

## Destruction of a hospital

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Of all institutions (banks, schools, colleges, government offices) the deliberate closure of hospitals appears to arouse the most anger. Perhaps the public recognizes that hospitals are more closely connected with charitable works than most other public institutions. Many European hospitals have been deliberately destroyed in the past; even now the Royal Hospital of St Bartholomew's in London, founded in 1123 by Rahere, is facing dissolution. One of history's worst recorded cases was the destruction in 1495 of the only known medieval Arab hospital on mainland Europe, namely the Maristan Hospital in Granada, Spain<sup>1</sup>. This resulted from the combined prejudice, arrogance and intolerance of the ruling Spanish political and religious powers of the times.

### ORIGINS OF THE MARISTAN HOSPITAL, GRANADA

In 711 AD the Moors were invited to Spain as mercenary soldiers to assist Count Julian in local wars. They brought with them their language, religion, architecture and medical sciences, and established themselves in Spain for more than 700 years. They retained direct contact with the Caliphates of Persia, Syria and Egypt who in the eighth to ninth centuries were the most ardent protectors of the schools of learning. The schools of Baghdad attained the greatest splendour, followed by those of Samarkand, Isfahan and Damascus.

The academies were usually housed in buildings around a mosque; both teachers and pupils lived there, and there were rooms for libraries and classrooms for the study of theology, philosophy, and medicine<sup>2</sup>. The texts for the study of medicine were at first entirely translations from the Greek philosophers and physicians, particularly Hippocrates. The Arabs' passion for mathematics, physics and especially chemistry brought about new developments in these studies, all of which were integrated with a wide practical experience of medicine. Unlike the Romans, the Arabs were very advanced in hospital building and organization. Arab hospitals were founded in Isfahan, Cairo, Damascus and Baghdad, and by 1200 AD there were more than thirty-five large hospitals in territory occupied by Islam. In the hospital in Cairo<sup>3</sup> founded in 1283, for example, there were special divisions for eye patients and

for those with fevers (where the rooms were refreshed by fountains); there were special rooms for female patients and the nurses were male and female. The hospital was directed by a chief physician who gave daily lessons to his subordinates. A large library and orphanage were adjoined to the hospital, all built within the precincts of a mosque. After completing their course of studies the pupils had to pass an examination given by the older physicians. Although there was no medical organization in the modern sense, the practice of medicine seems to have been reserved for those who had completed such a course of studies; of course, many charlatans probably practised too.

The Caliphate of Cordoba in Spain was particularly well developed in Arabic medicine, with Avicenna, Averroes and Maimonides all working there<sup>4</sup>. The most illustrious physician of the golden age of Arabic medicine was Avicenna (980-1037). He was born in a town close to

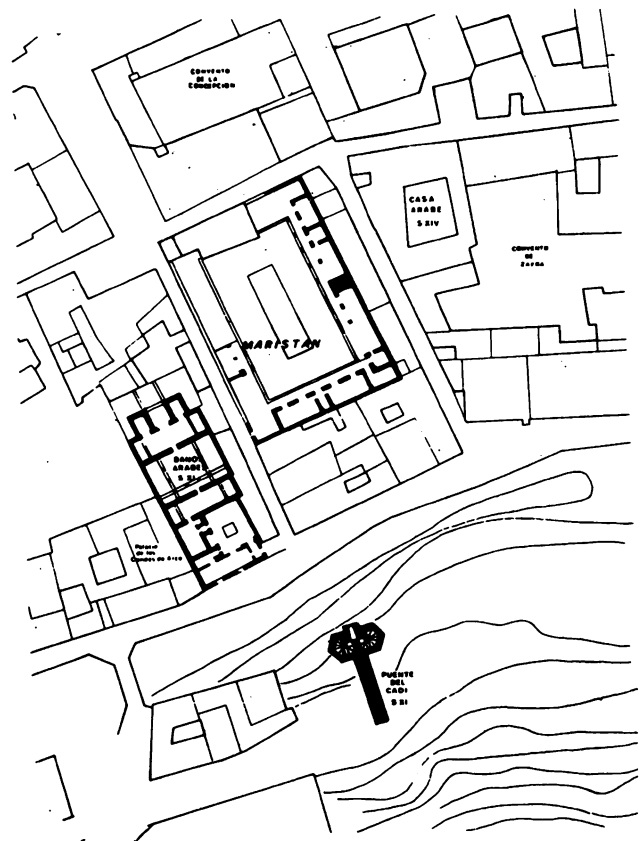


Figure 1 Hypothetical ground plan of the Maristan Hospital, Granada, with adjacent Arab houses (from Ref 10)

Bukhara and after studying the Koran, which he knew perfectly by the age of 10, dedicated himself to Aristotelean philosophy and finally to Hippocratic medicine. The *Canon* of Avicenna is divided into five large books and attempts to systematize all the medical doctrines of Hippocrates, Galen and Aristotle. The first volume is concerned with theoretical medicine; the second with simple therapeutics; the third with diseases and their treatments; the fourth with generalized disorders (i.e. those attacking different organ systems at the same time); and the fifth with the composition and preparation of drugs. Averroes<sup>5</sup> wrote his *Colliget*, an encyclopaedia collating all the works of Galen; and Maimonides wrote his *Medical Principles* which include a treatise on sexual intercourse and another on poisons (which contains valuable observation, on rabies and venomous stings as well as various poisons and their antidotes).

As part of the Arab medical development, the Maristan Hospital in Granada was built by Sultan Muhammad V in 1367—late in the Arab occupation of Spain. Its ground plan was similar to that of the Omayyad Hospital of Bimaristan Nuri in Damascus<sup>6</sup>, with a central courtyard containing a fountain or pool, and wards opening from three sides of the

open court (Figures 1 and 2). The quality of the decoration of the building can be guessed at by the surviving statues of the two lions (Figure 3) that were used as water fountains; they can now be seen by the pools of the Alhambra<sup>7</sup>.

Figure 4 shows the main facade of the Maristan as it may have been. The plain two-storey building possesses a doorway and windows decorated with arabesque stucco work. Over the main entrance is the fragment of an inscription which reads:

By constructing this Hospital the Sultan has performed a fine action for the present times and with no precedent from the introduction of Islam into our Country . . . he has offered this to God's glory demanding no reward . . .

The facade is very similar in design to those of the Hospital Real in Santiago di Compostela (Figure 5) and the hospital in Granada commissioned by Ferdinand and Isabella in 1511; the architects probably copied the Arab models in Spain<sup>8,11</sup>. The Maristan was organized into twenty-six rooms on the ground floor, ten being off the two long 'naves' and six more off the south wing of the open court. The writings of patients suggest that the north wing

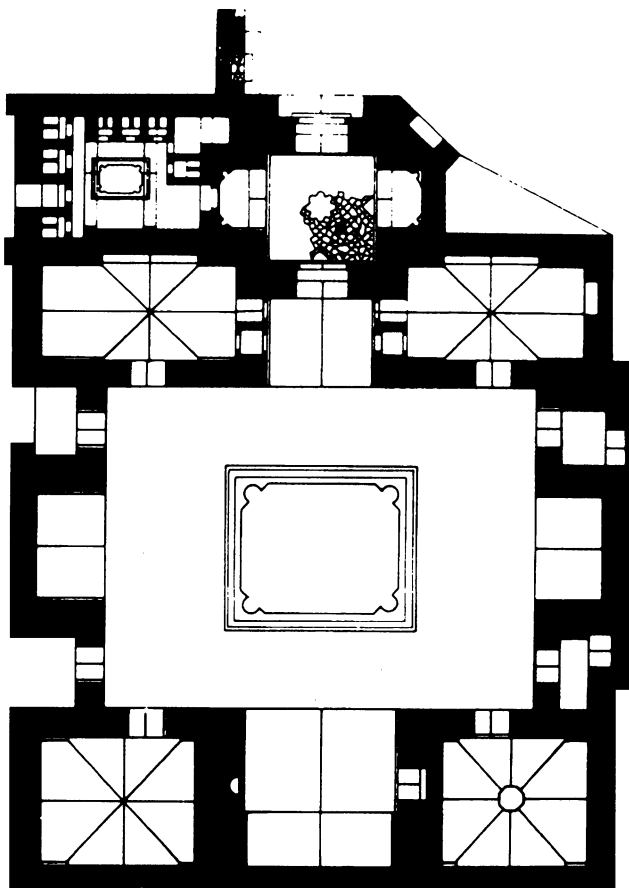


Figure 2 ground plan of the Bimaristan Nuri Hospital in Damascus (from Ref 6)

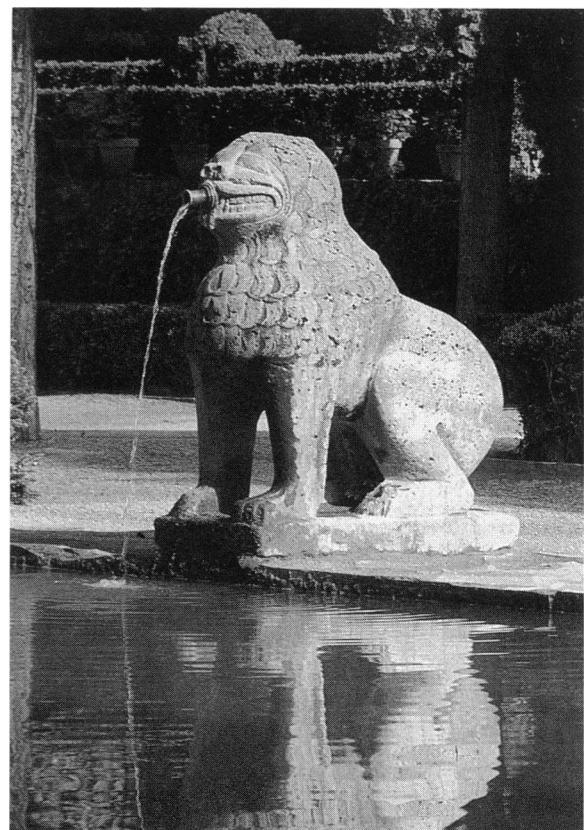


Figure 3 One of the lions from the Maristan Hospital, now in the Alhambra

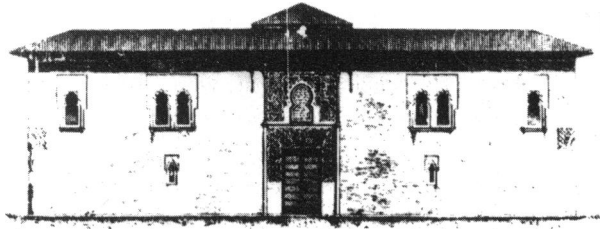


Figure 4 Reconstruction of the front facade of the Maristan Hospital, Granada (from Ref 10)



Figure 5 Front facade of the Hospital Real of Santiago di Compostela

contained the entrance, where the consulting rooms and administration were housed<sup>9</sup>.

### THE PRESENT STATE OF THE MARISTAN

The woeful ruins of the hospital are shown in Figure 6, with the Alhambra in the background. The major blow to the hospital was inflicted by Ferdinand and Isabella who, in line with their deliberate policy of ethnic cleansing by expulsion of the Arabs and Jews and their ban on all religions other than Catholicism, transformed it into a Royal Mint in 1495. The Maristan continued to make coins into the seventeenth century, when it was purchased from the Crown (1637) and transformed briefly into a convent. In 1748 it was converted into a wine store and at the beginning of the nineteenth century housed the state prison. It was finally destroyed in 1843, for reasons that are not recorded<sup>10</sup>.

The Archaeological Society of Granada is now attempting to restore the Maristan Hospital and to elucidate



Figure 6 Site of the Maristan Hospital today

its functional principles. Hospitals are part of the main fabric of society; they provide social landmarks, and their destruction, as may occur with Bart's, will surely be regretted by future generations.

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