

Medicine in Islamic Egypt

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The Byzantine forces were routed and had withdrawn from Egypt by the year 642 AD, and thus Egypt became one of the Islamic states belonging to the Islamic caliphate [1].

Among the famous doctors and scientists of Alexandria engaged in medicine at the Arab conquest of Egypt was Aribasius. Another doctor who had the same name was also famous and was often consulted on diseases of women and matters of childbirth [2].

During the Tulunid rule of Egypt (868–905 AD), the hospital of Ibn Tulun, who founded the Tulunid Dynasty in Egypt, was established at al-Fustat in 872 AD. It was situated between the mosque of Ibn Tulun and the hill of al-Gareh, in one of the most heavily populated quarters of al-Fustat. It was based on the model of the leading hospital at Baghdad [3] (Fig. 1).

The Fatimid era (358–567 AH/968–1171 AD) was one of the most brilliant Islamic historical periods in Egypt because of its intellectual and cultural achievements and successes. Cairo turned into one of the artistic, cultural, and scientific Islamic centers and it became the focus of research and science. During this period, there were numerous debates among doctors, which led to the flowering of this science. Different gifts were dedicated to the scholars' tuition fees and physicians' salaries. Whenever the caliph identified a physician as qualified in his career, he was empowered and favored by the caliph, and became his close friend. Medicine was in the hands of Jewish and Christian physicians in Fatimid territory during Al-Moez (341–365 AH/953–975 AD) and Al-Aziz (365–386 AH/975–996 AD) caliphs, until the mid-fifth century A.H/11th century AD. This continued up to Al-Hakim period (386–411 AH/

996–1021 AD) during which Sunni people attempted to challenge their authority and seize their position. Among famous Egyptian doctors was Ali Ibn Ridwan (d. 460 AH/1068 AD), who wrote many books in medicine with his own scientific creations, and who became the doctor of the Caliph Al-Aziz, and the chief physician in the court of the Caliph Al-Hakim. His most important book was entitled *Daf Madar al-Abdan Bi Ard Misr*, which discussed the climatic features of Egypt and their relationship with hygiene and public health, especially cholera. There was also Abd Allah Ibn Ali, who was the head of all physicians until his death in Cairo (592 AH/1196 AD). Several hospitals were founded so that along with theoretical medical courses at scientific centers students gain practical experience in these hospitals. In Egypt, general medicine was practiced, but some of the physicians diagnosed and treated internal, infectious, and ophthalmologic diseases and also performed surgeries. One of the requirements for studying medicine was learning disciplines such as philosophy and foreign languages, especially Syriac and Greek [4].

There was a long list of illustrious physicians who served in the hospitals founded by the Ayyubid Sultan Salah al-Din (532–589 AH/1138–1193 AD) in Cairo in the 12th century. Ibn al-Qift (d. 645–646 AH/1248 AD) and Ibn Abi Usaybi'ah (d. 668–669 AH/1270 AD) mentioned those physicians in their biographical dictionaries, which vividly portray the vitality of intellectual life, including the medical

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Figure 1



Mosque of Ibn Tulun in Cairo.

sciences, in their time. In the late 13th century, the Mamluk sultan Qalawun established a hospital in Cairo, which, as both a teaching and treatment center, was clearly intended to be the foremost medical facility of its day in the Islamic world. It was also at this very time that his contemporary,

the famous doctor and former Chief Physician of Egypt, Ibn al-Nafis (607–687A.H. /1210–1288 A.D.) advanced his theory regarding the lesser circulation of the blood several centuries before Europeans arrived at similar conclusions [5].

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Conflicts of interest

There are no conflicts of interest.

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