

# Rhazes

## Biography / Overview

Rhazes, also known as Abu Bakr Muhammad ibn Zakariya al-Razi, was a prominent Persian polymath and physician who made significant contributions to various fields including medicine, alchemy, philosophy, and ethics during the Islamic Golden Age. He was born in Rayy, Iran, around the year 865 and died in the same city in 925 CE at around the age of 60. Rhazes is considered one of the most well-known and respected figures in the history of medicine. His works have influenced medical practices in both the Islamic world and the European world for centuries. He served as the chief physician at the Baghdad and Ray hospitals and was renowned for his clinical skills and innovative medical treatments. He has also been described as the father of pediatrics and a pioneer of ophthalmology.

Throughout his life, Rhazes wrote numerous medical texts, some of which were translated into Latin and became standard medical textbooks in medieval Europe. Beyond medicine, he also wrote on various philosophical and ethical topics, demonstrating a holistic approach to healthcare that integrated medical knowledge with ethical considerations. He was one of the first to clinically distinguish between chickenpox and measles. Rhazes' intellectual curiosity and dedication to advancing knowledge in multiple disciplines have solidified his legacy as a pioneering figure in the history of medicine and science. During his lifetime, Rhazes made significant advancements in medicine and other fields, leaving a lasting impact on the development of scientific knowledge in the Islamic world and beyond.

## Bibliography / Primary Sources

Rhazes was a prolific writer, and his works covered a wide range of topics, including medicine, alchemy, philosophy, and ethics. Some of his primary sources include:

"Kitab al-Hawi fi al-tibb" (The Comprehensive Book on Medicine): This is one of the biggest medical encyclopaedias compiled by Rhazes with his own clinical observations, along with Greek, Syrian, Indian, and Arabic medical knowledge.

"Kitab al-Mansuri" (The Book of Mansur): This is a concise medical manual that covers various topics in medicine, from anatomy to treatment methods, which became an important text in both the Islamic world and medieval Europe.

"Kitab al-Asrar" (The Book of Secrets): It is a scientific and technical work by Rhazes where he focuses on chemistry and alchemy. In this text, he explains laboratory techniques, equipment, and methods for preparing substances.

"Kitab al-Tajribat" (The Experiences): This is Rhazes' personal notebook where he wrote down what he had learned from treating real-time patients. It is based on his own real-life practice as a doctor, not just on ideas from other books.

"Kitab al-Mulooki" (The Royal Book): This is a medical guide written by Rhazes for kings and rulers. This text gives deeper insights into healthy living, preventing illness, and treating common diseases.

These texts showcase Rhazes' diverse interests and expertise in various fields, highlighting his significant contributions to the intellectual landscape of the Islamic Golden Age.

### **Sources:**

Al-Razi, Abu Bakr Muhammad ibn Zakariyya. (2021). In Encyclopædia Britannica.  
<https://www.britannica.com/biography/al-Razi>

Pormann, P. E. (2011). Al-Razi, Abu Bakr al- (Rhazes). In E. Craig (Ed.), Routledge Encyclopedia of Philosophy.  
<https://www.rep.routledge.com/articles/thematic/al-razi-abu-bakr-al-rhazes/v-1>

Campbell, D. (2009). Rhazes: The Thinking Western Physician's Physician. JAMA, 301(9), 969.  
<https://doi.org/10.1001/jama.2009.271>

### **Birth Date / Death Date**

Birth Date: around 865 CE in Ray, Iran

Death Date: approximately 925 CE (at the age of 60–61) in Ray, Iran

These dates are approximate, as historical records from that period are not always precise. However, they provide a general timeline for Rhazes' life and work.

### **Notable / Best-Known For**

Rhazes is best known for his contributions to the field of medicine, particularly his emphasis on clinical observation, diagnosis, and treatment.

He is famous for being one of the first physicians to distinguish between smallpox and measles, providing the earliest clear clinical descriptions of these diseases.

He was a pioneer in the development of evidence-based medicine, advocating for the use of empirical evidence and patient observation in medical practice.

His comprehensive medical encyclopedia, "Al-Hawi" (The Comprehensive Book), became an essential resource for physicians in both the Islamic world and Europe.

Rhazes also made significant advancements in pharmacology, introducing new medications and treatments for various ailments.

Rhazes discovered numerous chemical compounds, including alcohol (ethanol), and refined the use of alcohol for medical purposes.

### **Famous Quotes**

"The doctor's aim is to do good, even to our enemies, so much more to our friends, and my profession forbids us to do harm to our kindred." – The Comprehensive Book, Rhazes

"All that is written in books is worth much less than the experience of a wise doctor." – Doubts on Galen, Rhazes

"The patient who consults a great many physicians is likely to have a very confused state of mind." – Medical Aphorisms, Rhazes

### **Major Works / Textual Contents**

Rhazes wrote numerous works on medicine, alchemy, philosophy, and ethics, showcasing his diverse intellectual interests and expertise. Some of his major works include:

"Kitab al-Hawi fi al-tibb" (The Comprehensive Book on Medicine): A comprehensive medical text that covers various diseases, treatments, and medical theories.

"Kitab al-Mansuri" (The Book of Mansur): A treatise on general medicine and healthcare practices.

"Kitab al-Asrar" (The Book of Secrets): An alchemical text exploring the nature of substances and their properties.

"Kitab al-Tajribat" (The Experiences): A collection of clinical observations and case studies.

"Kitab al-Mulooki" (The Royal Book): A philosophical work on ethics and morality in medicine.

These works demonstrate Rhazes' significant contributions to multiple fields and his enduring impact on the history of science and intellectual thought.

### **Influences / Intellectual Context**

Rhazes was influenced by various intellectual traditions and thinkers, including Greek medicine, Islamic philosophy, alchemical traditions, and the Arabic translational movement.

He studied the works of ancient Greek physicians such as Hippocrates and Galen, incorporating their theories and practices into his medical writings.

He engaged with Islamic philosophical thought, exploring the intersections between religion, ethics, and science in his writings. He benefited from Baghdad's House of Wisdom, where Greek texts were translated into Arabic.

Rhazes was influenced by the alchemical tradition, which informed his views on the nature of matter and the principles of transformation.

He also benefited from the translation of Greek, Persian, and Indian texts into Arabic, which expanded his access to a diverse range of knowledge.

These influences shaped Rhazes' intellectual development and the multidisciplinary approach he took in his work, blending medical knowledge with philosophical and ethical considerations.

### **Legacy and Modern Significance**

Rhazes' legacy lies in his lasting contributions to the fields of medicine, philosophy, and ethics, which have had a profound impact on the development of scientific knowledge and healthcare practices. His emphasis on clinical observation, evidence-based medicine, and the integration of ethical considerations into medical practice continues to resonate in current medical education and healthcare systems. His systematic approach to testing drugs and documenting their effects laid the groundwork for modern pharmacology. His works were influential in bridging the knowledge of ancient Greek physicians with the advancements of the Islamic Golden Age, shaping the way people in the medieval world thought about science and medicine.

Besides medicine, Rhazes' philosophical writings on ethics and morality have influenced the way people think about the relationship between science, religion, and ethics. His holistic approach to healthcare as a physician, taking ethical responsibility for the well-being of patients, still remains relevant in modern healthcare and medical ethics. Rhazes' multidisciplinary contributions continue to inspire various scholars, healthcare professionals, and thinkers across disciplines, showing why he is still considered an important figure in the history of science and medicine.

### **Modern Moments / Impact on 21st Century Society**

In 2018, McGill University's Osler Library digitized the preserved Latin translations of Rhazes' works, making them freely accessible to medical historians and researchers worldwide.

In 2019, the International Conference on Rhazes Studies was held in Tehran, Iran, bringing together scholars and researchers to discuss the legacy of Rhazes in contemporary medicine and philosophy.

In 2020, Rhazes' medical texts were translated into multiple languages, making his works more accessible to a global audience of medical professionals and academics.

The medical journal "Razi Journal of Medical Sciences," published by Iran University of Medical Sciences in Tehran, is a peer-reviewed, openly accessible journal that continues Rhazes' tradition of documenting and sharing clinical observations.

In 2022, a digital archive of Rhazes' manuscripts was launched online, allowing scholars and researchers to explore his works easily in a digital format.

### **Suggested Reading & Resources**

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