Excerpts from Ibn Sina’s Canon of Medicine in Arabic and Latin

The Canon of Medicine, or Al-Qanun fi al-Tibb, is the most famous scientific work by Ibn Sina (980–1037 CE), born near Bukhara in Persia, known in the West by the Latin name Avicenna. Ibn Sina was the foremost physician and philosopher of his time, who also wrote about astronomy, chemistry, geology, psychology, logic, mathematics, physics. The Canon of Medicine is a classic summary of Islamic medical knowledge of his time, which drew upon Greek, Indian, Persian and Chinese learning. It exemplifies the connected history of science. The image on the left is a leaf from an illuminated Persian manuscript copy of the Canon made in 1597 CE by Abd al-Karim al-Hanafi in Nakshi Arabic script. The image on the right is a page from Commentary of Hugo of Sienna on the First [Book] of the Canon of Avicenna Together with His Questions, printed in 1498 CE. Italian physician and teacher Hugo of Siena (b.1370 CE) made commentaries on medical classics from Greek, Roman and Islamic sources. Hugo’s comments were based on a Latin text of the Canon that Gerard of Cremona (d. 1187 CE), had translated at Toledo, Spain two centuries earlier. The Canon was one of many other 11th century translations from Spain that were printed in Europe during the first century after Gutenberg. These texts formed the curriculum in medical schools in the West from about 1300 to 1600. The Canon was reprinted in many editions and regarded as a medical authority as late as the early 19th century.

From Al-Qanun fi al-Tibb (Canon of Medicine)

In the first place we render thanks to Allah, for the very excellence of the order of His creation, and the abundance of His benefits. His blessings and the abundance of His mercies are upon all the prophets. In the next place, I may say that it is at the request of one of my very special friends—one whom I feel most bound—to consider, that I prepare this book on Medicine setting forth its general and particular laws to the full extent necessary, and yet with apt brevity. My

plan is to deal with the general aspects of each of the two divisions of medicine—the speculative and the practical. Then I shall treat of the general principles applicable to the diagnosis of the properties of the simples, following this with a detailed account of them. Then I shall take up the disorders which befall each individual member, beginning with an account of its anatomy, and that of its auxiliary. The anatomy of the several members and their auxiliaries is dealt with in the first book. Having completed the account of the anatomy, I shall show how the health of the member is to be maintained. This subject being completed, I proceed to a general discourse about general diseases—their causes, the signs by which they are recognized, and the modes of treatment. After this, I pass on to the special diseases and will point out in as many cases as possible—(i) the general diagnosis of their characters, causes and signs, (ii) the special diagnostic features, (iii) the general rules of treatment, (iv) the special methods of treatment by (a) simples, (b) compounded medicines. I include specially designed tables under the subject of simples to enable you to survey the facts rapidly as to the adjuvants for treating disease by simples. Compounded medicines, and their adjuvants, and how to mix them, I have deemed it best to consider separately in a "Formulary." Thus it is my intention to compose after the special subjects are dealt with. Disorders not confined to one member are described in this book; the cosmetics are spoken of; and the knowledge set forth in previous books is assumed. Allah helping me to complete this volume, the formulary will be added to it. Every follower of my teachings who wishes to use them profitably should memorize most of this work, even though he does not quite understand it all. It is my intention to prepare further volumes if Allah should prolong my life still further, and if circumstances prove propitious.

... THE ELEMENTS... The elements are simple bodies. They are the primary components of the human being throughout all its parts, as well as of all other bodies in their varied and diverse forms. The various orders of beings depend for their existence on the intermixture of the elements. Every object has three causes for its existence: material, formal and efficient. That which brings about the union of m (material cause) and f (formal cause) is called the "efficient cause." There is another cause called the "final cause," namely the reason for its existence, the reason for its creation...

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