Preventive Medicine and Diagnostics

CHAPTER SIX
PREVENTIVE MEDICINE AND DIAGNOSTICS

A. Health Management—Preventive Medicine and Dietetics

The preservation of animals’ health was (and still is) a central aspect of veterinary medicine, and much of the material in veterinary treatises of the Mamluk period deals with the maintenance of animals in good health from birth to old age. Presumably this was connected with the veterinarian’s role as consultant to the animals’ owners, and the information provided in the treatises guided those who worked with animals, whether as professional veterinarians or as keepers. A vital part of this guidance was the recommendation of kinds of food to be given to animals according to their general state of health. In this context, dietary supplements played an important part, particularly those obtained from plants, minerals of various kinds, and animals’ organs. Mostly, we read that the veterinarian’s declared purpose in choosing food was the need to preserve a balance between the four humours in the animal’s body, in keeping with the principles of the medical theory in this regard. In deciding on the types of food, the veterinarians took into consideration such factors as the climate, the weather, the geographical location, the animal’s general health, and its physical condition prior to a hunt or a military campaign. They also had to pay attention to specific conditions of the body that might affect the animal’s general health, such as oestrus (‘heat’), pregnancy, giving birth, mouling and suckling.

Nearly every veterinary book contains long chapters on different kinds of food and their suitability for specific animals in order to maintain their health.¹ To a certain extent, this was seen as preventive treatment to avert illnesses caused by changes in the weather, intense physical exertion during journeys, or injuries on the way caused by sandstorms or dust storms, which were often the fate of camels, horses, and other pack animals.² In discussing the health of hunting animals, the authors related to the dietary

¹ See, for example, al-Malik al-Ashraf, al-Mughni, p. 157.
² Al-Malik al-Ashraf, describing the treatment of camels arriving from a long and hard journey, discusses the types of food that should be given to them and the way to treat injuries sustained during the journey. See Ibid., p. 202.
regime appropriate for birds, dogs, and cheetahs. In this case, the main purpose was to maintain their physical fitness in order to ensure a successful hunt, which required careful preparations, including the provision of calculated quantities of kinds of meat suitable for feeding the different animals that took part in the hunt.3

Al-Malik al-Ashraf’s veterinary treatise on the care of horses and pack animals includes a chapter entitled “Things useful for preserving the health of beasts of burden [dawāb] at all times and protecting them from the various damages of the weather.”4 This chapter features a prescription composed of several substances that are believed to have a beneficial effect on the health, and the author advises everyone who cares about the health of the animals he treats to make a point of using it regularly at the beginning of every season. The mixture prescribed is a kind of treacle (tiryāq—theriaca), similar to that recommended by general doctors as a prophylactic against every disease that might attack humans.5 The veterinary prescription mainly consists of substances to smell (obtained from fragrant herbs), such as camphor, musk, roses and saffron. The author explains how to prepare the mixture, by crushing the fragrant substances, mixing them and heating them in rose water. The resulting mixture has to be kept in a glass or earthenware vessel, designed for long term storage. He emphasizes that it is the duty of every animal owner, or anyone responsible for an animal’s care, to keep a sufficient quantity of this medication available for immediate use in the stable. He states that regular use of this mixture helps the

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3 See, for example, “في حفظ تقوان صحة الجوارح من الأhoaية والخز الدرب وحفظ صحته بالمعاجين” — Rules for the care of hunting birds, their protection from wind, heat and cold, as well as, for keeping them healthy by using ointments,” Ibn Qushtumur, al-Qānūn al-wāḍiḥ, K.K. Ms. 978, fol. 53v○.


5 An important pharmacological book from the beginning of the Mamluk period, by Abū al-Muná Dāwūd b. Abī al-Naṣr known as al-ʿAṭṭār al-Hārūnī (d. 658/1259), gives a detailed description of the virtues of theriaca—tiryāq, called in the book al-Diryāq al-akbar and also al-Fārūq. The writer offers several different prescriptions for the preparation of tiryāq and discusses the different uses of it. Tiryāq’s main use is for treating snake bites and eliminating poisons from the body. He also mentions another kind of tiryāq, claiming that it is effective for treating problems of the bowels, pains in the liver and spleen, severe chronic headaches, and rapid heartbeat, as well as poisoning by animals, reptiles or mosquitoes. See Abū al-Muná Dāwūd b. Abī al-Naṣr known as al-ʿAṭṭār al-Hārūnī [or Cohen al-ʿAṭṭār] (d. 658/1259), Minhāj al-dukkān wa-dustūr al-aʿyān fī aʿmāl wa-tarākīb al-adwiyah al-nāfiʿah li-al-abdān, ed. Ḥasan ʿAṣī, Bierut: Dār al-Manāhil, 1992, pp. 127-134.