

The Great Professor Ibnosina (Avicenna)

Elhadi H. Aburawi

Division of Pediatric Cardiology, Department of Pediatrics, Lund University Hospital

Ibnosina (Avicenna) is the doctor of all doctors who defined medicine as “the science by which we learn the various states of the human body when in health, and when not in health, and the means by which health is likely to be lost and when not lost, is likely to be restored.” He is Abu-Ali Alhussein Ibno-Abdullah Ibnosina, known to the west as Avicenna (Figure 1).



Figure 1. Abu-Ali, Ibnosina
(from wikipedia.org with free copyright).

The great man was born in August, 980, Christian Era (CE)/Safar 370 after Hijra (AH) in Asfahan near Bukhara, Uzbekistan. He died in 1037 CE/428 AH in Hamadan, Iran. His early education was religious, and by the age of ten he had learned the holy Qur'an by heart. By age fourteen, he had surpassed all his mentors in school. By age 18, with his extraordinary intellect and memory, he had learned all there was to know about science at that time. He wrote his first book in philosophy at the age of twenty-one. He was a scientist, philosopher, and physician [1, 2]. Ibnosina became famous during the golden age of the Islamic civilization. He authored 276 books, many in the field of medicine and philosophy. The most famous of his books are *Alshifa* (The Book of Healing) and *The Qanun fil tibb* (The Qanun of Medicine), which means; The Code of Laws of Medicine. The Book of Healing is a scientific encyclopedia covering the natural sciences, psychology, geometry, astronomy, arithmetic, and music. This book was greatly influenced by the ancient Greeks, Aristotle and Ptolemy. It was exquisitely written. The contents were presented in an admirably coherent order, and were considered

an undisputed guide to medicine, natural science, and philosophy. The theory that Venus is closer to Earth than to the Sun was first presented in this text.

The Code of Law of Medicine Textbook “Qanun fil tibb” is based upon the writings of the Roman physician Galen, but was infused with Arabic medical lore and personal experience. Figure 2 shows the Latin copy of the Qanun fil tibb, dated 1484, located at the P.I. Nixon Medical Library at the University of Texas Health Science Center, San Antonio, Texas, USA.

It is considered one of the most famous books in the history of medicine and remained a medical authority for centuries. It defined the standards for medicine in Europe, and is Ibnosina's best known written work. His principles of medicine from ten centuries ago are still taught at University of California, Los Angeles and at Yale University, among others. The book explains the causes of health and disease. Ibnosina believed that the human body cannot be restored to health unless the causes of both health and disease are determined. He had an extraordinary influence on the West, in both medical education and practice. The “Qanun fil tibb” in particular has had a major impact on the medical field for a thousand years. At the University of Montpellier, for example, the Qanun is the oldest known syllabus from 1309 to 1557. Osler has described Ibnosina as the “author of the most famous medical textbook ever written [3].” It is subdivided into categories such as ethics and politics and contains more than one million words divided into five volumes. Considering the time in which it was written, this is phenomenal. The first volume discusses generalities, such as physiology, health, and sickness. The second deals with pharmacology of herbs and *Materia Medica*, which includes the three methods: agreement, difference, and concomitant variation. Note these three methods are characteristic of modern science. The third volume focuses on special pathology of different organs. The fourth is devoted to treatment of fevers, tumors, fractures, and illnesses which spread from their locus to other parts of the body. The fifth volume concentrates on pharmacology, describing the composition and preparation of remedies as a separate science. Remarkably this was before pharmacology was considered a science. One can understand why he has been honoured as a leader in pharmacology [1].

In philosophy, Ibnosina's theories were less abstract and closer to life than those of Aristotle, whose interpretation made philosophy less

accepting, and more difficult to adapt to change, which is constant over all time and place.

Ibnosina was the first to follow the ethical principles in his profession. The most famous book in this field is "Kitab al-Birr w'al-Ithm" (Textbook of Good Work and Evil).

Despite all this, he still had time for other duties. He was a prime minister and minister for various princes and would spend his days attending to the sick and giving counsel, writing at night, or when time allowed. He was known to write on horseback and from prison, relying solely on memory.

The Executive Board of UNESCO at its 166th session in 2002, on the initiative of the Iranian government established the Ibnosina Prize. Intended to reward the activities of individuals or groups in the field of scientific ethics, this is awarded once every two years. It is a gold medal of Ibnosina along with a certificate, a monetary prize of \$10,000, and a one-week academic visit to the Islamic Republic of Iran. Initially it was awarded in April, 2004, to Professor Margaret Somerville, Director of the Centre for Medicine, Ethics, and Law at McGill University in Montreal, Canada. The second award was presented in April, 2006, to Professor Abdulla Daar, of the Sultanate of Oman, who previously held the Chair of Surgery at Sultan Qaboos University, Oman. He is currently Professor of Public Health Sciences and Professor of Surgery at the University of Toronto, Canada [4].

Ibnosina Medical Association owes its name to the renowned 11th century physician and philosopher of medieval Islam. It is an honour for us to follow in his footsteps and for him to be our role model in different fields of interest e.g. as a role model for physicians, philosophers, and an expert in scientific ethics. Ibnosina is a well known figure recognized internationally. A healer and humanist, Ibnosina developed an exemplary holistic approach that captures the essence of ethics in science and has come to serve as a source of inspiration to us all for the promotion of his ideals, which is of central importance to UNESCO.



Figure 2 Qanun fil tibb, Textbook of Medicine (from wikipedia.org/ with free copyright).

The secret of Ibnosina's success is that he combined religion, philosophy and medicine. He was perhaps an even greater philosopher than theorist. He is the most famous scientist of Islam and one of the most well-known and respected men of all races and countries, for all times [5, 6]. We all owe him tremendous respect. Few men have had such an impact on so many for so long.

References

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