

# On the Characteristics of Arabic-Origin Medical Units in The Work “The Canon of Medicine”

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**Abstract:** This article explores the lexical-semantic features of Arabic-derived medical units found in Abu Ali Ibn Sina’s Canon of Medicine. It analyzes how these terms entered the Uzbek language, their semantic transformation, instances of polysemy and homonymy, and their usage in both modern medical language and colloquial speech. The analysis focuses on historically significant terms such as *dabba*, *xafaqon*, and *moxov*, examining their medical and stylistic characteristics, meanings in explanatory dictionaries, and functions in artistic and spoken discourse.

**Keywords:** Abu Ali Ibn Sina, Canon of Medicine, Arabic borrowings, medical terms, *dabba*, *xafaqon*, *moxov*, medical linguistics, semantics, homonymy, terminology studies.

**Introduction:** The lexical richness of a language is closely intertwined with the political, cultural, and scientific-spiritual development of any nation. This process is characterized by constant evolution and uninterrupted progress. In the formation of the lexical system, alongside internal mechanisms, borrowed units from external sources — that is, from other languages — play a significant role. In particular, due to historical events, cultural interactions, and religious-educational influences, the Uzbek language has assimilated a considerable number of words from Arabic, Persian-Tajik, Greek, Latin, Russian, English, French, and other languages at various stages of its development.

Today, a notable portion of the Uzbek lexical system consists of such borrowed units. These words have played an indispensable role in the development of the literary language and the expansion of terminological systems in various fields of science and technology — especially in medical terminology. From this perspective, studying the function and position of borrowed elements in the medical language from a historical and theoretical point of view remains a relevant issue.

Throughout the course of history, languages have developed through interaction and mutual contact,

making lexical exchange between languages a natural phenomenon. No language has evolved in isolation, free from the influence of others. Notably, the work *Al-Qanun fi al-Tibb* (The Canon of Medicine), authored by one of the greatest scholars of the Eastern Renaissance, Abu Ali ibn Sina (Avicenna), served as a bridge between Eastern and Western science — particularly in the field of medicine. Many of the medical terms employed in this work entered the language through Arabic and now serve as a vital source for the formation of the medical lexicon in modern Uzbek.

This article provides a linguistic analysis of the lexical and semantic features of Arabic-origin medical units found in The Canon of Medicine, examining their role in the process of terminologization and their connection to modern medical language.

The supplementary section titled “Guidelines for Using the Book”, attached to Volume I of the 2020 edition of The Canon of Medicine, places special emphasis on the following point:

“Most of the Arabic, Persian, and Greek words printed in italics are explained in the footnotes. More detailed information about pharmaceutical substances can be found in the Second and Fifth books of the Canon, while definitions of disease-related terms are provided in the Third and Fourth books. A table clarifying units of

weight is included in the appendix to the Second book." This explanatory note clearly indicates that many of the medical terms and scientific concepts used in The Canon of Medicine are borrowed — primarily from Arabic, Persian, and Greek. In particular, the use of italics to highlight borrowed units underscores the importance of special attention by the reader in understanding these terms.

Moreover, this fact also attests to the active involvement of external sources — including Greek and Latin, alongside Arabic and Persian — in shaping and enriching the lexical corpus of the Uzbek language, especially its medical terminology. This process was realized not only through translation efforts but also through early forms of term creation, systematization, and explanation. As a result, The Canon of Medicine is valued not only as a historical source but also as an invaluable reference for linguistic and terminological studies.

## METHOD

In the Islamic world, the science of medicine developed through the Arabic language, building upon the ancient Greek and Persian intellectual heritage. In the scholarly and cultural environment of the medieval Muslim world, medical treatises were predominantly written in Arabic. This significantly contributed to the spread of Arabic-origin medical terms into other languages, including Uzbek. Al-Qanun fi al-Tibb (The Canon of Medicine) by Abu Ali ibn Sina (Avicenna) was also authored in Arabic and contains numerous medical concepts expressed through borrowed Arabic terms.

For example, the term “dabba” is borrowed from Arabic and originally means “to move slowly,” “to crawl,” or “to penetrate.” In Avicenna’s work, it is used as a medical term referring to the abnormal displacement of internal organs beyond their anatomical boundaries — in modern terms, a hernia. The Second Section of the First Chapter of the Third Book of The Canon is titled “On Dabba and Similar Conditions”, where various types of hernias are discussed. Avicenna uses both “dabba” and its synonym “fataq” to describe not only modern hernia types but also other related medical conditions.

Notably, conditions categorized under the term “udra” are also included in this classification. “Udra” refers to what is now known in modern medical terminology as hydrocele — a condition characterized by fluid accumulation between the membranes surrounding the male genitalia. This example demonstrates Avicenna’s capacity for semantic generalization and his reliance on precise clinical observations in elevating symptoms and diseases to the level of formal medical terminology.

One noteworthy aspect is that the word “dabba” also functions as a homonym in Uzbek. According to the Explanatory Dictionary of the Uzbek Language, “dabba” also refers to a leather pouch (borrowed from Persian) used to store oil or other liquids. This highlights the multi-layered semantic structure of loanwords in Uzbek and their integration within historical and cultural contexts.

The term “xafaqon” is another Arabic-origin medical term, defined in Avicenna’s work as a pathological condition related to heart function — specifically, painful episodes arising either directly within the heart or in closely associated organs. In The Canon of Medicine, the term describes a disorder involving irregular pulsations, internal unrest, and abnormal heart rhythms, often manifesting as fluttering or palpitations. These symptoms are frequently linked to emotional stress, psychological excitement, physical exhaustion, or functional disorders of internal organs.

In the Explanatory Dictionary of the Uzbek Language, “xafaqon” is defined as:

An abnormal and rapid heartbeat, heart rhythm disturbances;

In some cases, a serious condition characterized by intense chest pain, sometimes leading to loss of consciousness.

Thus, in modern medical terms, “xafaqon” corresponds approximately to tachycardia (accelerated heart rate) and, in certain contexts, arrhythmia (irregular heartbeat). However, in Avicenna’s time, the term described a broader clinical syndrome, encompassing general physical weakness, pain in the chest area, and difficulty breathing — not just a heart rhythm disorder.

Furthermore, in colloquial Uzbek, the phrase “xafaqon bosmoq” expresses emotional unrest and physical symptoms such as heart palpitations, indicating that the term has become entrenched in everyday language beyond its technical usage.

Another notable term is “moxov”, a loanword from Arabic that functions both as a medical term and as a polysemous lexeme in Uzbek. It derives from the Arabic verb *maḥw* (محو), meaning “to erase,” “to disappear,” or “to eliminate.” According to Avicenna’s description in The Canon of Medicine, *moxov* refers to a severe disease caused by the systemic spread of corrupted substances throughout the body. This illness alters the appearance of bodily organs, sometimes leading to disfigurement or even the erosion of limbs. The definition emphasizes its chronic pathological nature and the severe, externally visible manifestations of the disease.

Modern sources, including Wikipedia, describe *moxov*

as:

A chronic infectious disease affecting the entire organism, particularly the skin, nervous system, and internal organs.

In contemporary medicine, this disease is known as leprosy, historically regarded as a dangerous, contagious, and socially isolating illness.

The lexical-semantic characterization of “moxov” in Uzbek is notably broad, with the term functioning as a homonym across several registers:

As a medical term – denoting the disease:

“Yes, Botir aka, nowadays people avoid me like I have leprosy.” (Said Ahmad)

In a pejorative sense – implying something despicable or troublesome:

“It's tough — like a cursed crop, just like leprosy.” (Media source)

As a curse or insult – expressing hatred or social exclusion:

“Beat him, the damn leper!”

These examples show how “moxov” has extended beyond its original medical meaning and entered the emotional and stylistic layers of the Uzbek language, serving as a tool for sarcasm, condemnation, and negative social labeling. This semantic expansion reflects its enriched socio-cultural function in the language.

Additionally, in literary and oral traditions, the disease moxov is often depicted as a symbol of human tragedy, social alienation, and humiliation. The linguistic units surrounding this illness reflect societal attitudes of fear, pity, and psychological despair. For instance:

"Your sister is in a bad state... her whole body is covered... I left the hospital. We ran around to doctors for a week.”[6]

Such examples suggest that moxov is not only a medical condition but also a linguistic, cultural, and psychological phenomenon.

## CONCLUSION

In conclusion, the Arabic medical terms found in The Canon of Medicine did not enter the Uzbek language solely through direct translation or borrowing. Rather, these terms have undergone specific semantic transformations within the Uzbek linguistic system, often acquiring multifaceted meanings. This phenomenon reflects, on the one hand, the natural outcome of historical and cultural language contact, and on the other, the adaptive capacity and semantic breadth inherent in the Uzbek lexicon.

The lexical, terminological, and stylistic analysis of

terms such as dabba, xafaqon, and moxov demonstrates that these units are not merely carriers of medical information. They also function as linguistic phenomena that encapsulate the socio-historical mindset and cultural consciousness of their time. Some of these terms continue to be actively used in contemporary Uzbek, either in their original medical sense or as metaphorical and expressive tools in various discourse contexts.

Therefore, the linguistic study of such terms is not only relevant for terminology studies, but also represents a significant scholarly task in the broader fields of lexicology, stylistics, and cultural linguistics.

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