

**A Museum and Library  
Of  
Islamic Medical History**

*A new perspective.*

**Husain F.Nagamia MD FRCS (Eng and Edin)  
Chairman,  
International Institute of Islamic Medicine (IIIM)  
Chief Emeritus,  
Dept. Cardio Vascular Surgery  
Cardiac Institute of Florida  
Clinical Assistant Professor of Surgery,  
University of S. Florida Medical School,  
Tampa, Florida, USA.**

**Introduction.**

Islamic Medical History is one of the richest heritages of the Islamic Civilization. Soon after our beloved Prophet (pbuh) had brought to humanity the message of Islam, and in a span of less than two centuries, this message had spread far and wide across the globe covering a large geographical area which included many different countries, cultures, races, and peoples who spoke many different languages. These divergent cultures were all thrown into a single crucible, causing a catalytic reaction that was to cause the synthesis of a great nation that had almost no parallels in history of mankind. In the midst of this vast Muslim Empire, a class of people evolved that were keen and thirsty for knowledge. These scholars belonged not only to the elitist of this society or the ruling

class, but also encompassed all its strata, the nobility, the middle and the working class.

This new civilization knew no boundaries of race, religion, color or creed, and as dictated by the tenets of this new religion of *Islam*, knowledge thrived, mushroomed and reached a new pinnacle of human achievement. A new lust was created for the acquisition, utilization and dissemination of this knowledge. Medicine was only a part of this miraculous boom, and many other arts and sciences flourished and prospered. These included mathematics, astronomy, alchemy, pharmacy, astrology, logic, philosophy to name only a few. The practical application of this knowledge had tremendous effects on the lifestyles of the common peoples, bringing to them new dimensions with the manufacture of paper, the use of the decimal systems, refinements in architecture, design and building construction, improvements in agriculture, horticulture, animal husbandry and the manufacture of goods and materials. It was also to revolutionize the teaching and practice of rational medicine. These events were forever to change their lifestyle and daily living. These historical events were to last for almost a millennium and knowledge was brought to a new peak of human achievement. Great contributions were made during this era to the development of all sciences including medicine. Medicine was gathered accumulated, translated, compiled, categorized and indexed. New discoveries were made and added to the discoveries of the ancients and a special cadre of Medicine evolved which has been termed as “*Islamic Medicine*”

### **The need for the Museum and Library of Islamic Medicine.**

It is estimated that there are about three million manuscripts, documents and ancient texts of Islamic Medicine, that are spread across the world. However these are widely disbursed through the many different parts of the globe. A good percentage of them exist in the Libraries of the Arab and Muslim Countries, but many of

them are stored and housed in Western Libraries and Museums. In recent times most of the research, collection and dissemination of this heritage has been done by western scholars or in western Universities by orient lists who look at these with a perspective somewhat different from one that may be generated by an Islamic or Islamically oriented scholar. As most of the Muslim countries emerge from a period of colonization and subservience to the West, they are beginning to understand that one of the most important aspects of our civilization that has been utterly neglected has been our history and heritage. This also includes our rich history and heritage in Medicine. Efforts are now being made to fill these gaps in our knowledge by the neo intellectuals of Islamic Civilization, but much, if not most of the fundamental research in this subject continues to be done in the West and very little is being done in the Islamic lands. Notable examples of these efforts are the collection, collation and publication of this historic material that has been gathered by eminent scholars like **Faut Sezgin** in his voluminous contribution of 99 volumes on “**Islamic Medicine**”

Some other efforts in the East that can be noted are publication of some original research by the late Hakim Mohammed Said at the Hamdard Foundation in Karachi Pakistan; research and publications of the Hamdard University in Delhi and some efforts being made at ISTAC in Kaula Lumpur Malaysia, to name just a few.

To this day no single center exists, that houses all the collections in one place, for scholars to continue research in the fundamentals of Islamic Medicine and benefit the humanity at large. The time has come to fill this gap and this paper examines the feasibility and execution of such a project.

## **Islamic Medical Manuscripts where are they?**

As already stated the Islamic Medical manuscripts are distributed widely in the world. The largest identified collections can be found in western libraries where they have been collected, collated and preserved. I have personally visited some of these libraries and viewed some of these collections. Some of the most well known are:

In the USA: Library of Congress, Washington DC, the National Library of Medicine in Bethesda Maryland, the medical Libraries of John Hopkins, Yale, Harvard, Princeton and UCLA.

In UK: The British Museum, the Wellcome Library of History of Medicine, the Libraries of the Colleges of Medicine and Surgery in London, Edinburgh and Glasgow in Scotland and collections in the Radcliffe library at the University at Oxford, and a generous collection in the libraries at the University of Cambridge.

In Europe: There are oriental collections in Paris, in Madrid at the Escorial, and in Germany at the libraries in Frankfurt, Munich and Berlin.

In the Middle East: At the University of Istanbul, at the Topkapi Museum, in the Alexandrian library in Cairo, and others in Damascus, Aleppo, and Tehran.

In Russia: The library of Moscow and Leningrad.

In India and Pakistan: Hamdard Foundation in Karachi and Delhi, The Khuda Baksh Library in Patna, the Library in Rampur, in Hyderabad and the Salar Jung Museum, and Royal Asiatic Society in Mumbai (Bombay).

In the Far East: The ISTAC Library in Kaula Lumpur

## **Examining the pioneers of Islamic Medicine and their role in Islamic Medical History.**

There were some great Physicians that shaped the history of Islamic Medicine. Earlier in Islamic history they were mostly Christians and many of them were associated with either the school at Jundishapur or with the hospitals and schools of Baghdad patterned after the one in Jundishapur. These included the Bukhtishu family of Physicians, and the Masawihs and Hunayn ibn Ishaq.

Most of the later physicians were Muslims and include such physicians as Al Majusi, Al Tabbari, and Al Razi. Their works and contributions are well known to the world today. Perhaps the most scintillating and prodigy of the Islamic Medical renaissance was Ibn Sina known to the west as Avicenna. His Magnus Opus “Qanun fil Tibb” became the standard work of Medicine for centuries to come and its Latin translations were used by west for several more centuries as a standard work of medical reference.

Mention has also to be made of the physicians in Al Andalus or Islamic Spain. These included Al Zahrawi who was made famous by his surgical treatise in Al Tasrif. This was to make great contribution to the development of surgery in the west. Mention also needs to be made of Ibn Rushd, Ibn Zuhr and the Jewish physician Ibn Maimun or “Maimonides” who were to contribute not only to medicine but also to the esoteric subjects like Medical Ethics.

In later years Ibn Nafees was to write about pulmonary circulation and challenge the long held beliefs of Galen and even Ibn Sina.

The legacy left behind by these phenomenal scientists was to shape the practice of medicine for many centuries to come in the vast Islamic empire and later lay the seeds of renaissance of Medicine in Europe in the 14<sup>th</sup> and 15<sup>th</sup> centuries CE.

## **The need for collection and preservation.**

If one looks at the lists of bibliographers like the 10<sup>th</sup> century Ibn Nadeem and the descriptions of historians like Ibn Abi Usaibiya it is evident that only a few of the original works of these great medieval masters have survived. Many of them have been destroyed by the ravages of time or the lack of preservation. Others are either buried in some unknown libraries in the vast dominions that constituted the unified Islamic empire of those times. The vast Islamic Empire that occupied at one time almost one fourth of the known world has now been broken up into much smaller countries and nations. After the colonization of these countries by the West much of their knowledge and wealth that existed in the form of ancient manuscripts, books, scientific and art works, have been pilfered, usurped, looted or destroyed. What exists in the libraries of the Eastern world is unkept and dilapidated and will require enormous effort for restoration and preservation. With newer methods of preservation and restoration now being made available an enormous task has to be undertaken to preserve the available and surviving treasures. This will require the resources and manpower of a wealthy nation that can devote these resources towards these ends.

## **The need for dissemination.**

Besides the task of collection and preservation there is also the task of dissemination of this knowledge. It is in the dissemination of this knowledge that a center like the **“Museum and Library of Islamic Medical History”** would prove to be an invaluable resource. The Museum and Library would serve as a center of collection, preservation, and dissemination of this knowledge. Its ongoing research and learning would provide and attract scholars from all over the world, and hopefully uncover secrets that may continue to benefit humanity. It would boost our knowledge of **“Islamic Medicine”** and help us to look at Medicine from an

*Islamic perspective*, a vantage point to which Islamic Scholarship has yet to pay attention. This would be a step in the right direction to spring forward and try and emerge from the dark ages that we the Islamic Nations are presently in.

## **Why Now?**

Two main reasons exist for this project to be undertaken now. The first one is that many Islamic nations have the wealth, the scholarship and the human resources that are necessary to undertake this ambitious project.

The second reason is that we now have the technical resources and capability with computers, internet and digital media of not only collecting but also of permanently preserving this knowledge base in a digitized format.

## **The modern technology. Digital, Cyber and Virtual age.**

We have entered into the age of digitization of knowledge. Libraries and Museums within the foreseeable future will have less books and more computer based storage. Digital imagery and virtual recreation is now enabling us to preserve entire books and collections in the digitized format with virtually no fear of deterioration or loss, due to ravages of time and elements. A Museum and Library based on these concepts would be amongst the foremost in the world and achieve fame and attraction.

## **Turning the pages:**

This is a novel innovation where a book or manuscript is digitized and enables the viewer to literally “turn the pages” without having to ever touch the original book or manuscript. It is now available to museums and libraries around the world to harness and use its

utility. A Museum based on this concept would revolutionize the preservation and dissemination of knowledge of Islamic Medicine.

## **Conclusion.**

There is a need for a Museum and Library of Islamic Medicine as one does not exist in the world today. The knowledge of Islamic Medicine is scattered in many parts of the World and needs to be collected, collated and if necessary translated by eminent scholars of today in order to rejuvenate and revive its eminence. This can only happen in a wealthy Islamic Nation. This can be accomplished by building a showpiece Museum and Library of Islamic Medicine in a central place of Islamic Heritage and Culture.

## **Bibliography**

### **Texts and studies on Islamic medicine**

By Fuat Sezgin

Publisher: Frankfurt am Main: Institute for the History of Arabic-Islamic Science, 1997

### **Islamic medicine**

#### **Publications of the Institute for the History of Arabic-Islamic Science.**

by Fuat Sezgin; Māzin Amāwī; Carl Ehrig-Eggert; E Neubauer; Institut für Geschichte der Arabisch-Islamischen Wissenschaften (Frankfurt am Main, Germany)

### **The Encyclopaedia of Islam. Volumes 1-11**

By Brill Academic Publishers.

Publisher: Leiden : Brill, 2003.

### **Bibliography on medicine and pharmacy in medieval Islam,**

By Sami Khalaf Hamarneh

Publisher: Stuttgart, Wissenschaftliche Verlagsgesellschaft, 1964.

**Pharmacy museums and historical collections in the United States and Canada**

by George B Griffenhagen; Ernst Walter Stieb; Sami Khalaf Hamarneh; American Institute of the History of Pharmacy.

Publisher: Madison, Wis. : American Institute of the History of Pharmacy, 1988.

**Health sciences in early Islam: collected papers**

By Sami Khalaf Hamarneh; Munawar A Anees

Publisher: San Antonio : Zahra Publications, ©1983-©1984.

**Arabic manuscripts of the National Library of Medicine, Washington, D.C.**

by Sami Khalaf Hamarneh; National Library of Medicine (U.S.)

Language: English Type:  Book

Publisher: Aleppo, Syria: Institute for the History of Arabic Science, University of Aleppo, 1977.

**Catalogue of Arabic manuscripts on medicine and pharmacy at the British Library**

By **سامي خلف** . Sami Khalaf Hamarneh

Publisher: **دار النشر** T **للجامعات المصرية**, Cairo : [Da'ir al-Nashr lil-Jāmi'at al-Miṣriyah] ; 1975.

**Index of Arabic manuscripts [sic] on medicine and pharmacy at the National Library of Cairo.**

by Sami Khalaf Hamarneh; Da'ir al-Kutub al-Miṣriyah.

Publisher: Cairo, Dar al-Mahasin Press, 1967

**Arabic medicine and its impact on teaching and practice of the healing arts in the West.**

by Sami Khalaf Hamarneh; Accademia nazionale dei Lincei.

Publisher: [Roma, Accademia Nazionale dei Lincei, 1971

**Index of manuscripts on medicine, pharmacy, and allied sciences in the Zāhirîyah Library, by Sami K. Hamarneh. Language and printing revised by Asma Homsy.**

by Sami Khalaf Hamarneh; Asma Homsy; Al-Maktabah al-Wataniyah al-Zahiviyah.

Publisher: Damascus, al-Taraqqa Press, 1968.

**Arabic texts available to practitioners of the health professions in medieval Islam.**

by Sami Khalaf Hamarneh

Publisher: [Cairo, 1968]

**Pharmacy and medicine through the ages**

by Hakim Mohammad Said

Publisher: Karachi, PK : Hamdard Foundation, 1980.

**1001 inventions : Muslim heritage in our world**

by Salim T S Al-Hassani; Elizabeth Woodcock; Rabah Saoud; Foundation for Science Technology and Civilisation (U.K.).

Publisher: Manchester, Great Britain : Foundation for Science Technology and Civilisation, ©2006.

**Health and medicine in the Islamic tradition**

by Fazlur Rahman

Publisher: New York : Crossroad, 1987.

**A research on the history of world medicine and treatment up to the present era**

by Muḥammad Taqī Sarmadī;

Publisher: Tehran : Sarmadi Publications, 2002-

**Islamization of knowledge : general principles and workplan.**

by Ismail R al-Faruqi; International Institute of Islamic Thought.

Publisher: Aligarh : Centre for Studies on Science, 1982.