



Medieval Recipes for Blood Sputum Treatment by Abulcasis

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Abstract

The 22nd treatise of the Kitab al-Taşrif (Book of medical arrangement) by the eminent physician and surgeon from Al-Andalus, Abulcasis Al-Zahrawi (c.936.c.1013), is about pneumology, and contains many recipes for beneficial remedies to lung and chest, with reference to preparation way and the diseases that cure. This article includes the translation from Arabic to English of five of these recipes that are beneficial to tuberculosis treatment, although they are also valid for other lung and chest illness. The translation is done taking as basis the 5774th Arabic manuscript of the National Library at Paris, as well as the 502nd Arabic manuscript of the Suleymaniye Umumi Kutuphanesi at Istanbul.

Keywords: Abulcasis Al-Zahrawi; Kitab Al-Taşrif; Medieval Arab Medicine; Medieval Arab Pharmacology; Pneumology; Blood Sputum

Introduction

The Kitab al-Taşrif (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, Abu l-Qasim Khalaf Ibn ‘Abbas Al-Zahrawi, known among other names as Abulcasis, Al-Zahrawi and Abulcasis Al-Zahrawi [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-Taşrif 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 22nd treatise of Kitab al-Taşrif’s [8], which was inedit, deals with pneumology, and contains many recipes for beneficial remedies to lung and chest, with reference to preparation way and the diseases that cure [9]. It is, therefore, a very interesting treatise for the field of medieval pharmacology. Below this article includes the translation from

Arabic to English of five of these recipes that are beneficial for blood sputum treatment, although they are also valid for other lung and chest illness. The translation is done taking as basis the 5774th Arabic manuscript of the National Library at Paris, as well as the 502nd Arabic manuscript of the Suleymaniye Umumi Kutuphanesi at Istanbul.

Recipes for Tuberculosis Treatment

Recipe for an electuary [f.121v^o]

Recipe for a beneficial electuary for the asthmatic and for those who suffer from lung disease, blood sputum and pus: You take broad bean flour and peeled sweet almonds, from each, 10 dirhams; white tragacanth and terebinth gum-resin, from each, 5 dirhams; 7 dirhams of cucumber seed; 1 dirhams of saffron; and 15 dirhams of poppy seeds. All this is crushed and sifted; Then the gum-resine is added, along with 60 dirhams of grape syrup, and everything is mixed. You must take 2 mithqals of this remedy in the morning and another 2 mithqals at night.

Recipe for some pills [f.123v^o]

Recipe for some pills included in the Kitab naş’a’ih al-ruhban (Book of monks' advice) [10] by Galen [11], beneficial for blood sputum

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and also for relaxing the belly, which he composed for a 30-year-old young man, for whom they were very helpful. Its ingredients are: burnt and washed yellow amber, burnt coral, washed acacia, fried gum Arabic, clarion and red rose, from each, 10 dirhams; opium and mastic, from each, 1/2 dirham. The dose is one pill taken with cold water at bedtime. And if these pills are left with all their components, the remedy has a more complete and effective action.

Recipe for a remedy by Galen [f.128v^o]

Recipe for a Galen remedy that benefits blood sputum: You take 1 pound of garden cucumber, cut it into small pieces, pour fresh water over it until it covers everything and cook it until 1/3 of the water remains. Then, 1,5 mithqals of mud from Samos is added and taken. If there is no such mud, Armenian mud is put in its place as a substitute. This is certainly a very good remedy.

Recipe for a paste [f.130v^o]

Recipe for a paste from Galen's *Kitab al-mayamir* (Book of Sermons) [12], which is beneficial for diseases and ulcers of the trachea, blood sputum, pus and infectious materials that accumulate in the chest; and it is also effective for those who breathe heavily. It is a very powerful remedy: You take terebinth gum-resin, saffron, incense, Chinese cinnamon and myrrh, from each, 4 mithqals; 3 mithqals of bluglosse; 2.5 mithqals of starch; 2 mithqals of black canafistula; 3 mithqals of white tragacanth; another 3 mithqals of Syrian date pulp; 4 mithqals of mud from Samos, which is called "al-kawkab" ("the star"); 3 mithqals of pure unmixed lapis lazuli; 3 mithqals of costus (and another copy indicates 1 mithqal); and 4 carats of superior honey, of excellent quality. Cook the honey and the terebinth gum-resin in a multiple container and, when it begins to become compact, mix the lapis lazuli with what has been cooked and boil it until it stops dripping. Then set it aside, add the crushed dry medicines, combine everything and use it. It is certainly a beneficial remedy, God Almighty willing [13].

Recipe for some powders [f.137v^o]

Recipe for some powders, which instantly benefit the sputum of blood coming from the chest, from *Kitab Al-Kafi fi l-tibb* (The Enough Book about Medicine) by Al-Razi [14]: You take incense and dragon's blood, from each, 1 portion; 1/2 portion of amber, hematite and sealed mud, from each, 1,5 portions; and Yemeni alum and pomegranate blossom, from each, 1 portion. Everything is crushed and 3 dirhams of it are administered together with 1 carat of opium, 1 carat of henbane seed and 2 daniqs of Chinese cinnamon, spikenard, myrrh or costus, and with this preparation mixed with water and vinegar it is gargle in the morning and at night. If the patient has a fever, it is best to administer this remedy with basil water or purslane water, as it is more effective this way.

Appendix

Glossary

Weights & measures

1 Carat (qirat) = 200 milligrams

1 Daniq = 1/6 de dirham

1 Dirham = 3, 12 grams

1 Mithqal = 4, 86 grams

1 Pound (raṭl) = 453, 59 grams

Medical terms

Blood sputum: It is common in many mild respiratory conditions, including upper respiratory infections, bronchitis, and asthma

Electuary (la'ūq): The electuary is a pharmaceutical preparation of liquid, paste, or solid consistency, made with various ingredients, almost always vegetables, and a certain amount of honey, syrup, or sugar.

Ulcer: A sore on the skin or mucosa, accompanied by disintegration of the tissue.

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Al-Razi

Abu Bakr Muhammad Ibn Zakariya' Al-Razi (865-925) known among the Latins as Rhazes, was born in Rayy near Tehran. Persian by birth, he has undoubtedly been the greatest and most original of all Muslim physicians and one of the most prolific authors in the Arabic language. He was chief physician at the Baghdad hospital and considered the inventor of the fishing line in surgery. His biographers attribute to him some one hundred and thirteen major works and some twenty-eight smaller works, twelve of which are on alchemy. His main work and the most important is the entitled one *Al-Ḥawi* (The Continent), translated for the first time into Latin, under the auspices of Charles I of Anjou, by the Sicilian Jewish doctor Faray Ibn Sālim, in the year 1279, with the name of *Continens*; subsequently, five other Latin editions were made. This encyclopaedic book collects the entire medical concept of the Greeks, Persians and Hindus, and adds its own contributions. *Al-Ḥawi* is in short a masterpiece that for centuries had a notable influence on the scientific thought of the Christian West.

Galen of Pergamon (Jalinus)

Aelius Galenus or Claudius Galenus, famous doctor born in Pergamon, Asia Minor, in the year 129, and died in Rome around the year 199. He studied mathematics, philosophy and medicine. In Rome, he was court physician and achieved fame and fortune. A skilled orator, he gathered large audiences, to whom he illustrated with spectacular experiments. His work, largely derived from the



theories of Hippocrates and Aristotle, remained the main medical knowledge until the mid-17th century, thanks to the work of transmission by the Arabs, for whom he is, along with Hippocrates, one of the most representative scientific figures and one of the most cited. His influence on the medieval scientific knowledge of the Arabs is undoubted. He wrote more than one hundred and twenty books, most of them are lost in their Greek originals and have been known through Arabic translations beginning in the 8th century. He is the last great author of medical works of Greek antiquity, and is distinguished as an anatomist and physiologist. In the field of anatomy, he enriched the knowledge of the time with the descriptions of vivisections and dissections of animals, which he performed publicly, but he performed only some confirmatory human dissections. In the field of physiology, he explained the functional unit by the pneumas or spirits, considering a vital pneuma or heart, a somatic pneuma or brain, and an organic pneuma or liver. He performed experiments, cutting the spinal cord of animals, and attempted to explain phenomena such as breathing and phonation. His pathology was humoral, like that of Hippocrates, and he admitted other alterations due to injuries to organs and tissues. Regarding the aetiology, he admitted some predisposing causes, and other occasional and immediate ones. He is an author frequently cited by Abulcasis in the *Kitab al-Taṣrif* and, therefore, in this treatise on pneumology.

Conclusion

The masterpiece of Abulcasis Al-Zahrawi entitled *Kitab al-Taṣrif* (Book of medical arrangement) is in a very high-ranking place within surgery, medicine and pharmacology of Al-Andalus; and his author exemplifies the noted level achieved by Arab scientific knowledge in the middle Ages. Due to his influence in Europe until the late 16th century and the early 17th century, among other reasons, Abulcasis has a very prominent position in the history of universal science; and, in particular, the pages translated and studied in this article attest to his relevance in the history of Islamic science.

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