

Ali-ibn-Sahl Rabban al-Tabari

Zahida Anwar* & Kanwal Zahra**

*AJ&K Medical College, Muzaffarabad, **Pakistan Institute of Medical Sciences, Islamabad

(Disclaimer: Compilation of his account is based on various sources and it's not an original research article. References and sources are given at the end. We are grateful to the original writers for their valuable work)

Ali-ibn-Sahl Rabban al-Tabari, commonly known as Abu-AL- Hassan, was an eminent scholar of 9th century. Born to a renowned family of Khurasan (near present day Tehran) he marked a name as a physician in the history of medicine. He got his early education in the field of medical sciences, calligraphy, mathematics, philosophy and literature from his father Sahl who himself was a famous physician and a high level state official of his time. Ali ibn Sahl Rabbān received his preliminary education in medical and natural sciences, calligraphy, mathematics, philosophy and literature from his father. In addition to Arabic, Persian and Syriac, he had also mastered the Hebrew and Greek languages to a high degree of proficiency. He translated his own book Firdous al-hikma written in Arabic into the Syriac language.

Besides good education in various contemporary subjects his father also taught his son the intricacies of religious thought and philosophical leanings. In addition, Al Tabri also had the privilege of learning different languages including Syriac and Greek in which was available a tangible knowledge of that time. All this laid the foundation on which the towering personality of one of the most brilliant scholars of middle ages was erected and was given the name title of "Rabbān" that means my leader.

After early education, Al Tabri moved to Baghdad which was considered the cultural Centre of that time. There, owing to his varied qualities of head and heart, he was appointed at a high post as Qazi. However, he never put on hold his thirst for knowledge and wrote a number of books on various subjects. He was one of the earliest authors to write on the comparative study of religions. He was an embodiment of nobility and sympathy because of which he was liked by most of his contemporaries and respected by all and sundry. Besides his other qualities, one thing which made him prominent in history was his work on medicine. He wrote an Arabic translation of Ptolemy's Almagest (a book on medicine). In this translation he was able to

resolve many difficult parts which the other translators failed to do before him. He was also an expert calligrapher and a learned philosopher of his time. Among many of his books, Kitab al- Dinwa al- Dawla (the religion and the state) and Kitab al-LuLwa (on medicine) stands out as a special mention.

Al-Tabari left twelve books. Most of them were on medicine. He was also a master of philosophy, mathematics and astronomy.

Firdous- al-Hikmah is one of the oldest encyclopedias of Islamic medicine, based on Syriac translations of Greek sources. It is divided into 7 sections and 30 parts, with 360 chapters in total. His Firdous- al-Hikmah ("Paradise of Wisdom"), which he wrote in Arabic also called Al-Kunnash. He also translated it into Syriac, to give it wider usefulness.

- Part-I: Includes general philosophical ideas, the categories, natures, elements, metamorphosis, genesis and decay.
- Part- II: Includes embryology, pregnancy, the functions and morphology of different organs, ages and seasons, psychology, the external and internal senses, the temperaments and emotions, personal idiosyncrasies, nervous affections, tetanus, palpitation, nightmare, the evil eye, hygiene and dietetics
- Part-III: Deals with nutrition and dietetics.
- Part-IV: Signs and symptoms of each disease and the treatment. Recommended general and special pathology, from the head to the feet.
 - General causes relating to eruption of diseases.
 - Diseases of the head and the brain.
 - Diseases relating to the eye, nose, ear, mouth and teeth.
 - Muscular diseases (paralysis and spasm).
 - Diseases of the regions of the chest, throat and lungs.

- Diseases of the abdomen.
- Diseases of the liver.
- Diseases of gallbladder and spleen.
- Intestinal diseases.
- Different kinds of fever.
- Miscellaneous diseases- explanation of body organs
- Examination of pulse and urine.

Part-V: Description of flavor, taste and color of tastes, scents and colors.

Part-VI: Drugs and poison

Part seven: Deals with diverse topics. Discusses climate and astronomy. Also contains a brief mention of sub-continent's medicine.

His other books included:

Tuhfat al-Muluk ("The King's Present"). A work on the proper use of food, drink, and medicines.

Hafzh al-Sehah ("The Proper Care of Health") follows Greek and Asian Authorities.

Kitab al-Ruqa ("Book of Magic or Amulets")

Kitab fi al-hijamah ("Treatise on Cupping")

Kitab fi Tartib al-'Ardhiyah ("Treatise on the Preparation of Food")

Quotes

On the Quran he said: "When I was a Christian I used to say, as did an uncle of mine who was one of the learned and eloquent men, that eloquence is not one of the signs of prophet-hood because it is common to all the peoples; but when I discarded (blind) imitation and (old) customs and gave up adhering to (mere) habit and training and reflected upon the meanings of the Qur'an I came to know that what the followers of the Qur'an claimed for it was true. The fact is that I have not found any book, be it by an Arab or a Persian, an Asian or a Greek, right from the beginning of the world up to now, which contains at the same time praises of God, belief in the prophets and apostles, exhortations to good, everlasting deeds, command to do good and prohibition against doing evil, inspiration to the desire of paradise and to avoidance of hell-fire as this Qur'an does. So when a person brings to us a book of such qualities, which inspires such reverence and sweetness in the hearts and which has achieved such an everlasting success and he is (at the same time) an illiterate person who did never learnt the art of writing or rhetoric, that book is without any doubt one of the signs of his Prophethood.