

SHORT COMMUNICATION

The First Medical Text in Preventive Medicine Written in Islamic World

Abstract

Medical books written in Islamic societies have devoted special chapters to preventive medicine named *Hefzossehha'*. Nowadays, *Ferdous Alhekmah* is considered as the first medical text authored by Muslim scientists in Islamic countries. But in this review study we offer a more ancient text that belongs to Ali Ibn Musa (Imam Reza PBUH), the 8th Imam of shi'ites. This text was written about 815-818 AD while Imam Reza was in Marv, the Abbasid's capital city during the al-Ma'mun's governance (813-833). This precedes the book of Tabari (810-855), *Ferdous Alhekmah*. This text was written specifically about preventive medicine and contains nutritional patterns; the effect of weather, sleep, four temperaments and humors on health; personal hygiene; cupping and phlebotomy; health care in travels; sex hygiene and its influence on fetus health and prevention of some especial diseases. This text was different from many books in this field in some ways. Thus, al-Ma'mun commanded some scribes to write the text with gold and therefore it is famous to "*Resaleh Zahabieh*" which means golden letter.

Keywords: Preventive medicine, medical history, Islamic medicine, *Resaleh Zahabieh*

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Introduction

Islamic preventive medicine has a long history dating back centuries. The Islamic preventive medicine was formed as early as the time of the Holy Prophet Mohammad in Medina (PBUH). The prevention of diseases in the Islamic medical training was and still is very important.^{1,2}

In the Quran and hadiths (words of the Prophet and Imams), we see many suggestions on the prevention of diseases. Among these suggestions, there are several recommendations on nutrition, hygiene, and health.^{3,4}

In the second half of the eighth century, when Greek-Arabic translation began in Baghdad, scientists in Islamic countries translated scientific texts from Greek into Arabic by the encouragements and supports received from Abbasid Caliphs. Yuhanna Ibn Masawayh (777-857) and Jibra'il ibn Bakhtishu (d. 829), the Christian Iranian scientists and Jundishapur university professors, had an important role in this action.⁵ In this period, medical books were mainly translations. After this, in the next period, named the golden period of medicine in the Islamic countries, Muslim physicians started to write, rather than translate, books. Tabari (810-855), Razi (865-925), Ahwazi (925-994) and Ibn Sina (980-1013) are scientists and authors of this period.⁶ *Ferdous Alhekmah*, the book that was authored by Ali Ibn Rabban Tabari, was the first book in this period.⁷ In this book, Preventive medicine was the dominant issue discussed in chapters named *Hefzosse-hha'*. In this study, we looked for the first book that was authored in this field in Islam.

Method

The information was gathered from libraries such as the Library of Astan Quds Razavi⁸, the National Library and the Archives of IR⁹, Library of the Ayat Allah Marashi Najafi¹⁰, in addition to the Malek museum¹¹. The materials were collected through their website under ancient medical books collection. We searched keywords such as preventive medicine, Islamic medicine, *Ferdous Alhekmah*, Canon, Al-man-suri and Kamelossana' in electronic database such as Google Scholar and Pubmed to obtain related articles. We chose the subject the "*Resaleh Zahabieh*" by Ali Ibn Musa al-Reza from the book of hadiths, as it was the most well known manuscript on Islamic medicine. In addition to books authored by Majlesi M.B. and Asgari S.M. who were renowned for their expertise on the books of hadith.^{12,13} Other ancient books and

- 1- Redzepagic, 1997: 35-9.
- 2- Elgood, 1962: 146-153.
- 3- Monette, 2012: 649-50.
- 4- Alaei et al., 2010.
- 5- Asgari, 2004:13-21,140-44.
- 6- Mohaghegh, 1987: 6-8.
- 7- Tabari, 2008:14, 22,128.
- 8- Organization of Library, Museum and Document Center of Astan Quds Razavi, 2011.
- 9- National Library & Archives of IR of Iran, 2011.
- 10- The Grand Library of The Great Ayat Allah MarashiNajafi, 2011.
- 11- Malek National Library and Museum Institution, 2011.
- 12- Asgari, 2004:13-21,140-44.
- 13- Majlesi, 1986: 308- 356.



documents were used in our search for articles on Iranian traditional medicine. The selections chosen for this purpose were as follows: Al-Ghanoon (Canon on medicine), *Ferdous Alhekmah* (Paradise of Wisdom), Al-mansuri (Liber Alman-suri) and Kamelossana' (The Complete Art of Medicine); these books were compared to the “*Resaleh Zahabieh*” (Figure.1) to realize which of these books was the most ancient one and what content differences were held within their texts.

14- Tabari, 2008:14, 22,128.



Figure 1. Persian Translation and Illustration of “*Resaleh Zahabieh*” with its Original Arabic Text by Mohammad Sharif Khatoon Abadi, 12th Century AD

Findings

Today, *Ferdous Alhekmah* is considered one of the oldest medical texts authored by a Muslim scientist of an Islamic country, Tabari. Tabari wrote this book in the third year of al-Motavakkel’s governance.¹⁴ His governance begins in the year 847, thus dating his writing around the year 850.

On the other hand, in the eighth century, al-Ma’mun, Abbasid Caliph, (786–833) held a number of meetings inviting scientists for the scientific debates. In one of these discussion meetings, in which Yuhanna Ibn Masawayh and Jibra’il ibn Bakhtishu, the greatest physicians, took part, Ali ibn Musa al-Reza (766-818), the eighth Shi’ites’ Imam, was also present. Al-Ma’mun requested the Imam to take part in these medical discussions. Imam Reza promised him to write some subjects in the field. Upon completion of his work, Imam Reza submitted it to Al-Ma’mun. Al-Ma’mun was so surprised with



the manuscript that he commanded the court scribes to re-write the articles in liquid gold, thereby, giving the book its name “*Resaleh Zahabieh*” meaning golden letters.^{15,16} This text was written around the period 815-818, while Imam Reza was living in the city of Marv, the Abbasid capital during the Al-Ma'mun governance (813-833). This text is older than the book *Firdous al-Hikmah*, (Paradise of Wisdom), authored by Ali Ibn Rabban Tabari, written in 850, the third year of al-Motavakkel's governance.

This study has compared the book “*Resaleh Zahabieh*” with those written by Tabari, Razi, Ahvazi and Ibn Sina'. This text is unique in content, as well. The followings are two points worth mentioning here:

1. These books contain chapters regarding suitable nutrition and health care subjects for each season, whereas the “*Resaleh*” has unique recommendation for each month.

2. In majority of the medical books, written before or after the “*Resaleh*” or those of that period, there is a chapter on wine which might have been influenced by the Christian translators of the Greek books mentioned above. Nevertheless, in this text, a lawful wine was introduced that is halal. In addition, the preparation method and its benefits were described.

The “*Resaleh*” is very succinct, but contains the important topics of health preservation. The text contains the following topics:

1. Nutritional pattern including quantity, quality, feeding times and suitable diet for each season and each month.

2. Weather and its effect on the body and ways to manage its changes.

3. Four temperaments (hot, cold, wet, and dry) and humors (blood, phlegm, bile, and black bile) and their changes and influences on health and physiology of body.

4. Types of water and the best water and other related subjects.

5. Effect of sleep on health and ways to design a good sleep.

6. Personal hygiene covering mouth and teeth hygiene, genitourinary, gastrointestinal care and so on.

7. Effect of age changes on health.

8. Cupping and phlebotomy, types, indication and their procedures.

9. Bathroom -that is similar to lake, sauna and Jacuzzi at that time- and its effect on the body and health.

10. Health care in travel.

15- Asgari, 2004:13-21,140-44.

16- Majlesi, 1986: 308- 356.



11. Sex hygiene and design of a good intercourse and its influence on fetus health.

12. Prevention of especial diseases: vitiligo, leprosy, hemorrhoid, arthralgia, renal stone, paralysis, gastrointestinal diseases, migraine, hepatitis and so forth.^{17,18}

17- Asgari, 2004:13-21,140-44.

18- Majlesi, 1986: 308- 356.

19- Davies et al., 2004: 403-14.

Discussion

Having compared the books, the researchers have found that the content of the “*Resaleh*” differs from that of the books written by the various Muslim scientists of that period. One of the most notable differences between this text and the above-mentioned books is related to the recommendations regarding the physician’s monthly advice to maintain health. Today’s medical field is faced with major health problems globally, cardiovascular diseases and diabetes mellitus being two of the majors diseases, where lifestyle changes are an eminent and essential component for prevention and treatment of these diseases.¹⁹

The research completed on the “*Resaleh*” could well allow us to design a new model of lifestyle modification that could very possibly lead to a reduction in diseases such as diabetes and cardiovascular disease.

Conclusion

The “*Resaleh Zahabieh*” is the first preventive medical text, unique in its content written in the Islamic world. Further Research on this subject may very well uncover more information on the subject of preventive medicine and its place in Islamic medical training. It could also help to design a new model of lifestyles to aid in resolving many dilemmas related to major diseases, such as cardiovascular disease and diabetes mellitus.

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Competing interests

The authors declare that they have no competing interests.

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