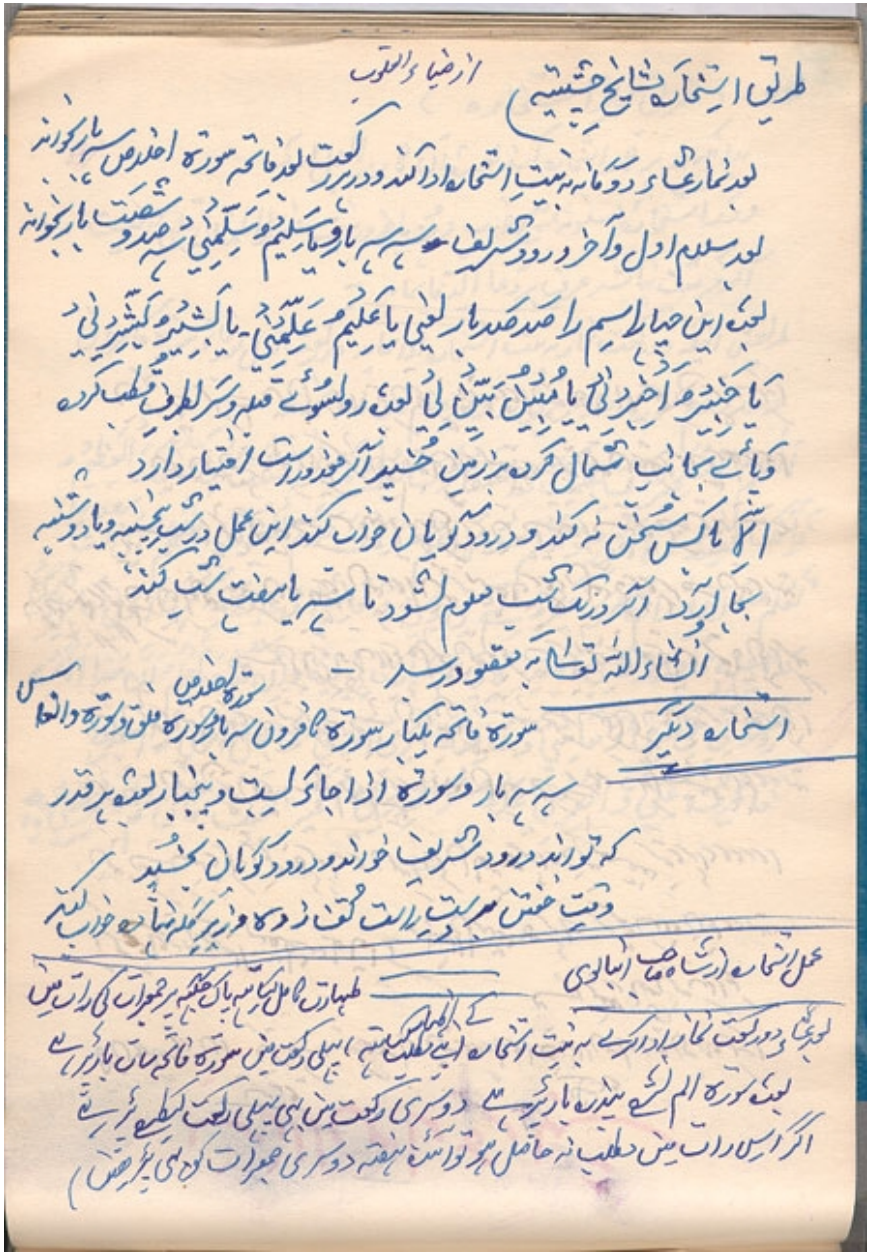
Source: MS Leiden Or. 22.934



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.

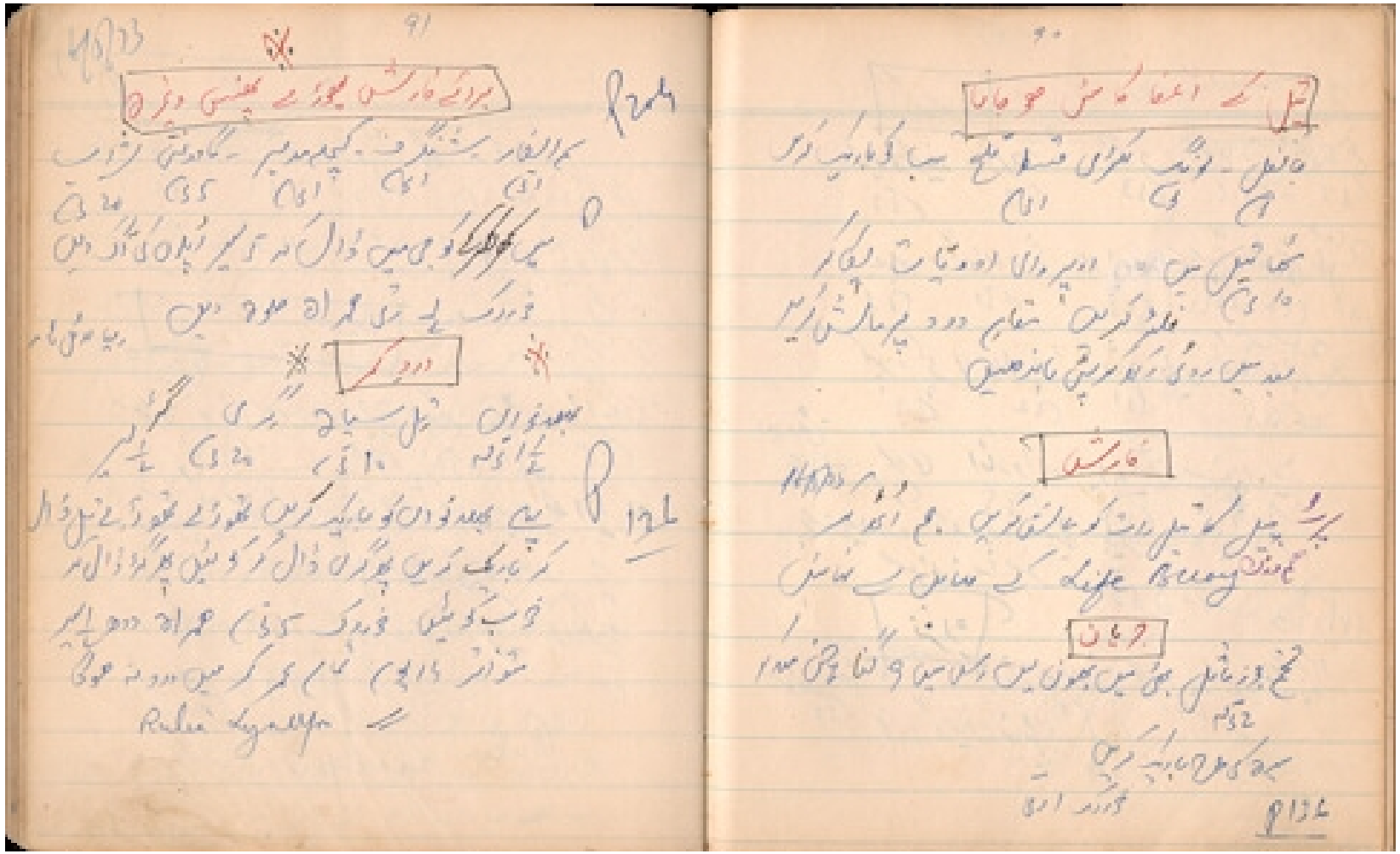
Source: MS Leiden Or. 22.957



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.

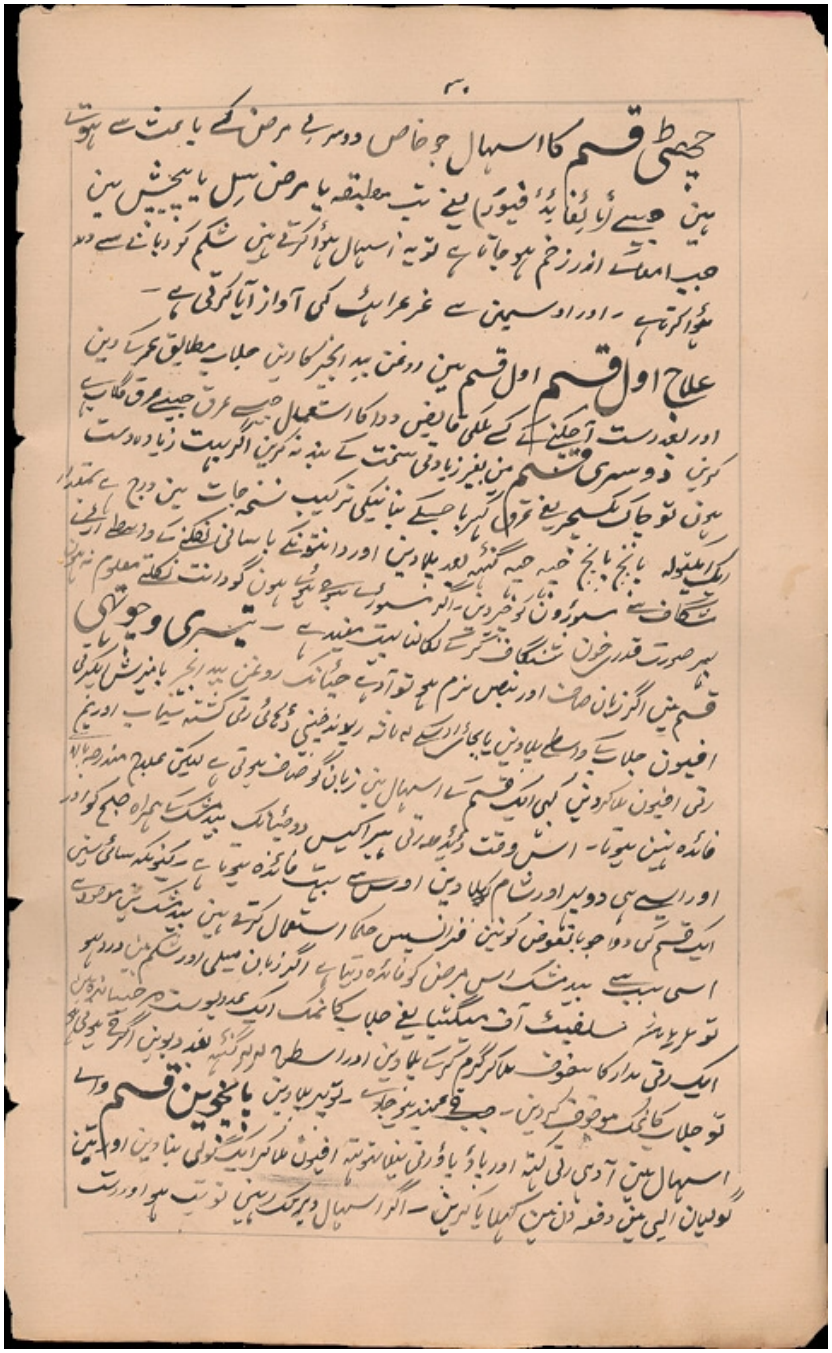
Late 20th century.

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.



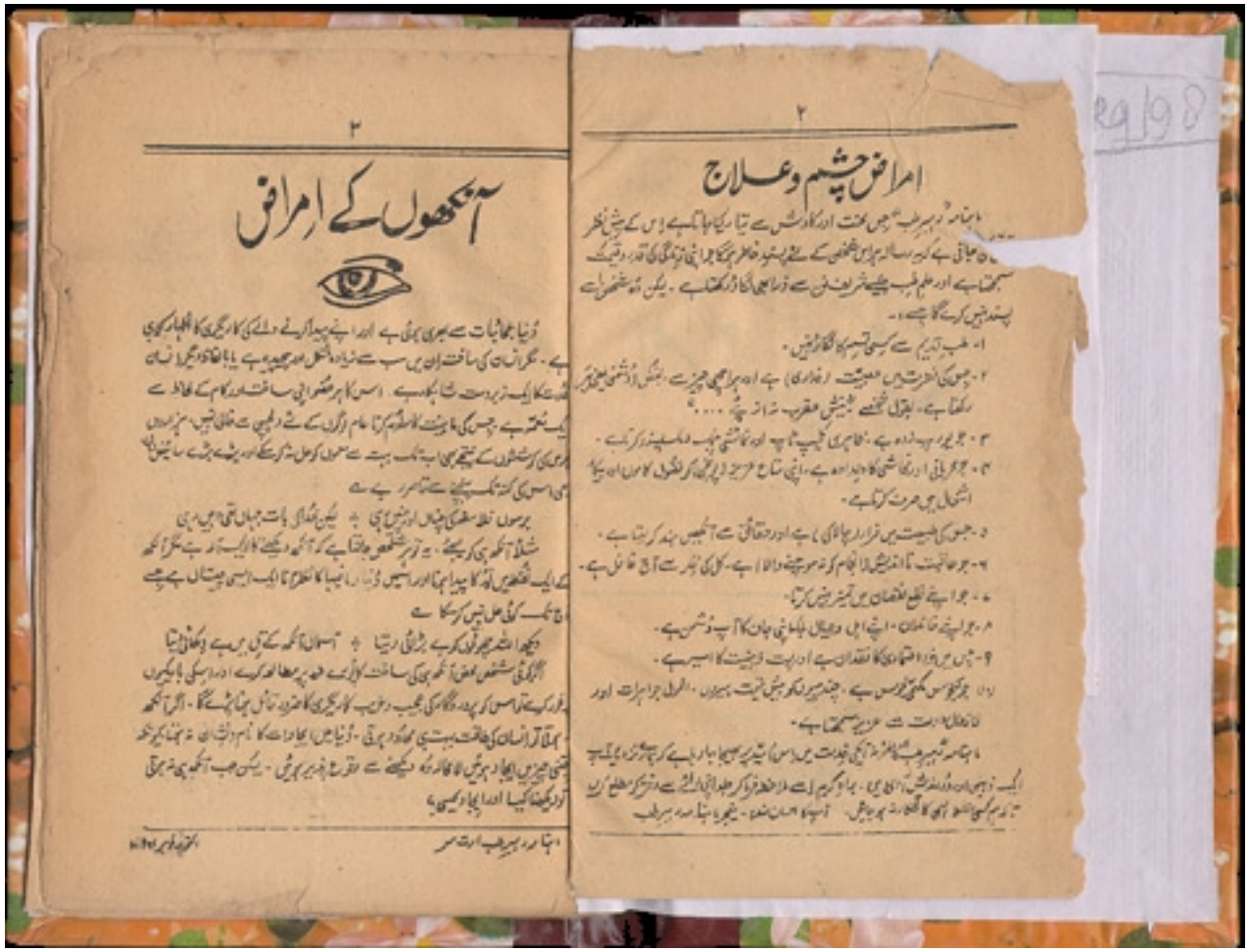
Practice of Medicine ya `ni `Ilag al-Amrad, anonymous medical treatise in Urdu, English and Arabic. The list of ailments is in Urdu, the explanation in Urdu, and sometimes also in Arabic and English.

Source: MS Leiden Or. 22.578.

Yunani tibb was also the subject of numerous printed publications. These circulated in the milieu of the *hakim*s. 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 *hakim*s 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.

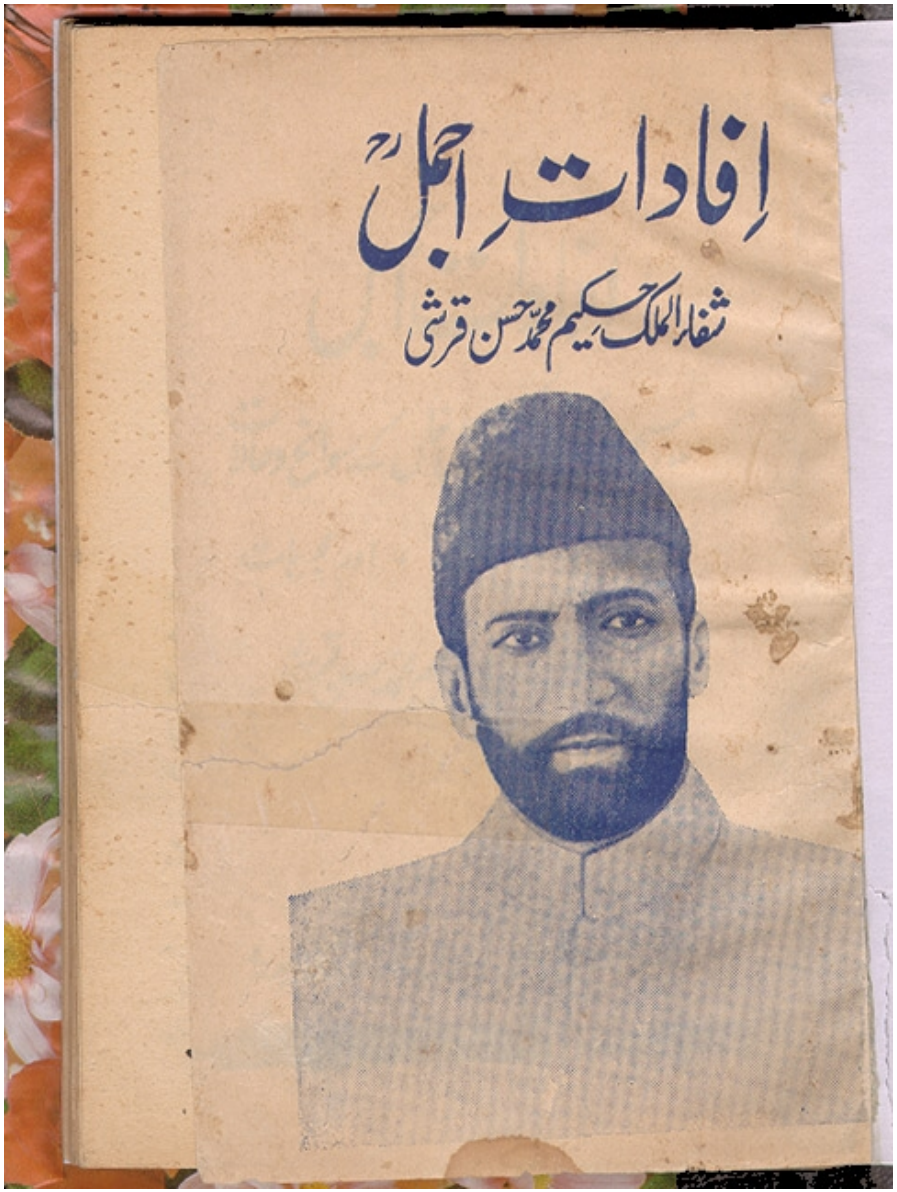


آنکھوں کے امراض

امراض چشم و علاج

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.