QUARTERLY NEWSLETTER Q1 2011

INSTITUTE OF MEDIEVAL AND POST-MEDIEVAL STUDIES

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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.

IMPMS Activities and Board Meetings Since Mid-December 2010

Board meeting of December 19, 2010

At this last meeting of 2010, it was agreed that, since it had not been possible to hold an annual IMPMS event in 2010, the subject would be considered again at the January 2011 meeting. Muhsin Shaheed circulated a letter confirming the understanding between the Fort Worth science museum and the Islamic History Museum in Jackson MS for the Fort Worth museum to exhibit Timbuktu manuscripts and related items in 2012-13. The IMPMS President, Dr. Basheer Ahmed, then introduced a guest, Dr. Harbans Lal, who spoke about the Parliament of World Religions. The Parliament meets somewhere in the world every four years. The last meeting was held in Melbourne, Australia, in the summer of 2010, and Dallas is one of three cities competing to host the Parliament in 2014. The others are Guadalajara, Mexico, and Brussels, Belgium.

The board then elected, by unanimous vote, the following members of the new executive committee, to take office as of January 1, 2011:

Edward Thomas,	President
Dr. Yushau Sodiq,	President-Elect
Muhsin Shaheed,	Vice-President
Moazam Syed,	Secretary/Treasurer
Dr. Basheer Ahmed,	Past President
Ambassador Ahsani,	President Emeritus

(Information just received as this is being written: Brussels has been selected to host the Parliament of World Religions convention in 2014.)

Board meetings in the first quarter of 2011

Meetings were held on January 30 and February 27. The main subjects discussed included two proposals: a dinner event with a keynote speaker and an essay contest for high school students. Final decisions on these proposals have not yet been made, but they will certainly be high on the agenda of the next meeting, which will be held on April 3 instead of the last Sunday of March because Mr. Thomas will be abroad on March 27. At the February meeting board members were informed that neither Reem Elghonimi nor Imam Dr. Yusuf Kavakci would be able to participate in the IMPMS session planned for the Medieval Studies Congress in Kalamazoo MI in May 2011. Later, with only two presenters still available – too few for the planned roundtable, it was decided to cancel the session altogether.

IMPMS Presentation at the Martin Luther King, Jr. Library in Dallas

On March 12, 2011, Board members Edward Thomas and Muhsin Shaheed made a presentation at this branch public library. Projecting map slides, Mr. Thomas showed the spread of Islamic civilization in its early centuries, and he then spoke briefly about nine great scholars who lived between the 8th and the 15th centuries. Mr. Shaheed then described the great civilization achieved under Muslim rulers in medieval West Africa, with particular reference to the renowned scholars of Timbuktu and the manuscripts they produced.

Ibn Sina (Avicenna) 980-1037

A Great Physician and Scholar of the Medieval Era

M. Basheer Ahmed, M.D.

There is no doubt that Western civilization has made invaluable contributions to the development of modern sciences; however, scientific progress did not start suddenly, exclusively, in Europe, or appear out of nowhere in the 16th century. European and American history acknowledges the work and scientific advancements made by Greek and Roman scholars until the 3rd century A.D. It picks up again in 1500 A.D. at the beginning of the Renaissance.

Did nothing happen in the sciences between 300 and 1500 A.D.? Very little is mentioned about the history of social, political or scientific development in traditional history texts. Historian Harold J. Morowitz described this phenomenon as "History's Black Hole."[1] He asserts that the given impression is that the Renaissance arose, Phoenix-like, from ashes smoldering for a millennium of the classical age of Greek and Rome. In fact, the period between 300-1500 A.D. is regarded as the Dark Ages for Europe, as scientific progress there remained dormant. Virtually no progress was made, especially in the field of medicine. During this time, the powerful and authoritarian Roman Catholic Church viewed care of the soul as far more important than care of the body; thus, actual treatment of physical illness was little valued. Prayers became the primary mode of treatment. The study of disease and patient care were neglected. Any knowledge of medicine was limited to studying the writings of ancient physicians; and, consequently, the practice of surgery was almost abandoned.[2]

Early Muslim physicians recognized that the knowledge of medicine included studying the human body, diagnosing ailments and treating them with appropriate medications as well as surgical interventions. They established hospitals, medical schools and written medical textbooks. These books were widely used in Europe until the 17th century. Muslim physicians made accurate diagnoses of a variety of illnesses such as plague, diabetes, gout, epilepsy, cancer, various infections and surgical disorders. They set down the principles of observation, clinical investigations and drug trials. They mastered surgical skills and devised new tools, filled teeth with gold, introduced optics and described in detail the fundamentals of diet and hygiene, many of which are still valid today.

Among the well-known Muslim physicians, the most famous is **Ibn Sina (Avicenna)**. Abu Ali Hussain Ibn Sina was born in 980 A.D. in Afshana, a town near Bukhara, then capital of the Samanid dynasty and now an important city in Uzbekistan. His father, who came from Balkh, worked for the Samanid ruler. Ibn Sina studied in Bukhara and became the most brilliant medical scholar, philosopher and educator in the world by the beginning of second millennium. He is also called *Al-Sheikh -Al Rais* (The Leading Sheikh or Prince) because of his vast knowledge, which included medicine as well as many other disciplines such as mathematics, philosophy, logic and religion. He did original research and contributed to the development of all sciences. Through his efforts, medicine recorded an unprecedented progress.

Ibn Sina would be considered an intellectual prodigy by any standard. By the age of 10, he had mastered the Arabic language and the Qur[1]an. By age 14, he had studied philosophy, mathematics, astronomy and the Greek language. He examined Aristotle's philosophy and logic, Porphyry's Isagoge, Euclid and Ptolemy's Astronomy and other sciences. At age 17, he learned medicine, and within a few years, his reputation as an expert physician was so well-established that he was appointed as the ruler's physician. He traveled to several large cities in the region, including Gorgan, Rayy, Hamadan, and Isfahan (all of which are in Iran today`) and Baghdad. Ibn Sina started writing at the age of 21 and wrote more than 200 books on philosophy, astronomy, theology and medicine. He excelled in the knowledge of logic and philosophy, and reintroduced Aristotle to Europe through his writings.

Ibn Sina's most significant contribution to medical science was his famous book *Al-Qanoon fi al Tibb* ("The Canon of Medicine"). It was the pre-eminent medical encyclopedia of that time and remained a standard textbook of medicine for the next 700 years. In addition to bringing together all of the current available knowledge, Ibn Sina made original contributions to this five-volume text.

The first volume deals with anatomy, physiology and pathology, with emphasis on the importance of dissection of the human body. The second volume describes the general principles of treatment, and pharmacology. The third and fourth volumes consist of diseases of all organs of the body, special pathology of fevers, and signs and symptoms of known diseases. The fifth volume describes a disease that starts in one part of the body but subsequently affects several parts of the body.

Unique for its time, Ibn Sina[1]s work indeed gave a different perspective and clarified the knowledge of medicine. He made a comprehensive attempt at collecting, systematizing, as well as updating, the data with personal observations and original research. The fragmentary and unorganized Greco-Roman medical literature that had been translated into Arabic was reorganized in order to produce a coherent and orderly medical system. The encyclopedic work of Ibn Sina included the entire medical knowledge available from ancient to the most current sources. Due to Ibn Sina's systematic approach for perfection and its intrinsic value, the *Qanoon* (Canon) superseded the work of Galen and remained superior for six centuries.

Ibn Sina was the first physician to describe guinea worm infestation and anthrax. He was the first physician to discuss the theory that small organisms may be responsible for infectious diseases, 1000 years ago, and advocated the use of broad mold organisms in the treatment of non-responsive open wounds. He described trigemmal neuralgia and facial paralysis of central and peripheral types. Other important, original contributions included his recognition of the contagious nature of phthisis and tuberculosis; the distribution of diseases by water and soil; and, the interaction between psychology and health. Ibn Sina wrote separate chapters on cardiac drugs for the elderly. He also discussed the treatment of anxiety, depression and melancholia.

The Qanoon was translated into Latin and Hebrew. About 30 editions were published in Europe. The last Italian edition was published in Rome in 1593. Until the 17th century, half of the medical school curriculum in Islamic and European countries was based on Ibn Sina[1]s book *Al-Qanoon*[3]

Other noteworthy books by Ibn Sina include *Isharat*, focusing on philosophy and logic. He contended that logic does not discover truth but helps man make best use of his qualities and prevents him from making wrong decisions. In another, *Kitab Al-Shifa* (A Book of Healing), he described a detailed method of preparation of medications (simple and compound), medical ethics and philosophy. Ibn Sina writes his observations and encourages discussion on Platonic philosophy and Islamic theology.

Sir William Osler, the father of modern medicine, sums up Ibn Sina's personality in this way: "We cannot understand the sway exercised by Ibn Sina for three or four centuries: mentally to live and move in the medieval mind is not given to many and the knowledge most of us have of Rais (The Chief) is at third or fourth hand." Students like Carre de Vaux were eloquent over the precocity of Ibn Sina's talents, the quickness and loftiness of his intellect, the clarity and force of his thought, the multiplicity and extent of his work, the impetuosity and variety of his passion. Regarded as a resume and symbol of all human activities, he stands out as one of the great personalities in a great civilization His enthusiastic biographer, Carre de Vaux, does not hesitate to say, "Never time will present a comparable figure since encyclopedic knowledge no longer exists." [4](English translation)

A fitting closing to this article is Ibn Sina's opening of the *Qanoon*: "Medicine is a science from which one learns the status of the human body with respect to what is healthy and what is not, in order to preserve good health when it exists and restore it when it is lacking."[3]

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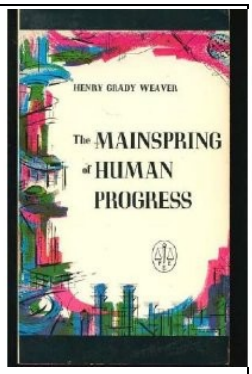
1. Morowitz, H.J. "History's Black Hole" – hospital practice, May 1992, pp. 25-31.
2. Tschanz, David "Arab Roots of European Medicine" Saudi Aramco World, May/June 1997, Volume 48 No.3.
3. Savage, Smith E. "Islamic Culture and Medical Arts." National Library of Medicine, Bethesda MD 1994.
4. Osler, W. "The Principle and Practice of Medicine", New York 1892.

Recommended Reading



Weaver, Henry Grady. "Mainspring of Human Progress", 13 ed, Talbot Books, 1987

Excerpts from "The Mainspring of Human Progress".

The Mainspring of Human Progress was written over 60 years ago by Henry Grady Weaver, who was an executive at the General Motors Corporation. In 1938 he was judged to be of enough importance to grace the cover of TIME magazine. The Mainspring of Human Progress attempts to trace the history of human liberty and freedom through the ages. An entire chapter titled "The Second Attempt" speaks about the Islamic empire that flourished for over 800 year. Here are some excerpts from that chapter.

Prosperity in the Dark Ages

Theirs was a spontaneous religion based on a sense of reality, springing from and depending upon the personal self. And for 800 years, during the period when the greater part of Europe was submerged in the Dark Ages, this religion produced the most brilliant scientific progress and the greatest material prosperity that had ever been known to man.....

Scientific Farming

The foods were amazing and strange. There was a variety of meats, cooked with seasonings and sauces. There were salads and ices. There was an unknown drink in tiny cups - coffee, sugared and spiced. No European had ever before seen such a variety of cereals, vegetables, and fruits - rice, spinach, asparagus, lemons, melons, peaches produced by the world's first scientific farmers. In Europe, oxen and women pulled wooden plows which merely scratched the earth, and the crop was whatever God might will. Half of the farm land always lay fallow - giving birth to a crop tires the earth, and it must rest.

But in the world of the Saracens, not an acre of arable land ever rested. From Cathay to the Atlantic, across three continents, the Saracen farmers were deep plowing and contour plowing, fertilizing, irrigating, and rotating crops. They poured into the markets an abundance of nearly every food that we have today and took in return a wealth of goods such as the world had never known before. These goods included damask linens, mohair, muslin, Syrian silks, morocco leather, oriental rugs, mosaics, inlaid woods, glassware, porcelains, enamels, filigree and wrought work in metals. Damascene steel was not equaled until very recently in the United States.

From the Saracens

We Americans owe directly to the Saracens our Californian and southwestern architecture, our cotton industry, our asphalt paving, and a long list of such things as beds, tables, table and bed linens, divans, sofas, glass, china, rugs, strawberries, peaches, ice cream. We speak Arabic when we say mattress, cotton, talcum, sugar, coffee, sherbet, naphtha, gypsum, benzine. Our cars are run, our streets are paved, our houses are furnished, and our bodies are clothed with things that the Saracens began to create a thousand years ago.

More Arabic Words in English

Just above, Henry Grady Weaver notes some English words of Arabic origin. There are many more. In an article in a previous Newsletter about the great mathematician, astronomer and geographer **al-Khwarizmi**, it was noted that the word *algorithm* comes from his name. We also owe him the word *algebra*, which came from the word *al-jabr* in the title of his influential book on quadratic equations. Indeed, many other words beginning with *al* are of Arabic origin, such as *alcohol, alkali, almanac, alcove, albatross, alcazar,* and *alchemy*. But there are other words, too: *antimony, azimuth, admiral, camphor, carat, cipher, elixir, divan, soda, zenith,* etc.

If we expand our search to include the names of stars, the four pages of this whole Newsletter, if there were nothing else in them, would be able to contain only a portion of those names. Astronomers of the Islamic world first took the existing names in Greek and other languages and Arabized them. Then, as they discovered new stars with their observatories, which improved steadily over the centuries, more Arabic-named stars were added.