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Understanding of pathology in the light of Fusul-e-Buqrat/hippocratic aphorisms

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Abstract

The "Hippocratic Aphorisms" have exerted a singular influence over generations of physicians both in the east and in the west, it also impacted on medical practice, as the Aphorisms were so popular that both doctors and their patients knew them by heart. Hippocratic Aphorisms are divided into seven sections (*fusūl*, sg. *faṣl* in Arabic) containing between 25 (section one) to 87 aphorisms (section seven). The Arabic tradition is particularly rich, with more than a dozen commentaries extant in over a hundred manuscripts. These Arabic commentaries did not merely contain scholastic debates, but constituted venues for innovation and change.

Keywords: Hippocrates of KOS, hippocratic aphorisms, lemmas/*fusul*, Arabic commentaries, Galen

Introduction

Hippocrates of Kos (460-377 Before Common Era, BCE) is recognized as the father of modern medicine, Because of his everlasting and primitive work on medicine and rational conclusions, and does not rely on religious or magical beliefs ^[1, 2].

About the Book

The "Hippocratic Aphorisms" have exerted a singular influence over generations of physicians both in the east and in the west, it also impacted on medical practice, as the Aphorisms were so popular that both doctors and their patients knew them by heart ^[3]. The translation of Galen's Hippocratic commentaries that *Hunayn ibn Ishāq* produced, served as a basis for subsequent developments. Based on *Hunayn's* comments about his translation in the Epistle to 'Alī ibn Yahyā, the journey that Galen's commentary took from Greek into Arabic was a long one, that *Ġibrīl ibn Buḥtīṣū's* (d. 828) attempts at correcting the translation only made matters worse, *Hunayn* decided to undertake a fresh translation of the entire text into Syriac ^[3]. *Hunayn* says that he translated the lemmas/*fusul* of Hippocrates' original text (*faṣṣ*) into Syriac as well, not relying on other's Syriac translation of the Hippocratic lemmas/*fusul*. Hippocratic Aphorisms are divided into seven sections (*fusūl*, sg. *faṣl* in Arabic) containing between 25 (section one) to 87 aphorisms (section seven) ^[4, 5].

Some Aphorisms

1. Women in whom the uterus is cold, or remarkably humid, do not conceive, for the semen is destroyed. And when the uterus is too dry and hot, conception does not occur, because the semen corrupts for want of nourishment."
2. "Soft tumors are safe; but the crude are dangerous."
3. "Urine that is thin on the surface, and exhibits a bilious sediment, indicate disease is acute."
4. "Bubbles floating on the surface of urine denote affections of the kidneys, and that the disease will be long ^[6]."

Commentaries

Galen (129-216) cited an extensive commentary on "Hippocratic Aphorisms", as did other medical authors. The Arabic tradition is particularly rich, with more than a dozen commentaries extant in over a hundred manuscripts. These Arabic commentaries did not merely contain scholastic debates, but constituted venues for innovation and change.

"Hippocratic aphorisms" can be divided into two groups:

- A. Commentaries that are like original aphorisms divided into seven *maqālāt*/books (Arabic *maqālāt*, sg. *maqāla*);
- B. Commentaries that follow a thematic arrangement.

Galen's commentary exerted an enormous influence on how Arabic commentators understood Hippocrates' Aphorisms.

Ibn Abī Šādiq's

The majority of manuscripts follow Galen's arrangement, yet a few are thematically ordered into 20 *abwāb*/chapters (*abwāb*; sg. *bāb*). *Ibn Abī Šādiq* is conscious about the fact that he is imposing his own order on the text, perhaps in a way responding *Muhammad ibn Zakarīyā al-Rāzī's* criticism that the Hippocratic Aphorisms was badly arranged and ordered, as it were, randomly presented by Hippocrates. It is also crucial to see how *Ibn Abī Šādiq* rearranges the Hippocratic Aphorisms so that the book as a whole roughly resembles the structure of a medical encyclopaedia such as al-Mağūsī's Royal Book of Medicine (*al-Kitāb al-malakī fīl-ṭibb/Kamil us sanaat*). On the other hand, its similarity to Avicenna's Canon is negligible, supplying yet another reason to doubt the report that Ibn Abī Šādiq was Avicenna's student.

The thematic arrangement in *Ibn Abī Šādiq's* commentary is as follows:

Chapter 1: includes the first aphorism and universal judgments (*al-aḥkām al-kullīya*)

Chapter 2: Diets and regimens for healthy people

Chapter 3: Types of purging

Chapter 4: Diseases that affect people according to their age

Chapter 5: Chronic illnesses, winds and rains

Chapter 6: Diseases from head to toe

Chapter 7: Diseases affecting women

Chapter 8: Ulcers, swellings, burns, amputated limbs, and fractures

Chapter 9: Wounds

Chapter 10: Fevers

Chapter 11: Sweats

Chapter 12: Urine

Chapter 13: Sleep

Chapter 14: Crisis, critical days, purging that occurs during them and the illnesses that accompany them

Chapter 15: Regimen and diet for sick patients

Chapter 16: Convalescing patients

Chapter 17: Milk

Chapter 18: Wine

Chapter 19: Water, snow and ice

Chapter 20: Diseases that terminate when another disease occurs and kinds of purging.

Ibn Bāğğa

Ibn Bāğğa remarks that the Aphorisms was hardly available to readers without Galen's commentary accompanying it.

Alī ibn Riḍwān's

Alī ibn Riḍwān's commentary is in fact, notes extracted from Galen's commentary;

Al-Nīlī's

Al-Nīlī's commentary is explicitly advertised as glosses on Galen's commentary;

Ibn al-Quff's

Ibn al-Quff's commentary takes Galen's commentary as a starting point, although his commentary goes much beyond Galen's in length, scope and complexity. *Ibn al-Quff's* commentary is the longest commentary on the *Aphorisms* preserved in Arabic, and possibly also in any other language. He refers to a huge number of medical authorities: to the works of well-known Greek medical authors such as Galen, Hippocrates, and Erasistratus, as well as well-known Arabic authors such as Muḥammad ibn Zakarīyā al-Rāzī, Ibn Abī Šādiq and al-Mağūsī. Yet, it is clear that philosophers such as Aristotle and, above all, Avicenna, influenced how Ibn al-Quff understood individual aphorisms.

Al-Sinğārī (12th cent.)

Al-Sinğārī's commentary Interestingly, this is nearly the same order as in the thematically ordered version of *Ibn Abī Šādiq's* commentary; both are divided into 20 chapters, bearing the same titles and contents. The introduction to Ibn Abī Šādiq's thematically arranged commentary does not offer enough information to ascertain whether the text ordered along thematic lines should be attributed to the author himself or to a later scribe. Likewise, the preface suggests that *al-Sinğārī* communicated this ordering to a student orally, and the student, speaking in the first person plural, undertook the task of recopying *Sinğārī's* commentary along the lines dictated by al-Sinğārī. The recension of *al-Sinğārī's* text speaks volumes about the lasting impression that *Ibn Abī Šādiq's* commentary had on later authors.

Mūsā ibn Ubayd Allāh al-Qurṭubī (Maimonides, d. 1204) Abd al-Laṭīf al-Bağdādī (d. 1231)

Al-Bağdādī prefaces his commentary with a long introduction, discussing commentary practice, the *Aphorisms* and their place in the medical curriculum; he also bemoans the declining condition of medical education in his day. These are popular motives in *al-Bağdādī's* writing to which he returns frequently. Unlike Galen and the other Arabic *Aphorisms* commentators, *al-Bağdādī* goes through the eight "headings (*ru'ūs*)" that a commentator normally discusses before he begins writing. In *al-Bağdādī's* view, Avicenna and his medical followers place far too much emphasis on medical theory, losing sight of medicine's practical aim of bringing wellbeing to the ill.

Nağm al-Dīn Aḥmad ibn al-Minḡāh (d. 1258)

This text seems to belong to the aporetic commentary genre arising in medical circles after 1200, *Ibn al-Minḡāh's* text thus deserves further study in the history of the rise and spread of the exegetical techniques of verification (*taḥqīq*) after 1200.

Ibn al-Nafīs (d. 1288)

It has been observed that Ibn al-Nafīs' commentary is noteworthy for being brief. Gulam Jeelani says that "Qarshi wrote two commentaries on "*Fusool Buqrāt*" written by Hippocrate. One is called "Sageer" in which he wrote the text first then his commentary on the same. Another one is called "*Kabir* which comprises the real text then the commentary of the Galen lastly submitted his remarks on both, the real text as well as the Galen's commentary.

'Abdallāh ibn 'Abd al-'Azīz ibn Mūsā al-Sīwāsī (early 14th c.)

Ibn Qāsim al-Kilānī (fl. 1340-1356)

This is a thematically arranged commentary on the *Aphorisms*. Available edition is based on two manuscripts. Typical of later *Aphorisms* commentators, this author's medical thought is heavily influenced by Avicenna's *Canon of Medicine*.

Ibrāhīm al-Kīṣī and 'Abd al-Raḥīm al-Ṭabīb

It is 'Abd al-Raḥīm al-Ṭabīb's (d. between 1383 and 1387) commentary on Ibrāhīm al-Kīṣī's (fl. ca. 1300) paraphrase of the *Aphorisms*. Al-Kīṣī's text normally offers a condensed and simplified version of Ḥunayn's translation of the Hippocratic lemmas.

Translations

Hakeem Gulam Hussain Kantori translated 'Fusul e Buqrat' in Persian/farsi [7].

Hakeem Syed Khurshid Hasan Khurshid had translated into Urdu language [7].

Critics

Muhammed ibn Zakariya Razi describes the aim of writing "Kitab ul Murshid" as 'Fusul e Buqrat/Hippocratic Aphorisms' there is lot of ambiguity and lack of proper description of all aspects of medicine, but memorization is easy. so due to this goodness I intended to write a book on the style of *Buqrat's fusool*, and explaining all the ambiguities of it [8].

Ali ibn Abbas Majoosi describes the aim of writing *Kamil us sanaat* that Hippocratic in his book *fusool e Buqrat* and all in his books kept such pattern of conciseness and brevity that it has become difficult to understand the meanings of most his words. *Ibn Abī Ṣādiq's* commentary relies heavily on Galen and addresses *Muḥammad ibn Zakarīyā al-Rāzī's* criticisms of Galen in "Doubts on Galen" [8].



Fig 1: First page of *Fuṣūl Abuqrāt* [1v] (1/40), British Library: Oriental Manuscripts, or 9452, ff 1v-21r, in Qatar Digital Library <https://www.qdl.qa/archive/81055/vdc_100023646098.0x000014

Conclusion

Through proliferous works focusing on medical knowledge Hippocrates of Kos played an important role in preserving, collecting, and explaining medical knowledge. He influenced both the western and Islamic medical fraternities.

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Conflict of interest: Nil

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