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“Into St. John’s fire so that all misfortune may go into the air with the smoke.” – Paracelsus

My thesis looks at the influence of the man known in his Latinized name as Avicenna (980 - 1037 CE) during the early to mid Renaissance period. Avicenna was a Persian polymath born outside of the town Bukhara in Uzbekistan. He created a vast library worth of treatises, ranging up to 450, of which many important topics at the time were discussed. The genre he was most famous for was medicine, as hundreds of his works dealt with treatments and analyses on yet untreatable ailments. Avicenna lead a curious life filled with controversial political decisions, religious discrimination, and potentially illegal dissections. He was gifted in his ability to absorb information and, with hardships in between, gained access to many libraries in exchange for medical treatment. His childhood in Bukhara proved to be extremely beneficial for him, as his family held some social standing, which gave him the early access to a medical education that he needed. Toward the end of his lifetime he accomplished his most important feat, the completed edition of the Canon. This work would go on to completely dominate the medical field in Europe following its translations two centuries past his death. In particular, I look at the Italian universities that he affected and found primary sources with curricula that showcase his works being extensively used at the schools. Avicenna’s legacy is difficult to quantify due to its sheer magnitude. His books saw consistent usage at schools, professors would undertake decades-long breaks simply to write commentaries on the Canon, and many crucial physicians at the time used Avicenna’s work as the backbone to their own groundbreaking books. Even when accounting for the number of references and presence around Italy, his more abstract contributions are another topic altogether. Innovations in cardiovascular treatments, the pioneering of pulseology and better regulatory standards for scientific experimentation are all achievements Avicenna can say he pioneered. Given this large legacy, I look to qualify it in contrast to the other scholars that were prominent at the time. In particular, the surge of a humanist field may give the impression that Galen or Hippocrates were the leaders in medical theory at the time. Such position could realistically be challenged with the clout of someone of Avicenna’s caliber, and so I embark on convincing readers that instead of looking to Greece or Rome for medical guidance in the Renaissance, they should glance to Persia.

Sources Include

