

1001 Cures – Contributions in Medicines & Healthcare from Muslim Civilisation

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1001 Cures is a read that any physician or science enthusiast would enjoy. Although the book title pays tribute to the infamous 1001 Nights or Arabian Nights, the material it covers has a rivalling impact on our modern civilisation equal or exceeding any literary masterpiece.

1001 Cures covers the era of Muslim civilisation, however it doesn't shy away from giving credit to all scholars who contributed to this civilisation's succession, regardless of their origin or religion.

The elegantly structured book contains nineteen rich chapters. The first half is dedicated to various distinctive medical specialities while the second half covers ethics and philosophy with two independent chapters honouring Al-Razi and Avicenna (Ibn-Sina) influential scholarly work. All chapters are packed with carefully researched accounts and provide an extensive reading list for avid readers. Casual readers interested in individual chapters are advised to read the book introduction as it offers informative summaries for all chapters and it will help navigate the book contents.

In the first chapter, readers are set on a time travel back to the 8th century AD, when the Muslim rulers embarked on a simple task to translate Greek texts to Arabic. The Greco-Arabic translation movement turned to be a life-changing endeavour that shaped the course of history and elevated Arabic to be the medieval world lingua franca. The translations covered all fields of knowledge and literature available – which questionably may be the biggest influx of scientific writing in centuries that will set the scene to ages of scientific and medical flourish in years to come.

Muslim civilisation scholars expanded on the Greek theories and refined them. For instance, marginal modifications were introduced to Galen's work on

humoral pathology but his anatomy work was challenged based on logical and empirical grounds by Ibn al-Nafis physiology commentaries. These topics were covered in detail in chapters two and three.

The Muslim civilisation scholars preferred preservation of health, whether that is physical or mental to its restoration. As a result, Arabo-Muslim physicians believed in soul and body reciprocity, an important principle of Greek medicine. This was demonstrated by the unprecedented dedication to the topic in their encyclopaedias (e.g. 'Book of all beneficial things for body and soul' by al-Balkhi) compared to the Greek works. To elucidate on this connection, they studied mental health, ethics and natural philosophy. This holistic treatment approach led to ample medical literature on hygiene to improve both physical and mental state. The fourth and fifth chapters discuss these topics and relevant works by Al-Razi, Al-Kindi, Maimonides and many more.

At the occurrence of ailment two courses of treatment are expected to take place; medication and surgery. Three chapters cover these topics. Chapter six on pharmacology demonstrated how the Arabs excelled in the field, building on knowledge from Greece, India, south east Asia and China. Their pharmacopoeias provided instrumental work on experimenting with compounding, portioning and categorising medicines. A more contemporary pharmaceutical content is presented a few chapters away in chapter twelve, studying the ramifications of the inverse – translation flux of the newly developed iatrochemical knowledge from Latin Europe to the Ottoman empire in the 17th century.

The seventh chapter delves into surgical practice of the era with the majority of the text dedicated to the

pioneering work of al-Zahrawai (Albucasis) who is universally celebrated as the greatest medieval surgeon.

The eighth is titled gynaecology, but it doesn't only cover the medical practice itself. The chapter offers in-depth insight into the middle ages' development of the field in patriarchal societies.

While female practitioners played a great role in providing primary health care in the middle ages, there are only few mentions to female physicians and small number of medical works on women's health.

Some encyclopaedias, as AL-Razi's the Book of Experiences, mentioned breast disorders and extensive contraception methods classification, though it primarily targeted females few mentioned ones were to be administered by males. The next chapter naturally covers childcare and all the aspects of their well-being. The scholarly work provided advice on breastfeeding, weaning, even the milk quality and its connection to food consumed by the mother/nurse. In few pages, the author highlights that these physicians paid similar attention to children's health and hygiene as to adults.

The ophthalmology chapter provides a concise account on the field that kept using practices developed during that era up until recent modern times. It covers major textbooks, practices development and use of medicines but fails to mention Ibn al-Haytham, the hailed father of optics who was the first to explain how vision works.

The interconnected issues of epidemiology, theology, colonialism effects and quarantine are explained in the wholesome content of chapter eleven titled Plague and contagion.

The twelfth chapter explains how medical ethics evolved from the Greek traditions under the Muslim civilisation doctrine. Similarities were drawn on topics of physician's oath and rise of official regulating manuals to ensure competence and avoid malpractice. The author includes witty doctor jokes and some information on the quackery of those ages, which will brighten the reader's mood after a serious read.

Chapter fourteen investigates the concept of medieval Islamic hospital 'Bimaristan', how it evolved over different periods and its role in society. The Bimaristan was mainly a charitable organisation, catering for the physical/metal needs of the poor, travellers and students while offering a perfect training ground for future practitioners.

As previously mentioned, chapters fifteen and sixteen are devoted for the lives and practices of al-Razi and Ibn Sina, who were arguably most significant physicians of their time.

The last three chapters, compile conclusions the readers must have reached by now if they read the book chapters in their chronological order, medicine during that era was deeply connected to language, philosophy and religion.

The majority of the personnel mentioned in the book were litterateurs and philosophers. This can be explained by their holistic soul-body approach, which was supported by the religious bodies who not only encouraged seeking and dissemination of knowledge but advocated healthcare. All of which have resulted in the production of easy to comprehend and entertaining texts written by these accomplished scholars.

This review aimed to provide an insight to the '1001 cures', a content rich book perfect for novices and academic scholars alike.