



Medieval Recipes from Abulcasis for the Treatment of Anxiety and Depression

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Abstract

The Kitāb al-Taṣrīf (Book of medical arrangement) is the masterpiece of the well-known Cordovan physician Abulcasis Al-Zahrāwī (c.936-c.1013). This author was also an eminent surgeon, the first of Medieval Islam, and his influence reached as far as Renaissance Europe. The 9th treatise of his work is an interesting medieval treatise of cardiology and neurology as well as medical specialties equivalent to the current psychiatry and psychology, including the correct treatment of some of their most common ailments and diseases. It contains recipes of great value to the fields of pharmacology, cardiology, neurology, psychiatry and psychology. This paper is an approach to this treatise, and includes the translation to English from some of its fragments referring to recipes of remedies that are beneficial for the treatment of anxiety and depression, according to the 502nd Arabic manuscript of the Süleymaniye Umumi Kütüphanesi from Istanbul, and the 137th manuscript of the Ṭibb Taymūr collection from the Egyptian National Library and Archives (Dār al-Kutub al-Miṣriyya) in Cairo.

Keywords: *Abulcasis Al-Zahrāwī, Medieval Arab Medicine, Medieval Arab Pharmacology, Medieval Arab Psychiatry, Medieval Arab Psychology, Kitāb al-Taṣrīf.*

INTRODUCTION

The Kitāb al-Taṣrīf (Book of medical arrangement) [1] is the masterpiece of the Andalusian remarkable and illustrious physician and first surgeon of the medieval islam [2], besides a famous author, Abū l-Qāsim Khalaf Ibn ‘Abbās Al-Zahrāwī, known among other names as Abulcasis Al-Zahrāwī [3].

This encyclopaedic work is collected in thirty-nine manuscripts [4] around the world and it is divided into thirty treatises each of which is preceded by a title summarizing its content. Abulcasis cites in his book other important authors and works, and takes many of the recipes from these sources, so Al-Taṣrīf is full of enriching quotes [5].

The 30th treatise on surgery is the most famous of all, reaching its influence as far as Renaissance Europe [6]. Furthermore, in pharmacology, which this article mainly is about, Abulcasis is a very representative figure due to his important achievements [7].

The 9th treatise of this important work is an interesting medieval treatise on different fields of medicine, such as cardiology, neurology, psychiatry and psychology, including the correct treatment of some of their most common ailments and diseases [8]. The full treatise remains unpublished nowadays and it contains recipes of great pharmacological

value. I am currently preparing a study of the full treatise with a Spanish translation

In this treatise, Abulcasis follows the theory of the four humors that make up the human body, proposed by Hippocrates and developed by Galen: blood, phlegm, yellow bile, and black bile (atrabilis), which were associated with the four classical elements: air, water, earth, and fire, respectively; and the four qualities: hot, cold, wet, and dry. So blood is warm and wet; phlegm is cold and wet; yellow bile is warm and dry, and black bile is cold and dry [9]. It was believed that the balance of these humors determined a person's health and temperament, while an imbalance could cause illness and different personality types, such as sanguine/optimistic, phlegmatic, choleric and melancholic. This theory was largely obeyed by the Arabs in Middle Ages. The Medieval pharmacopoeia was also oriented along these lines, so that the remedies prepared to cure diseases possessed properties antagonistic to the humor causing the ailment.

Below is the English translation of some texts referring to three recipes with remedies that are beneficial for the treatment of anxiety and depression, and other sickness, according to the 502nd Arabic manuscript of the Süleymaniye Umumi Kütüphanesi from Istanbul, and the 137th Arabic manuscript of the Ṭibb Taymūr collection from the Egyptian

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RECIPES FOR THE TREATMENT OF ANXIETY AND DEPRESSION

Andromachus' Theriac (f.449/f.175r^o)

The theriac by Andromachus [10], the physician, which is beneficial for illness and diseases of the spirit and psyche, disturbance, asthma, convulsions, hemiplegia, obsessions, suffocation, epilepsy, apoplexy, and all the symptoms from black bile, melancholy and phlegm. In addition, it replenishes the mind, increases memory, strengthens the mind, is good for the brain, and balances the natures. It is the most important remedy for kings. Its ingredients are: Take 12 *dirhams* of musk; walnut, caraway, pearls, coral, camphor root, doronic, Indian aloe wood, red behen, white behen, and spikenard, 3 *mithqāls* of each; nutmeg, clove, large cardamom, Chinese cinnamon, costus, cinnamon, cassia, ginger, hot pepper, and sedge, 4 *dirhams* of each; saffron, white pepper, and black pepper, 2 *mithqāls* of each; camphor, mace, Indian water lily root, yellow sandalwood, white liquid storax, rose, cubeb, and mastic, 1 *mithqāl* of each; cassia branches, sweet-smelling reed flowers, buglose, and harmal grain; and euphorbia, bryony, small cardamom, wild carrot, asarum, galangal, and aromatic round aristolochia, 8 *dirhams* of each. The remedies are crushed and sieved; then the amber and liquid storax are dissolved in milk and mixed together; on the other hand, the gold and silver are allowed to cool, and are pounded together until have the consistency of medicines. Then, mix everything with skimmed honey and let it sit until ready. Take 1 to 3 chickpeas of the prepared mixture together with marjoram water and cooked clove water.

Ibn Māsawayh [11] pointed out that it is a theriac that, due to its excellent fragrance and its many benefits, is very popular among kings.

It is proven and is excellent.

Theriac by Galen (f.449-f.451/f.175r^o)

Recipe of a theriac composed by Galen [12], who said he had tried it and that it was definitive for atrabilis and the obsessions it causes, as well as for intense cold of the head, apoplectic attacks and all diseases caused by black bile. Ibn Al-Jazzār [13] said that he had prepared this theriac for Mansour the servant, and this praised its properties. The recipe is as follows: Take musk and castoreum, 3 *dirhams* of each; 7 *dirhams* of aloe socotrina; 10 *dirhams* of colocynthid fat; agaric, white cane turbit, Chinese cinnamon, cassia, marjoram leaves, Persian thyme, white pepper, black pepper, hot pepper, long aristolochia, round aristolochia, yarrow, melilot, aromatic asafoetida, eruca seed, mastic, wormwood, wild cow dung and Greek absinthium, 4 *dirhams* of each; Judean balsam wood, dodder and polypody, 5 *dirhams* of each; and bugloss, alharma grain, euphorbia, Indian salt, spikenard, asarum, white costus and mace, from each, 2 *dirhams*. Crush the remedies and sieve them; then, macerate the gums in

an old boil, knead all this with a sufficient quantity of honey and left to stand for six months. The dosage is ½ *mithqāl* or less. And if you want it to act as a purgative, increase the dose, taking it with water in which fresh marjoram has been boiled.

Theriac by Ibn Al-Jazzār (f.450/f.175r^o-175v^o)

Recipe of a theriac, composed of one hundred drugs, which Ibn Al-Jazzār made for the Imām Al-Mahdī bi-llāh the Almighty [14], after gathering more than twenty handwritten copies. He said that he had not seen a remedy more effective than this, nor more beneficial, excellent and complete in all. The recipe is as follows: Take musk, amber, gold, silver, Indian aloe wood, yellow amber, Chinese cinnamon, camphor root, doronic acid, cloves, and nutmeg, of each, 2 *dirhams*; saffron, squid, castoreum, undrilled pearls, mastic, camphor, red rose leaves, yellow sandalwood, burnt coral, burnt raw silk, asarum, lavender, small cardamom, large cardamom, sweet-smelling rush flowers, ginger, costus, mace, and cubeb, of each, 3 *dirhams*; agaric, aloe socotrina, and lavandula stoechas, of each, 10 *dirhams*; white pepper, black pepper, hot pepper, gentian, bugloss, long aristolochia, round aristolochia, small rhubarb, melilot, zamarrilla, and alharma grain, of each, 4 *dirhams*; broad fennel seed, dried hyssop, marjoram leaves, pyrethrum, sedge, lichen, rue seed, dill seed, galangal, eruca seed, wormwood, mustard seed, wild carrot, blue iris and fagonia, of each, 5 *dirhams*; common yew, Indian pepper, balsam grain and wood, euphorbia, Indian salt, yellow sulfur, opium and henbane seed; of each, 2 *dirhams*; 7 *dirhams* of Persian thyme; 6 *dirhams* of anise; black hellebore, white hellebore, red behen, white behen, asparagus seed, fresh ripe date seed, red myrrh, and caper root peel, of each, 1 *dirham*; liquid storax, which is the monks' incense, juniper, cow dung, sagapene, and asafoetida, of each, 4 *dirhams*; Judean bitumen and psyllium, of each, 3 *dirhams*; 8 *dirhams* of scammonia; 12 *dirhams* of Greek absinthium; 5 *dirhams* of maidenhair fern; ammoniac and Armenian borax, of each, 1 *dirham*; wild celery seed and staphysagria, of each, 2 *dirhams*; 6 *dirhams* of wild cucumber; and Nabatean celery seed, chicory seed, opopanax, ash fruit, and celandine, of each, 1 *dirham*. The dried remedies are crushed, sifted, and then pounded again; later the gums are macerated in an old boil and in myrtle syrup or in filtered honey wine; the gold and silver are allowed to cool to the consistency of flour, and are pounded; after that, the amber and storax are dissolved in 1 ounce of pure moringa, kneaded with the medicine and the previously pounded musk, and the whole is combined with three times its quantity of skimmed honey, and set aside to mature for six months. The dose is equivalent to one chickpea and one fava bean for those suffering from sadness, fear, tremors, convulsions, constant ulcers, and unexplained distress; it should be taken with water boiled with marjoram and basil myrtle, or with water boiled with fennel root extract and celery root extract. For stomach and liver colds, the preparation should be taken with water boiled with mastic, clove, and bulrush flowers; and for women with

uterine pain and obstructed menstruation, with water boiled together with horehound and dittany. For the elderly and for cold-related illnesses, the preparation should be taken with water boiled with thyme, dill, and cumin. One gram of the remedy can also be inhaled with marjoram and orris water; and in summer, with violet oil and breast milk. It can also be consumed almost always with myrtle stew and aged syrup, generally from 1 *dirham* to 1 *mithqāl*. I have found that its benefits far exceed what is said.

APPENDIX

Glossary

-Weights & measures

-1 *Dirham* = 3,12 grams

- 1 *Mithqāl* = 4,25 grams

- 1 Ounce ((*ūqiyya*) = 28,34 grams

Authors and relevant figures cited in the text (in alphabetical order)

Al-Mahdī

Abū Muḥammad ‘Abd Allāh ibn al-Ḥusayn (874–934), born in ‘Askar Mukran, current Iran, as Sa‘īd ibn Al-Ḥusayn, is known by his regnal name Al-Mahdī bi-llāh, the Guided by God, and was the founder of the Fatimid Isma‘ili Caliphate, the only major Shia caliphate in Islamic history, and the 11th Imam of the Isma‘ili branch of Shiism. The Fatimids originated during the Abbasid Caliphate and initially conquered Ifriqiya, current Tunisia and parts of Algeria, and later came to dominate the Mediterranean coast of Africa. They made Egypt the center of their caliphate in the second half of the 10th century. The dynasty then controlled the Mediterranean coast of Africa and made Egypt the center of their caliphate in the second half of the 10th century. At its height, the caliphate included, in addition to Egypt, parts of the Maghreb, Sudan, Sicily, the Mediterranean Levant, and the territory of the Ḥijāz in the Arabian Peninsula.

Andromachus

Andromachus is the name of two ancient Greek physicians, Andromachus the Elder and Andromachus the Younger, father and son, who lived during the time of the Emperor Nero. In this treatise, Abulcasis refers to the father, who was born in Crete and was Nero’s physician around 54–68 AD. He was the first person to be given the title of *archiatre* (*archiater*), that is, chief physician serving a monarch, and is known for having invented a famous antidote, named after him, *Theriaca Andromachi* (Andromachus’ *theriac*), the recipe for which is cited in the text, and which long enjoyed great fame. Andromachus left the instructions for making this preparation in a 174-line elegy dedicated to Nero.

Galen

Jālīnūs is the Arabic name of this illustrious physician born in Pergamon, Asia Minor, in 129 and died in Rome around 199.

He studied mathematics, philosophy, and medicine. In Rome, he was court physician and achieved fame and fortune. A skilled orator, he drew large audiences whom he enlightened with spectacular experiments. His work, derived largely from the theories of Hippocrates and Aristotle, endured as the primary source of medical knowledge until the mid-17th century, thanks to the work of the Arabs, for whom he was, along with Hippocrates, one of the most representative scientific figures, one of the most cited and one of those who exerted the greatest influence on them. He wrote more than 120 books, many of which are lost in their original Greek and are known through Arabic translations that began in the 8th century. He is the last great author of medical works from Greek antiquity and distinguished himself as an anatomist and physiologist. In the field of anatomy, he enriched the knowledge of the time with descriptions of vivisections and animal dissections, which he performed publicly; in humans, he only performed some confirmatory dissections. In the field of physiology, he explained functional unity through the pneumas or spirits, considering a vital pneuma or heart, a somatic pneuma or brain, and an organic pneuma or liver. He conducted experiments, removing brain and sectioning the spinal cord of animals, and attempted to explain phenomena such as respiration and phonation. His pathology was humoral, like Hippocratic, and he also admitted other alterations due to organ and tissue injuries. Regarding the aetiology, he recognized predisposing causes and occasional and immediate ones. He accepted the medicinal force as the set of activities that maintain health; and, therefore, considered medicines as adjuvants to this force.

Ibn Al-Jazzār

Abū Ja‘far Aḥmad ibn Abī Khālīd Al-Jazzār (d.circa 1005) is a famous Tunisian physician from Kairouan, belonging to a family of doctors, since his father and uncle were also. He was a philanthropist and wise and cared about healing not only the rich and powerful but also the poor and disinherited ones for whom he composed the book entitled in Arabic *Kitāb ṭibb al-fuqarā’* (Medicine of the poor), unfortunately lost as well as all his medical production, about twenty, with the exception of two works, *Risāla fī-ibḍāl al-adwiyā* (Epistle about substitute medicines) and above all *Zād al-musāfir* (Traveler’s allowance). He also composed a treatise on simple remedies and a treatise on compound remedies, known as *Al-Bugya* (The Desire), which is cited in these pages. In addition, he wrote about philosophy and history.

Ibn Māsawayh

Abū Zakarīyā Yūḥannā ibn Māsawayh (c.777-857) is one of the main authors of science from the Middle Ages. His knowledge involves a mixture of Hellenistic elements, Christian ideas and recipes from Orient, the result of which was to unite alchemy, medicine and astrology. He translated many Greek scientific works and belonged to the famous *Bayt al-Ḥikma* (House of Wisdom) in Bagdad, which he became the director. Failing to obtain human subjects for dissection,

a practice never encouraged by Islam, had recourse to apes. At this time, few advances could be achieved in anatomy, except studying the anatomical structure of the eye. He wrote the oldest systematic treatise on ophthalmology in Arabic, entitled *Al-Ashr maqālāt fī l-‘ayn* (The ten treatises on the eye). According to the Arabic sources, Ibn Māsawayh wrote over forty works, but only ten remain. Latin versions are more numerous.

CONCLUSION

Abulcasis Al-Zahrāwī is, without any doubt, one of the most important medieval physicians and he influenced both Muslim world and Occident as far as Renaissance Europe. His main work is a masterpiece entitled “*Kitāb al-Taṣrīf li-man ‘ajiza ‘an al-ta’līf*” (Book of medical arrangement), which is in a high-ranking place within surgery, medicine and pharmacology of Al-Andalus. In addition, this book exemplifies the high level achieved by Arab scientific knowledge in Middle Ages, and so it is essential to study its pages in order to make them known to other areas of knowledge. This article contributes to this. The texts translated and studied in this paper show the interest in emotional disorders and the progress made in this field by the Arabs, and certify the relevance of this eminent author in the history of Islamic science as well as his prominent position in the history of universal science.

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