



Ibn Mandevaih Isfahani (949–983(?) AD), a physician from Isfahan's medical school

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Abstract

There have arisen a number of prominent Iranian-Islamic physicians throughout the history of the fertile medicine landscape of Iran, some of whom are not very well known. Abu Ali Ahmad ibn Abd al-Rahman Mandevaih Isfahani (949–983(?) AD) was a great medical figure with scientific activities in the Hospital of Isfahan and al-Adudi Hospital of Baghdad in the golden age of Iranian-Islamic history, culture, and civilization during the reign of the Buyid dynasty and Abbasid Caliphate. He was also a prominent physician during the reign of Adud al-Dawla Deylami (949–983 AD). This present research has as its objectives the studying of the scientific life of ibn Mandevaih Isfahani and his works in this field. The works of this scientist and scholar reflect his skill and expertise in literature, philosophy, medicine, and medicine-related fields including ophthalmology and pharmacology.

Keywords

Ibn Mandevaih Isfahani, Buyid dynasty, Abbasid Caliphate, medical history

Introduction

Medical knowledge is the fruit of the efforts and experience of physicians who have contributed to the creation, evolution, and advancement of medicine by putting forward their works. Hence, these works and manuscripts are a precious treasure in traditional medicine. Islamic medicine has evolved during various phases of its development.

Ibn Mandevaih Isfahani (ابن مندويه اصفهانی) was one of the physicians of great fame in the Buyid era, whose works have not captured much attention in spite of his repute. His valuable manuscripts and scientific personality have remained somewhat unknown. Ibn Mandevaih, the physician from the Buyid era, started his scientific activity when prominent physicians emerged in the scientific arena of Islamic civilization.

There was not a sudden shift transition of power simply from the Abbasid Caliphate (750–1258 AD) to the Seljuk Empire (1037–1194 AD) as an extension of Iranian-Islamic intermingled historical period. By this, we mean that there was an (incoming) interpolating era which (nearly) acted out as a buffer intermediary epoch which is most commonly named Buyid dynasty (934–1062 AD) which was of Daylamite roots (Figure 1). Such an interlude had, of course, its own historiographical causes and

interrelations whose elucidation is beyond the scope of this present article.¹

At the time, prominent physicians penned fruitful medical textbooks. Among these physicians were Ali ibn Sahl Rabban al-Tabari, al-Razi (Rhazes), Ibn Sina (Avicenna), al-Biruni, Abu Maher Shirazi, Ali ibn Abbas (Haly Abbas), in addition to other well-known physicians. Ibn Mandevaih, however, ought to

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Figure 1. The realm of Buyid dynasty in 970 AD (available at: https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/File:Buyids_970.png, accessed 21 February 2017).

be deemed one of the scholars who contributed to the evolution and development of the Islamic medical school.² The present paper examines the biography and scientific life of this Iranian physician to explain his role in the growth and development of Iranian-Islamic history, culture, and civilization. Special attention, nonetheless, is duly paid to his medical works.

Biography and scientific life

Abu Ali Ahmad ibn Abd al-Rahman ibn Mandevaih Isfahani was born in 949 AD in a reputable family in the city of Isfahan.^{3,4} Careful, critical examination of the lives of physicians and works penned in the fourth century A.H. reveals that ibn Mandevaih was one of the prominent figures of this age. He was a philosopher, pharmacologist, and an eminent physician of the Buyid and Abbasid eras in Baghdad. Unfortunately, in spite of the multiplicity of his works and mastery over different fields of medicine and literature much as a polymath, there is very little precise report of the biography and scientific life of this well-known physician. It is through manuscripts and books authored by ibn Mandevaih (which add up to over forty works) that light is shed on a few aspects of his life. For example,

from these works, it is possible to understand his contemporary figures, his fields of expertise and skills, and the depth of his knowledge.

His father was counted as a scholar with expertise in philology, poetry, and grammar. In *Uyūn al-Anbā fi Ṭabaqāt al-Aṭibbā*, ibn Abī Uṣaybi'a quotes much poetry from ibn Mandevaih's father.³ Ibn Mandevaih himself was a man of literature and poesy just as his father was. *Al-She'r va al-Sho'ara* is one of the literary books he authored, although according to some researchers this book was written by his father (i.e., Abd al-Rahman).⁵ In his *Ela Hamzahibn al-Hassan Ali men Ankar Hajah al-Tabib ela elm al-Loqah*, ibn Mandevaih puts emphasis on the importance of philology and its necessary relation to medicine.⁴ Moreover, it is made clear through a review of the list of works by ibn Mandevaih (e.g. *Resalah ela Hamzah ibn al-Hassan fi Nafs va Ruh ala Ra'y al-Unanein*) that he also had knowledge of philosophy and *Hikmat* [Traditional Wisdom]. It is for this reason that some historians have referred to him as a philosopher.^{6,7}

Although there is not a clear account of his travels, it is well known that he learned medicine in the city of Shiraz from Abu Maher Shirazi, a famous physician of the 9th and 10th centuries AD. Abu Maher was

a prominent physician in Shiraz.⁸ Thus, ibn Mandevaih must have traveled to this city to learn medicine by enjoying the scholarly presence of this physician. On the other hand, ibn Mandevaih is considered a contemporary figure of Abu Ala Shirazi (?–1001 AD), who was a physician in the Buyid dynasty in Fars.⁶ This is probably yet another proof of his residence in Shiraz. Elgood introduces ibn Mandevaih as one of the pupils of Haly Abbas (930–993 AD), the author of *Kāmil al-Sīnā'at Tibbiyya*.⁹ Nevertheless, since Abbas himself was one of the pupils of Abu Maher Shirazi,⁸ Elgood's argument seems shaky.

Regarding his scientific life, it is known that ibn Mandevaih served in Isfahan Hospital.^{10,11} He seemingly wrote *Resaleh ela al-Moteqaledin (al-Mote'alemin) alaj al-Marza BimarestanIsbahan* for physicians and medical students in Isfahan for treatment of patients.³

According to historical sources, when Adud al-Dawla Deylami (949–983 AD) founded the al-Adudi Hospital in Baghdad in 981 AD, about 24 prominent physicians from different Islamic lands were invited to work in this Hospital (Figure 2).^{5,12} Ibn Mandevaih travelled to Baghdad at the invitation of the Buyid king and started working in this Hospital on a salary. This evidence proves his mastery and proficiency in medicine. Adud al-Dawla endowed numerous estates and properties to al-Adudi Hospital of Baghdad, which were among the most important sources of finance for this hospital.^{4,13}

Except for the brief description provided, there is no more precise report of his life. The year and place of demise of this character are unknown and there is no reference in old sources. However, in more recent references, it is quoted without any evidence that ibn Mandevaih passed away in 1019 AD^{14,15} or 1048 AD.¹⁶ Some sources suggest, he died in 983 AD at the same time as Adud al-Dawla's passing away.⁴

Remaining medical works of Ibn Mandevaih

Ibn Mandevaih was an expert in medicine and trained many students.¹⁷ According to al-Qiftī, his medical manuscripts and booklets were shared all throughout medical circles in Isfahan.⁵

Ibn Mandevaih's booklets and works were well-known. In his "Four Discourses," Nizami Aruzi (who himself had mastery over medicine in addition to poetry and teaching, and proves his mastery in his *Chahār Maqāla*, or Four Discourses) makes mention of ibn Mandevaih: "There are two books a physician must always carry with him: *Tohfa al-Mohuk* by al-Razi and *al-Kefayah fi al-Teb* by ibn Mandevaih."¹⁸

In the works of ibn Mandevaih, there are references to a booklet titled *Resalah ela al-Astaz al-Raees fi Alaj*



Figure 2. Al-Adudi Hospital in Baghdad (9th century AD) (available at: http://www.grouporigin.com/clients/qatarfoundation/chapter2_5.htm, accessed 21 February 2017).

Shaaq al-Booasir. Some contemporary authorities believe that "al-Astaz al-Raees" [Master Professor] refers to Avicenna.^{7,19,20} Dr. Ehsan Moqadas, the editor of some of ibn Mandevaih's booklets, rejects the idea that ibn Mandevaih authored this work in response to Avicenna's request for hemorrhoid treatment. Dr. Moqadas brings in the high scientific ranking of Avicenna as his reason for refusing to accept the aforementioned letter as response to "al-Astaz al-Raees."¹³ It must be admitted that this booklet was penned at the request of the Buyid minister known as Abu Fadl ibn al-Amid (912–970 AD), because ibn Mandevaih lived during his office. Ibn al-Amid was Adud al-Dawla Deylami's tutor. As put by ibn Miskawayh (932–1030AD), the Buyid historian, the Buyid Caliph used to call ibn al-Amid the "Astaz al-Raees" or "Al-Astaz."²¹

The remaining scientific works of ibn Mandevaih reveal the multiplicity and diversity of his medical writings. His booklets were mostly monographs written by him with traces of opinions of physicians, medical treatments/cures, and description of diseases. The list of his

works includes, of course, booklets criticizing and rejecting viewpoints of other physicians: the book, for instance, written at the request of Abu Muhammad Abdullah ibn Ishaq is one of those writings. In addition, the book written for Yousef ibn Yazdad (a physician) was aimed at rejecting some of ibn Yazdad's medical methods (e.g. Yousef's injection treatment with glazed flax).^{3,17} The titles of some of his books (e.g. the *Resalah ela*) [letter to...] suggest that some of his writings were letters to certain people.^{3,7}

Ibn Mandevaih was a true expert in various medical and paramedical fields such as pharmacology,

pharmacy, and ophthalmology. He wrote textbooks in these fields. Forat Faeq wrote a book on the biography and works of ophthalmologists in the Islamic civilization; he did refer to ibn Mandevaih and his works.¹⁶ *Resalah fi Tarkib al-Tabaqat al-Ayn* was one of the sources for *Al-Kamil fi Tibb al-Ayn* by Abd al-Masih Kahal (died in app. 18th century AD).²² *Resalat Alaj Za'f al-Basar* and *Resalat Alaj Inteshar al-Ayn* are among the books used by Haly Abbas in writing his masterpiece of *Kamilal-Sana'a al-Tibbiyya*.^{3,20}

Pharmacy and pharmacology were also among the medical fields in which ibn Mandevaih was interested.

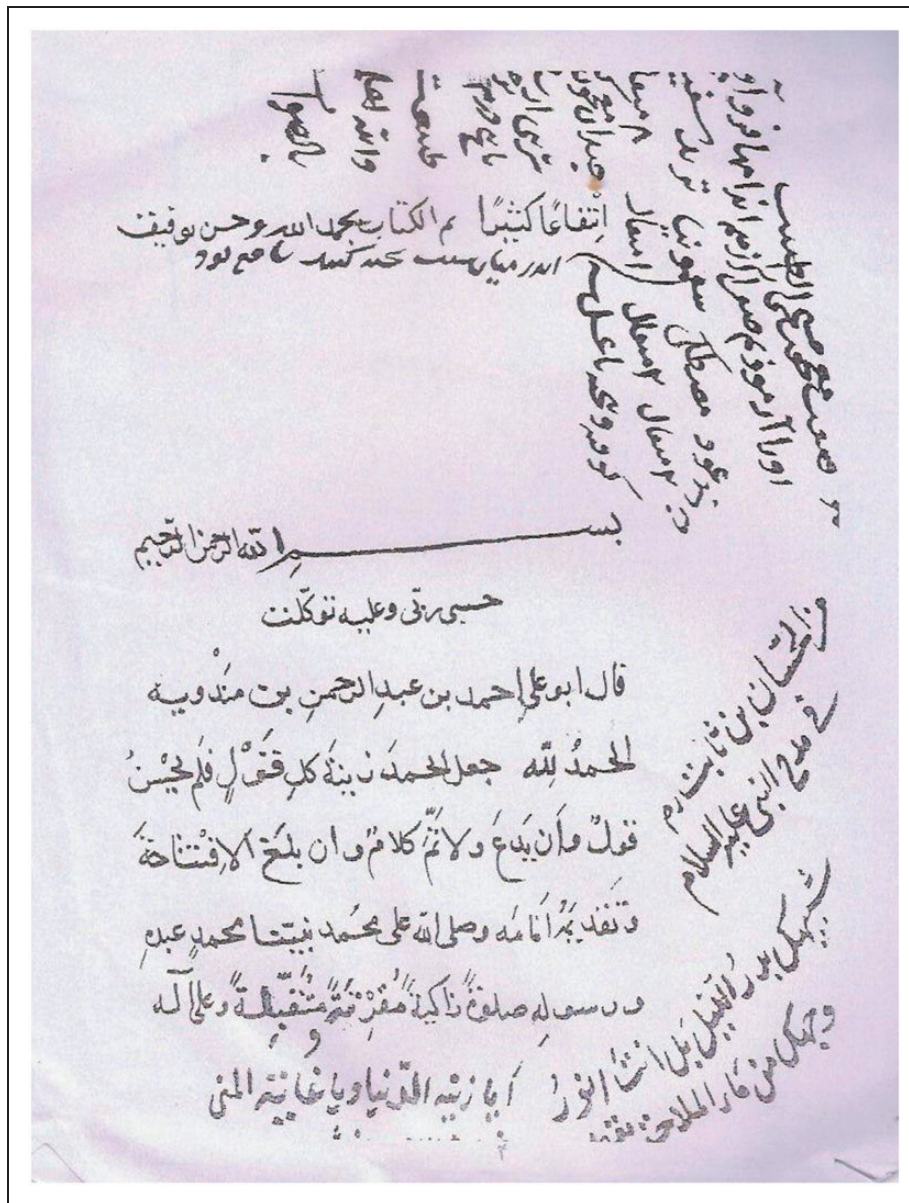


Figure 3. First page of “*Al-Kefayah fi Elm al-Teb*” [Sufficient materials in medicine] by Ibn Mandevaih (Tehran: Research Institute for Islamic and Complementary Medicine. 2004).

He laid out his viewpoints in these fields by writing booklets. *Osul al-Teybva al-Morakabat al-Atrieh* was a monograph introduced by its author as a means of knowing different types of fragrance, methods of making confections, and combinations of drugs and aromatics.¹³ The books he wrote about medicines and advantages and disadvantages of beer and some intoxicants in addition to the references made by al-Biruni (973–1048 AD) in his *Seydaneh* reflect ibn Mandevaih's reputation and expertise in pharmacology.²³

The titles and contents of some of his books including *Resalat al-Tadbir al-Jasad*, *Resalat ela Abi al-Qasem Ahmad fi Tadbir al-Mosafer*, *Resalat ela Mostaseq fi Tabdir al-Jasad va Alaj Daeh*, *Fi al-Kafur* (which was written to reject Masarjooeyeh's opinions), and *Fi al-Tambr al-Hendi*^{3–17} suggest that he was concerned with prevention, protection of health, and effect of drinks and plants on health and hygiene.

Ibn Mandevaih was one of the very first physicians who wrote an independent book in pediatrics titled *Resalat fi Owja al-Atfal*. This manuscript is considered one of the oldest textbooks on this topic.¹⁴

There is a reference in Avicenna's works to a Persian book titled *Fi al-Nabz*.²⁴ According to some contemporary historians, the said manuscript was penned either by Miskawayh or by ibn Mandevaih.⁶ The cause of such uncertainty is that this text was written at the request of Adud al-Dawla Deylami. Since Buyid Monarch died in 372 A.H. and Avicenna was born in 370 A.H., it is possible to assume that this work was written by ibn Mandevaih.

Al-Kafi fi al-Teb, which is also known as *al-Kefayah fi Elm al-Teb*, is ibn Mandevaih's most important medical book, actually one of the most significant medical textbooks throughout the whole Islamic civilization (Figure 3). This manuscript was so famous, so important that it came to be known as the *Qanun al-Saghir*.^{5,9,18,25}

Amongst other treatises, booklets, and books ascribed to ibn Mandevaih are: *At'ameh va Ashrabe*, *Tadarok Anva al-Khata fi Tadbir al-Tebbi*, *Al-Jameh al-Saqir*, *Al-Jameh al-Kabir*, *Al-Tabikh*, *Al-Madkhal fi al-Teb*, *Al-Maqith fi al-Teb*, *Naqz al-Jahez*, and *Nahayeh al-Ekhtesar*.^{4–17}

Conclusion

Ibn Mandevaih's advent was in an era when medicine flourished considerably; the support of Buyid Caliphs and kings for scientists and physicians and establishment of scientific centers and hospitals had set the scene for development and flourishing of medicine. Ibn Mandevaih is one of the physicians who significantly contributed to the evolution and development of medical sciences in this era. He spent ample time

and effort in communicating this knowledge to the subsequent generations by writing comprehensive books and medical booklets. *Al-Kafi fi al-Teb* is his medical masterpiece, known as the Small Canon of Medicine. This work was an encyclopedia of medicine before Avicenna's *Canon of Medicine*: it was considered a primary medical handbook due to its brevity and comprehensiveness. It can also be counted among the small number of writings having the capacity to be used for medical self-teaching. Other valuable books penned by this physician comprised booklets mirroring his mastery of knowledge. These were generally penned for his pupils as a response to their questions or rejection of contemporary viewpoints.

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 - Ela Hamzahibn al-Hassan Ali men Ankar Hajah al-Tabib ela elm al-Loqah: letter to Hamzah ibn al-Hassan Ali who happened to deny a physician's need for philology.
 - Fi al-Kafur: on camphor.
 - Fi al-Nabz: on pulsology.
 - Fi al-Tambr al-Hendi: on Tamarind.
 - Kamilal-Sana'a al-Tibbiyya: the perfect book of the art of medicine.
 - Nahayeh al-Ekhtesar: compendium extrimum.
 - Naqz al-Jahez: remedying luxations.
 - Osul al-Teybva al-Morakabat al-Atrieh: fragrant roots and aromatic compounds.
 - Qanun al-Saghir: small Canon of Medicine.
 - Resalat Alaj Inteshar al-Ayn: monograph on cataract treatment.
 - Resalat Alaj Za'f al-Basar: treatise on the remedy to weak eyesight.
 - Resalat al-Tadbir al-Jasad: treatise on handling the body.
 - Resalat ela Abi al-Qasem Ahmad fi Tadbir al-Mosafer: letter to Abi al-Qasem Ahmad on handling journeys.
 - Resalah ela al-Astaz al-Raees fi Alaj Shacaq al-Booasir: letter as treatise on hemorrhoid fissure to the Master Professor.
 - Resaleh ela al-Moteqaledin (al-Mote'alemin) alaj al-Marza Bimarestan Isbahan: letter to the learners on treating Isfahan Hospital's patients.
 - Resalah ela Hamzah ibn al-Hassan fi Nafs va Ruh ala Ra'y al-Unanein: treatise to Hamzah ibn al-Hassan on soul and spirit according to the Greek school.
 - Resalat ela Mostaseq fi Tabdir al-Jasad va Alaj Daeh: letter to one having edema on how to handle his body and cure his ailment.
 - Resalat fi Owja al-Atfal: monograph on children painful diseases.
 - Resalah fi Tarkib al-Tabaqat al-Ayn: monograph on eye socket anatomy.
 - Tadarok Anva al-Khata fi Tadbir al-Tebbi: handling various types of medical errors
 - Uyün al-Anbā fi Ṭabaqāt al-Atibbā: notable sources on classes of physicians.

Translation of book titles

- Al-Jameh al-Saqir: compendium medicinum.
- Al-Jameh al-Kabir: expandium medicinum.
- Al-Kamil fi Ṭibb al-Ayn: comprehensive book of ophthalmology.
- Al-Kefayah fi Elm al-Teb: sufficient materials in medicine.
- Al-Madkhal fi al-Teb: prolegomena to medicine.
- Al-Maqith fi al-Teb: helping handbook in medicine.
- Al-She'r va al-Sho'ara: poetry and poets.