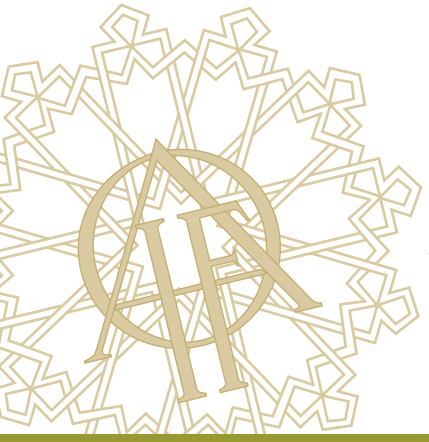
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AnIsl 9 (1970), p. 123-126

Khalil Messiha

Reconsideration and Origin of an Arabic Medical Prescription.

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RECONSIDERATION AND ORIGIN OF AN ARABIC MEDICAL PRESCRIPTION

BY

KHALIL MESSIHA

This note concerns a manuscript from an Ancient Arabic medical book. The Metropolitan Museum published a wrong translation of the technical data of the manuscript. In our note we shall give the right scientific translation of the contents of the manuscript, then we shall give the probable origin of such prescriptions from Greek medecine, which in turn got them from Ancient Egyptian medecine.

The original article [1] runs as follows :

«Manuscripts and miniature paintings leaf from a Mss. of the Arabic translation of Materia Medica of Dioscoredes dated A.H. 619 (A.D. 1222/23), written and illuminated by Abdallah Ibn Fadl. acc. no. 13. 152. 6. (Fig. 1). The miniature painting of our leaf represents a physician preparing a cough medecine. The gist of the Arabic inscription is as follows : —

> *Ease The throat by taking 1/4 oke* (a measure of weight equaling about 2 3/4 lbs) *of bitter root, 18 oke of licorice root 1/4 or 1/8 oke of white pepper — Pulverize them together and put the resulting powder into a cloth, tie it up and immerse it in sweet wine for three days — strain the liquor into a clean Vessel Drink after dinner.*

The miniature is painted in yellow, brown red, light and dark blue, green and gold set against a neutral background. The pictorial rendering and the vivid colour scheme with predominating reds and blues are characteristic of Abbasid school of Baghdad. The faces of semitic type, show individual differentiation. Leaves from this manuscript once belonged to F.R. Martin are now scattered all over the world. Two leaves in the possession of V. Everit Macy are on loan in the Metropolitan Museum».

If you examine the miniature (see fig. 1), you will find an Arabic Physician pounding herbs in a mortar. In front of him there is a funnel suspended from a tripod, this is the cloth used for filtering. The filtrate is streaming into the receptacle below the funnel.

[1] From *Metropolitan Museum Studies,* Vol. 1, Part two, 1929, U.S.A.

AnIsl 9 (1970), p. 123-126 Khalil Messiha
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Fig. 1.

Reproduction drawn according to a photograph in the «Metropolitan Museum Studies», Vol. I, Part 2, 1929, accompanying the article of «Dated Specimens of Mohammedan Art in the Metropolitan Museum of Art — Part II», by M. S. Dimand.

AnIsl 9 (1970), p. 123-126 Khalil Messiha
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Under the tree, there is a jar in which he is going to put the prepared medecine. The correct translation of the Arabic inscription should be [1]:

« The way of making a syrup for nasal catarrh and cough.

Also for swollen abdomen and relaxed Stomach. Take 1/4 ounce [2] *of myrrh* [3] *and 1/8 ounce of Iris root* (not liquorice) [4] *and 1/4 and 1/8 ounce white pepper, pound them all and tie in a cloth and put them in three measures* [5] *of Syrup* [6]. *Leave for three days, strain and then keep in a clean vessel; drink after dinner*».

Above the miniature there are two lines of another prescription (not translated by the metropolitan Mus.), which run as follows :—

« *When the Syrup cools down, decant because this Syrup is good for pain of buccal cavity, the side, the lungs, and Anuria and rigors, and for one with thick phlegm in his throat: it clears colour and increases sleep, has no bad effect; it is good for bladder and kidney.* »

The origin of such prescription could be traced to its source which, in my view is the Ancient Egyptian medecine. The Arabs translated the greek medecine, using as their main sources the books of Galenus and Dioscoredes. The Source of the greek medecine was mainly the Ancient Egyptian [7]. Now if we turn to the drugs mentioned in the Arabic prescription we find them used in Ancient Egyptian Medical prescriptions :



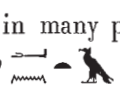
Myrrh : This natural resin was widely used both internally e.g. to treat prolapsed rectum [8], to treat catarrh in the head and externally to treat exanthemata of the scalp. In Pap. Hearst it is mentioned in many prescriptions with its hieroglyphic name [9] *ʿn ti-w*  (Fig. 2) or *ʿntyw* and its coptic name is ϣϧⲁⲗ.



Fig. 2.

[1] Cf. David of Antioch, « *Tazkaret Dawoud El-Antachi* », 4 Vols. Published in Arabic, for technical data about Arabic medecine.

[2] An Oke = 36 Okias i.e. ounces.
An Okia = 37.4 gms.

[3] Myrrh in Arabic means « bitter gum » and is quite different from bitter root. Cf. David of Antioch, *Tazkaret Dawoud El-Antachi,* Vol. 1, p. 239, « myrrh expels gases, pain of liver and spleen and kidney and bladder and worms when ingested ».

[4] In Arabic « OSUL » means roots and thence « OSUL SAWAN » = Iris root, while « OSUL SOUS » = root of liquorice.

[5] In Arabic AḲSAT is the plural of Ḳist which signifies a measure of Capacity.

[6] Cf. David of Antioche, « *Tazkaret Dawoud El Antiochi,* Vol. 1, p. 171 under the Leading « Syrup, where he describes the way of making syrups of the juices of certain fruits and sugar or honey.

[7] Cf. Hassan Kamal, *Ancient Egyptian medecine,* Vol. II, Cairo 1964, p. 218. Also Cf. Abdel Aziz Abdel Rahman, *The History of Medecine, Pharmacy & chemistry in Ancient Egypt,* Cairo 1939, p. 65.

[8] Cf. B. Ebbel, *The Papyrus Ebers,* Copenhagen 1937, pp. 43, 65, 77.

[9] Cf. George A. Reisner, *The Hearst medical Papyrus,* Vol. I, Leipzig 1905, p. 18 (*b*) also II 17; VII 16; IX 6; XIII 1... etc.

AnIsl 9 (1970), p. 123-126 Khalil Messiha
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Iris : Is a type of tulips. If we refer to about Quassim El-Wasir we find that he gives the history of how the Alexandrians translated the greek medecine to Arabic [1], he mentions «Sawsan» as equal to iris with blue flowers. In Egyptian it is «Soushin» [2]. *sšn* : plur.  (Fig. 3) lotus *ḥ3 -w n w sšn-w*.



Fig. 3.

Loret, v., in his book «La flore pharaonique» says that Soushin is very near to Sawsan in Arabic and also to ϣⲱϣⲉⲛ «Shaoshen» in Coptic. From the above evidence, I think, that «Osul Sauesan» of the Arabic prescription are the rhizomes of Lotus. Papyrus Ebers gives prescriptions containing Lotus [3].

Pepper : Is a well know condiment. Used in Arabic Medecine, (see David of Antioch, in his book *Tazkaret Dawoud,* Vol. 1 (p. 204). He says «it clears the voice, stops production of phlegm and cold cough, asthma, dyspnæ, foul gases and Colic»). It is still used in Indian medecine ; Dr. Sardar Jaswant Singh [4] says about it, «A good stimulant, carminative. As a valuable alternative tonic in paraplegia, chronic cough enlargements of the spleen and *other abdominal Viscera*».

[1] In the Arabic book «Eon El-Anba Fe Tabakat El Atteh, 1240 Higra, i.e. The book of the best news about ranhs of Physicians» by Mowaffak Eldin Abi El Abbas Ahmed Ibn el-Kassem Khalifa Ibn Jouness El Mokhtar El Hassan Ebn Bathan Said, it is said that the alexandrians who translated the books of Galenus were seven, those are, Stephan and Gassius and Tadrius and Akelawus and Ekladius and Jehia El Nahuri and that Akelawus was the most prominent of the Alexandrians. He was the one who arranged the sixteen books of Galenus, and they read them in order; they met daily to read and understand them.

[2] Cf. George A. Reisner, *The Hearst medical papyrus,* Vol. I, Leipzig 1905, p. 37 (*b*) vocabulary.

[3] B. Ebel, *The Papyrus Ebers*, Copenhagen 1937, p. 80.

[4] Dr. Sardar Jaswant Singh, *Practical Nature Therapy,* Lucknow 1942, p. 255.

AnIsl 9 (1970), p. 123-126 Khalil Messiha
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