THE EMERGENCE AND THE OBJECTIVE
OF ISLAMIC MEDICINE
FOR THE PRESERVATION OF HEALTH*

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In order to appreciate the value of the Islamic medical system, it is essential to know the emergence and the objective of Islamic medicine since they are directly connected with the religious command to preserve the health of humans. In Surah al-Baqarah, verse 247, the command to seek medical attention occurs side by side with references to expand one’s knowledge, which is fundamentally important for humanity—meaning that Islam concerns itself not only with the expansion of knowledge, but the improvement of health and body. In this context, the religious scholar Imam al-Shafi’i (d. 204/820) stresses that there is no knowledge after the knowledge of lawful (halāl) and unlawful (harām) a except the science of medicine. This

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1 In Islamic medical system, preservation of health (hifz al-ṣihḥah) is the most important branch of Islamic medicine since it is primarily concerned with the prevention of illness rather than with cure. No doubt, perfect health is a wish that humans crave for. In the Shari’ah, health is referred to as a state in which human beings function normally and in sound perfect condition for a healthy body, mind and spirit.

indicates that the science of medicine should be considered as one of the noble sciences directly after the knowledge of ħalāl and ħarām. This is because, like the knowledge of ħalāl and ħarām, the services of medical science are needed by Muslims including young and old, male and female, rich and poor, the learned and the illiterate and common alike. The present paper will study the emergence and the objective of Islamic medicine and their relevancies to the preservation of health. 'Ilm al-Ṭibb; al-Ṭibb and its implication for the preservation of health; the theory of bodily balance in Islamic medicine; mental health in Islamic medicine and the concept of darūrah (compelling necessity) in Islamic law for the preservation of health.

A. The Emergence of 'Ilm al-Ṭibb (Medical Science)

'Ilm al-Ṭibb, like other sciences and fields of scientific study, developed gradually. As far as its emergence is concerned, Ishāq b. Ḥunayn (d.297/910) in his Tārīkh al-Ṭibbāʾ, is credited with being the first scholar to write systematically on the history of medicine and its development, particularly with respect to its chronological development. In this treatise, Ṣunnyān states that at the time of al-Wāthiq, the ‘Abbasid caliph, a group of philosophers and physicians, among this group, Bukhtishū’, Ibn Māsawayh, Ṣunnyān and others, were asked by the caliph about the origin of medicine, whether it was by transmission, experience or reason. In this treatise, Ishāq b. Ṣunnyān divided

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4 According to al-Bīrūnī, Ishāq’s Tārīkh al-Ṭibbāʾ provides enough information on this field, if it had been acquired without any correction or alteration by corrupt copyists and transmitters. See Al-Bīrūnī, Risālah al-Bīrūnī