

**ALI BIN ABBAS
AL-AHWAZI**

*The Analyser of
The Medical Science*

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He is Abu Al-Hassan Ali Bin Abbas Al-Ahwazi, known in the west as Hally Abbas. He was born in Al-Ahwaz city in Iran and died in 384 A.H. (994 A.D.).

Ali Bin Abbas was most famous as a doctor. Physicians as well as patients flocked to him for medical teaching as well as medical treatment.

In his book 'The Islamic Civilization and Its Effect Upon World Development' Galal Mazhar says that Ali Bin Abbas was one of the most outstanding Arab physicians known to Europe and his medical writings came to be studied as reference books in the teaching of medicine. He may be the first Moslem physician known to the Latin west.

Al-Ahwazi left no much writings. But one single book of his titled The Complete Medical Profession (**Kamil Al-Sina'a Al-tibbiyya**) came to be widespread in the east and the west alike. Beside its theoretical value the book was based upon medical practice in the operation room itself.

Edward G. Brown wrote a book titled 'The Arab Medicine' where he says that Hally Abbas was a brilliant physician and a self-taught scientist who read widely in his field... "His book is a treasure both for medical science and medical treatment. It is well classified... the best readable and most useful of the great Arabic medical writings".

The authority of this book remained unchallenged until the appearance of Avicenna's book 'Canon of Medicine (**Kanun fi'l-tibb**). The second was not a substitute for the former but an excellent addition to it.

Samy Haddad, in a lecture at the American University of Beirut said that Al-Ahwazi's book is "one of the

monumental Arabic remains handed down to us from the fourth century Hidjira. It's classification into parts and sub-parts brings it nearer to modern medical books than to older ones". In his view that book is the best Arabic one in its field.

So many comments by eminent medical scientists agree that Al-Ahwazi's book is a comprehensive medical encyclopaedia that came to be a reference source consulted by physicians to understand diseases, their causes, symptoms, diagnoses and prescription of suitable therapy.

The importance of the book brought in many European attempts to have it translated from Arabic into Latin. At last **Constantine the African** did it between 1070-1078 A.D. But, unfortunately, Constantine attributed the authorship to himself and dropped the original writer's name altogether. The book became so widespread in Europe and not until the beginning of the twelfth century A.D. when **Etienne the Antioch** managed a new translation of the book that scholars came to know about the real author. The reason behind the new translation was due to Etienne's doubts in some remarks made in the former translation together with other suspicions in Constantine's ability to write such a book. He started a search for the manuscript until he found it. The new translation came bearing the original author's name and including a bitter attack on Constantine.

In this famous book Al-Ahwazi stressed the importance of health protection as prior to health treatment. He encouraged sport playing as the best protective means of man's health especially before meals. In his view sports strengthen and harden the human body, improve and quicken digestion and help to analyse the food remnants through the digestive system. No clearer example can be

given, he continues, than to notice the good health of hard working people and their higher relative immunity against diseases. However, Ibn Abbas recommends that sports should not be practised directly after meals.

Al-Ahwazi studied epilepsy thoroughly until he came to remarkable findings that remained valid throughout the ages.

In Arabia the population used to suffer severely from eye diseases, and, for cure, physicians used to prescribe strong medicines that could harm the eyes. Ibn Abbas attended to that serious problem. The eye, in his opinion, is a highly sensitive human organ that should not be medicated with strong, variant or successive drugs. If the reason behind the sick eye comes from heat, dust or smoke then the first curative step depends upon the removal of the causes.

As to dentistry Al-Ahwazi made contributions. He gave a detailed explanation of how to bring back to normal a broken lower jaw.

Although he was a pioneer Moslem scientist to discover the importance of blood circulation in blood vessels the discovery was misleadingly attributed to **William Harvey**, the famous English physician (born in 1578 and died 80 years later).

During his time tuberculosis was a very widespread disease. **Al-Ahwazi** realized the difficulty of any curative measures. To him the cause lay in the continuous movement of the lungs, that movement which prevents the healing of the ulcerated area. This point, in itself, was a pioneering idea by **Al-Ahwazi**.

He also had a developed theory in the movement of a woman's uterus. To him the developed foetus does not come out spontaneously at birth but is expelled outward by the mother's uterus. He also wrote on the development of the foetus inside the mother's womb in such a scientific and experimental way that aroused the astonishment of modern scientists.

It is curiously enough to know that Al-Ahwazi had written on cancer in a woman's uterus. He gave an excellent scientific diagnosis of malignant tumours which hinder pregnancy whether the afflicted is the father or mother.

In the field of surgery Al-Ahwazi towered above so many others. He performed several surgical operations including nearly all parts of the human body. It was a pride for the Arab and Moslem physicians when he succeeded by surgery, in getting out a calculus. He wrote a detailed explanation of the operation.

On tonsillitis he wrote extensively and did many surgeries in the field. Interesting enough is his description of the operation: "... the patient has to sit with his face towards the sun. He has to open wide his mouth, a servant to pull back the patient's head and another to press down his tongue with a tool. Next you pierce a hook into one of the tonsils and pulls it out without doing any harm to the membranes around, then you have it cut with the suitable tool. The same is to be done with the second. **Immediately** after the operation the patient has to gargle his mouth by cooled rose water and vinegar."

On the morals of the medical profession Al-Ahwazi gave many advices:

‘... a physician has to be pure, intelligent, religious and observant of God’s rules. He has to be good mannered, far from all uncleanness, disgrace and dissolution. The secrets of his patients have to remain hidden from any person whoever he is. He has to stay permanently under call whether at his hospital or for home visits. He should discuss the cases of his patients with other clever colleagues..’ “... Once he observes all this a physician would make a successful career and people would trust him and he would be loved and honoured.’

In brief we can safely state that Ali Bin Abbas Al-Ahwazi was an outstanding Moslem authority in the medical field. He left no much writings but his renowned book was encyclopaedic in theoretical and clinical medicine. With its original unprecedented findings the book was a driving force for the development of European medical science. But for Al-Ahwazi, Al-Razi, Avicenna and others in the Arab and Islamic civilization Europe would have remained in its dark ages.

Noteworthy to say as well that Al-Ahwazi was famous for his modesty and his charity to the poor. His wide learning has refined and ennobled his soul until he came out as a distinguished scientist of all times. His sincerity and devotion have stamped all his deeds. He was known for his piety, his righteousness, moral courage and his refutation of all vanities and debauchery. Western scientists were well aware of this when they spared no effort in translating his medical writings from Arabic into different European languages especially Latin. His book was characterised by its smooth scientific style and its clear objective ideas, qualities that contributed to the great importance the book has reached.

