

ARTICLE · CULTURA & SAÚDE

Avicenna

The Philosopher of the Arabs and his influence on medieval medicine

Dr. Alexandre Amato

Received for publication in April 2004 · Section: Article · Language: English

ABSTRACT

The text offers a brief biographical profile of Avicenna, the Western name of Abu Ali al-Hussain ibn Sina, an Arab philosopher born near Bukhara in 980 and died in Hamadan, in Persia, in 1037. Regarded as one of the greatest philosophers of Islam and known as the Philosopher of the Arabs, he specialized in medicine, mastering it by the age of 16. At 18 he cured Prince Nuh ibn Mansur after other physicians had failed, which earned him political protection and access to the library of the Samanid rulers. The author highlights his work as physician, jurist, teacher, and political figure, as well as his vast output of about two hundred works, among them the *Book of Healing* and the medical encyclopedia *al-Qanun*, or *Canon*, the latter more esteemed in his time than the writings of Rhazes and Galen and studied in the West for centuries.

KEYWORDS: *avicenna; history of medicine; arab medicine; islamic philosophy; ibn sina; middle ages*

In Arabic 'Abu 'Ali al-Hussain ibn 'Abd Allah ibn al-Hassan ibn 'Ali ibn Sina, known in the West as Avicenna, an Arab philosopher (born near Bukhara in 980 and died in Hamadan, in Persia, in 1037), considered one of the greatest philosophers of Islam and known as "the Philosopher of the Arabs." A man of great culture, he specialized in the medical field. At only 16 he had studied medicine, and his competence was evident. At 18 he treated and cured Prince Nuh ibn Mansur, after several attempts by other physicians. Gaining trust, political protection, and favor, the princes of Bukhara granted him

access to the library of the Samanid rulers, the sanctuary of Arab learning at the time. He was a physician, jurist, and teacher, and he held political posts. He wrote about 200 works, the most important being the *Book of Healing*. His works were widely used in the Middle Ages. He completed the encyclopedia *al-Qanun*, or *Canon*, at 21; in his own time it was held in higher regard than the work of Rhazes (*al-Razi*) or of Galen. For centuries (until the mid-seventeenth century), and among Christians as well, his work was studied and translated by masters, physicians, and students.