

The *Kitāb mujarrabāt al-khawāṣṣ* of Abuleli (c.1060-1131)

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Abstract

Abū l- 'Alā' Zuhr, known as Abuleli (c.1060-1131), is one of the most important physicians from Al-Andalus and wrote on pharmacology and medicine. He is the main author on popular scientific knowledge in the Middle Ages together with Al-Majūsī (d.994) in East. Among his works, we find the treatise entitled in Arabic *Kitāb mujarrabāt al-khawāṣṣ* (Book of the experience facts) that contains interesting descriptions on the healing qualities and the medical characteristics of diverse minerals, plants and animals as well as other incredible attributes that are included in the framework of folk medicine. This paper is an approach to the study of this book and adds the English translation of some of its texts taken from the 520th Arabic manuscript at the Bodleian Library in Oxford, UK.

Keywords: Medieval Arabic Science; Islamic Pharmacology; Folk Medicine; Abū L- 'Alā' Zuhr (Abuleli)

Introduction

Abū l- 'Alā' Zuhr ((c.1060-1131) [1], known among other names as Abuleli, father of famous Avenzoar [2] belonged to an important family of physicians from Al-Andalus and wrote on pharmacology and medicine [3]. He is the main author on popular scientific knowledge in the Middle Ages together with Al-Majūsī (d.994) [4] in East. Among his works, we find the treatise entitled in Arabic *Kitāb mujarrabāt al-khawāṣṣ* (Book of the experience facts) [5] that, structured according to Arabic alphabet letters, contains interesting descriptions on the healing qualities and the medical characteristics of diverse minerals, plants and animals as well as other incredible attributes that are included in the framework of both scientific and folk medicine with a large dose of quackery and magic [6]. Abuleli is the Wizard of Al-Andalus.

Below this paper includes the English translation of some texts belonging to *Kitāb mujarrabāt* taken from the 520th Arabic manuscript at the Bodleian Library in Oxford which contains the aforementioned book. These pages

also incorporate interesting scientific data about diverse minerals, plants and animals of a great pharmaceutical and medical value in Medieval times in addition to their unbelievable qualities.

Pedanius Dioscorides [7,8] Hippocrates [9,10] Galen [11,12] and Ibn Māsawayh [13] are some of the authors cited.

Pharmaceutical and medical curiosities contained in the *Kitāb mujarrabāt*

Examples from the mineral, vegetable and animal kingdoms:

- *Falcon* (f.12r^o-f.12v^o)

If you cook falcon with lily oil and apply it on the eyes, it prevents the cataracts from spreading; and, applied in the gout disease, it will benefit the patient. Apply to the eyes alcohol made with gallbladder of falcon stops the cataracts and makes the disease to heal if it is advanced. If

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a woman takes falcon stool mixed with syrup, she will get pregnant even if sterile.

- *Nightingale* (f.12v^o)

If you hang nightingale and crab-eye meat wrapped in skin of deer over who wants to be sleepless will not sleep while it lasts.

- *Papyrus* (f.13r^o)

Applying powders of burned papyrus on the malignant sores makes them heal and, applied on the bleeding, stops it. And applying chewed papyrus on wasps sting makes it heal

- *Henbane* (f.13v^o)

If you hang henbane on top of the colic patient, he will heal and be successful in everything he undertakes. Washing the penis with macerated henbane water is an aphrodisiac.

- *Purslane* (f.13v^o)

If you put a bit of purslane under the pillow, it will never fall out. Chewing purslane eliminates the toothache.

- *Borax* (f.14v^o)

If you crush some borax, you knead it with honey and apply it on the penis, the pubis and the navel, it will cause a strong sexual arousal and is a powerful aphrodisiac.

- *Atutia* (f.18r^o)

Ibn Māsawayh said: Atutia dries eye moods. If you put one *dirham* of atutia into a stockpot, meat inside will become wormy. If you want to cancel it, then you add wine and meat will get back as before.

- *Frankincense (Olibanum)* (f.83r^o-f.83v^o)

Frankincense is hot and dry. Its quality is that it stops menstrual bleeding and haemorrhage in abdomen. It is harmful to the lung and is good with the Persian rice. The best variety is the male white olibanum. The dose is one *dirham* in oil and apply the ointment to the pimples will be beneficial. If you apply it crushed over ulcers and wound that makes them heal. And if you macerate frankincense. If someone is wounded and suffers a severe nosebleed, then you will take one *dirham* of olibanum and two *dirhams* of oleander leaves, crush both and make it

drink to the patient. What is good for the burning on the face is to take four *dirhams* of fish tail and two *dirhams* of castoreum, crush and knead both, and apply this cream over face. If you crush olibanum, you knead it with egg white and you apply this ointment on the herniated and swollen navel, the hernia will disappear and the navel will heal.

- *Sealing wax* (f.85v^o-f.86r^o)

Galen said: Sealing wax is hot and humid. Its quality is that it benefits the chronic pain of liver. It is harmful to the head and together with the mastic you get very good results. The best sealing wax is the red. The dose is two *dirhams*. Hippocrates said: Sealing wax is rubber of wood and it is also used as incense. In Libya it is compared to odorous lotus. It has strength to eliminate accumulated fat, to open the organ obstruction and to remove waste. Dioscorides said: Sealing wax stops the bleeding and regulates the nature. Mixed with yellow amber it is excellent. The dose is one *dirham*.

- *Plantain* (f^o.86r)

Galen said: Plantain is cold and humid. Its quality is that it is beneficial to blood and yellow bile. It is harmful to the spleen and together with the mastic you get very good results. The best is the fresh one. The dose is three *dirhams*. And he added: If you take plantain, crush it very much, blend it with melted wax and put it on the pit of the stomach: that makes the stomach heal. Plantain is beneficial to the open wounds and if you sprinkle the open wound with plantain, leaves of rue, vineyard, chard or blackberry: that makes them heal. Among the things that benefit haemorrhoids is to take plantain and dill root, crush both together, knead with syrup and apply on the place. If you take plantain, crush it and put it on superfluous flesh growing on the eyelids that will eliminate it. Galen said: Plantain is effective for toothache: it consists of making rinses with water from plantain cooking and that will undoubtedly be very beneficial. Plantain is also effective against throat scrofula. If you apply powders of plantain crushed, that will extract the tip of the arrow and other weapons stuck in the body. Applying plantain burned in bandages benefits the abdominal cramps. Plantain is beneficial for the tremors, if you take three *dirhams* of plantain mixed with lettuce leaves together with one ounce of syrup and jujube.

Conclusion

Abuleli is an example of the high scientific level reached by Arab and Islamic medicine in the Middle Ages.

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He symbolizes the two currents existing in medieval Arab medicine: the scientific, that they inherited from Antiquity mainly the Greeks, and the popular characterized by having a big dose of quackery, like his work *Kitāb mujarrabāt al-khawāṣṣ* (Book of the experience facts) shows. Abuleli for this reason is set in a very outstanding place in history of universal science.

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