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### Introduction to Discourse on Fever of Averroes

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#### ABSTRACT

The 884<sup>th</sup> Arabic manuscript from the Royal Monastery of San Lorenzo de El Escorial (Ms. DCCCLXXIX, according to Miquel Casiri's cataloguing) contains in the folios 1r<sup>o</sup>-7r<sup>o</sup> and the folios 63v<sup>o</sup>-64v<sup>o</sup> two short treatises written by the great scholar from Cordova Ibn Rushd (Averroes) (1126-1198) on fever and its acute access. The first part (f.1r<sup>o</sup> to f.7r<sup>o</sup>), titled in Arabic Talkhīs Kitāb al-ḥummayyāt (Summary of fevers book), is a paraphrase of Galen's De febris; and the second one (f.63v<sup>o</sup> to f.64v<sup>o</sup>) is a booklet that lacks a specific title and it possibly is the work called Masā'il fī-nawā'ib al-ḥummā (Questions about the acute access of fever) or Kalām fī-i'tiqād zamān al-nūba (Speech on the acute bout of fever time). The present article is an approach to the study of these writings and provides the edition and the translation to English of some fragments as well as a brief introduction to the author and his main oeuvre.

**Keywords:** Averroes. Scientific Literature. Fevers. Arabic Medieval Medicine. History of science.

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## Introduction

Abū-l-Walīd Aḥmad Ibn Muḥammad Ibn Rushd (1126-1198), known in the Western world as Averroes, is one of the most important thinkers of the Middle Ages. He was jurist, astronomer, mathematician, and over all, physician, philosopher and theologian [1]. Among his more relevant writings [2], we find *Kulliyāt fī-l-ṭibb* (Generalities on Medicine) [3], in the field of medicine, and *Tahāfut al-Tahāfut* (The Incoherence of the Incoherence), in the field of philosophy [4], a book of refutation to *Tahāfut al-Falāsifa* (The Incoherence of the Philosophers) by the Persian theologian from the 11<sup>th</sup> century Al-Ghazālī [5].

Ibn Rush was the main commentator of Aristotle and the creator of a school: Averroism [6], that attempted to reconcile Aristotelian ideology with Islam, trying to harmonize Muslim revelation with Aristotelian logic in order to have a better understanding of God [7]. This ideology was the mainstream in European thought until start of modern experimental science [8]. The theologians of Christian Scholasticism [9], especially St Thomas Aquinas (1225-1274) [10], refuted Averroism, although St Thomas was also built on the Averroistic theories or at least was somewhat influenced by them.

In relation to Ibn Rushd's medical works, there are some writings that deal with kinds of fevers and their acute access. The 884<sup>th</sup> Arabic manuscript from the Royal Monastery of San Lorenzo de El Escorial [11], Ms. DCCCLXXIX according to Miquel Casiri's cataloguing [12], contains in the folios 1r<sup>o</sup> to 7r<sup>o</sup> and the folios 63v<sup>o</sup> to 64v<sup>o</sup> two short treatises written by Averroes on this subject. The first part (f.1r<sup>o</sup> to f<sup>o</sup>7r<sup>o</sup>), titled in Arabic *Talkhīs Kitāb al-ḥummayyāt* (Summary of fevers book), is a paraphrase of Galen's *De febris* [13]; and the second one (f.63v<sup>o</sup> to f<sup>o</sup>64v<sup>o</sup>) is a booklet that lacks a specific title and it possibly is the work called *Masā'il fī-nawā'ib al-ḥummā* (Questions about the acute access of fever) or *Kalām fī-i'tiqād zamān al-nūba* (Speech on the acute bout of fever time)[14].

The main theories discussed in both writings contained in the Escorial manuscript are set out below.

## Discourse on fever of Averroes

On the basis of Galen's theory [15], Averroes describes fever fundamentally as an alteration of natural heat due to corruption of humors caused by an effusion of waste substances. Depending on the humor acting, i.e., blood, phlegm, yellow bile and black bile, in accordance with medical system explained by Hippocrates [16], and depending on the organ of the body affected by corruption, different types of fever can take place.

In a general sense, he indicates that fever break period is the convergence time of the humor in the organ which the infection is in; and its acute access period is the time which nature acts to protect and defend the concerned humor or the time which the humor is corrupted and infected.

And now, taking as reference the 884<sup>th</sup> Arabic manuscript from the Library of El Escorial at Madrid in Spain, the English translation of some fragments from *Talkhīs Kitāb al-ḥummayyāt* (1r<sup>o</sup> to f.7r<sup>o</sup>) and *Masā'il fī-nawā'ib al-ḥummā / Kalām fī-i'tiqād zamān al-nūba* (f.63v<sup>o</sup> to f<sup>o</sup>64v<sup>o</sup>) is provided and, as I said, these texts discuss causes and kinds of fever as well as its acute access described by Averroes as per the Medieval Islamic knowledge [17].

Averroes writes:

**[f.1r<sup>o</sup>]** Fever is more virulent when the effusion of waste substances is greater and it is less severe when the pouring of disposal is lower and more scarce. Furthermore, even when the body vomits some waste substances, what is poured is low and slight whereas, when it vomits many waste substances, the spillage is copious. Also, when the surplus is toxic, the spilled humors will get corrupted too, and the grade of malignancy will depend on remoteness from the natural state. The cause of plenty spillage may be either weakness of organ receiving surplus or strength of the driving one

or both together or virulence of damage from the expeller. This applies to tumors which cause fever if their heat reaches the heart, as mentioned above. The corruption takes place in the spilled humors due to the causes already explained but the time of occurrence and their characteristics are not of just one type being that some of them belong to kind of phlegm, other ones belong to that of black bile and other ones belong to that of yellow bile. When surplus becomes corrupted, because of this it is generated an unusual heat far from nature of organ which the humor is in. And if that heat gets to the heart, it is originated for this reason fever turning numb the organ which surplus was poured into, although the organ may also not turn numb (...).

**[f.2v<sup>o</sup>]** The first moment of fever is that of rest, i.e., when the surplus is accumulated in the expeller organ. The second one corresponds to that of fever crisis, i.e., when the humor is altered and burned by infected heat in the receiving organ (...).

**[f.3v<sup>o</sup>]** Fever will be intermittent when, during the combustion of humor in the receiving organ, the humor does not get accumulated in the ejecting one; and if it does, then fever access is over and fever develops in an only cycle from start to finish (...).

**[f.4v<sup>o</sup>]** According to Galen, the beginning of fever access takes place when the corrupted heat starts acting upon the accumulated humors. It is during the beginning of crisis in the receiving organ when these humors flow to it and not at beginning and end of their accumulation that is the moment in which fever starts (...). If fever intermittency occurs at the moment when the surpluses accumulate in both organs, the receiver and the ejector, while at the same time the outpouring from the ejector to the receiver takes place, then the crisis only will occur just during humor combustion (...).

**[f.64r<sup>o</sup>]** If the issue is in this way, then it is not sufficient the cause said by Galen referring to that the duration of pause in fever is the time of humor confluence in the infected organ, while

access time in fever is when nature acts to protect that humor or when that humor gets corrupted, because it is necessary the existence of humor as soon as this spills into the organ or is generated in it; that is to say, fever access, when it comes upon, starts to take place due to the corrupted humor spillage or to its generation.

As we have already mentioned, the acute access of fever, i.e., fever crisis, is the action of natural heat on the corrupted humor, such as occurs in tumors: Certainly, as soon as substance spills to the organ with tumor, there a strange heat is generated. And this is the action of natural heat on the spilled substance (...).

**[f.64v<sup>o</sup>]** A patient suffering from a bout of fever has something similar to the one that has taken food, since first his body gets cold and pulse decreases, and at last, later, body gets hot and pulse increases.

## Conclusion

These pages exemplify Averroes relevance in history of scientific knowledge in both Islamic and Christian cultures of the Middle Ages. His works and theories, especially those of philosophy, theology and medicine, had a considerable influence over later thinkers and scientists. Among his medical writings there are both the paraphrase of Galen's *De febris* and a brief treatise on the access of fever that have been study subject in this article.

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