RAZI AND HIS BOOK ON AL-TIN
AL NISHABURI

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A few miles from the present city of Tehran, capital of Iran, lie the ruins of the ancient city of Rayy\(^1\). Many scholars in different fields of learning, called Razi\(^2\), have arisen from there. The most important among these is Abu Bakr Muhammad ibn-i Zakariya\(^\text{a}\), who is known in Latin as Rhazes (251/865-320/932). Razi, in accordance with the tradition of his time, was a physician and a philosopher. He gained medical fame in Europe at the beginning of the thirteenth century with works such as: Continens (al-Havi), Liber Almunsoris (al-Tibb al-Mansuri), Smallpox and Measles (al-Hasbah wa al-Judari) and other works\(^3\). As a philosopher however, he has become better known only during this century through the efforts of the late Paul Kraus\(^4\) and Suleiman Pines of the Hebrew University in Jerusalem\(^5\). My interest in the philosophical writings of Razi led me to several years of research and the publication, in 1970, of a comprehensive work on his philosophical thought\(^6\). Inevitably, I came across medical information, some of which had not been previously studied; for example, Razi\'s book which concerned a certain kind of earth prepared in Nishapur\(^7\) and exported to other places, similar to Terra sigillata in Europe\(^8\). Scholars who have compiled bibliographies of Razi, such as Ibn-al-Nadim\(^9\) (d. 377/987), al-Biruni\(^10\) (d. 440/1078), Ibn Abi Usaiba\(^11\) (d. 668/1269) have all attributed a book to Razi called: Fanna illa' in al-Muntaqil bihi 'almanafi.

In the translation of Ibn-i-Nadim this title has been recorded as: A section concerning that clay in which one is beneficially immersed\(^12\). In the translation of al-Biruni, Julius Ruska has translated the title in the following way: Daruber, das in dem von ihm [sc. Galien] eigneuferten Tom nutzliche Eigenschaften enthalten sind\(^13\). G.S.A. Rankine translated the title from Ibn Ali Usaib\'s as follows: Dissertatio quod futum translatum continetur\(^14\) utilitates. In certain Persian books on the works of Razi the following translation is made of this title: a book concerning a kind of earth which would contain benefits if transferred\(^15\). None of these titles, however, is correct; the confusion arises from the word Muntaqil, derived from Naql, meaning to transfer, which in this case is not correct. The correct form is Mutanaqal from Naqal meaning tablet. In order to clarify the above statement I would like to present the following evidence:

1. Ibn Samajun\(^16\) (d. 392/1002), Ghafqi (d. 560/1165), and Ibn al-Baitur\(^17\) (d. 646/1248) in their respective books on simple drugs refer to the earth from Nishapur that is prepared as tablets al-Mutanaqal bihi under the heading of edible earth (Tin al-aqil). They quote in this connection passages from the above-mentioned book by Razi and also from one of his other works\(^18\).

2. Tha'alibi\(^19\) (d. 429/1037) who was from Nishapur, in a work about the attributes of cities, persons or things, says under the heading "Earth of Nishapur" (Tim Nisabur) that this earth is edible and that its like is not found anywhere else in the world, that it is imported near and far and presented to Kings. He further adds that Muhammad ibn Zakariya has described the benefits of this earth in one of his books. Finally, Tha'a'ilibi quotes a piece of poetry by a certain Ma'muni which starts with this line:

"Bestow upon me that Naqal [tablet of earth] from which we were created and to which we return."

3. Nuwairi\(^20\) (d. 733/1332), when mentioning Nishapur and its products says that 'Amr ibn Laith, the Safavid King (265/878) said: 'I have to defend this city, for its plant is rhubarb, its earth is Nuq[al (Tablet of Earth) and its stone is turquoise'. In explaining the 'Earth Tablet' he makes the same remarks about it as Tha'alibi\(^21\).

Also some scholars have used the term al-Tin al-Khurasani to denote this earth, as for example, Ibn
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Butlän (d. 456/1063) in Taqwim al Sihha22, Ibn Jazla (d. 493/1099) in Minhaj al-Bayân23 and Ibn al-Hashâhâ in a commentary upon the medical terms used in Liber al-Mansoîs24. As for the location of this earth Muslim geographical works contain some indications, for example Mârjâ, while mentioning the mines of Khorasân, states that edible earth comes from the city of Zâzâ25.

Ibn Rusta says that the Najâh earth which is exported to many parts of the world comes from a place between Nishâbûr and Qâdâ26. The term Najâh is another expression used for edible earth27. Ali Ibn-i-Rabbani-i-Tabari (fl. 236/850)28 and Ibn Ba’tûr29 have used the term Habb al-Najah (Najâh tablet).

It should be noted that Muslim physicians and pharmacologists were familiar with different kinds of earth; mostly due to Arabic translations of the works of Dioscorides (40 B.C) and Galen (d. A.D. 201). Among the physicians who listed different kinds of earth, we can mention 'Ali Ibn Rabbâni-i-Tabari in Paradise of Wisdom (Firdaus al-Fikma)30, Râzi in Continens (al-Hâvî)31 and Ibn Sina (d. 428/1037) in the Qânân.32 Of the pharmacologists Ibn Samâjân, Ghaqi, Maimonides33 (d. 601/1204) and Ibn al-Baitâr in their book on simple drugs and also al-Biruni in Kitâb al-Ihíla34 can be noted. Among Persian books the oldest to list different kinds of earths is Kitâb al-âbnîya by Muwaffaq al-Dîn Harâwî, which is written in the second half of the tenth century.35

Apart from works of medicine, mention is found of the eating of various kinds of earth in books relating to other fields. For instance, a tradition had been related from the Prophet Mohammad (PBUH) in which it is said that since God created Adam from the earth it is forbidden for his descendants to eat the earth36. Also in Persian literature it is often mentioned that whoever eats the earth is thin and has a yellowish complexion.37 These are probably allusions to the habit of eating earth rather than the use of earth for medical purposes.

Let us return to the earth of Nishâbûr, and its medical qualities. It is said to be good against nausea and vomiting and to combat the effects of greasy and sweet foods, and also that it causes contraction of the stomach.38

At present there is no trace of this earth. However, it was related to me by a physician that before World War II in a village of Khurasân a soldier who suffered from indigestion, used to prepare a tablet from a yellowish earth and what in Persian is called Jawz-i-Hindi, (Indian walnut). He used to eat this and speak of its great benefits.

The physician brought some of this to Tehran and according to him the analysis showed a high content of the substances which are now used as antacids39.

My aim has been to correct the title of the book of Râzi which had been for long misunderstood. Also I have tried to introduce different materials that throw light on the earth of Nishâbûr. It is my hope that this may serve as an introduction to further research.

REFERENCES

1. In old Persian Fagâ, in Greek, see Kent, R.G., Old Persian, New Haven, 1953, PP. 122-205.
2. For example, Fahkr-al-Dîn Râzi, the great Muslim theologian.
4. His most important work is Opera Philosophica. Cairo, 1939, in which are published the philosophical treatises of Râzi.
5. The most important work being Beiträge zur islamischen Atomlehre. Berlin, 1936, in which the author has dealt with the concept of Râzi about matter, space, and time.
7. Located in the East of Iran, Birthplace of many famous men including Umar Khayyâm.
in his 'Āthar al-Bilād (Beirut, 1389 A.H.) has quoted this story but he was mistaken in bringing the word 'al-Baqi' instead of 'al-Nuql'.
33. Ibn-i-Maymûn: Sharh i'asma'. Al-Uqqâr, Cairo, 1940, no. 172, PP. 238, 49.
34. Al-Biruni: al-Saidana, MS. no. 149 Karsunu, Turkey, and Microfilm no. 363. Tehran University Central Library.
37. See, for example, Nâs Ir-I-Khusraw: Divân, Tehran, 1305-7, A.H., P.
39. From a letter by Dr. N. Sharqi to Dr. M. Iqbal, President of the Iranian Medical Council, dated 19 June 1972.