

# Islamicisation of Medicine in the 13<sup>th</sup> Century: A Case of Ibn Abī Uṣaibia's *History of Physicians*

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## ABSTRACT

One of the challenges in the Islamization of knowledge project is the absence of a ready approach for integrating the existing disciplines within the Islamic knowledge paradigm. Among the constituents of such an approach is an epistemological framework that defines a discipline to serve as reference for further efforts on the operational level. This study intends to fill this gap with a perspective on Islamic epistemological framework in the field of medicine during the Islamic medieval era. The focus of analysis is on the topic of the origin of medicine and the views of ancient Greek physicians in the compilation entitled 'Uyūn al-anbā' fī ṭabaqāt al-aṭibba' or History of Physicians authored by Ibn 'Abī 'Uṣaibia'. The study used interpretive textual analysis method to arrive at certain constructs for an Islamic medical epistemological framework from the point of view of the author. The analysis concludes that the perspective of the author on the selected topics was suggestive of possible constructs for an Islamic epistemological framework that can serve as a point of reference for further development of an approach for integrating medical disciplines in the Islamization context.

**KEYWORDS:** Ibn Abī 'Uṣaibia', History of Physicians, Islamicisation, epistemological framework, origin of medicine -Greek physicians

## INTRODUCTION

The need for Islamic inputs in terms of epistemology, values and attitudes in the medical curriculum had been an on-going effort in some notable Islamic Higher Education Institutions. The overall aim was to eliminate the dichotomy of teaching Islamic sciences separately from the medical disciplines through grounding the medical ethics within the Islamic paradigm and relating the medical profession to solve the issues of society in accordance to the purposes of the Sharī'a (Maqāṣid). The need for such an approach was rationalized due to the denial of moral consideration in the profession and the inconsistencies of western ethical theories and principles.<sup>1</sup>

Despite the consensus to have Islamic input in Curriculum in the Islamization project, one of the remaining challenges is to produce textbooks that has the Islamic knowledge philosophy that contains the ontological, epistemological and axiological input for students.

But to put the perspectives in the form of textbook had been a challenging task faced by the instructors

and the institutions. Al-Farūqi once mentioned that producing textbooks is the 'crown' on all the preceding efforts of Islamization.<sup>2</sup> 'Alwāni mentioned that the main focus of Islamization 'was on the practical aspects of producing textbooks for use in teaching the social sciences, as this was considered the first priority at a time when the Muslim world was losing its best minds to the West and the western cultural and intellectual invasion'.<sup>3</sup> Although the framework was outlined by Al-Farūqi in early 80's, after some years, it was still observed that the failure to produce textbooks remained a major reason for criticizing the Islamization of Knowledge project. Textbooks are product of serious research and theory building but they were not done satisfactorily.<sup>4</sup>

The problems to produce textbook in the Islamization of Knowledge project identified by Nur Kholis et. al<sup>5</sup> are caused firstly, by the difficulties in identifying the suitable integration frameworks that are needed by the different natures of the disciplines; secondly, the unavailability of a ready to use integration method; thirdly, insufficient knowledge among the lecturers on the philosophy of knowledge that is essential to gain insights on the theoretical level of Islamization of knowledge; and finally, the lack of mastery of Islamic legacy.

The study attempts to identify an Islamic epistemological framework for medicine during the Islamic medieval era that can serve as reference for

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further integration efforts in the Islamization project by constructing such a framework based on the perspective of Ibn Abī Uṣaibia'h (IAU) in his book '*Uyūn al-anbā' fī ṭabaqāt al-aṭibbā'* or the History of Physicians (HP).

An Islamic epistemological framework constructs for medicine from the perspective of a Muslim physician and historian of the 13<sup>th</sup> century could become a point of reference to curriculum reformers and text book writers in the medical disciplines in their undertakings to integrate those disciplines within the Islamic paradigm. Without such a paradigm, as noted by Kasule, Islamization project will only produce superficial efforts such as: "insertion of Qur'anic verses and hadiths in an otherwise European piece of writing, searching for scientific facts in the Qur'an, searching for Qur'anic proof of scientific facts, establishing Qur'anic scientific miracles, searching for parallels between Islamic and European concepts, using Islamic in place of European terminologies, and adding supplementary ideas to the European corpus of knowledge."<sup>6</sup>

In this regard, the question that this paper tries to answer is: What are the perspectives contained in the book that can become the constructs for an Islamic epistemology of medicine?

## METHODS

An interpretive textual analysis of the book would help to reveal the perspectives of IAU that can be induced as constructs for an Islamic epistemological framework for medicine in his era. An interpretive textual analysis aims to get beneath the surface of the denotative meaning of the text and consider the implicit meaning of it. In this case, the writer did not directly deal with the epistemological paradigm but the choice of words and his inclination to assert his religious belief through his exposition of the topic was suggestive of certain concepts that can be epistemological in nature. Being a Muslim educated in an Islamic environment and system during his time, he would be inclined by default to accommodate such discipline within his world view as a Muslim. Therefore, his Islamic perspectives on medicine as a knowledge that was not a direct product of Islamic knowledge culture, highly influenced by the Greek civilization and was subjected to various cultural settings by various cultures well before the emergence of the Islamic civilization, struck a chord with the idea of integration underscored by the Islamization project. Medicine as a product of diverse cultures and religions was assumed to be laden with a mixture of knowledge paradigms and epistemologies. This study believes that that IAU's religious and education background would become significant factors in integrating these paradigms with his Muslim worldview that underlie his treatment of the topic.

This approach for integrating knowledge within the Islamic paradigm is given a specific reference by the

term Islamicisation introduced by M. Kamal Hasan. Islamicisation refers in particular to the effort of harmonizing the secular western aspect of human knowledge with the Islamic knowledge paradigm by making the latter as its point of reference. The term Islamization used in this paper is an umbrella term to denote the general effort of establishing a *tawhidic* knowledge paradigm in all branches of knowledge although it might be connoted as promoting exclusivism and unnecessary deconstruction of human knowledge. Alternatively, the term 'islamicisation' will remove the unwanted perception and interpretation that the Islamization of knowledge project is one of the manifestations of Muslim Westophobia. It will also help to stay clear of the misgivings and misconceptions among the Western and Muslim scholars alike.<sup>7</sup>

The Islamic epistemological framework for medicine in the paper is based on the framework outlined by Kasule<sup>6</sup> who identified the epistemological concepts of knowledge to be: its nature, history, source, classification and limitations.

To show that the book contains possible constructs for an Islamic epistemological framework for medicine from the point of view of its author, the discussion in this paper will focus on two topics of the book: the origin of medicine and the views of selected ancient Greek personalities as the first practitioners on medicine.

The study will make use of both the original Arabic manuscript along with its English translation for citing purposes.

## DISCUSSION

### The History of Physicians ('*Uyūn al-anbā' fī ṭabaqāt al-Aṭibbā'*)

Ibn 'Abī al 'Uṣaibia' (IAU), the writer of the book '*Uyūn al-anbā' fī ṭabaqāt al-Aṭibbā'* or The History of Physicians (HP), is Muwaffaḳūddīn 'Ahmad bin al-Qāsim bin Khalīfah al-Hākim al-Khazrajī. He was born in Damascus in 1200 (596H) and passed away in 1280 (668H). His family was from the medical circle that had privileged relation with the royals of Cairo and Damascus. His father was also a physician in Damascus. He studied with his family members who were also physicians along with some renowned scholars of his time such as Ibn Baiṭar and others. He befriended Ibn Nafīs during his posting in the Nāṣirī Hospital in Cairo.<sup>8</sup>

The book was regarded as the most complete history of medicine in the Near East in his time. 'It is particularly valuable because it quotes long extracts from earlier writers, including some statements by the 2nd century medical writer Galen about Jews and Christians which have not been otherwise preserved. It even mentions a work of Galen, *On Grief*, which is of the greatest value for the history of libraries in Rome, and which was only rediscovered in the last few years. It gives us much

material about Hunain ibn Ishaq, including his own account of his misfortunes, and it discusses the people active in the translation movement of Greek science into Arabic. Two recensions exist of his great compendium, the “*Ṭabaqāt al-aṭibbā*” “or “*Uyūn al-ʿAnbāʾ fī Ṭabaqāt al- Aṭibbā*” (Sources of Information on the Classes of Physicians or Essential information on the Classes of Physicians). The first was composed in 1241, and a second edition with some additions was edited by A. Müller in 1884.<sup>9</sup>

A project to translate the book is being undertaken by a joint project between Oxford and Warwick Universities. On the website of the project the significance of the book was highlighted that it “covered nearly 1700 years of medical history, from the mythological beginnings of medicine with Asclepius through Greece, Rome, and India, down to his day. It is viewed as the only earliest comprehensive history of medicine and certainly the most important and ambitious of the medieval period, containing the accounts of over 442 physicians, their education, training, notable medical experiences, some important historical facts, wisdoms and quotes as well as their compositions in the medical and various other disciplines, presented in an interesting manner interlaced with beautiful poetry and entertaining anecdotes illustrating their personal and professional characters”.<sup>10</sup>

On the website of the online translation, it was mentioned that the book was translated from Arabic by Dr. L. Kopf in 1956, a more updated version with partial annotations by Dr. M. Plessner in 1971 from the Institute of Asian and African Studies, The Hebrew University, Israel, for the National Library of Medicine, Bethesda, Maryland under the Special Foreign Currency Program, carried out under a National Science Foundation Contract with the Israel Program for Scientific Translations, Jerusalem.<sup>10</sup>

Since the available translation by Dr. L. Kopf omitted many poetries and anecdotes of the original in addition to paraphrasing and permutations at a significant number of places, an ongoing project to produce this remarkable compilation for the first time in a more reliable and readable translation with critical edition is being sponsored by The Wellcome Trust in a joint project between the University of Oxford and the University of Warwick. For nearly 300 years attempts to translate this monumental work have failed owing to the extraordinary range of skills needed to tackle it. This joint project is the first to assemble a team of senior and junior scholars with the required skills and interests to make it happen.<sup>10</sup>

The fact that Western scholars had been interested in translating and analyzing the content of the book might serve as a reminder of its significance to the Muslim academia to take up a similar interest especially those who are on the track of the Islamization project.

## The origin of medicine

It is acknowledged in the History of Physicians (HP) that the Greeks were the first practitioners of medicine though it was pointed out that the issue of its origin remained complicated due to lack of sources. He presented various opinions on the origin of medicine from different sources with diverging views that centered primarily on two premises: that it was divinely inspired, or it was created by human through experience, coincidences, observation and experiment. He was objective in citing the opposing views on the matter, quoting from certain sources when available, reporting the views without references in some other times. After presenting all the views he deliberated by gathering all the opinions as possible explanations for the origin of medicine. He favored the divine source as the origin of the discipline, putting it at the top of his list followed by other previously discussed views. Fully aware of the limitations of sources that can support the views, IAU only took them as being probable evidently through his own admission that they ‘..may partly be..’.<sup>11</sup>

The divine origin as believed by the author is significantly inferred from his use of the word Allah. At this juncture, some might object that what he referred to is the generic meaning of the word and not the specific reference of the worshipped Deity that conforms to the Islamic faith and belief. Therefore, ‘Allah’ as referred to by IAU is the general and common conception of God as found in all religions or it may be as take on the specific meaning. The term ‘Allah’ in Arabic can be either a generic noun or a proper one or both. In the linguistic-cultural context of the language, the use of the term Allah among the Christians and polytheist Arabs to refer to the Deity before Islam was well documented in the poems and inscriptions. In the Quran itself the term was indicated as generic since it is translatable: the One Who is worshipped.<sup>12</sup> The convention between the Arab speaking Muslims, Christians, Jews and others in the Islamic civilization then was that ‘Allah’ is the term referring to God. To explain this, the Sapir Whorf hypothesis might be helpful: that language to certain extent influences thought and that our mapping of the outer experience is bound to the mental categorization we make based on the system of the language we use.<sup>13</sup>

Therefore, to opine that the view on the divine origin of medicine in his book was not exclusively Islamic does not deny also the fact that it might be so from the biased point of view of the author since he was a Muslim. The shared Arabic linguistic background among the different religious communities might have even enabled IAU to support the divine origin assertion of medicine from the sources of the different religions. But whenever the traditional reference to the Deity in other religious traditions was different from the conventional use of the term Allah in the three Abrahamic religions, he

maintained the idea of the divine origin in those other traditions by attributing it to the view of their own sources that medicine had been taught by certain individual identified as 'prophets' in those traditions; falling short of explicitly stating that those prophets were also sent by Allah, a common belief in Islam.

His exposition on the Islamic heritage related to medicine was minimal. There was no serious attempt to epistemologically ground medicine as knowledge. This lack of methodological rigor perhaps was understandable given the overall theme of his work. It is also due to the conviction that knowledge is essentially and divinely originated from Allah as the author sees it. This *a priori* stand is evident in the use of the term Allah and overall disposition of the subject of the origin of medicine. The Islamic account on the origin of medicine was taken from a prophetic saying that mentioned that the knowledge of plants for healing purposes was bestowed on the Prophet Sulaiman A.S. He went on quoting from the Jewish, Sabians, Zoroastrian sources as well as other ancient communities' opinions that pointed to their respective prophetic source of medicine. Without indicating any particular reference, he cited opinions from Judaism that The Almighty taught Moses medicine, while from the Sabians he mentioned that their tradition said that Seth A.S. inherited the knowledge from his father Adam A.S.<sup>11</sup>

Arabic speakers of the different religions might have common linguistic concept of God but their theological concept differs. In linguistic term, they shared a common denotation of the term but differ in its connotation. Their differences are in the belief or disbelief in the message of the Prophet Muhammad ﷺ and his prophethood. IAU in this regard used this common belief when he referred that medicine was of divine origin.

The inclusivism as the result of the linguistic phenomenon that positioned Arabic as the lingua franca not only among the diverse ethnics in the Islamic territorial boundaries during that time but also among the different religions, had cultivated a thinking paradigm that was tolerant and accommodating in nature albeit the prevailing differences that originally set apart those beliefs to become different religions.

By this linguistic phenomenon, IAU went on to discuss about the other opinions on the origin of medicine by maintaining this divine paradigm. To consistently adhere to it, IAU had from time to time made direct references to The Almighty as the real cause of healing. His second point about dream as the origin of some aspects of medicine for example mentioned Galen's account attributing a cure from disease to The Almighty after a dream he had. He also mentioned that an Arab ruler had a dream in which he was told by the Prophet to treat his ailment with olive oil. His assertion that medicine was divine in origin yet pervaded another view he

stated as the origin of medicine, inspiration. He clearly stated that inspiration was also divine in nature by quoting the views of Galen, regarded as the most accomplished of all medical researcher of antiquity.<sup>11</sup>

On the view that observation of animal habits as a possible origin of medical knowledge, he interjected his comment by referring the animal instinct to eat certain food while avoiding other as a sign of Allah's wisdom for in his creation. For this reason, he posited a perspective that regardless of the differences in the methods to acquire medicine, they are still attributable to God Who is the cause and source for some other methods of acquiring the knowledge such as coincidence, empirical observation and experimentation.<sup>11</sup>

The contradicting views on the issue of the origin of medicine, were taken as possible sources for the origin of medicine in his final analysis. Instead of viewing them as opposites at different ends, he posited them as complementing one another, acknowledging the divine origin while recognizing the human factor in developing it in later stages through experience, observation, experiment and the like.

#### **On the Greek Physicians as the first Practitioners of Medicine**

The presence of Islamic *Tawhidic* knowledge paradigm that put The Almighty as the source of knowledge and *raison d'être* of human life was evident in IAU's exposition of the early Greek practitioners of medicine. One of the features that stood out the most, is his attributing to God as 'Allah the Most High and Exalted' (*Tabāraka wa Ta'āla*) whenever references were made to God in the sayings and quotes of the Greek physicians who are commonly known in our time to be either atheist or polytheist. It should be noteworthy that the divine aspect in the thoughts of Greek philosophers had been on the sidelines of the ancient Greek scholarship for the past years in the West. There has been attempts recently to highlight the aspect of the belief of Socrates and differentiate it from the belief of his contemporaries.<sup>14</sup>

Since the first medical practitioners were conventionally admitted to being the Greeks due to their surviving works on medicine at that time and their contributions in the field, IAU's also quoted some resources to present them as inheritors of the discipline from earlier Prophets. In this regard, he either mentioned this view from specific references or generally point it out as a convention of his day. Obviously, his attempt to relate the Greeks physicians' belief in God is to coherently maintain the Islamic knowledge paradigm and epistemology he held as his overall framework of exposition for this topic.

What is noteworthy is that, contrary to modern

assumption that many of those early Greek philosophers or physicians were either atheists or polytheists, as with the majority of the population of their dwelling places at that time, IAU seemed indifferent to this fact and was rather coherent in maintaining what those ancient Greek figures referred to as God (Allah) had no contradictory precepts to his belief as a Muslim. Modern readers of Arabic would assume that these figures were unmistakably Islamic due to the consistent use of 'Allah' in their quoted sayings due to the common use of Arabic as the socio-linguistic characteristic of the societies in the Islamic territories in the era.

But to attribute this perspective simply to the preconditioned socio-linguistic background of the societies in the era thus brushing aside IAU's own perspective on the matter as a mere linguistic coincidence would prove to be inaccurate. This is because, beside the inherent socio-linguistic ramification of the use of 'Allah,' IAU also tried to enforce his perspective on the divine origin of medicine by soliciting the roles of Prophets in disseminating knowledge. In this regard, he quoted the views of Galen when he described his belief in the divine factor inherent in the Greek medical tradition by attributing their origin to the Prophets of Allah. The prophetic factor in the origin of medicine was also evident from other different sources quoted by IAU.

For example, since the figure of Asclepius is central in Greek medicine, IAU quoted that Asclepius was a holy man with connection with the Prophet Idrīs. He quoted from al-Mubashshir Ibn Fātik's book "Choice Maxims and Best Sayings," who wrote: "This Asclepius was the disciple of Hermes, whom he accompanied on his travels. They left India and arrived in Persia, whereupon Hermes left Asclepius behind in Babylon in order that he might govern the religious law of its inhabitants. This Hermes is Hermes I, whose name is pronounced Ermes, which is the name of Mercury. The Greeks call him Trismegistus, the Arabs Idrīs and the Hebrews Henoah, who was the son of Jared, the son of Mahalaleel, the son of Cainan, the son of Enos, the son of Seth, the son of Adam - peace be upon all of them. His birthplace was Egypt, in the town of Memphis. His time on earth was eighty-two, or according to another report, 365 years".<sup>11</sup>

This account served to indicate the prophetic lineage through which medicine was passed on to the Greek. It would be a highly significant claim if proven with evidences but unfortunately Ibn Fātik himself was not stating any source from which he took the report although he did mention in the introduction of his book that he compiled it from the different books he used to read.<sup>15</sup>

The divine description of Asclepius was further supported by IAU by reporting some views of the Greeks themselves: "Galen further repeats several times in his writings that Asclepius' medicine "had a divine character." In this translation the original

Arabic phrase clearly mentioned that medicine is from Allah but was transmuted to become the phrase: had a divine character.<sup>11</sup> He added: "Hippocrates says that God, the Exalted, made Asclepius ascend to His presence through the air in a pillar of fire".<sup>11</sup> Another claim quoted by IAU: "In the book "Encouragement of the Study of Medicine" [Protrepticus], Galen says with regard to Asclepius: "God, the Exalted, told Asclepius: I am more inclined to call you a god than a man".<sup>12</sup> The repetitious phrase "God the Exalted" is the rendered meaning of the original Arabic Allah *Tabāraka wa Ta'āla* clearly shows the writer's conviction and belief that medicine is a branch of knowledge that is originated from Allah. However, in this English translation regarding Asclepius, God did not really say that he was more inclined to call him god than a man, as quoted just now, for the original Arabic text clearly stated the word '*malak*' which literally means an angel; this seems to be a choice of word by the translator to elevate the status of Asclepius from a perceived angel in IAU's original Arabic writing to the status of a god, perhaps to be more in line with the prevalent Western perception on the status of Asclepius.

IAU further asserted the status of Asclepius as a prophet: "Another writer tells that Asclepius was greatly revered by the Greeks, who sought to heal their sickness at his grave. It is also reported that a thousand candles were lit on his grave every night. There were kings among his descendants, and prophetic status was claimed for him".<sup>11</sup>

Without indicating a particular source IAU asserted: "Asclepius lived before the Great Flood. He was a disciple of Agathodaemon the Egyptian, who was one of the prophets of both the Greeks and Egyptians. His name means "he who has good luck." This Asclepius was he who inaugurated the medical art among the Greeks. He taught it to his sons but forbade them to pass it on to a stranger".<sup>11</sup>

Asclepius in the Western world had been historically regarded as the god of medicine. As previously indicated, the report from IAU mentioned a different perspective. He was a holy man, a saint or perhaps a prophet himself who believed in God. IAU mentioned that Asclepius was reported as having prophetic vision, from an unverified source IAU quoted that he was among "the first to build temples and praised God in them...he was the first to give warning of the Flood, foreseeing that affliction, consisting of water and fire, would rain down on the earth from the heavens. Fearing that knowledge might be destroyed by the Flood, he erected the temples in Akhmim [Panopolis] and had their walls engraved with pictures of all the techniques and technicians and of all the tools employed by them. The sciences were also depicted in drawings for the benefit of future generations since he was anxious to preserve them for posterity and feared that all trace of them might vanish from the earth".<sup>11</sup>

The belief in God, as a characteristic of the early practitioners of medicine was maintained among those who inherited the knowledge. Hippocrates, who is regarded as the father of medicine in the western tradition, was described in the sources quoted by IAU as a believer in God. In quoting the Hippocratic Oath in Arabic, the reference to God is the phrase 'Allah, the master of life and death':

"This is the text of the pledge drawn up by Hippocrates: "I swear by God, the master of life and death, the giver of health and the creator of healing and every cure, and I swear by Asclepius and by all those close to God, both men and women". Again, in this English translation God refers to Allah in the original Arabic text, but the choice of the translator for not borrowing Allah from the original text unlike in some other places in the translation might indicate a possibility that he wanted to avoid asserting the aspect of Monotheism in the oath. By altering this meaning, the translation therefore is only partially faithful to the original.

The comment on this translation in the endnote of the online translation was that the oath as narrated by IAU is different from what is known in the Western Tradition: "'I swear by Apollo the physician, by Aesculapius, Hygieia, Panacea and by all the gods and goddesses".<sup>11</sup>

The differences between the oath quoted by IAU and the widespread translation of the oath in the West in present time are in two places in the text: first, there is no mentioning in the Arabic text of the oath about 'gods and goddesses' as in the modern translation of the oath; second, the Arabic text mentioned "I swear by God (Allah)" whereas the modern translation mentioned the name of Apollo and the Healer without any direct reference to the Deity. There are a few possibilities: that IAU used a manipulated translation of the oath from Arabic; or the western translation is taken from a different manuscript used originally as the source text of the Arabic translation. In any case the Arabic translation was done by Hunayn ibn Ishāq, a Christian Arab who translated the work of Hippocrates. It was noted that across the centuries the most controversial part of the oath is its introductory proclamation. It had been going through many transitions and the Christian translation of a monotheistic perspective was around for more than 1000 years.<sup>16</sup> IAU perhaps was only quoting the available translation that coincidentally conform to the monotheistic belief of Islamic due to the shared linguistic background between people of different faiths of his time who referred to God through the word 'Allah'. Whatever is the possibility, through this Arabic oath of Hippocrates IAU was able to maintain the divine knowledge paradigm of medicine by presenting the oath with content that was not in contradiction to the Islamic belief paradigm. The Arabic word (*awliyā'*) was used in place of 'gods and goddesses' in the western translation. The Arabic rendering means saints or the phrase 'those close to God' as

found in the online translation of HP void of any indication of the godly status of those figures as found in the English version of the oath.

In describing Pythagoras, the idea that medicine was of divine origin was again attributed by IAU to a chain of contacts made by the Greek figure that was traceable to a certain Prophet. IAU quoted an account from Qādi (Judge) Sa'īd's book: "The Classes of Nations": "Pythagoras came some time after Pendacles. He learned wisdom from the followers of Solomon the son of David, peace be upon them, when they came to Egypt from Damascus. Prior to that he learned geometry from the Egyptians. Then he returned to Greece, where he introduced the sciences of geometry, natural science, and theology. On his own initiative he founded the science of musicology and composition, in accordance with numerical measurements, claiming that he attained this by prophetic inspiration".<sup>11</sup>

The underlying perspective on the divine origin of medicine held by IAU was inferred or perhaps consolidated by his overall method of presenting the lives of his subjects. Some quotes had clear indication of the belief of the subject. For example, his quoted sayings of Pythagoras reflected a personality of a pious man with firm belief in Allah The Almighty. They were taken from the book "Choice Maxims and Best Sayings" by the Emīr Maḥmūd al-Dawlah Abī al-Wafa' ibn Fātik:<sup>11</sup>

- 1) Just as the beginning of our existence and creation flows from God Almighty, so must our souls flow to God the Almighty.
- 2) Thought belongs to God, and thus loving thinking is bonded to love for the Almighty; he who loves God the Almighty would act to please Him; he who acts to please Him comes closer to Him, and he who comes closer to Him is safe and victorious.
- 3) Honoring God the Sublime does not lie in sacrifices and ritual killings, but the faith in Him to which He is entitled suffices as a mark of our worship.
- 4) Too much talk about God the Sublime is a sign of a man's lack of knowledge about Him.

In presenting Socrates, IAU again relied on the same source. He was described as a staunch preacher against idolatry and a pious believer in Monotheism. Therefore, his execution was the result of inciting the populace against idolatry:

"When his contemporaries asked him concerning idolatry, he kept them away from it, abrogated it and forbade people to worship idols, while exhorting them to worship the unique and everlasting God, the creator and originator of the world and all that is in it, the omniscient and omnipotent, not the sculptured stone, which cannot talk, neither hear nor feel by any instrument. He incited the people to piety and benevolence, ordered them to do good and prohibited the vile and reprehensible all according to his belief in them,

but he did not aim at the perfection of conduct for he knew that this would be unacceptable to them".<sup>11</sup> His execution was explicitly attributed in IAU's book to attempting to turn people away from idolatry, a fact that is either ignored or suppressed in the modern western Greek scholarship: "When the leaders in his time, namely the priests and archons came to know the goals of his propaganda, his views concerning idols and his efforts to turn the people away from them, they bore witness against him, which made the death sentence inevitable. Those who imposed death on him were the eleven judges of Athens and he was administered the poison called *konaion* [hemlock]".<sup>12</sup>

When IAU was not able to find any account indicating a direct reference to God relating the Greek figures to their belief, the sayings and wisdoms of those figure would indirectly bear testimony to their pious characteristics. Plato and Aristotle were presented as wise men with highly ethical characteristic. The wisdoms and quote attributed to them reflected a high degree of values promoted in the Islamic ethical paradigm.

Galen, a physician of which IAU referred to significantly in his book was described in the sources as a man of faith, had made contact with Jesus and referring to Moses a few times in his books.<sup>12</sup> The divine epistemological aspect of medicine in the testimonies and reports from the translated works of these Greek philosophers/physicians quoted by IAU are of great significance to enrich the input for the Islamic epistemology for medical knowledge.

Although these accounts were not verified seriously by IAU himself to prove their reliability, it is still noteworthy that they in fact existed in the historical sources. Therefore, instead of dismissing these accounts to be of no value and ambiguous, the fact remains that they carry some indications on the monotheistic belief of those figures and thus are still valuable even if they still need to be academically verifiable. In fact, this is perhaps one of the most significant assertion on the aspect of Monotheism as a possible belief of the early Greeks who are generally regarded to be polytheists.

However, it is noteworthy that this view was not commonly shared by traditional Muslim scholars. Abu Mūsā al-'Ash'arī opposed strongly from relying on them for their rejection of the possibility of prophethood among human.<sup>17</sup> The view on the infidelity of the philosophers was also voiced by Ibn Taimiyyah as he branded the philosophers and their Greek or Indian historical figures as ignorant of the concept of Prophethood.<sup>18</sup>

Undoubtedly, the topic on the real belief of the ancient Greek philosophers is a point of discontent among Muslim scholars. Some of them such as Aristotle did believe in One God but had developed a theory that exclude God from being involved in

worldly movements. Ibn Rushd, a renowned philosopher himself accused Aristotle of committing a 'shirk' by this theory.<sup>19</sup>

Due to the opposing views on the ancient Greek philosophers among the Muslim scholars on the compatibility of their belief with the Islamic paradigm and the unknown detailed nature of their specific belief, a careful approach to quote what was presented by IAU on the belief of those philosophers/physicians should be taken. They are presumptions that are not credible enough to become a basis for a sound theory and are rather subjective. These accounts were not verified by IAU himself, but they can be taken as IAU's perspective on the epistemological aspect of medicine as a knowledge of divine origin.

### Islamicisation of Medicine: Epistemological viewpoints from Ibn Abī 'Uṣaibi'ah

The current Islamicisation project to assert the role of revelation as a source of knowledge may be complemented further by considering the perspectives presented in this medieval compilation. Islamic knowledge epistemology posits that God is the source of knowledge who endowed human with the intellectual faculty to explore and advance his knowledge further. IAU's exposition of stating the origin of medicine, though he admittedly said was a probable academic effort at best due to lack of evidence, cited the opinions of some notable historical figures in medicine on their belief that the discipline was originally inspired by God to his Prophets. The origin of the discipline from God was a belief absent in other secular epistemological systems. This belief was first proclaimed in his preface that: "Allah, Who has dispersed the nations throughout the world and Who will revive the dead; the creator of the spirit of life and the healer of sickness, who bestows abundant favors upon him whom He prefers and threatens painful punishment and affliction to him who disobeys Him; He Who, by His wondrous deeds, caused creatures to come into being from the void and Who, by His most perfect acts and with gravest wisdom, decrees maladies and reveals the remedy".<sup>11</sup>

According to some views cited in his book, those who maintain the divine origin of medicine, claimed that it was through the Prophets of God who passed the knowledge to their disciples, or through dreams or inspiration that made human pursue the discipline through practical experience which was gradually improves and refined. They also argued that it would have been impossible for human mind to create such a lofty of science except with some Godly intervention.<sup>11</sup>

Subsequently, medicine by virtue of its divine origin was regarded by IAU as "one of the noblest, a most goodly one and its praise is sung in the divine books and in religious treatises, the lore of the body has been set on a par with the lore of religion".<sup>11</sup>

The divine origin of medicine is an epistemological notion that can also clarify the purpose of medicine as a practice. IAU opined that medicine had two major purposes: nurturing and restoring health. By helping a person retain and restore his health, a physician is helping him to fulfill his obligations to attain the heavenly bliss that he needs for the Hereafter.<sup>11</sup>

IAU had never attempted to synthesize the Quran or the prophetic tradition seriously in his treatment of the subject of divine origin of medicine. There was no mentioning of even a single Quranic verse in his approach to this topic. He even quoted an unverified status of the saying of the Prophet with regard to medicine. Despite this, what perhaps might be a significant contribution in the project of Islamicisation of disciplines was his reference to the historical accounts before the time of the Prophet Muhammad ﷺ on the role of those previous Prophets and the possible transmission method that the knowledge was later taught and spread. Perhaps, the most stand out aspect of this was the views of the ancient Greek practitioners that were depicted as not a contradiction to the belief and tenets of the Islam but a confirmation of their compatibility with the messages of the Prophets of God. Those Greek figures were mentioned and quoted by IAU alongside with their own views as found in their own translated works and the reports of historians on their histories, though might be questionable as verified facts, still proved to be worthy of mentioning. This aspect of relating the ancient Greek physicians and philosophers with the belief in God and their views on the divine origin of medicine was unheard of if not totally disregarded in the Western scholarship tradition.

The basic tenet that Allah is the source of knowledge, was given a historical construct by IAU when he tried to relate the ancient Greek medical figures as having direct contact with the Prophets or those who were close to them. IAU had attempted to construct an epistemological framework of medicine using historical accounts that could serve as arguments that can trace the origin of knowledge to the Prophets and ultimately to Adam. His historical construct for epistemological framework did not begin from the time of the completion of the revelation to the Prophet ﷺ but rather inclusive of any relevant historical accounts before the era of the Quranic revelation. This would serve as an indication intended by the IAU to assert that the Quran carries messages that conform with the contents of the past revelations.

In his approach to the question of the divine origin of medicine, he did not confine the claim of divinity as exclusive to be the first source of knowledge but rather a pervading factor in all other sources of medicines such as observation, experimentation, analogy and others. This unity of the sources must be a foundation of the aspect of the origin of knowledge in the Islamic epistemological system. Contrary to the claim that earlier Muslims “failed to

Islamize Greek medicine when they neglected the empirical scientific method of the Qur’an and adopted negative aspects of Greek philosophy that discouraged experimentation”,<sup>6</sup> a thorough examination of the Islamic history of medicine might reveal a contrary stand.

In fact, evidence-based medicine derived from experimentation and observation had been in the heart of medicine since antiquity. It had been maintained and even developed by Muslim physicians. It was noted that “Avicenna, for instance, specified a set of conditions to ascertain the faculties of simple drugs going beyond those of his Greek forebears. Al-Rāzi carried out an animal experiment to nuance his view about the toxicity of mercury. And, most strikingly, he also used a control group to gain certainty about a treatment. Like al-Rāzi and Avicenna, the physician and philosopher ‘Abd al-Latīf al-Baghdādi was acutely aware of the limitations of medical knowledge, where we can only hope for good approximation when dealing with concrete cases”.<sup>20</sup>

IAU also did not rule out dreams as a source of medical knowledge. This would indicate that his epistemological construct was not purely positivistic since the metaphysical element, as an important characteristic of knowledge in Islam, needs also to be acknowledged.

## CONCLUSION

Through his exposition of the topic of the origin of medicine and his quoted reports that claim the belief of some of the notable Greek ancient practitioners of medicine as conforming to the Islamic belief system, the following perspectives contained in Ibnu Abī Uṣaibia’s book might serve as an example for an Islamic epistemological framework for Islamic medieval medicine in particular and the project of Islamization of medicine in general:

1. The nature: Medicine is a human knowledge, originally inspired by God but developed by human throughout their histories with the intellectual properties endowed in them. Medicine was both an art and science in medieval Islam. The word ‘ṣinā‘ah,’ used by IAU in Arabic means a profession. Unlike modern medicine that is constructed as biomedical science that focuses on clinical practices, medical knowledge was a part of a body of knowledge that was related to philosophy and other disciplines. It was a human knowledge with no standard universal practice but had advanced initially with the Greeks and improved with notable contributions by Muslims. Its nature cut across the difference in religions and cultures as many non-Muslims were also given prominent recognition by the Islamic rulers for their services and contribution. IAU’s perspective on medicine and his biographies of the physicians indicated that Islam cherished the knowledge of others and was not

dogmatic and exclusivist about their contributions and advancements because of their different beliefs.

2.The history: It was difficult to determine factual data on the origin of medicine. Nonetheless, through some references IAU made use of some unverified accounts to construct that medical knowledge had a divine origin. He managed to gather views and opinions that pointed to the belief of the ancient practitioners of medicine in the divine origin of medicine through contacts with some prophetic figures.

3.The source: The conceptual framework used by IAU in dealing with the origin of medicine maintained that the notion that Allah as the origin of knowledge is the foundation for the other direct and indirect sources and methods of acquiring knowledge such as experimentation, empirical observation, chance, dream and inspiration. He maintained that although medicine had developed through the time mostly by human experience, God is still the cause of such actions to take place. It is a combination of both transcendence and human experience.

4.The classification: IAU mentioned that medicine was the most important discipline after the knowledge of revelation. The notion that Allah is the source of knowledge leads to the understanding that He taught human from His knowledge what is beneficial to human for enabling them to worship Him, a purpose which is not attainable without a healthy condition as its prerequisite.

5.The limit: The notion that Allah is the source of knowledge means that human knowledge and experience is limited, restricted by spatial-temporal limitations that render it as a continuously progressive discipline. IAU mentioned that the knowledge cannot be possibly confined to certain people of place as the needs for medicine would differ due to ailments that were the results of different eating habit and climate. Therefore, treatments might not be absolute and definitive as they are mere approximations.

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