

CONFERENCE PAPER

Al-Akhwayini Al-Bukhari, a Pioneer in Psychiatry


Abstract

Abu Bakr Rabi' ibn Ahmad Al-Akhawayni Al-Bukhari, a prominent 10th-century physician from Bukhara and a pioneer in psychiatry, played a key role in the development of medical science during the early Islamic Renaissance in Turan (Transoxiana). This article examines Akhawayni's life, works, and scientific innovations by analyzing his most important surviving work, "*Hidāyat al-Muta'allimīn fi al-Ṭibb*" (lit. *The Students' Guide to Medicine*). Regarded as the first comprehensive medical text in the Persian language, this book was not only used as a valuable textbook for generations but also contains extensive clinical observations and the author's personal experiences. Akhawayni's innovations in medical classification, diagnosis, and treatment of mental illnesses—which earned him the title "*Physician of the Insane*"—along with his descriptions of diseases, such as diabetes and infectious diseases, solidify his status as a distinguished physician and researcher in the history of medicine.

Key words: History of Medicine, Psychiatry, Al-Akhawayni Al-Bukhari, Mental Disorders, Medieval Iran, Language, Physicians

Received: 11 Sep 2025; Accepted: 27 Sep 2025; Online published: 7 Oct 2025

Research on History of Medicine/ 2025 Oct; 14(Suppl. 1): S125-S128.

Fayzkhuja Mahmudov (M.A.)¹ 

1- M.A. in Epigraphy and Manuscripts at the Institute of History, Academy of Sciences of Uzbekistan, Tashkent, Uzbekistan

Correspondence:

Fayzkhuja Mahmudov
M.A. in Epigraphy and Manuscripts at the Institute of History, Academy of Sciences of Uzbekistan, Tashkent, Uzbekistan

e-mail: fayzmaxmud@mail.ru

Citation:

Mahmudov , F., 2025. Al-Akhwayini Al-Bukhari, a Pioneer in Psychiatry. *Res Hist Med*, 14(Suppl. 1), pp. S125-S128. doi: 10.30476/rhm.2025.51274.

Copyright: © Journal of Research on History of Medicine. This is an Open Access article distributed under the terms of the Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial 4.0 Unported License, (<http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc/4.0/>) which permits unrestricted use, distribution, and reproduction in any medium, provided the original work is properly cited non-commercially.



Introduction

The first period of the Islamic Renaissance in Turan (Transoxiana) saw the rise of globally recognized scholars. These scholars contributed foundational ideas in various scientific fields. In medicine, Avicenna stands out, but his achievements reflect an already rich base of medical knowledge in Turan. An eighth-century pharmacy-laboratory in Paykand proves the existence of this infrastructure (Tajbakhsh, 2006, p. 7).

Abu Bakr Rabi' ibn Ahmad al-Akhawayni al-Bukhari was one of the most important 10th-century physicians in Turan, predating Avicenna. He was a scholar and psychiatrist. Limited studies have left little biographical information about him. He was from Bukhara and died around 983 AD (Golzari, et al., 2012), living two or three generations before Avicenna. He studied under Abul-Qasim Tahir ibn Muhammad Maghna'i Al-Razi, who was a student of Muhammad ibn Zakariya Al-Razi (Rhazes). Al-Akhawayni Al-Bukhari wrote *Hidāyat al-Muta'allimīn* for his son during a period when most Persian scientific works were sponsored by royalty.

Materials and Methods

This study uses a historical-analytical approach. The main source is *Hidāyat al-Muta'allimīn fī al-Ṭibb*, Akhawayni's only surviving work (1965 critical edition). I also use modern research articles on his contributions. The study describes and categorizes Akhawayni's medical innovations.

Findings

Scientific Works of Akhawayni

Akhawayni's scientific works include *Qarabadin* (in Greek, *Graphidion*, a book on pharmacology), *Kitab al-Nabz* (a book on the pulse), *Kitab al-Tashrih* (a book on anatomy), and *Hidāyat al-Muta'allimīn fī al-Ṭibb* (*A Guide for Students of Medicine*). Among these, only *Hidāyat al-Muta'allimīn* has survived; it is considered the first comprehensive medical text in the Persian language. Akhawayni wrote this book in a simple and explicit language for his son or medical students. He wished the book to serve as a textbook—a “legacy” for his pupils and “beneficial source” for others (Yarmohammadi, Daneshfard, and Bahmani Kazeruni, 2013). Despite its simple language, the work is truly scientific. To prevent errors or misunderstandings in diagnosis and treatment, the author listed the names of each disease, body part, and medicinal plant in Arabic, Persian, and Greek. The work was so significant that it retained its status even after the emergence of Avicenna's *The Canon of Medicine*. Nizami Aruzi, in his *Chahar Maqala* (*The Four Discourses*), listed this book alongside the works of Al-Razi and Jurjani as one of the essential key texts that every novice physician must study.

Scientific Innovations of Akhawayni

Akhawayni, a physician with 30 years of experience, recorded his numerous clinical observations and personal experiences in this book. He rarely quotes others without verifying the disease, its etiology, and/or its treatment. He consistently states his own observations and then quotes the opinions of others. If he was unsuccessful in treating a particular disease, he explicitly stated so. For example, regarding the treatment of various types of *Istaqa* or dropsy (edema), he wrote:

“I cured a Tablī type of Istaqa, and I cured a Lahmī type of Istaqa, but I could not cure the Zaqī type of Istaqa”. (Akhawayni Al-Bukhari, 1965, p. 452)

In the chapter on fevers (*Fī al-Humiyāt*), he devised a method to help beginners differentiate among different types of fever as follows:

“I use a technique to make it clear to you: I draw lines corresponding to the number of days, and I will mark the peak points to indicate the bout of a continuous fever (ghubb) and a quartan fever (rub). This helps draw a clear line between them.” (Akhawayni Al-Bukhari, 1965, p. 677) Using these lines and points, he illustrated the different types of fever. His most important innovations include:

Medical Classification: Akhawayni was the first physician in the history of medicine to classify different types of fevers, ranging from simple fevers to malaria. He was also the first to design the “fever chart”. To achieve an accurate diagnosis and appropriate treatment, Akhawayni monitored the patient’s condition from the first day by recording pulse, respiratory rate, sweating or chills, and urine color. (Sajadi, et al., 2012)

Mental Illnesses (Psychiatry): Akhawayni was so proficient in treating mental illnesses and depression that during his lifetime in Bukhara, he was known as “*Ṭabīb al-Majānīn*” (*Physician of the Insane*) (Akhawayni Al-Bukhari, 1965). A significant portion of his book is dedicated to describing mental and neurological disorders such as epilepsy, phobias, obsessive-compulsive disorder, insomnia, paralysis, and stroke. He also delineates the diagnostic features of depression, negative thoughts, and unexplained laughing or crying.

Diabetes and Infectious Diseases: Identifying increased urine volume as the primary symptom of diabetes, he described the disease using the term “*Pormīz*” (excessive urination or Jesheng). Furthermore, he provided precise observations regarding infectious diseases, namely anthrax (which he considered fatal) and rabies (for which he stated an incubation period of 40 days) (Tajbakhsh, 2006, p. 7).

Pharmacology: Akhawayni formulated 10 new compound drugs and introduced the administration of medicines into the patient’s body through specialized tubes.

Language and Discourse of *Hidāyat al-Muta‘allimīn fī al-Ṭibb*

In addition to preserving the Old Persian, he employed a simple style, fluency, and intelligibility in the book. The frequent use of the infinitive mood is one of the outstanding features of this book, as shown in the examples below:

“Water must be poured on snow, and not vice versa” (p. 161). *“Iced water, rosewater, and vinegar must be splashed on his face, and brush over his face and hair; pleasant scent must be kept before his nose, and sweet-smelling poultices must be placed on his joints, and he must be given the foods that I recommended there”* (p. 387). *“But, there is no room here to discuss it.”* *“And much blood must be taken (Hijama or Cupping therapy), and little food eaten, so that it does not upset the stomach”* (p. 415). *“And he should prepare an appropriate food with pomegranates, sweetened raisins, cinnamon, pepper, and dried, fragrant coriander and cumin”* (p. 439), and the like.

Discussion and Conclusion

Abu Bakr Rabi’ ibn Ahmad Al-Akhawayni Al-Bukhari was an eminent scholar in the history of medicine. His work, *Hidāyat al-Muta‘allimīn fī al-Ṭibb*, is not merely a Per-



sian medical encyclopedia but also a testament to a scientific approach grounded in experience and meticulous observation. His innovations in psychiatry, the classification of fevers, and pharmacology vividly manifest his noteworthy contribution to the furtherance of medical science before the era of Avicenna. It can be concluded that Al-Akhawayni Al-Bukhari was a multifaceted scholar who possessed valuable experience and insights in the fields of medicine, psychiatry, and chemistry, significantly contributing to these disciplines. Therefore, a deeper study of his life and scientific legacy should be a priority for the history of medicine and the region.

Funding

None.

Conflict of Interest

None.

References

- Akhawayni al-Bukhari, A.B.R.A., 1965. *Hidayat al-Muta'allimin fi al-Tibb*. Edited by J. Matini. Mashhad: Mashhad University Press.
- Golzari, S.E., Khodadoust, K., Alakbarli, F., Ghabili, K., Islambulchilar, Z., Shoja, M.M., and Shahabi, M., 2012. Sleep paralysis in medieval Persia—the Hidayat of Akhawayni (?–983 AD). *Neuropsychiatric Disease and Treatment*, 8, pp. 229-234.
- Sajadi, M.M., Bonabi, R., Sajadi, M.R., and Mackowiak, P.A., 2012. Akhawayni and the first fever curve. *Clinical Infectious Diseases: An Official Publication of the Infectious Diseases Society of America*, 55(7), 976-980.
- Tajbakhsh, H., 2006. *Tārīkh-e Dāmpēzeshkī va Pezeshkī-e Īrān (History of Veterinary Medicine and Medicine in Iran)*. 3rd ed. Vol. 2. Tehran: University of Tehran Press.
- Yarmohammadi, H., Daneshfard, B., and Bahmani Kazeruni, M.H., 2013. Akhawayni Bukhari, a Pioneer of Medicine in Iran. *Journal of Medical History*, 5(16), pp. 1-14.

