

DIOSCORIDES' *MATERIA MEDICA* MANUSCRIPTS IN TURKEY

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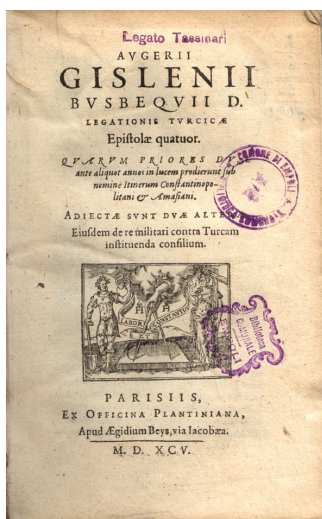
Introduction

Pedanius Dioscorides (Πεδάνιος Διοσκορίδης), an ancient Greek physician, botanist, and pharmacologist, was born in Anazarbus (presently near Adana in Turkey) and lived between ca. 40 AD and 90 AD in the time of the Roman Emperors Nero and Vespasian. He is well known for his five-volume book in Greek, Περὶ Ὑλῆς Ἰατρικῆς, translated as *De Materia Medica* in Latin, in which Dioscorides not only described the drugs of his time and explained their effects but also arranged their descriptions systematically, and enumerated nearly 400 plants (1,2). So this book, as one of the earliest precursors to modern pharmacopoeias is a milestone in the development of pharmacy and botany, and was highly influential on these disciplines even until the 16th Century (3).



Pedanius Dioscorides

Lithography by Vigneron Pierre Roch
(1789-1872), 1829



**Cover of the Busbecq's
"Turkish Letters" (1595)**

Through repeated Arabic translations from the ninth century, this oeuvre was

highly influential in developing the framework of Islamic pharmaceutics (4,5); this can particularly be evidenced in Ibn Culcul's works and in Ibn al-Baitār's *Kitāb al-Jāmi* (*Book of Simple Drugs*). *De Materia Medica* also gained popularity during the Ottoman Empire, and it was mainly associated with the title *Kitab'al Haşayiş* by Dioscorides, who was also known under several different aliases, including *Skorrides*, *Skoridos*, *Diskoridis*, and *Zizkorides* (6,7,8,9).

One of the oldest copies of the manuscript—now referred to as *Codex Vindobonensis*, preserved today in the National Library of Austria—was created in 512 AD for the daughter of Byzantine Emperor Flavius Anicius Olybrius. At one time, it belonged to Hamon, the Jewish chief physician to Emperor Suleiman the Magnificent (1495–1566), until it was sold by the physician's son and brought to Vienna from Constantinople through the endeavors of O. Ghiselin de Busbecq (1521–1592), the then ambassador of the Austrian Monarch. Busbecq explains his excitement at finding this book and provides some descriptions of its physical condition in one of his Turkish Letters, dated 1562.

The purpose of this presentation is to introduce the existing manuscripts of the *Materia Medica*, which can be found in Turkish libraries, dating from the thirteenth to the eighteenth centuries, and to provide a brief description of each, with some sample pages highlighted.

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Name of the Manuscript:	Kitab al-Haşaiş fi't-Tib
Library:	Suleymaniye Yazma Eser Kutuphanesi (Suleymaniye Manuscripts Library), Istanbul
Catalogue no:	Manuscripts – Ayasofya
Dated:	H. 621, 1224 AD
Language:	Arabic

Translated by: Istafan Ibn Basil (Stephanos Basilos) and reviewed by Hunain Ibn Ishak, a Nestorian, and one of the earliest and most successful translators of Greek writings, including the works of Dioscorides (10).
Translated from: Greek
Number of folios: 187
Special notes: Includes 294 miniature drawings. Very similar to the manuscript Ayasofya 3703. Includes 7 chapters, while the original *Materia Medica* has 5. The additional chapters deal with animals and poisons, and were probably added by Hunain Ibn Ishak himself. Another point that strengthens this idea is a note written on folio 187a of the manuscript, saying, "Here are the five books of Dioscorides, all the medicines, and the books have been completed" (11).

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Name of the Manuscript: Kitab al-Haṣaiṣ fi't-Tib
Library: Suleymaniye Yazma Eser Kutuphanesi (Suleymaniye Manuscripts Library), Istanbul
Catalogue no: Manuscripts – Ayasofya 3703
Dated: H. 621, 1224 AD
Language: Arabic
Number of folios: 203
Special notes: This copy is very similar to the previous manuscript (Ayasofya 3702) and includes 153 miniature drawings. There is an interesting miniature in the beginning, which depicts two men sitting in an old pharmacy with medicines on the shelves; there is a man standing between them. The original folio was clipped by a reader in the 1960s, and a handmade copy from the original was drawn by Prof Dr Suheyl Unver (12). This copy is supplemented by another book called the "Grape Viniculture," written by Hunain Ibn Ishak, which talks about 28 different species of grapes (13).



Folio 2b and 3a

(Suleymaniye Yazma Eserler Kutuphanesi – Ayasofya No: 3703)
 (Courtesy of the SYEK Istanbul)

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Name of the Manuscript: Kitab al-Haṣaiṣ fi't-Tib
Library: Suleymaniye Yazma Eser Kutuphanesi (Suleymaniye Manuscripts Library), Istanbul
Catalogue no: Manuscripts – Ayafosya 3704
Dated: Not certain. (Probably between X-XII. Century AD)
Language: Arabic
Number of folios: 192
Special notes: Includes 565 miniature drawings. The manuscript seems a bit damaged and much older than the aforementioned copies. The text includes lots of Syrian words, in addition to the Arabic. In the beginning of the manuscript, there is a damaged drawing that possibly depicts Dioscorides with his disciples. At the top of this folio is written, "Dioskorides el-feylesof" (Dioscorides, the philosopher). On folio no. 3, there is another miniature of Lukkat al-Akakir (who gathers medical things) Fartilus and Mutetabb (physician) Vanzerius. This miniature is also heavily damaged. On the top of this page is the signature of an Ottoman Ruler, Celebi Mehmed Ibn Bayezid (1387–1421), which probably indicates that the manuscript came to the Ottomans during his period.



Folio 2b and 3a
 (Suleymaniye Yazma Eserler Kutuphanesi – Ayasofya No: 3703)
 (Courtesy of the SYEK, Istanbul)



Folio 6b and 7a

(Suleymaniye Yazma Eserler Kutuphanesi – Ayasofya No: 3703)

(Courtesy of the SYEK, Istanbul)

Name of the Manuscript:	Kitab al-Haṣaiṣ
Library:	Topkapi Sarayi Kutuphanesi (Library of Topkapi Palace), Istanbul
Catalogue no:	A.2127
Dated:	December 1228 AD (626 Safer)
Language:	Arabic
Translated by:	Mihran Ibn Mansur Ibn Mihran
Calligrapher:	Ebu Yusuf Behnam Ibn Musa Ibn Yusuf'ul Musuli
Translated from:	Syrian
Number of folios:	274
Special notes:	The first 10 pages of the manuscript comprise an introduction, which is written by Mihran Ibn Mansur. The <i>Materia Medica</i> part extends from folio 11b to folio 203b (14). It includes 586 miniature drawings. At the beginning of the manuscript, there are three miniatures (13.5 x 18.5 cm) set in a golden blond background. One miniature depicts Dioscorides sitting in a chair and pointing at two people holding books in their hands. The younger one is bending toward Dioscorides, while the older one is standing behind him. On the second folio, Dioscorides and a disciple are shown holding a mandrake root. There is an inscription stating that the manuscript belongs to the personal library of the Seljuk Commander, Mehmed. On folio 6b, there is a miniature of a man trying to cut a plant using a hook.



Folio no: 1b (right) and 2a (left)
(Topkapi Sarayi Kutuphanesi – No: A.2127)
(Courtesy of the TSK, Istanbul)



Folio no: 2b, Dioscorides and a disciple holding a mandrake
(Topkapi Sarayi Kutuphanesi – No: A.2127)
(Courtesy of the TSK, Istanbul)



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Name of the Manuscript: Kitab-al Haşaiş
Library: Topkapi Sarayi Kutuphanesi (Library of Topkapi Palace, Istanbul)
Catalogue no: 2147
Dated: 18 May 1462 AD (18 Shaban 866) (15)
Language: Persian
Translated by: Ali Ibn Serif el-Huseyni
Calligrapher: Ali Ibn Serif el-Huseyni
Translated from: *Materia Medica's* Arabic translation of Mihran Ibn Mansur Ibn Mihran
Number of folios: 203
Special notes: This manuscript was translated from Arabic and does not include any illustrations (16).

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Name of the Manuscript: Kitab'un Nebat
Library: Istanbul Universitesi Nadir Eserler Kutuphanesi (Istanbul University Manuscripts Library), Istanbul
Catalogue no: Manuscripts - T.Y. 1221 (17)
Dated: (Hijri 1275, 1858 AD) Copy of the original translation of 1770 from Latin to Turkish
Language: Turkish
Translated by: Osman Ibn Abdurrahman of Belgrade
Calligrapher: Nuri Uskudar-i es-Seyyid Ali Riza
Translated from: Pietro Andrea Mattioli's famous Latin translation of 1554 (18)
Number of folios: 294
Special notes: Although it was written in the eighteenth century, this translation was retained as a manuscript instead of being published in print. It includes text in black and subjects in red, without any illustrations. According to the foreword, some unused plants were omitted from the translation, and the manuscript was organized into four chapters (19).

Conclusion

Considering Turkey's huge cultural inheritance from the Ottoman Empire, it is expected to find more *Materia Medica* manuscripts in Turkey. However, only six have been identified in the following libraries in Istanbul: the Suleymaniye Manuscripts Library, the Library of Topkapi Palace, and the Istanbul University Manuscripts Library. There might be several reasons for this: the technical difficulty involved in reproducing the hundreds of plant drawings, apart from reproducing the text; issues with regard to the circulation of manuscripts written afterwards, which were highly influenced by the *Materia Medica* but also included some additional, up-to-date knowledge; and finally—and perhaps most importantly—the overwhelming exportation (sometimes theft) of existing manuscripts from Turkey over time. For instance, Antoine Galland (1646–1715), a French orientalist and archeologist, explained in his memoirs dated 1672, that a huge number of books, including hundreds of very rare manuscripts, were transported from Istanbul to foreign countries in his time. Nevertheless, the remaining *Materia Medica* manuscripts dated to the thirteenth century—found at the Suleymaniye Manuscripts Library and the Library of Topkapi Palace, Istanbul—are still worthy of recognition because of the fine condition they are in at present and the beautiful miniature drawings they contain.

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- (18) Ibid, p. 12
- (19) See reference 5, p. 51