

## BOOK REVIEW

### **Arabian Drugs in Early Medieval Mediterranean Medicine** *by Zohar Amar and Efraim Lev*

E-book (PDF), 296 pages  
Edinburgh University Press  
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If you are interested in medieval Arabian medicine, this is the book for you. The authors trace the development of Arab medicine from its sources in Greek, Persian and Indian medicine, the import and export of foods, drugs, minerals and animals into Arabia via Muslim conquests, and the introduction of trade routes that stretched from Europe to China.

The book has four chapters. The **Introduction** brings the reader into the world of Arab medicine, outlining the major influences and developing trade in medicinal and other substances such as perfumes and precious stones. **Agricultural and Pharmaceutical Innovations: Milestones in Research and Case Studies** covers the growing of new crops, the influence of Dioscorides, and the key Arabic herbalists.

The main section, **'Arabian' Substances**, focuses in depth on a selection of relevant substances including nutmegs, senna and diamonds with descriptions of their medicinal properties. For example: "Ibn Rushd writes that nutmeg is 'a hot and dry drug ... It has a nice odour. It cleans the stomach's languidness of a putrid humour and strengthens it. It is useful for the liver and also the spleen of people that suffer from cold.' According to Ibn Juljul, nutmeg strengthens the stomach and the heart, removes gases and digests food".

Finally, in the **Discussion and Conclusions**, the authors conclude that the major achievement of Arab medicine is the incorporation of Indian and Persian medicine into the Galenic frame. The amount of research they have recorded would certainly support this view.

There are thirty-five coloured plates of *materia medica* taken from the authors' own collections. Each chapter is enriched by copious endnotes and there is a comprehensive bibliography at the end of the book, giving the reader plenty of scope for further research. Indexing is very good and includes separate indices of English, Arabic and Scientific Names.

Although some of the names of people and places are not generally well known, I found the book easy to read and gained a great deal of knowledge about the history of Arabian medicine.

**Peter G Homan**  
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