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Arabic Treatises On Environmental Pollution Up To The End Of The Thirteenth Century

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Ever since the earliest Arabic writings on medicine we meet treatises on widespread illnesses or crowd diseases, including epidemics. Some of those works discuss the causes and treatment; others deal with the treatment only. This paper is limited to the works that deal with environmental pollution as a cause of such illnesses. They cover subjects like air and water contamination, solid waste mishandling and environmental assessments of certain localities. The treatises reviewed are those written by (1) al-Kindi, (2) Qusta b. Luqa, (3) al-Razi, (4) Ibn al-Jazzar, (5) al-Tamimi, (6) Abu Sahl al-Masihi, (7) Ibn Sina, (8) Ali b. Ridwan, (9) Ibn Jumay', (10) Ya'qub al-Isra'ili, (11) Abdullatif al-Baghdadi, (12) Ibn al-Quff and (13) Ibn al-Nafis. Studying the contents of each work shows which authors were merely copying the Greek theory of humours and miasma, and which made genuine contributions to the field. The period covered in the paper is up to the end of the thirteenth century A.D. This is because the Black Death took place in the fourteenth century, and encouraged several authors of that time to write about epidemics and plagues. Other contemporary researchers have studied these later works.

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