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Quwa (Vital powers) vs modern physiology of control systems

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Abstract

The Unani system of medicine describes three primary vital powers Quwa Fa'ila (active power), Quwa Hafiza (retentive power), and Quwa Namiya (augmentative power) as essential forces governing bodily functions. This paper attempts to correlate these traditional concepts with modern physiological systems: the neurological, immune, and endocrine systems. Quwa Fa'ila aligns with the control and coordination by the nervous system; Quwa Hafiza corresponds to preservation through immune defense and memory; Quwa Namiya parallels hormonal regulation of growth and repair. This comparative framework provides a holistic understanding of health and disease by integrating classical Unani and contemporary biomedical perspectives ^[1-4].

Keywords: Unani medicine, Quwa Fa'ila, Quwa Hafiza, Quwa Namiya, nervous system

Introduction

Unani medicine conceptualizes life as governed by intrinsic vital powers called Quwa, which direct physiological activities and maintain the balance necessary for health. Among these, Quwa Fa'ila (executive power), Quwa Hafiza (retentive power), and Quwa Namiya (growth power) are central to the maintenance and regulation of the body. While rooted in Greco-Arabic philosophy, these principles can be interpreted through modern systems biology, particularly in relation to the nervous, immune, and endocrine systems. This paper explores these conceptual parallels to reveal deeper philosophical and functional convergences between Unani and modern medical thought ^[2, 5, 6].

Comparative Framework

Table 1: Overview of Quwa (Vital Powers) in Unani Medicine

Unani Power	Arabic Term	Literal Meaning	Function in Unani Medicine
Quwa Fa'ila	القوة الفاعلة	Active Power	Executes physiological actions (e.g., digestion, movement)
Quwa Hafiza	القوة الحافظة	Retentive Power	Maintains integrity, memory, and defense
Quwa Namiya	القوة النامية	Augmentative Power	Supports growth, development, and repair

Table 2: Modern physiological systems and their functions

Modern System	Primary Role
Neurological System	Controls voluntary/involuntary actions, cognition, signal integration
Immune System	Maintains homeostasis, defends against pathogens
Endocrine System	Regulates growth, metabolism, long-term physiological changes

Table 3: Mapping of unani vital powers with modern systems

Unani Power	Mapped System(s)	Functional Alignment
Quwa Fa'ila	Neurological System	Controls and initiates activity (e.g., motor action, thinking, reflexes)
	Muscular/Somatic Systems	Executes movement and action
Quwa Hafiza	Immune System	Retains and defends body identity, maintains internal balance (homeostasis)
	Central Nervous System	Cognitive memory and information retention
Quwa Namiya	Endocrine System	Supports growth via hormones (e.g., growth hormone, thyroid hormones)
	Cellular/Gene Regulation	Controls tissue development and regeneration

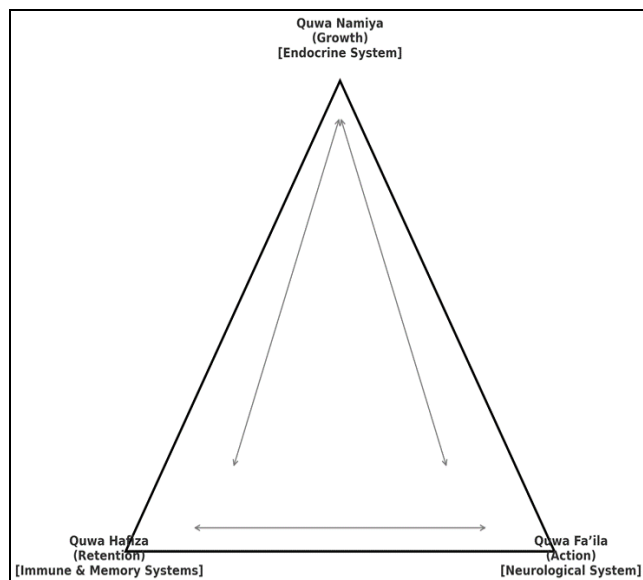


Fig 1: Triangular Mapping of Quwa and Systems.

Figure 1 shows the triangular interaction of Quwa Fa'ila, Hafiza, and Namiya with corresponding physiological systems [7-9].

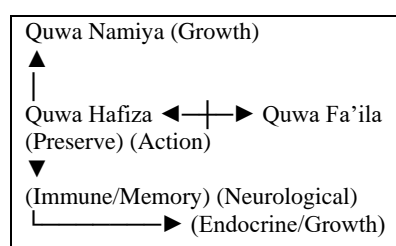


Fig 2: hormonal, neural, and immune overlap in functional physiology

Figure 2 illustrates the functional convergence of modern systems with traditional Unani vital powers [10-12].

Discussion

Quwa Fa'ila is the dynamic force that initiates and executes physiological actions. In modern physiology, this role is primarily carried out by the nervous system, which controls movement, sensation, thought, and autonomic functions. The motor cortex, spinal cord, and peripheral nerves orchestrate actions that reflect the very essence of Fa'ila's purpose. Similarly, digestive enzymes and muscular contractions autonomously regulated also echo this power's domain [4-6].

Quwa Hafiza, responsible for preservation and memory, finds a modern counterpart in the immune system and the neurological basis of memory. The immune system preserves the body's internal environment by defending against pathogens, akin to Hafiza's role of maintaining integrity. Adaptive immunity and immunological memory align conceptually with the retentive nature of Hafiza. Simultaneously, the brain's hippocampus and cortical memory centers embody Hafiza in cognitive retention [7-9].

Quwa Namiya governs growth, repair, and nourishment. This closely parallels the endocrine system, particularly through hormones like growth hormone (GH), insulin-like growth factor (IGF), thyroid hormone, and insulin. These hormones regulate metabolism, tissue growth, and regeneration. Cellular repair processes and developmental

physiology can also be mapped onto the functional spectrum of Namiya [10-13].

Through these comparisons, it becomes evident that the Unani concept of Quwa captures the essence of systemic integration and physiological control. The tripartite model offers a framework remarkably similar to how neurology, immunology, and endocrinology are viewed in modern medicine as interrelated control systems essential for maintaining homeostasis [14, 15].

Conclusion

The classical Unani notions of Quwa Fa'ila, Quwa Hafiza, and Quwa Namiya represent sophisticated understandings of physiological control. When juxtaposed with modern systems the nervous, immune, and endocrine they reveal striking conceptual parallels that reinforce the holistic wisdom of traditional medicine. This comparative study encourages an integrative approach, promoting synergy between ancient knowledge systems and modern science for better patient care and research [1, 3, 16].

Conflict of Interest

Not available

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