

LETTER TO EDITOR

Refutation and Criticism of the Article “Hakim Seyyed Ismail Jorjani: An Iranian physician of Gorgan”

Dear Editor,

As the readers and editor-in-chief of the Journal of Research on History of Medicine know, the fields of historical rebuttal and critique in humanities research are especially complex and it is of crucial importance that the expertise should be involved in accomplishing the research and/or dealing with the criticism; It is admitted that as the present article, is, in fact, the first work of such a nature in the field of historical critique and investigation, it may have some drawbacks. The drive to write this article has come from another work my colleague and I published in August 2021. The latter article entitled “A Contemplation of the Geographical Origin of Seyyed Isma’il Jurjani” provides several historical grounds for the idea that the first origin of Seyyed Isma’il Jurgani is in Chorasmia and the city of Gurganj or Urgench. The writing in question has challenged many scholars of the history of medicine (Golshani, and Esmaili, 2021, p. 137)., However, a hastily written article entitled “Hakim Seyyed Ismail Jorjani: An Iranian Physi-

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cian of Gorgan” was published in November 2021 in an attempt to just criticize our work, overlooking the important points found there (Vatanparast, Abdoli, and Mahlooji, 2021, p. 275). For months, we had no intention of responding to that article, but the suggestions of some colleagues in fields of history, history of medicine, and Persian medicine for providing a scientific and objective response persuaded us to respond to this article which, as far as we understand, lacked an academic approach.

First, the critical article considered our research a hastily written article, while there has been no haste, and Gurganj is claimed to be the birthplace of Seyyed Isma’il Jurjani as a result of ten-year research conducted by the writer of the first article who is an expert in studies on Central Asia and Greater Khorasan. This point was first presented in a Letter to the Editor format entitled “Seyyed Ismael Jorjani, the Famous Iranian Physician and Philosopher” and was published in *Jorjani Biomedicine Journal* in 2014 (Golshani, 2014, p. 69-70), and then, in an article entitled “Chorasmia Medical School from the Beginning until the Mongol Invasion” in the *Journal of Medical Ethics and History of Medicine* in 2015 and several other articles (Golshani, et al., 2016, p. 5). Later, in September 2020, this view on the origin of Jurjani was defended by the first writer of this article as a part of his Ph.D. dissertation on the history of Iran after Islam entitled “Development of Medical Science in Transoxiana from the 3rd to the End of the Ninth Century AH (9th to the End of 15th AD), and his findings faced no objections by the scientific committee of the dissertation, including the supervisor, advisors, and the academic jury (Golshani, 2020, p. 207).

Second, a look at the life of Hakim Seyyed Isma’il Jurjani (1042 – 1137 AD) in the important historical geography of Ancient Airyanem Vaejah or Irānwēj in the region of Chorasmia shows that up to the Mongol invasion, Gurganj (Jurjan in Arabic) was one of the greatest and most prosperous metropolises equal to the present major economic cities, such as Shanghai, Tokyo and New York in the modern world, and many Khwarezmian kings would spend the wealth of their territory on attracting many intellectual scientists, theologians, Mu’tazila philosophers, and physicians to this significant scientific center (Hashemi, 2016, p. 30. Khosrow Beagi, 2015, p. 70-72). Having a large population of merchants and tradesmen from China, India, Scandinavia, and Byzantium, and being located in the middle of the Great Silk Road, this Iranian city fueled many in the east and west of the civilized world with jealousy during the Islamic Golden Age, and as a result, an Abbasid Caliph, Al-Nasir (1158 – 1225), later managed to persuade the Mongols to attack this city; To this end, he corresponded with Genghis Khan (1162 –1227) to invade Gurganj. What the caliph could never imagine was that the Mongols would later invade Baghdad (Khosrow Beagi, 2015, p. 72; Eqbal Ashtiani, 1931, p. 341). In studies on the history of Iran and the corresponding historiographies, the Mongols’ attack made such an immense destructive impact on the social, cultural, scientific, and literary history of Iran that the experts divide the history of this country into before and after the Mongol invasion (Amiri Khorasani, and Ghaffari, 2016, pp. 1-2). Previously located on the side of the Oxus River and south of the Aral Sea, the great and prosperous metropolis of Gurganj was wiped from history in such a way that there was no mention of it anywhere, except in a few Arabic historical writings and travelogues. Later, the Turks and Mongols gradually changed the name of Chorasmia to Khiva and Gurganj to Urgench (Khosroabadi, 2019, p. 21).

Third, in addition to introducing Seyyed Isma’il Jurjani, the importance of Gurganj as



a metropolis in the historical geography, local history, bibliography, ancient culture and language (Khwarezmian language, Sogdian language, and Modern Persian or Dari), archeology, and the history of Khwarazm’s scientific schools, the Baha al-Doleh Hospital of Khwarazm, Khwarazm’s I’tazila school, and the grave opposition of Mu’tazila and Ash’arī theology in Nezamiyeh schools were partly discussed in the article (Golshani, and Esmaili, 2021, pp. 139–141).

Fourth, before moving forward, it is more desirable to determine the exact historical geographic location of Gorgān or Jorjan in the modern world, which is located around the region of Tabaristān and Golestan Province in Iran (Figure 1).



Figure 1. The distance between the ancient Jorjan in the vicinity of Gonbad-e Kavus and the present Gorgan, the capital of Golestan Province (Golestan province, n.d.)

A point forgotten in history is the destruction of Gorgān or Jorjan owing to the earthquake, natural disasters, and political and military incidents since the invasion of Oguz or Ghuzz Turks to eventually that of Mongol. The population of this city emigrated to an area in 100 km west of this region, i.e., the city of Astarābād which replaced the historical Gorgān or Jorjan. During the recent ninety years, however, Astarābād had been considered as an origin for the emergence of the Qajar dynasty, and because of this, Reza Shah Pahlavi (1878–1944), who was against this dynasty, changed its name from Astarābād to Gorgan on September 11, 1937, and after several centuries in silent, the name Gorgān or Jorjan was reborn (Matufi, 2008, p. 15; Borjian, 2008, p. 681). In 1926, during the era of Reza Shah Pahlavi, the then-modern city of Gonbad-e Kavus, likely to be located in the actual area of the ancient Jorjan, was built in 1926 by German urban engineers and the inhabitants of Dasht-e Gorgan, Turkmen Sahra, and other parts of Iran settled there (Nazari, 1997, p. 30). (Figure 2)

As mentioned above, the writers of the critical article take Gorgan as the birthplace of Seyyed Isma’il Jurjani. However, from a scientific standpoint, this assumption is totally out of the question since there was no library, hospital, scientific center, or intellectual school in Gorgan during the time of Jurjani. Of course, just for a few years, under the rule of Qabus ibn Wushmagir (Reign 977–1012) there was a limited scientific atmosphere during the time of Avicenna (980–1037) and Al-Biruni (973–1048), but not at the time of Jurjani (Matufi, 2008, p. 126). However, the idea of building Nezamiyeh schools in Gorgan and Tabaristān was followed by Khwaja Nizam al-Mulk and led to the formation of the intellectual structure of Sunni jurisprudence (Ebrahimi Dinani, and Beygi, 2019, pp. 14-16). The region of ancient Jorjan, located in the east of Tabaristān, was under the influence of local rulers, such as the Ziyarid dynasty (931-1090) who were Sunni, and





Figure 2. The second page of the Ettela'at newspaper in which the order of Reza Shah for changing the name of Astarābād to Gorgan is inserted. (Gorgan in Ettelaat newspaper, n.d.)

also for a short period, the Buyid dynasty (934-1056) and Bavand dynasty (655 – 1349) who practiced Shi'ism. These areas were always under the rule of Sunni rulers of the Samanid Empire, Ghaznavid Empire, and Seljuk dynasty, and contrary to other northern areas of Iran, such as Tabaristān, Mazandaran, and Gilan where Twelve Shi'ism, Zaydism, and Isma'ilism were practiced, people of this area always remained Sunni and defended the Rashidun Caliphs and the Abbasid Caliphate. In this regard, in his book, Aḥsan al-taqāsīm fī ma'rifat al-aqālīm (lit. The Best Divisions in the Knowledge of the Regions), the geographer Al-Maqdisi (945 – 991), who visited this area hundred year before the Seljuk came to Gorgan, described the people of Jurjan as follows: “The people of Qūmis, most parts of Jurjan, and some parts of Tabaristān are Hanafi, and the rest of them are Hanbali and Shafi'i. The people of Ahl al-Hadith are entirely Shafi'i. There are many people of Mu'tamir al-Najar in Jurjan. In addition, the people of Karramiyya have some Khanqahs in Jorjan and Tabaristān” (Al-Maqdisi. 1906, p. 365). Nowadays, the ancient Jorjan or the present Gonbad-e Kavus is one of the major educational and training centers of Sunni people in Iran with Sunni Mosques and seminaries.

The claim for Jurjani being from Gorgan, in addition to the claim that his religion was Sunni Islam, is against what is found in manuscripts and books and is also contrary to the claim made by Jurjani himself for practicing Shi'ism. In addition, in his book Al-Dharī'a



ilā Taṣānīf al-Shī‘a (List of Shia Books), Agha Bozorg Tehrani (1876–1970) listed Jurjani as a Shiite scholar. Seyyed Isma‘il Jurjani was Shiite and among the descendants of the prophet (Seyyed), and due to his interest in intellectual and experimental sciences and Mu‘tazila instructors, he also graduated from the intellectual and Mu‘tazila School of Abu Mozar Zabi (died 1115 AD) in Chorasmia. Therefore, it is quite unlikely for him to be allowed to study at the Nezamiyeh school of Gorgan and also to survive the dogmatism of the Sunni people (three religious branches of Shafi‘i, Hanafi, and Hanbali, and the Ash‘arī theology school) during the rule of Seljuk dynasty (Jahani, and Golmohammadi, 2015, pp. 13-14; Bavafaye Dalivand, 2011, p. 26). Toward the end of his life, in his 90s, he found out that, after a long time, an open environment was provided for intellectuals within the territory of the Seljuk in Khorasan and Merv. That is why Seyyed Isma‘il Jurjani went there to continue his studies and a couple of years later, at the age of 97, he died in Merv in 1137 AD (Nayernouri, 1998, p. 79; Shamsardekani, 2010, pp. 35-37).

Fifth, the idea that many medical historians and the critics of the article in question have raised about Seyyed Isma‘il Jurjani may have derived from the book, *Tarikh-i Tabaristān* (The History of Tabaristan) written by Baha al-Din Muhammad ibn Hasan ibn Isfandiyar, commonly known as Ibn Isfandiyar in about 1217 AD. Ibn Isfandiyar gives the name Sayyid Abu-ul-Fazael Isma‘il ibn Mohammad al-Mousavi al-Jurjani to Jurjani and while he lists Zakhireye Khwarazmshahi, Yadegar, Al-Aghraz, Al-Khofiyya Al-Ala‘iyya, and a translation of Avicenna’s Canon, he also introduces Jurjani as a physician contemporary with Qabus ibn Wushmagir and ‘Adud al-Dawla (936 – 983) from the region of Jorjan (Ibn Isfandiyar, 2013, p. 171).

A weird point is that Ibn Isfandiyar spent the last five years of his life in the city of Gurganj in Chorasmia, and while being in that city, he had probably witnessed the Mongol invasion of Chorasmia in 1220 AD and was killed there in this event. Before the Mongol invasion, Ibn Isfandiyar benefited a great deal from the Scribes and booksellers and the library of Gurganj to complete his two books (*The History of Tabaristan* and *The Letter of Tansar*). While at that time, about eighty years after the death of Jurjani, he was already renowned within that territory at the time of the Khwarazmian and Seljuk kings. This and the following evidence, including the mention of certain rulers, such as Qutb ad-Din Muhammad I (Reign 1097 – 1127) and Ala al-Din Atsiz (Reign 1127 – 1156) in the introduction of Jurjani’s book [These works were dedicated to the dynast of Khwarazmian Kings], and the invitation by Ahmad Sanjar to Merv during the last years of Jurjani’s life, in addition to his excellent management of the Baha al-Doleh Hospital of Khwarazm, testify that Jurjani’s death occurred about 150 to 200 years earlier and it happened in Gurganj or Merv, not in Jurjan (Aledavood, 1995, p. 13; Ibn Isfandiyar, 2013, p. 22; Golshani, 2020, pp. 99-100). The following historians probably used the book of *Tarikh-i Tabaristān* (The History of Tabaristan) by Ibn Isfandiyar without further analysis and consideration of historical subtleties, and the mistake of considering Jurjani from Gorgan has been repeated in historical writings to the present day.

And as a final note, it is worth mentioning that the article entitled “Hakim Seyyed Ismail Jorjani: An Iranian Physician of Gorgan” seems not to be familiar with the political, social, and scientific period during the concurrent ruling time of the Seljuks and Khwarazmshians required to gain more understanding about the life period of Seyyed Isma‘il Jurjani. Unfortunately, the writers of the aforementioned article, without having any accurate knowledge of the political history of Greater Khorasan and Central Asia,



ignore all the reasons denoting that Seyyed Isma'il Jurjani has come from the region of Chorasmia and the city of Groganj and their article, they fail to provide any solid response to any of the questions posed for this issue; they just insisted on the old and non-scientific claims about the topic while giving references to their own research on multiple occasions. In addition, while mentioning the small town of Gorgan, they devoted half of their article to the importance of cotton cultivation in the area, bringing down the level of discourse from the prosperous, scientific, and academic environment of Chorasmia to the agricultural environment of Gorgan (Golshani, and Esmaili, 2021, pp. 139-141; Vatanparast, Abdoli, and Mahlooji, 2021, pp. 276-277).

Of course, the writers of the critical article are expected to do more research, giving at least some documents regarding the unique feature of Gorgan and Turkmen Sahra. During the Seljuk era, like the Parthian Empire, they were successful in building war machines, i.e., horse breeding (247 BC to 224 AD); The use of Gorgan-bred horses by Parthian riders in certain wars, such as the Battle of Carrhae (May, 6, 53 BC) during the Parthian Empire and by skilled Turkman riders in the Turkmen Sahra area of Gorgan in the Battle of Manzikert (August 26, 1071 AD) during the time of Alp Arslan (Reign 1063 – 1072) and other important battles in the northwest, northeast, west, and south areas, played a crucial role in Iran's victory against military attacks (Belis, and Colburn, 2020, p. 198; Norwich, 1991, p. 238). Perhaps several Bitars and veterinarians of this area recorded this in some writings. The best research on this topic is provided in the Ph.D. dissertation and articles of Babak Abbas Beigi, a Ph.D. graduate in the history of medicine. These writings are about Persian horses, and they could use this subject as a more important issue than cotton cultivation (Abbas Biegi, 2020, p. 49; Meymandi Nejad, 1958, p. 249). They could also consider the geostrategic and military importance of Gorgan from the ancient times when this place was located near the Great Wall of Gorgan or the Red wall with a length of 200 km plus thirty military castles. The wall, after the Great Wall of China, is considered the second biggest military wall in history to the present time. In this regard, the colleague, and fellow-writer of this article, who is a researcher of the history of medicine and Persian medicine, who has also served as a colonel physician and medic in the hospital and medical office of the Iranian Army, as a member of the 30th Infantry Division based at Gorgan, verifies the importance of this region to the Iranian military forces as the base and general headquarters of this division, located in the present city of Gorgan (Astarābād) and its secondary bases in Gonbad-e Kavus and Nowdeh Khanduz which are placed along the defensive and ancient Wall of Gorgan (Matufi, 2008, p. 55).

The writers of the present article wish to highlight that, while there is no intention to undermine the region of Gorgan in this research, the historical facts talk differently about this region. Much like the other lands in the territory of the Seljuk dynasty (1037 – 1153 AD), in Gorgan also there were groups of Sunni jurisconsults and Ash'arī theologians in power with their hard-liner and rigid approaches as well as anti-intellectualistic ideas. Indeed, it should be admitted that the city of Gorgan lacks the distinctive feature of fostering Seljuk scholars and scientists, such as Seyyed Isma'il Jurjani who was an expert in intellectual and experimental science. First, we should take care not to make any mistake in grasping the word "Groganj" mispronounced when, translated from Persian to Arabic. The word is read as Jorjan or Jorjanie in the Arabic reading of historical texts. Second, we should not overlook the following historical point that because of the political gains of a colonial government, the domestic vulnerability of Iranian governments during the



past two hundred years, and the signing of the Treaty of Akhal on September 21, 1881 AD, based on which Russian Empire (1721–1917 AD) annexed the upper parts of the Atrek River in the northeast of Iran, part of Chorasmia and the city of Gorganj was separated from Iran (Shamouli, and Basiri, 2018, p. 49; Halabi, 2005, pp. 247, 254). Some historians consider Chorasmia or Irānwēj as the birthplace of Zoroaster and the origin of the proto-Iranians and the land of Arians, and as the writers of the present article claim, Gorganj in Chorasmia is the birthplace of Seyyed Isma'il Jurgani. The scientific, literary, and cultural environment of Chorasmia from which Jurjani rose should be considered the first major place for the recognition of modern Persian language and literature in writing scientific, especially medical, texts using certain keywords from the region of Transoxiana and Chorasmia from languages, such as Khwarezmian, Sogdian, and Modern Persian or Dari (Amoozgar, and Tafazzoli, 1991, p. 22; Golshani, et al., 2018, p. 77).

Conflict of Interest

None.

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