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*An Analytical Survey of Persian Works  
on Indian Learned Traditions*

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## AN ANALYTICAL SURVEY OF PERSIAN WORKS ON INDIAN LEARNED TRADITIONS

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## *Dastūr al-‘amal ba-qawl aṭibbā-yi hindī*

The *Dastūr al-‘amal ba-qawl aṭibbā-yi hindī* (The Practical Rules [of Medicine] according to the Indian Physicians) is a short text on rules of seasonal health according to Indian medicine. The preface of the only known manuscript copy, preserved at the British Library, states that it is one of the works of the philosopher and physician Ibn Sīnā (d. 370/980) (*min taṣnīf-i šayḥ al-ra’is Bū ‘Alī Sīnā*). Although Ibn Sīnā’s *Qānūn fī al-ṭibb* includes few references to Indian medical culture this attribution is certainly spurious as this tract is not mentioned elsewhere among the writings of Ibn Sīnā.

The *Dastūr al-‘amal* examines the six seasons of India according to the Hindu calendar and their effects on human constitutions and on the three bodily humours of Ayurvedic doctrine. It specifies the humours associated to each season, as well as the food, the drugs and the health practices prescribed by Indian doctors in each period of the year. Ayurvedic medicine attributes an important role to the effects of seasonal variations of climate on human health and seasonal regimen (*ṛtucaryā*) is a topic covered by major Ayurvedic works such as the *Carakasamhitā* and Vāgbhaṭa’s *Aṣṭāṅgahrdayasamhitā* and *Aṣṭāṅgasamgraha* (see Zimmermann 1980, Wujastyk 1998, pp. 240-241, 263-271, Meulenbeld 1999, pp. 14, 394, 479).

The introductory paragraph of the *Dastūr al-‘amal* indicates the months (each season lasts two months) and the nature (*ṭabī‘at*) of each season. The Arabic term *ṭabī‘at* is used to introduce the difference between *ādāna kāla* and *visarga kāla*; the former is the period of the year that takes (*ādāna*, glossed by Persian *gīranda*) the strength (*quwwa*) of animals and plants and the latter is the period that releases (*visarga*, glossed by Persian *baḥšanda*) the strength. Winter (*hima*) is here associated with *ādāna* and summer (*grīṣma*) with *visarga* while according to Ayurvedic canonical sources, summer is a season of *ādāna* and winter is related to *visarga* (see Vāgbhaṭa 1998, p. 58, Wujastyk 1998, p. 263).

The short introduction is followed by six paragraphs each dealing with one season (*faṣl*). The order of seasons followed by the text is *hima* (winter), *śiśira* (cool season), *vasanta* (spring), *grīṣma* (summer), *varṣā* (rainy season) and *sarad* (autumn). The beginnings of paragraphs are structured in a similar manner and state the constellations and the dominant humours of each season. During *hima* the Sun is in Scorpio and Sagittarius, wind (*bād*) is the ruler (*ḥākim*) of the body and phlegm (*balgam*) is the assistant (*pīš-dast*) while blood (*ḥūn*) decreases. One must eat sweet and hot food and the substances which suppress the wind (*bād šikan*) and must anoint the body with sesame oil (*kunjud*) or of similar substances. One should remain in places where the wind does not come in, sit near the fire and use hot drugs (*adwiya-yi garm*) such as ginger (*zanjabīl*) and pepper (*filfil*). Other substances such as yellow myrobalan (*halīla*), oranges and asafoetida (*angūza*) are also effective to restore the natural balance during this season. The paragraph ends with a compound prescription (*ma‘jūn*) of which the main ingredients are *Phyllanthus emblica* (*āmīla*) and *Lepidium latifolium* (*šīṭaraj*).

Similar instructions are offered for the other seasons. The paragraph on *śiśira*, during which the Sun is in Capricorn and Aquarius, is very short as this season is also characterized by coldness as *hima*. During *vasanta* the Sun is in Pisces and Aries, phlegm is the ruler and wind his assistant. One should stay under the shade, eat light and dry food, drink water from the well, avoid to sleeping during the day and abstain from sexual intercourse. During *grīṣma* the Sun is in Taurus and Gemini, bile (*ṣafrā*) is the *ḥākim* and wind the *pīš-dast* while phlegm decreases. One should eat light and cold food and continue to abstain from sex. In the season of *varṣā* the Sun is in Cancer and Leo while the associated humours are the same of *grīṣma*. The digestive power (*quwwat-i hāzima*) becomes weak and therefore one should eat moderately. One should follow diets which reduce and dissolve all the three humours (*ḥilt*) of the body, i.e. wind, phlegm and bile. The dominant humours of *sarad*, during which the Sun is in Virgo and Libra, are also *ṣafrā*, which is the ruler, and *bād*. During this season one should practice phlebotomy and should take purgatives (*mushil*).

The text makes a selective use of Indic terminology. Indian terms refer mostly to the divisions of time such as *ādāna kāla*, *visarga kāla* and the names of seasons and months. On the other hand, the Arabic-Persian names of constellations, drugs and food are mostly used in the text, though some *hindī* words are referred to such as

*khicrī*, a dish made of rice and *dāl* which should not be eaten during *varṣā*. For what concerns the technical lexicon relating to bodily humours and elements, the Arabic-Persian terms (*bād*, *balgam*, *ṣafrā*) are used throughout the text without any reference to Ayurvedic terminology, an approach which is often adopted in other Persian texts on Ayurvedic medicine produced in South Asia (see Speziale 2014).

**Manuscript: London**, British Library, India Office, 2362/4, ff. 90b-94a, **vii**) the same manuscript includes another treatise on health ascribed to Ibn Sīnā (*Risāla-yi ḥifẓiyya*) and a copy of Aḥmad ibn Arslan’s *Maqālīd al-kunūz*, which is a Persian treatise on alchemy that covers Indian knowledge and terminology. The manuscript belonged to Sir Charles Wilkins (d. 1836) whose interest in Indian medicine can also be inferred from the annotations he made on the margin of an 18th century copy of *Dastūr al-aṭibbā* of Muḥammad Qāsim Firišta (b. 978/1570), a Persian work dealing with Ayurvedic medicine (Ms. London, British Library, India Office, 2364, see Ethé 1903, p. 1268), **viii**) Ethé 1903, pp. 1506-1508.

Legend: i) Place of copying; ii) Period of copying; iii) Copyist; iv) Commissioner; v) Information on colophon; vi) Description of miniatures/illustrations; vii) Other remarks; viii) Information on catalogue(s)

**Secondary sources bibliography:** Ethé, Hermann, 1903, *Catalogue of Persian Manuscripts in the Library of the India Office*. Oxford, vol. 1. Meulenbeld, Jan, G., 1999, *A History of Indian Medical Literature*, Groningen, Egbert Forsten, vol. 1a. Speziale, Fabrizio, 2014, “The Persian translation of the *tridoṣa*: lexical analogies and conceptual incongruities”, *Asiatische Studien*, 68, 3, pp. 783-796. Vāgbhaṭa, 1998, *Aṣṭāṅgasamgraha*, Edition and English Translation: *Aṣṭāṅga Samgraha of Vāgbhaṭa*, vol. I, (*Sūtra sthāna*), Murthy, K. R. Srikantha, ed., Varanasi, Chaukhambha Orientalia (Jaikrishnadas Ayurveda Series 79). Wujastyk, Dominik, 1998, *The Roots of Ayurveda: Selections from Sanskrit Medical Writings*, New Delhi, Penguin Books India. Zimmermann, Francis, 1980, “*Rtu-satmya*: The seasonal cycle and the principle of appropriateness”, *Social Science and Medicine*, 14, pp. 99-106

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