

## ORIGINAL ARTICLE

### Al-Ruhawi's Report on Gondishapur Hospital in *Adab al-Tabib* (9<sup>th</sup> Century)

#### Abstract

Jundishapur is one of the most important centers for transferring medical knowledge from Persian civilization to Islamic civilization. The studies of this hospital-university center in recent decades have gone through at least three different periods. The third round of Jundishapur studies focuses on new findings and lesser-known reports. The book *Adab al-Tabib* and its author reports on the ninth century AD about Jundishapur provides new information to researchers in this field that has not been reported so far. The author's description of this book provides a new picture of the relationship between the Jundishapur Hospital-Training Center and Baghdad, which can be a good reflection of its management, and the transfer of physicians and researchers from Iran to the Center of Islamic Civilization. This information shows how, with the strengthening of Baghdad as a scientific center, Jundishapur slowly lost its importance, and doctors and researchers preferred to migrate to Baghdad for more income. This migration can be considered the second great scientific migration of Iranians in history.

**Key words:** Ishaq ibn Ali al-Ruhawi, Jundishapur, University, Persian medicine, Iranian people

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## Introduction

Iran has a lengthy history of medical knowledge and expertise. The existence of educational and legal institutions, as well as the monitoring of a disciplined administrative system over the treatment process across the various Iranian provinces, is explicitly mentioned in the surviving texts of the Sassanid civilization. In 224 A.D. (Zargaran, 2014, pp. 307-312), Ardeshir I established the Sassanid civilization in Iran, which the Arabs destroyed in 651 A.D. Gondishapur Hospital was among the Sassanid historic institutions containing both therapeutic and educational activities and is very important for medical history research (Mahlooji and Abdoli, 2021, pp. 199-202). For many decades, this hospital and studies conducted about it have piqued the interest of academics, and as a result, numerous study lines have arisen around it, some of which we will discuss in this article. The book *Adab al-Tabib* (Morals of the Physician) by al-Ruhawi is among the documents that mention Gondishapur Hospital and the discussions formed around it. So far, researchers have paid little attention to this book. This article examines al-Ruhawi's references to Gondishapur Hospital and places them in the context of other Gondishapur-related studies.

## Gondishapur Hospital

According to contemporary studies, Gondishapur Hospital is the oldest known hospital and is mentioned in several documents. The exact date of this hospital's establishment is unclear; however, according to several pieces of evidence, it dates back to the time of Mani's death in 274 A.D. (Ardestani, 2015, pp. 11-42). Mani was an Iranian prophet who was executed by one of the Sassanid kings at Gondishapur during the Sassanid Empire. However, it seems that the activity of this hospital peaked under the reign of Khosrow Anushirvan, the Sassanid emperor (Miller, 2006, pp. 615-617).

Gondishapur was regarded as a prosperous agricultural location during the Parthian era (Khodaei, 2010, pp. 55-64). Archaeological evidence demonstrates that the government's view of the city has shifted since the Sassanids. The Parthians were probably more concentrated on eastern Iran (Mohammadi, 2016, pp. 103-124), while the Sassanids were more focused on the western parts of Iran. As a result, the Parthians see Gondishapur as more of an agriculture-based land. On the contrary, during the Sassanid era, this land was considered geopolitically owing to this government's invasions of Roman territory. Because of the strength and impenetrability of the Roman Empire's northern boundaries, the Sassanids launched most of their invasions from the southern areas. Forming a clear view of this subject requires more research and is beyond the scope of the issues covered in this article. However, investigating the significance of the city of Gondishapur aids our understanding of the Sassanid civilization. The remaining Sassanid period pottery, which was used to carry water to Gondishapur (Jelodar, 2010, pp. 223-245), as well as the surviving tombs, which the Zoroastrians used to bury their dead (Alidadi, Hesari, and Astaraki, 2016), indicate the shift in the demographic composition of this region over several hundred years. As a result of the emergence of Islamic civilization and geopolitical changes in the





area, the city gradually lost its prominence, with Gondishapur Hospital being the sole prominent location.

In the early centuries of Islam, Gondishapur remained a major scientific and medical center, where information from many places ranging from India and Greece to other notable scientific areas of the world was gathered and taught. There are traces from that time revealing that several physicians and translators were there to interpret different texts. However, with the foundation of Baghdad as the capital of the Islamic Caliphate, Gondishapur physicians were brought to Baghdad, where they constructed a training hospital and founded the Islamic civilization medical system as well as the translation movement. With the relocation of scientists to Baghdad, this training institution was gradually phased off. The Abbasid caliphs also established Baghdad's Bayt al-Hikmah (Grand Library of Baghdad) in the pattern of Gondishapur (Mahlooji and Abdoli, 2018, pp. 209-216). But despite several documents about this place as a scientific core through that period, there are some doubtful viewpoints about the existence of this place (Pormann, and Smith, 2014, p. 51), and gathering related data on this subject seems to be useful for presenting Gondishapur as a medical and scientific center.

### **Three Different Lines of Study Regarding Gondishapur Hospital**

Existing research on Gondishapur Hospital and its involvement in the process of knowledge transmission from Iran to Islamic civilization can be divided into three distinct streams. Pioneering researchers from the first period include Edward Browne, Najmabadi, Tajbakhsh, and others. During this time, the researchers studied the procedure and methods of conveying medical knowledge from Iranian civilization to the Islamic world by analyzing texts received from Gondishapur Hospital and the clinicians working in this hospital. One of the highlights of this type of research was the introduction of Hunayn ibn Ishaq as one of the most prominent translators of the period. This viewpoint was expressed in several works, and Gondishapur was recognized as a place focused on translation studies) Vowles, 1930, pp. 993-994; Brody, 1955, pp. 29-37; Underwood, 1948, pp. 160-161).

The second stream of these investigations started with a criticism of the first researchers' perspectives. During this time, the academics sought to minimize Iran's and Gondishapur's roles in the translation movement. Manfred Ullmann, a famous German academic, was perhaps the first to engage in the process and analyze the works of the first era. He expressed his disagreement in his book, *Islamic Medicine*. Ullmann attempted to contrast the Syriac identity of the Syriac-speaking population—who were initially Parthians and converted to Christianity during the Sassanid era—with their Iranian identity. By creating concepts like the legacy of the Syriac Church of the East, he gives identity to this current (Karimi Zanjani, 2019) and seeks to present the Iranian heritage as a restricted heritage, including only Avestan-Pahlavi writings. He also believed the educated physicians of the Gondishapur school and other scholars from other areas of the Sassanid Empire to be Christians simply because they spoke Syriac, ignoring and even contradicting their Iranian identity. Fuat





Sezgin is another researcher from the second stream. While developing the notion of separating Syriac speakers from Sassanid civilization and considering them non-Iranians, he stated that the practice of translating medical texts into Arabic was begun many decades after the Sassanid period by Jabir ibn Hayyan, not by Gondishapur physicians. Sezgin attempted to minimize the translation efforts of Gondishapur Iranian physicians as much as possible with this interpretation. Sezgin's persistence on these extreme readings was so strong that even Ullmann labeled Sezgin's analyses as confusing and radical (Ulman, 2004, p. 13) However, in *Medieval Islamic Medicine*, E. Smith-Savage, and E.P. Pormann took the next step in criticizing the scholars of this period, presenting Gondishapur as a complete myth (Sadeghi and Ghafari, 2017, pp. 389-397). According to the writers of this book, there was no written record of a location named Gondishapur before the thirteenth century. They claimed Gondishapur was fiction and stated that the Egyptian historian Abu al-Hasan Ali ibn Yusuf al-Qafti (1148-1242 A.D.) included it in his book (*Tarikh al-Hokama*) for no other reason than to exaggerate the physicians of Gondishapur.

The third stream of Jundishapur studies was primarily concerned with archaeological documentation and textual analysis. Archaeological excavations and conferences like "Proceeding of the first international congress of Gondishapur" in 2017 as well as the exhibition of archaeological records, transformed many people's perceptions of what was going on in Gondishapur. Another activity of this stream was the examination of books and the identification of Baghdadi's pioneer physicians. Of course, most of these writings had previously been accessible, but, oddly, they have not been examined (Soylemez, 2005, pp. 1-27; Puya, 2010, pp. 13-23). For example, there is a reference in the book "*Medieval Islamic Medicine*" about *Firdous al-Hikmah*, by Rabban al-Tabari, which was composed in the ninth century AD. Gondishapur Hospital is referenced explicitly in this book, and Tabari even writes about his personal experience and interaction with the head of this hospital (Mahlooji and Abdoli, 2021, pp. 199-202). However, the book's writers have not included this evidence, and it is unclear why the writers claim the earliest manuscript mentioning Gondishapur Hospital was published in the thirteenth century.

This article addresses a report about Gondishapur Hospital mentioned in Ishaq ibn Ali al-Ruhawi's ninth-century book, *Adab al-Tabib*. The existence of Gondishapur Hospital, as well as its ties with Baghdad and the Abbasid court, is explicitly discussed in the report.

### **Ishaq ibn Ali al-Ruhawi's Biography**

Ishaq ibn Ali al-Ruhawi was an Iranian physician, most likely a Nestorian Christian or Jewish. He is the first Arabic author of a medical ethics book titled *Adab al-Tabib* [20]. One of his works' most notable characteristics is that he includes scattered references to historical issues throughout the text. These shards of information may considerably aid in understanding how medical knowledge was transported from Iran to Islamic civilization. The book's topic, which is thought to be the earliest surviving text on medical ethics in Islamic civilization, shows how knowledge was





transferred from Iranian civilization to the Islamic world. Many didactic works were published in ancient Iran's culture, and ethics was one of the most prominent fields of study throughout the Sassanid period (Hejazi and Bahrami, 2019, pp.61-80). During the translation movement, several of these didactic works were translated into Arabic and are still among the most notable ones (we can, for example, refer to *Kalila wa Demna*). In terms of genre, al-Ruhawi's book may be classified as a specialist educational resource for doctors. This work aims to broaden the didactical movement into specialized disciplines (such as medicine). This idealistic tendency may be seen in al-Ruhawi's other works as well. His interest in the issue of physician examinations in these books reflects the aim of scholars at the time to standardize the medical profession.

*Adab al-Tabib* contains a lot of information on al-Ruhawi himself. This data demonstrates that the author was acquainted with Gondishapur Hospital and even paid attention to the details about the hospital and the professionals who work there. Examining this data and cross-referencing it with other sources may pave the way for future scholars in this field.

#### **Al-Ruhawi's Report on Gondishapur Hospital in *Adab al-Tabib***

Al-Ruhawi alludes to the intricate and constant relationship between Baghdad (the Caliphate's headquarters), the Abbasid caliphs, and the Gondishapur Hospital in his book and gives the reader a depth of knowledge in this respect. He begins by discussing three great Gondishapur physicians and then narrates the story of the al-Khayzuran's pregnancy. al-Khayzuran bint Atta (died 789) was Mahdi, the Abbasi caliph's wife, and the mother of two caliphs, Hadi and Harun al-Rashid. It seems that this lady had considerable political power in the Abbasid court (Nemati, 2007. p. 11), and it was important for Mahdi to have children with her. Israel Bakhtishu was a physician who helped her overcome her infertility. She was able to have two children due to this physician's services. After that, Mahdi bestowed the *Jabril* on him as a reward for what he had done. Al-Ruhawi underlines *Jibril*'s scientific skills by stating that he was a physician at Gondishapur Hospital for thirty years [23]. This demonstrates that studying at Gondishapur Hospital was so important in determining a person's academic reputation, and this person did not need to be introduced by someone else. Al-Ruhawi goes on to explain the prevalent environment at this hospital, an atmosphere that represents the Bakhtiashou family's spiritual and managerial supremacy over this place. According to al-Ruhawi, Bakhtiashou's influence was so overwhelming that he was able to immediately dismiss a physician who had been working at the hospital for 30 years.

Al-Ruhawi narrates the story of the physician's dismissal, stating that an Iranian-origin physician at Gondishapur Hospital, Masawaiyh, was outraged by Bakhtiashou's affluence and contrasted his financial status to Bakhtiashou's. According to al-Ruhawi, the man complains that *Jibril* is purchasing and signing contracts for vast parcels of property in Baghdad while he has gotten stuck working in the hospital (Ruhawi, 2008, p. 148). Miskawayh complaint irritated *Jibril*, and he discharged him





from the hospital. Al-Ruhawi references Masawaiyh's thirty-year job experience in one part and forty-year work experience in another part of his book. In addition to these stories, al-Ruhawi gives more details concerning the hospital's activities. He goes on to mention Masawaiyh's dismissal as a point that might be useful in comprehending the hospital's treatment methods. Masawaiyh's traveled to Baghdad after being dismissed for apologizing to Jibril, but Jibril refused his apology. After a time, Masawaiyh's finance decreased, and to re-enter the workplace, he asked one of the influential men (Leqas al-Bia) to mediate between him and Jibril. Legal questions him, "Have you not learned or specialized in anything in your thirty years of working at the hospital?" Masawaiyh's response Yes, I am an ophthalmologist specializing in treating various injuries. This conversation reveals that there were some distinct medical approaches at Gondishapur Hospital: pharmacological therapy, cupping therapy, and ophthalmology (Ruhawi, 2008, p. 148).

Al-Ruhawi recounts physicians' actions at Gondishapur Hospital in various parts of the book to highlight their prestige and rank. Masawaiyh is an excellent example of these physicians. According to al-Ruhawi, Masawaiyh eventually made his way inside the court and came across Jibril after one of his successful treatments. "*Masawaiyh, you are now a physician*", says Jibril. Masawaiyh tells him: "*I was not a physician before? I have forty years of hospital medical experience, and now you tell me I'm a doctor?*" Jibril regretted his comments and left. This evidence implies that there was a strong relationship between Gondishapur Hospital and the Baghdad court and that the Islamic translation movement influenced this connection.

### Conclusion

Examining numerous medical texts reveals that there is a wealth of data concerning the activities of Gondishapur Hospital and its influence on the establishment of Islamic civilization, and this information is being unearthed over time. This data refutes the second stream set of Gondishapur Hospital theorists' ideas. As previously said, this stream says that the earliest documentation relating to this hospital date back to the 13th century, and this stream attempted to either deny the existence of this hospital or minimize its link with ancient Iranian civilization. However, reviewing several historical texts reveals that this stream is incorrect. One of these texts is al-Ruhawi's book *Adab al-Tabib*, in which he discusses the relationship between Gondishapur Hospital and the Abbasid Caliphate in Baghdad and demonstrates that the most famous physicians in the Abbasid Caliphate were the same physicians who studied at Guondishapur Hospital. These same individuals established Islamic medicine in Baghdad, which is effectively the label for Iranian medicine.

### Conflict of Interest

None.





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