

Review Article

Medieval Recipes for Treatment of Hair Contained in the *Kitab Al-Tasrif* (Book of Medical Arrangement) of Abulcasis Al-Zahrawi (C.936-C.1013)

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Abstract: Among the many scientists who enriched the scientific panorama in medieval Spain, one of the most important is without any doubt the Cordovan physician and surgeon Abulcasis Al-Zahrawi (circa 936-circa 1013). This paper is an approach to his figure and his main work entitled *Kitab al-Tasrif* (Book of medical arrangement) with special reference to its treatise XIX which deals to cosmetics and drugs for embellishment of body. The article contains an introduction about the author and the translation into English of some fragments of this part of the *Tasrif*, according to the Arabic manuscript no.5772 from the National Library of Paris. These translated texts include interesting medieval recipes for treatment of hair of great value for history of medicine and pharmacy.

Keywords: Abulcasis Al-Zahrawi, medieval Arabic medicine, medieval Arabic pharmacology, scientific knowledge of the Middle Ages, *Kitab al-Tasrif*

INTRODUCTION

Among the many scientists who enriched the scientific panorama in medieval Spain, one of the greatest is without any doubt the Cordovan physician and surgeon Abulcasis Al-Zahrawi (circa 936-circa 1013) [1]. His full name is Abu-l-Qasim Khalaf Ibn 'Abbas Al-Zahrawi [2] and he is known in the Latin tradition by several names, being Abulcasis the most usual of all. He was born in the suburb of Madinat Al-Zahra' in Cordova, around 936 and died around 1013 [3]. He lived in the golden times of the Umayyad Caliphate of Al-Andalus but few data of his biography are known and therefore the available information about him has to be taken with caution since there are many gaps in this regard [4].

The importance of Abulcasis [5], who was simultaneously physician, surgeon, pharmacist, ophthalmologist and dentist, is unquestionable [6]; and this is restricted not only to the history of Arabic science [7] but also to the history of the universal scientific knowledge due to the influence that his achievements had got all over Europe till late 16th century [8]. Thanks to Abulcasis the surgery, which is treated in the 30th treatise of the *Tasrif* [9], reached the rank of science since previously it was considered of lower category than the other medical disciplines [10].

Abulcasis wrote two works [11]: a) *Kitab al-tasrif li-man 'ajiza 'an al-ta'lif* (Book of the medical arrangement for those who are not capable of its

knowledge by themselves), that is his masterpiece, known as *Kitab al-Tasrif* or simply *Al-Tasrif*; and, b) *Kitab fi-l-tibb li-'amal al-jarrahin* (Book of medicine for the practice of the surgeons), not edited yet and included in the MS Deutsche Staatsbibliothek of Berlin, num.6254, mf.91, which, according to the explanation of Abulcasis made in the introduction of the book, is a summary of surgery written by Al-Zahrawi for his pupils as an appendix of his career of physician and as an abstract of his experience of surgeon; and it probably is a compendium of the 30th treatise from *Al-Tasrif* [12, 13].

Al-Tasrif is one of the most voluminous works made in the Islamic medieval world because it comprises a wide spectre of scientific knowledge prevailing at that time [14]: medical and surgical science, both in theory and in practice, diets and pharmacopoeia. The book that is divided into thirty treatises was written by Al-Zahrawi as a training manual for the students of his private school of medicine that he led in Spain with all probability [15].

The 19th treatise is an interesting medieval manual of pharmacology on cosmetics and drugs for health and embellishment of body [16] and contains recipes of a great value for the history of medicine and pharmacy, a few of which are translated into English in the next section.

RECIPES FOR EMBELLISHMENT OF HAIR

These are eleven recipes that have been taken from the 19th treatise of the *Kitab al-Tasrif* according to the Arabic manuscript no.5772 from the National Library of Paris.

Recipe of a remedy for preventing hair loss (f.77v^o)

You take laudanum and macerate it in syrup of oak-apple for one day and one night; then you crush it in a mortar together with myrtle oil once and with syrup again until it has the texture of honey. You can also mix it with maidenhair previously crushed and sifted in the amount corresponding to half of its weight. You use this remedy with myrtle oil or spikenard and it certainly is beneficial.

Recipe of an oil for hair loss (f.77v^o)

You take ten berries of juniper and equal portions of laudanum and absinthe. Later you crush all that, you wrap it in a wrapping and you macerate it in the oil for six or seven days, and then you apply it on the head.

Recipe of another remedy making grow hair, giving it volume and darkening it (f.77v^o)

You take laudanum, you crush it with olive oil and sweet wine, and you apply it in layers on the clean head, previously washed.

Recipe of another beneficial remedy for hair loss that is not caused by any disease (f.77v^o)

You take dry sulphur, you crush it, you knead it with water and you apply it in layers on the head. You can also use ash-tree root instead of dry sulphur.

Recipe of a remedy making grow hair (f.78r^o)

You take pistachio leaves, you burn them and you crush them; and then you knead the ash with myrtle oil and you apply a bit of it on the head.

Another recipe of a remedy making grow hair (f.78r^o)

It is taken ash from cane root, is kneaded very well with myrtle oil and applied on the head. And if mixed with laudanum, the remedy is more beneficial.

Recipe for a remedy that gives volume to the hair and protects it (f.78r^o)

This recipe has proven. You take four ounces of Christ's thorn leaves; one ounce of unperforated oak-apple; ¼ ounce of dried willow leaves; two ounces of sumac; three ounces of dried apple leaves; and fourteen pounds of unripened olives oil. You crush whole, you knead it with strong raisin wine and you mix it with the oil and then it is applied. It is good and it has been proven.

Recipe of an oil that protects the hair (f.78r^o)

This remedy also strengthens the hair, gives volume and embellishes it, as well as avoids its weakening and loss, and improves its odour. It is amazing: It takes one ounce of cypress leaves, pomegranate flowers, dry myrtle, dry pennyroyal, dried leaves of apple-tree, willow leaves, olive leaves and chard leaves; and ½ ounce of absinthe, maidenhair, marshmallow, cedoaria (camphor root), cardamom and juniper. You mix everything and you cook to simmer in seven pounds of water and three pounds of aromatic sesame oil, until the oil reaches the texture and consistency of the medicines and the water has been consumed. It is then separated, is allowed to cool until it is tempered, is poured into a glass container and is assiduously applied on the hair. This certainly embellishes and protects it.

Recipe of a remedy that makes hair grow and also protects it (f.78r^o)

You take laudanum, myrrh and myrtle oil and you mix everything very well crushed until to have ointment texture, and then you apply it on hair root. Certainly that prevents hair loss.

Recipe of a remedy that strengthens hair root and prevents hair loss (f.78r^o-f.78v^o)

You take one portion of laudanum, absinthe and bone of date burnt; you wrap it in a wrapping [f^o 78v^o] of linen, you place it into a bottle with oil and it is left so for a few days. You then apply it on the head and certainly this remedy strengthens hair root and makes hair grow, if God the Most High wants.

Recipe of a soap that strengthens hair root and cleans the head and the beard from the harmful moisture (f.78v^o)

You take salt, you fry it very well and let it cool. You then crush it very often and you sift it. Later you take the same amount of sugar and marshmallow, you mix all together, you crush it with rose oil or sesame oil, and with this soap you wash the head. It is beneficial.

Recipe of an oil that protects the hair, gives it shine and embellishes it (f.79r^o)

This oil also strengthens hair root and prevents its weakening and its loss. You take two ounces of leaves of green myrtle; one ounce of mountain poplar, dried leaves of olive, oak-apple, sumac, flowers of pomegranate and dried leaves of willow; and ½ ounce of Indian nard and leaves of terebinth fruit. You mix these remedies, you boil them to simmer in six pounds of water and two pounds of unripe olives oil until having oil texture. It is poured into bottles and you assiduously apply on the hair. Certainly it is beneficial, if God the Most High wants.

Recipe for hair loss (f.79v^o)

Among the things that are beneficial for hair loss is to apply frequently myrtle oil on the hair. That certainly will protect it without damaging it.

Recipe of a beneficial remedy for hair loss (f.79v^o)

You take laudanum, you dilute it in syrup, you mix it with myrtle oil, for example, and you apply it on the hair at night. Then you wash the hair with cold water, repeating the treatment a few times. It is certainly effective, God willing.

CONCLUSIONS

Abulcasis Al-Zahrawi is an example of the high scientific level reached by Arab and Islamic medicine in the Middle Ages. The *Kitab al-Tasrif* is part of the important cultural and scientific legacy brought by the Arabs and, for this reason, his author is set in a very outstanding place in history of universal science. The 19th treatise in which are included the texts translated in this paper is an interesting manual on aesthetics and cosmetics that contains recipes and several medical considerations of great value for the history of medicine and pharmacy.

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