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 Abū Bakr Muhammad ibn-i Zakariyā, who is known in Latin as Rhazes (251/865-320/932). Rāzī, 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-Ḥawī), Liber Almanorsis (al-Tibb al-Mansūrī), 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 Rāzī led me to several years of research and the preparation, 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, Rāzī’s book which concerned a certain kind of earth prepared in Nishābūr\(^7\) and exported to other places, similar to Terrasigillatae in Europe\(^8\). Scholars who have compiled bibliographies of Rāzī, such as Ibn-i-Hadim\(^9\) (d. 377/987), al-Bīrūnī\(^10\) (d. 440/1078), Ibn Abī Usāiba\(^11\) (d. 668/1269) have all attributed a book to Rāzī called: F anna li’il tin al-Muntaqī biḥt manāfī.

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-Bīrūnī, Julius Ruska has translated the title in the following way: Darüber, das in dem von ibn [sc. Galen] eignenfurthen Tom nutzliche Eigenschaften enthalten Sind\(^13\). G.S.A. Rankin translated the title from Ibn Ali Usâibî’s as follows: Dissertatio quod futum translata continent.

In certain Persian books on the works of Rāzī the following translation is made of this title: a book concerning a kind of earth which would contain benefits if transferred\(^14\). None of these titles, however, is correct; the confusion arises from the word Mantaqī, derived from Naql, meaning to transfer, which in this case is not correct. The correct form is Mutantaqīl from Naql meaning tablet. In order to clarify the above statement I would like to present the following evidence:

1. Ibn Samajjūn\(^16\) (d. 392/1002), Ghāfqi\(^7\) (d. 560/1165), and Ibn al-Baitār\(^18\) (d. 646/1248) in their respective books on simple drugs refer to the earth from Nishābūr that is prepared as tablets al-Mutanqaql bihi under the heading of edible earth (Tin al-akī). They quote in this connection passages from the above-mentioned book by Rāzī and also from one of his other works\(^19\).

2. Thāʿalibī\(^4\) (d. 429/1037) who was from Nishābūr, in a work about the attributes of cities, persons or things, says under the heading “Earth of Nishābūr” (Tim Nisabūr) 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 Zakariyā has described the benefits of this earth in one of his books. Finally, Thāʿalibī quotes a piece of poetry by a certain Maʿmūn which starts with this line:

“Bestow upon me that Naq[R tablet of earth] from which we were created and to which we return.”\(^20\)

3. Nuwālī\(^7\) (d. 733/1332), when mentioning Nishābūr 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 Naq[R Tablet of Earth] and its stone is turquoise’. In explaining the ‘Earth Tablet’ he makes the same remarks about it as Thāʿalibī\(^1\).

Also some scholars have used the term al-tin al-Khurāsānī to denote this earth, as for example, Ibn...
Butlān (d. 456/1063) in Taqwīm al-Sihhah\(^2\), Ibn Juz’ā (d. 493/1099) in Minhaj al-Bayān\(^3\) and Ibn al-Hashābi\(^4\) in a commentary upon the medical terms used in Liber al-Mansoīs\(^5\). As for the location of this earth Muslim geographical works contain some indications, for example Maqādisī, while mentioning the mines of Khorsān, states that edible earth comes from the city of Zūzān\(^6\).

Ibn Rusta says that the Najahjā earth which is exported to many parts of the world comes from a place between Nishābūr and Qīr\(^7\). The term Najahjā is another expression used for edible earth\(^7\). Ali Ibn-i-Rabbān-i-Tabāri (fl. 236/850)\(^8\) and Ibn Baitār\(^9\) have used the term Habb al-Najāh (Najāh 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 Rabbān-i-Tabāri in Paradise of Wisdom (Firdaws al-Hikma)\(^10\), Rāzī in Continens (al-Hāvī)\(^11\) and Ibn Sina (d. 428/1037) in the Qānūn.\(^12\) Of the pharmacologists Ibn Samājūn, Ghashfī, Mainonides\(^13\) (d. 601/1204) and Ibn al-Baitar in their book on simple drugs and also al-Biruni in Kitāb\(^14\) al-

saydana\(^14\) can be noted. Among Persian books the oldest to list different kinds of earths is Kitāb al-abniya by Muwaffaq al-Din Harawi, which is written in the second half of the tenth century.\(^15\)

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 earth\(^16\). Also in Persian literature it is often mentioned that whoever eats the earth is thin and has a yellowish complexion.\(^17\) 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 Nishābūr, 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.\(^18\)

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 Khurāsān 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 antacids.\(^19\)

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

REFERENCES

1. In old Persian Fagā, in Greek, see Kent, R.G., Old Persian, New Haven, 1953, PP. 222-235.

2. For example, Fakhīr al-Dīn Rāzī, the great Muslim theologian.


4. His most important work is Opera Philosophica. Cairo, 1939, in which are published the philosophical treatises of Rāzī.

5. The most important work being Beiträge zur islamischen Atomlehre. Berlin, 1936, in which the author has dealt with the concept of Rāzī about matter, space, and time.


7. Located in the East of Iran, Birthplace of many famous men including Umar Khayyām.


in his 'Āthar al-Bilād (Beirut, 1380 A.H.) has quoted this story
but he was mistaken in bringing the word 'al-Baghi' instead of
'al-Nuqā'i'.
22. Ibn Bula’n: Taqwim al-Sihha. Persian Trans., Tehran, 1350
A.H., p. 122.
23. Ibn Jazīl: Minhāj al-ba‘īn (MS. 11966 Hamdard Institute of
History of Medicine New Delhi), under 'al-tin al-Khurasānī.
24. Ibn Al-Hulīshīa: Mufid al-Ulūm wa naqib al-humūm. Rabat,
1941, Under 'al-tin al-Khurasānī.
P. 331.
27. Maidānī in his al-Sāmi fi al-asimī (Tehran, 1345 A.H., Which is an
2, P. 648.
33. Ibn-i Maymūn: Sharḥ i‘asma‘. Al-Uqqār, Cairo, 1940, no. 172,
PP. 238, 49.
34. Al-Birūnī: Al-Sa‘īdana, MS. no. 149 Karsunlu, Turkey, and
Microfilm no. 363. Tehran University Central Library.
35. Fawārif: al-Abā‘ī an Ḥaqqa‘ al-ṣāfa‘. Tehran, 1340 A.H., PP.
215-29.
36. Nūman Ibn Hayyūn Al-Magribī: Da‘īm al-Isam. Cairo, 1379,
37. See, for example, Nās Ir-I-Khusraw: Divān. Tehran, 1305-7,
A.H., P.
40. From a letter by Dr. N. Sharq to Dr. M. Iqbal, President of the
Iranian Medical Council, dated 19 June 1972.