

ORIGINAL ARTICLE

An Investigation of the Transfer of Traditional Medicines from the Northern Routes of the Persian Gulf to Shiraz in the Al-Buwayh Period

Abstract

The transfer of medicine through the Northern roads of the Persian Gulf to the shores and backshores of the Persian Gulf has a long history. In the history of post-Islamic Iran, al-Buwayh was the first government who facilitated the transfer of medicine from the Northern and Southern ports of the Persian Gulf to Shiraz. The emirs of this dynasty, especially Aduḍ al-Dawla, played an important role in transporting medicine from the Northern and Southern ports of the Persian Gulf to Shiraz by making the roads safe. The present study, by performing a library research and following a descriptive-analytic method, seeks to find out, firstly, what the most important routes of drug transfer from the Persian Gulf ports to Shiraz were, and secondly, what the rulers of Al-Buwayh did for the security of the roads from the Northern Persian Gulf to Shiraz. The research findings indicate that, in the Al-Buwayh era, imported medicines (such as Cinnamon, Barbahar, and *Alpinia officinarum*(khosrodaro)) were used to be first unloaded in Sohar and Siraf ports and then be transferred to Shiraz through three important highways.

Keywords: Al-Buwayh, Medicine, Persian Gulf, Cinnamon, Barbahar, *Alpinia officinarum* (khosrodaro), Clove, Camphor

Received: 4 Jul 2020; Accepted: 21 Jul 2020; Online published: 29 Nov 2020
Research on History of Medicine/ 2020 Nov; 9(4): 261-268.

Fathali Bozorgmehrnejad¹

Mostafa Nadim²

Soleyman Heidari³

1- Ph.D. Student, Department of History, Faculty of Literature and Humanity, Shiraz University, Shiraz, Iran

2- Ph.D., Associate Professor, Department of History, Faculty of Literature and Humanity, Shiraz University, Shiraz, Iran

3- Ph.D., Assistant Professor, Department of History, Faculty of Literature and Humanity, Shiraz University, Shiraz, Iran

Correspondence:

Mostafa Nadim

Ph.D., Associate Professor, Department of History, Faculty of Literature and Humanity, Shiraz University, Shiraz, Iran

mos.nadim@gmail.com

Citation:

Bozorgmehrnejad F, Nadim M, Heidari S. An Investigation of the Transfer of Traditional Medicines from the Northern Routes of the Persian Gulf to Shiraz in the Al-Buwayh Period. *Res Hist Med.* 2020; 9(4): 261-268.



Introduction

After the fall of the Sassanids, the Muslim caliphs gained power and the inhabitants of Fars province gradually converted to Islam. Hence, Fars lost its importance as a religious center of this dynasty. However, this did not diminish its commercial importance, especially in the field of medicine. In the Islamic era, Fars province, and its center, Shiraz, regained their importance and prosperity in trade after a short time, and the merchants of the province, compared with the preceding era, had more trade with different lands. During the first centuries of the emergence of Islam, trading with foreign countries was facilitated. This was mainly because of the access of the merchants to the northern and southern ports of the Persian Gulf, existed in ancient times and developed in the Islamic era, especially in the era of Al-Buwayh. The main issue of the present research is to study the role of the northern roads of the Persian Gulf in the transfer of medicine to Shiraz and to other cities on the shores of the Persian Gulf. Accordingly, the research seeks to answer the following questions:

1. From which routes did the ports of Persian Gulf lead to Shiraz?
2. What drugs were exported or imported?
3. What measures did the Buwayhid's rulers take to secure the northern roads of the Persian Gulf?

To address these questions, the research, based on the library resources, has followed a descriptive-analytic method to analyze the data. After giving a brief introduction to the rise of Al-Buwayh in Fars, the article focuses on the main issue of the research.

The rise of the Al-Buwayh in Fars by controlling the commercial ports of the Persian Gulf

The name of the Buwayhid dynasty is derived from Buwayhid, the father of the three brothers (Ali, Hassan and Ahmad) who founded the dynasty. The three brothers first gained positions in the Makan Ibn Kaki Corps of Gilan province. In the power struggles between Makan and Mardavij ibn Ziyar, Makan was defeated and the sons of Buwayhid joined Mardavij, who had gained power in Tarbistan. (Busse, 1993, p. 220) Mardavij handed over Karaj to Ali in 321 AH. But Ali had not yet arrived in Karaj that Mardavij changed his mind and decided to take control of the city himself. Ali was in Ray that he became aware of Mardavij's intentions and quickly gained control of Karaj. (Ibn Miskawayh, 1997, pp. 373-374) In Karaj, Ali earned a lot of money by making the adherents of the Khorami sect obey him. To expand his territory, he went to Isfahan and conquered the city. However, despite occupying Isfahan, Ali could never prove the legitimacy of his status as the ruler of Isfahan. Therefore, he left Karaj and Isfahan for Mardavij and went to Arjan. He was in hope to establish an independent kingdom in Southern Iran by capturing Arjan. Having conquered Arjan, Ali gained a lot of property and at the request of Ali Nobandjani, the puppet ruler of the caliph in Shiraz, whose relations with the caliph had been strained, invaded this city. (Ibn Miskawayh, 1997, p. 377) After conquering Shiraz, Ali persuaded the caliph to recognize him in Fars (Busse, 1993, p. 122). Ali expanded his territory. With the help of his brother, Hassan, he invaded Isfahan and his brother, Ahmad, by advancing toward Khuzestan, invaded Baghdad and entered this city in 334 AH and the Abbasid caliph had no choice but to legally recognize him and assign legal titles to all three brothers. (*Majmal al-Tawarikh wa al-Qasas*, n.d, p. 379)



Despite the expansion of al-Buwayh's territory in the southern half of Iran, the success of the emirs of this dynasty was heavily based on their access to important commercial ports on the northern and southern shores of the Persian Gulf. In fact, the ports in the Persian Gulf were important sources of maritime trade for Al-Buwayh. This would improve their status and meet their economic needs, and hence, strengthening the foundation of Al-Buwayh's power. Therefore, Al-Buwayh Emirs, realizing the importance of the ports, tried to dominate the ports of the Persian Gulf. Mu'izz al-Dawla took control of the port of Basra, in the northwest of the Persian Gulf (Ibn Miskawayh, 1997, p. 148). Emad al-Dawla captured all the northern ports of the Persian Gulf, and when the port of Basra was threatened by the Omani, Mu'izz al-Dawla sent an army to conquer Oman in 354 AH. The Emir of Oman agreed to read the sermon after Amir Dailami. After the Dailami forces left the city, the people of the city expelled the insurgents and the Emir of Oman. (Faqihi, 1978, p. 168). A year later, in the year 355 AH, Mu'izz al-Dawlah conquered Oman with the help of Adud al-Dawla, who had rushed from Fars to help him. (Ibn al-Athir, 1992, p. 279) The death of Mu'izz al-Dawla caused a revolt and the loss of Al-Buwayh's control over Oman. Adud al-Dawla suppressed the rebels in 362 AH and regained the control of Oman. However, Al-Buwayh opposition forces, including the Kharijites, remained active in Oman. Adud al-Dawla, who had seized power in Fars after Emad al-Dawla, suppressed the insurgents in two successive wars, and peace returned to Oman. (Ibn al-Athir, 1992, pp. 58-59) Adud al-Dawla's definite dominance over Oman led to the formation of a trade triangle in the northern and southern ports of the Gulf. He took control of the port of Basra in the northwest of the Persian Gulf, the port of Siraf in the center of the Persian Gulf, and Oman (the port of Sohar) at the eastern entrance to the Persian Gulf. The result of this domination was the consolidation of al-Buwayh's authority over the maritime trade, including the drug trade, which culminated in his time.

Commercial Medicine Ports in the Northern and Southern Ports of the Persian Gulf

The Persian Gulf is one of the most important waterways in the world, which has been used for commercial purposes by Iranians since ancient times. (Istakhri, 1961, p. 109) This waterway, being located near Fars province, always played an important role in its prosperity. This province led to the Persian Gulf from the south (Ibn Hawqal, 1987, p. 10) and had five important sub-provinces: Shapur Khoreh, Istakhr Ardeshir Khoreh, Darab Gard and Arjan (Behbahan). (Ibn Rustah, 1986, p. 122) During the Islamic era, all five sub-provinces had direct trade relations with the two important ports of Siraf and Oman, and a significant proportion of the importing or exporting commercial goods to these two ports, including medicines, passed through Fars province and from there went to other places. In the fourth century and in the era of Al-Buwayh, the most important port of medicine was Siraf. This port had a long history in importing and exporting medicine. During the Sassanid era, traditional medicines, such as pepper and camphor were imported from India and East Asia to the port of Siraf and other ports in the Persian Gulf. From there, they were transported to other places by land. (Ricks, 1971, pp. 400-402)

After the arrival of Islam in Iran, not only did the commercial importance of the Persian Gulf not decrease but also the amount of imported and exported traditional



medicines to ports, such as Siraf port, compared to the two ports of Abla and Basra, increased (Hourani, 1959, p. 90) This is because of the fact that, due to the mud, deep draft ships could not navigate in the river, and so other ports of the northern shores of the Persian Gulf soon became the destinations for ocean-going ships. The city and port of Siraf were the most important port that attracted the attention of the ship's captains, and this port gradually replaced those of Basra and Abla. (Ricks, 1971, p. 403)

In the fourth century AH and in the era of Al-Buwayh, the port of Siraf became the most important port for loading or unloading all kinds of goods, including medicine and Muslim geographers wrote in detail about the types and varieties of goods imported to or exported from Siraf. Muqaddasi, for instance, while emphasizing the importance of Siraf's connection with China, mentioned this port as the gateway to China and the warehouse of Khorasan (Maqdisi, 1982, p. 636; *Hudud al-'Alam*, 1983, p. 131; Abulfeda, 1970, p. 377) Istakhri and Ibn Hawqal also referred to Siraf enjoying the same importance as Shiraz. (Istakhri, 1961, p. 113; Ibn Hawqal, 1987, p. 51.) But what underlay the importance and prosperity of Siraf port?

Part of the importance of Siraf and its prosperity in trade was due to the roads leading from Shiraz and other cities of the province to this city. Furthermore, the importance of the Persian Gulf cities and the transfer of trade routes from those cities to Siraf added to the importance of Siraf and Sirafi merchants also took full advantage of this opportunity and played an important role in the maritime and land trade of medicine in the era of al-Buwayh. An examination of Muslim geographers' reports on the export or import of medicine from /to Siraf showed that the port traded medicine with certain ports of China, Ceylon, India, and East Africa in the fourth century. Medicines that were imported from different countries and regions included: Cinnamon from China (Ibn al-Faqih, 1970, p. 83; Ibn Khordadbeh, 1889, p. 52), myrobalan, urchins, Clove, *Alpinia officinarum* (Khosrow Daru /Kholnjan) Cinnamon, Sandalwood (Chandan), Pepper, from India (Ibn al-Faqih, 1970, p. 83) Camphor and sandalwood from the Malay Peninsula (Ibn Khordadbeh, 1889, p.54)

Various goods, which were mainly the products of the coastal cities of the Persian Gulf, were exported from Siraf to the ports of other countries. The most important medicines exported from Siraf to other ports were barbahar, turmeric, and some distillates that had medical use. (Maqdisi, 1982, p. 658)

Apart from Siraf port, Sohar port in Oman at the entrance of the Persian Gulf also played an important role in drug transportation. Merchant ships from all over the world entered this port (*Hudud al-'Alam*, 1983, p. 169) and, according to the Muqaddasi, this port (Sohar) was the gateway to China and Iraq as well as being a refuge to Yemen (Maqdisi, 1982, p. 47) and a commercial rival of Siraf.

Most medicines and drugs that entered Oman, Siraf and other northern ports of the Persian Gulf (Genaveh, Mehruban, Siniz, Najirm) reached these ports via the Spice Road. It was a network of sea lanes that connected the east to the west. In fact, this route started from the west coasts of Japan and China and after passing through the islands of Indonesia and bypassing India continued to the lands of the Middle East, and from there led to the Mediterranean and finally to Europe. (Reid, 1997, p. 10) Having reached the Persian Gulf, the Spice Road was divided into several branches, one of which, after reaching the port of Siraf, continued on land and on the shores of the Persian Gulf towards the cities of Lar, Bushehr, Kazerun, and Istakhr (Shiraz), Ghomsheh,



Abarqo, Kashan, Qom and Rey. (Bastani Parizi, 1994, p. 190) However, the medicinal goods that reached the northern and southern ports of the Persian Gulf were transported to other coastal cities of the Persian Gulf and from there to Shiraz through other routes besides the spice route (mentioned below).

Drug Transportation Routes from the Northern and Southern Ports of the Persian Gulf to Shiraz

The southern and northern ports of the Persian Gulf were connected by sea, and a significant portion of the drugs that had entered important ports, such as Oman and Siraf, from India, China and the east coast of Africa, were transported to other ports and from there they were transported by land to Shiraz through the following routes and then, from this city, they were sent to other places. The most important routes that led from the northern ports of the Persian Gulf to Shiraz in the fourth century AH were as follows: 1- The route of Mehruban port to Arjan, Shiraz 2- The route of Genaveh port to Shiraz 3- The route of Siraf port to Shiraz

The first route went from Mehruban port to Arjan before reaching Shiraz. Different Muslim geographers mentioned this with minor differences, the route of caravans and the distances between them. For example, ibn Rustah mentioned certain routes some of whose stops differed from those given by other writers, including Moqaddasi. The path ibn Rustah explained was as follows:

“From Arjan to that valley, five parasangs (each parasang equals about 4.8 or 5.6 km); from that valley to Hir, six parasangs; from Hir to Bandak, four parasangs; from Bandak to Khan Hammad, eight parasangs; from Arjan to Sirabur, ten parasangs; from Sirbour to Sibuyen, four parasangs; from Muridistan to Darkhid, four parasangs; from Darkhid to Khurabadhan, six parasangs; from Khurabadhan to Nubandajan, four parasangs; from Nobandgan to Shah Dozdan, four parasangs; from Shah Dozdanto Nay-Murghan, six parasangs; from Nay Morgan to Kurabanahtian, five parasangs; from Kurabanahtian to Dastjerd, eight parasangs; and from Dastjerd to Shiraz, ten parasangs.”(Ibn Rustah, 1986, p. 222)

In Ahsan al-Taqasim, Muqaddasi wrote about the route between Mehruban and Shiraz:

“From Arjan to Rishahr, there is one neighborhood. Then to Mehruban, there is one stage; from Arjan to Zaytoun, there are two *berids* (each berid equals two parasangs); then to Habs, one stage; then to Bandak, one stage; then to Gonbad two or one berid through the defile; then to Zank, two berids; then to dowkhovith, one stage; then, to Khovathan, two berids; then, to nobandegan, the same distance.” (Maqdisi, 1982, pp. 673-674)

The second route was from Genaveh route to Shiraz, through which merchants and traders transported their goods.

Istakhri wrote about the route from Genaveh to Shiraz and explained it from Shiraz to Genaveh as follows:

“First from Shiraz to Khan Shir, over Sakan river, six parasangs; from Khan to Arjan plain, four parasangs; and from Arjan plain to Tire four parasangs; and from Tire to Kazerun six parasangs; and from Kazerun to Dezbez, four parasangs and from Dezbez to Sar Aqaba, four parasangs; and from Sargariveh to Tawj - there is a city - four parasangs; and from Tawj to Janaba, twelve parasangs, in total forty-four parasangs”(Istakhri,



1961, pp. 117-118)

The third route deriving from the Persian Gulf and reaching Shiraz was that from Siraf to Shiraz. This road was one of the most important ways to transfer medicine to Shiraz and geographers wrote about this route in detail. In Ahsan al-Taqasim, Muqaddasi wrote about the route of Siraf to Shiraz from two perspectives: first, from Siraf to Shahr-e Gour; Then from Shiraz to Shahr-e Gour.

“From Siraf to Hajm, one stage; then, to Barzeh, one stage; then, to Qirand, one stage; then, to Meh; then, to Raigan, one stage; then, to Bia Bashurab, one stage, then, to Gour, one stage; and from Shiraz to Siraf.” The first stop of Kafra, one stage; then, to Kool, one stage; then, to Bumhan, one stage; then, one stage to Gour” (Maqdisi, 1982, pp. 674-675)

It is worth mentioning that Muqaddasi considered each stage to be equal to sixty kilometers, while Ibn Khordabeh and Istakhri considered thirty-six kilometers as one stage; and in the fourth century, each parasang was equal to six kilometers and each mile was about one thousand eight hundred and fifty meters.

Having passed the mentioned routes, the merchants and traders would use animals to transfer their goods to the center of Fars province, Shiraz, and from Shiraz to the center of Iran.

The Buwayhid Rulers of Fars and the Strengthening the Security of the Ports and Roads North of the Persian Gulf

In the first part of the article, some of the measures taken by the Buwayhid ruler to dominate the ports of the Persian Gulf were mentioned and it was emphasized that the Buwayhid ruler was well aware that controlling the Persian Gulf trade highway and trade triangle (Basra, Siraf, and Oman) were of prime importance in consolidating their power. In addition, to maintain power, the Buwayhid ruler had to preserve the security of roads and the transportation of basic goods, including medicine. Adud al-Dawlah was one of the Buwayhid emirs who made a great effort to create security on the northern routes of the Persian Gulf for the transfer of medicine. During the period of Adud al-Dawla, Persian medicine had never witnessed such prosperity and success. He had a famous hospital built in Shiraz (Ibn Balkhi, 1984, p. 133) and prominent physicians and pharmacists worked under his (Adud al-Dawla) patronage. (Faqihi, 1978, p. 258) Some of the medicine required by health centers of Shiraz and other cities were provided by the northern and southern ports of Fars. As soon as Adud al-Dawla gained power, he took measures for maintaining the health of the people and facilitating the transfer of medicine. At first, he established his control over ports, such as Siraf, Sohar, Basra, etc. (Vossoughi, 2005, p. 120). The roads became so secure in his territory and on the roads in the farthest places, even on the shores of Makran, that sermons were read in his name. (Maqdisi, 1982, p. 712)

In addition, Adud al-Dawla would punish those who contributed to the insecurity of the caravans and merchants. He even forced some of them to migrate to remote areas. (Ibn Balkhi, 1984, p. 141) Moreover, to ensure the security of roads and the ease of trade and commerce, he eradicated the bandits of Gafas who had made the roads of Kerman and Fars unsafe (Maqdisi, 1982, p. 719) Another wise measure taken by Adud al-Dawlain for preventing robbery was that he settled a group of Bedouins who were already involved in robbery in the desert between Fars and Kerman (Faqihi, 1978, p.



587). He also encouraged the merchants and people crossing the paved roads leading to Siraf to the extent possible. (Mostafavi, 1964, p. 104) He also established a mint in Siraf to facilitate the transfer of money (Qasim Begloo, 2006, p. 147-192). Owing to Adud al-Dawla's actions and the security improved on the northern roads of the Persian Gulf and ports, the income he earned through trading, mainly that through trading medicine, increased so much that some estimated his annual income from the ports of the Persian Gulf and the Sea of Oman amounting to three million, three hundred and forty-six thousand Rials. (Ibn Balkhi, 1984, p. 171-172) This represents special attention given by Adud al-Dawla to maritime trade expansion and safe transportation of goods on the roads leading to the northern shores of the Persian Gulf.

After Adud al-Dawla, the prosperity of Fras gradually diminished. Conflicts between Adud al-Dawla's successors resulted in the insecurity of the roads. The transfer of medicine from the northern ports of the Persian Gulf, including that of Siraf to Shiraz, was disrupted, and important ports involving in medicine transportation on the northern shores of the Persian Gulf gradually lost their former prosperity. Some researchers attributed natural disasters, such as the earthquake happened in 364 or 367, to the decline of the Siraf. Thomas Rex, in his article, examined the loss of prosperity of the northern ports of the Persian Gulf, including Siraf, and concluded that despite the turmoil after the death of Adud al-Dawla and the eventual fall of the Buwayhid dynasty, trade in the port of Siraf lasted until the twelfth century. (Ricks, 1971, p. 413)

Conclusion

With regard to the main issue of this research, as well as the research questions, it can be concluded that the three components of power and authority of rulers, secure roads and finally the need of the market and government for a particular product are directly related to each other. All three components, examined in this article, can be considered important in the medicine trade in the Al-Buwayh era. The Buwayhid emirs knew that they had no choice but to develop trade, especially maritime trade, to consolidate their economic power. Trade expansion largely depended on road safety, the needs of the market and the government determining the type of imported/ exported goods. Along with the improvement of medical facilities in Shiraz during the Adud al-Dawla era, the need to import medicine from the northern routes of the Persian Gulf was felt. With actions taken by Adud al-Dawla, security established on the northern roads and the flow of medicine to Shiraz and other cities increased. After the death of Adud al-Dawla and because of the contention among his successors, several components were lost. The successors of Adud al-Dawla lacked the required power and authority (the first component), leading to the insecurity of the northern roads of the Persian Gulf (the second component) and finally because of the loss of the centrality of Shiraz and the fall of Al-Buwayh, the transfer of medicine on the northern roads of the Persian Gulf from the ports to Shiraz was declined to the minimum level.

References

- Abulfeda, I., 1970. *Taghveem-Al-Boldan*. Translated from Arabic by M. Ayati. Tehran: Iranian Culture Foundation.
- Bastani Parizi, M., 1994. Pepper Road. *Kelk*, April, 49-50, p.184.
- Busse, H., 1993. *The Cambridge history of Iran*. Translated from English by H. Anousheh. Tehran: Amirkabir.



- Faqihi, A., 1978. *Buyid dynasty*. Gilan: Saba.
- Hourani, G. F., 1959. *Arab seafaring in the Indian Ocean in ancient and early medieval times*. Translated from English by M. Moghadam. Tehran: Franklin.
- Hudud al-'Alam*, 1983. Translated from Arabic by M. Sotoudeh. Tehran: Tahouri.
- Ibn al-Athir, A., 1992. *Al-Kamil Fi Al-Tarikh*. Translated from Arabic by A. Halat. Tehran: elmifarhangi.
- Ibn al-Faqih, A., 1970. *Mukhtasar al-Baldan*. Translated from Arabic by M. H. Tehran: Iranian Culture Foundation.
- Ibn Balkhi, 1984. *Farsnamh*. Tehran: donyayeketaab.
- Ibn Hawqal, M., 1987. *Surat Al-Ard*. Translated from Arabic by J. Shi'ār. Tehran: Amirkabir.
- Ibn Khordadbeh, A., 1889. *Al-Masalak wa Al-Mamalak*. Translated from Arabic by S. Khakrand. Beirut: Dar Al-Sadr.
- Ibn Miskawayh, A., 1997. *Tajarob al-Omam*. Translated from Arabic by A. Monzavi. Tehran: Tous.
- Ibn Rustah, A., 1986. *Al-A'lāq al-Nafīsa*. Translated from Arabic by H. Gharachanlou. Tehran: Amirkabir.
- Istakhri, A., 1961. *Al-Masalak wa Al-Mamalak*. Translated from Arabic by E. Afshar. Tehran: Bongahe Tarjame va nashre ketab.
- Majmal al-Tawarikh wa al-Qasas*, n.d. Tehran: Kalale khavar.
- Maqdisi, A., 1982. *Ahsan al Taghasim fi marefat al aghalim*. Translated from Arabic by A. Monzavi. Tehran: Moalefan va Motarjeman Iran.
- Mostafavi, M., 1964. *Eghlem pars*. Tehran: anjam asare melli.
- Qasim Begloo, M., 2006. *Siraf coins*. Tehran: Institute for Iranian Contemporary Historical Studies.
- Reid, S., 1997. *The silk and spice routes, Exploration by sea*. Translated from English by S. Malek Shahmirzadi. Tehran: Daftare farhange eslami.
- Ricks, T., 1971. Daryanavardi dar khaleje Fars. *Majalle farhange Iranzamin*, 18, pp. 392-432.
- Vossoughi, M., 2005. *Tarekh khaleje fars va mamaleke hamjavar*. Qom: Mehr.

