

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.<sup>1</sup> In *Sūrah 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 Imām al-Shāfi'ī (d. 204/ 820) stresses that there is no knowledge after the knowledge of lawful (*ḥalāl*) and unlawful (*ḥarām*) except the science of medicine.<sup>2</sup> This

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<sup>1</sup> In Islamic medical system, preservation of health (*ḥifz al-ṣiḥḥah*) 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.

<sup>2</sup> Al-Dhahabī, *al-Ṭibb al-Nabawī* (Istanbul: Hakikat Kitabevi, 1990), 125; 'Abd al-Laṭīf al-Baghdādī, *al-Ṭibb min al-Kitāb wa al-Sunnah*, ed. 'Abd al-Mu'ṭī Amin Qal'aji (Beirut: Dār al-Ma'rifah, 1988), 187.

indicates that the science of medicine should be considered as one of the noble sciences directly after the knowledge of *ḥalāl* and *ḥarām*. This is because, like the knowledge of *ḥalāl* and *ḥarām*, 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 *ḍarūrah* (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-Aṭibbā'*,<sup>3</sup> 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, Ṣunayn states that at the time of al-Wāthiq, the 'Abbasid caliph, a group of philosophers and physicians, among this group, Bukhtishū', Ibn Māsawayh, Ṣunayn and others, were asked by the caliph about the origin of medicine, whether it was by transmission, experience or reason.<sup>4</sup> In this treatise, Ishāq b. Ṣunayn divided

<sup>3</sup> Ishāq ibn ṣunayn's *Tārīkh al-Aṭibbā'* was edited with an introduction by Franz Rosenthal, in *Oriens* 7 (1954): 55–80; Ibn al-Nadīm, *al-Fihrist* (Beirut: Dār al-Ma'rifah li al-Nashr wa al-Tawzī', n.d), 345–46, Ibn Abī Ulaybi'ah, '*Uyūn al-Anbā' fī Ṭabaqāt al-Aṭibbā'*', ed. Nizār Riḍā (Beirut: Manshūrāt Dār al-Maktabah al-Ḥayāh, n.d), 11–17, hereafter cited as '*Uyūn*'; 'Abdullah 'Abd al-Rāziq Mas'ūd al-Ṣā'id, *Origins of Medicine* (Ammān: Dār al-Diyā'), 1987.

<sup>4</sup> According to al-Birūnī, Ishāq's *Tārīkh al-Aṭibbā'* provides enough information on this field, if it had been acquired without any correction or alteration by corrupt copyists and transmitters. See Al-Birūnī, *Risālah al-Birūnī*