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# RAZI AND HIS BOOK ON AL- TIN AL NISHABURI

M. MOHAGHEGH

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 Zakariyap, who is known in Latin as Rhazes (251/865-320/932). Rāzi, 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-Hāvī), Liber Almansoris (al-Tibb al-Mansūri), 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 Rāzi 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, Rāzis book which concerned a certain kind of earth prepared in Nīshābūr[7] and exported to other places, similar to Terra sigillata in Europe[8]. Scholars who have compiled bibliographies of Rāzī, such as Ibn-al-Nadīm[9] (d. 377/987), al-Bīrūnī[10] (d. 440/1078), Ibn Abi Usaiba[11] (d. 668/1269) have all attributed a book to Rāzī called: *Fī anna li'l tīn al- Muntaqil bihī manāfi.*

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 Bīrūni, Julius Ruska has translateed the title in the following way: Darüber, das in dem von ihm [sc. Galen] eignefuhrten Tom nutzliche Eigenschaften enthalten Sind[13]. G.S.A. Ranking translatd the title from Ibn Alī Usaibi's as follows: Dissertatioquod lutum translatum contineat[14] utilitates. In certain Persian books on the works of Rāzi 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 Mutanaqqal from Noql meaning tablet. In order to clarify the above statement I would like to present the following evidence:

1. Ibn Samajūn[16] (d 392/1002), Ghāfqi (d.560/1165), and Ibn al Baitār[18] (d. 646/1248) in their respective books on simple drugs refer to the earth from Nishabūr that is prepared as tablets al-Mutanaqqal bihī under the heading of edible earth (Tīn al- akl). They quote in this connection passages from the above-mentioned book by Rāzī and also from one of his other works[19].

2. Thaālibī (d. 429/1037) who was from Nīshābūr, in a work about the attributes of cities, persons or things, says under the heading" Earth of Nishabur" (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 Zakarīyā has described the benefits of this earth in one of his books. Finally, Tha'alibī quotes a piece of poetry by a certain Ma'mūni which starts with this line:

> "Bestow upon me that Nuql [tablet of earth] from which we were created and to which we return."[20]

3. Nuwalrī (d. 733/1332), when mentioning Nīshābūr 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 Nuql (Tablet of Earth) and its stone is turquoise'. In explaining the 'Earth Tablet' he makes the same remarks about it as Tha'ālibī[1].

Also some scholars have used the term al-tīn al-Khurāsāni to denote this earth, as for example, Ibn



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Butlān (d. 456/103) in *Taqwīm al Sihha*[22], Ibn Jazla (d. 493/1099) in *Minhāj al -Bayān*[23] and Ibn al-Hashahā' in a commentary upon the medical terms used in *Liber al-Mansois*[24]. As for the location of this earth Muslim geographical works contain some indications, for example Maqdisi, while mentioning the mines of Khorasān, states that edible earth comes from the city of Zūzan[25]

Ibn Rusta says that the Najāhi earth which is exported to many parts of the world comes from a place between Nishābūr and Qā'i[26]n. The term Najāhī is another expression used for edible eart[27]h. Ali Ibn -i -Rabban -i-Tabari (fl. 236/850)[28] and Ibn Baitār[29] 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 'Alī Ibn Rabban-i-Tabarī in *Paradise of Wisdom (Firdaus al-Hikma)*[30], Rāzī in *Continens (al-Hāvī)*[31] and Ibn Sina (d. 428/1037) in the *Qānūn*.[32] Of the pharmacologists Ibn Samajūn, Ghafqī, Maimonides[33] (d. 601/1204) and Ibn al Baitār in their book on simple drugs and also al-Biruni in *Kitāb*[33] *al. saydana*[34] can be noted. Among Persian books the oldest to list different kinds of earths is *Kitāb al-abniya* by Muwaffaq al-Din Harawī, 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 earth[36]. 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 Nīshābūr, 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 Khurāsān a soldier who suffered from indigestion, used to prepare a tablet from a yellowish earth and what in Persian is called Jawz-ı-Hindī, (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[39].

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

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