



Avicenna Canon of Medicine Volume 3: Special Pathologies (The Canon of Medicine)

By Abu Ali al-Husayn ibn Sina, Translator: Peyman Adeli Sardo

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Translated for the first time in English or in any European language, Avicenna in Volume 3 presents various diseases systematically from the brain to the toes, with their etiology, symptoms, diagnosis, prognosis and treatment with simple and compound drugs. Special mention may be made of the following sections: Head: brain, (intemperaments, headache in all its aspects, organic diseases of the brain, epilepsy, paralysis, etc.) eye, ear, nose, mouth, throat, and teeth. Chest: lungs, heart, breasts. Alimentary tract: stomach, intestines, liver, gall bladder and spleen. Intestines and the anus, disorders of the rectum. Urinary tract: the kidneys, bladder and urine. The male reproductive system; the female reproductive system, conception, pregnancy, and diseases of women. Muscles: joints, and feet.

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Editorial Review

Review

In the sciences, also, Avicenna composed many small treatises dealing with particular problems in physics, meteorology, and so on, as well as sections contained in the larger compendia, especially the *Shifa*, in which is found the most complete exposition of his views on zoology, botany, and geology, as well as psychology, which in Peripatetic philosophy and contrary to the view of the later schools like the *Ishraqis* is considered as a branch of physics or natural philosophy. As for medicine, Avicenna composed the famous *Qanun*, or *Canon*, which is perhaps the most influential single work in the history of medicine, the *Urjazah fil-tibb* (*Poem on Medicine*), containing the principles of Islamic medicine in rhyming verses easy to memorize, and a large number of treatises in both Arabic and Persian on various diseases and drugs. ---Seyyed Hossein Nasr *Science and Civilization in Islam*.

The influence of Avicenna on the History of Medicine is immeasurable. Just to mention some of the areas where he made outstanding contributions: Experimental medicine: Clinical pharmacology; Inductive logic; Pharmaceutical sciences. Anatomy and physiology: Blood pressure, Dissection, Neuroanatomy and neurophysiology and Ophthalmology. Cardiovascular system: Cardiology, Pulsology and Sphygmology. Etiology and pathology: Bacteriology and microbiology, Cancer therapy, Hepatology, Quarantine. Humours and temperaments: Four Humours, Four Temperaments. Neurosciences and psychology: Clinical psychology and psychotherapy, Neurology and neuropathology, Neuropsychiatry and neuropsychology, Psychoanalysis, Psychophysiology and psychosomatic medicine, Sleep medicine. Surgery: Anesthesia, Cancer therapy, Hirudotherapy. Other Contributions: Chromotherapy, Dermatology, Endocrinology, Gerontology and Geriatrics, Phytotherapy. ----enotes Study Guides

We can draw three main conclusions from this short overview of Avicenna's medical writings. First, these works, and especially the *Canon*, offer rich pickings The role of experience in gaining medical knowledge is one such question; another is the function of the soul and how it interfaces with the brain. Second, it is clearly wrong to characterize Avicenna's *Canon* merely as a well-arranged collection of previous medical knowledge with some Aristotelian philosophy thrown in for good measure. In the *Canon*, Avicenna's contribution is not limited to organizing information. We have seen that he is innovative in three ways: he further developed Galen's concept of qualified experience; he draws at least occasionally on his own experience as a clinician; and he incorporates his own innovative philosophical ideas about the inner sense into his medical discourse. Third, one can only marvel at the relative neglect with which medical historians and philosophers alike have treated Avicenna's medical writings. We now have a somewhat critical [Arabic] edition and English translation of the *Canon*, although it is barely known in the West. And although some scholars have tried to address certain aspects of Avicenna's medical theory and practice, much more remains --Peter E. Portman, *Medical practice, epistemology & physiology in Interpreting Avicenna: Critical Essays* Edited by Peter Adamson

About the Author

The Prince of Physicians, Abu Ali ibn Sina (Avicenna) (b. 370/980) was born in Bukhara. By the age of ten he had learned the entire Quran as well as grammar and then began the study of logic and mathematics. Once these subjects were mastered, he studied physics, metaphysics and medicine. By the age of sixteen he had mastered all of the sciences of his day except metaphysics. While he had read Aristotle's *Metaphysics* over and over again and had even memorized it, he could not understand it until he read al-Farabi's commentary on it. Avicenna was then eighteen years old. He was favored by the ruler of Bukhara because of his mastery

of medicine, but when he was thirty-two, he was forced to migrate because of the political situation in his home town area. He migrated to Jurjan on the southeast coast of the Caspian Sea in an attempt to join the court of the well-known Qabus ibn Wushmgir. This never materialized as the ruler had died in 1013 during Avicenna s travels to Jurjan. Avicenna then retired to a village near Jurjan where he was to meet his disciple-to-be, al-Juzjani. Al-Juzjani was devoted to Avicenna and was to write commentaries upon his works as well as to preserve copies of all of the master s writings. It was in Jurjan in 1012 that Avicenna wrote the beginning of his great medical text, The Canon (al-Qanun) on medicine. Avicenna remained in Jurjan for two or three years before moving to Rey in 405/1014 or 406/1015, a city near present day Tehran and from there to Hamadan in the northwest Iran. He became a minister in the Buyuid Court of Shams al-Dawlah as well as the court physician. Once again Avicenna was obliged to migrate because of the unstable political conditions in Hamadan so he moved to Isfahan where he enjoyed a fifteen year period of peace, writing many of his major works at that time. Eventually, however, he was forced to migrate once again and moved back to Hamadan where he died in 428/1037.

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