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THE USE OF THE KORAN AND THE SUNNA IN THE MEDICINE OF THE PROPHET

1. Introduction

The development of Islamic medicine began in the late 8th and 9th centuries, at the same time as extensive translations from the Galenic tradition were undertaken. Among pious Muslims the infiltration of Galenic medicine and other Hellenic sciences was not regarded positively. The attitude of the pious can be exemplified by Yāqūt, who expressed his concern that even basic Islamic teachings were forgotten in the eagerness to copy the Greeks.¹ The pious Muslim view was that the basis for all sciences should be found in the Koran and they especially cherished the verse "We have neglected nothing in the Book" (Koran 6:38).²

Medicine was perhaps even more controversial than the other sciences, because it clearly opposed the principle of *tawakkul*, reliance on God alone. Illnesses were considered by the opponents of medicine as acts of God, and acting against God's will was wrong. This idea originated in early Islam. It is related that Abu Bakr refused treatment, claiming that the physician had said: "I do what I want". Abu Bakr referred to the Koranic verse where God is said to be "Doer of what He will" (Koran 85:16). Thus the physician discredited himself by equalling himself to God. For the pious, God was the real physician, the master of health and illness.³ With the development of medical science the question of the lawfulness of medicine became more acute. The refusal of treatment, *tarak at-tadāwī*, was incorporated into the teachings of practical *tawakkul* among the *ṣūfīs* in the 9th century. Contrary to other *ṣūfī* practices, the idea was also supported among the pious outside *ṣūfī* circles, but not for long. Already in the 9th century voices were heard opposing it.⁴ Instead dutiful Muslims took up and stressed the importance of the tradition "for every illness there is a cure". This tradition was interpreted as permission to treat the sick and study medicine.

Even though the pious in general approved of medical treatment, they were not

¹ Ignaz Goldziher, *Stellung der alten islamischen Orthodoxie zu den antiken Wissenschaften. Abhandlungen der Preussischen Akademie der Wissenschaften, phil.-hist. Klasse* 8. Berlin 1916, 4.

² Ignaz Goldziher, *op. cit.* 6; the translations of verses from the Koran are taken from Marmaduke Pickthall's *The meaning of the Glorious Coran*. Beirut s.a. Also the numbering of the verses follows his translation.

³ Benedikt Reinert, 'Die Lehre vom *tawakkul* in der klassischen Sufik.' Berthold Spuler (hrsg.), *Studien zur Sprache, Geschichte und Kultur des Islamischen Orients*, Neue Folge 3. Berlin 1968, 212-213.

⁴ Reinert, *op. cit.* 207.

necessarily eager supporters of Graeco-Islamic medicine. This led to the forming of a more Islamic type of medicine, the medicine of the Prophet, which was based on the Koran and Sunna. Those traditions of the Prophet which dealt with medical subjects were collected and put together to form books entitled 'the Prophet's medicine', *ṭibb an-nabī*. The earliest such titles date from the early 9th century.⁵ Some of the books contained only sayings of the Prophet, either including or excluding the chains of transmitters. In some the material was arranged in accordance with the order of presentation familiar from the medical books of the Graeco-Islamic school.⁶ The later books did, however, also include parts with medical theory, where illnesses were classified and their causes explained.

Because the basic ideas of the Prophet's medicine were derived from the Koran and Sunna, the majority of its authorities were not physicians but experts on traditions and Islamic jurisprudence. The jurists were very much concerned to combine prevalent medical practices with the rulings of the Koran and Sunna. The aim of this article is to study how three authors who wrote on the subject of the Prophet's medicine used traditions and the text of the Koran to form a medical theory and to legitimize medical treatment. The theory of the Prophet's medicine shows how the Koran and the Sunna can be used to support a scientific theory.

2. The texts and the authors

Three texts will be examined in this article: Ibn Qayyim al-Jauziyya's *aṭ-Ṭibb an-nabawī* is the oldest, dating from the first half of the 14th century; aṣ-Ṣanaubarī's *Kitāb ar-raḥma fī ṭ-ṭibb wa-l-ḥikma* dates from the latter part of the 14th or early 15th century; the most recent is Jalāladdīn as-Suyūfī's *Ṭibb an-nabī*, dating from the latter part of the 15th century.⁷ Ibn Qayyim's and Suyūfī's texts have a separate chapter on medical theory before the explanation of individual diseases. Ṣanaubarī calls his book an abridgement and he deals very briefly with theoretical issues, concentrating on practical suggestions for treatment. However, the manner in which he describes certain crucial illnesses and cures demonstrate his views on medical theory. The fact cannot, however, be avoided that Ibn Qayyim's views are more prominent in the following discussion. This is due to the fact that his medical theory is the most elaborate and comprehensive of the three.

Ibn Qayyim al-Jauziyya (1292-1350) was Ibn Taimiyya's most faithful pupil and became a respected scholar of the Hanbalite school. Ibn Qayyim was a prolific writer and

⁵ Ömer Recep, *Ṭibb an-nabī*. (Diss.) Philipps-Universität, Marburg/Lahn 1969, 4. Also in Muḥammad Nāzim an-Nasīmī, *aṭ-Ṭibb an-nabawī wa-ʿilm al-ḥadīth* 1. Beirut 1407 A.H./1987, 30-35.

⁶ Recep, *op. cit.* 4-13; an-Nasīmī, *op. cit.* 36-111.

⁷ Ibn Qayyim al-Jauziyya, *aṭ-Ṭibb an-nabawī*. Ed. ʿAbd al-Ghanī ʿAbd al-Khāliq, medical notes by ʿĀdil al-Azharī, traditions verified by Maḥmūd Faraj al-ʿUqda. Cairo 1957. aṣ-Ṣanaubarī, *Kitāb ar-raḥma fī ṭ-ṭibb wa-l-ḥikma*. Cairo 1313 A.H. (1895/1896). I have not studied Suyūfī's text in the original Arabic but have used Cyril Elgood's English translation: *Tibb-ul-Nabbi* or *Medicine of the Prophet*. Translation into English with preface by Cyril Elgood, *Osiris* 14/1962, 33-192. an-Nasīmī, *op. cit.* 100-111, gives Suyūfī's book the title *al-Manhaj as-sawī wa-l-manhal ar-rawī fī ṭ-ṭibb an-nabawī*, manuscript Dār al-Kutub aḏ-Ḍāhiriyya 168 (3127). The description of the content differs from the content of Elgood's translation. However, Ömer Recep, *op. cit.* 10, gives Elgood's translation as being that of *al-Manhaj as-sawī*.

produced a considerable number of writings on various topics: theology, jurisprudence, political theory and mysticism. Among his works there are three dealing with medicine. *ad-Dā' wa-d-dawā'* is a book on religious ethics and moral disease.⁸ According to Carl Brockelmann, the book contains information about the secret powers of the Koran as a cure. *Ṭibb al-qulūb* is an extract of some unnamed larger work.⁹ The third book, *aṭ-Ṭibb an-nabawī*, is a systematic and comprehensive presentation of one type of medicine.

According to Brockelmann, Muḥammad al-Mahdāwī b. °Alī b. Ibrāhīm aṣ-Ṣanaubarī al-Yamanī al-Hindī is the actual writer of the book *Kitāb ar-raḥma fī ṭ-ṭibb wa-l-ḥikma*, even though it is often erroneously ascribed to Jalāladdīn as-Suyūfī. It has not been possible for the present writer to gain any additional information about him apart from the sparse facts given by Brockelmann: he was from South Arabia and belonged to the Ismailite sect. Brockelmann classifies him under writers on medicine, but whether he was a medical practitioner cannot be determined. No other writings are mentioned. He died in 1412.¹⁰

Jalāladdīn as-Suyūfī (1445-1505) was an expert on traditions and a jurist of the Shafī'ite school. He followed his father as professor of jurisprudence at Shaikhūniyya. He has left an impressive number of writings on a multitude of topics covering the various fields of Islamic science.¹¹

3. The acceptability of medical treatment

All three writers—Ibn Qayyim, Ṣanaubarī and Suyūfī—accept medical treatment as permissible. Ṣanaubarī does not even discuss the matter, but takes it for granted. Ibn Qayyim and Suyūfī are more aware of the controversies on the matter and discuss the problem at length. They both base their acceptance of medicine and medical treatment on the Prophet's tradition: "for every illness there is a cure". Ibn Qayyim takes up the arguments of those who reject treatment and condemns them in strong words. He quotes the Koran and claims that they are like the idolators who say "Had Allah willed, we had not worshipped aught beside Him, we and our fathers" (16:35). He also mentions the Prophet's tradition where some Bedouins came to the Prophet asking whether they could treat the sick or not. Ibn Qayyim says that only the Bedouins could be ignorant enough to ask such a question. The Prophet's best companions never did so because they knew God and His wisdom so well that they did not have such doubts. (Ibn Qayyim, 10.)

In Ibn Qayyim's opinion, treating the sick on the one hand and relying on God on the other are not incompatible. God has given both the illnesses and the cures; thus using the cures which God has given is actually doing God's will. Refusing treatment in favour of total reliance is actually refusing the God-given means. A person who believes that by rejecting treatment he is relying on God is in fact rejecting God. (Ibn Qayyim, 10.)

Suyūfī also stresses the importance of the tradition "for every illness there is a cure"

⁸ Joseph Norment Bell, *Love theory in later Hanbalite Islam*. Albany 1979, 95.

⁹ Carl Brockelmann, *Geschichte der arabischen Literatur* 2. 2. Aufl., Leiden 1949, 128.

¹⁰ Brockelmann, *op. cit.* 242.

¹¹ Brockelmann, *op. cit.* 180-206.

and adds as a further proof of the acceptability of treatment that, on the evidence of several traditions, the Prophet himself treated the sick and allowed himself to be treated when ill. He does, however, quote extensively from traditions of the Prophet and his companions which propound the view that even though medical treatment is permissible, it is better to do without it. Whereas Ibn Qayyim totally ignores these traditions, Suyūfī relates faithfully how Abu Bakr, Abu l-Dardā' and the Prophet himself considered reliance on God better than medicine. He does not try to explain the evident contradictions in the contents of the ḥadīths, but only sums up the discussion by stating that in his opinion an individual should not forget the existence of reasons and causes and that a medical practitioner should do everything he can for a patient and only then place his reliance in God as to the final result. He supports his opinion by a non-medical tradition, which makes precautions permissible. As the final authority he refers to the Koran: "Let them take their precautions and their arms" (4:102). (Suyūfī, 123-125.) Suyūfī considers it only reasonable to treat the sick, but he does not condemn those who refuse treatment. In his opinion, God has permitted the treatment but there is no obligation.

4. The purpose of medicine

Both Suyūfī and Ibn Qayyim consider preservation and restoration of health as the objectives of medicine. In Suyūfī's opinion, restoration to health is the best gift of God to man (Suyūfī, 51). Suyūfī does not elaborate on the point but leaves it at that. Ibn Qayyim goes further and divides the objectives of medicine into three categories: preservation of health, restoration of health and prevention of illness. This division he bases on the words of the Koran. He quotes verses of the Koran, in which he sees references to these medical principles. The preservation of health is mentioned in the verse about fasting: "and (for) him who is sick among you, or on a journey, (the same) number of other days" (2:184). Ibn Qayyim interprets the verse as God's allowing a traveller to postpone his fasting, because He does not want the traveller to fall ill. Added to the hardships of the journeying, fasting would endanger the health of the traveller. (Ibn Qayyim, 2.)

The principle of restoring health is evident in the verse about pilgrimage: "And whoever among you is sick or hath an ailment of the head must pay a ransom of fasting or almsgiving or offering" (2:196). According to Ibn Qayyim's interpretation, the sick person does not take part in the actual pilgrimage, but is allowed to shave his head like a pilgrim. He then explains the shaving of the head of the sick to be an example of God's guidance for treating illnesses. When the hair is shaved, the pores in the head open up, the steam collected in the head is released and the patient's condition improves. (Ibn Qayyim, 2-3.) Here Ibn Qayyim deviates from the usual interpretation of this verse, which mainly concentrates on explanations clarifying "the ailment of the head" as lice or other vermin or as a headache.¹² Here Ibn Qayyim widens the meaning of the verse and considers it to contain the principle of releasing substances from the body in order to restore health.

The third objective of medicine, the prevention of illnesses, is also found in the

¹² aḡ-Ṭabarī, *Tafsīr* IV. Ed. by Muḥammad Muḥammad Shākir and Aḥmad Muḥammad Shākir. 2nd ed., Cairo s.a., 54-86.

Koran, in the verse dealing with ablutions: "And if ye be ill...then go to high clean soil and rub your faces and your hands (therewith)" (4:43). God has here allowed the sick to perform the ablutions with sand in order to prevent them getting from the water something which their bodies cannot tolerate. This Ibn Qayyim sees as God's guidance for the prevention of illnesses. (Ibn Qayyim, 3.)

5. The role of the physician

Even though God is considered to be the ultimate cause of illness and cure, the physician has his role to play. To illustrate the duty of the physician, Ibn Qayyim relates a tradition in which Abraham holds a discussion with God. Abraham asks: "Lord, where do the illnesses come from?" God answers: "From me." Abraham: "Lord, where do the cures come from?" God answers: "From me." Abraham: "What does the physician then do?" God answers: "The physician is the one to whom I send the cure." (Ibn Qayyim, 11-12.) Suyūfī agrees with Ibn Qayyim that the physicians are the ones who find the cures for illnesses. He argues further that the physician's duty to examine a patient and determine the illness is actually mentioned in the Koran. The verse he refers to is: "Lo, therein verily are portents for those who read the signs." (15:75; Suyūfī, 132-133.) This verse belongs to the story about Lot and the signs given to the people of his city, but Suyūfī wants to extend the meaning also to studying the symptoms of illnesses and diagnosing them in order to find a cure.

Both Ibn Qayyim and Suyūfī stress the importance of relying only on professional physicians, who really know medicine. Suyūfī condemns quackery on the basis of the Prophet's view. He reports a tradition where the Prophet said that if a person who is not a recognized physician gives medical care and causes the death of his patient or injures him, he is held responsible for his actions (Suyūfī, 130). Ibn Qayyim relates the opinions of various jurists about the responsibility and punishments of a quack (Ibn Qayyim, 109-112).

Who then is a good physician? Ibn Qayyim lists twenty principles that a physician should follow in order to be considered a good professional. Among other things he should possess a full knowledge of all categories of treatment: natural cures, spiritual cures (*ilāhiyya*) and cures with the help of imagination (*ʿilāj bi-t-takhyīl*). Natural cures are found in nature, whereas spiritual cures are given by God to the prophets. Prayer, reliance on God and almsgiving are examples of spiritual cures. They are included in the medicine of the Prophet, which is thus superior to all other forms of medicine. The third form of curing, with the help of imagination, seems to refer to the psychological cures known in Islamic medicine. Ibn Qayyim does not explain this form of cure, but merely says that imagination can sometimes achieve more than drugs. (Ibn Qayyim, 112-114.) Even though it is the doctor's duty to examine and treat a physical illness, he should not concentrate solely on curing the body. In Ibn Qayyim's opinion, the curing of the soul should always have first priority. Damage to the body is temporary, whereas damage to the soul is eternal. (Ibn Qayyim, 18.) Suyūfī refers to Hippocrates when explaining the duties and the character of a physician. According to Hippocrates, a physician should not

administer deadly drugs, nor perform abortions. He should be moderate and eager to help the poor. He should also be soft in talk and close to God. This reference to Hippocrates is an abridgement of the Hippocratic oath and testament, which formed the core of medical ethics in the Islamic world.¹³ Suyūfī follows the Islamic formulation, which leaves out the names of the Greek gods. He feels the need, however, to explain why he has quoted Hippocrates. He admits that Hippocrates was not a believer, but maintains that his position as the father of Greek physicians and the head of medical science is enough to justify his authority. (Suyūfī, 66.)

All three authors—Ibn Qayyim, Ṣanaubarī and Suyūfī—accepted some earlier physicians as authorities. They all appreciate Hippocrates. Ṣanaubarī calls him 'wise Hippocrates' (Ṣanaubarī, 13). Suyūfī praises him as the founder of medicine, and, as a proof of the great respect Hippocrates enjoys, Suyūfī mentions that his tomb is still frequently visited (Suyūfī, 66). Ibn Qayyim says that he was for the Greek what al-Ḥārith ibn Kalada was for the Arabs (Ibn Qayyim, 93). This contemporary of the Prophet, the semi-legendary physician of the Arabs from the school of Gundeshāpūr, is also referred to by Suyūfī. Of the Greek doctors Galen too is mentioned and Suyūfī considers him the equal of Hippocrates (Suyūfī, 129). Of the representatives of Islamic medicine Ibn Sīnā and Ibn Māsawaih are most often referred to. The founder of the Shafī'ite school of law, Muḥammad Ibn Idrīs ash-Shāfi'ī (died 820), is included by Suyūfī and Ibn Qayyim among those who have an extensive knowledge of medicine. Suyūfī tells that Shāfi'ī had deplored the fate of medicine in his time. He had said that the Arabs had lost their knowledge and replaced their own physicians by Jews and Christians, referring to the many non-Muslim practitioners of Islamic medicine (Suyūfī, 129).¹⁴

Suyūfī also provides the information that the two Hanbalite scholars Ibn Taimiyya and al-Wāsiṭī, who were both Ibn Qayyim's teachers, were, in addition to their other accomplishments, skilled in medicine (Suyūfī, 129). As to the earlier authorities on the Prophet's medicine, Suyūfī and Ibn Qayyim refer to Abu Nu'aim, but merely as an authority on the Prophet's traditions and not as a source of theoretical information (Suyūfī, 88, 106; Ibn Qayyim, 246, 313).¹⁵ Suyūfī also refers to Ibn Qayyim but only as a source of some medical traditions.¹⁶

¹³ Manfred Ullmann, *Die Medizin im Islam*. Berthold Spuler (hrsg.), *Handbuch der Orientalistik*, Abt. I, Ergänzungsband VI:1. Leiden 1970, 223. The texts of the oath and testament are in Ibn Abī Usaibi'a, *Uyūn al-anbā' fī ṭabaqāt al-aṭibbā'*. Ed. Nizār Riḍā. Beirut 1965, 45-47.

¹⁴ The persons listed are mentioned several times throughout the texts, but here only one page reference is given: al-Ḥārith ibn Kalada also in Suyūfī, 55; Galen also in Ibn Qayyim, 322; Ibn Sīnā in Suyūfī, 55, in Ibn Qayyim, 219 (Ibn Qayyim refers to Ibn Sīnā frequently as Ṣāhib al-Qānūn); Ibn Māsawaih in Suyūfī, 103 and Ibn Qayyim, 219; ash-Shāfi'ī in Suyūfī, 129 and in Ibn Qayyim, 320.

¹⁵ Suyūfī, e.g. 88, 106; Ibn Qayyim, e.g. 246, 313. an-Nasīmī, *op. cit.* 92-94, says that Ibn Qayyim's main source was al-Kaḥḥāl Ibn Ṭarkhān's (1252-1320) *al-Aḥkām an-nabawiyya fī ṣ-ṣinā'a ṭ-ṭibbiyya*, even though Ibn Qayyim does not mention him. When comparing the two texts an-Nasīmī found in them several similarities, even identical expressions. Ibn Qayyim has, however, systematized and developed al-Kaḥḥāl's ideas.

¹⁶ Suyūfī, 89, 94, 128, 140. Cyril Elgood transcribes the name "Ibn ul-Jūzī", but in his introductory remarks to the translation of Suyūfī's text, 41, Elgood identifies him as Ibn Qayyim al-Jauziyya, even though the transcription of the name could as well point to Ibn al-Jauzī (1116-1200), another Hanbalite scholar. However, an-Nasīmī, *op.cit.* 108, states positively that Suyūfī used Ibn Qayyim's *af-Ṭibb an-*

6. The classification of illnesses

Of the three authors, Ibn Qayyim is most explicit in the categorization of illnesses. He divides them into two distinct groups: the illnesses of the body and the illnesses of the heart. This classification is based on the text of the Koran, which according to Ibn Qayyim also speaks of two types of illness. The sick, who are mentioned in the verses giving special instructions about ablutions, fasting and pilgrimage, suffer from bodily diseases. Diseases of the heart are mentioned in the verses telling about people who suffer from an illness in their hearts. The diseases of the heart are further subdivided into two subgroups—also on the basis of the Koran. The diseases of doubt and uncertainty are meant in the verse about unbelievers: "In their hearts is a disease, and Allah increaseth their disease" (2:10). Here Ibn Qayyim follows the usual interpretation of the passage by interpreting the disease as that of doubt.¹⁷ The second subgroup consists of the diseases of lust and seduction; they are mentioned in the verse where the Prophet's wives are warned against a man "in whose heart is a disease" (33:32). This interpretation is also given by Koranic commentators.¹⁸ Even though Ibn Qayyim closely follows the traditional interpretation of the verses and does not bring any new ideas to it, he does something new in incorporating these diseases mentioned in the Koran into his medical system as real illnesses that can be treated.

Actually the division of illnesses into two categories is taken from Islamic medicine, where illnesses are either spiritual (lack of emotional balance) or physical (lack of physical balance). In spiritual medicine (*ṭibb an-nufūs* or *aṭ-ṭibb ar-rūḥānī*) the soul and body influence the ethical life of a person and the ethical life again influences the soul and body. Spiritual medicine tries to keep the soul and body healthy through ethical conduct and, in case of illness, restore the health of body and mind by ethical and psychological means. The content of the ethical way of life recommended varied in accordance with the views of the physicians. For example ar-Rāzī, who as a rationalist did not believe in the immortality of the soul, expressed his views in terms of Hellenistic philosophy. Ibn Miskawaih, on the other hand, was more religious, but even his views of recommendable life differed from the teachings of Islam.¹⁹

Ibn Qayyim accepted this concept of spiritual medicine, only reclassifying the diseases as those of the heart. The ethical life he recommended was purely Islamic. For Ibn Qayyim the health of the heart meant that "the heart is aware of its Lord and Creator. It knows His names, character, deeds and judgements. The heart is content with Him and loves Him. The heart avoids what is forbidden and what arouses His anger. Only in this way does the heart achieve health and life. The health of the heart is only reached through prophets, even though some think that it can be achieved without following the prophets,

nabawī as a source. Two of Suyūṭī's references to Ibn Qayyim can be found: Suyūṭī's reference on p. 94 is in Ibn Qayyim on p. 301 and the reference on p. 140 can be found in Ibn Qayyim on p. 22. Nevertheless, Ibn Qayyim's influence on Suyūṭī seems to be limited to quoting the same traditions.

¹⁷ Ibn Qayyim, 2. The usual interpretation is given by Ṭabarī, *op.cit.* vol. 1, 280.

¹⁸ Ṭabarī gives alternative interpretations for the disease mentioned in the verse, one of them being the disease of doubt and the other the disease of a desire to commit adultery. aṭ-Ṭabarī, *Kitāb jāmiʿ al-bayān fī tafṣīr al-Qurʾān* 22. Būlāq 1329 A.H., p. 3.

¹⁹ Mehmet Bayraktar, 'Spiritual medicine of early Muslims.' *Islamic Quarterly* 29/1985, 10, 13.

but they are mistaken" (Ibn Qayyim, 3). This last reference is directed to the *ṣūfīs*, who often follow the example of saints and believe that to be the way to the knowledge of God. In spite of this direct criticism of the *ṣūfīs*, he does, however, resort to the *ṣūfī* vocabulary, when he talks about the diseases of the heart. He has chosen the word 'heart' (*qalb*) instead of 'soul' (*nafs*), possibly because for him, as for the *ṣūfīs*, the 'soul' (*nafs*) is the carnal soul and thus full of vices. The heart represents the part of the person where God's influence is felt. It possesses knowledge of God and reliance on Him.

Suyūfī does not follow Ibn Qayyim's system of classification. He concentrates on classifying causes of illnesses and not illnesses themselves. According to him there are six causes, the first of which is air. Pure air protects against illnesses, whereas polluted air causes them. Each season has its own typical illnesses because of the differences in the air. The five other causes are imbalances in food and drink, bodily movement and rest, emotional movement and rest, waking and sleeping, excretion and retention. (Suyūfī, 52.) Ibn Qayyim also mentions these and stresses the importance of balance.²⁰ In Ibn Qayyim's system five of these are causes of bodily illnesses and the sixth, emotional movement and rest, belongs to the field of the diseases of the heart. According to Suyūfī, excessive anger, joy, apprehension, grief and modesty set the soul in motion. The illness caused is actually internal but the effects are external. (Suyūfī, 52.) He does not mention spiritual diseases as an independent group of illnesses, but he is in any case aware of the interaction between mind and body. A further indication of this is his argument that the more balanced the body is the better is the character of the individual. The Islamic way of life as the most balanced is exemplified by the Prophet: he had the best character and the most balanced temperament, because his character was the Koran. (Suyūfī, 49, 63.)

Şanaubarī does not give any form of classification, due to the concise form of his book. He merely lists diseases and their cures without any apparent order. He does, however, have a chapter on the disturbances of the soul (*al-ʿawāriḍ an-nafsāniyya*) where he discusses excessive emotions. He, too, recognizes the imbalance of emotions as illness and suggests reliance on God, prayers and other religious observances as a cure. (Şanaubarī, 25-27.)

7. The humoral theory

In the Prophet's medicine, as in Islamic medicine, the Hippocratic theory of the balanced humours in the body is the basis of physical well-being. According to the theory, there are four humours in the body: blood, phlegm, black bile and yellow bile. They represent in man the basic elements of all matter: air, water, fire and earth. The elements are nowhere found pure but always mixed in varying proportions. The proportions of the mixed elements form the temperaments: wet, cold, hot, dry, hot—wet, cold—wet, hot—dry and cold—dry.²¹

All three writers on the Prophet's medicine closely follow the generally accepted

²⁰ Ibn Qayyim, *op. cit.* 31 (air); 12-13, 172-178 (food and drink); 191-194 (bodily movements and rest); 186-191 (waking and sleeping); 3, 25-28, 101-105, 194 (excretion and retention); 153-156, 206-209 (emotions).

²¹ Manfred Ullmann, *Islamic medicine*. (Islamic Surveys 11.) Edinburgh 1978, 56-58.

Hippocratic theory of humours and temperaments and none of them sees a need to find legitimation in the religious texts. The only divergence arises in the discussion of the elements. Ibn Qayyim refuses to accept fire as one of the four elements and bases his criticism of the theory of elements partly on religion. So here it is not the acceptance but the refusal of a theory that is justified by religion. For Ibn Qayyim fire is the element of the Devil, not that of man. Referring to the Koran, he says that man was created of dry clay, dried by sun and air. Thus the elements of man can only be earth, water and air. In addition to this clearly religious view, he also uses common sense arguments: everybody knows that fire can be easily extinguished by water; how then can it form compounds with water and retain its true character as fire. This obvious contradiction he supports by a reference to Ibn Sīnā, who in his book *Shifā'* said that all the elements retain their nature even in compounds. He does not, however, extend his criticism further to the existence of humours and temperaments, but accepts them without any qualms. He even accepts the hot temperament, only claiming that it does not originate from fire: fire is always hot but a hot thing is not always fire. (Ibn Qayyim, 13-17.)

Suyūfī and Şanaubarī agree that everything consists of fire, water, air and earth. Şanaubarī disagrees with Ibn Qayyim about the creation of man. According to him, God created man of all four elements. He does not support this view by references to the Koran but quotes the words of the Prophet (Şanaubarī, 3). He does not give any source or chain of transmitters for this tradition and it cannot be found in any of the main *ḥadīth*-collections.²² It is obviously an apocryphal tradition invented to support the Hippocratic theory even against the wordings of the Koran.

According to the theory of balance, the body of a man has three possible states: normal, abnormal and a state between the two. In the normal state the temperament is balanced and a person is healthy. Each individual has his own natural balance, which the physician has to determine before attempting any cures. The temperament can, however, be imbalanced without causing harm to the individual and then he is not considered ill. If the temperament is out of balance in a way that causes the person to suffer, he is ill and must be treated. The third state is between health and illness. According to Ibn Qayyim, it is a kind of transitory state through which a person has to go, when he is either getting ill or well (Ibn Qayyim, 4-5). Suyūfī considers it to mean either convalescence or old age. Old age you cannot cure, but you can use medical knowledge to make it more comfortable. (Suyūfī, 51, 124.)

Because the illnesses are viewed as states of imbalance of the humours, the goal of treatment is the restoration of the balance with the help of a suitable diet or drugs. For this purpose the temperaments of the various foodstuffs and drugs must be assessed. This Greek tradition is evident also in the lists of drugs included in the textbooks of the Prophet's medicine.²³ Most of the drugs or foodstuffs listed in the three books discussed here can also be found in the *materia medica* of Dioscorides and al-Bīrūnī.²⁴

²² *Concordance de la tradition musulmane*. Ed. A. J. Wensinck. Leiden 1936. s.v. nār, kh-l-q.

²³ The drugs are listed in Suyūfī, 66-119; Şanaubarī, 8-16; Ibn Qayyim 218-317.

²⁴ The source for Dioscorides' *Materia Medica* used here is John M. Riddle, *Dioscorides on pharmacy and medicine*. (History of Sciences Series 3.) Austin 1985. Also al-Bīrūnī's *Book on pharmacy and*

Suyūfī and Şanaubarī clearly have more drugs taken from these sources than Ibn Qayyim, who mainly confines himself to those found in the ḥadīths. He seems, however, to accept drugs on the basis of traditions, which he himself admits to be either weak or false. In some cases it has been enough for him to find a tradition in which the drug is mentioned in a non-medical context. For example, the pine-nut (*ḥabb al-arz / ḥabb aṣ-ṣanaubar*) is included in his list of drugs, because the Prophet has likened a hypocrite to a pine tree: "A hypocrite is like a pine tree: it stands firm until it is uprooted." After quoting this Ibn Qayyim proceeds to give the medical properties of the pine-nut (Ibn Qayyim, 220). Suyūfī also mentions the pine-nut as a medicament, but without any reference to the Prophet (Suyūfī, 79). Pine-nuts are also included in Bīrūnī's *Materia Medica*, where Dioscorides also is mentioned in this instance.²⁵ Ibn Qayyim has here taken up a possibly widely known and used medicament, but has not been able to accept it without finding some kind of justification for it in the Prophet's tradition.

8. Contagion

Contagious diseases were known from experience in pre-Islamic times. At least plague, leprosy and mange (in camels) were known to be contagious.²⁶ Later in Islamic times the matter became more complicated, because a ḥadīth of refusing contagion was accepted. In the ḥadīth the Prophet says: "There is no contagion, no augury, no owl and no snake" (*lā ʿadwā wa-lā ṭiyarata wa-lā hāmata wa-lā šafara*). The owl and the snake in the tradition refer to pre-Islamic beliefs, according to which the soul of a dead person might be transformed into an owl and the feelings of hunger in the stomach were caused by a snake gnawing the ribs.²⁷ Contagion was then considered to be one of pre-Islamic beliefs. This view also influenced the concept of contagion in Islamic medicine. Even though most physicians accepted contagion as a fact, they still had to explain why they did not consider the Prophet's words valid.²⁸

The problem of contagion is, of course, also present in the Prophet's medicine. Of the three writers Suyūfī takes a firm view: there is no contagion, because the Prophet has said so. What looks like contagion is actually a mere coincidence. He does, however, take up the contradicting tradition "Flee from one with leprosy as you flee from a lion", but he explains it as meaning that a person who cannot bear to see the sufferings of a leper is allowed to go away from him. (Suyūfī, 137.)

Ibn Qayyim's view is not that straightforward. He discusses the problem at length and gives varying opinions reflecting contemporary discussion. Of the various opinions he supports the view which explains all the contradicting traditions about contagion by claiming that the Prophet directed his words to different groups of people. Those whose faith and reliance on God are strong, are not afraid of illnesses, because bodily discomforts are unimportant. Those to whom life in this world is still very important can

materia medica 1. Ed. and English transl. by Hakim Mohammed Said. Karachi 1973, has been consulted.

²⁵ al-Bīrūnī, *op.cit.* 207.

²⁶ Ullmann, *Islamic medicine* (1978), 86.

²⁷ G. H. A. Juynboll, *The authenticity of the tradition literature*. Leiden 1969, 140.

²⁸ Ullmann, *Die Medizin* (1970), 246-247.

take precautions and flee from lepers. The seemingly contradictory traditions are meant to show that both actions — escaping from contagion and ignoring it — are acceptable. In discussing the tradition according to which there is no contagion, Ibn Qayyim explains it as not meaning contagion of such diseases as plague or leprosy but contracting illnesses through evil omen (*shu'm*). He refers to the explanation given in Ibn Qutayba's book *Ikhtilāf al-ḥadīth*, where it is said that the words *lā 'adwā* (there is no contagion) refer to situations where people tend to say: "She infected me by her ill omen" (*i'tadatnī bi-shu'mihā*). The Prophet's words should not, in his opinion, be taken out of this context. (Ibn Qayyim, 118-120.)

The third writer, Ṣanaubarī, does not discuss the problem explicitly. He does, however, state that living in a pestilential area is a cause of contracting the disease. This may imply that he accepts contagion, but it may just as well refer to the corrupted air in the area causing the illness. (Ṣanaubarī, 102.)

Plague was the most serious epidemic disease in the Middle Ages and all three writers discuss it (Suyūfī, 149-151; Ṣanaubarī, 102-104; Ibn Qayyim, 28-35). They agree that plague is caused by corrupted air. The same theory is prevalent in Islamic medicine and it originates in the Greek sources. It was understood that the body absorbs putrid air, which then affects all the vital organs. There was no final cure for the disease, but the physicians suggested sour fluids, bloodletting and excision of the plague boils. In addition to this they also suggested penance, supplication and prayer.²⁹ So the representatives of the Prophet's medicine were not alone in resorting to religious cures when faced with plague. The disease was generally accepted as coming from God and the religious scholars further stressed that a Muslim who dies of plague dies as a martyr (Ibn Qayyim, 214; Suyūfī, 149). In the Prophet's medicine this incurable disease was seen as God's blessing, because it enabled the believer to enter Paradise as a martyr.

9. Magic

In pre-Islamic times magic was a natural part of medicine. It was generally believed that a person could be made ill by witchcraft. Also, when illnesses were cured, supernatural means were used.³⁰ In the days of the Prophet belief in witchcraft and the evil eye remained strong. According to the traditions, the Prophet himself accepted the existence of the evil eye as a fact (Suyūfī, 153; Ibn Qayyim, 127). He had also been bewitched (Ibn Qayyim, 98). Some Koran commentators hold the view that the eyes mentioned in verse 68:51 refer to the evil eye: "And lo, those who disbelieve would fain disconcert thee with their eyes".³¹

Ibn Qayyim refers to the words of the Prophet and uses them to support his own acceptance of the evil eye and witchcraft as causes of illnesses. In his opinion, these powers usually only have effect on a person whose heart is morally weak and whose soul is filled with lusts. True believers, whose hearts are filled with God, do not so easily fall victim to

²⁹ Michael Dols, *The black death in the Middle East*. Princeton, N.J. 1977, 98-99, 105.

³⁰ Felix Klein-Franke, *Vorlesungen über die Medizin im Islam*. (Sudhoffs Archiv, Beiheft 23.) Wiesbaden 1982, 14-15.

³¹ This interpretation of the verse is given by Suyūfī, 153, and Beidhawī, *Commentarius in Coranum* 2. Ed. H. O. Fleischer. Lipsiae 1848, 351.

magical tricks. Thus everyone is able to defend himself against magic. (Ibn Qayyim, 101.) Suyūfī agrees with Ibn Qayyim on the acceptance of the evil eye and also uses the Prophet's words as corroboration (Suyūfī, 153). Şanaubarī does not discuss the existence or non-existence of the evil eye and witchcraft, but merely gives practical advice on how to defend oneself against their effect (Şanaubarī, 63-65).

Incantations and charms are presented as acceptable cures. Ibn Qayyim restricts their use to averting the evil eye, curing stings, stopping bleeding and to easing various pains. This use is supported by the Prophet's words of approval. Suyūfī does not in any way restrict the use of these magical cures, but quotes a tradition where the Prophet allowed the use of incantations by saying: "Whosoever among you is able to help his brother, let him indeed do so." Both Ibn Qayyim and Suyūfī maintain that the content of the incantation must be in accordance with the teachings of Islam. Suyūfī tells that the Prophet also had made sure that there was "no suggestion of polytheism" in the wording before he accepted the use of an incantation. (Suyūfī, 154, Ibn Qayyim 136-147).

As to written amulets, Suyūfī seems to oppose the writing and wearing of them. He tells that Aḥmad ibn Ḥanbal was once asked to tell whether there was anything in the Koran or traditions about the amulets. Ibn Ḥanbal answered that Ibn Mas'ūd, the Prophet's companion, had abominated them but that 'Ā'isha, the Prophet's wife, and other women had been complacent towards the practice. Suyūfī then adds that Aḥmad ibn Ḥanbal himself was far from being strict in the matter. (Suyūfī, 156-157.) In fact, Ibn Qayyim bases his acceptance of the amulets on the example of both Aḥmad ibn Ḥanbal and Ibn Taimiyya. Both of them had either written amulets themselves or seen them written by others (Ibn Qayyim, 277-278). In this, Ibn Qayyim introduces a practice for which he can find no support in the Sunna of the Prophet. He does not here mention the Prophet at all and ignores the tradition quoted by Suyūfī in which the Prophet condemned amulets as the work of the Devil (Suyūfī, 157). The writing and wearing of amulets must have been so common a practice that instead of condemning it Ibn Qayyim concentrated on informing how to make proper amulets with an Islamic content. In his opinion amulets should not contain any non-Islamic features, and the words should preferably be taken from the Koran or else be incantations approved by the Prophet.³²

Şanaubarī is far from being so exacting as to the content of amulets. He gives instructions how to make amulets for curing all kinds of diseases, from the effects of the evil eye to various fevers. The texts of his amulets are hardly Islamic. They contain combinations of Arabic letters, Greek letters and various geometric figures.³³ His amulets belong to an older and more widespread magical tradition than the carefully chosen, strictly Islamic verses introduced by Ibn Qayyim.

10. Conclusions

The development of the Prophet's medicine was a serious attempt to create a form of medicine that was acceptable even to the most scrupulous Muslim. The theories and

³² Ibn Qayyim gives several acceptable texts for amulets on pp. 276-279.

³³ He presents amulets throughout the book. Typical examples are on pp. 38-39.

practices of contemporary Islamic medicine were accepted, but they were incorporated into the religious system. Thus the principles of medicine, the classification of illnesses and the forms of treatment were taken from Islamic medicine, but they were either shown to be mentioned in the Koran or supported by the Sunna of the Prophet. The Koran and the traditions were used in three different ways in forming a theory of medicine: first to support existing, generally accepted medical practice. Even though God was considered to be the ultimate cause and cure of illnesses, it was argued on the basis of the Prophet's example that it was permissible to seek cures and to resort to the help of a physician. Ibn Qayyim went even further in arguing that the rejection of treatment was acting against God's revealed will and thus the gravest of sins. He supported his argument with the words from the Koran. Secondly, religious arguments were used in rejecting theoretical concepts which were considered non-Islamic. Suyūfī refers to the words of the Prophet when condemning the idea of contagion. Ibn Qayyim, on the other hand, uses God's words about the Creation to refute fire as an element in man. Thirdly, new content was given to existing views. The classical theory of excessive emotions as illnesses was accepted and confirmation for the existence of moral diseases was found in the Koran. As a restraint to excessive emotions, all three writers suggested religious observances. The ethical way of life necessary for the health of body and mind was found in the rules of Islam. The Prophet is set up as an example of the most balanced person emotionally and physically.

Of the three writers, Ibn Qayyim and Suyūfī represent the Prophet's medicine at its best. They have both formed a logical medical theory closely tied to the teachings of Islam. Suyūfī, however, is often almost too faithful in reporting various conflicting traditions and then being forced to leave the issue unresolved. Ibn Qayyim also points to the differences in the traditions, but usually solves the problem in one way or another and does not leave questions open. Şanaubarī's medicine of the Prophet differs greatly from the two other texts. Its concise form accounts for the lack of a comprehensive theoretical discussion, but not for the fact that his references to traditions are incomplete and often rather dubious. In cures magic plays a much more important role than in Suyūfī's and Ibn Qayyim's texts, but most often Şanaubarī does not give the magical cure as the only cure but merely as an alternative after giving dietary advice.

On the whole, the Prophet's medicine should not be condemned as a collection of mere superstition. On the contrary, it forms a comprehensive medical system, although one based on religion.

