

LETTER TO EDITOR

A Critique on the article “Cause Investigation of the Outbreak of Typhoid in Iran during 1320-1324 Hijri Shamsi”

Dear Editor,

An article entitled “Cause Investigation of the Outbreak of Typhoid in Iran during 1320-1324 Hijri Shamsi” has been published by the author Soleiman Heidari in the Journal of Research on History of Medicine in 2016(issue 5(3):157-170). (Heidari, 2016, 157-70) Having read this paper with great interest, I found some issues worth to be reconsidered:

1. The author believes (page 159) that in the history of Persian medicine after Islam, Mohammad Ibn Zakaria Razi was the first scientist who wrote about “*motbeghe fever*” (typhoid). (Heidari, 2016, p. 159) But some historical resources show that

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there have been scientists who, in their discussions over different types of fever, have already referred to the issue of motabghe fever. For instance, Ali ibn Rabben Tabari in "*Ferdous al hekme fi al-Tibb*" has referred to "*sonakhus*" or "*motbeghe fever*" in a separate chapter, entitled "*Fi sonakhus and heya hami al-dam*".

Tabari says: "*sonakhus* occurs when blood becomes infected inside the arteries and intestines, causing permanent fever." (Tabari, 2002, p. 208) Or, Abu Zakaria Yohanna, son of Masouyah (170-243 AH), one of the physicians of Jundishapur, wrote the book "*Al-Hamiyat*" at the end of the second century AH. Honain ibn Ishaq Masihi Nesturi (194-262 AH) translated Galen's book into Arabic as "*Asnaf al-Hamiyat*". Also, Thabit Ibn Qara (d. 288 AH), in his book "*Al-Dakhira fi Elm al-Tib*", while discussing various types of fevers, referred to "*motbeghe fever*" (Najmabadi, 1992, p. 459). Then, according to these pieces of evidence, Razi cannot be considered as the first scientist who has written about "*motbeghe fever*".

2. The author writes: "After Jorjani, other scientists and physicians, such as Ali ibn Abbas Ahwazi magus and Abu Mansour Mowaffaq ibn Ali Heravi, have pointed out about typhoid disease ... (Heidari, 2016, p. 160)." However, Ahwazi and Heravi lived before Jorjani (434-531 AH). The author of this article failed to notice that Ahwazi, the author of the book *Kamel al-Sanae al-Tebbie* (died 384 AH) and *Mowaffaq al-Din Heravi*, the author of the book *Al-Abniyeh an haghhaegh al-advia*, are physicians of the fourth century AH (Najmabadi, 1992, pp. 461-475).

3. On page 160, the author states that Jorjani in his book, *Alkhofi Alalaeieh*, explained the ways to diagnose "*motbeghe fever*". The author also claimed that after Avicenna, Jorjani, in his two famous books, *Zakhireh Kharazmshahi* and *Alkhofi Alalaeieh*, contributed to the expansion of the existing knowledge about the diagnosis of "*motbeghe fever*". However, Jorjani in the third article of the second chapter of *Alkhofi Alalaeieh* wrote just a few sentences about the causes, symptoms, and treatment of typhoid and did not expand the related knowledge existing before. (Jorjani, 1990, p. 227)

4. The author believes (p. 160) that Heravi described typhoid in his books, *Al-Abniyeh an haghhaegh al-advia*. However, this is a book in the Persian language in the field of pharmacy which describes medicinal substances



and it does not describe diseases. In this book, Heravi, while expressing the characteristics of the barley, just briefly touched on typhoid: "... But those fevers arise from a hot substance, such as *"tabe ghab"*, *"moharraghe"* and *"motbeghe"*, and a simple meal should be eaten" (Heravi, 1967, p. 198). So Heravi did not describe typhoid.

5. The author acknowledges that in medical history, typhoid was known by other names, such as *damane* fever, typhoid fever, and *lazem* fever (*son-akhus*). (Heidari, 2016, p. 159) But the question is that, are *"motbeghe fever"* and typhoid identical? And which evidence made the author consider *"motbeghe fever"* as typhoid? Some have called *"moharraghe"*, a sort of severe typhoid (Fathollahzade, 2019, p. 2). In Dari Persian, *"moharraghe"* is a synonym of typhoid, and these days in Persian-speaking countries, such as Tajikistan and Afghanistan, typhoid fever is called *"moharraghe"* (Matthews, and Hamza, 2005, p. 10). Poolak considers Typhus as another name for typhoid and believes that due to the severity of the disease, it is called *"moharraghe"* or *"motbeghe"* (Poolak, 1989, p. 500). Pollack says that people often assume typhoid fever as Malaria because of the similarity existing in their signs and symptoms, and they treat typhoid the same way that they treat Malaria (Poolak, 1989, p. 500). Also, in the early 19th century in Europe, typhoid was called typhoid (similar to typhus) because of the patient's state of near-unconsciousness and weakness. (Fathollahzade, 2019, p. 3).

Due to the similarity of the symptoms of typhoid fever to other infectious and febrile diseases and also considering frequent references made by Iranian medical scholars in their books to different types of fevers, makes independent research on the true name of this disease in historical and medical texts necessary.

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