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Intense romantic love in a 12th-century Persian medical encyclopaedia

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Hussain ibn Muhammad ibn Mahmud ibn Ahmad Hussaini Jorjani (1042–1137 AD), known as Hakim Esmail Jorjani (Jurjani) in the west, was born in the Old Persian city of Gorgan (northeastern Iran). He studied medicine under the guidance of Abd al-Rahman ibn Ali ibn Abi Sadeqh, who was often remembered as The Second Hippocrates.

At the age of 70, Jorjani wrote *Zakhireh-i Kharazmshahi* (*Treasure of King Khwarazm*), one of the first medical encyclopaedias written in the Persian language. This textbook was more than 750 000 words long, comprised 10 volumes, and covered almost all aspects of medicine. It is the largest work on the healing arts ever compiled in the Persian language. In writing this text, in addition to his own extensive experience in medical science, Jorjani gathered the extant knowledge of over 30 of his predecessors.

Zakhireh provided early descriptions, particularly in volume 6, on issues that correspond to a number of present-day neuropsychiatric disorders and their manifestations. Among them is intense romantic love, a cross-cultural phenomenon with a special place in Old Persian writings. Jorjani defined intense romantic love as an obsession with components of depression, in which sexual desires play a role in establishment of the disorder. He explained that the victim of such an obsession shows heightened attention towards the object of his love. Jorjani characterised the beloved person as having sunken eyes, dryness of the eyes, as crying intermittently, and having disturbed sleep patterns. His speech is frequently accompanied by eye motions, smiles and repetitive sighs. The individual is delighted upon hearing poetry on the object of his love, and saddened when listening to a story on separation. The patient experiences an irregular pulse, especially when visiting the object of his affection, hearing her name or description. Jorjani primarily used the last feature to diagnose the condition.

Jorjani suggested ways to manage intense romantic love. He explained that patients with this affliction need physical and psychiatric supportive care (for example, to improve their diet and sleep and their hope for the future). He proposed occupying them in important professions to give them less time to think about their obsession. Another method he recommended was to introduce a possible new object of affection to such a patient and facilitate forgetting the previous object by admiring the new candidate's qualities. A third technique is for friends to wisely admonish the patient to change his ideas. The final recommendation is to enlist other women to discuss the bad character of the first love with the patient. He also explained that some patients require treatment for depression.

Jorjani's description of intense romantic love meets a number of symptoms mentioned in modern diagnostic criteria for some psychiatric disorders, including obsessive-compulsive disorder, separation anxiety disorder, adjustment disorder and major depressive disorder. He described a psychosomatic reaction as a main diagnostic test for this disorder (i.e. pulse rate change). His advised treatment methods represented an early form of cognitive-behavioural therapy and interpersonal psychotherapy.



Enchanted Melody by Master Mahmoud Farshchian. 1987, USA. A man playing a flute and the vibrant autumn colours excite a young woman's pleasure, and the young couple revel in each other's company. (Reproduced by permission from Master Mahmoud Farshchian).