Regimen of elders in Kitāb al-Dhakhīra fī ‘Ilm al-Ṭibb by Thābit b. Qurra

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ABSTRACT

Objective: This study aimed to examine the chapter related to regimen of elders in Kitāb al-Dhakhīra fī ‘Ilm al-Ṭibb by Thābit b. Qurra (836–901 AD), a renowned translator and scholar of the translation period of Islamic science and medicine.

Materials and Methods: An exact copy of Kitāb al-Dhakhīra fī ‘Ilm al-Ṭibb edited by G. Sobhy and printed in al-Maṭba‘at al-ʿĀmīriyye was examined and compared to the manuscript in the Şehit Ali Paşa Collection, nr. 2028, in the Süleymaniye Manuscript Library in Istanbul. The subchapter on regimen of elders was translated and has been discussed.

Results: Information on regimen of elders is the last subheading of the first chapter, which is on health protection. Considering the content, the physiology and pathology of senility and its related regimen are coherent with the principles of the humoral theory.

Conclusion: As Thābit b. Qurra mentioned, the main source of information regarding regimen of elders in Kitāb al-Dhakhīra fī ‘Ilm al-Ṭibb seems to be the writings of Galen.

Keywords: Thābit b. Qurra, Kitāb al-Dhakhīra fī ‘Ilm al-Ṭibb, regimen of elders, senility, history of medicine

INTRODUCTION

Geriatric medicine was introduced by Ignatz Nascher in 1909 with the term geriatrics for elderly care. Although it is a young specialty, information about old age and the related diseases has existed since ancient times (1). Information about aging and diseases among the elderly can be found in some aphorisms in sections I, II, III, VI, and VII of the Hippocrates’ (460–370 BC) Aphorisms (2, 3). Plato (428/427–348/347 BC), Aristotle (384–322 BC), Plutarch (46–after 119 AD), and Galen (129–200 AD) are also among the ancient writers who documented information about old age in their works (4).

Galen of Pergamum discussed issues about old age in the fifth book of his important work De sanitate tuenda and mentioned practices that can be followed for a healthy old age and treatment methods for some diseases. Galen, mentioning that any aspect present in excess must be corrected by using the opposite, informs that old age is dry and cold; therefore, the correction should be performed with moisturizing and warming substances. He further explains comprehensively about matters related to old age in accordance with the principles of humoral pathology (2, 5).

Oribasius of Pergamum (325–403 AD), an ancient writer, also wrote a chapter on old age in both Synopsis and Euporistae. Overlapping information in Synopsis and Euporistae indicates that the information documented in Synopsis is a summary of that documented in Euporistae. The information documented by Oribasius about old age in the aforementioned works seems to be a summary of the information documented by Galen in De sanitate tuenda (2, 6). On the other hand, Paul of Aegina (625–690 AD) presents the information he received from Oribasius’ Synopsis in a section where he mentions the regimen of the elderly. In this case, it can be said that Paul’s work was indirectly influenced by Galen’s work (2, 7).

Abū Bakr Muḥammad b. Zakaryyā al-Rāzī (865–925 AD), one of the famous physicians of the Islamic world in the Medieval times, also briefly recorded some basic principles about the regimen of the elderly in his work al-Manṣūrī fi al-Ṭibb. According to Rhazes, the elderly should avoid hard work, fatigue and sexual intercourse as well as blood-letting unless mandatory. They should eat easy-to-digest food, often take a bath, sleep, perfume themselves and rest, drink beverage/wine at a mild temperament and quantity, and also mild clarity and delicacy (2, 8).

Thābit b. Qurra and Kitāb al-Dhakhīra fī ‘Ilm al-Ṭibb

Thābit b. Qurra (836–901 AD) was one of the most important learned men of the translation period of Islamic world in Medieval times (Fig. 1). He was a Sabian from Harran. When his opinions conflicted with the community he lived in, he moved to Kefertūthā, a city near Dārā. He was taken to Baghdad and taught by a notable scholar Abū Jāfar Muḥammad b. Mūsā b. Shākīr (d. 873 AD). Then he was presented to Abūḥassān Caliph Mu-
tamiṣ and joined the palace astronomers. According to another narration, when Muwaffaq-Billah (d. 891 AD) detained his own son Muʿtamiṣ, Thābit was his tutor. Thus, he became one of the palace astronomers during Muʿtadid’s caliphate period (892–902 AD). Thābit knew Syriac, Arabic, and Greek. He was known to have written and translated works on mathematics, astronomy, and medicine and corrected previously translated works (9–11).

Kitāb al-Dhakhīra fī ’Ilm al-Ṭibb is accepted as his most famous work on medicine. The introduction of the book stated that the book contained all essential information on medicine regarding the definition and cure of illness in compliance with Thābit’s experience and was compiled by Thābit for his son (9, 12).

The first of the 31 chapters of the book is on health protection. This chapter discussed food, drink, massage, exercise, baths, sexual intercourse, and health regimen regarding human life stages as subheadings. The chapter on health regimen regarding human life stages discussed regimen for the children, the young, the middle-aged, and the elders (12). This study aimed to examine the subchapter on regimen of elders of the first chapter, which is on health protection in Thābit’s Kitāb al-Dhakhīra fī ’Ilm al-Ṭibb.

MATERIALS and METHODS

An exact copy of Kitāb al-Dhakhīra fī ’Ilm al-Ṭibb edited by G. Sobhy and printed in 1928 in al-Maṭbaʿat al-Āmīriyya in Cairo was examined (Fig. 2) (13) and was compared with the manuscript in the Şehit Ali Paşa Collection, nr. 2028, in the Süleymaniye Manuscript Library in Istanbul (Fig. 3–5) (Appendix) (14). The subheading “regimen of elders” is translated from Arabic to Turkish and then to English. The information obtained is presented in the Results section and discussed in the context of the history of medicine literature.

RESULTS

Thābit b. Qurra informs that elders have cold and dry bodies and this is corrected by using warming and moistening things like warming and moistening foods.1 According to Galen’s Aphorisms, elders should eat things that are free from strong flavors, such as acid, pungent, salty, bitter, and sour and are light and delicious. They should drink wine/drink moderate in color, smell, and taste and should use these in required temperament and amount. They should bathe in fresh waters2 and receive massage with warm oils.

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1 “But we must endeavor to correct everything by means of the opposite excess; as, for example, in old age. For age is cold and dry, as has been shown in my book On the Constitution. And the correction of this is effected by moistening and warming agents (5, p. 195).”

2 “And such are warm baths of sweet waters, and drinking of wine, and such of the foods as are at the same time moistening and warming (5, p. 195).”
Exercise for elders should be in proportion to their strength, i.e., low riding for weak ones and walking for strong ones. The best riding and walking are the accustomed ones. Elders should avoid all evacuating and strenuous exertion, especially sexual intercourse and walking are the accustomed ones. Elders should avoid all evacuating and strenuous exertion, especially sexual intercourse and walking.

According to Galen, healthy elders should not be kept from enema with olive oil because it wets and moistens hard excretions and makes what passes slippery. Accordingly, it moistens withered and desiccated bodies of elders. In Galen’s opinion, bathing twice or thrice a month is useful to very old and weak elders with good tolerance. Elders benefit from the ginger jam and the rinds of its root. Eating garlic does not harm those who are used to it, particularly in times/cold times after eating coarse foods, which cause dropsy or generate stone in their kidneys when consumed frequently.

The elderly also need to avoid dispraised foods that produce unfavorable chyme. These foods are divided into three groups: 1. foods that increase yellow bile (all pungent ones, such as mustard, pepper, garlic, onion, rue, most spices, pungent pickles and sardines, rabitha (a kind of small fish)/seeds and all desiccated, warm-dry foods), 2. foods that increase phlegm (fresh rough fish, waterfowl, most vegetables and fresh fruits [peach, apricot, cucumber, snake cucumber, and nonsweet watermelon], fatty and oily foods, milk, and milk products), and 3. foods that increase black bile (beef, male goat’s meat, salted mountain game meat, salted fish, buttermilk, curdled milk, dried and old cheese, cabbage, eggplant, and lentils).

Referring to Galen, Thābit asserts that the opposite is cured by the opposite and similar is protected by similar. Accordingly, harm of excessive sweet is removed with mitigating sour things like oxymel, tart pomegranate juice, and quince wine/drink made with vinegar and, if this is impracticable, with vinegar mixed with water and vice versa. Harm of excessive fatty and oily things is removed with constipating pungent things, such as pickles, garlic, onion, caper, chestnut, acorn put up with vinegar, roasted myrtle berries, Syrian carob, nabk, and azarole.

It is approved that some of their [elders’] appetite may be fulfilled as much as to intercept the strength of thought. The aim here is similar to the aim to fodder quadrupeds. The intention here is not the appetite of the quadruped, but end of the journey.

It is ordered to keep away from those with contagious diseases that are generally seven, i.e., leprosy, scabies, smallpox, measles, halitosis, ophthalmia, and pestilential diseases, and to be cautious of seven inherited diseases from parents, i.e., leprosy, vitiligo, emaciation, consumption, melancholy, gout, and epilepsy.

For the ones that have bodies easily ready to fullness/plethora, it is necessary to reduce the quantity and quality of food or one of them and to increase the exercise.

**DISCUSSION**

Thābit began his work that covered diseases from head to toe with a chapter related to principles of health protection. In his valuable review on Kitāb al-Dhakhīra fī ʿIlm al-Ṭibb, Meyehof (9) indicated the references with their authors that Thābit used, such as Hippocrates, Galen, Ibn Māsawayh, al-Kindī, Ḥunayn b. Iṣḥāq, Yūḥānna...
Thābit referred to Galen’s commentary on Hippocrates’ Aphorisms as one of the references in the chapter on regimen of elders. In comparisons, it is recognized that another source is Galen’s De sanitate tuenda (4) as Meyerhof pointed out. Considering the content, physiology and pathology of senility and related regimen are coherent with the principles of humoral pathology. It is understood that Thābit adopted Galen’s opinions in these parts since he cited from Galen.

In a work on Islamic science and medicine, Meyerhof (15) said, “It was Hunayn who gave Galen his supreme position in the Middle Ages in the Orient, and indirectly also in the Occident.” In Bayat’s Tip Tarhi (History of Medicine), the information on translated works in the translation period of the Islamic world in Medieval times supports Meyerhof’s opinion (16). Bayat (16) said that thirteen works of Hippocrates, 64 works of Galen, and twenty works of Rufus of Ephesus were translated into Arabic in the translation period that lasted about two centuries. Fazlıoğlu (10) asserted that Thābit is considered as one of the two great translators of Islamic civilization with Hunayn. In the chapter on Almagest in Kashf al-Zunun, Katip Çelebi informed (17):

“As told, no one could have benefited from books of wisdom if Thābit has not translated them into Arabic because Greek was not known, all books that were not translated by these people stayed as they were and they cannot be utilized (17, p. 1271).”

There are many adaptations from Galen among Thābit’s works on medicine (18). It is appropriate to say what Meyerhof said about Hunayn regarding Galen about Thābit b. Qurra or to include Thābit in Meyerhof’s comment. It can be claimed that Thābit had a significant contribution to the settlement of Galenism in Islamic science and medicine in Medieval times. Although Hippocrates’ Aphorisms was translated into Arabic by Hunayn (15, 19), it is remarkable that Thābit included Hippocrates’ opinions with Galen’s comments in his works.

As a conclusion, it is understood from the information given by Thābit b. Qurra that the main source of the information on regimen of elders is Galen’s writings in Kitāb al-Dhakhira fi ’ilm al-Tibb and this information is coherent with the principles of humoral paradigm.

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brary, Şehit Ali Paşa Collection, nr. 2028 [Türkiye Yazma Eserler Kurumu Başkanlığı, Süleymaniye Yazma Eser Kütüphanesi, Şehit Ali Paşa Koleksiyonu, no. 2028]. v. 1a,5a–6a.
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APPENDIX

Aqua Tiberius, in the Greek version of the text. However, in Arabic, the version used by Thabit ibn Qurra, the text is much more detailed and extensive. The text describes the characteristics of the two versions, and how the Arabic version is more accurate and detailed. The text also discusses the differences between the two versions, and how they are used in different contexts.

The text is written in a clear and concise manner, making it easy to understand. The author uses simple language and avoids technical jargon, which makes it accessible to a wide audience. The text is well-organized and divided into sections, making it easy to follow.

Overall, the text is a valuable resource for anyone interested in the history of science and medicine. The text provides a detailed and accurate account of the life and work of Thabit ibn Qurra, and the contributions he made to the field of medicine. The text is a must-read for anyone interested in the history of science and medicine.
Acıduman and Acıduman. Elders in Kitāb al-Dhakhīra by Thābit b. Qurra

Şehit Ali Paşa, nr. 2028: "الحالة"

"بارد بالبس" "الرطب"

فاؤضه العادة من زوك وشي "هجر" "ويعتاد"

"الطريقية" "ويعتندوا في اجتذاب" "وهي" "تولد" "أكثار" "والصحنا والبروز" "واكثر" "والمذاب واللابن" "ومن مديده إلى شيء من ذلك فلا بد من شيء" "ضدها" "فإن تعذرت هذه" "شام بلوط" "والعكس" "أكثار" "شوهانها المقدار" "الفكر في ذلك" "كربادك" "مالخوليا" "قل المارد من ذلك 만 تبلغ غاية سفرك" "عن" "ق في أكثر" "شتهي علي باشا، nr. 2028: "absent in Şehit Ali Paşa, nr. 2028.

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