

History of Medicine in Iran

The Discourse of Medicine in the Čahār Maqāla (Four Discourses) of Nezami Aruzi of Samarghand

Ahmadreza Afshar MD¹**Abstract**

Nezami Aruzi prepared Čahār Maqāla (Four Discourses) as a guide and admonishment for the rulers and kings. The fourth discourse of Čahār Maqāla with 12 anecdotes is devoted to the science of medicine and the characteristics of the physicians. The discourse presents the name of the eminent scientists, physicians, as well as Farsi and Arabic medical books that had professional acceptance in the medieval in Persia. The author has described how medicine was studied in the medieval in Persia and has presented notes on the physiology of the nervous system, pulse, uroscopy, fever, spiritual affairs and medical ethics. The current essay is a brief review of the medical subjects in Čahār Maqāla.

Keywords: Čahār Maqāla, history of medicine, Nezami Aruzi

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Nezami Aruzi of Samarghand and Čahār Maqāla

Ahmad Ibn Umar Ibn Ali of Samarghand (1110 – 1161 AD) poetically is known as Nezami Aruzi. He was entitled Aruzi because he was a master of Aruzi style of Persian poem.¹ His reputation is mainly because of Čahār Maqāla (Four Discourses) which is his only work completely survived (Figure 1).^{2,3} He was primarily a poet and courtier; however, it is inferred from the anecdotes in Čahār Maqāla that he practiced astrology and medicine when occasion arose.¹⁻⁴

Nezami Aruzi believed that the rulers and kings should be familiar or have close associates acquainted with the secretarial art to ensure good orders to their kingdom, poetic art to perpetuate their good names, astrology to determine the good time for their jobs and medicine to keep their good health. Therefore, he prepared a discourse on each subject that collectively is known as Čahār Maqāla (Four Discourses) to admonish and guide the rulers and kings. Čahār Maqāla was prepared in 551AH (1156 AD) and was dedicated to Hesam Addin Abul-Hassan-Ali Ibn Fakherdin-Masud Ibn Husayn, who was a prince of the Al-e Shansab or Shansab dynasty of kings (moluk) of Ghur.¹⁻⁴

Čahār Maqāla is an important masterpiece in Persian literature since it has described several historical events, and episodes in the life of scientists, physicians and men of letters and its unique Farsi literary language.⁴ It consists of a preface and four discourses. Every discourse begins with an introduction section and followed by several anecdotes. The first discourse is about the essence of the secretarial art and the nature of the perfect secretary and what is in related to it. The second discourse is about the essence of the poetic art and the talent of the poet. The third discourse is about the essence of the science of astronomy and the competence of the

astrologer. The fourth discourse is about the essence of the science of medicine and the behavior and demeanor of the physicians.^{2,3} Čahār Maqāla has been translated into English (Figure 2), French, Italian, Russian, Swedish and Urdu.¹⁻⁴ The current essay is a brief review of the medical subjects in Čahār Maqāla.

The preface

The preface consists of five sections and an anecdote. The author has discussed about the human beings and physiology of the nervous system in the preface. The nervous system faculties were divided to the “perception faculty” who discovers and discerns things, and the “motor faculty” who brings voluntary movement. The author has subdivided the perception faculty to external and internal senses. The five senses of touch, taste, sight, hearing and smell were considered as the external senses. The compound sensation, imagination, cogitative, apprehensive and retentive faculties were considered as the five internal senses, which are the function of the brain. He has further located the lodge of each internal sense in the brain regions.^{2,3}

The fourth discourse

The fourth discourse begins with a definition of medicine: “the medicine is an art that maintain and restore health in the human body, whereby the body decorates with long hair, clear complexion, good fragrance and good looking.” Then, the author describes the characteristics of the good physicians. A physician should have soft temper to recognize the nobility of the human soul, a wise nature acquainted with logic, and excelling in acumen with the help of God. The physician should have agile intelligence for correct and sharp judgment, to derive known from unknowns and for correct understanding of the ailments. The author has discussed about pulse, urine and fever. The physicians should take the pulse rate by examining the wrist or side of the neck. A pulse consists of a systole, a diastole and the intervening pause. According to the “Cannon” of Abu Ali Ibn Sina (Avicenna 980 – 1037 AD), there

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are ten sorts of pulses. Inspection of the urine appearance, color and sediments (uroscopy) may give a clue to special conditions. Different types of fever may be noticed as a special diagnostic sign. The discourse on medicine consists of twelve anecdotes.^{2,3}

The Anecdotes

In the Anecdote one, the author describes healing by praying. Khawja Imam Abu Bakr Daqqaq was a physician who failed to treat his patient with severe colic pain. The remedies were not effective and the physician became disappointed of a cure. In the next morning, the physician was waiting for the patient's death. He read Fatiha from Quran and breathed toward the patient. However, the physician became aware that the patient had obtained relief. The physician believed that this was from the blessing effect of the Scripture. The patient received cure from the divine dispensary. The author concluded that the physicians should be of good faith and follow the commands and prohibition of holy laws.^{2,3}

The author continues on how the medicine should be studied. The medical students should procure and read the "Fusul" (Aphorisms) of Hippocrates (460 – 370 BC), the "Masael" (Questions) of Hunyan Ibn Ishag (809 – 873AD), the "Murshid" (Guide) of Mohammad Ibn Zakariaya Al-razi of Ray (Rhazes, circa 854 – 925 AD) and the abstracts of these works which were provided by Abu Sahl Nili (964 – 1024).^{2,3}

Then, students should read the intermediate works such as: the "Thesaurus" (Dhakhira) of Thabit Ibn Qurra (826 – 901 AD), the Al-Mansuri of Mohammad Ibn Zakariaya Al-razi of Ray, the "Hiddaya" (Direction) of Abu Bakr Ajwaini, the "Kefaya" (Sufficiency) of Ahmad Ibn Faraj and the "Aghraz" (Aims) of Seyyed Ismail Jurjani (1041 – 1136 AD) (2, 3).

Detailed treatise such as "Sitta Ashar" (Sixteen) of Galen (129 – 199 AD), "Hawi" (Continents) of Mohammad Ibn Zakariaya Al-razi of Ray, the "Kamelu Sanaat" (Complete Practitioner) of 'Ali Ibn Al-'Abbas Al-Majusi (930 – 994), "Hundered Chapters" (Sad Bab) of Abu Sahl Masihi (970 – 1010), "Cannon" of Abu Ali Ibn Sina (Avicenna), and the "Dhakhira-i- Kharazm Shahi" (Thesaurus of the Shah of Khwarazm) of Ismael Jorjani (1042 – 1137 AD) should be also read.^{2,3}

The author believed that a physician attain worth of confidence when he became a master of the first volume of "Cannon" and reach to the age of forty years old. However, since there is no confidence on memory, he should keep with himself smaller treatises such as: the "Tuhfatul Muluk" (Gift of kings) of Mohammad Ibn Zakariaya Al-razi, "Kifaya" of Ibn Manduya of Isfahan, the "Tadarok Anwae Khata Fi Tadbir Tebbi" (Provision against of all sort errors in Medical treatment) of Avicenna, as well as the "khafi Alae" and the "Yadegar" (Memoranda) of Seyyed Ismael Jorjani.^{2,3}

Although the author has provided a list of Farsi and Arabic medical books that had professional acceptance in the medieval in Persia; however, he believed that all the information from the named sources could be found in Cannon and if one becomes master in Cannon, he would be independent from the other books.^{2,3}

In the anecdote two, Bukht-Yishu, a Christian physician in Baghdad, visited a patient with diarrhea who was a relative of Mammun the Caliph. Various treatments were ineffective and the general condition of the patients became worse. Therefore, Bukht-Yishu tried a risky treatment by relying on God's grace. He gave the patient a purgative. The patient's diarrhea increased

but stopped by the next day. Bukht-Yishu reasoned that if he did not proceed the remedy the patient would be died; however, there was a possibility and hope for curing by starting the treatment.^{2,3}

In the anecdote three, Avicenna related in the book of "Kitabul Mabda Va Maad" (Book of the Origin and the Return) that how a physician in the court of one of the House of Saman had cured a maid with rheumatic swelling in her joints at once. The king accompanied by the physician demanded for food. A maid carried a tray of food on her head. She bent down to put the tray on the ground but she could not stand upright again because of rheumatoid swelling of her joint. The king immediately ordered the physician to cure the maid. The physician tried to correct the posture first by removing the veil from her head; however, it was not effective. Then he ordered to remove her trousers but she cured immediately and stood up straight. The physician reasoned that the warmth of the shame had dissolved the thick rheum.^{2,3}

In the anecdote four, Amir Mansur Nuh Ibn Nasr from the House of Saman, developed a chronic ailment and Muhammad Zakariaye Rhazi, the composer of the book of "Kitabe-Al-Mansuri", was summoned to treat him. Rhazi took the patient to a hot bath, prepared a concoction and incited the king to extreme anger to change the patient's humours to a more desirable, mature and perfect conditions. The treatment was successful and ailment dissolved.^{2,3}

The anecdote five is the famous story of how Avicenna diagnosed love-sickness of a relative of Qabus Wushmgir in Gurgan. Avicenna was brought to visit the patient. He examined the patient's pulse and urine and realized that he was felt in love. The patient's pulse gave a strange flutter, when he heard the name of the district, street, house and name of his beloved girl.^{2,3}

Anecdote six is a report of a porter who suffered from a severe headache due to plethora. Al-Majusi, the author of the "Kamelu-Senaat", treated him by inducing bleeding from his nostrils. Al-Majusi examined the patient's pulse and urine and ordered to tighten the patient's neck with his turban snugly. Then he ordered to strike the patient's head with twenty blows and forced him to run until the blood began to run from his nostrils. Then the patient felt asleep while bleeding. However, when the patient aroused he was cured and his headache did not return.^{2,3}

In the anecdote seven, Avicenna cured a patient with a delusional believe. A prince of the House of Buya believed that he was transformed to a cow. He starved and refused eating and asked to be slaughtered. Avicenna visited the prince and ordered the preparations for the killing of the cow. While Avicenna was sharpening his knife, he touched the chest of the prince and told that the cow was too lean to be killed. Avicenna ordered that the cow (the Prince) should become fatter to be suitable for slaughtering. The prince started to eat in the hope of became suitable for slaughtering. However, the prince recovered and his health restored in a month.^{2,3}

In the anecdote eight, an honored physician named Adib Ismael visited an unconsciousness butcher due to stroke. The butcher used to eat warm fat from the belly's of the slaughtered sheep. The physician had noticed his harmful habit and prognosticated that his health was endangered. He applied remedies for the unconsciousness butcher. The butcher arose after three days, but remained paralyzed for the rest of his life.^{2,3}

Anecdote nine describes the confrontation of the Sheikhol Islam Abdullah Ansari who was fanatically hated from Adib Ismael who was a physician and a man of science in Harat. The Sheikh tried several times to hurt Adib Ismael and burn his books. The

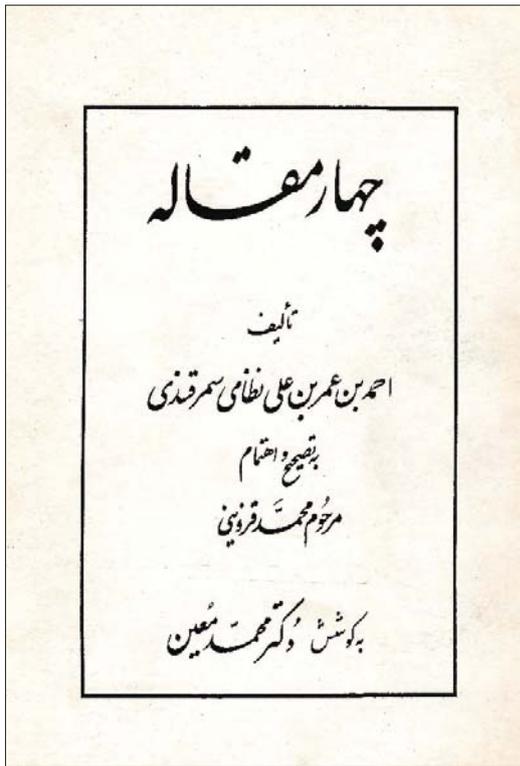


Figure 1. Front page of the Čahār Maqāla.¹

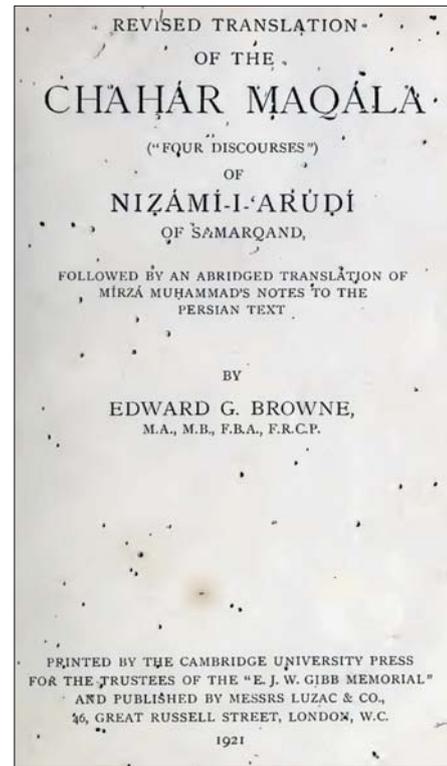


Figure 2. Front page of the translation of Čahār Maqāla translated by Edward G. Browne.²

Sheikh became ill and in the course of his illness he developed hiccough that could not be cured by treatments. His urine was sent to Adib Ismael for diagnosis. The physician realized that the sample belonged to the Sheikh. The physician provided a mixture of two ingredients, along with a message of “you should learn the science, not burn the books” sent to the Sheikh. The Sheikh’s hiccough immediately stopped after consuming the remedy.^{2,3}

The anecdote ten describes a case of a referral pain from the shoulder region to finger tips. Galen in Alexandria treated the finger tips pain in a noble man by applying an unguent on his shoulder. Galen discerned that the pain was a referral pain from the shoulder region to the finger tips.^{2,3}

In the anecdote eleven, Paul the Catholicos in Shiraz was summoned to treat a vitiligo patch on the chest of Fadl Ibn Yahya Al-Barmaki who was ashamed of its appearance. Paul the Catholicos was the most skillful physician in Iraq, Khorasan, Syria and Pars. First, the Fadl presented a factitious complaint to the physician but the patient did not follow his recommended diet. In the next day, Paul the Catholicos inspected the patient’s urine (uroscopy) and realized that the patient did not observed his diet; but he became aware that it was an examination for proving his skills. Then the Fadl disclosed his chief complaint but all the treatments were not effective. The physician suspected that there was a spiritual cause for the devel-

opment of the vitiligo. In fact, Fadl’s father was displeased with him. The Fadl ask forgiveness from his father, satisfied him and the vitiligo cured. The physician reasoned that the appearance of the vitiligo was due to spiritual dissatisfactions.^{2,3}

In the anecdote twelve, the author, Nezami Aruzi, has described how he had treated a girl with hypermenorrhea. He examined the girl’s pulse and found it strong. The girl had healthy temperaments, a clear complexion and a favorable age. The author ordered to a phlebotomist for bloodletting from her basilica veins. The girl was cured by removing the bad blood from her body.^{2,3}

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