

THE JEWISH DOCTOR

Medicine and medical matters have been a respected occupation and preoccupation of Jews and Judaism since time immemorial.

Although Judaism avows that healing comes from God, nonetheless the place of the doctor is very well established. Medical matters are of concern in the Torah, where health care and sanitation are mentioned. For example, Exodus 21, verses 18-19 state *'if men quarrel and one strikes his fellow with a stone or fist, and he does not die but is bedridden; if he recovers, the aggressor compensates his incapacity and pays for his medical care.'* Deuteronomy 23 verse 14 indicates the importance placed on matters of sanitation, even during war: *'You shall have a shovel in addition to your weapons and it will be used to cover your excrement.'*

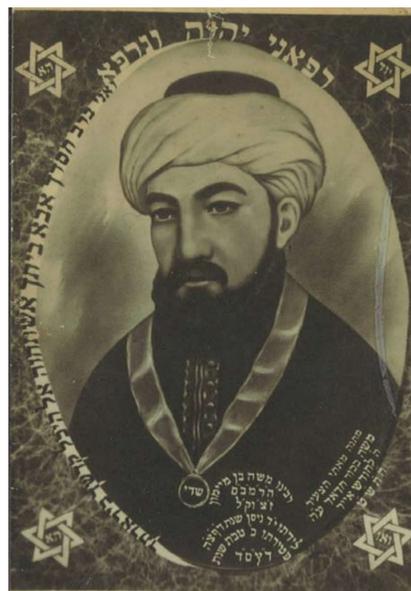
There are many references in the Talmud to medicine and in Tractate Sanhedrin (17B) it states that it is forbidden to live in

a city without a doctor. In Babylonia Jewish medicine continued to be practised and greatly influenced the rise of Arabic medicine. In the early Middle Ages the physicians who attended the rulers of Islam and Christendom were largely Jews.

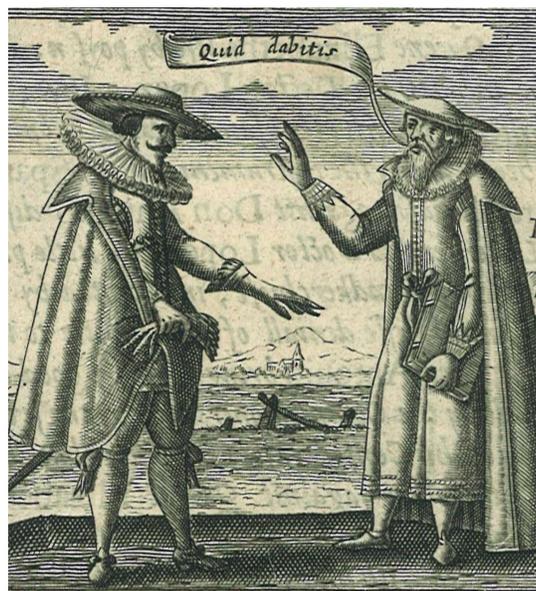
Perhaps the greatest Jewish physician was Moses Maimonides (1135-1204) who was forced to leave his native Spain and eventually settled in Egypt. There he became physician first to Grand Vizier Alfidil, then to Sultan Saladin, after whose death he remained a physician to the royal family. He wrote scientific works which were far in advance of his contemporaries. Besides being the greatest of physicians, he was also the chief Rabbi of Egypt and one of the greatest rabbinic scholars of all time. Many of the great rabbis of medieval times were also doctors including Yehuda HaLevi, Ibn Tibbon, the Ramban and the Sforno.



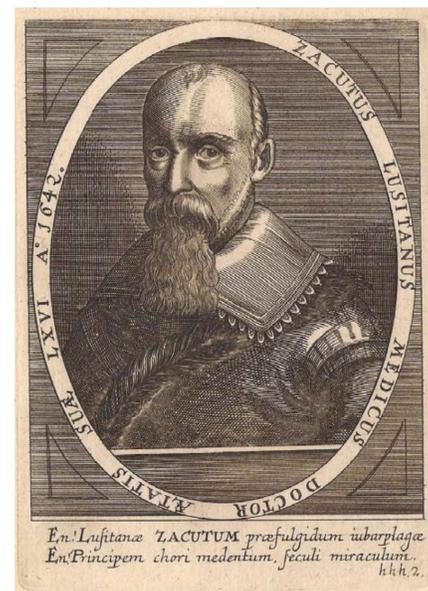
Print of Moses Hemon, physician to Suleiman the Magnificent, 1520-1566



Moses Maimonides. Traditional image on religious postcard 1930



Print entitled Lopez compounding to poison the Queen, 1627



Doctor Zacutus Lusitanus 18th century print

It is said that in the Middle Ages Jews accounted for 1% of the population in Europe but supplied 50% of the physicians. At this time, Jewish doctors played a leading part in founding Europe's first Medical School in Montpellier which still exists.

Dr Rodrigo Lopez (c. 1525 – 1594) was born a Marrano or secret Jew in Portugal. He was forced to flee during the Portuguese Inquisition and settled in England in 1559. In 1586, Lopez reached the pinnacle of his profession when he was made physician-in-chief to Queen Elizabeth I. However, in 1594 he was arrested on suspicion of trying to poison the Queen and was executed later that year. He may have been an inspiration for Shylock in Shakespeare's *The Merchant of Venice*.

Doctor Lusitanus was a Marrano, born in Lisbon in 1575 and died a Jew in Amsterdam in 1642. He was an outstanding physician, among the first to describe Blackwater Fever, a complication of Malaria.