After the coming Prophet Muhammad, the Arabian tribes, in a burst of fervor, swept over western Asia and Northern Africa. They disrupted but did not destroy, the Eastern Roman Empire, which had survived the barbarian onslaught that had wiped out the Empire in the West. The Eastern Empire came to be known as the Byzantine Empire.

The Arabs fell heir, to much of Greek science and this proved important and even beneficial to the history of science. The advances of science, in what remained of Roman dominations, came to a complete halt for thousand years. It was the Arabs alone, who were in a position to preserve and transmit the accumulated knowledge of the ancients. They not only preserved, but also, made advances in some cases, notably alchemy and medicine.

Rhazes, known formally as Abu Bakr Muhammad Ibn Zakaria Al-Razi, was a physician and alchemist during this period. He was born, a few miles north of Teheran. Rhazes was interested in music, particularly lute, in early life. His dedication to medicine did not manifest till he was 30. He came across an old apothecary, who fascinated him with stories of medicine and disease. He decided to study medicine and ended up as chief physician of Baghdad’s largest Azudi hospital. Thereafter, his rise to fame was rapid. Common sense, psychology, great professional skill and astute diagnostic ability brought him general acclaim. He was sometimes called “Galen of the Arabs”.

Aggregate of significant medical knowledge from the beginning was assembled and annotated in his 20-volume masterpiece Al-Hawi or “Continens”. Specific items included renal and vesical calculi, the use of animal gut for surgical sutures, the value of lead and mercury in ointments etc. He prepared what we now call plaster of paris and described the manner in which it could form casts, holding broken bones in place. Physicians followed his surgical writings, until Ambroise Pare replaced them in the 16th century. His most celebrated treatise described the clinical findings, which distinguished smallpox from measles.

The great Rhazes became blind as he aged. He refused medical attention and died at the age of 90.