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Presentation Of The Text

The Golden Treatise is a medical dissertation on medical cures and the maintenance of good health attributed to Ali ibn Musa Al-Rida' (148–203/765–818), the eighth Holy Imam of Shi'a Muslims. He wrote it at the request of the caliph of his time, Al-Ma'mun. Its title is 'The Golden Treatise' because Al-Ma'mun had ordered it to be written in gold ink in recognition of its high value.

The superiority and fame of this treatise should be adequate proof for a researcher to conclude that it is indeed from the intellectual output of Imam Al-Rida' (a). However, while citing it, renowned scholars have doubted the attribution of the dissertation to the Imam¹ in fact, its attribution to the Imam continues to be disputed till this day. In spite of this, this dissertation has not gone unnoticed and recently, there is a renewed interest in it due to the 21st century's trend towards spirituality, natural medicine, and Shi'a Islam.

Among the Imami bibliographers of the 5th to 11th centuries, the dissertation became known through the initial transmission of Muhammad ibn Jumhur al 'Ammi, a Imami transmitter from Basra, or al-Hassan ibn Muhammad al-Nawfali, who is described as "highly esteemed and trustworthy" by al-Najjashi. This text has been transcribed by Abu Muhammad Harun ibn Musa Tal 'akbari from Muhammad ibn Himam ibn Sahl.

Several scholars have attempted to write commentaries on this dissertation².

The Significance Of This Dissertation

Islamic medicine³, like all traditional medicine, is a holistic form of medicine. It provides various therapeutic means to completely heal a person, such as:

- Spiritual healing through alms-giving,
- Dhikr (remembrance of God through repetition of His Name and Attributes),
- Mind-Body therapy through prayers, dietary, aroma, and herbal therapy,

- Applied therapy through leeches' therapy (hirudotherapy)[4](#), cupping, and massage.

This wholeness stems from Islam's cosmic vision of creation, in which all creatures are seen as closely intertwined. The body, the microcosm, is seen as a duplicate or a reflection of the universe, the macrocosm. Health and disease[5](#) are mainly matters regarding the interfaces and interactions between these two worlds.

After being overshadowed for approximately 150 years by other forms of healing, from approximately the year 1850 onwards, this traditional medicine, known now as alternative, holistic, or complementary, has made it come back and is featuring again on medical agendas. This traditional medicine is coming to the rescue of modern medicine from its powerlessness in healing numerous diseases. This should not cause surprise because modern medicine has a materialistic approach; it is incomplete because it assesses the human body in isolation from its environment and spirit. In 1987, the World Health Organization formalized the value of traditional medicine and over the past few decades, people have started to hear more about postmodern medicine or integrative medicine, which aims to reconcile traditional and modern medicine[6](#).

Historians of Islamic medicine have in large extent neglected the role played by the medical traditions of the Shi'a Imams with regards to the first periods of their establishment, communication, and assimilation into medical knowledge[7](#).

The Golden Treatise differs from the well-known *Tibb al Nabawi* (Prophetic medicine) in its doctrinal elaboration and its medical content. For instance, in this dissertation there are compounded prescriptions whereas in the *Tibb al Nabawi* there are only prescriptions using single items. The reason for this difference is that both are adapted to different times and space frames; that of the Prophet Muhammad (S) was for the Arab desert surroundings and at the early establishment of the religion of Islam, while in the case of Imam Al-Sadiq (a)[8](#), and especially Imam Al-Rida' (a), they were for a time of scientific renaissance and a strong 'court culture' in which caliphs invited scholars from different cultural backgrounds to hold in-depth discourses with them[9](#). The period of Imam Rida' (a) was the golden period of medicine in the Islamic world, with renowned Muslim physicians like Tabari (810–855), Razi (865–925), Ahwazi (925–994), and the great medical wise man, Ibn Sina (980–1013).

The Golden Treatise presents interesting and unique features compared to the other religious medical collections of the same epoch. It is especially noteworthy for its notable level of assimilation of pre-Islamic scientific doctrines and notions from a few centuries. Examples of the same caliber and type are found in the Sunni commentaries of *Tibb al Nabawi*. It can be safely claimed that this dissertation is one of the most precious pieces of Islamic legacy dealing with the science of medicine. It is the oldest synthesizing of galenic and pre-Islamic knowledge that is encompassed in the medical religious traditions of Islam. Another salient feature of the dissertation is that its physiological, anatomical, and pathological lexicon is the same as that which we find in important Arabic medical books like Ibn Sina's (980–1037) *Qanun*.

The research presented in this dissertation facilitates designing a new model of lifestyle modification that could very possibly lead to reductions in many diseases, especially and certainly not limited to the more well-known diseases such as diabetes and cardiovascular diseases. Preventive medicine is the most important way to health preservation and this dissertation is the oldest medical text and among the first books in preventive medicine and health preservation which was written in the Islamic world by a Muslim¹⁰.

Discussion about a person's diet constitutes the cornerstone of this dissertation; diet is numbered as one of the six principles (*sitta daruriyya*) of good health¹¹.

While the dissertation appears to very simplistic, which was intentional in order to address the mentality at Imam's time, the content is in fact very deep, multidimensional, and complicated in its implications to a non-understanding mind. It needs a scientific lens to study it, understand it in its entirety, and to conduct lengthy research on it to unveil its secrets and uncover its treasures. At the least, it should be compared to modern scientific facts¹².

This inclusive, scientific, and invaluable dissertation is a summary and intersection of a number of medical sciences, such as anatomy, biology, physiology, pathology, and the science of health care. It provides most of the knowledge related to the science of preventive medicine, nutrition, chemistry, and a large portion of other sciences as well. What is most eye opening is that all of this greatness is found within a dissertation written during a period of time in which medical science was still primitive?

The Golden Treatise states that four substances or humors (*Taba'i' or khalT or mizaj*) determine a person's health:

- blood (dam)
- yellow bile (safra')
- black bile (sawda)
- phlegm(balgham)

These four substances are responsible for the nutrition, growth and metabolism of an organism. They originate in the digestive process, and their correct proportion and balance maintains health. Per the dissertation's teachings, nutrition and traditional medicine may be used to cure any imbalances, the liver plays an important role in producing and maintaining the required proportions, and a person becomes sick when their proportions are altered.

The dissertation can be divided into fourteen major areas of study:

1. Description of the body as a realm, which is supervised by the heart

2. The factors that best suit the body according to its humors
3. Recipe of the Imam's syrup (*sharbat Imam Al-Rida' (a)*)
4. Effects of the consumption of specific foods
5. Bathing etiquette (*adab al hammam*)
6. Principles for the good maintenance of internal organs (*al aj'iza' al dakhiliyya*)
7. Travelling etiquette (*adab al safar*)
8. Humoralism (*qiwa' al nafs wa al Taba'at al 'arba'*)
9. Sleeping etiquette (*adab al nawm*)
10. Teeth-brushing etiquette (*adab al miswak*)
11. Disposition of the body according to life development stages (*halat al insan hasab al fusul*)
12. Cupping etiquette (*adab al hajama*)
13. Incompatible foods (*al aghziyya' al mutanafiyya*)
14. Sexual intercourse etiquette (*adab al muqaraba*)

1. See the Appendix 2.

2. See the Appendix 2.

3. See the chart of the traditional and Islamic medicine in the Appendix 4.

4. <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Hirudo> [1] medicinalis Medicinal use

5. <https://www.leechestherapy.com/about-leeches> [2]

Post-Modern Medicine: Reconciling Traditional and Modern Medical Practice; Kaynama MRa , Saberi Mb , Tazmini Gc, International Journal of Endocrinology and Metabolism, 2008, p.60. {<http://endometabol.com/1914.fulltext> [3]}

6. Idem, p.61.

7. Fabrizio Speziale. – La Risala al dhahabiyya traite medical attribue a l'Imam Ali al Riza Luqman. Annales des Presses Universitaires d'Iran, 2004, 20 (2), pp. 7 – Revue semestrielle, 1

8. The sayings of all the Imams especially the 6th and the 8th include, like those of the Prophet, multiples references on medical content. These references have been consigned in canonical Shi'a traditions collections like Al Kafi but this stuff has been as well-consigned in a medical treatise under the name: 'Tibbol Al A'imma compiled by the sons of Bistam ibn Safir disciple of Imam Jafar and Im'am Musa al Kazim, Abd Allah and Al Husayn in the tenth century. It has been translated into English from Arabic in the Oxford University. Trad. Angl. editée par A. Newman, Islamic medical wisdom, the tibt al-A'imma. 1991. For the medical teachings of Al-Imamal Sadiq, see: Fahd T-. 1970."Ga'f-ar as-Sadiq et la tradition scientifique arabe ">. in Le Shi'isme imamite" Paris. pp. 131-142.

9. Court Cultures in the Muslim World. Seventh to nineteenth centuries. Edited by Albrecht Fuess and Jan-Peter Hartung, 2011.

10. Herbalism Ebrahim Azarpour, Herbalism in MedicAl-ImamReza Ebrahim , journal on new biological reports, Islamic Azad University, Racht and Lahijan, 2015, p.4.{www.researchtrend.net/ [4]}

11. See in appendix, the chart 1. 4. Yasin T. Al-Jibouri., Kerbala and Beyond: An Epic of Immortal Heroism, 2011, U.S.A.,

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Links

[1] <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Hirudo>

[2] <https://www.leechestherapy.com/about-leeches>

[3] <http://endometabol.com/1914.fulltext>

[4] <http://www.researchtrend.net/>