

Diet and Reception Thereof in the Context of Middle East Medicine – a Historical Excursion

Diēta un tās recepcija Tuvo Austrumu medicīnas kontekstā – vēsturisks ekskurs

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Diet, along with abstinence and science of nutrition, used to be one of the cornerstones of the Middle Eastern medicine. It was promoted by different, even ideologically opposed world outlooks originating in ancient Greek and Roman science, Islam civilisation, rationalism and religious mysticism. This intellectual heritage related to the link between correct nutrition and health was gradually adopted by the Christian Europe, causing upheaval of the perception of illness and health. Unfortunately, modern food and pharmacy industries in both East and West have led us to obesity and mass catastrophe of diabetes, with growing number of heart attacks and strokes. This makes the medical findings of the past even more topical today, at the same time proving the common points of communication between different cultures and religions in areas of vital importance to people.

Keywords: diet, fasting, abstinence, medicine, Middle East, religion.

Medicine is one of the most important substances of our existence. It is closely related to philosophical, religious and socially-economical viewpoints of what is important for a human being: perception of life and death, understanding of the relation between the body and soul, explanation of the sense (or senselessness) of sufferings, awareness of physical and spiritual cleanliness (or pollution) of one's organism, etc. Both the East and the West used to have spiritual teachings, which perceived the diet along with meditation as one of the most important spiritual purification methods of an individual. The concepts of "illness" and "health" themselves are understood from culture-historical vantage point and not only as a result of a diagnosis set by medical practitioners. Starting from the 17th century, a serious dietary science had gradually gained an important role in human treatment in Europe, which in the 20th century was either pushed out of the "official medicine" space or subjected to a tendentious criticism as a result of the aggressive gaining of power by the food and pharmacy industries. Currently, when the number of diseases caused by incorrect eating habits and sedentary lifestyle has dramatically grown all over the world, discussions regarding the importance of a diet have

resumed at the governmental levels, books are being published, alternative stores are opened, etc. It should be taken into account that “Around 415 million people worldwide (8.8 per cent) in the 20–79 years age-group had diabetes in 2015 and by 2040, 642 million people (10.4 per cent of the adult population) is expected to have diabetes. In the Middle East and North Africa region, 35.4 million people lived with diabetes in 2015 and the number is expected to rise to 72.1 million by 2040.”¹ However, serious rehabilitation of the diet has not come about today due to the tendency to seek financial profit characteristic to the dominant model of Western capitalism in relation to profiteering from “treatment” of diseases, as well as orientation of the “official medicine” to mitigation of consequences of an illness rather than prevention of causes thereof. Unlike in medieval Europe, where medicine was dominated by obscure demonization of illnesses and understanding of eating was limited to quantity rather than quality, and spiritual life was determined by narrow-minded interpretation of religion, – critical thinking, rationalism and scepticism developed in the Middle East along with discussions about the interconnection of birth control, ecology and human health. Paradoxically, right now a contrary process is ongoing in both Middle and Far East: food is dominated by semi-finished products, the environment is being catastrophically polluted and birth control is not even discussed by the general public.² The reasons behind these tendencies are both urbanisation, at first initiated by the West, expropriation of the land of self-sustaining rural communities, marginalisation of the population, and complete cessation of the once existing intellectual tradition in the context of global consumer society. The negative consequences of the food industry are even stronger in the rich Gulf Arab countries. However, recently intensive discussions have started in relation to this theme, elucidating the true reasons of the increasing obesity, diabetes, allergies, strokes and infarctions. This is proved by the numerous publications devoted to the theme of obesity in the UAE.³

Ancient Arabic medicine, including dietetics, stands for a peculiar link between the medicine of Ancient Greece-Rome⁴ and that of the medieval Europe, at the same time gaining knowledge from the lifestyles of Bedouins of the Arabian Peninsula, religious findings of Islam (fasting, “healing by Quran”), the heritage of the ancient cultures of the Middle East (Babylonian, Chaldean, Egyptian, Persian etc.) and teachings of the Far East (especially India). To specify the term “Arabic”, it is first used to understand the scientists speaking and writing in the Arabic language of

¹ Al Madani, Abdulrazzaq Ali. Manage your life better to fight diabetes. *Gulf News*, 08.09.2016, p. A5.

² Regulation of birth policy in China, nature protection in Japan, supporting of self-sufficient environmentally friendly lifestyle in rural Iran, and development of alternative environmentally friendly technologies in the UAE are exceptions.

³ Why fasting is good for you. *Gulf News*, 09.03.2016, p. A28; Chaudhary, Suchitra Bajpai. 10.000 cases of stroke reported last year. *Gulf News*, 02.05.2016, p. A5; Chaudhary, Suchitra Bajpai. Dubai survey: Obesity, heart disease, diabetes top ailments. *Gulf News*, 01.06.2016, p. A6.

⁴ Especially Hippocrates (~ 460 – ~370 BC) and Galen (129 – ~200 AD) in the meaning of scientific heritage.

which the majority were of Persian and Jewish origin (and who at the same time knew their native language). It should be also remembered that a large number of Arabic doctors were Middle Eastern Christians. At the same time, Islam as the dominant religion of the region, with its principles and instructions, which comprised all areas of human life, influenced the field of medicine, at the same time accumulating experiences from other religions and world outlooks.

The origins of the diet and deep understanding of nature by the Arabs who lived in deserts and semi-deserts in antiquity go back to the self-sufficient lifestyle of the Arab Bedouins. Evidence of this is provided in the itineraries of different travellers from the West, even up to the Modern Times. As an extreme opposite to the condition of modern man appears the description of Bedouins provided by the British explorer Sir Richard F. Burton in his once famous work “Narrative of a Pilgrimage to El-Medinah and Meccah” (Volume 3: Meccah): “I have seen two or three muscular figures, but never a fat man.”⁵ “... even simples are not required by a people who rise with dawn, eat little, always breathe desert air...”⁶ In fact, a healthy lifestyle and moderation in eating and pleasures was characteristic to the entire Muslim society. This is vividly proved in Dean Mahomet’s book “Travels” (1793–1794), with the description of the Indian Muslims: “The Mahometans are, in general, a very healthful people: refraining from the use of strong liquors, and accustomed to a temperate diet, they have but few diseases, for which their own experience commonly finds some simple yet effectual remedy.”⁷ Back in his days, the Prophet explained the secret of the good Arab health to a physician who was surprised about it: “It is the custom of these people not to eat until hunger overcomes them and to cease eating while there still remains a desire for food.”⁸ It is general knowledge that one of the five pillars of Islam is the obligatory fasting (*Ṣawm*) during the holy month of Ramadan. The meaning of this fasting is explained by Arabic lawyer and commenter of Quran Ibn Qayyim al-Jawziyyah (1292–1350) as protection (*junna*) from illnesses of the spirit, heart and body.⁹ Unfortunately, the positive consequences of such purification were possible only within the framework of the leisurely and modest rhythm of life of the traditional society. Today, the Ramadan fasting in Arabic countries has turned into its opposite – uncontrolled overeating and nightly orgies at disco clubs and restaurants have made this period even riskier for human health. Almost nothing has remained from spiritual concentration and reassessment of values.

During transformation of Islamic civilisation, along with Arabic conquests and establishing of the caliphate, an interesting court culture developed in Baghdad with a varied and eclectic cuisine, stressing the taste and variety rather than health and temperance. However, information has remained from the times of the first “Rightly

⁵ Burton, Richard F. *Narrative of a Pilgrimage to El-Medinah and Meccah*. Vol. 3. Meccah. Cambridge; New York, et. al.: Cambridge University Press, 2012, p. 39.

⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 78.

⁷ Fisher, Michael H. (ed.). *The Travels of Dean Mahomet. An Eighteenth-Century Journey through India*. Berkeley; Los Angeles; London: University of California Press, 1997, p. 68.

⁸ Salim M. Khan, Hakim. *Introduction to Islamic Medicine*. Norwich: Bahr Press, 2009, p. 13.

⁹ Ibn Qayyim, Al-Jawziyyah. *Medicine of the Prophet*. Johnstone, Penelope (transl.). Cambridge: The Islamic Texts Society, 2013, p. 338.

Guided” caliphs, appealing to observe moderation in eating and diet. For example, according to evidence, caliph Umar ibn al-Khattab (634–644) had expressed severe criticism regarding overeating:

“Beware of overeating! It makes one too lazy to perform the ritual prayer, corrupts the body and leads to sickness. Being moderate with one’s food is less wasteful, healthier for one’s body, and strengthens one’s devotion.”¹⁰

Also later, during the Crusader period, the ideal of temperance continued to exist in the courts of the Middle East rulers along with appetites for luxury and posh banquets. It was closely related to the concept of *jihād*, which gained new motivation at that time. Only unlike the “jihadists” manipulated by different socially-economical forces of the modern world, which has created a modern version of obscurantism deifying narcotics and fast food, the ideal of *jihād* of the 12th–13th centuries comprised, along with fighting against Crusaders and tolerance towards the defeated ones, also temperance in food (and pleasures). According to testimony by Ibn Shaddād (d. 1234), the renowned leader of the Islamic world Saladin (An-Nasir Salah ad-Din Yusuf ibn Ayyub) (1137–1193), who became a symbol of chivalry also in Europe due to his generosity, generally preferred simple and natural food.¹¹

Temperance in food and refraining from the use of pleasure-giving substances in human history has often been a part of spiritual mobilisation. It especially refers to movements aimed at achieving radical socio-economically, politically and ethically motivated reforms. On the other hand, overeating, untamed bodily desires and orgies, which all weaken human reaction, mental and physical endurance and ethical resistance, have made even well-armed military mercenaries unable to withstand. Inability of the modern European population to solve issues of their rights and security is partly originating from such idle and inert lifestyle. In the past, in the Middle East (much like in Europe during Reformation and revolutions) diet, fasting, temperance and declaring certain food to be taboo was ideology of certain religiously-political groups. For example, the Qarmatians – a Shia group, which played a significant role in Islamic countries from 894 until 1078 (especially in the Persian Gulf and Bahrain) by establishing one of the first communist societies in the world,¹² also used to be known as “the Greengrocers” (*al-Baqliyyah*).¹³

Referring to the professional medicine of the Islamic civilisation, which considerably developed in Abbasid Baghdad, Seljuq and Ayyubid Damascus, Berber and Arab Spain, Fatimid and Mamluk Cairo, as well as Islamic Central Asia, Mughal India etc. – many dietary, herbal medicine and homeopathic principles were formulated, which are as topical nowadays as during the period of synthesis of the ideas of Arabic (Muslim and Christian), Byzantine, Persian, Jewish, Indian, etc. thinkers

¹⁰ Geder, Geert Jan van. *God’s Banquet. Food in Classical Arabic Literature*. New York: Columbia University Press, 2000, p. 34.

¹¹ Fuess, Albrecht; Hartung, Jan-Peter. *Court Cultures in the Muslim World*. London and New York: Routledge, 2001, p. 367.

¹² Rahman, Mohanned. *The Qarmatians: The world’s first enduring communistic society*. Available at <http://www.worldbulletin.net/islamic-history/127416/the-qarmatians-the-worlds-first-enduring-communistic-society> [last viewed September 11, 2016].

¹³ Available at <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Qarmatians> [last viewed September 11, 2016].

from the 8th to 15th centuries. It would be interesting to the modern man to look into the findings of certain medieval Arab thinkers and to understand with a surprise how modern (and, from the modern vantage point, “alternative”) they are. For example, the eminent Jewish and Arabic doctor and philosopher Maimonides (Mūsā bin Maymūn) (1135 or 1138–1204) recognised moderation and a healthy lifestyle to be one of the priorities of getting well.¹⁴ He wrote special directions on dietetics for Sultan al-Malik al-Afdal, which were later translated into Latin as aphorisms.¹⁵ His advice could be as well used today in prevention of many diseases, for example, this finding: “It is not proper for us to gorge ourselves full of food ... Putrefied foods and beverages produce decay [i.e., toxins] similar to that produced by deadly poisons.”¹⁶

Ibn Nafis (1213–1288) in his turn, “followed in his treatment of patients the basic principle underlying humoral pathology namely that he did not prescribe a remedy as long as **he could prescribe a diet**, and he did not prescribe a compound remedy as long as he could content himself with a simple drug.”¹⁷ For the sake of comparison, one can agree with the opinion of Latvian scientists, that Western (European) science arrived at a similar finding with regard to use of doses of medicines very late, because it was believed for a long time that “a disease penetrates the organism of an ill person from outside, therefore huge doses of toxic substances were used for “exorcising” it, which caused vomiting, diarrhoea, salivation and excessive perspiration.”¹⁸ Such prescribing of medicines in the format of inadequately many medicines is also practiced by modern doctors, who often happen to be agents of pharmacy companies. This has especially severe consequences in, for example, treatment of psychological illnesses and neuroses and, as a result, the patient suffers much more from the respective therapy than from the actual cause of the illness.¹⁹ A healthy diet with consuming of the necessary set of minerals and vitamins is not even considered in this regard. Often enough, the food provided in hospitals is completely worthless from the perspective of health. The reasons of the dead end of Western medicine also stem from the world outlook inherited from the Middle Ages. This is very accurately formulated by the eminent German scientists and doctors Peter Jentschura and Josef Lohkämper in their book on self-purification of the organism, highlighting the link between food, diet and views of the society. In the Western tradition a disease is not understood in interaction with a person’s spiritual and physical being, but taken outside the context and demonised, because “... Christianity granted to

¹⁴ Available at https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Maimonides#cite_note-rosner-33 [last viewed September 11, 2016].

¹⁵ Fück, Johann. *Arabische Kultur und Islam im Mittelalter*. Weimar: Hermann Böhlau Nachfolger, 1981, p. 314.

¹⁶ Rosner, Fred. *The Medical Legacy of Moses Maimonides*. New Jersey: Ktav Publishing House, 1997, p. 64.

¹⁷ Waines, David. *Food Culture and Health in Pre-Modern Muslim Societies*. Leiden; Boston: Brill, 2011, p. xxxi.

¹⁸ Almane, Renāte; Vegnere, Inta. Homeopātijas vēsture Latvijā. In: *Acta Medico-Historica Rigensia V (XXIV)*. Rīga: P. Stradiņa Medicīnas vēstures muzejs, 2000, p. 191.

¹⁹ Available at <http://www.einblicke-altenburg.de/?q=book/export/html/1149> [last viewed May 5, 2017].

its God the rule over just one half of the natural kingdom. The other half is ruled by the Satan, the devil. It is understandable that such duality results in conflicts.”²⁰ A way out of the stalemate would be seeing the human organism as a whole rather than through the prism of the “good-evil” dualism (today it would be referred to as “acceptable-unacceptable”) and trying to neutralise the “evil” symptoms just by means of tablets and injections that was the old “demonization tactic”. At the same time, one can agree with Hakim Muhammad Salim Khan that unlike the Ancient Greek and Middle Eastern approach, which studied the human being as an indivisible whole, the Western science “... has taken him to pieces in order to study each piece separately” and, as a result, “this view of the world has created fundamental problems, both technological and psychological.”²¹ A unique example that shows the different attitude both towards a “psychical illness” and the reality *per se* is a piece of historical evidence from the times of Crusades in Palestine, left by a 12th century Syrian writer, Usāmah ibn Munqidh (1095–1188). Crusaders were surprised by the ability of an Arab doctor to heal a mentally ill woman to which the Arab doctor replied: “**the woman I put on a diet** and made her humour wet”. The reaction of the Western doctor, of course, was not happiness for the recovery of the woman, but rather deep suspicion and aggression. He immediately put his arsenal of demonization in use, stressing that “This woman has a devil in her head who has fallen in love with her.” Of course, the diet recommended by the Arab doctor was stopped and the “sick” woman began once again to eat the usual food, as a result of which her disorder got worse. Then the Frankish physician said: “The devil has entered her head”, took a razor, incised a cross on her head and pulled off the skin in the middle until the bone of the skull appeared; this he rubbed with salt. Naturally, the woman died afterwards.²² Regardless of the historically specific perception of the “four humours of the body”, that accounted for one of the cornerstones of the ancient Arab psychiatry,²³ the very attitude to the human being and his problems at that time seems to be surprisingly “modern” from the contemporary perspective. Also other findings of the ancient Middle Eastern medicine regarding use (or non-use) of certain food types fully match advice of serious contemporary dieticians. For example, the eminent Persian philosopher, physicist and poet Ibn Sina (980–1037) advises in his monumental work “Canon of Medicine” (“*Kitāb al-Qānūn fī aṭ-Ṭibb*”)²⁴ to reduce the quantity of food consumed in summer, giving preference to lighter food as much as possible, not to eat heavy meat meals but replace them with

²⁰ Jentschura, Peter; Lohkämper, Josef. *Gesundheit durch Entschlackung*. Münster: Verlag Peter Jentschura, 1998. The quote is from the Latvian edition *Organisma attīrīšana*. Riga: Jumava, 2004, p. 26.

²¹ Salim M. Khan, Hakim. *Introduction to Islamic Medicine*. Norwich: Bahr Press, 2009, pp. 26–27.

²² Usāmah Ibn-Munqidh. *Memoirs of Usāmah Ibn-Munqidh*. Hitti, Philip K. (transl.). London: I. B. Tauris & Co. Ltd., 1987, p. 162.

²³ The theory of “Four humours” (Humorism) is, in fact, inherited from the Ancient Greek medicine.

²⁴ The work is written in Arabic.

vegetables.²⁵ In fact, all the modern findings of the balance of acids and alkali in the organism, which follows from the person's nutritional habits, have been ingeniously anticipated and formulated in the ancient medicine of both the ancient world and the Middle East. The interconnection between nutrition, lifestyle and health at that time was also understood by the thinkers who were not physicians themselves. Due to the strong tradition of empirical science, which was inherited already from the times of flourishing of Abbasid Caliphate, they were able to make correct conclusions. For example, the distinguished Arabic historian Ibn Khaldūn (1332–1406) very directly and critically analysed reasons and consequences of obesity: "... a great amount of food and the moisture it contains generate pernicious superfluous matters in the body, which in turn, produce a disproportionate widening of the body, as well as many corrupt, putrid humours. ... When the moisture with its evil vapours ascends to the brain, the mind and the ability to think are dulled. The result is stupidity, carelessness, and a general intemperance."²⁶

Following temperance and diet, vegetarianism and veganism in both Eastern and Western discourses are often related to a considerate attitude to the environment and critical position with regard to overpopulation (or scepticism regarding high birth rates *per se*). Sometimes these opinions are accompanied by supporting of social justice, harsh criticism of religions and explanation of belief as a limited and obscurant system of stereotypes. Such thinkers are known in Europe already from the times of the genesis of early atheism – the 16th–17th centuries. In the culture historical heritage of the Middle East the respective intellectual tradition started already much earlier. Let us remember, among others, Arabic philosopher Abul 'Ala Al-Ma'arri (973–1057) demonised by the modern "Islamist" environment, who, being a strict vegetarian at the same time completely denied any religion whatsoever (including Islam, Judaism and Christianity), perceiving them as a "fable invented by the ancients" with an aim to control the subjected population.²⁷ In this aspect his opinions are similar to the interpretation of a religion as a mind-polluting narcotic provided by Karl Marx (1818–1883). In the opinion of Al-Ma'arri, a diet and clearing the organism from dross cannot be separated from spiritual purification (in the meaning of non-acceptance of religions) or a person's ethical attitude to flora and fauna by not supporting killing of animals and polluting oneself with eating their meat.²⁸ He has also laid down the basic principles of classical vegetarianism philosophy. In fact, Al-Ma'arri was not just a vegetarian but a vegan.²⁹ His sceptical attitude to

²⁵ Avicenne. *Poème de la médecine*. Texte arabe, traduction française, traduction latine du XIIIe siècle avec introductions, notes et index. Jahier, Henri; Nourredine, Abdelkader (eds.). Paris: Les Belles Lettres, 1956, p. 65.

²⁶ Ibn Khaldūn. *The Muqaddimah. An Introduction to History*. Rosenthal, Franz (transl., introduction). Princeton; Oxford: Princeton University Press, 2005, p. 65.

²⁷ Nicholson, Reynold Alleyne. *A Literary History of the Arabs*. Routledge: Abingdon on Thames, 1962, p. 318.

²⁸ Available at https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Al-Ma%CA%BFarri#cite_note-2 [last viewed September 14, 2016].

²⁹ Crone, P. *God's Rule – Government and Islam: Six Centuries of Medieval Islamic Political Thought*. New York, 2004, p. 355.

birth rates in his statements is rather related to understanding the futility of sufferings that a person has to live with over their entire life as a result of birth. Paradoxically, the anti-natalism³⁰ supported by Al-Ma'arri is undoubtedly an important theme in the context of Middle East, taking into account that overpopulation is one of the factors (along with the Western invasion) that took Arab (and African) countries into a chaos of unending riots and conflicts. Serious and rational attitude to one's organism, nutrition and environment also involves reasonable family planning, being aware of the limited resources available to the society. In a sense, scepticism of the ancient Arabic thinker can be compared to the conclusion by classic of ethology Konrad Lorenz (1903–1989) regarding irresponsible reproduction of oneself as one of the greatest manifestations of human egoism.³¹ Rationalism of Al-Ma'arri did not at all arise in an empty place, it followed from the Arabic spiritual tradition, which started already under the Abassid dynasty – caliph al-Ma'mūn (813–833), when the intellectual atmosphere was influenced by the Mu'tazili school of theology, which was entirely founded in reason and rational thought.³² In the environment of Middle Eastern thinkers, vegetarianism had a long continuation. For example, the eminent Persian philosopher, mystic and founder of the Iranian school of Illuminationism – al-Suhrawardi (1155–1191) – also was a vegetarian.³³

Diet, temperance and fasting were not only the result of the Middle Eastern rationalism and scientific progress, but also a cornerstone of philosophies of various mystically-spiritual movements. In Islamic countries, traditionally it was a world outlook of Sufis, which was aimed at taking down all barriers that separated the man from the God. Without going deep into the history of Sufism and its manifold manifestations through poetry, dance, manner of communication, etc. – let us look only at the aspect of diet and fasting. Like in the religious-philosophical systems of Ancient India, toughening one's organism, self-discipline and abstaining from consuming food in Sufism is a way to spiritual purification. From the vantage point of purification of the organism it could be referred to as replacement of “acid pleasures” with “alkali pleasures.”³⁴ In the work of Ibn Khaldūn “The Muqaddimah” the gradual fasting method of Sufis (by gradually reducing or increasing the dose of food instead of immediate action) is extensively described and it fully corresponds to the modern findings of medical fasting: “The assumption of physicians that hunger causes death is not correct, except when a person is exposed suddenly to hunger and is entirely cut off from food. Then, the stomach is isolated, and contracts an illness that can be fatal. When, however, the amount of food one eats is slowly decreased by gradual

³⁰ Available at https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Al-Ma%CA%BFarri#cite_note-EB-1 [last viewed September 14, 2016].

³¹ Available at <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Ethology> [last viewed September 14, 2016].

³² Leaman, O. Key. *Concepts in Eastern Philosophy*. London; New York: Routledge, 1999, p. 25.

³³ Crone, Patricia. *God's Rule – Government and Islam: Six Centuries of Medieval Islamic Political Thought*. New York: Columbia University Press, 2004, p. 355.

³⁴ Jentschura, Peter; Lohkämper, Josef. *Gesundheit durch Entschlackung*. Münster: Verlag Peter Jentschura, 1998. The entire work of the respective authors is devoted to this theme.

training, there is no danger of death. The adepts of Sufism practise (such gradual abstinence).³⁵

The Sufis considered fasting and sleeplessness the basis of the development of their inner self (*naḥs* in Arabic).³⁶ It should be taken into account that a natural reaction of the organism upon reduction of consumption of food is lesser need for sleep, followed by disappearing of tiredness, which is related to overloading of the organism with processing of food. Without doubt, this influences the sharpness of thought and clarity of perception, which the Sufis interpreted as spiritual (and religious) experience according to the perception of the unity of body and soul. According to information from German Orientalist Annemarie Schimmel, the first Sufi mystic, who speaks about “alchemy of hunger” is an early Sufi saint of the Khorasan school – Shaḡiq al-Balkhi (d. 810).³⁷

Abstinence and fasting have been also praised by Sufi poets – mystics, for example, the distinguished Persian poet, lawyer and theologian Jalāl ad-Dīn Rūmī (1207–1273), who stressed that “Hunger is God’s food by which He quickens the bodies of the upright.”³⁸ In his poetry Rūmī also praises abstinence from senseless thoughts, which pollute our spirit (by analogy as too much food pollutes one’s body):

Abstain from thoughts though they tempt and harass –
The heart’s the forest, thought a crazed wild-ass!
The best of medicines is abstinence, ...³⁹

By analogy, in the European Christian tradition monk orders used to give similar importance to fasting. However, due to the minor role of science in consciousness of monks and the dominant repressive regulation of household rules, it caused negative opposition and as a result in the medieval Europe monks already suffered from obesity-related health problems such as arthritis.⁴⁰ At the same time, Middle Eastern medicine, including diet teachings, underwent intensive reception in entire Europe during the medieval and early modern periods (not only in Iberian peninsula and South Italy, which was under the rule of Berbers and Arabs). Since its first translation in Latin in the 12th century the famous work of Ibn Sina “Canon of Medicine” served as a manual for European physicians over a period of 500 years.⁴¹ The “Arabic medicine” (which was a generic name for all Middle Eastern medicine) reached all Northern Europe, including Baltic, already in the 13th century. A parchment code

³⁵ Ibn Khaldūn. *The Muqaddimah*, p. 68.

³⁶ Schimmel, Annemarie. *Mystical Dimensions of Islam*. University of North Carolina Press: Chapel Hill, NC, 1975, p. 114.

³⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 115.

³⁸ *Ibid.*

³⁹ Jalal Al-Din Rumi. *The Masnavi*. Book One. Mojaddedi, Jawid (introduction, notes, transl.). Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004, p. 179.

⁴⁰ Available at <http://www.thefinertimes.com/Middle-Ages/food-in-the-middle-ages.html> [last viewed September 14, 2016].

⁴¹ The work was translated by Gerard of Cremona (~ 1114–1187).

is stored in Tallinn, with notes by Friar Mauritius from Reval.⁴² This universal scientist, who completed his doctorate in Paris in 1270,⁴³ referred to Persian and Arabic scientists respected in the medieval Europe (including in the area of human health), mentioning Ibn Sina, Al-Ghazali (~ 1058–1111), Ibn Rushd (1126–1198), etc.: “Avicennam sequitur et suum Algazelem. Averroes autem et Abubacer et Avenpethe et quidam alius philosophus Arabus aliadicunt.”⁴⁴ In the neighbouring Riga, evidence of the influence of “Arabic medicine” is provided by a survey from the 15th century, later titled “Medicinalia.” As it is known, in Riga, like in other European cities, all medical functions were the competence of spiritual fraternities, therefore it is obvious that this composition too, was produced in the respective environment. “Medicinalia” contains references not only to Ibn Sina, who was well-known in the West, but also to one of the pioneers of medical ethics – a Persian doctor and author of “Complete Book of the Medical Art” (“*Kitāb Kāmil aṣ- Ṣinā‘a aṭ-Ṭibbiyya*”) – ‘Ali ibn al-‘Abbas al-Majusi (10th century)⁴⁵, who preferred diet and natural healing to drugs when treating patients.⁴⁶ What regards diet, the abovementioned material from Riga provides instructions as to how a correct diet helps to avoid the infection of pestilence.⁴⁷

In the early modern period, Europe started not only in-depth study of the “Arabic medicine”, but also criticism and reassessment, trying to clear the nucleus of the ancient world (especially Ancient Greek) integrated in it from later deposits. Thus, for example, philologist Janus Cornarius (~1500–1558), after a conflict with Anabaptists, started his European journey by going to Livonia (Riga), Russia and Scandinavia in 1526 and later returning to Western Europe to clear the works by Ancient Greek authors (especially Hippocrates (~ 460 – ~370 BC) from the dominating “Arabism”.⁴⁸ Very soon European scientists, having deeply studied both the ancient Greek-Roman, and Middle East medical tradition overtook the spiritual relay race in certain areas and according to the information provided by the U. S. National Library of Medicine already “in the 17th century, early modern European medical theory had an impact upon Islamic medicine through the writings of the Paracelsians, followers of Paracelsus (d. 1541), whose ‘chemical medicine’ employed mineral acids, inorganic salts, and alchemical procedures in the production of remedies. Sali ibn Nasr ibn Sallum, a physician born in Aleppo, Syria, and later the court physician in Istanbul to the Ottoman ruler Mehmet IV (ruled 1648–1687/1058–1099 H)

⁴² Dates of birth and death are unknown.

⁴³ Available at <http://www.mauritanum.eu/about-us/mauritan-tradition/> [last viewed September 14, 2016].

⁴⁴ Amelung, Friedrich. *Baltische Culturstudien aus den vier Jahrhunderten der Ordenszeit (1184–1561)*. Dorpat: Verlag von C. Mattiesen, 1884, p. 46.

⁴⁵ Arbusow, Leonid (ed.). *Die Geschichte der Rigaer Stadtbibliothek und deren Bücher*. Hg. von der Rigaer Stadtverwaltung. Riga, 1937, p. 73.

⁴⁶ Available at https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/%27Ali_ibn_al-%27Abbas_al-Majusi [last viewed September 14, 2016].

⁴⁷ Arbusow, Leonid (ed.). *Die Geschichte der Rigaer Stadtbibliothek und deren Bücher*, p. 73.

⁴⁸ Arbusow, Leonid. *Die Einführung der Reformation in Liv-, Est- und Kurland*. Vermittlungs-verlag von M. Heinsius Nachfolger. Leipzig, 1921, p. 627.

was greatly influenced by these writings.⁴⁹ At the same time, the eminent German physician, botanist and philosopher Paracelsus (1493–1541),⁵⁰ who is considered to be the father of the modern homeopathy, was forced over his entire life to struggle with attempts of accusation, the consequence of which would be his burning at the stake. The example is even more interesting because he contradicted the existing authorities in medicine and the practices that they followed, such as the public burning of ancient books. Unlike the ancient Arabic and Persian scientists, their European colleagues had to face much more difficult working conditions due to the obscurantism in the society and the narrow-minded environment of the representatives of power. In any case, the science of diet and understanding the importance of nutrition habits in genesis of either illness or health continued to develop both on the side of Reformation and the side of the newly reborn Catholicism, which is proved by, for example, the once popular work of a Flemish Jesuit and a theologian Leonard Lessius (1554–1623) “Hygiasticon” (a treatise on how to preserve strength and to live long). The entire composition is a song of praise of diet and although L. Lessius does not mention by name any Middle Eastern scientist, interpretations of those ancient thinkers are clearly and undoubtedly visible in his book.⁵¹

Over the entire 17th and 18th centuries, knowledge of the ancient Middle Eastern medicine underwent reception also in the European belles-lettres both from the position of deep understanding and just as a “fashionable theme” discussed in salons. Thus, for example, the distinguished German Enlightenment author Christoph Martin Wieland (1733–1813) in 1772 published a pedagogic work written in the form of oriental stories,⁵² where he compares danger of overly rich foods (that can be consumed at the expense of one’s health) to natural foods, which, when cooked well, “even Avicenna (Ibn Sina) would have nothing against.”⁵³

Unfortunately, today, when speaking about millions of people manipulated by the advertising, which dominates the consumer society, it has to be concluded that the modern Western perception of such fundamentally important areas for humans as nutrition study has not changed much in comparison with the times of the pleasure-greedy monarchs’ rule in the 17th century. Critically thinking specialists who explain the essence of obesity and speak about purification of the organism – comparatively – are known only to a small number of those interested or to people who have saved their own lives from the dangers of “offers” provided by civilisation through following their personal wisdom. On the other hand, the chefs lobbied by the food

⁴⁹ Available at https://www.nlm.nih.gov/exhibition/islamic_medical/islamic_14.html [last viewed September 14, 2016].

⁵⁰ His real name was Philippus Aureolus Theophrastus Bombastus von Hohenheim.

⁵¹ Kunst, lang zu leben, oder: Ein bewehrtes Mittel den menschlichen Leib in Gesundheit auch ohne Verletzung der Sinnen ... biß auff’s höchste Alter zu erhalten. Lessius, Leonardus. Münster i. Westph., 1614. In: Digitale Sammlungen der Universitäts- und Landesbibliothek Münster. Available at <http://sammlungen.ulb.uni-muenster.de> [last viewed October 5, 2016].

⁵² Wieland, Christoph Martin. *Der goldene Spiegel oder die Könige van Scheschian, eine wahre Geschichte*. Leipzig: M. G. Weidmanns Erben und Reich, 1772.

⁵³ *Ibid.*, p. 130.

industry have won large television audiences, not even speaking about the numbers of published cookbooks.

Kopsavilkums

Diēta līdz ar atturību un uztura mācību kādreiz bija viens no Tuvo Austrumu medicīnas stūrakmeņiem. To veicināja dažādi, pat ideoloģiski pretēji pasaules uzskati, kas sakņojās antīkās Grieķijas un Romas zinātnē, islāma civilizācijā, racionālismā un reliģiskā misticismā. Šo intelektuālo mantojumu attiecībā uz pareiza uztura un veselības saikni pakāpeniski adaptēja kristīgā Eiropa, radot apvērsumu priekšstatos par slimību un veselību. Diemžēl mūsdienās pārtikas un farmācijas industrija – kā Rietumos, tā Austrumos – ir novedusi pie aptaukošanās un diabēta masveida katastrofas līdz ar infarkta un insulta precedentu skaita palielināšanos. Tas senatnē fiksētās medicīnas atziņas padara vēl aktuālākas, vienlaikus liecinot par dažādu kultūru un reliģiju kopīgiem saskarsmes punktiem cilvēkam vitāli svarīgās jomās.