



LETTER TO EDITOR

Mas'ūd ibn Muḥammad al-Sijzī, the Author of “*Ḥaqā'iq Asrār al-Ṭibb*” and His Lifetime

Dear Editor,

There is no doubt that an accurate historical account of medicine depends mainly on recognizing and introducing renowned physicians and influential medical authors. However, owing to the lack of primary sources, it is sometimes challenging to identify the prominent authors and physicians. Mas'ūd ibn Muḥammad al-Sijzī is one such figure whom historical sources do not have enough information about him. He authored an influential book titled “*Ḥaqā'iq asrār al-ṭibb*” (lit. the Realities of the Secrets of Medicine) in Arabic, which is a comprehensive collection of various medical terminologies and their definitions. Numerous manuscripts of the book “*Ḥaqā'iq asrār al-ṭibb*” can be found in libraries worldwide.¹ The book was previously published in Damascus (2006) and Tehran (2008). There are two old and modern Persian translations of this book by Hakim Am'ani (1046 AH/1636 .A.D) under the title “*Miftaḥ al-Hodud*” and Rashid Tafaqqod (2010).

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1- Manuscript copies of “*Ḥaqā'iq asrār al-ṭibb*” can be found in numerous libraries and institutions across the world. Some of these include:

In Iran: Majlis Library, Library of

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“*Ḥaqā’iq asrār al-ṭibb*” discusses three important issues: first, it focuses on things about the general [principles] of medicine. It includes discussions on topics such as “Defining common medical terms,” “Explaining well-known diseases,” and “Defining compound drugs and related discussions”. Next come the practical aspects and techniques related to medical principles. Some of the subjects covered in this part include “Methods of obtaining, mixing, and storing pharmaceutical drugs,” and “Applications of spices in beating, softening, cooking, straining, and burning.” And thirdly, the book delves into matters that are categorized into different subcategories. It covers various topics, such as “Quantities of general matters divided into only two categories,” “Quantities of general matters divided into only three categories,” “Quantities of general matters divided into only four categories,” and so on.

Very little information is available about the author of “*Ḥaqā’iq asrār al-ṭibb*” in Biographies of Scientists’ books, and his name is occasionally misattributed in some catalogs of manuscripts. For instance, in some manuscripts of the ‘*Uyūn al-anbā’ fī ṭabaqāt al-aṭibbā’* of Ibn Abī Uṣaybi‘ah, the name of renowned physician Abu al-Ḥussain Ṭahir ibn Ibrahim ibn Muhammad al-Sijzī has been erroneously read and transcribed as al-Sanjari. Such mistakes are found in other similar instances in manuscripts and published books about the author of “*Ḥaqā’iq asrār al-ṭibb*”. The lack of accurate and extensive historical records makes it difficult to compile a biography of Mas‘ūd al-Sijzī.

In the prefaces of the Arabic text and the Persian translation of “*Ḥaqā’iq asrār al-ṭibb*,” as well as in some manuscript catalogs, it is suggested that Mas‘ud bin Muhammad al-Sijzī passed away around 734 AH/1334 AD, citing Carl Brockelmann’s “*Geschichte der arabischen Litteratur*.”²² This places al-Sijzī among the physicians of the 8th century AH or the Ilkhanid or Muzaffarid era. However, based on the following information in this article, it is assumed that al-Sijzī’s life was dated about two centuries earlier than the proposed date.

As Mas‘ūd al-Sijzī did not mention the names of specific books or individuals, we cannot accurately date his work in “*Ḥaqā’iq asrār al-ṭibb*.” However, in the introduction, he stated that he, alongside other distinguished scholars, served “Ṣadr al-Dawlah wa al-Din, Qiwām al-Islam wa al-Muslimīn, Malik wazārat al-Sharq wa al-Gharb, Abī al-Mafākhir Qāsim ibn ‘Irāq ibn Ja‘far” and these scholars dedicated their books to the court in the hope of gaining the favor and support of

the University of Tehran, Astan-e M‘asumeh Library (Qom), Mar’ashi Library (Qom), Golpaygani Library (Qom), Astan Qods Razavi Library (Mashhad), Ferdowsi University Library (Mashhad), Motahari School Library (Tehran), National Library of Iran (Tehran), Library of the University of Tabriz (Tabriz), Khanghah Ahmadih Library (Shiraz), Outside Iran: Kāshif al-Ġiṭā’ Library (Iraq), University of Science and Technology Library (Yemen), National Library of Tunisia (Tunisia), King Faisal Center for Research and Islamic Studies (Riyadh, Saudi Arabia), Egyptian National Library (Cairo, Egypt), Berlin State Library (Germany), Princeton University Library (United States), British Library (London, United Kingdom), Bankipour, Reza Rampour and Asefia (India), Vatican Apostolic Archive (Vatican City)

2- It must be pointed out that this citation is wrong and stems from a hasty reading of Brockelmann’s text, as he states that the book “*Ḥaqā’iq Asrār al-Ṭibb*” was written before this year (although the oldest manuscript of the book bears this date in its pages) and that he did not talk about the time of the author’s life at all! Surprisingly, the date changed in some quotations from “before” to “after” and some thought that al-Sijzī lived after the year 734 AH/1334 AD according to Brockelmann! This is a misreading that has nothing to do with the famous German orientalist.



the minister. This hints at the historical context of the book.

In his speeches, the minister mentioned the ambiguity of medical terms. Then, Mas'ūd al-Sijzī decided to compose a book explaining medical terminologies for him. This detail brings us closer to dating the book. Although the patron, Abu al-Mafākhir Qāsim ibn Iraq ibn Ja'far, is not extensively mentioned in historical texts, there exists a treatise dedicated to this scholarly minister by the renowned Iranian courtier, Rashid al-Din al-Waṭwāṭ (died 573 AH/ 1182/3 AD), titled "*Ghara'ib al-Kalim fi Ragha'ib al-Hikam*." In this treatise, al-Waṭwāṭ refers to his addressee as "Sadr al-Dawlah wa al-Din, Qiwaṃ al-Islam wa al-Muslimīn, Malik wazara' al-Sharq wa al-Gharb, Abu al-Mafākhir Sadr al-Dawlah Qāsim ibn Iraq ibn Ja'far," which is evidently the same person that Mas'ūd al-Sijzī referred to him in "*Ḥaqā'iq asrār al-ṭibb*".³ This connection helps us contextualize the book within a more precise historical timeline.

In the Persian *Diwan of Rashid al-Din al-Waṭwāṭ*, three odes are dedicated to the praise of the Khwarazmshahi minister and scholar, Dīa' al-Din Iraq ibn Ja'far, who happens to be the father of Abu al-Mafākhir Qāsim ibn Iraq, the patron of Mas'ūd al-Sijzī. These poems provide additional context for understanding the cultural and intellectual environment in which al-Sijzī and his contemporaries lived and worked. The opening lines of these odes read as follows:

1. ای آنکه رخت بهار چینست / رویم ز غم تو پر ز چینست
"O you, who your face is like the Chinese spring / your sorrow fully wrinkles my face." (34 verses)
2. ای وزیر عالم و عادل ضیاءالدین عراق / نیست مانند تو در صدر خراسان و عراق
"O just and knowledgeable minister, Dīa al-Din Iraq, no one is like you not in Khorasan and not in Iraq." (18 verses)
3. آیا خوب سیرت وزیری که ملک / ندیده است مانند تو وزیر
"O Minister of good morals / No king has ever one like you in the earth of Khorasan and Iraq" (13 verses)

The introduction of "*Ghara'ib al-Kalim*" treatise and his three Persian odes by al-Waṭwāṭ shed light on the approximate period of Abu al-Mafākhir Qāsim ibn Iraq. It can be inferred that this scholarly minister held office during the second half of the 6th century AH, rather than the 8th century

3- The information provided in this passage contradicts the assertion made by Muhammad Fu'ad al-Dhakhiri, the editor of the book "*Ḥaqā'iq Asrār al-Ṭibb*", that Mas'ud bin Muhammad al-Sijzī was a minister in the Muzaffarid dynasty of Fars during the 8th century AH.



AH and the Ilkhanid or Muzaffarid period. Consequently, it becomes reasonable to assume that Mas'ūd al-Sijzī authored his book during this period. Based on these findings, it seems more accurate to place Mas'ūd al-Sijzī's lifetime in the 6th century AH, during the Khwarazmshahi era.

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Authors' Contribution

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Conflict of Interest

None.

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