

THE GOLDEN AGE OF ARABIC MEDICINE

90' & 52'

Directed by Anaïs van Ditzhuyzen & Mathieu Schwartz

Produced by Tournez S'il Vous Plaît & Arte France



LOGLINE

Over a thousand years ago, Arab scientists pioneered modern pharmacy by bringing together knowledge from ancient history and faraway lands, with which they experimented and then improved. Today, a team of researchers are delving into the brilliant grimoires of medieval Arab civilization. Their goal is to find new treatments, especially for infectious diseases.

SUMMARY

To help invent the medicines of the future, a cross-disciplinary team has taken an innovative approach: making something new out of something old! A microbiologist with a passion for history and a historian who was also trained to be a chemist, are looking into a surprisingly overlooked part of history, so they can learn from the golden age of pharmacy. They immersed themselves into old manuscripts from the medieval Arab world, which dated back to the year 1000, to unearth forgotten anti-infective agents, replicate and test them in a lab. The team hope they will be able to derive new antibiotics from them, thanks to new techniques, and thus contribute to the fight against antibiotic resistance - one of the biggest challenges of modern medicine. As we will be following these scientists on their quest to finding new treatments, we will learn about a fascinating and little-known period in history. From the 7th to the 15th century, a brilliant civilization ruled over thousands of kilometers, from Spain all the way to the banks of the Indus River. Scientists from all areas of expertise have thrived, researched, debated and come up with new inventions there. They set out in search of ancient and foreign medicinal remedies, rediscovering millennia of knowledge from the Greco-Roman civilization, the Achaemenid Empire, Ancient Egypt and the brilliant civilizations of Asia. These experts collected hundreds of thousands of manuscripts in remarkable libraries, translated as many remedies into Arabic, and experimented with them - something highly innovative at the time. They created new components and new technologies. This led to the beginnings of chemistry, galenics and new techniques such as the complex combination of plants and metals.

Part present-day investigation, part immersive dive into history, the two stories echo each other over a thousand years apart, demonstrating that the future can be rooted in a brilliant past, as long as we turn on the light that has been turned off for too long.

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