

26 Jabir ibn Hayyan

Jabir ibn Hayyan is a central figure in Arabic alchemy. Working from about 750 AD he also preserves the Greek alchemical thought but adds to it in several transforming ways.



But there is a problem: he was so popular later in Europe that so many European alchemists write under his name (which transliterated as "[Geber](#)") it becomes difficult for us to distinguish the genuine from the later fakes. The real Jabir was interested in much more than alchemy: he was a Pythagorean mathematician, which means he has a definite sense of the divinity of numbers, which makes him a numerologist. When in doubt of authorship, look for numerology; the original Jabir will speak of them often.

As I have studied alchemy, no real effort is made to differentiate the original from the fake: they all get lumped together, and Jabir gets the credit. Geber gets his own page. I've had trouble finding good English translations of the real Jabir.

New ideas attributed to Jabir are these: the mercury-sulfur theory, the variable "degrees" of a furnace heat, he defines the major processes of alchemy (sublimation, descension, calcination, solution, coagulation, fixation, and ceration). We writes concisely and clearly, like Aristotle, which makes him a fan favorite.

I don't have any good translations of the original Arabic, but here is a download of the Arabic version of [Selected Treatises](#).

Here is an early Arabic catalog of Jabir's work compiled by an-Nadim (987 AD):

“ § 10. The Life of JABIR IBN ~YYAN A\$-~OFI and the titles of his works.

He is ABO 'ABDALLAH JABIR IBN ~ YYAN B.'ABDALLAH AL-KOFI, known as A\$-\$OFI. People differ about him, for the Shi'ites say that he is one of their great men and one of the 'I Gates', and they assert that he was the companion of JA'FAR A\$-\$ADIQ-Peace be upon him!, and that he was a Kufan. Some philosophers, however, maintain that he was one of themselves, and that he composed books on logic and philosophy, whereas the seekers after the Philosopher's Stone assert, that the leading position (in this Art) in his days was held by him, but that he lived in concealment. They maintain that he kept roaming about the countries without settling in a place

because he feared the government would attempt his life. It is also said, however, that he belonged to the circle of the Barmacides, was devoted to them and showed respect (especially) to JA'FAR B. YALJYA; for those who maintain this, say that he means, by 'his master JA'FAR', this very Barmacide, whilst the Shi'ites assert that he means by this (phrase) JA'FAR A~~~ADIQ Peace be upon him ! A reliable man who practised the Art. told me that he (the narrator) used to live in the street of the Syrian Gate, in a lane known as t Gold Lane '. Now this man told me that JABIR for the most part lived at Kufa and, owing to the city's good air, prepared there the elixir. When, at Kufa, the cellar was discovered in which .a golden mortar weighing 200 rill 36 was found, the place-said "thisnian-where they had found it"(the mortar) was the actual house of JABIR B. I:IAYYAN, but they found nothing else in the cellar except the mortar and a place for carrying out (the processes of) Solution and Fixation. This happened in the days of 'IZZ AD-DAULA IBN MU'IZZ AD-DAULA (r.356/967...367/977). The Chamberlain ABO SABUKTAGIN told me that he himself went to receive this (treasure).

Many scholars and elders of the Booksellers' Corporation say that this man, I mean JABIR, did not exist at all, whilst some of them say that, if he really did exist, he composed nothing but the Book of Mercy (Kitab ar-Raft.ma) 37, and that those books (supposed to have been composed by him) were written by other people and then ascribed to him. But t say that for an eminent man to sit down, and weary himself out with the composition of a book comprising 2000 folios, fatiguing his talents and thoughts in composing it and (tiring) his hand and' body in writing it down, and then to assign it to another person, either real or imaginary-this, I say, is a kind of foolishness. Such a thing no one w6uld endure; nor would anyone who has busied himself with science, even for a moment embark on it; for what kind of profit would there be in it and what sort of advantage? (No,) the man (JABIR) really existed.: his circumstances are too clear and well known and his writings too important and numerous (for his authorship of them to be doubted).

This man has written books on the tenets (madhahib) of the Shi'ites, which I shall mention in their (proper) place , and books on various topics of the sciences which I have already mentioned in their (respective) place in this book.

t K and 5 have here, according to the custom of the Sh'ites, the formula ' Peace' be upon him I', whilst Fli1gel's' May Allah be pleased with him ! in his own books on the Art introduced him as follows t Saith our Master, ABO' MOSA JABIR IBN I:IAYYAN'.

§ 11. The names of his Pupils 42.

1. AL-KHIRAQI, after whom the Khiraqi Street in Medina is named.
2. IBN cIYAD AL-MISRI.
3. AL-IKHMIMI. .

§ 12. The names of his Books on the Art.

A big catalogue by him exists, which comprises everything he has written on Alchemy and the other subjects, and there exists also a small catalogue by him, which comprises only what he has written on the Art; and we shall mention a number of his books which either we have seen, or which reliable people have seen and mentioned to us.

1. The First Book of the Element of the Foundation (ustuquuss al-ass), for the Barmacides.
2. The Second Book of the Element of the Foundation, for the same.
3. The Book of Perfection (al-kamal), and this is the third (book addressed) to the same.
4. The Great Book of the One (al-walid).
5. The Small Book of the One.
6. The Book of the Pillar (ar-rukun).
7. The Book of Explanation (al-bayan).
8. The Book of Arrangement (at-tartib).
9. The Book of Light (an-nur).
10. The Book of the Red Tincture (al-ibgh al-mar).
11. The Great Book of Ferments (al-khami'ir).
12. The Small Book of Ferments.
13. The Book of Processes based on Reasoning (at-tadibir ar-ra'yiya).
14. The Book known as 'The Third'.
15. The Book of the Spirit (ar-ruh).
16. The Book of Mercy (az-zi'hak).
17. The Book of the Interior Alloys (al-malaghim al-jauwiniya).
18. The Book of the Exterior Alloys (al-malaghim al-barraniya).
19. The Great Book of the Amalekites.
20. The Small Book (356) of the Amalekites.
21. The Book of the Raging Sea (al-bal' al-zakhir).
22. The Book of the Eggs (al-bai).
23. The Book of the Blood (ad-dam).
24. The Book of Hair (ash-shar).
25. The Book of Plants (an-nabat).
26. The Book of Completion (al-istifi).
27. The Book of Well-Guarded Wisdom (al-Qikma al-ma'ina) ..
28. The Book of Division into Chapters (at-tabwib).
29. The Book of Salts (al-amlal).
30. The Book of Stones (al-asjar).
31. The Book of the Chameleon (abi qalamiin).
32. The Book of Construction of the Circle (at-tadwir).
33. The Book of the Splendid (al-bahir).
34. The Book of Repetition (at-takrir).
35. The Book of the Hidden Pearl (ad-durra al-makniina).
36. The Book of Gradual Progress (at-tadarruj) " " .
37. The Book of the Pure (al-khali).

38. The Book of the Encompassing (al-Ijawī).
39. The Book of the Moon.
40. The Book of the Sun.
41. The Book of Combination (at-tarkīb).
42. The Book of Understanding. (al-fiqh).
43. The Book of the Element (al-ustūquṣṣ).
44. The Book of Animals (al-ḥayawān).
45. The Book of Urine (al-bawl).
46. The Book of Processes, II.
47. The Book of Secrets (al-asrār).
48. The Book of Hiding Mines or Minerals (kitman al-marādīn) ".
49. The Book of Quality (al-kaifiyya).
50. The Book of the Sky (as-samā'), i-vii.
51. The Book of the Earth (al-arsf), i-vii.
52. The Book of Extracts (al-mujarradat).
53. The Book of Eggs, II.
54. The Book of Animals. II.
55. The Book of Salts, II.
56. The Book of Plants, II w.
57. The Book of Stones, II.
58. The Book of the Perfect (al-kamil).
59. The Book of Praise (al-madī) X.
60. The Book of Reminders (or Surpluses) of the Ferments (fa~alat alkhama'ir)
61. The Book of the Element (al-'un~ur).
62. The Book of Combination, II.
63. The Book of Specific Properties (al-khawa~~).
64. The Book of Reminder II: (at-tadhkir).
65. The Book of the Garden (al-bustan) ZZ.
66. The Book of Torrents (as-suyūl).
67. The Book of the Spirituality of Mercury (riiQ.aniyat'Utarid).
68. The Book of Completion (al-istitmām).
69. The Book of Species (al-anwāt).
70. The Book of the Proof (al-burhān).
71. The Great Book of Substances (al-jawāhir).
72. The Book of Tinctures (al-a~bagh).
73. The Great Book of the Perfume (at-ra'i:Qa).
74. The Elegant Book of the Perfume.
75. The Book of the Sperm (al-maṇi).
76. The Book of Clay (at-tin) a.
77. The Book of Salt (al-mill).) b.
78. The Book of the True (and) Most High Stone (al-~ajar al-l].aqqal-a'~am).
79. The Book of Milks (al-albān).
80. The Book of Nature (at-tabi'a).
81. The Book of Metaphysics (rna ba'd at-tabi'a).
82. The Book of Reflexion (of Light, at-talmi').

83. The Book of the Froud (al-fakhir).
84. The Book of the Submissive (al-ari' C).
85. The Book of the Lustre of the Sword (al-ifrind) d•
86. The Book of the Truthful One (al-adiq).
87. The Book of the Luxuriant Garden (ar-rauQ.a).
88. The Book of the Flowering One (az-zahir).
89. The Book of the Crown (at-taj).
90. The Book of the Mountains (al-jibal) e.
91. The Book of Preface to Knowledge (taqdimat al-ma'rifa).
92. The Eooks of the Arsenics (az-zaranikh).
93. The Book Ilahi.
94. The Book for Kha#f.
95. The Book for] umhur al-QariJJ,i'.
96. The Book for 'Ali Ibn Yaq#in.
97. The Book of the Sown Fields of the Art (mazari' a~~~ina.'a).
- 98.. TJu.-,BoDk-frw.. 'AlU.b.1:LI.sIjilq.III-Barmaki.
99. The Book of Transmutation (at-ta~rif).
100. The Book of Guidance (al-huda) a. .
101. The Book of the Softening of Stones (talyin al-~ijara) for M an~ur ibn. A~mad al-Barmaki.
102. The Book of the Aims of the Art (aghrad a~~~an'a) for Jajar ibn Yajjya al-BarmalH. . - .
103. The Book of the Faint Colour (al-bahit).
104. The Book of the Aim of Aims (gharad al-aghrad) ..
- 105-12. (Desunt.) - . - .
- . These are One Hundred and Twelve Books: and by him thereafter are Seventy Books, namely:
113. The Book of Divinity (al-lahut).
114. The Book of the Gate (al-bab} h. . .
115. The Book of the Thirty Words (ath-thalatliin kalima).
116. The Book. of the Sperm (al-mani).
117. The Book of Guidance (aj.-huda).
118. The Book of Attributes (a:;-~ifat).
119. The Book of the Ten (al-'ashara).
120. The Book of the Epithets (an-nu'it).
121. The Book of the Bond (al-'ahd).
122. The Book of the Seven (as-sab'a).
123. The Book of the Living (al-~ayy).
124. The Book of Government (al-l)ukiima).
125. The Book ~f Eloquence (al-balagha).
126. The Book of Likeness (al-mushakala).
127. The Book of the Fifteen (khamsat tashar).
128. The Book of the Equal (al-kaf).
129. The Book of Comprehensive Knowledge (al-~ata).
130. The Book of the Filter (ar-rawiiq).

131. The Book of the Cupola (al-qubba) i.
132. The Book of Regulation (aq.-9-abi).
133. The Book of Trees (al-ashjar).
134. The Book of Gifts (al-mawahib).
135. The Book of the Necklace (al-mikhnaqa).
136. The Book of the Crown (al-iklil):-
137. The Book of Refined Metal (al-khila~).
138. The Book of the Worthy (al-wajih).
139. The Book of Desire (ar-~aghpa).
140. The Book of Creation (al~khilqa).
141. The Book of the Gift (al-hiba) k.
142. The Book of the "Luxuriant Garden (ar-rau~a).
143. The Book of the Pure (an-na~i').
144. The Book of Criticism (an-naqd)."
145. The Book a/the Pure (at-tahir).
146. The Book of the Night (al-lalla)' .
147. The Book of Advantages (al-manafi').
148. The Book of the Game (al-lu'ba).
149. The Book of Origins (al-m~adir).
150. The Book of Collection (al-jam').
- 151-2. (Desunt.)

These make Forty out of the Seventy Books, then follow:

15~2. (41-50) Epistles on Stones, I-X, without special names.

Thereafter are by him :

163-72. (51-60) Ten Epistles on Plants, I-X, and further

173-82. (61-70) Ten Epistles on Stones, I-X.

That makes Seventy Epistles .

.Then follow Ten Books as Supplement at the ' Seventy', namely:

183. The Book of Emendation (at-ta~Q.ij;l).
184. The Book of the Meaning (al-ma'na).
185. The Book of E/UCidation (al-ig~).
186. The Book of Intention (al-himma) (357).
187. The Book o/the Balance (al-mizan).
188. The Book of Harmony (al-ittifaq).
189. The Book of the Condition (ash-shart).
190. The Book of the Remainder (al-fa<}.la).
191. The Book of the End (at-tamam) m.
192. The Book of the Aims (al-aghrag).

Thereafter are by him, following the former books, Ten Discourses; Namely:

193. Emendations of PYTHAGORAS.
194. Emendations of SOCRATES.
195. Emendations of PLATO.
196. Emendations of ARISTOTLE.
197. Emendations of ARCHIGENES (Arshighanis).

198. Emendations of ARCHIGENES (Arkaghanis).
199. Emendations of HOMER.
200. Emendations of DEMOKRITOS.
201. Emendations of /JARB! n.
202. Emendations of ours (i.e., of JABIR's own writings).

Then follow Twenty Books with special titles, namely:

203. The Book of the Emerald (az-zumurrud).
204. 'TheBook of the Pattern (al-anmiidhaj).
205. The Book of the Blood of the Heart (Life-Blood or Soul), (al-nluhja).
206. The Book of Secrets (al-asrar). .
207. The Book of the Distant (al-ba'id).
208. The Book of the Exquisite (al-fadil).
209. The Book of the Cornelian (al-'aqiqCL;.
210. The Book of the Crystal (al-billaura).
211. The Book of the Resplendent (as-sati').
212. The Book of Illumination (al-ishraq).
213. The Book of Symptoms (al-m.akhayil).
214. The Book of Rivalry (at-tafagul).
216. The Book of Ambiguity (at-tashabuh).
217. The Book of Interpretation (at-tafsir).
218. The Book of Dist~nction (at-tamyiz).
219. The Book of Perfection and Completion (al-kaulal wa t-tatnatn).
- 220-2. (Desunt.) .

Then there follow Three Books:

223. The Book of the Secret Thought (a~-ej.amir).
224. The Book of Purity (at-tahara).
225. The Book of the Aims (al-aghra<J.)Q.

And thereafter Seventeen Books, the first of which is :.

226. The Book of the Beginning of the Performance (al-nlubtada' bi r-riyaga).
227. The Book of the Introduction to the Art (al-madkhal ili ~-!?'ina'a).
228. The Book of Suspension of Judgment (at-tawaqquf).
229. The Book of Confidence in the Truth of Science (ath-thiqa bi-~iQ1}.at al-'ilm).
230. The Book of Mediation in the Art· (at-tawassut fi ~-~ina'a).
231. The Book of the Test (al-miQna).
232. The Book of Reality (al-1}.aqiqa).
233. The Book of Harmony and Discord (al-ittifaq wa l-ikhtilaf).
234. The Book of Evidence and Perplexity (at-tabyinP wa 1-1}.aira).
235. The Book of the Balances (al-mawazin).
236. The Book of the ObscureSecret (as-sirr al-ghami~).
237. The Book of the Furthest' At~inable End (al-mablagh al-aq~a).
238. The Book of Disagreement (al-mukhalafa).

239. The Book of Commentary (ash-shari}).
240. The Book of the Aims concerning the Ultimate End (al-aghrad fi q , n-nihaYa).
241. The Book of Thorough Examination (al-istiq~a') .
- . 242. (Deest.)

Then follow Three Books:

243. The Book of Purity (at-ta4ara), other than that mentioned above.
244. The Book of Confidence (ath-thiqa) r.
245. The Book of the Aims (al-ahgra9) B.

Says MUJAMMAD IBN ISJ:IAQ: JABIR says in his Catalogue: I After these books, I composed Thirty Epistles with special titles (246-75). .Then I co~p,osed Four Discourses, namely:

276. The Book of the First Active (al-fa-'ila) Mobile Nature (at-tabi/a), i.e., Fire.
277. The Book of the Second Active Immobile Nature, i.e., Water.
278. The Book of the Third Passive Dry Nature, i.e., Earth.
279. The Book of the Fourth Passive Moist Nature, i.e., Air.

Says JABIR: To these books belong Two (other) Books containing the commentary thereof, namely:

280. The Book of Purity.
281. The Book of Aims (al-aghrad) '.

Thereafter I composed Four Books, namely:

282. The Book of Venus (az-Zuhara).
283. The Book of Comfort (as-salwa).
284. The Book of the Perfect (al-kamil).
285. The Book of Life (al-Q.ayat).

Thereafter I composed Ten Books according to the opinion (ray) of ' APOLLONIUS (Balinus), Master of Talismans, namely,:

286. The Book of Saturn (Zu1;lal).
287. The Book of Mars (al-Mimkh).
288. The Greater Book of the Sun.
289. The S~r Book of the Sun.
290. The Book of Venus (Zuhara).
291. The Book of Mercury ('Uta-rid).
292. The Greater Book of the Moon.
293. The Book of the Aims (al-aghrad) U.
294. A book known as The Book of Inherent Virtue, of its Essence (kha~iya t nafsihi).
295. The Book of Jupiter (al-Mushtari) 1'.

To him (JABIR, also) belong Four Books on the Hidden Treasures:

296. The Book of the Result (al-1}.a~il)~
297. The Book of the Racecourse of the Mind (In aid an al-'aql).

298. The Book of the Quintessence (al-'ain).

299. The Book of the Pleiads (or Arrangement) (an-na~m).

Says ABO MOSA (i.e., JABIR): I composed 300 books on Philosophy and 1300 books on Automata (a~-!tiyal) after the way of the Book of Taqa#ur W· 'and 1300 epistles on % Crafts (a~--ana'i()), and War-Engines (alat al-J;;arb\). Then

I composed on Medicine an important book 4& and composed (other) books small and large, and I composed on Medicine (altogether) about 500 books as, e.g.:

300. The Book of the Pulse and Anatomy.

Then I composed :

301. The Book on Logic according to the opinion (ra'y) of ARISTOTLE.

Then I composed :

302. The Elegant Book of Astronomical Tables, about 300 folios.

303. The Book of Commentary on EUCLID.

304. The Book of Commentary on the Almagest.

305. The Book on Mirrors.'

306. The Book of. the Greedy (al-jariif), against which the Theologians (al-mutakallimftn) wrote refutations. It is also said to' be by Abii Sa'id al-Mi~ri.

Then I composed. books on Asceticism (az-zuhd) and sermons (al-mawa'iz), and I composed books on Niranjiiit, and I composed (358) many books ~n matters that act by their specific properties. Then I composed 500 books to refute the philosophers; then I composed a book on the Art, known as the Book of the Kingdom (al-mulk), and another book, known as the Book of the Luxuriant Gardens (ar-riyaq.)