

Abul Qasim Khalaf Ibn Al-Abbas Al-Zahrawi Encyclopedia Article

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936-1013

Spanish Surgeon

Abul Qasim Khalaf ibn al-Abbas al-Zahrawi (Latinized as Albucasis) was a Spanish Arab surgeon who made advances in the emerging art of surgery and wrote extensively on the surgeries that he performed. His reputation spread beyond Spain throughout the Muslim world; he was the personal physician to King al-Hakam II of Spain.

Al-Zahrawi was born in A.D. 936 in Zahra near Cordova, Spain. He is remembered for his 30-volume, 1,500-page medical encyclopedia called *Al-Tasrif li-man 'ajaza 'an al-ta'lim* which is translated as "The recourse of him who cannot compose (a medical work of his own)." In this publication he details what was known and what he had observed about the science of medicine. Three of the books cover in detail the subject of surgery. Some of the procedures detailed include surgery of the eye, ear, and throat, cauterization (applying heat to tissue usually to treat skin tumors or open abscesses), treatment for anal fistulas, and the need to drain blood from a chest wound. He also wrote on setting dislocated bones and fractures and the dissection of animals.

One of the procedures detailed was the removal of stones from the bladder. The surgeon was instructed to insert his finger into the rectum of the patient, move the stone down the neck of the bladder, and then make an incision in the wall of the rectum to remove the stone. An issue facing the patient and surgeon at this time was if the pain of the condition, in this case stones in the bladder, was greater or less than the pain of the surgical procedure. The risk of death from this surgery was also a concern.

Beyond surgical procedures, al-Zahrawi wrote on phlebotomy (the procedure of opening up a vein), obstetric procedures, midwifery, and child rearing. He was the first to give illustrations of medical and dental instruments, a number of which he designed, and 200 of which appear in the thirtieth volume of the *Al-Tasrif*. Three of the instruments that he invented were an instrument to examine the ear, an instrument to examine the urethra (the canal through which urine is discharged from the body), and an instrument used to remove objects from or insert objects into the throat. Al-Zahrawi's work continued to influence the practice of medicine for five centuries; he died in 1013.