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KARABAKH

HEALERS



Incense flask, 1st-3rd centuries, Caucasian Albania

KARABAKH IS ONE OF THE OLDEST HISTORICAL REGIONS OF AZERBAIJAN AND IS DIVIDED INTO TWO GEOGRAPHIC ZONES – HIGHLAND AND LOWLAND KARABAKH. THE CITY OF SHUSHA WAS THE CULTURAL CENTER OF NAGORNO-KARABAKH FROM THE 18TH CENTURY, WHILE THE LARGEST ECONOMIC, ADMINISTRATIVE AND CULTURAL CENTER OF THE LOWLAND PART OF THE REGION WAS THE CITY OF BARDA, WHICH WAS CONSIDERED AS POPULOUS AND IMPORTANT IN THE EAST IN THE 10TH-11TH CENTURIES AS BAGHDAD.



Vessels for ritual drinks and medicines, 4th century BC, Caucasian Albania

The famous historian al-Istakhri (10th century AD) writes about Barda (or Berdaa): «Berdaa is the main city, and it is large, square and laid out on a plain; it has an enormous fortification; its markets are under close drawn awnings; outside the market there is the main mosque. This city is the Baghdad of this region, the houses are magnificent, made of fired bricks and stucco. It is a beautiful, pleasant and rich city! Some of the columns of the main mosque are made from stucco and brick, and others from wood.» [5]

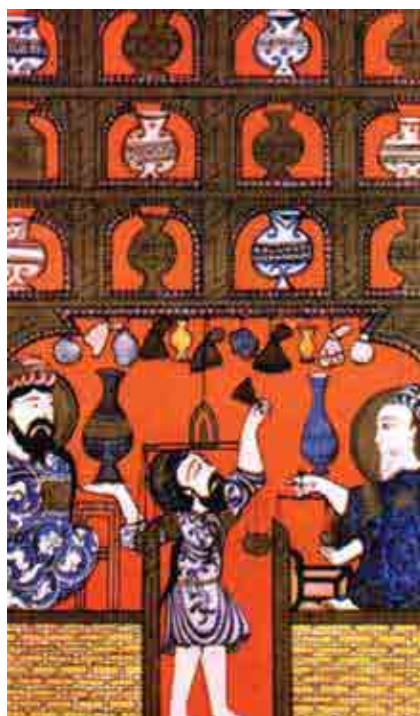
Starting from the 4th century BC, the State of Caucasian Albania took shape on the territory of Karabakh and retained its independence until the end of the 7th century. Describing Karabakh, the 8th century Albanian historian Moses Kalankatuatsi enthusiastically exclaims: «How beautiful this country is!» [6]. Indeed, the land of Karabakh is famous for its beauty and rich natural resources, including lush forests, mountain meadows and orchards abundant in medicinal plants. In total, there are about 4,500 species of top plants in Azerbaijan - trees, shrubs and grasses, many of which are used in folk medicine [4].

Exploring ancient Azerbaijani manuscripts of the 12th-18th centuries, it proved possible to establish the specific belonging of more than 700 medicinal plants used by residents of Karabakh in the Middle Ages [2].

Incidentally, it was because of such rich vegetation, including horticultural and medicinal plants, that the region was named Karabakh, which means a «large garden»: «gara» means «black» or «big» and «bag» means a garden in Azerbaijani. Many plants growing in Karabakh not only have medicinal properties, but are endemic, that is they are not found anywhere but in the blessed land of Karabakh. Among them is the legendary flower «Khari Bulbul», the symbol of the city of Shusha - the historical center of Karabakh. The famous red Karabakh tulips covering the Jidir-duzu plateau near this city not only gave indescribable beauty to this beautiful corner of nature, but were also used in folk medicine as a natural aphrodisiac and remedy that improves appetite and digestion.

In ancient and early medieval

times, Karabakh was part of the Albanian state, which was mentioned by ancient Greek and Roman authors. Strabo writes in his Geographica: «The Albanians pursue a rather shepherd life, and resemble more the nomadic tribes, except that they are not savages, and hence they are little disposed to war. They inhabit the country between the Iberians and the Caspian Sea, approaching close to the



*Medieval Eastern pharmacy,
16th century miniature*

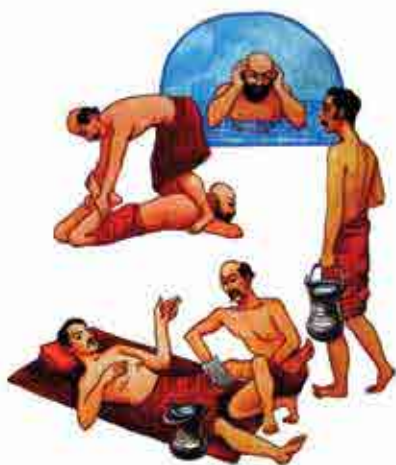
sea in the east, and in the west, they border on the Iberians. Of the remaining sides, the north is protected by the Caucasus Mountains, for these overhang the plains ... The men are distinguished for their beauty and size ... they are improvident with respect to war, government, and agriculture. They fight, however, on foot and on horseback, both in light and in heavy armor ... They can send into the field a larger army than the Iberians, for

they can equip 60,000 infantrymen and 22,000 horsemen; with such a force, they offered resistance to Pompey ... They use javelins and bows, and wear breastplates, shields, and coverings for the head, made of the hides of wild animals, like the Iberians.» [12]

It is reported that even in the first century AD, Caucasian Albania exported medicinal plants to Rome in special jars and boxes. The existence of a well-developed medical science in Caucasian Albania is also proved by the local historian Moses Kalankatuatsi, who writes in his famous essay «The History of the Caucasian Albanians»: «Perfection is achieved by one who indulges in sciences such as mathematics, agronomy and medicine» [7].

During the first century AD, Christianity began to spread in Caucasian Albania, due to which Syrian and Greek medicine came to the region. At the time, there were Albanian church schools in Karabakh, where students could get acquainted with the works of such great antique physicians as Hippocrates and Galen. A great role in the development of medicine in Karabakh in the 4th-5th centuries was played by Nestorian doctors, who fled to Caucasian Albania due to persecution by the Byzantine Empire in Syria, Greece and Iran and practised the ancient Greek school of medicine. In Iran, the Nestorians created the famous Jundishapur medical academy [6], whose representatives repeatedly visited Karabakh, providing medical services to the local nobility. Along with professional medicine, Turkic folk healing was widespread in Karabakh [1].

Medieval Turkic medicine widely used medicinal herbs, magic, and surgery. Popular surgeons were



Eastern bath-house

called «sinigchi» which means a specialist in the treatment of fractures, and early otolaryngologists - «chopchu» («chop» – rod, speck). Treatment with koumiss, sour milk and herbs was widely used. Wormwood was used to improve appetite, St. John's wort - against infections of internal organs, and violet and rose - against the headache. During excavations at the site of the capital of Caucasian Albania, the city of Gabala, the remains of a pharmaceutical laboratory of the 8th -9th centuries were found. Scientists found a lot of clay and glass containers for storage of medicines and cosmetics here. They also found a distillation device for distilling medicinal oils. Vessels for storage of medicines were also discovered during excavations in the city of Beylagan [9].

Medicine in Azerbaijan reached its highest peak after the spread of Islam. In the 12th century, Karabakh was part of the Azerbaijani state of the Atabay Ildegizids with its capital in Tabriz. In such cities of Karabakh as Barda and Beylagan, there were medical schools, pharmacies, hospitals and well-known physicians. Karabakh doctors were sent

to study medicine in such large cities of Azerbaijan as Tabriz, Ganja and Shamakhi. In Shamakhi, they took lessons from Kafiyaddin Omar (12th century), the founder of the Malham Academy of Medicine and uncle of the famous poet Khagani Shirvani [8].

Azerbaijan's most prominent physician in the 16th century was Yusif Garabagi, who was dubbed «a great teacher» by his contemporaries. He was born in Karabakh, but conducted most of his clinical and research activities in Central Asia, where he taught in a madrasah in Samarkand. How did Yusif Garabagi end up so far from home? The fact



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is that the 16th century was a time of hardship for the Azerbaijani people, their science, culture and statehood. During this period, the whole of Azerbaijan, including Karabakh, became a scene of bloody wars between the Azerbaijani Safavids and Ottoman sultans. As a result, the economy and culture of the region were affected, and scientists tried to leave the country [11]. It was

during this period that many Azerbaijani poets, philosophers and physicians, fleeing the war and political turmoil, went to Central Asia and India. One of them was Yusif Garabagi [3].

In Samarkand, he wrote many medical treatises and the «Explanations and Interpretations of 'The Canon of Medicine' by Ibn Sina». In order to eliminate depression and treat and improve the memory, Yusif Garabagi recommended regularly eating ginger mixed with honey, which was also considered a great way to improve digestion. To combat infectious diseases of the skin (scabs), they used sulfur powder mixed with fresh onion juice.

The famous Azerbaijani scientist and physician, Mammadgulu Gaibov Garabagi (1818-1879), a native of Shusha - the capital of the Karabakh Khanate, was the personal physician of the outstanding Azerbaijani poetess Khurshud Banu Natavan, a descendant of the Karabakh khan's family. Garabagi had a large collection of more than 150 medieval Oriental manuscripts on medicine. He is the author of numerous recommendations on medicine and cosmetology [9].

For instance, in order to protect the skin from sunburn, he recommended lubricating it with ordinary egg white. To improve digestion and increase the secretion of gastric juice and bile, Mammadgulyev Garabagi advised taking a spoonful of «iskanjabin» – a boiled mixture of vinegar and honey - before meals.

By the beginning of the 19th century, the capital of the Karabakh Khanate, Shusha, became a major cultural center of Azerbaijan. This city gave the country a great number of prominent musicians, poets



Vessels for ritual drinks and medicines, 5th century BC, Caucasian Albania

and physicians [10].

The famous doctor from Shusha, Akhund Mirza Sadig Latif oglu Latifov, (died in 1901) studied medicine from the renowned healer, Abulhasan Hakimbashi, in Tabriz. Having returned to Shusha, Mirza Sadig became a doctor known to the whole of Azerbaijan, and patients flocked to him from everywhere [9]. Mirza Latif oglu treated depression with a decoction of St. John's wort picked in the mountain meadows of Karabakh. Current studies suggest that St. John's wort is really effective against mild forms of depression.

In ancient and medieval times, there were traditional pharmacies in Karabakh. They were called «Attar Dukani» (drug stores) and sold not just drugs, but also means of personal hygiene, as well as spices and cosmetics. The range of products in such pharmacies included hundreds of drugs from plants, animals and minerals, as well as spices, which were used not only as a perfume, but also for medicinal purposes. Among them were such remedies as chamomile, mint,

thyme, St. John's wort, medical honey and exotic means such as rhino horn, tiger bile, ambra, musk, bezoar stone and mummy [2].

These pharmacies existed in Karabakh and Azerbaijan until the 1920s. For example, at the end of the 19th century, such a pharmacy in Agdam was owned by a doctor called Mir-Baba - the father of the famous Azerbaijani writer Yusif Vazir Chamanzaminli [9]. 🌿

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