

Nidai; A Sixteenth Century Physician: Medical History

On Altıncı Yüzyılda Bir Hekim; Nidai

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ABSTRACT Nidai is one of the important Ottoman physicians in the sixteenth century. He had written a lot of medical books those contain original medical information. He also wrote a book on veterinary medicine named Baytarname. This book is about the horses, their species, training, diseases and certain treatments concerning these diseases. When his texts are studied, it is realized that although he insisted and depended on his observations, he also knew the ideas of former medical authorities and sometimes made comments on these ideas. He believed that physicians should have cared about the psychological conditions, and medical treatments should be together with psychological treatments. Nidai wrote a book named Mualece-i Zahmet-i Firengi that gave comprehensive explanation about syphilis and its treatment. As could be seen in his other books, he gave considerable importance to hygiene and public health and also advised on food and lifestyle for prevention of health it is most famous book is Menafi al-Nas and consists of 60 chapters. In the introduction of the book, it is stated that the aim of writing the book is to enlighten the people for preservation of health. One of the most important parts in this book is the section named Vasiyetname-i Nidai, which is included at the end of the book. In this part, Nidai commented on the characteristics of a doctor and stated that in addition to the medical knowledge and experience, a doctor should have been modest, good tempered, generous, kind and honest.

Key Words: History, 16th century; physicians; Turkey; history of medicine

ÖZET On altıncı yüzyıl Osmanlı devleti hekimlerinin en önemlilerinden biri olan Nidai, özgün bilgiler içeren birçok bilimsel tıbbi kitap yazmıştır. Ayrıca atların türleri, hastalıkları ve tedavileri konusunda "Baytarname" isminde veterinerlik ile ilgili özgün bir kitabı da mevcuttur. Nidai, eserlerinde genellikle kendi tecrübeleri ve görüşlerini ifade etmiş olsa da, kendinden önceki otoritelerin görüşlerine de yer vermiş ve onları yorumlamıştır. Doktorların psikolojik durumları göz önünde bulundurmaları ve tıbbi tedavinin psikolojik tedaviyle birlikte olması gerektiğine inanmıştı. Nidai, sifilis hastalığını ele aldığı, hastalık ve tedavisi hakkında kapsamlı bilgiler içeren "Mualece-i Zahmet-i Firengi" isminde bir eser yazmıştır. Onun diğer kitaplarında da görüldüğü gibi, hijyen ve toplum sağlığına büyük önem vermiş, sağlığın korunması için eserlerinde beslenme ve yaşam tarzına dair çok önemli önerilerde bulunmuştur. En önemli kitaplarından birisi, 60 ciltten oluşan "Menafi al-Nas" isimli eseridir. Bu eserin girişinde, kitabı yazış amacını sağlığın korunması yönünde toplumu aydınlatmak olarak belirtilmektedir. Bu kitabın en önemli bölümlerinden biri ise, eserin sonuna eklenen "Vasiyetname-i Nidai" bölümüdür. Bu bölümde bir doktorun iyi karakter özelliklerini değerlendirmiş ve bu özelliklerin neler olması gerektiği üzerinde durmuştur. Ona göre bir hekim tıbbi bilgi ve becerilerine ilave olarak alçakgönüllü, iyi huylu, cömert, şefkatli ve dürüst olmalıdır.

Anahtar Kelimeler: Tarih, 16. yüzyıl; doktorlar; Türkiye; tıp tarihi

As is known, during the sixteenth century, the Ottoman Empire possessed the largest borders in its history. In this century, certain important improvements were made and some institutions were built in the fields of science and thought. One of these constructions was Suleymaniye Complex, in which different philosophical, religious and scientific subjects including medicine were taught and also a hospital served as an institution of treatment. Another important institution was Istanbul Observatory, which was the only observatory that had been founded in the Ottoman Empire. Its chief observer was Taqi al-Din who was one of the most important mathematicians in the Ottoman Empire. He offered new astronomical instruments and a method of calculus that could be used in the astronomical evaluations and calculus. He was also the first scientist who found a device which resembled to microscope that could be used to magnify the tiny bodies.

When the scientific activities were studied, valuable works, not only in astronomy and mathematics but also in medicine, could be determined, for this century. Davud al-Antaki, Nidai and Kaysunizade are amongst personalities who managed these activities at that time.

As it was mentioned, one of the important physicians in the sixteenth century was Nidai. Although he was known as Nidai, his actual name was Shaban. His birth date is not known precisely but depending on the date of his work, *Esrar-ı Genc-i Mânâ*, which was written in 1543, his birth date could be estimated as 1509. His family came from Kudus and settled in Ankara. He was educated in Ankara and moved to Crimea afterwards. He began to work in Sahip Giray Han's palace and then was sent to Istanbul as an ambassador. Since some people complained of him to Sahip Giray Han, he was put in prison for seven years, when he returned to Crimea. During his days in the prison he was interested in mystic philosophy and accepted Mawlana's thoughts as his own way. Sahip Giray was killed in 1551 and Nidai had been freed after this event.

Nidai learned medical knowledge in Crimea. After then he came to Konya and became the private physician of the prince Selim. Before moving Kütahya, he also worked as a physician in a hospital in Konya. When Prince Selim became the emperor in 1566, he came to Istanbul and became one of the physicians of the Ottoman Palace. Although we do not have exact information on the date of his death, it should be after 1567, the time when his work, *Durr-u Manzum* was written.¹ In that book there is a note stating "the real interpreter of Kaysuni's Arabic risale was Nidai who briefly translated it from Arabic to lisan-ı Rumi (Anatolian Turkish)".

Both Nidai and Kaysunizade were important physicians in Kanuni's period and were generally confused with each other. The reason of this confusion should have been the translation of Nidai from Kaysunizade's medical risala. Umran Ay thought that it was the translation of *Menafi al-Nas*.² Kaysunizade was from Cairo and he became the chief physician in the Ottoman Palace. He wrote the books, named *Risala min Ilm al-Tibb* and *Kitab al-Tibb*. In his works, he gave information about syphilis, which was accepted as a contagious disease. The first book about this disease³ in Europe was written in the sixteenth century. Kaysunizade was known to be the physician who treated Kanuni's gout complaints and also mummified the Kanuni's body after his death in Battle of Szigetvar.³

One of the works of Nidai is *Fetihname-i Kalai Cerbe*, which is about the siege of Cerbe Island in Tunisia by Piyale Pasha, during the period of Kanuni. This book was not on medicine and it was written in poetic form.⁴ In this book the siege and the attainment of Cerbe Island by Piyala Pasha was explained. The author stated that he wrote this book when he was 35 years old.⁵ In this book we find some details about Sufism.

His another work was named as *Esrar-ı Genc-i Mana*, which was written as a poem and was about Sufism. He also wrote a book on veterinary medicine named *Baytarname*. This book is about the species, training and treatment of certain diseases of horses.

Tarcuma-i Nazm-i Lokman Hakim, a part of his book *Menafi al-Nas*, was also written in a poetic form. It gives knowledge about the electuary that was prepared by Lokman Hakim. His another book, *Rebi al-Selame* about cholera and certain fevers, was dedicated and presented to Selim II. It was also written in poetic form and consists of seven sections and a conclusion. In this work, he explained the reason why he wrote this book. He stated that, in the year he wrote the book, the fevers appeared very extensively and he felt that it was necessary to warn people against the fevers and offer the treatment for them.

Durr-u Manzum: This book has several copies in manuscript libraries and is a summary of his book called *Menafi al-Nas*. It is also named as *Manzume-i fi al-Tibb*. In some libraries it is shown under the name of *Tibb* or *Tibb al-Manzum*. In the conclusion part, he declared the date of writing this book as 1567.⁶ This book was written in Turkish. Some writers assume the reason why it had been written in Turkish was to let the people in that period understand and use it for their health problems. Since the number of physicians in Anatolia was not enough, the book was intended to be used by non-professionals.⁷

This book consists of four chapters. In the first chapter, he gave information about four elements, four humors and their roles in human health. In the second chapter, there are information about the diseases of the head which contains the ailments of the eyes, teeth, ears, also including certain diseases of the body, like coughing, dropsy, back pains, cramps etc.

Itching of eye and cataract are among the eye diseases defined in the book. He advised to use lentil and salamoniac in order to treat cataract, and ginger for the redness of the eye.

He accepted nose bleeding as a disease of nose and offered to apply vinegar sprit (*sirke esrari*) on the nose in order to stop bleeding. For the treatment of deafness, he advised to use radish oil twice in a day; in the morning and in the evening.

Nidai also mentioned certain diseases of the throat, including the inflammation of tonsils. He

prepared a blister of nutmeg in order to treat them. He stated that it was used for the treatment of diseases appearing very frequently and applying ice on the throat would be very useful.

He thought that some of the blisters could be useful for paralysis. Its ingredient were yogurt of cow milk, henna and pitch. All of them were mixed and spread on the piece of cloth and applied on the part of the body where the paralysis occurred. For the lumbar pains, he advised to use a blister which consisted of radish mixed with salt added to the powder of barley.

The third chapter of the book is about certain kinds of fruits and flowers and the electuaries and blisters which were prepared by using those materials. The fourth chapter is about drugs and their usage.

Similar to the other physicians in the classical periods, he always preferred herbal and animal drugs instead of chemical items. He also preferred to treat the illnesses using nutriment instead of using medicaments.

In this book and his other medical works, he especially cared about the human health and warned the other physicians about sanitary precautions, especially, the cleanness of the teeth and mouth. With the sentences "Eat and drink in moderate amounts" and "Hunger resembles a rain for health" he advised not to eat a lot, especially it was not good to eat and drink during the night. He also advised to sleep during the night for sleeping during the day was not healthy.⁸

Nidai advised dieting and eating according to one's humors and nature. He said that there was four main humors in the human body that controlled the whole body, and the condition of the health depended on the balance among them. These humors were blood, phlegm, yellow bile and black bile.

He also quoted some passages from certain writers and used them in his works. If he examined the drugs, he stated that it was examined by himself and said: "I examined it."

When his texts are studied, it is realized that he insisted on observation and relied on his obser-

vations, although he knew the former medical authorities and sometimes he cited their ideas.

He also believed that physicians should have care about the psychological conditions and psychological treatment should have been parallel to the medical treatment. He also stated that praying also made a positive influence on patients.

Nidai wrote a book on syphilis, named *Mualece-i Zahmet-i Firengi* and he gave explanation of the disease and its treatment. As mentioned above, Kaysuni also wrote about this disease. Nidai gave brief information about the disease and its treatment. He expressed that it was a contagious disease.⁹ However he also gave information about the contagious diseases in his famous work, *Mena fi al-Nas*.

During the Renaissance, important changes occurred with regard to the types of epidemic diseases that afflicted the European people. For instance, influenza spread throughout Europe in a severe epidemic form. Before the turn of the century, syphilis also appeared in a severe and epidemic form that moved down thousands of victims. At that time, there were discussions as to whether syphilis was brought to Europe from Spain after the discovery of America. In the Ottoman Empire it was named a disease, which was spread through Europe. Fracastoro was the first who wrote on syphilis and its description in his work, *Contagiosus et Contagious Diseases*.¹⁰

In *Mena fi al-Nas*, Nidai gave information about all of the diseases beginning from the head to the foot, similar to the classical systematization that appeared in Islamic World. He also explained certain skin diseases like vitiligo, syphilis and certain tauns (fevers). In this work he spared a special part for the gynecology and explained them differently and gave details that appeared only in his work.

As is seen in his other books, hygiene and public health were very important considerations for him. He gave advises in order to protect one's health, including recommendations about what to eat and how to behave.

Menafi al-Nas is the most famous work among his books. Some authors alleged that this book was a translation, but nobody could give the name of the work that it was translated from. As were mentioned above, some writers claimed that it was translated from one of Kaysuni's Arabic works, but no one wrote the name of the original work.¹¹

Menafi al-Nas consists of 60 chapters. In its introduction, he stated that he translated this work in order to enlighten people from the aspect of health protection. He also noted that each country needs good-trained physicians but there were not enough physicians to serve in this way. As a physician he wished to be useful for people.

In this work he gave information about humors, human natures, its differences, and also the diseases that appeared in the body beginning from the head to the foot.

After explaining the creation of human being, he gave information about the vessels, the nature of the pulses and urine in *Menafi al-Nas*. He also explained humor theory, the parts of the body and the disease of the head, ears, nose, teeth and the eyes.

Nidai mentioned that some of the skin diseases were mainly contagious diseases, like itching, the small pox, syphilis and leprosy. He called syphilis as the diseases of Frenk and he gave brief information about it in 19th chapter of his book.

He defined certain skin diseases like vitiligo and Addison disease and also explained how these diseases and hair diseases could be treated.

He explained the pain in the spleen and in some other parts of the body, giving treatment recommendations about these conditions. He also gave information about jaundice and its treatment.

As is seen through the whole book, he considered symptoms like pain, fever etc. as particular diseases. Nowadays these symptoms are not treated as diseases, but they are accepted as remarks or symptoms in order to be used to define the diseases.

One of the important explanations was given about the hemorrhoids. He classified and explained them in ten groups; five of them were from the he-

art and the rest were from rectum. He classified the last five depending on their symptoms, like bleeding hemorrhoids, or swallowed hemorrhoids. He stated that some of them were consisted of inflammation and were very hard. Their treatments were very difficult and needed some surgical intervention.¹²

Nidai used medical plants in order to treat hemorrhoids. Among these plants were some kind of nuts, black grapes and ginger. Although he preferred compound medicaments, in that book there was also information on simple and complex medicines. Among these medicines, different electuaries, laxatives and mucilaginous medicines, their usage and preparations could also be seen.

He also used certain fats and oils. He called these kinds of medicines 'mucerreb' which means that they had already been experienced by some other physicians and the results were satisfactory.

Nidai also gave information about the nourishment and how a person should nourish himself to stay healthy. He mentioned some simple and compound foods for healthy nourishment.

In this book there is also information about the animals, for instance birds, rabbits, and some inorganic materials, like certain stones and metals, which could be used for medicinal purposes.

He spared a certain place for mucilaginous recipes and useful tiryaks including some liquids, which were prepared with opium and some other drugs to relieve pains.

At the end of the book, he stated that why he wrote this book. He expressed that he traveled for long years and studied hard on the manuscripts he found in different places, where he traveled. He also said that he collected the prescriptions from all the works he studied on. After then, he wrote this book, named *Menafi al-Nas* in order to be useful for the people.

One of the most important points in this book is the section, named *Vasiyetname-i Nidai* that was added at the end of the book. It is about two pages

in poetic form. In this part, he gave certain advises to his colleagues, and said that how they had to behave their patients and treat their colleagues. V.B. Kurdoglu published it in his work, *Şair Tabibler*.¹³

Nidai stated that a doctor should have a good character, which meant that he should be modest, good tempered, generous, kind and honest in addition to his knowledge about medical learning and practice.

Nidai thought that a doctor should never say that he recovered his patient. As Ambroise Paré (1510-1590) pointed out, he accepted that only God could give the power to cure, not the doctors. Nidai noted that God gave the health problems and also made them recover.¹⁴ For that reason, when a doctor could not treat his patient successfully, no one should accuse him.

Nidai also expressed that a doctor should not be ignorant and should be perfect from every point of view. He meant that people should not be accused of being illiterate.

Nidai believed that being a good doctor was a present of God for a human being. For that reason the doctor should appreciate this talent, as the former thinkers accepted. A doctor was a holy person in some way. He caused to recover a person's health by the help of God.

Nidai also added that a doctor should be a trustworthy and good-natured person; he had to be a second Lokman hekim who had known as alixir. A doctor was a chosen one. He had to possess a private place in the society. Although the medical knowledge was secret in ancient times; the doctor should have to write what he know in order to share the knowledge about health, with other people. A doctor had to know the importance of medical knowledge and the importance of his responsibility for having this knowledge. This issue is still true nowadays as much as the historical periods. Physician should be sympathetic, polite, graceful and confident in him/herself. Similarly, Erdemir expressed that a physician should care about culture and being a scientific man.¹⁵

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