

AL-QĀNŪN FI'L-ṬIBB

BOOK I

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GENERAL PRINCIPLES OF MEDICINE IN FOUR PARTS

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comprising six Lessons

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P R E F A C E

Abū ‘Alī al-Ḥusain Bin ‘Abdallāh Bin Sīnā, known to the West as Avicenna, was born at Bukhara in A.D. 980 and died at Hamadan in A.D. 1037. From his childhood, he gave promise of outstanding achievements. At the early age of eighteen, Ibn Sīnā’s reputation as an outstanding physician culminated in his appointment as the court physician to the Samanid Prince, Nūḥ Ibn Maṣṣūr. Consequent on the overthrow of the Samanid rulers, Ibn Sīnā wandered through Persia and braved hazards to continue his unquenchable quest of knowledge and power. The first period of his travails was ended by Prince Shams ad-Dawlah of Hamdān when he appointed Ibn Sīnā as his court physician. It is here that he wrote his monumental work, *al-Qānūn fī’l-ṭibb*, the ‘Canon of Medicine’.

In Ibn Sīnā’s days, knowledge did not recognize any barriers. He considered all sciences as his domain and he transmuted into gold whatever he touched. His was a very powerful intellect and an encyclopaedic mind. Although his genius produced outstanding works in prose on different subjects, he was no stranger to poetry which also marginally claimed his creative attention. The versatile genius of Ibn Sīnā mastered and transcended astronomy, physics, chemistry, medicine, mathematics, natural sciences, logic and Qur’anic exegesis. After making lasting contributions to all these, he still had energy to pursue arts of war and peace. He assisted his patrons not only in civil administration but also in military campaigns, during one of which he died of colic and exhaustion. He combined with his creative pursuits, administrative responsibility and love for good things of life. Judged by the most exacting standards he is a towering figure as a scientist and philosopher and a prolific writer.

Ibn Sīnā acquired great distinction in science, medicine and philosophy. His contributions to these disciplines won recognition and admiration not only in Middle East but also in Europe. Apart from science, medicine and philosophy, his works include religious tracts and stories with a mystical significance. He shaped philosophy into a powerful force that gradually penetrated Islamic theology and mysticism and Persian poetry in Islam and gave them universality and theoretical depth. He evolved an original system based

on Aristotle's philosophy. Part of Ibn Sinā's contribution lay in making Aristotle's philosophy more systematic and coherent. Expanding on Aristotle's theory of the three fold soul, viz., vegetative, sensitive and intellectual, he developed a psychology based on external and internal senses. Although greatly influenced by the then Neo-Platonists, Ibn Sinā drew directly both on Plato and Aristotle.

Ibn Sinā's greatest contribution, however, is in the field of medicine where he is rated among the all-time great. His *magnum opus* is *al-Qānūn fī'l-ṭibb*. It exceeds one million words and contains all about medical science that was known up to the 10th century. *al-Qānūn* soon rose to the position of primacy in medical literature. It was taught as a text in the universities in Europe and Middle East until the 17th century. It is the most authoritative and comprehensive codification of the Greco-Arab system of medicine. It is a compendium that not only distilled medical knowledge inherited from Greece but added significantly to it in the light of subsequent thinking, experience and experimentation. It is the one book that influenced European medical thought profoundly for over half a millennium and still continues to be studied by thousands of scholars in the East and West.

Al-Qānūn is divided into five books. The first book is on general principles of medicine, physiology, pathology, etiology, hygiene, symptomatology, general rules and methods of treatment, regimen and anatomy; the second book is concerned with *materia medica*; the third book deals with particular diseases; the fourth relates to general therapy and the fifth book is a formulary of compound drugs.

Written originally in Arabic, *al-Qānūn* was first translated into Latin by Gerard of Cremona (A.D. 1114-1187). This Latin translation introduced *al-Qānūn* to the West. A study of this translation however, leads one to the conclusion that the manuscript on which it is based was defective. Quite a few words appeared out of context; diacritical marks were used incorrectly and at many a place complete passages found in other manuscripts appear to have been omitted. Moreover, the translation, being a medieval language and containing many abbreviations, has presented difficulties in comprehension to the modern reader. This appears to have led Prof. E.G. Browne to remark that the translation "swarms with barbarous words" and is "almost unintelligible".

A Russian translation was published at Tashkent during 1954 and 1960. Between these two (Latin and Russian) translations, a number of whole or part translations of *al-Qānūn* appeared in French, German, Hebrew and Greek, besides such oriental languages as Persian and Urdu.

The Latin translation, however, is the only European version based directly on the original Arabic. An English translation of the first book of *al-Qānūn* was prepared by Dr. O. Cameron Gruner and published in 1930. Dr. Gruner's English translation is based on the Latin versions published at Venice in 1595 and 1608. Dr. Gruner removed many of the defects of the Latin translation: he numbered paragraphs, explained the more abstruse theories and essayed the solution of certain problems in the light of modern medicine. His translation, however, can at best be called a free translation. It contains a mixture of philosophy, medicine, physics and mysticism. Dr. M. H. Shah of Pakistan translated the first volume of *al-Qānūn* into English. It was published in 1964. This translation avoids many shortcomings of earlier translations and reads well. But he based his translation on an Urdu translation. A doubly translated book does not fully conform to the original one.

Al-Qānūn contains a large number of philosophical, theological, astronomical, meteorological and geographical terms which puzzled its Latin and English translators. Consequently distortions crept into the translation particularly with regard to the technical terms.

Keeping these facts in view, it was decided to get an English translation of this great work directly from the original Arabic text. The first task, however, was to prepare a critical edition of the book. Several manuscripts and printed editions were obtained and a number of other works consulted to arrive at a definitive reading. It took five years to complete the job. Reference was made to the following sources.

Sources for the edition

1. Photocopy of the Aya Sofia (Istanbul) manuscript of *al-Qānūn*, transcribed in 618. A.H. A sentence in the manuscript:

هذا الفصل فى نسخة الذى قيل انها قوبلت على نسخته الاصل الذى
للمصنف

[This section is reproduced from the copy which is said to have been compared with the author's own copy.]

conclusively establishes its antiquity and significance. Here and there variant readings have been noted on the margins of this manuscript.

2. Manuscript of *Shāh Amānī* (second and fifth books) transcribed at Delhi in 1133 A.H. The first, third and fourth books could not be found.
3. *Al-Qānūn* printed at Rome in A.D. 1593.

4. *Al-Qānūn* printed at Tehran in 1295 A.H.
5. *Al-Qānūn* Bulaq edition (Egypt) 1294 A.H.
6. *Al-Qānūn* printed at Nāmī Press, Lucknow (India) in 1324 A.H.

The Aya Sofia manuscript was made the basis of our critical edition and for corrections the four printed editions were given the following rating.

- (1) The Nāmī edition
- (2) The Būlāq edition
- (3) The Tehran edition
- (4) The Rome edition

Wherever the text in Aya Sofia manuscript is at variance with the text of other manuscripts or printed editions, but can be construed as correct, the text of the Aya Sofia manuscript has been kept undisturbed. Where the texts of other copies appeared more appropriate, they were incorporated in the critical edition in place of the original text of Aya Sofia manuscript and texts substituted have been indicated in the footnotes.

After preparing an authentic and complete critical edition of *al-Qānūn*, my team set about producing a faithful English translation of all its five books direct from the Arabic text. The editors and translators have done their best to put forth Ibn Sīnā's medical theories in appropriate and readable language. To facilitate the work, a comprehensive glossary of *al-Qānūn*, comprising about 15,000 Arabic terms and their 50,000 English equivalents, was compiled and published at the outset.

I am very happy to acknowledge the hard work and labour that my colleagues have done in the translation and revision of this historical and classical medical book, particularly Mr. S.A. Ali, Head, Deptt. of Islamic Studies, Jamia Hamdard, Mr. A.H. Farooqi, Reader, Deptt. of Islamic Studies, Jamia Hamdard and Dr. Hameedullah, Department of English, Aligarh Muslim University. These scholars have completed their job under my personal supervision.

New Delhi-110062
April, 1993

Hakeem Abdul Hameed
Chancellor
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