

INSTITUTE OF MEDIEVAL AND POST-MEDIEVAL STUDIES

10 Homeplace Ct. Arlington TX 76016: PH: 817-907-6080 www.impms.org

The mission of IMPMS is to make people aware of the great contributions of Islamic civilization to the West, and indeed to the whole world, by presentations and dissemination of written and audio-visual materials and also through participation in academic conferences as well as by organizing events on this subject.

BOARD OF DIRECTORS

Amb. Syed Ahsani

President Emeritus

syedahsani@sbcglobal.net

Dr. M. Basheer Ahmed, MD

President

mbahmed05@yahoo.com

Edward Thomas

President Elect

edwardthomas@prodigy.net

Dr. Yushau Sodiq

Vice President

y.sodiq@tcu.edu

Arshad Nizam

Secretary / Treasurer

nizam@optonline.net

Muhsin Shaheed

Member

mshaheed@academicplanet.com

Jawad Siddiqui

Member

2000japan@gmail.com

Moazzam Syed

Member

moazzam.syed@luminant.com

Reem Elghonimi

Member

reighonimi@verizon.net

Aziz Budri

Member

azizbudri@gmail.com

NEWSLETTER EDITORS

Edward Thomas

Editor-in-Chief

edwardthomas@prodigy.net

Shamoun Siddiqui

Managing Editor

shamoun.siddiqui@gmail.com

IMPMS Activities and Decisions Since Mid-September 2010

Texas Medieval Association (TEMA) Conference, September 24-26, 2010

A report on this conference will be found elsewhere in this Newsletter.

Presentation at the Islamic School of Irving

On October 4 Edward Thomas gave a 2-hour presentation to about 200 students of this school on the subject "The Rise and Decline of Islamic Civilization's Leadership in Scientific Innovation."

Award to Ambassador Ahsani

On November 6, IMPMS President Emeritus Ambassador Syed Ahsani received a Lifetime Achievement Award for service to the Muslim community at the South Central Zone Conference banquet of the Islamic Society of North America (ISNA). IMPMS had a table at the event for its board members and guests.

Panel Discussion at Texas A&M University

On November 10, Dr. Basheer Ahmed and Edward Thomas drove to College Station to participate in a panel discussion that evening on "Contributions in History of Science from Islamic Civilization." They were joined on the panel by three Texas A&M faculty members: Dr. Gul Russell, Professor, Department of Humanities in Medicine, who served as Moderator and spoke on Ibn Sina's *Canon of Medicine* and Ibn al-Haytham's contributions in Optics; Dr. G. Donald Allen, Associate Head, Department of Mathematics, who spoke on "Original Mathematics" in Islamic civilization 9th to 15th centuries; and Dr. Kevin Krisciunas, Professor, Department of Physics and Astronomy, who spoke on Nasir al-Din al-Tusi and Muhammad Taragai (Ulugh Beg). Dr. Ahmed presented a brief overview, with special focus on Al-Zahrawi and Ibn Rushd, while Mr. Thomas discussed Ibn Khaldun. About 200 students attended the program.

Meeting at Martin Luther King, Jr. Library in Dallas

On November 13, Edward Thomas and Muhsin Shaheed met at the library with its Friends Support Committee and the assistant librarian to discuss a proposal for an IMPMS presentation to youth and adults. The Committee and the librarian approved the idea in principle, with the date – probably in early 2011 – to be set after further discussion. There was also keen interest in the Timbuktu museum exhibit, which Mr. Shaheed said was expected to open in Fort Worth in December 2011.

Meetings of IMPMS Board

Meetings were held on October 3 and November 14. Board decisions included setting the annual IMPMS membership dues at \$25 and publishing the IMPMS Newsletter every three months. Regarding the Timbuktu exhibits, Dr. Sodiq agreed to assist Muhsin Shaheed in defining what if any formal involvement IMPMS would have. As for having an IMPMS invitational dinner, after the writer we had sought as keynote speaker became unavailable, because of taking a position overseas, the board decided in November not to have such an event in 2010. A final board meeting of the year is scheduled on December 19, 2010.

Abu Rayhan al-Biruni (ca. 973-1048)

Edward Thomas

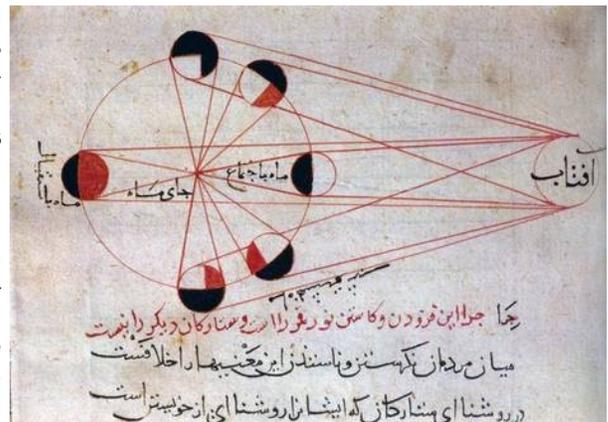
Al-Biruni was born and raised in that same region south of the Aral Sea, Khwarizm (sometimes spelled Khwarazm or Khorazm) that was the homeland of the great mathematician Al-Khwarizmi, who lived some two centuries earlier. In al-Biruni's youth, Khwarizm was in the territory governed by the Samanid dynasty, which was essentially independent even though it continued to recognize the religious authority of the Abbasid caliph in Baghdad. The Samanids, whose capital was Bukhara, made the New Persian language (evolved from pre-Islamic Persian by adopting a script based on Arabic and incorporating many Arabic words) their official language. That Persian, with some added words and a few other changes, is still used today. It was al-Biruni's native language.

Biruni (as he is called in Persian, without the Arabic article "al") showed his brilliance early by becoming an accomplished scholar in mathematics and various scientific fields, especially astronomy. In 995, when the Samanids lost Khwarizm in a coup, he left his homeland for a couple of years, and he did so again in 999, when the Samanids were overthrown and replaced by two dynasties led by Turkic warriors. Biruni spent his years away mainly in towns in what is now northern Iran, including Rayy (now Tehran). In 1004 he returned to his home town. Wherever he lived, he busied himself with astronomical and other scientific work, usually under the local ruler's patronage.

Meanwhile the Turkic warrior who had ended Samanid rule in Khorasan (northeastern Iran) in 999 was expanding his domain both eastward toward India and northward into Central Asia. Sultan Mahmud was descended from slaves who first served as guards and then as sub-governors before seizing power themselves and starting the Ghaznavid dynasty, so called because they made Ghazna (today Ghazni, a city in eastern Afghanistan) their capital. In 1017 Sultan Mahmud conquered Biruni's homeland and took him and an older astronomer who had been his teacher and later colleague to Ghazna. From that time to the end of his life, Biruni worked for Sultan Mahmud and finally his son. In one sense he may have been a captive, but he also got the patronage necessary to do his scholarly work. The Sultan took Biruni with him on his raids into India. Biruni had apparently learned some Sanskrit before going to India, and there he was able to become fully proficient, so much so that he translated some books from Sanskrit into Arabic and Persian. He studied north Indian culture almost like an anthropologist and wrote a book called simply *Book of India*. Indian scholars were advanced in mathematics and astronomy, and what he learned from their works was probably useful to him.

It is estimated that Biruni wrote close to 150 books (or book length equivalents) during his lifetime, but less than one-fifth of them are now extant. He made important contributions to virtually the whole range of sciences – astronomy, geology, physics, geography, biology, pharmacology, etc. – as well as to mathematics (algebra, trigonometry), geography, philosophy and more. He even wrote a book on astrology, though he did not accept that field as genuinely scientific. Perhaps his greatest opus was the *Qanun al-Mas'udi*, named for Sultan Mahmud's son and successor, which brings together the astronomical knowledge Biruni had been accumulating throughout his life. Also surviving is a fascinating exchange of letters with the great Ibn Sina (Avicenna)

In another work, Biruni asserted that it did not matter whether we think that the sun revolves around the earth, or that the earth revolves around the sun. The relative motions will be the same. The math is the same. Thus Biruni was apparently open to the possibility of a heliocentric universe more than 500 years before Copernicus lived.



Biruni's illustration of *phases of the moon*, with explanation in Persian

Timbuktu: A Legacy of Knowledge, Dignity and Wealth from West Africa to America in the 11th to the 18th Century

Muhsin Shaheed

When Timbuktu is mentioned, it is not unusual to hear, "What is Timbuktu?" The history of Timbuktu stretches over 8 centuries, from the 11th to the 19th. In this article, I will present some well-established facts regarding Timbuktu, a historic city and region in West Africa. After Makkah (Mecca), home town of the Prophet Muhammad (Peace and Blessing Be Upon Him [PBUH]), Africa was the first continent where Muslims lived. In 615 C.E., after their exile or flight from Makkah to Abyssinia (Ethiopia) during the lifetime of the Prophet, the Christian King Negus Al-Asham (Ahmed Al-Najashi) gave asylum to the early Muslims fleeing the Quraysh tribe. King Negus later converted to Islam; he was the first king to embrace the religion of Islam (Ref-1) which began spreading westward.

In the late 1100s a trading post was established in West Africa at the southern edge of the Sahara Desert by Tuareg nomads. They built it near a water well belonging to a woman named Bouctou, and eventually the community that built up around there got the name Timbuktu. From there caravans crossed the desert to Sijilmasa, Morocco, at the northern edge of the Sahara. The most valuable trade was salt from the Mediterranean shores in exchange for gold from West Africa (Ref-2). Timbuktu came to export more gold than any other place in the world.

Scholars, jurists, and other scientists in Timbuktu and elsewhere in West Africa made important contributions in the natural sciences, social sciences, medicine, mathematics, geography, good governance, law, equal rights for male and female, religious tolerance, conflict resolution and creating a culture of peace, just to name a few areas. International scholars have begun to translate from Arabic to English the 800,000 to 1,000,000 manuscripts in Mali (the country where Timbuktu is located today) alone; there are an estimated 10,000,000 in all of West Africa. The translation of the ancient manuscripts so far has revealed that Timbuktu was a highly sophisticated, literate society. There were over 12,000 scholars in over 125 schools. The city flourished with prosperity, peace, security and knowledge as well as across tribal and religious differences. The skill of book binding along with writing and purchasing books were the number one source of income. Scholars and students came from Asia, Europe and the known world to sit at the feet of the inhabitants of this magnificent society to seek knowledge.

The manuscripts were written by the scholars of Timbuktu. The most recent unveiling of the artifacts, manuscripts and history in Mali will no doubt shatter the myths that have long dogged the continent as not contributing to the advancement of civilization. A Moroccan diplomat and writer known in Europe as Leo the African who traveled there early in the 16th century gave this description:

"In Timbuktu there are numerous judges, doctors and clerics, all receiving good salaries from the king. He pays great respect to men of learning. There is a big demand for books in manuscript, imported from Barbary. More profit is made from the book trade than any line of business." Leo Africanus (Ref-3)

During Mansa Musa's leadership from 1312-1332, he made the Pilgrimage to Mecca in 1323-24 with 60,000 in his entourage, spending and giving away gold that would amount to over \$548 billion in today's economy.

The period of the Songhai Empire (1465-1591) is considered the Golden Age of Timbuktu. It ended with a crushing defeat by the more modernized Moroccan army. Many scholars were captured and carried back to Morocco, including perhaps the most famous one, Ahmed Baba. By that time European powers were busy colonizing the American continents, and a new African product – people – had become more desirable even than gold. Conservative to moderate estimates are that between 12.5 million to 50 million Africans were captured and deported to the Americas during the infamous slave trade (Ref-4) Over 90% of them came from West Africa. Most were Muslims, and some were scholars.

Exhibits of selected manuscripts are now being loaned for periods to a few museums outside Mali, including in the United States. There are plans for them to be on display in Fort Worth during late winter and early spring 2013. The contributions by scholars in Timbuktu and West Africa are generally and uniquely unmatched, with the equality among male and female, good will across tribal and religious lines, and centuries of peace, prosperity and literacy.

References

- 1.Saad, Elias N., *Social History of Timbuktu: The Role of Muslim Scholars and Notables 1400 – 1900* (Cambridge Studies in Islamic Civilization, (Cambridge Studies in Islamic Civilization, Cambridge University Press, 1983), 58-59; *Africa From the seventh to the Eleventh Century*, Ed. I. Hrbek, General History of Africa. III, UNESCO, 1992, chapters 2, 3, 13 and 14.
- 2.Sodiq, Yushau, PhD, "Timbuktu." *Encyclopedia of African American History*. Ed. Walter C. Rucker, Leslie Alexander. Santa Barbara, CA: ABC-CLIO, 2010. ABC-CLIO eBook Collection. 10 May 2010
- 3.Jackson, James G., *An Account of Tinbuctoo and Housa, Territories in the Interior of Africa*, by El Hage Abd Salam Shabeeny (London, Longman, Hurst, Rees Sertina, van V., Ph.D., *The Golden Age of the Moor*, Transaction Publishers, New Brunswick USA, 1992.
- 4.Sertina, Ivan V., Ph.D., *The Golden Age of the Moor*, Transaction Publishers, New Brunswick USA, 1992.,

Did you know

that the first African known to have set foot in what is now the United States was a Muslim? That was in 1527. He came from Azemmour, Morocco, and he is sometimes known as Azemmouri. However, he also got the Spanish name Estevanico because he was sold in Spain to a Spaniard who took him on a voyage to Cuba and then on to Florida . He was also known as Black Stephen and Stephen the Moor. After his master's death in 1527, he became a great explorer of the huge area that is now the southern and southwestern U.S and northern Mexico . He may have been the first person not born in the Americas to cross North America from ocean to ocean.



Texas Medieval Association (TEMA) Annual Conference, 2010

The TEMA 2010 Conference took place between September 24-26 at the Southern Methodist University in Dallas. Several IMPMS board members attended the opening reception on Friday, September 24 at 5 p.m. and a lecture after it. Later came a "Texas Supper" in the large TEMA tent. Round table discussions and presentation sessions began the next morning. The 2-hour IMPMS session, entitled "Science, Society, and History in the Medieval dar al-Islam," included the following topics: "Al-Zahrawi, the Eminent Muslim Surgeon of 10th century Spain and the Father of Modern Surgery," presented by Dr. Basheer Ahmed, IMPMS President; "Timbuktu: A Legacy of Knowledge, Prosperity and Peace from Africa to America in the 11th to the 18th Century," presented by board member Muhsin Shaheed; and "How the Islamic World Lost its Position as World Leader in Scientific Innovation," presented by Edward Thomas, president-elect. Ambassador Syed Ahsani, IMPMS President Emeritus, was unable to be present, but a handout he put together on the brilliant 13th century polymath Nasiruddin Tusi was made available.

2011 International Congress on Medieval Studies, Kalamazoo MI

The conference on Medieval Studies that attracts the largest participation in the United States, and perhaps in the world, is the International Congress held annually at Western Michigan University in Kalamazoo. The 46th International Congress on Medieval Studies will be held there May 12-15, 2011, and is expected to draw more than 3000 participants. IMPMS representatives have taken part in these events in earlier years, and IMPMS will be well represented in the 2011 Congress at a Sponsored Session organized by Reem Elghonimi. While the full program will not be available until February of 2011, Reem reports that the IMPMS Session will include presentations of the following papers: "The Madina Constitution" by Imam Dr. Yusuf Kavakci; "Islamic Scholarship in West Africa in the Medieval Ages" by Dr. Yushau Sodiq; "The Individual and Religiosity in Medieval Iberia" by Reem Elghonimi; and "Islamic Civilization's Contributions to the Science of Astronomy in the Medieval Period" by Edward Thomas. Muhsin Shaheed has agreed to be a Discussant.