



The Medical Qualities of the Elecampane, the Black Caraway and the Ivy According To Abu L-‘Ala’ Zuhr (D.1131)

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Abstract

Abu l- ‘Ala’ Zuhr (c.1060-1131), known among other names as Abuleli, is one of the most important physicians from Al-Andalus who wrote on pharmacology and medicine. He also is the main author in Occident on popular scientific knowledge, as is Al-Majusi (d.994) in Orient. Among his works, we find the treatise titled in Arabic Kitab mujarrabat al-khawaṣṣ (Book of the experience facts) that contains interesting descriptions on the healing attributes, the pharmacological properties and the medical characteristics of diverse plants and animals as well as other rare attributes included in the framework of folk medicine and the quackery, even magic and sorcery. This paper is an approach to this book and contains the English translation of Arabic text according to the manuscript no.520 of the Bodleian Library in Oxford relating to the elecampane (f.41v^o-f.42r^o), the black caraway (f.52v^o-f.53r^o) and the ivy (f.81v^o.f.82r^o).

Keywords: Medieval Arabic Science; Islamic Pharmacology; Folk Medicine; Abu l-‘Ala’ Zuhr

Introduction

Abu l- ‘Ala’ Zuhr (c.1060-1131), Avenzoar father, known as Abuleli among other names, is one of the most important and original physicians from Al-Andalus [1]. Belonging to an illustrious family of scientists and having a vast culture and education, he wrote mainly on pharmacology and medicine. Abuleli belonged to a privileged class of court physicians with a notable political and public life and apparently became the almoravid Yusuf ibn Tashfin vizier, at least the Arabic manuscript in Paris of the work Tadhkira gives him that title hence Latins called him Alguazir Albuleizor too. Many works have remained from his intense cultural and scientific activity some of which are lost [2]. The most significant ones are two: The Kitab mujarrabat al-khawaṣṣ (Book of the experience facts), which this article focuses on, and the Tadhkira, (Memorandum) previously cited [3]. Abuleli owes his renown above all to his qualities as a practical physician. He recommended to be cautious in the treatment of any disease in relation to the use of drugs and he warned of the mistake that an overdose would entail in the administration of a remedy. The two great master lines converge in Abu l- ‘Ala’: a) Greek-based scientific medicine, represented in the Tadhkira; and b) popular medicine, which is inserted within the quackery, mainly

depicted in the Kitab mujarrabat al-khawaṣṣ, so he is the main author in Occident on popular scientific knowledge, as is Al-Majusi (d.994) in Orient [4]. This mixture makes Abuleli one of the most interesting scientists in Al-Andalus and one of the most original medical authors in the middle Ages [5]. The Kitab mujarrabat al-khawaṣṣ (Book of the experience facts) contains interesting descriptions on the healing qualities, the pharmacological properties and the medical characteristics, as well as other rare attributes, relating to diverse plants and animals, which are listed in alphabetical order. The text is often included, as I've said before, in the framework of folk medicine and quackery, even in magic and sorcery. Below is the English translation of some texts included in the Kitab mujarrabat al-khawaṣṣ according to the manuscript no.520 of the Bodleian Library in Oxford, concerning to the medical qualities of the elecampane (f.41v^o-f.42r^o), the black caraway f.52v^o-f.53r^o) and the ivy (f.81v^o.f.82v^o).

The Medical Qualities of the Elecampane, the Black Caraway and the Ivy

Elecampane (f.41v^o-f.42r^o)

Property of elecampane is that it reduces urine and benefits the joints contraction caused by humidity. It is good as a restorative of

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urinary bladder if eaten or applied in bandages and beneficial for urination (f.42r^o) induced by cold. It also has aphrodisiac properties. Ibn Masarjawayh said: If a woman fumigates with elecampane that will cause menstruation. To take one mithqal of elecampane, previously crushed and kneaded, warms limbs aching from the cold, and applied on vermin bite heals them. If you do not have elecampane, you can replace it with licorice root.

Black caraway (f.52v^o-f.53r^o)

Burned, crushed with vinegar and applied as an ointment on warts and calluses, it eliminates them. To fumigate with one daniq of black caraway, 1 daniq of rue and 1/2 daniq of mastic, that causes a breakup between lovers. If you take 2 daniqs of black caraway, 1 daniq of balsam of Judea (f.53r^o) and 1/2 daniq of elecampane husks and you add all of it on a meal, while conjuring someone's name, this makes the feeling of love disappear from him. If you crush leaves and branches of black caraway together with its seed and apply it on the wounds of the penis and piles, they will heal. Qusṭa ibn Lawqa said: If you take black caraway, vinegar syrup and castoreum and fumigate with this anywhere, certainly the vermin will run away from there. To apply black caraway mixed with vinegar kills earthworms.

Ivy (f.81v^o.f.82v^o)

The ivy is cold and dry. It is laxative (f.82r^o); and according to Al-Bustani, it is harmful for the spleen and good for diabetes. Take ivy leaves, crush them with myrtle oil and apply on the pit of the stomach. It will be beneficial for guts pain. If someone is stuck with a sharp instrument or poisoned and suffers from mouth bleeding, let him take leaves of ivy, vine, apple, pomegranate and quince, macerate them in water and gargle with it. This will be of benefit to him. Everyone who has itchy eyes should apply an ivy extract-based eye drop because that will benefit him, although it will limit or reduce his vision and cause profuse tearing. If the ear is pierced and blood comes out, then take ivy leaves and thuja cook them both with vinegar and instil a few drops into the ear. That will stop the bleeding. You can also take vinegar and rose oil and instil a bit into the ear. If you take ivy leaves, pomegranate and acorn peels and black caraway oil, you boil all it with water and give a bit of this medicine to the patient with bloody oral sputum, it will be eliminated. Yuḥanna ibn Masawayh said: Ivy property is that it opens organs obstruction. Ivy is hot and dry. It softens the belly and purges bile. If ivy is eaten cooked or mixed with oil of sweet and bitter almonds, grapes, macerated raisins (f.82v^o), dried pears and grapes, it will be of benefit to complex fevers caused by bile and phlegm. Ivy is also laxative. And Ibn Masawayh adds: Ivy water cuts the magnet.

Appendix

Authors (in alphabetical order)

Al-Bustani [6]

He is maybe 'Abad Al-Waḥid Al-Bustani, author of the book entitled in Arabic *Kitab al-ṭibb al-insani bi l-ṭibb al-yismani wa l-ruhani* (Human medicine for physical and spiritual medicine).

Ibn Masarjawayh (7th century) [7]

A Jewish of Persian origin who is considered one of the Arab medicine's fathers along with Ibn Masawayh (c.777-857) and Ḥunayn ibn Ishaq (808-873). He also was the earliest translator from Syriac to Arabic. In addition to that, he wrote two works in Arabic entitled in English *The virtues of food, their advantage and their disadvantage, and the virtues of medicinal plants, their advantage and their disadvantage, which are now disappeared, but whose content is known in part thanks to quotations.*

Ibn Masawayh (c.777-857) [8]

Abu Zakariya Yuḥanna ibn Masawayh is one of the main representatives of science of his time. His knowledge involves a mixture of Hellenistic elements, Christian ideas and recipes from the East, 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 of. According to the Arabic sources, Ibn Masawayh wrote over forty works, but only ten remain. The Latin versions are more numerous.

Qusṭa ibn Lawqa (c.820-c.912) [9]

Qusṭa ibn Lawqa Al-Ba'labakki is a Libanese Christian scientist and translator who practiced medicine in Bagdad, where he acquired a similar reputation as Ḥunayn ibn Ishaq. Ibn Lawqa had a vast culture, was perfectly mastered the Arabic, Greek and Syriac languages and was an expert in medicine, philosophy, geometry. Arithmetic, astronomy and music. He contributed to the spread of the old Greek science among the Arabs and to its diffusion in Orient.

Weights and Measures (in alphabetical order)

Daniq: 1 daniq = 1/6 dirhem (1 dirhem = 3, 12 gr.)

Mithqal: 1 mithqal = 4,68gr.

Conclusion

Abu l-'Ala' Zuhri (Abuleli) is without any doubt one of the most interesting Medieval physicians and the only that wrote about magic, sorcery and quackery in Occident. In him two great lines confluent: that of the scientific medicine and the popular medicine; and this makes him an original and important author. Therefore, it is essential to study his work and make it known to other areas of knowledge. This article contributes to this.



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