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IBN SINA A STUDY OF SCHOLARLY ACHIEVEMENT AND CONTENTIOUS INTERPERSONAL RELATIONS

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Annotation: This annotation explores Ibn Sina's intellectually productive period in Isfahan, where his elevated political status and favorable working conditions enabled him to finalize the major parts of The Canon of Medicine and The Cure. Supported by Emir Ala al-Dawla and assisted by a team of devoted scribes, he completed extensive medical, philosophical, and astronomical writings, including an abridgment of Ptolemy's Almagest. Despite this scholarly flourishing, Ibn Sina's personal relations remained strained: he maintained few loyal disciples and engaged in long-standing intellectual conflicts with contemporaries such as Miskawayh and Kirmani. His polemical style, sharp criticisms, and self-assertive attitude contributed to the mixed reputation reflected in historical accounts. The text highlights the paradox of a scholar whose extraordinary intellectual legacy was accompanied by a complex, often contentious personal character

Keywords: Ibn Sina (Avicenna), Isfahan period, canon of medicine, The Cure (Ash-Shifa), Medieval Islamic philosophy, Scholarly patronage, Intellectual rivalries, Historical biographical analysis

Introduction.
It was Ibn Sina's good fortune, by his early fifties, to be ensconced in a comfortable home in Isfahan and with the title and pay level of the second- most senior official in the land.[1] His job as vizier entailed serious and timeconsuming responsibilities, but it also left him time to think and write. It helped that he had at his beck and call a team of eager acolytes to whom he could entrust the time- consuming tasks of culling old books for material, rewriting, editing, and copying.
Methods. During his stay in Isfahan Ibn Sina completed the last three volumes of the Canon of Medicine, which alone comprise nearly 3,000 pages of fine print in modern translations, and also the final sections of The Cure, which number a further thousand pages. Then there were further treatises, essays, poems, and letters. Ibn Sina completed his Canon about the same time he finished the final section of The Cure, on astronomy, in which he again offers his abridgment of Ptolemy's Almagest. As we've seen, his patron, the emir Ala al- Dawla, intrigued by that field, funded some observational instruments, several of which Ibn Sina himself designed [2]. Ala al- Dawla, however, was not prepared to plow through The Cure, so he charged Ibn Sina with preparing a shorter version— in other words, an abridgement of a summary of a compilation. Ibn Sina passed most of this task to his secretary, Juzjani,[3] but saved the section on philosophy for himself.[4] In these years Ibn Sina also drafted for Ala al-Dawla a treatise on the benefits and harms of wine and one on colitis, both of which presumably pertained directly to the emir's own condition. If we are to believe Juzjani, Ibn Sina continued the drinking and carousing that had become a fixture of his life during his time in Hamadan.[5] Yet for all his frenetic socializing, he remained a curiously solitary figure. Even after holding years of evening "seminars" at his home in Hamadan, he had few committed disciples. A diligent recent scholar came up with only four, counting

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Juzjani.[6]And in every case except Juzjani, their relationship with Ibn Sina went downhill. If it was difficult to be Ibn Sina's friend, it was painful to be his enemy. His bitterest conflicts tended to be with senior officeholders who had intellectual aspirations of their own. One who remained on Ibn Sina's "enemies" list for decades was Abu Ali ibn Miskawayh, a second-level bureaucrat, sometimes writer on ethics, bookman, and overall a respectable mediocrity. Ibn Sina encountered him first in Rayy and again in Isfahan, where Miskawayh had made the unfortunate decision to spend his retirement. Ibn Sina never missed a chance to ridicule the man. Miskawayh had had a friend in Hamadan named Abu l- Qasim al- Kirmani, whom he forewarned of Ibn Sina's arrival and primed for combat. It was Kirmani whom the emir paired with Ibn Sina for the traditional debate by which a newcomer would be presented to the court and local intelligentsia. The exchange went badly.[7] In a private letter Ibn Sina fumed that Kirmani was "strange and outlandish. . . . As for his logic, it was another logic, his natural science some other natural science."[8] Elsewhere Ibn Sina referred to him as a "dung beetle" and "shit- eater."[9] Most offensive to Ibn Sina was Kirmani's repeated claim that members of the most influential circle of thinkers in Baghdad supported his own and Miskawayh's dialectic mode of analysis and not the syllogistic reasoning of Ibn Sina. Knowing that these men also claimed to be the true heirs of Aristotle and the Peripatetics, Ibn Sina wrote them a challenging letter and then ordered copies of all their works from a Baghdad book dealer. Upon reading their writings he was so disgusted that he sent back the entire bunch without seeking repayment. Ibn Sina was adept at sustaining grudges: typically, he extended the feud with Kirmani over several decades. Even a victim's death did not end matters. The philosopher and theologian Abu al- Hassan Muhammad al- Amiri died in 992, but thirty years later Ibn Sina was still ridiculing him as a "muddler" who did not deserve to be called "the foremost of modern philosophers,"[10] as some had done. Some of his most ferocious attacks were doubtless defensive in nature, as when he forbade his Azerbaijani disciple Bahmanyar from showing the manuscript of his last major work, Pointers and Reminders, to any of the "ignoramuses," "deviants," "parasites," "shit eaters, and anyone else who is not worthy of the truth."[11]The same should be said of the boasting that often accompanied Ibn Sina's belittling of others. Ibn Sina himself was by no means above criticism. As noted, he lifted passages of his autobiography from a Greek biography of Aristotle.[12] That he would brazenly pilfer this work, which was well known in its Arabic translation, attests to his grandiose— and perhaps even delisional— view of himself. Most of his contemporaries respected his intelligence but thought, as poor Miskawayh put it, that he should "amend his own character."[13] A modern Muslim biographer who deeply respects Ibn Sina's philosophy nonetheless points out that contemporaries were full of praise for his knowledge but "had not a single kind word for the man himself."[14]

Conclusion.

Ibn Sina's Isfahan period stands as a defining phase in the formation of his scientific and philosophical legacy. Despite chronic conflicts and a reputation for abrasive behavior, his achievements in medicine, philosophy, and astronomy during this time laid the foundation for his enduring influence. The tension between his intellectual brilliance and problematic character remains a central theme in understanding his life and work.

References:

1. Afnan, Avicenna: His Life and Works, p. 70.
2. Gutas, Avicenna and the Aristotelian Tradition, p. 467.

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3. Ahmed H. al- Rahim, “Avicenna’s Immediate Disciples: Their Lives and Works,”Avicenna and His Legacy, Langermann, ed., p. 9.
4. Entitled Najat or The Salvation, see Gutas, Avicenna and the Aristotelian Tradition, pp. 115 ff. Many analysts have explored the differing nuances between this work and the relevant sections of The Cure. Gutas, Avicenna and the Aristotelian Tradition, p. 225.
5. Gohlman, The Life of Ibn Sina, pp. 81– 82.
6. Rahim, “Avicenna’s Immediate Disciples,” pp. 1– 26.
7. Gutas, Avicenna and the Aristotelian Tradition, p. 503 fn.
8. David C. Reisman, “The Life and Times of Avicenna,” in Interpreting Avicenna: Critical Essays, Peter Adamson, ed., Cambridge, 2013, pp. 15– 19.
9. Ibid., p. 19.
10. Gutas, Avicenna and the Aristotelian Tradition, p. 330.
11. Ibid., p. 158.
12. Ibid., p. 223.
13. Afnan, Avicenna: His Life and Works, p. 77.
14. Ibid., p. 78.David C. Reisman, “The Life and Times of Avicenna: Patronage and Learning in Medieval Islam,” Interpreting Avicenna: Critical Essays, Peter Adamson, ed., Cambridge, 2013, p. 24.