



## AVICENNA - HISTORY'S PRODIGY

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### ABSTRACT

The earliest of the manuscripts available in the world, "Kitab al-Qanun fi-t-tibb" ("Canon of Medicine"), by the great Abu Ali ibn Sina (980-1037), dating back to the 12th century, is kept in the Institute of Oriental Manuscripts of the Russian Academy of Sciences in St. Petersburg. This major work has been the most complete encyclopedia of medicine for a millennium. As early as in the 12th century, it was translated in Europe from Arabic into Latin by the Italian Gerard of Cremona (1114-1187) and then disseminated in many manuscripts. "The Canon of Medicine," Avicenna began writing when he was twenty years old and completed this work in 1020-at the age of forty, when Avicenna's medical and life experience was vast. This article is just an attempt to lift the veil over the mystery of the genius' formation, and how this priceless folio, created in the ancient Uzbek land, came to St. Petersburg.

**KEYWORDS:** - Manuscript, capital work, encyclopedia, Koran, medicine, collection, mystery, folio, genius, Central Asia, Europe.

### INTRODUCTION

What part of our vast heritage we have already discovered, and what part still keeps its unique secrets and stories? Handwritten masterpieces and their fates...

For the author, the study of a unique folio - the most famous book in the history of world medicine "Kitab al - Kanun fi - t-tibb" - "The Canon of Medicine" by Abu Ali ibn Sina or Avicenna, as he is known in the West, was an absolute exclusivity. The author was lucky to hold the world's earliest manuscript of Avicenna's "Canon", dating back to the 12th century, while working in the Muslim collection of the Institute of Oriental Manuscripts of the

Russian Academy of Sciences in St. Petersburg.

### THE MAIN RESULTS AND FINDINGS

The basis of the Institute's Muslim collection is the collection of the famous French diplomat Jean Baptiste Louis Jacques Rousseau (1780-1831), who lived for many years in Aleppo and Tripoli. The French diplomat had hundreds of handwritten books in his collection. A passionate collector and Orientalist, he decided in two stages, in 1819 and 1825, to sell seven hundred manuscripts from his collection to the Imperial Library of the Russian Academy of Sciences. Among these books was the priceless manuscript of Avicenna's "Canon of Medicine. Thus, this masterpiece made its way to St. Petersburg.



A few words about the curious pedigree of Jean Baptiste Louis Jacques Rousseau. He was a nephew of the great philosopher and enlightener of France, Jean Jacques Rousseau, and belonged to a family of hereditary diplomats. His grandfather, as a goldsmith, worked in the Embassy of France in Persia under King Louis XIV of France, and then served for many years as a jeweler at the court of Safavid Shah Hussain I (1694-1722). Jean Baptiste Louis Rousseau's father was also a diplomat. As consul in Basra and Baghdad, it was he who started the collection of manuscripts that were destined to make his son famous. It is not known whether the Canon of Medicine was purchased by Jean Baptiste Rousseau himself or by his father.

This capital work was the most complete encyclopedia of medicine for a millennium. It was translated from Arabic into Latin as early as the 12th century in Europe by the Italian Gerard of Cremona (1114-1187), and was then disseminated in many manuscripts. And when the printing press was invented, the Canon became one of the first printed books, after the Bible, and even rivaled it in number of editions.

The Latin text was published in the second half of the 15th century, in 1473, but the Arabic text was printed in Italy in the late 16th century, in 1593, in the print shop of the famous Dukes of Florence, practically the "godfathers" of the Italian Renaissance, the Medicis. No translation of the Canon from the Arabic original into any other language (except Latin) has been made in any country of the world. Although in the 1930s an attempt was made to translate the Canon into English, but unfortunately only half of the first book was translated. Only from 1934 to 1961, the Uzbek scholars, in cooperation with the USSR Academy of Medicine were able to translate the entire Canon into Russian and Uzbek languages, with all comments. The work lasted for 27 years.

It is now known that Avicenna began to write

The Canon of Medicine when he was twenty years old and completed it in 1020 - at the age of forty, when Avicenna's medical and life experience was vast.

"I became addicted to the science of medicine, and medical science is not a difficult one, and of course I succeeded in it, in no time at all. Famous doctors began to come to me for advice... And I was at the time 16 years old"[1].

These lines are from the biography of Ibn Sina, which he dictated around 1012 to his disciple and friend, Abu Ubeid al-Jurjani (d. 1070). It covers the first half of Avicenna's life. The second half of the biography of the great healer, Jurjani wrote from what he saw in person while staying with him until the end of his days. In the biography dictated by Jurjani, there is one curious fact that reveals very authentically the essence of the character of the young genius.

So what kind of person was this young man? Already at age 10, knew by heart all surahs from the Holy Koran, and by the age of 16 had independently studied the works of ancient authors. Avicenna brilliantly knew the treatises of Euclid (3rd century BC) and the Almagest of Claudius Ptolemy (2nd century), the Fiqh - Islamic religious law and logic. And only one book did not lend itself to his understanding.

"When I had perfectly studied logic and the natural and mathematical sciences, I turned to theology and read Aristotle's Metaphysics. But I did not understand its meaning, the purpose of its writer was hidden from me".

Avicenna read Aristotle's Metaphysics forty times. Just think, forty times, moreover, he learned it by heart, but never understood its purpose. "And I despaired of being able to understand it and said to myself, this is the book, the way to understand it is not there".

And so, one day before sunset Avicenna came to the rows of scribes where handwritten books



were sold. Bukhara, at that time, was a unique cultural center. And the rows of books, a place where philosophers, poets and scholars met and debated. Avicenna was a frequent visitor there. A merchant acquaintance was praising a certain book and offered it to Avicenna. It was a commentary on Aristotle's *Metaphysics*. "There is no use for this book," said Avicenna, and resolutely dismissed it. But the merchant began to persuade the young man, telling him that the owner of the manuscript needed what would be paid for it. Avicenna bought it. It was a book by the eminent scholarly encyclopedist Abu Nasr Muhammad Farabi [2] (circa 870-950). His commentaries on Aristotle's *Metaphysics*.

"The doors of the main thoughts of this book opened before me. I was overjoyed and the next day I gave an abundant handout to the needy," recounts in Avicenna's biography. Truly, in the East, Farabi is called the second teacher after Aristotle. But this is another story.

We have only tried in this narration to lift the veil over the mystery of the formation of a genius personality. One of the greatest thinkers of humanity, a scientist and encyclopedist Avicenna created more than four hundred and fifty works in the field of medicine and philosophy, astronomy and mathematics, physics and chemistry, music and literature. The extant correspondence between Abu Ali ibn Sina and Abu Rayhan Biruni (Abu Rayhan Muhammad ibn Ahmad al-Biruni, 973-1048) is a unique example of scientific dialogue, profound understanding, philosophical views of the ancient, ancient authors, devotion to science and intellectual search of "the cornerstone of the universe".

His major work "*Kitab al - Kanun fi - t-tibb*" defined the development of medicine for many centuries ahead and actually became the foundation of practical medicine and pharmacology.

Avicenna's work was admired by the great

geniuses of the European Renaissance. Leonardo da Vinci (1452-1519) wrote about Avicenna in his "Codex" on human anatomy around 1500, which demonstrates the careful study and analysis of the "Canon of Medicine" by Avicenna. Dante Alighieri (1265-1321) also ranked Avicenna among the great ancient scholars:

"There's the geometer Euclid - there's Ptolemy, Hippocrates, Galen and Avicenna..."[3].

## CONCLUSION

According to historians, Omar Khayyam passed away bent over the treatise of Ibn Sina. While working on this study, the author found information that most recently, Avicenna's Canon of Medicine, translated into Irish back in the 16th century, had been found in Ireland. This folio was published in London in 1530.

In his famous rubai, Avicenna writes, "From black ashes to heavenly bodies, I have solved the mysteries of great words and deeds..."

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