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HISTORY OF MEDICINE – ORIGINAL ARTICLE – OPEN ACCESS

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Regimen of elders in *Kitāb al-Dhakhīra fī 'Ilm al-Ṭibb* by Thābit b. Qurra

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ABSTRACT

Objective: This study aimed to examine the chapter related to regimen of elders in *Kitāb al-Dhakhīra fī 'Ilm al-Ṭibb* by Thābit b. Qurra (836–901 AD), a renowned translator and scholar of the translation period of Islamic science and medicine.

Materials and Methods: An exact copy of *Kitāb al-Dhakhīra fī 'Ilm al-Ṭibb* edited by G. Sobhy and printed in al-Maṭba'at al-Āmīriyye was examined and compared to the manuscript in the Şehit Ali Paşa Collection, nr. 2028, in the Süleymaniye Manuscript Library in Istanbul. The subchapter on regimen of elders was translated and has been discussed.

Results: Information on regimen of elders is the last subheading of the first chapter, which is on health protection. Considering the content, the physiology and pathology of senility and its related regimen are coherent with the principles of the humoral theory.

Conclusion: As Thābit b. Qurra mentioned, the main source of information regarding regimen of elders in *Kitāb al-Dhakhīra fī 'Ilm al-Ṭibb* seems to be the writings of Galen.

Keywords: Thābit b. Qurra, *Kitāb al-Dhakhīra fī 'Ilm al-Ṭibb*, regimen of elders, senility, history of medicine

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INTRODUCTION

Geriatric medicine was introduced by Ignatz Nascher in 1909 with the term geriatrics for elderly care. Although it is a young specialty, information about old age and the related diseases has existed since ancient times (1). Information about aging and diseases among the elderly can be found in some aphorisms in sections I, II, III, VI, and VII of the Hippocrates' (460–370 BC) *Aphorisms* (2, 3). Plato (428/427–348/347 BC), Aristotle (384–322 BC), Plutarch (46–after 119 AD), and Galen (129–200 AD) are also among the ancient writers who documented information about old age in their works (4).

Galen of Pergamum discussed issues about old age in the fifth book of his important work *De sanitate tuenda* and mentioned practices that can be followed for a healthy old age and treatment methods for some diseases. Galen, mentioning that any aspect present in excess must be corrected by using the opposite, informs that old age is dry and cold; therefore, the correction should be performed with moisturizing and warming substances. He further explains comprehensively about matters related to old age in accordance with the principles of humoral pathology (2, 5).

Oribasius of Pergamum (325–403 AD), an ancient writer, also wrote a chapter on old age in both *Synopsis* and *Euporistes*. Overlapping information in *Synopsis* and *Euporistes* indicates that the information documented in *Synopsis* is a summary of that documented in *Euporistes*. The information documented by Oribasius about old age in the aforementioned works seems to be a summary of the information documented by Galen in *De sanitate tuenda* (2, 6). On the other hand, Paul of Aegina (625–690 AD) presents the information he received from Oribasius' *Synopsis* in a section where he mentions the regimen of the elderly. In this case, it can be said that Paul's work was indirectly influenced by Galen's work (2, 7).

Abū Bakr Muḥammad b. Zakariyyā al-Rāzī (865–925 AD), one of the famous physicians of the Islamic world in the Medieval times, also briefly recorded some basic principles about the regimen of the elderly in his work *al-Manṣūrī fī al-Ṭibb*. According to Rhazes, the elderly should avoid hard work, fatigue and sexual intercourse as well as bloodletting unless mandatory. They should eat easy-to-digest food, often take a bath, sleep, perfume themselves and rest, drink beverage/wine at a mild temperament and quantity, and also mild clarity and delicacy (2, 8).

Thābit b. Qurra and *Kitāb al-Dhakhīra fī 'Ilm al-Ṭibb*

Thābit b. Qurra (836–901 AD) was one of the most important learned men of the translation period of Islamic world in Medieval times (Fig. 1). He was a Sabian from Harran. When his opinions conflicted with the community he lived in, he moved to Kefertūthā, a city near Dārā. He was taken to Baghdad and taught by a notable scholar Abū Jāfar Muḥammad b. Mūsā b. Shākir (d. 873 AD). Then he was presented to Abbasid Caliph Mu'-



Figure 1. Thābit b. Qurra (836–901 AD)
https://www.biyografya.com/biyografi/11290

tamiḍ and joined the palace astronomers. According to another narration, when Muwaffaq-Billah (d. 891 AD) detained his own son Muʻtamiḍ, Thābit was his tutor. Thus, he became one of the palace astronomers during Muʻtaḍid's caliphate period (892–902 AD). Thābit knew Syriac, Arabic, and Greek. He was known to have written and translated works on mathematics, astronomy, and medicine and corrected previously translated works (9–11).

Kitāb al-Dhakhīra fī ʿIlm al-Ṭibb is accepted as his most famous work on medicine. The introduction of the book stated that the book contained all essential information on medicine regarding the definition and cure of illness in compliance with Thābit's experience and was compiled by Thābit for his son (9, 12).

The first of the 31 chapters of the book is on health protection. This chapter discussed food, drink, massage, exercise, baths, sexual intercourse, and health regimen regarding human life stages as subheadings. The chapter on health regimen regarding human life stages discussed regimen for the children, the young, the middle-aged, and the elders (12). This study aimed to examine the subchapter on regimen of elders of the first chapter, which is on health protection in Thābit's *Kitāb al-Dhakhīra fī ʿIlm al-Ṭibb*.

MATERIALS and METHODS

An exact copy of *Kitāb al-Dhakhīra fī ʿIlm al-Ṭibb* edited by G. Sobhy and printed in 1928 in al-Maṭbaʻat al-Āmīriyya in Cairo was examined (Fig. 2) (13) and was compared with the manuscript in the Şehit Ali Paşa Collection, nr. 2028, in the Süleymaniye Manuscript Library in Istanbul (Fig. 3–5) (Appendix) (14). The subheading "regimen of elders" is translated from Arabic to Turkish and then to English. The information obtained is presented in the Results section and discussed in the context of the history of medicine literature.

RESULTS

Thābit b. Qurra informs that elders have cold and dry bodies and this is corrected by using warming and moistening things like warming and moistening foods.[i] According to Galen's *Aphorisms*, elders should eat things that are free from strong flavors, such as

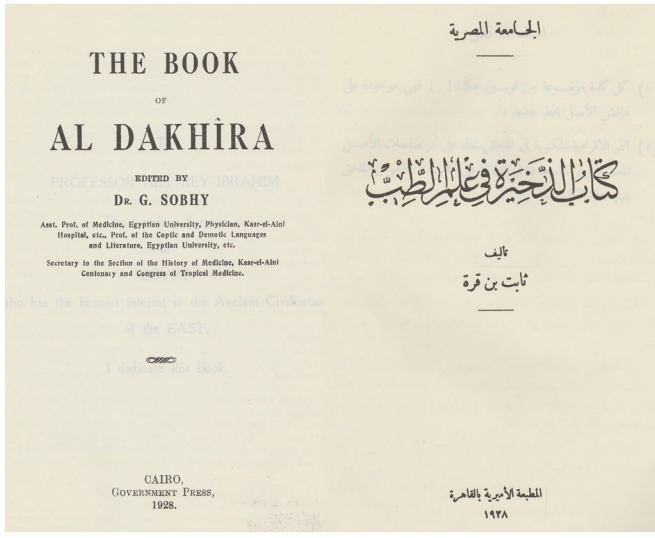

Figure 2. Title pages of *Kitāb al-Dhakhīra fī 'Ilm* al-Ṭibb by Thābit b. Qurra edited by G. Sobhy and printed in 1928 in al-Maṭba'at al-Āmīriyya in Cairo (13)

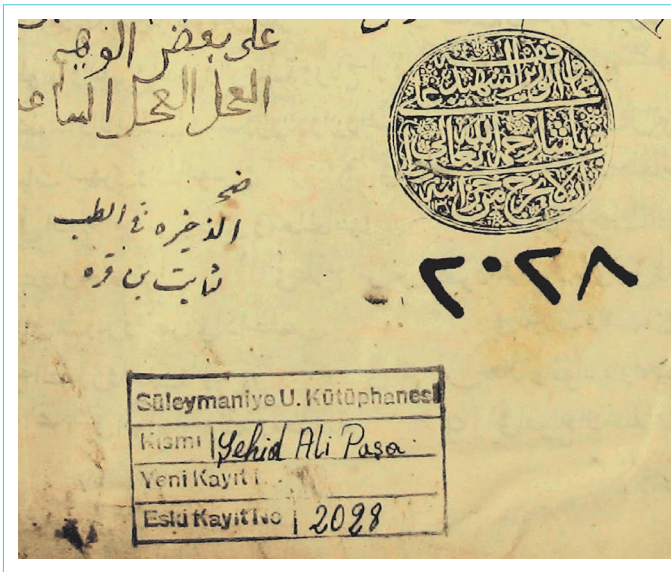

Figure 3. The registration page of the manuscript in the Şehit Ali Paşa Collection, nr. 2028, in the Süleymaniye Manuscript Library (Türkiye Yazma Eserler Kurumu Başkanlığı, Süleymaniye Yazma Eser Kütüphanesi, Şehit Ali Paşa Koleksiyonu, no. 2028, v. 1a) and the name of the book and its author: *al-Dhakhīra fī al-Ṭibb* – Thābit b. Qurra (Courtesy of Türkiye Yazma Eserler Kurumu Başkanlığı, İstanbul, Türkiye) (14)

acrid, pungent, salty, bitter, and sour and are light and delicious. They should drink wine/drink moderate in color, smell, and taste and should use these in required temperament and amount. They should bathe in fresh waters[ii] and receive massage with warm oils.

[i] "But we must endeavor to correct everything by means of the opposite excess; as, for example, in old age. For age is cold and dry, as has been shown in my book *On the Constitution*. And the correction of this is effected by moistening and warming agents (5, p. 195)."

[ii] "And such are warm baths of sweet waters, and drinking of wine, and such of the foods as are at the same time moistening and warming (5, p. 195)."

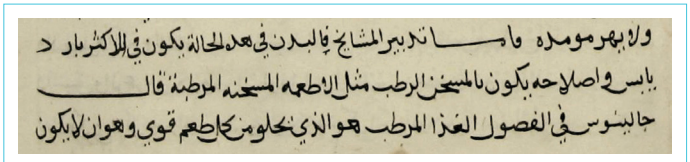

Figure 4. Beginning of the subheading "regimen of elders" in the Şehit Ali Paşa Collection, nr. 2028, in the Süleymaniye Manuscript Library (Türkiye Yazma Eserler Kurumu Başkanlığı, Süleymaniye Yazma Eser Kütüphanesi, Şehit Ali Paşa Koleksiyonu, no. 2028, v. 5a) (Courtesy of Türkiye Yazma Eserler Kurumu Başkanlığı, İstanbul, Türkiye) (14)



Figure 5. The folios depicting "regimen of elders" in the Şehit Ali Paşa Collection, nr. 2028, in the Süleymaniye Manuscript Library (Türkiye Yazma Eserler Kurumu Başkanlığı, İstanbul Süleymaniye Yazma Eser Kütüphanesi, Şehit Ali Paşa Koleksiyonu, no. 2028, v. 5b-6a) (Courtesy of Türkiye Yazma Eserler Kurumu Başkanlığı, İstanbul, Türkiye) (14)

Exercise for elders should be in proportion to their strength, i.e., low riding for weak ones and walking for strong ones. The best riding and walking are the accustomed ones. Elders should avoid all evacuations[iii] and strenuous exertion, especially sexual intercourse and common human desires, they should make a habit of comforting in low beds, and they should avoid all that moves the body because their bodies are quick to change like those of convalescents (13, 14).

According to Galen, healthy elders should not be kept from enema with olive oil because it wets and moistens hard excretions and makes what passes slippery. Accordingly, it moistens withered and desiccated bodies of elders.[iv] In Galen's opinion, bathing twice or thrice a month is useful to very old and weak elders with good tolerance.[v] Elders benefit from the ginger jam and the rinds of its root. Eating garlic does not harm those who are used to it,[vi] particularly in times/cold times after eating coarse foods, which cause dropsy or generate stone in their kidneys when consumed frequently (13, 14).

The elderly also need to avoid dispraised foods that produce unfavorable chyme. These foods are divided into three groups: 1. foods that increase yellow bile (all pungent ones, such as mustard, pepper, garlic, onion, rue, most spices, pungent pickles and sardines, rabīthā (a kind of small fish)/seeds and all desiccated, warm-dry foods), 2. foods that increase phlegm (fresh rough fish, waterfowl, most vegetables and fresh fruits [peach, apricot, cucumber, snake cucumber, and nonsweet watermelon], fatty and oily foods, milk, and milk products), and 3. foods that increase black bile (beef, male goat's meat, salted mountain game meat, salted fish, buttermilk, curdled milk, dried and old cheese, cabbage, eggplant, and lentils) (13, 14).

Referring to Galen, Thābit asserts that the opposite is cured by the opposite and similar is protected by similar.[vii] Accordingly, harm of excessive sweet is removed with mitigating sour things like oxymel, tart pomegranate juice, and quince wine/drink made with vinegar and, if this is impracticable, with vinegar mixed with water and vice versa. Harm of excessive fatty and oily things is removed with constipating pungent things, such as pickles, garlic, onion, caper, chestnut, acorn put up with vinegar, roasted myrtle berries, Syrian carob, nabk, and azarole (13, 14).

It is approved that some of their [elders'] appetite may be fulfilled as much as to intercept the strength of thought. The aim here is similar to the aim to fodder quadrupeds. The intention here is not the appetite of the quadruped, but end of the journey (13, 14).

It is ordered to keep away from those with contagious diseases that are generally seven, i.e., leprosy, scabies, smallpox, measles, halitosis, ophthalmia, and pestilential diseases, and to be cautious of seven inherited diseases from parents, i.e., leprosy, vitiligo, emaciation, consumption, melancholy, gout, and epilepsy (13, 14).

For the ones that have bodies easily ready to fullness/plethora, it is necessary to reduce the quantity and quality of food or one of them and to increase the exercise (13, 14).

DISCUSSION

Thābit began his work that covered diseases from head to toe with a chapter related to principles of health protection. In his valuable review on *Kitāb al-Dhakhīra fī ʿIlm al-Ṭibb*, Meyerhof (9) indicated the references with their authors that Thābit used, such as Hippocrates, Galen, Ibn Māsawayḥ, al-Kindī, Ḥunayn b. Isḥāq, Yūḥannā

[iii] " such as phlebotomy, vomiting, purgation, etc.

[iV] "Wherefore I do not purge even those who are constipated in chronic diseases, such as chiefly befall many in winter, and those similarly constipated during convalescence after a long illness, with acid enemata, but inject oil only. And this does not at all contraindicate sometimes giving enemata to the healthy when they are constipated, for they soften the hard portions of the excrements, and a certain lubrication occurs in the passage, and the body itself of old men is softened, which has been hardened like hard membranes (5, p. 217)."

[v] "Moreover, Telephus, the grammarian, reached a more advanced age than Antiochus, living nearly a hundred years, and he used to bathe twice a month in winter, and once a week in summer, and three times a month in the intervening seasons of spring and fall (5, pp. 202–3)."

[vi] "Then it is advantageous also to eat onions and garlic, if one should be accustomed to it (5, p. 207)."

[vii] "But they should realize and remember not only this statement of Hippocrates, "that opposites are remedies of opposites," but also (...) (5, p. 23)."

b. Sarābiyūn, Yūsuf al-Sāhir, and Manka. Meyerhof (9) informed that the main sources of the chapter on health protection are Galen's commentary on Hippocrates' *Aphorisms* and Galen's *De sanitate tuenda*. Galen's *De alimentorum facultatibus* in the chapter on foods and Hippocrates' *De dieta acutorum* in the chapter on drinks were benefited. He said that Thābit also benefited from al-Ḳindī's works (9).

Thābit referred to Galen's commentary on Hippocrates' *Aphorisms* as one of the references in the chapter on regimen of elders. In comparisons, it is recognized that another source is Galen's *De sanitate tuenda* (4) as Meyerhof pointed out. Considering the content, physiology and pathology of senility and related regimen are coherent with the principles of humoral pathology. It is understood that Thābit adopted Galen's opinions in these parts since he cited from Galen.

In a work on Islamic science and medicine, Meyerhof (15) said, "It was Hunayn who gave Galen his supreme position in the Middle Ages in the Orient, and indirectly also in the Occident." In Bayat's *Tıp Tarihi* (*History of Medicine)*, the information on translated works in the translation period of the Islamic world in Medieval times supports Meyerhof's opinion (16). Bayat (16) said that thirteen works of Hippocrates, 64 works of Galen, and twenty works of Rufus of Ephesus were translated into Arabic in the translation period that lasted about two centuries. Fazlıoğlu (10) asserted that Thābit is considered as one of the two great translators of Islamic civilization with Ḥunayn. In the chapter on *Almagest* in *Kashf al-Zunūn*, Katip Çelebi informed (17):

> "As told, no one could have benefited from books of wisdom if Thābit has not translated them into Arabic because Greek was not known, all books that were not translated by these people stayed as they were and they cannot be utilized (17, p. 1271)."

There are many adaptations from Galen among Ṯābit's works on medicine (18).[viii] It is appropriate to say what Meyerhof said about Ḥunayn regarding Galen about Thābit b. Qurra or to include Thābit in Meyerhof's comment. It can be claimed that Thābit had a significant contribution to the settlement of Galenism in Islamic science and medicine in Medieval times. Although Hippocrates' *Aphorisms* was translated into Arabic by Ḥunayn (15, 19), it is remarkable that Thābit included Hippocrates' opinions with Galen's comments in his works.

As a conclusion, it is understood from the information given by Thābit b. Qurra that the main source of the information on regimen of elders is Galen's writings in *Kitāb al-Dhakhīra fī ʻIlm al-Ṭibb* and this information is coherent with the principles of humoral paradigm.

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"Now the common principle for all disordered natures is better to apply to this also, and that is to correct them by their opposites, with much rest, but to support them by their similars when, on account of too much business, the patient is prevented from resting (5, p. 228)."

[viii] *"Ğawāmiʿ K. Ğālīnūs fī Quwa l-adwiya al-mushila, Ğawāmiʿ K. Ğālīnus fī k. Sūʾ al-mizāğ al-muḫtalif, Ğawāmiʿ K. Ğālīnūs fi ḍ-Ḍubūl, Ğawāmiʿ K. Ğālīnūs fī Taŝrīḥ ar-raḥim, Muḫtaṣar Ṯābit b. Qurra al-Ḥ. li-kitāb Ğālīnūs fi l-maulūdīn li-sabʿati (in der Hds.: tisʿat) ašhur, Ğawāmiʿ K. Ğālīnūs fī asnāf al-amrāḍ; According to Ibn Abī Uṣaibiʿa: Ğawāmiʿ K. al-Mirra as-saudāʾ li-Ğālīnus, Ğawāmiʿ K. al-Karma li-Ğālīnus, Ğawāmiʿmā qālahū Ğālīnus fī kitābihī fī taŝrīf ṣināʿat aṭ-ṭibb, etc. (18, pp. 261-2)."*

brary, Şehit Ali Paşa Collection, nr. 2028 [Türkiye Yazma Eserler Kurumu Başkanlığı, Süleymaniye Yazma Eser Kütüphanesi, Şehit Ali Paşa Koleksiyonu, no. 2028]. v. 1a,5a–6a.
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APPENDIX

فأما تدبير المشايخ فالبدن في هذه الحال[i] يكون في الأكثر باردا يابسا[ii] وإصلاحه يكون بالمسخن المرطب[iii] مثل الأطعمة المسخنة المرطبة. قال (جالينوس) في «الفصول» آخذ[iv] المرطب هو الذي يخلو من كل طعم قوي وهو أن لا يكون[14,v.5a] عفصا ولا حريفا ولا مالحا ولا مرا ولا حامضا ويكون من اللذيذة السهلة[v] الهضم والشراب المعتدل في اللون والرائحة والطعم كما وصفنا آنفا فيستعمل منه بقدر الحاجة اليه في الكمية والمزاج والاستحمام بالمياه العذبة والدلك بالأدهان الحارة والرياضة على قدر الطاقة من كان ضعيفا فبالركوب الوطيء ومن كان قويا فبالمشي وأفضله ما قد اعتادوه من الركوب والمشي[vi] ويحذرون[vii] جميع الاستفراغات والكد والجماع خاصة والأعراض النفسية عامة ويتعاهدون[viii] الطيب في المراقد الوطيئة[ix] ويجتنبون كل ما يحرك البدن[x] فان أبدان الشيوخ مثل أبدان الناقهين تسرع الاستحالة إلى الأمراض. قال (جالينوس) ليس يمنع الشيوخ الأصحاء من الحقنة بالزيت لأنها تبل الفضول الصلبة[xi] وترطبها وتزلق ما تمرّ به فترطب لذلك أبدانهم التي قد قحلت وجفت. ومن اعتاد منهم أكل الثوم فلا يضره أكله في الأوقات خاصة إذا كان ذلك بعد أكلهم الأطعمة الغليظة فان ذلك عند الأكثار منهم يلقيهم في الاستسقاء أو يولد الحصا في كلاهم.[xii] قال (جالينوس) من كان سنه في غاية الشيخوخة وقوته ضعيفة فالذي يحتمل من الاستحمام في الشهر مرتين أو ثلثا ومما [ينفع] المشايخ بخاصية فيه من النفع من الهرم الزنجبيل المربى وكذلك الانجباب وكذلك[xiii] يجب أن يتجنبوا[xiv] الأغذية المذمومة وهي التي تولد الكيموسات الرديئة وجملتها ثلاثة [xv]التي تكثر[xvi] الصفراء من كل حريف مثل الخردل والفلفل والثوم والبصل والسذاب وأكثر[xvii] التوابل والكواميخ الحريفة [والصحناة] والربيثا والبن[xviii] وكل طعام حار يابس مجفف والذي يكثر البلغم مثل السمك الغليظ من الطري وطير الماء وأكثر البقول والفواكه الرطبة مثل الخوج والمشمش والخيار والقثاء والبطيخ الذي لا حلاوة له والأطعمة الدسمة والدهنة واللبن وما يتخذ منه. فأما الذي يكثر السوداء فلحم البقر والتيوس وأكثر[xix] لحوم الصيد وخاصة الجبلية والنمكسود والسمك المالح والدوغ[xx] والجبن اليابس وخاصة العتيق منه والكرنب والباذنجان والعدس. ومن مديده إلى شيء من ذلك فما يدفع[xxi,13,p.6] به ضررها فيكون ذلك بأضدادها[xxii] كما قال (جالينوس) حفظ الأشياء بأشباهها وعلاجها بأضدادها. فيدفع ضرر الإكثار من الحلو بالحامض الملطف مثل السكنجبين وماء الرمان المز وشراب السفرجل المعمول بالخل. فان تعذرت هذه[xxiii] فالخل الممزوج بالماء وبالعكس. ويدفع ضرر الإكثار من الأشياء الدسمة والدهنية بالأشياء الحريفة القابضة مثل الكواميخ والثوم والبصل [والكبر] والشاهبلوط[xxiv] والبلوط المدبر بالخل وحب الآس المحمص والخرنوب الشامي والنبق والزعرور وبالعكس[xxv]. وقد أشاروا باعطاء النفس بعض شهوتها بالقدر[xxvi] الذي يقطع به قوة الفكر عنها[xxvii] في ذلك بعد أن تعلم أن مرادك منه مرادك من[xxviii] اعلاف دابتك الذي ليس تريد به[14,v.5b] شهوة الدابة لكن لأن تبلغ به مرادك من غاية سفرك[xxix]. ومما أمروا به التحرز من أصحاب الأمراض الذي تعدي وهي في الأكثر سبعة: الجذام والجرب والجدري والحصبة والبخر والرمد والأمراض الوبائية. والتوقي من[xxx] الأمراض التي تكون وراثة عن الآباء وهي أيضا في أكثر الأمر[xxxi] سبعة: الجذام والبرص والدق والسل والماناخوليا[xxxii] والنقرس والابليسيما. ومن كان بدنه مستعدا [للإمتكلاء] بسهولة فيجب أن ينقص من كمية الغذاء وكيفية أو إحداهما ويزيد في الرياضة.[13,p.7;14,v.6a]

[i] Şehit Ali Paşa, nr. 2028: **"الحالة"**

[ii] Şehit Ali Paşa, nr. 2028: "بارد يابس"

[iii] Şehit Ali Paşa, nr. 2028: "الرطب"

[iv] Şehit Ali Paşa, nr. 2028: **"الغذا"**

[v] Şehit Ali Paşa, nr. 2028: **"اللذيذ السهل"**

[vi] Şehit Ali Paşa, nr. 2028: "وأفضله العادة من ركوب ومشي"

[vii] Şehit Ali Paşa, nr. 2028: "ويحذر"

[viii] Şehit Ali Paşa, nr. 2028: **"ويتعاهد"**

[ix] Şehit Ali Paşa, nr. 2028: **"الرطبة"**

[x] Şehit Ali Paşa, nr. 2028: "ويجتنبوا كلما حرك البدن"

[xi] Şehit Ali Paşa, nr. 2028: "قال ابقراط ليس شيء للشيوخ الأصحاء لأنه يبل الأعضاء الصلب"

[xii] Şehit Ali Paşa, nr. 2028: "أكثر وأمنه أو يولد لذلك الحصا في كلاهم ومن اعتاد منهم أكل الثوم ولم يضره أكله في الأوقات الباردة خاصة وبعد المأكل الغليظة فان ذلك يوقعهم في الاستسقاء إذا"

[xiii] "ومما [ينفع] المشايخ بخاصية فيه من النفع من الهرم الزنجبيل المربى وكذلك الانجباب وكذلك" absent in Şehit Ali Paşa, nr. 2028.

[xiv] Şehit Ali Paşa, nr. 2028: **"يجتهدوا في اجتناب"**

[xv] Şehit Ali Paşa, nr. 2028: **"وهي"**

[xvi] Şehit Ali Paşa, nr. 2028: **"تولد"**

[xvii] Şehit Ali Paşa, nr. 2028: **"أكثار"**

[xviii] Şehit Ali Paşa, nr. 2028: **"والصحنا والبزور"**

[xix] **"وأكثر"** absent in Şehit Ali Paşa, nr. 2028.

[xx] Şehit Ali Paşa, nr. 2028: **"والدوغ والرائب"**

[xxi] Şehit Ali Paşa, nr. 2028: "ومن مديده إلى شيء من ذلك فلا بد من شيء"

[xxii] Şehit Ali Paşa, nr. 2028: **"ضدها"**

[xxiii] **"فان تعذرت هذه"** absent in Şehit Ali Paşa, nr. 2028.

[xxiv] Şehit Ali Paşa, nr. 2028: **"شاه بلوط"**

[xxv] **"وبالعكس"** absent in Şehit Ali Paşa, nr. 2028.

[xxvi] Şehit Ali Paşa, nr. 2028: **"شهواتها المقدار"**

[xxvii] Şehit Ali Paşa, nr. 2028: "الفكر في ذلك"

[xxviii] Şehit Ali Paşa, nr. 2028: **"كمرادك"**

[xxix] Şehit Ali Paşa, nr. 2028: **"بل المراد من ذلك ان تبلغ غايت سفرك"**

[xxx] Şehit Ali Paşa, nr. 2028: **"عن"**

[xxxi] "في أكثر الأمر" absent in Şehit Ali Paşa, nr. 2028.

[xxxii] Şehit Ali Paşa, nr. 2028: **"ماليخوليا"**