

The Contribution of Muslims in Developing Modern Hospital System

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The hospital was one of the most developed institutions of medieval Islam and one of the high-water marks of the Muslim civilization. The hospitals of medieval Islam were hospitals in the modern sense of the word.¹

Piety and Philanthropy cannot very well be divorced in medieval Islam, but by observing the Muslim hospitals and other institutions of charity and social welfare it is seen quite clearly that the idea of public assistance had developed beyond what piety alone could have produced. A discriminating and comprehensive consideration of the necessity of public assistance and social welfare, beyond mere religiosity, may be said to have been responsible for the quality and quantity of the hospitals of Islam.

Moreover, the humanitarian features of the Islamic medieval hospital must not be allowed to eclipse its high medical standing per se. The hospital was one of the most developed institutions of medieval Islam and one of the high-water marks of the Muslim civilisation. The hospitals of medieval Islam were hospitals in the modern sense of the word. In them the best available medical knowledge was put into practice. They were specialised institutions. Unlike the Byzantine hospitals, they did not have a mixed function of which the treatment of the sick was only one part.

Of the pre-Islamic hospitals, the temples of healing, represented mainly by the Greek *asklepion*, were places to which the idea of miraculous cure was far from being alien. The psychological effect and the mysterious atmosphere of these temples must certainly have played a great part as far as the experience of the patients was concerned. Although psychological factors were not ignored or excluded from the Islamic medieval hospitals, the essential and epoch-making characteristic of these institutions was their insistence on high standards and their strict adherence to scientific medicine.

The king of Egypt Mansur Qalawun (1279-1290), while still a prince, fell ill during an expedition which he was directing in Syria. He was so impressed by the Nuri Hospital of Damascus, founded in 1154 by Nuruddin Mahmud Zangi ibn Aksungur, in which he was treated, that he made a vow to found a similar institution as soon as he ascended the throne. The famous Mansuri Hospital of Cairo thus resulted from that enthusiasm borne out of close acquaintance with Damascus's Nuri Hospital. This shows that the larger hospitals of medieval Islam were fit to cater to people of highest social standing.

As the hospital in Islam reached a high standard to which it had not attained before, it must have gone through a process of development within the World of Islam itself. The first and earliest six hospitals of Islam may be said to mark an initial process of speedy evolution spanning a period of less than two centuries during which, beginning apparently from a modest status, the Islamic hospital became a stronghold of scientific medicine and adapted itself to Muslim ideologies and economic requisites. It thus acquired a stabilised form, spread widely, and became an integral part of city life.

The hospital was one of the greatest achievements of Muslims in the medieval times. The concept of equality, beneficence and non-maleficence was first introduced in Muslim hospitals named as **Bimaristans** at that time. In Persian, "bimar" translates to "ill person" and "stan" translates to "place."

The Islamic hospitals in the medieval times focused on limiting the spread of contagious diseases and the Hospitals of Baghdad built in the 9th and 10th century had different wards for different diseases. Health workers were employed to clean the hospital and take care of the patients. The employees served both day and night shifts to ensure they were all well-rested. Woods (2004) has opined that Muslim hospitals were the first to feature competency tests for doctors, drug purity regulations, nurses and interns and advanced surgical procedures. The Muslim physicians of the

medieval ages had developed a better understanding of the pathology of contagion, accordingly they played key role in creating hospitals with separate wards for specific ailment for the first time in order to keep the people with contagious diseases away from other patients.

Famous historian Will Durant (1950), while writing about the Al-Mansuri hospital in Cairo, Egypt, asserts that the hospital had a spacious quadrangular enclosure with four buildings around a courtyard 'adorned with arcades and cooled with fountains and brooks.' He further describes that the hospital had 'separate wards for diverse diseases and for convalescents' and was equipped with laboratories, a dispensary, out-patient clinics, kitchens, baths, a library, a religious place for worship, lecture halls and 'pleasant accommodations for the insane' (Durant, 1950: 330-331)

There are countless links between the current day practiced medicine and the medical advancements achieved by Muslims in the medieval times. The knowledge was the transferred to Europe from the Middle East and formed the basis of Modern Medicine.

References

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