Arabic Sciences and Philosophy, vol. 23 (2013) pp. 277–289
doi:10.1017/S0957423913000039 © 2013 Cambridge University Press

AVICENNA'S CONCUPISCENCE

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Abstract. Philosophical and medical excellence notwithstanding, Avicenna was far from being an otherwordly person who buried himself in his books. He had an extraordinarily adventurous life and is reported to have been fond of good food, drink, and lovemaking. This article discusses the wellknown but quite unusual view that he died of having too much sex. A detailed analysis of the sources and a common-sense approach to some of their medical claims will show that this allegation is not supported by any evidence whatsoever. Quite the opposite: it will be argued that the main source on which all later reports must taken to depend has been tampered with in two places to produce the image that we know. Thus, we must assume that people hostile to Avicenna and his philosophy are behind this, their forgery most likely having been committed in the first half of the twelfth century AD.

Résumé. Nonobstant son excellence en philosophie et en médecine, Avicenne était loin d'être un homme étranger au monde, enterré dans ses livres. Il a eu une vie extraordinairement aventureuse et on dit qu'il était un amateur de bonne chère, de boisson et de plaisirs sexuels. Cet article étudie l'idée bien connue mais plutôt inhabituelle selon laquelle il serait mort par excès d'activité sexuelle. Une analyse détaillée des sources et une approche réaliste de certaines thèses médicales qu'elles contiennent montrera que cette allégation ne repose sur aucune preuve de quelque type que ce soit. Bien au contraire, on soutiendra que la principale source dont s'avèrent dépendre tous les rapports postérieurs a été manipulée à deux endroits en vue de produire l'image que nous connaissons. Il faut alors admettre que ce sont des gens hostiles à Avicenne et à sa philosophie qui sont à l'origine d'une telle manœuvre, cette légende ayant été forgée très probablement durant la première partie du XII^e^ siècle.

INTRODUCTION

There are few things about Avicenna (980–1037)[1] that have excited people's imagination more than his supposed sexual intemperance, which many believe must even have caused his death. Accounts of it are commonplace, and in as much as these expose a vulnerable side of this exceptional thinker, his opponents must have given them a warm and heartfelt welcome. Until recently, I never questioned Avicenna's reputation in this regard, which always seemed as solid as a rock. But that was until I decided to find out more about it.

[1] Dates given in this article refer to the Common Era unless indicated otherwise.

https://doi.org/10.1017/S0957423913000039 Published online by Cambridge University Press

Having examined the available evidence, I have come to the conclusion that even though Avicenna does indeed appear to have been a sensual man, there is no reason to believe that his sexual habits provoked any serious illness or could even be held accountable for his painful and untimely death.

Let me start with two examples, typical of the portrayal of Avicenna's sexuality in modern literature. In his account of Avicenna's evening-classes in Hamadan in around 1015, Jon McGinnis says the following:

> In the evening he would meet with his students [. . .] The lessons were then followed by an almost certainly riotous symposium, replete with singers of various classes and wine [. . .] As a somewhat lurid aside, since most professional singers at this time were female slaves, and slave girls were viewed as being at their master's sexual disposal, Avicenna's soirees probably involved a good bit of "adult entertainment", which would be consistent with al-Juzjānī's own observation that Avicenna had an insatiable sexual appetite.[2]

And in his *Avicenna, His Life and Works*, Sohayl Afnan observes:

> As a man of excessive passions, not given to moderation, he indulged in sexual relations far more than even his strong physique could stand. We are told that even in failing health he did not abstain [. . .].[3]

Most of the books that mention him are full of praise for his knowledge and ability, but contain not a single kind word for the man himself. Often they half-mockingly remark that he was the person who died of sexual excesses, and whose *Book of Healing* (*Shifā'*) and *Book of Deliverance* (*Najāt*) helped neither to heal nor to deliver him.[4]

Such is the *communis opinio* about Avicenna's sexual life, based on the testimony of his student, assistant, and companion of twenty-five years, the astronomer and physician Abū ʿUbayd Juzjānī.[5] Avicenna dictated his autobiography to Juzjānī, who completed it with his own account of events from the time that they met until his master's death in 1037.[6] And it is on two passages from this account by Juzjānī alone, that all later reports on Avicenna's sexual depravity are ultimately based. So, what do these passages say?

[2] J. McGinnis, *Avicenna* (Oxford, 2010), pp. 22–3.
[3] S. Afnan, *Avicenna. His Life and Works* (Woking and London, 1958), p. 77.
[4] *Ibid*., p. 78.
[5] On Abū ʿUbayd Juzjānī, see R. Wisnovsky, "Jowzjāni (Juzjāni), Abu ʿObayd ʿAbd al-Wāḥed", in I. Yarshater (ed.), *Encyclopaedia Iranica*, vol. 15, fascicle 1 (New York, 2009), pp. 82–4; Ahmed H. al-Rahim, "Avicenna's immediate disciples. Their lives and works", in Y. Tzvi Langermann (ed.), *Avicenna and his Legacy. A Golden Age of Science and Philosophy*, Cultural Encounters in Late Antiquity and the Middle Ages (Turnhout, 2009), pp. 1–25, on pp. 4–8.
[6] The autobiography and its completion by Juzjānī were published by W. E. Gohlman, *The Life of Ibn Sina*. A Critical Edition and Annotated Translation (New York, 1974).

https://doi.org/10.1017/S0957423913000039 Published online by Cambridge University Press

TESTIMONY 1

In the first passage, taken from the bi-lingual Arabic-English edition by Gohlman, Juzjānī says the following:

وكان الشيخ قويّ القوى كلّها وقوّة المجامعة من قواه الشهوانية اقوى واغلب ويشتغل به كثيرًا فأثّر في مِزاجه [. . .] حتّى صار امره في السنة [. . .] اصاب الشيخ قولنج.[7]

Gohlman translates:

The Master was vigorous in all his faculties, the sexual faculty being the most vigorous and dominant of his concupiscible faculties, and he exercised it often. It affected his constitution [. . .] to the point that in the year [so-and-so] [. . .] the Master was afflicted by the colic.[8]

As far as I know, Gohlman's edition and translation of this passage have never been challenged. So let us have a closer look at the beginning of the above account:

The Master was vigorous in all his faculties, the sexual faculty being the most vigorous and dominant of his concupiscible faculties, and he exercised it often [. . .].

First of all, what are the "concupiscible faculties", Gohlman's rendering of the Arabic *quwā shahwāniyya*? In explanation of this it should be pointed out that, like his master Avicenna, Juzjānī seems to have had a Peripatetic conception of the faculties of the human soul,[9] of which the *quwwa shahwāniyya* formed a part. In his discussion of the faculties of the soul in the *Shifā'*, Avicenna gives a complete taxonomy of these faculties. Restricting ourselves to that part of the taxonomy that brings us in a straight line to the *quwwa shahwāniyya*, the following hierarchy emerges: 0. *Nafs* → 1. *ḥayawāniyya* → 1.a *quwwa muḥarrika* → 1.a.(i) *bāʿitha ʿalā al-ḥaraka* = *quwwa nuzūʿiyya* or *shawqiyya* → 1.a.(i).A. *quwwa shahwāniyya*.[10] In English: 0. Soul → 1. Animal soul → 1.a motive faculty → 1.a.(i). inciting to motion = appetitive faculty → 1.a.(i).A. concupiscible faculty. By the concupiscible (from the Latin *concupisco*,

[7] Gohlman, *The Life of Ibn Sina*, pp. 80.8–82.3.
[8] *Ibid*., pp. 81, 83.
[9] These faculties are the faculties of nutrition, perception, intellection, and desire, discussed in Aristotle's *De anima*.
[10] G. Anawātī and S. Zāyed, *Ibn Sīnā, al-Shifā'*, vol. 6: *al-Nafs* (Cairo, 1975), pp. 32ff. For the correspondence between Avicenna's *quwwa shahwāniyya* and Aristotle's *epithumētikon*, see A. M. Goichon, *Vocabulaires comparés d'Aristote et d'Ibn Sīnā* (Paris, 1939), p. 28.

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"to be very desirous of") faculty the soul inclines towards that which is judged suitable according to the senses. The senses must be understood in the widest possible terms: touch, taste, smell, sight, and hearing are all included.[11] Accordingly, one could say that the concupiscible faculty is associated with bodily passions directed at the good things in life. As far as I know, Avicenna nowhere uses the plural *quwā shahwāniyya* that we find in Juzjānī. This is not so strange because it is a single faculty. Juzjānī's use of the plural is therefore best understood as the faculty's various manifestations in the form of different expressions of sensual desire. On a similar note, the phrase *qawī al-quwā kullihā* (Gohlman: "*vigorous in all his faculties*") must refer to Avicenna's great attachment to sensual pleasure as a whole. There is no reason to believe that the reference is to anything more than that. Finally, Gohlman's "sexual faculty" does not seem to be a good rendering of the Arabic *quwwat al-mujāmaʿa*. There is no such faculty in the soul, while "faculty" can hardly refer to Avicenna's sexual endurance, which seems too cynical and disrespectful to fit the context. Instead, I suggest to understand the Arabic *quwwat al-mujāmaʿa* in terms of a more mundane sexual *appetite*.

This having been said, Juzjānī's

وكان الشيخ قويّ القوى كلّها وقوّة المجامعة من قواه الشهوانية اقوى واغلب ويشتغل به كثيرًا [...]

can be rendered in the following terms, slightly modifying Gohlman:

The Master was a very sensual man, his sexual appetite being the most vigorous and dominant expression of his concupiscible faculty, and he gratified it[12] often [...].

After the above, Juzjānī continues by saying:

فأثّر في مِزاجه [...] حتّى صار امره في السنة [...] اصاب الشيخ قولنج.[13]

[11] Even though for Avicenna the internal senses are important vehicles and repositories of whatever is perceived by the external senses, they are usually not directly associated with the workings of the concupiscible faculty. On the internal senses in Avicenna, cf. *e.g. Ibn Sīnā, al-Nafs*, ed. Anawātī and Zāyed, pp. 145ff; D. Black, "Psychology: soul and intellect", in P. Adamson and R. Taylor (eds), *The Cambridge Companion to Arabic Philosophy* (Cambridge, 2005), pp. 308–26, on pp. 312–16.

[12] In answer to the justifiable objection that the masculine suffix *hi* in *yashtaghilu bihi* cannot refer back to the feminine *quwwat al-mujāmaʿa*, I should like to draw attention to the fact that the reference is most likely not to *quwwa* nor to *mujāmaʿa*, but rather to the *gratification* of the desire in the *act* of copulation or *jimāʿ*, which is masculine. There is also a possibility that non-corresponding gender in this case reflects a feature of Middle Arabic (cf. *e.g.* J. Blau, *A Handbook of Early Middle Arabic* [Jerusalem, 2002], p. 46, § 82), but then this would be – as far as I can see – the only passage in the whole of Juzjānī's biography to be marked by this phenomenon, which makes such an explanation less plausible.

[13] Gohlman, *The Life of Ibn Sina*, p. 82.1–3.

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In Gohlman's translation:

> It affected his constitution [. . .] to the point that in the year [so-and-so] [. . .] the Master was afflicted by the colic.[14]

Now what is a colic? In contemporary medicine, a colic is a form of intense abdominal pain that, in adults, is caused by kidney stones (renal colic) or gall stones (bilial colic). In both cases the stones cause an obstruction. In the first case the obstruction is of the muscular tubes that propel urine from the kidneys to the urinary bladder, while in the second case, stones obstruct the duct by which bile is discharged from the gall bladder into the small intestine where it assists in the process of digestion. Apart from this, there is baby colic which has a variety of causes, among them stomach gas.[15]

The definition of *qawlanj* given by Avicenna in his *Treatise on Colic* (*Risāla fī al-Qawlanj*) indicates that for him *qawlanj* was something different from what we call a colic today, be it renal or bilial. For him, *qawlanj* was a painful, unnatural obstruction of the larger intestine.[16] The obstruction could involve excrement, phlegm, wind, or be cancerous.[17] In total, Avicenna enumerates sixty causes for these four major forms of *qawlanj*.[18] So the question arises as to what, in Juzjānī's view, was the cause of Avicenna's impaired bodily health, to the point that he was afflicted by *qawlanj*. We have to remember that Juzjānī wrote a series of glosses on difficult passages from Avicenna's *Canon of Medicine*[19] and that he was also around when his master treated Shams al-Dawla (d. 1021) for *qawlanj*,[20] so that he can certainly be assumed to have had a general understanding of this disease and its causes. Now is it possible that he thought that Avicenna's disease was due to excessive sexual intercourse, in the way in which this is suggested by Gohlman's edition and translation? This is not very likely because Avicenna's treatise on *qawlanj* does not include sexual intercourse among the things that cause or aggravate *qawlanj* while none of the causes that he does mention can be

[14] *Ibid*., p. 83.
[15] Cf. *e.g. The Merck Manual for Health Care Professionals*, Index, *sub* colic, at: http://www.merckmanuals.com/professional/index/ind_co.html (as consulted on 16 March 2012).
[16] Avicenna, *Risāla fī al-Qawlanj*, in Ṣ. M. Ḥammāmī, *Kitāb al-Qawlanj li-Abī Bakr Muḥammad Ibn Zakariyyā' al-Rāzī. Ma'a dirāsa muqābila li-risālat Ibn Sīnā fī al-Qawlanj* (Aleppo, 1983), pp. 143–75, on p. 157.5–6. See also the Introduction to the edition on pages 7–18, and the comparative discussions on pages 177–201.
[17] These four kinds are the ones that he concentrates on in his enumeration of the causes of *qawlanj* in his *Risāla fī al-Qawlanj*, pp. 166.18–168.10. There are others, less important, mentioned at pp. 166.19–167.1.
[18] Cf. *ibid*., p. 168.9–10, where Avicenna mentions this number at the end of his run-down of the causes of the four major forms of *qawlanj*.
[19] Wisnovsky, "Jowzjāni", p. 83; al-Rahim, "Avicenna's immediate disciples", p. 8.
[20] Gohlman, *The Life of Ibn Sina*, p. 50.6–9, and p. 52.7–10, with the English translation on pages 51 and 53.

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construed in such a manner as to implicitly refer to or somehow include, excessive copulation.

So, if there were no objective medical grounds occasioning Juzjānī to identify Avicenna's sexual indulgence as the likely cause for the illness that is said to have cost his Master his life, then why does he seem to do so? The answer is: because part of the text is missing. Let me explain. There exist several lines of transmission of Avicenna's autobiography and its completion by Juzjānī,[21] and in his edition of the two texts Gohlman records the major variant readings in the footnotes. Now the interesting thing is that the oldest extant copy of Juzjānī's biography of Avicenna, a copy that is contained in MS Istanbul, Université 4755 (24) (folios 311a–316a, witness B), and which is dated 588/1192,[22] contains the following important addition between *kathīran* and *fa-aththara* mentioned earlier:[23]

فقيل له فيه وفي كثرة المأكول والسهر فقال إنّ الله تعالى قد وفّر في قواى الظاهرة والباطنة فانا اوفى كل قوّة حقّها.

When challenged on account of this and because of his indulgence in food and lack of sleep, he said: 'God the Most High has given me internal and external faculties in abundance; all I do is give every faculty its due'.

On this reading, Avicenna's *qawlanj* would have been caused by an intemperate lifestyle, which little by little destroyed his health. Avicenna's account of the potential dangers of unhealthy diets in relation to *qawlanj*[24] entirely supports this, which means that in this case the text of MS Istanbul Université 4755 (24) is to be preferred over the one chosen by Gohlman.

In explanation of the divergence between MS Université 4755 (24) and the other witnesses, I should like to advance what I believe to be the most plausible hypothesis, being the assumption that, somewhere in the chain of transmission, the passage in question was removed from the original version by one of Avicenna's adversaries. We must remember that especially after the publication of Ghazālī's *Incoherence of the Philosophers* towards the end of the eleventh century, Avicenna was seen by many as a renegade.[25] And if this were not bad enough, Juzjānī in his biography of Avicenna also tells us

[21] *Ibid*., pp. 1–10.
[22] For a description, cf. *ibid*., pp. 2–3.
[23] *Ibid*., p. 82, note accompanying line 1.
[24] Avicenna, *Risāla fī al-Qawlanj*, pp. 166.18–168.10.
[25] For Ghazālī's opinion of the philosophers, among them Avicenna, cf. *e.g.* F. Griffel, *Al-Ghazālī's Philosophical Theology* (Oxford, 2009), pp. 97–109.

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(in all innocence, of course) about wine-drinking, singers, and love-making.[26] So what could have seemed more appropriate to his detractors than that the licentiousness of this heretic had finally gotten the better of him? I think we can discard the possibility that the fragment in question got lost in an accidental manner. The omission is just too clear-cut (*fa-qīla* until *ḥaqqahā* is a *complete* statement) and its consequences are just too significant to make it the product of chance. If some people think that I am reading much more into the evidence than can really be accounted for, I would ask them to keep on reading, for there is more to come.

In view of the above, I suggest to modify the text as canonized by Gohlman by inserting the fragment from MS Istanbul Université 4755 (24), whereby the Arabic and the English translation are now as follows (slightly modifying Gohlman):

وكان الشيخ قويّ القوى كلّها وقوّة المجامعة من قواه الشهوانية اقوى واغلب ويشتغل به كثيرًا فقيل له فيه وفي كثرة المأكول والسهر فقال إنّ الله تعالى قد وفّر في قواى الظاهرة والباطنة فانا اوفى كل قوّة حقّها فأثّر في مِزاجه [. . .] حتّى صار امره في السنة [. . .] اصاب الشيخ قولنج.

The Master was a very sensual man, his sexual appetite being the most vigorous and dominant expression of his concupiscible faculty, and he gratified it often. When challenged on account of this and because of his indulgence in food and lack of sleep, he said: 'God the Most High has given me internal and external faculties in abundance; all I do is give every faculty its due'. Inevitably, this affected his constitution [. . .] to the point that in the year [so-and-so] [. . .] the Master was afflicted by the colic.

This is how I suggest to reconstruct and understand the passage from Juzjānī. But in all fairness to Gohlman it must also be said that the text as established by him has a very long pedigree. Indeed, if we look at Avicenna's biography in Bayhaqī's (d. 1170) *Tatimmat Ṣiwān al-ḥikma*, in Ibn Khallikān's (d. 1282) *Wafayāt al-Aʿyān*, and in Shams al-Dīn Shahrazūrī's (d. *c.* 1288) *Nuzhat al-arwāḥ*, it becomes apparent that in each case, their work is based on a similar reading.[27] And to complicate things further, Juzjānī's

[26] Gohlman, *The Life of Ibn Sina*, p. 54.7–9, with 55 (translation), and 78.4–7, with 79 (translation), together with the fragment under discussion here. Of course Avicenna himself tells us also about his wine-drinking in his autobiography, for which see Gohlman, *The Life of Ibn Sina*, pp. 28.6–30.2, with pages 29 and 30 for the English translation.

[27] *Tatimmat Ṣiwān al-ḥikma. Ẓahīr al-Dīn Bayhaqī*, ed. R. al-ʿAjam (Beirut, 1994), pp. 71.21–72.3; *Wafayāt al-aʿyān wa-abnāʾ al-zamān. Li-Abī al-ʿAbbās Shams al-Dīn. . . Ibn Khallikān*, ed. I. ʿAbbās, 8 vols. (repr. Beirut, 1977–78), vol. 2, p. 159.17–18; *Nuzhat al-arwāḥ*

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account of the final days of Avicenna would seem to make their case even stronger. So let us have a look at the second testimony and see what that fragment is all about.

TESTIMONY 2

Avicenna's *qawlanj*, which had begun while accompanying the Kākūyid ruler ʿAlāʾ al-Dawla (d. 1041) during a military campaign, was not going away. In fact, he must have suffered quite a lot. There is question of seizures, which must have been especially painful. There are moments of rest and then, relapses.[28] It is not known how long this condition continued, but going by the account of Juzjānī and in view of circumstantial evidence from Avicenna's letter to his pupil Bahmanyār Ibn Marzbān[29] that we find at the beginning of the *Mubāḥathāt*, it seems to have been in excess of two years.[30] In this period, Avicenna was more often suffering than not. This is the context in which we must read the second passage, at the end of Juzjānī's account, in the version established by Gohlman:

> The Master was carried in that state to Isfahan, where he was occupied with taking care of himself. He was so weak that he was unable to stand, so he continued to treat himself until he was able to walk. He attended the court of ʿAlāʾ al-Dawla, and in addition to that he did not take care and frequently had sexual intercourse. He had not completely recovered from his illness, and so he had intermittent relapses and recoveries. When ʿAlāʾ al-Dawla set out for Hamadan, the Master went with him but the illness seized him again on the way, so that by the time they reached Hamadan he knew that his strength had wasted away and that it was not sufficient to repel the illness [. . .] he passed away into the presence of his Lord and was buried in Hamadan in the year 428. The year of his birth was 370, and so the sum of his years was 58. May God find his deeds worthy.[31]

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*wa-rawḍat al-afrāḥ fī tārīkh al-ḥukamā*ʾ. By Shamsuddin Muḥammad bin Maḥmood al-Shahrazūri, (d. after 687 AH/1288 AD), ed. Syed Khurshīd Aḥmed, 2 vols. (Hyderabad, 1976), vol. 2, p. 117.5–8. Gohlman notes that the account in Ibn Khallikān may depend on Bayhaqī, and that the accounts of Ibn Khallikān and Shahrazūrī are very similar (Gohlman, *The Life of Ibn Sina*, pp. 1–2).

[28] Gohlman, *The Life of Ibn Sina*, p. 82.1ff.

[29] On Bahmanyār, cf. H. Daiber, "Bahmanyār, Kīā", in I. Yarshater (ed.), *Encyclopaedia Iranica*, vol. 3, fascicle 5 (New York, 1988), pp. 501–3; al-Rahim, "Avicenna's immediate disciples", pp. 9–14.

[30] ʿA. Badawī, *Arisṭū ʿinda l-ʿarab* (Cairo, 1947), p. 122.5–7. English translation by Dimitri Gutas in his *Avicenna and the Aristotelian Tradition*. Introduction to Reading Avicenna's Works (Leiden, 1988), p. 64. Gutas refers to Bahmanyār as "Kiyā".

[31] Gohlman, *The Life of Ibn Sina*, p. 86.3ff.

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On the whole, the above account is affectionate and written with care and respect. The only passage that seems out of place is the following (underlined):

وحضر مجلس علاء الدولة وهو مع ذلك لا يتحفّظ ويكثر المجامعة ولم يبرأ من العلّة كل البرء وكان ينتكس ويبرأ كلّ وقت.

He attended the court of 'Alā' al-Dawla, and in addition to that he did not take care and frequently had sexual intercourse. He had not completely recovered from his illness, and so he had intermittent relapses and recoveries.

I find it hard to believe that Juzjānī should refer to his master's supposed sexual immoderation during his illness in Isfahan. First of all, one must ask oneself what the chances are that someone who is hardly able to walk and who suffers from intermittent attacks of severe abdominal pain is going to insist on having abundant sex.[32] In his letter to Bahmanyār referred to earlier, Avicenna himself explains that his sickness was such that he could not even *write*. Also, I do not see what could have motivated Juzjānī to conclude the biography of his master with a rather disturbing reference to the latter's sex life while he must have known very well that sexual intercourse was not recorded in the medical literature as causing or aggravating *qawlanj*; so why would he refer to it in this context? The answer to this question must again be sought in the textual tradition.

As is apparent from the notes to the edition, the text established by Gohlman is found in two of the six witnesses used by him: MS Istanbul, Ahmet III 3447 (6) (folios 22a–26b), dating from 866/1462, called witness J;[33] and also in a version of Juzjānī's biography found in the margin of a copy of Shahrazūrī's *Nuzhat al-arwāḥ*, a version that was written after 754/1353 and called witness N.[34] But the interesting thing is that two other witnesses, viz. MS Istanbul, Université 4755 (24) (witness B, as stated before dated 588/1192) and MS Istanbul, Aya Sofya 4852 (1) (folios 4b-13a, witness A, copied in the early 7th/13th cent.),[35] contain a different version (with the English version adapted by me from Gohlman):[36]

[32] This is how *yukthir al-mujāmaʿa* must be understood. Gohlman's "frequently" is a euphemism.
[33] Described in Gohlman, *The Life of Ibn Sina*, p. 3.
[34] For a description, cf. *ibid*., p. 2. The account in Ibn Khallikān is based on a similar reading of Juzjānī's text. Cf. Abbās, *Wafayāt*…, vol. 2, p. 159.24.
[35] For a description of witness A, cf. *ibid*., p. 3.
[36] *Ibid*., p. 86, note to lines 5–6.

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وحضر مجلس علاء الدولة وهو مع ذلك لم يبرأ من العلّة كلّ البرء وكان ينتكس ويبرأ كلّ وقت.

He attended the court of ʿAlāʾ al-Dawla while he had not completely recovered from his illness, and so he had intermittent relapses and recoveries.

Now this sounds much more plausible. Avicenna, while being sick, tried to continue to fulfil his duties in the best way he could – without any reference to sexual debauchery. Please note that the manuscripts that contain this reading represent the two oldest independent witnesses of the autobiography/biography that we have. The importance of the above reading can thus hardly be overestimated.

Contrary to witnesses A and B, witnesses Q and Ṣ (Ibn al-Qifṭī and Ibn Abī Uṣaybiʿa) contain the following addition to the text established by Gohlman (underlined):

لا يتحفّظ ويكثر التخليط في امر المجامعة [. . .].[37]

he did not take care and led a completely perverted sex life [. . .].

Gohlman does not explain why he does not accept this addition, but I imagine that he must have felt it was a bit over the top, the versions contained in Q and Ṣ being extensive revisions of earlier versions anyway,[38] and that we should rest content with the text as established by him, the more so because the phrase *wa-yukthir al-mujāmaʿa* chosen by him mirrors the phrase *wa-yashtaghilu bihi kathīran* of the first fragment more closely. Even though I think that Gohlman should have chosen the reading of witnesses A and B instead of those of J and N, I do believe he was right about rejecting the reading found in Q and Ṣ because this reading seems to draw at least in part upon the wording of Bayhaqī's *Tatimmat ṣiwān al-ḥikma*.[39] I do not believe

[37] *Ibid*. A similar representation of things is also found in Shahrazūrī's *Nuzhat al-arwāḥ*, vol. 2, p. 118.2–3.

[38] For which cf. Gohlman, *The Life of Ibn Sina*, p. 5.

[39] Cf. Bayhaqī, *Tatimmat ṣiwān al-ḥikma*, p. 72.14–17 in which the latter declares about Avicenna's illness in Isfahan (key words underlined):

والشيخ يعالج نفسه [. . .] فقدر الشيخ على المشي وحضر مجلس علاء الدولة لكنّه مع ذلك لا يحتمي ولا يتحفّظ ويكثر التخليط في أمر المعالجة ولم يبرأ من العلّة كلّ البرء [. . .]

"The Master treated himself [. . .], was then able to walk, and attended the court of ʿAlāʾ al-Dawla. But even so he did not protect himself, and not being cautious he completely messed up his [own] treatment while he had not yet fully recovered [. . .]". It is interesting to note that while Bayhaqī refers to *muʿālaja* (treatment) Q and Ṣ have *mujāmaʿa* (intercourse). The reading *maʿālaja* of al-ʿAjam's edition of the *Tatimma* is confirmed by the editions of M. Kurd ʿAlī, *Tārīkh al-ḥukamāʾ*. *Taʾlīf Ẓahīr al-Dīn al-Bayhaqī* (Damascus, 1946/

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that either of Ibn al-Qifṭī or Ibn Abī Uṣaybiʿa is personally responsible for the above editorial intervention, it being much more likely that this was the version of Juzjānī's text as it was available to them.

In connection with Gohlman's reading, I also made the following important discovery: analyzing the use of the imperfect tense in Juzjānī's biography of Avicenna, I found that in the vast majority of the cases (26) the imperfect is used in conjunction with the perfect tense, mostly, but not always, with *kāna*: *kāna yafʿalu*.[40] In the few instances that the imperfect tense was found in isolation (3 cases), and now I am talking about other passages than the one under discussion here, it was used in two cases to express what we would call a universal truth[41] and once to reproduce thought content.[42] This leads me to conclude that the text as established by Gohlman is not consistent with my findings elsewhere. Based on these findings, I would *not* have expected Juzjānī to say, in the problematic phrase afore-mentioned:

وهو مع ذلك لا يتحفّظ ويكثر المجامعة

But, rather, if anything at all, then something like:

وكان مع ذلك لا يتحفّظ ويكثر المجامعة

So, all in all, there are four reasons that induce me to believe that the problematic phrase does not belong to the original text and needs to be excised: 1. It is most unlikely that Avicenna, given the condition that he was in – he couldn't even write – indulged in copious sex; 2. There is no medical reason to refer to Avicenna's alleged sexual debauchery during his illness in Isfahan, while any other motive for Juzjānī's mentioning it can (in my view) be discarded; 3. In the two oldest independent textual witnesses the phrase in question is not found; and 4. The phrase is suspect in the way in which it makes use of the imperfect tense. In view of the sum total of these considerations, I cannot but conclude that the alternative reading of the two witnesses cited earlier must be regarded as coming closest to the original wording of Juzjānī's text. And as before, the alteration detected in testimony 2, which was undoubtedly encouraged by the previous

1365), p. 69.7–10, and M. Shafīʿ, *Tatimmat Ṣiwān al-ḥikma of ʿAlī b. Zaid al-Baihaḳī*, 2 vols., Arabic-Persian text (Lahore, 1935), vol. 1, p. 58.2–5. I have not yet been able to determine the precise character of the interplay between Bayhaqī and Juzjānī's text in the process of its transmission (witnesses J & N, and Q & Ṣ).

[40] Here follow the page and line numbers in Gohlman's edition: 44.4–5, 52.5, 54.6 (2x), 54.7, 54.9, 56.7, 58.5–6 (2x), 66.10–68.1, 68.3–4, 68.4–5 (3x), 72.2–3, 78.7, 80.8–82.1, 82.1–2, 84.1 (2x), 84.3, 86.3–4, 86.6–7 (2x), 88.2 (2x). There are no significant differences between the various witnesses used in the edition.

[41] *Ibid*., pp. 64.1 and 70.4.

[42] *Ibid*., p. 74.2–4.

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alteration in testimony 1, must have been carried out with sinister rather than with noble motives.

CONCLUSION

In the end, the conclusion must be that the whole idea of Avicenna contracting a colic because of having too much sex and then even dying from it, is the result of a progressive destruction of his character by parties hostile to his person. This progressive destruction took place in the process of transmission of Juzjānī's biography of his Master:

1) In the version of Juzjānī's biography that must come closest to the original, and which is contained in the oldest available witness, viz. witness B (MS Istanbul, Université 4755 (24), folios 311a–316a, dated 588/1192), Avicenna's colic is (correctly) represented as the natural result of an overall unhealthy lifestyle. No mention of sex during his fatal illness in Isfahan.
2) Then, in the next oldest witness, viz. witness A (MS Istanbul, Aya Sofya 4852 (1), folios 4b-13a, first part $7^{th}/13^{th}$ cent.), a key-phrase is omitted, whereby Avicenna's colic is now (misleadingly) depicted as resulting from excessive sex. No mention (yet) of sex during his fatal illness in Isfahan.
3) Then, in witness J (MS Istanbul, Ahmet III 3447 (6) (folios 22a–26b, dated 866/1462) and witness N (a version of Juzjānī's biography found in the margin of a copy of Shahrazūrī's *Nuzhat al-arwāḥ*, a version that was written after 754/1353), Avicenna's colic is again depicted as resulting from excessive sex while mention is now also made of abundant sex during his fatal illness in Isfahan.
4) Finally, witnesses Q and Ṣ (Ibn al-Qifṭī and Ibn Abī Uṣaybiʿa, both $7^{th}/13^{th}$ cent.) do not only depict Avicenna's colic as resulting from immoderate sex, but in addition, they portray Avicenna as leading a *completely perverted* sex life while fatally ill with the colic in Isfahan.

With the passing of the centuries, Avicenna's reputation as a degenerate sexual maniac became firmly established. In fact, this has remained the dominant view until this very day. In that sense, his detractors have certainly succeeded in what they set out to do. The interesting thing is that Gohlman, in spite of his very keen eye and his command of the manuscript tradition, made the fatal decision to take his lead from Ibn al-Qifṭī and Ibn Abī Uṣaybiʿa in case witnesses A, B, J and N were not unanimous in their

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readings.[43] This caused him to not only discard the single correct reading of witness B in connection with testimony 1, but also to discard the correct readings of B and A in the case of testimony 2. The above discussions may thus be seen as a supplementary note to Gohlman's otherwise exemplary edition.*

[43] Gohlman, *The Life of Ibn Sina*, p. 6.

* This is a significantly rewritten version of a lecture given at the Symposium *Prince of the Physicians. The Legacy of Avicenna in the Islamic World and the West*, held at the University of Leiden, The Netherlands, on 16 January 2012. I should like to thank an anonymous reader and my friend Ronald E. Kon of Mheer for their valuable comments on an earlier draft of this article.

https://doi.org/10.1017/S0957423913000039 Published online by Cambridge University Press