

HUNAYN IBN ISHAQ AL-'IBADI: A Great Translator from Greek to Arabic

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Abu Zayd Hunayn Ibn Ishaq al-'Ibadi, the celebrated physician, was the most eminent man of his time in the art of medicine. He possessed a perfect acquaintance with the language of the Yunanis (Greeks), and it was by him that the work of Euclid was translated into Arabic. Thabit Ibn Qurrah, (See no. 125) who came after him, cleared up the difficulties of this work and put it into better order. This was also the case with the *Almagest* [Ptolemy's well-known work on astronomy.] and the greater part of those books, composed in Greek by physicians and philosophers, which have been rendered into Arabic. Hunayn was the most laborious of all those who were engaged in this business of translating; some works (*it is true*) were executed by others. Were it not for this, persons unacquainted with Greek could have derived no benefit from such works, and it is certain that those which remain untranslated are useless except to him who understands that language. Al-Ma'mun was particularly anxious to have books of this kind turned into Arabic, written out and corrected; before him, Ja'far and other members of the Barmak family had encouraged the undertaking, but the efforts of al-Ma'mun were much more successful than theirs. Hunayn himself composed a great number of useful treatises on medical subjects. The life of his son Ishaq has been already given (no. 85). I have read in the History of the physicians (akhbar al-Itaba) that Hunayn went to the bath every day after his ride, and had water poured on himself; he would then come out, wrapped up in a bed-gown, and after taking a cup of wine with a biscuit, lie down, and sometimes fall asleep, till such time as perspiration should cease; he would then get up, burn perfumes to fumigate his person, and have dinner brought in; this consisted in a large fattened pullet stewed in its gravy and cake of bread two hundred drachms in weight: after supping the gravy and eating the fowl and the bread, he took asleep, and on awaking he drank four pints (*ratl*)*[If we read it as ritle it might mean four cups of wine, which is more probable-Ed.] of old wine; if he felt a desire for fruit freshly gathered, he took Syrian apples and quinces. This was his habit till the end of his life.

He died on Tuesday, 7th Safar, A.H. 260 (December, A.D. 873).

In the life of his son, the meaning of the word *'Ibadi* has been already given. The Yunanites were physicians who lived before the time of Islamism; they were sons of Yunan, [Yonan is most probably an altered form of Ionia.] the son of Yafith (*Jephet*), the son of Nuh (*Noah*).

***Source: Ibn Khallikan's Biographical Dictionary, Volume2, pp. 270-271. New Deli, Kitab
.Bhavan: 1996***