

ORIGINAL ARTICLE

Reflection on Shiraz Medical School in the Second Century AH: *Wise Jasliq*

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Abstract

Maybe it can be said that Shiraz Medical School has been one of the oldest medical school in Iran which has remained rather neglected. The traces of such a claim can, at times, be found in the books and works left from the ancestors. The book “*Chahar Maghaleh*” or *Four Discourses*, written by *Nizami Aruzi Samarqandi*, is one of the books left from the 6th century AH. The book contains some reports on poets, astronomers, secretaries and physicians. One of these anecdotes is about a skilled physician from Fars province: Shiraz, confirming the existence of a medical school in this region. Using library research, the researchers of this study have made an effort to verify this claim.

Key words: History of Medicine, Shiraz, Chahar Maghaleh of Nizami, Medical Schools, Literature

Received: 30 Jun 2019; Accepted: 21 Aug 2019; Online published: 25 Nov 2019
Research on History of Medicine/ 2019 Nov; 8(4): 253-260.

Citation:

Adabinia SZ. Reflection on Shiraz Medical School in the Second Century AH: *Wise Jasliq*. *Res Hist Med*. 2019;8(4): 253-260.

Introduction

Four Discourses of Nizami Aruzi Samarqandi is one of the books left from 6th century AH, whose author has written anecdotes about the importance of writing and secretary, astronomy, poetry and medicine. The significance of the book *Four Discourses* lies in its style of writing and reporting. Numerous literary studies, taking literary approaches, have been done on the content of this valuable work.

The chapter focusing on medicine in *Four Discourses* has attracted the researchers' attention, and hence, they have attempted to examine it from the viewpoint of medical ethics and describe the method physicians have adopted to treat patients appropriately.¹ Also, another study has focused on the names of poets, literary scholars and philosophers found in *Four Discourses*, but concerning physicians, the study has only named *seyyed Ismail Jorjani*.²

This research, taken a medical history approach, introduces *Jasliq Parsi*, the physician who was from Shiraz in the second century AH.

The History of Shiraz

Many historians after Islam, such as *Yaqubi* in *al-Baladan*, *Ibn Khordazbeh* in *al-Masalik* and *al-Mamalik*, *Istakhri* in *Marasid al-Etelae fi asma al-Amkenah val-Boqa*, *Masoudi* in *al-Tanbih val-Eshraf* and *Meghdisi* in *Ahsan ol-Taghasim* have attributed the history of the construction of Shiraz to *Mohammad ibn Yussef Saghafi*, the representative of the caliph in Iraq³, between the 65th and the 80th century AH.

Ibn Balkhi, in *Fars-nameh* considers Shiraz as a part of the property of Fars, but it has been developed and constructed by *Mohammad ibn Yussef Saghafi*.⁴

With regard to the exploration of Persepolis and according to the clay tablets found in the palace of Dariush in 517 BC, labors, working there, appear to come from *Shira-its-tsi-ish*. So it seems that this name, more than any other names, befits Shiraz. Also, *Hamdollah Mostofi* in *Nozhat ol-Qaloub* believes that the early construction of Fars and consequently, Shiraz, dates back to the epoch of *Fares ibn Masour ibn Sami ibn Nooh* and that *Mohammad ibn Yussef* has just renewed the buildings.⁵

Undoubtedly, the development and flourishing of a city largely depends on health of its citizens. Regardless of political issues, Shiraz's survival bears witness to the presence of healthy citizens who, in turn, owed their health to the rulers and physicians who have accumulated and disseminated sci-

1- Heidarnia, 2008: 147-158.

2- Sam Nezhad Coroki, 2015: 41-49.

3- Sami, 1995: 12.

4- Ibn Balkhi, 2006: 132.

5- Arbiter, 1974: 40.



ence in their school. They appear to be the frontiers of the school that, from now on, is called Shiraz Medical School.

The most famous and the oldest physician whose name always comes along with that of Shiraz is *Musa bn Yussef Sayar Shirazi*, known as *Abu Maher Shirazi* living in the 3rd and 4th century AH.⁶

Now with a brief overview of *Nizami's Four Discourses*, we have realized that the fourth article talks about a skilled physician from Pars, Shiraz.

Nizami Aruzi

Abolhassan Nizam al-Din or *Najmeddin ibn Omar ibn Ali Smamarqandi*, known as *Nezami Aruzi*, is one of the poets and writers of 6th century AH. But unfortunately, the exact date of his birth and death is unavailable. However, it is known that he has been close to the court of kings of Ghorī Bamiyan and contemporary to *Khayyam* and *Amir Mo'azi*.⁷ As it appears from his book, *Four Discourses*, he, in addition to pros, has also mastered poetry, secretary, medicine and astronomy.

Four Discourses

The original name of this book apparently was the "*Majma ol-Nawadr*", but because of the quadr-articles found in the book, it was known as *Four Discourses*. In the introduction of *Majma ol-Sofaha*, this was mentioned as: *al-Nawadr* by *Nizami Aruzi*, known as *Samarqandi* was called *Four Discourses*. This prose work, dedicated to *Abolhassan Hesam al-Din Ali* (Ghorī Bamiyan's prince), was written between 551 and 552 AH.⁸

The book *Four Discourses* contains one introduction consisting of 5 chapters on the Ghorī's kings, the Origin of Creations, external senses and power of heart.

The four articles of the book are as follows, respectively:

The First article: About the nature of writing and secretary and related issues

The Second article: About the nature of poetry and competence of the poet

The Third article: About astronomy and astronomers

The Fourth article: About medical sciences and the physician's education

In the course of these articles, the author expressed the features and qualities of four classes of professions that he believed should be in service of the king's court and conveyed his purpose of writing the articles of the book, not for expressing grace, but for expressing his gratitude to Allah as

6- Golshani, 2010: 112.

7- Nizami Aruzi Samarqandi, 1962: 3.

8- Nizami Aruzi Samarqandi, 1948: Introduction.



well as leading and helping the novices.

Fourth article

The last article of *Four Discourses* consists of a short introduction and twelve anecdotes about medicine and medical ethics, in which ten physicians are introduced.⁹

Eleventh narrative

The eleventh anecdote of the fourth article narrates how *Jasliq Parsi* has treated *Fazl ibn Yahya Barmaki*, the minister of *Harun al-Rashid*, suffering from Vitiligo:

“On the *Fazl ibn Yahya*’s breast some whitish patches appeared, called vitiligo.¹⁰ He became very concerned and decided to go to the public bath only at nights, so that nobody became aware of his illness. Then, he summoned his advisors and asked for the most skilled physician in Iraq, Khourasan, al-Sham and Pars. All his advisors replied: *Jasliq Parsi*.

Fazl sent a person to Shiraz to bring the wise *Jasliq* from Pars to Baghdad. Then, he invited *Jasliq* into his room and in order to test him, *Fazl ibn Yahya* told him about a flaw in his foot¹¹ and asked if it was treatable. Wise *Jasliq* said: ‘avoid eating dairy and pickles and the meat of one-year-old birds. Pour honey on egg yolks and eat. Having followed this, you would be informed what spices you might consume’. *Fazl* accepted but that night, he ate whatever he liked, including dairy and pickles.

The next day, *Jasliq* came and asked for Quarore¹². Having examined that, he said: ‘I can’t treat your disease, because although I refrained you from eating dairy products and pickles, you ate dairy products and pickles as well as cumin potage¹³. If you do not stop eating these, your treatment would not succeed.’ Then *Fazl* admired *Jasliq*’s competency, and skillfulness. *Fazl* told him that he did that to test his efficiency and then, informed him of his real problem and asked him to treat his ailment.

Jasliq started the treatment and did whatever was right. A few days passed but treatment was no good.

Wise *Jasliq* wondered why the treatment lasted so long whereas the disease was not so acute? Until one day while he was sitting next to *Fazl ibn Yahya* told him: ‘My Lord! I did whatever I could to treat you, but it was not effective. Is your father unhappy of you? If yes, first, you must ask him for forgiveness so that I can cure you’. *Fazl* went to *Yahya* that night and asked him to forgive him and be satisfied with him. His old father got happy and forgave him. Then, *Jasliq*

9- Nizami Aruzi Samarqandi, 1964: 106-134.

10- Type of skin disease.

11- weakness

12- Urine sample glass container.

13- Some kind of food.



treated *Fazl*, using the same treatment procedure. He was recovered and after a short time he got well again.

So *Fazl* asked *Jasliq*: ‘How did you know that the cause of my illness was the discontent of my father?’

Jasliq said: ‘I did everything I knew for your treatment, but this wasn’t effective. I guessed that the underlying cause of your disease must have been sorts of mental ones, and not physical. I noticed that there was no one to be dissatisfied with you. Everyone was happy of your good behavior and generosity. Later, I understood there was a friction between you and your father and he was unhappy of you. I speculated that this could be the underlying cause of your illness. I attempted to help remove this discontent and then this positively affected the treatment. And I was not wrong.

And after that *Fazl ibn Yahya* gave him a lot of gifts and sent him back to Pars.¹⁴”

Fazl ibn Yahya Barmaki

Abu Abbas Fazl ibn Yahya was born in Medina on the 23rd of Dhu al-Hijjah in 148AH (February 25, 765A.D), seven days before the birth of *Harun al-Rashid*.

His father, *Yahya*, was the minister of abbasid dynasty and because of his father’s influence, he also became the head of the Heram, ruler of Khorasan and for a short time, the minister of *Harun al-Rashid*¹⁵.

The *Jasliq*

The word of *Jasliq* is the Arabicized version of the word “Catholicos” that means Christian judge. *Allameh Dehkhoda*, in his Persian dictionary, under this word has provided other meanings taken from other sources, such as: Christian leaders in the land of Islam, the scientist and eremite, the Christian’s ruler and Wise Christian. Concerning the rank and position hierarchy, the names are ordered as follows: Btrigh, Catholicos, Archishop, Bishop, Qsis, and Deacon, respectively. In fact, Catholicos is considered as one of the highest Christian scholars.¹⁶

In *Four Discourses of Nizami Aruzi*, only the term *Jasliq Parsi* has been mentioned and there is no trace of the real name of this wise man. But in the historical documents, there are many people whose real names come along with the adjective *Jasliq*, namely : *Jasliq Bariha*, *Jasliq Sozsys*¹⁷, etc. In addition, those who held the position of *Jasliq* have had a special place in medicine, so that in the Iranian medical books, there is a kind of medication called *Hab-e-Jasliq*^{18,19},

- 14- Nizami Aruzi Samarqandi, 1962: 13-130.
- 15- Bova, 2001: 146.
- 16- Dehkhoda, 1963: 66.
- 17- Ibn Joljol, 1971: 146.
- 18- Akhavini, 1992: 457.
- 19- Ibn Sina, 2010: 406.



a kind of pill which was good for treating diseases.

Conclusion

As already mentioned, the first physician, attributed to Shiraz, was *Abu Maher Shirazi* belonging to 3rd and 4th centuries AH, but *Nizami Aruzi* spoke about a well-known physician named *Jasliq* in the eleventh anecdote found in the fourth article in *Four Discourses*.

Jasliq in *Nizami Aruzi*'s book, was a physician from Pars, who lived in Shiraz and among the physicians of Iraq, Khorasan, al-Sham and Pars, he was the most famous and skilled physician.

Perhaps, it might be interesting to note that *Fazl ibn Yahya Barmaki* asked for *Jasliq Parsi*, from Pars to treat his ailment while at that time there were other famous physicians, like *Gibreel ibn Bakhtiash*²⁰, (from great family of George and famous physician of Jundishapur and Baghdad) and *John ibn Massavieh*²¹ (one of the physicians of Abbasid court). Furthermore, the Baghdad Medical School was very well known and highly reliable.

Considering the distance between Shiraz and Baghdad, *Fazl ibn Yahya*'s order to summon *Jasliq* from Pars to his court undoubtedly indicated the high status of *Jasliq* in medical science at the end of the second century AH. With little reflection on the eleventh anecdote, although *Fazl* heard from his servants about the skillfulness of *Jasliq Parsi*, he decided to test his competency. The Persian physician with his proper diagnosis attained *Fazl ibn Yahya*'s confidence. Also, in treating *Fazl* and prescribing medications, *Jasliq* was so confident in his science that when he saw that the treatment failed, he sought for the cause in something beyond the physical one. And when *Fazl* received his father's consent, *Jasliq*, following the same treatments, succeeded to cure him. This indicated that *Jasliq* was quite aware that mentality and anxiety can adversely affect the physical ailment. So he sent *Fazl* to his father, *Yahya*, for obtaining his satisfaction.

With regard to the duration of the ministry and the presence of *Fazl ibn Yahya* in Baghdad, it can be speculated that *Jasliq Parsi* lived in the end of third century AH. *Ibn Abi Asbiyah*, in the *Eyoun al-Anba*, wrote a report of *Jasliq* during the ruling of *Harun Rashid* that coincided with *John ibn Massavieh* and *Gibreel ibn Bakhtiash* and was involved in sending for *Dehshtak*²² by *Gibreel* to be the head of hospital that *Harun al-Rashid* was building, naming him *Batimanius Jasliq*²³, but the report did not mention if he was a physician or not. Of

20- Golshani, 2014: 60-61.

21- Shams Ardakani, 2012: 25.

22- Chief of Jundishapur Hospital

23- Ibn Abi Osaibiyah, 2007: 455.



course, as *Jasliq Batimanius* was respected by Dehshtak, the head of Jundishapur hospital and *Gibreel ibn Bakhtiash*, the physician of Abbasid court, this increased the likelihood that *Batimanius* also was a physician. If this is the case, then, it is likely that *Jasliq Parsi* is *Jasliq Batimanius*.

Nizami Aruzi Samarqandi's report of *Jasliq Parsi* in *Four Discourses* can be a good reference to the status of Shiraz Medical School in the early Islamic centuries, better revealing the age of this school.

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