

Contributions of Muslim Scientists to Medicine and Related Sciences

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CHAPTER THIRTEEN

IBN AL-KHATIB AND HIS THEORY OF CONTAGION

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13.1 INTRODUCTION

The main focus of this chapter is to answer who is the first scientist discovered and described the theory of contagion. In addition, the significant of this chapter is to evaluate Ibn Al-Khatib's contributions to the progress of medicine. The method used in this chapter is as follows: a brief review of Ibn Al-Khatib's life is given, as well as a description on his theory of contagion and what was the belief on his time about diseases. The last of the great Andalusian physicians was Ibn al-Khatib, who was also a noted historian, poet, and statesman. Ibn Al-Khatib played important role in the political and intellectual life of Granada during the 14th century. Ibn al-Khatib was the last representative of the Andalusian medical tradition (Brockopp and Thomas, 2008, p. 38). Ibn Al-Khatib wrote this plague treatise soon after the initial outbreak of the Black Death in 1349. His work *Muqni'at al-sa'il 'an al-marad al-ha'il* (the satisfaction of the Questioner Regarding the Appalling Illness) dealt chiefly with the medical aspects of the plague (Phillips, 1998, pp. 47 - 62). Soon after his death, the energies of the Muslims of al-Andalus were wholly absorbed in the long costly struggle against the Christian force (Brockopp and Thomas, 2008, p. 38).

13.2 THE BELIEF IN HIS TIME ABOUT DISEASES

In the middle of the 14th century "black death" was ravaging Muslim World and Europe, Western Christians believed the plague was God's punishment for a sinful society, that the disease was contagious, and that measures to avoid contagion such as quarantine and flight would be effective. At the same period, Muslims believed that the plague was God's will but that God's will was unknowable and unavoidable. They further believed that disease could be seen as purification for the soul, not a punishment, and that the plague was not contagious. However both of them stood helpless, considering it an act of God (Phillips, 1998, pp. 47 - 62).

13.3 HIS THEORY OF CONTAGION

Before Ibn Al-Khatib, Ibn Sina discovered the contagious nature of infectious diseases in the early 11th century. He introduced quarantine as a means of limiting the spread of contagious and infectious diseases in *The Canon of Medicine* (Syed, 2002, pp. 2-9). He also stated that bodily secretion is contaminated by foul foreign earthly bodies before being infected, but he did not view them as primary causes of disease (Beretta, 2003, pp. 129-154).