

## The Canon of Medicine (القانون في الطب) Ibn Sina ('Avicenna'), c.1025

This is the title page of Book 1 in the five-volume *Canon of Medicine* which was completed by the Islamic physician [Ibn Sina](#) in 1025CE. He became known as 'Avicenna' in Europe.

This copy was probably made in Egypt in the mid 1400s. You can view an online version at [Digital Bodleian](#).

The *Canon* is an overview of medicine, drawing on Persian, Chinese and Indian practice, and attempting to place [Galen's](#) ideas within [Aristotle's](#) natural philosophy.

The text was hugely influential. It became a standard medical work in both the Islamic world and Europe during the medieval period and was still in use up to the late 1600s.

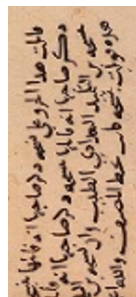


Bodleian Library MS Pococke 131, fol 1a

In general, Ibn Sina's recommendations for treatment follow three steps:

1. Lifestyle changes such as diet, physical exercise, massage, sleep management, and bathing.
2. Simple medicines (*Mofradat*) – ones containing a single herbal or mineral active ingredient.
3. Compound medicines (*Morakabat*) containing multiple active ingredients

There were also special treatments for particular illnesses. An example is the use of electric shocks to treat epilepsy or melancholy (depression). These were delivered by application of the [electric ray](#) (a fish of the genus *Torpedo*), to the forehead of the patient!



fol 174b

### Questions

1. Ibn Sina thought that many illnesses were due to poor diet or lack of exercise. **Give some examples where modern doctors would agree.**
2. **Why do you think Ibn Sina's *Canon* was so influential across several different cultures for so long?**
3. On the last page of this copy, a scribe has noted the book he copied from, and the one that was copied from, and so on, going back seven copies to one that was "in the hand of the author, but God knows best". **What were the problems of learning from hand-copied texts?**

### FURTHER READING

Find out more about Ibn Sina's life and work in this [2019 article from \*The Oxford Scientist\*](#).