

Book Reviews

A Collection of Essays on the History of Medicine in Iran



History is a torch shedding light on the path of a nation to glorious future. If you do not care about your past, you cannot plan to shape your future. With hundreds of eminent scholars, Iran was one of the most prominent centers in the world for science production in general, and medicine in particular. There had only been a few documents on the history of medicine in Iran until a couple of years ago when *Archives of Iranian Medicine*, the

official publication of *Iranian Academy of Medical Sciences* has devoted a section to this important topic. Recently, Dr. M. H. Azizi, the (co) author of most of these articles, compiled all the published articles in the journal into a book so that interested readers can have readily access to all the documents. The book consists of four parts—ancient time medicine, contemporary medicine, outstanding physicians, and incidents of fatal diseases in Iran.

The first part describes *Gondishapur* School of medicine, one of the greatest universities of medical sciences in the world; reputed Iranian scholars *Avicenna* and *Rhazes* and their work; and even mythology such as *Asclepius* and its Persian equivalent. Part two devotes to the history of contemporary medicine in Iran and covers medicine during *Qajar* dynasty, development of various specialty medical branches, and establishment of modern medical universities in Iran. Life of great scholars who has had paramount influence on medical sciences in Iran is covered in the third part of this book. The fourth part briefly reports the historical background of fatal diseases and epidemics in Iran. It includes a history on tuberculosis, leprosy, diphtheria, malaria, and 1918 deadly Spanish influenza.

Unlike some history books, this book is not boring at all, as the authors look at an event from different perspectives. Articles in this book are evidence-based and appropriate photos, when possible, are provided. The quality of some of the old photos, however, could have been improved by image processing, but it does not lessen the value of this book and we suggest all who involved in medicine, particularly young students read it with scrutiny.

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At first, I thought this would be a simple matter: I would read a few of the Book's essays (beginning with my own, of course) and, then jot down a few complimentary sentences. And that would be that. But when I finished Dr. Nayernori's "Medical Symbols", I realized that this "Collection of Essays on the History of Medicine in Iran" is truly a unique compilation of well written historical – medical treatises. Part II of Dr. Nayernouri's essay provides a marvelous insight into the emblematic aspects of the subject, a real counterpart of the Ancient Greeks'. Lest it be forgotten, Iran is credited with the richest 'Treasury of Medical History'

in the world. I was delighted to see the picture of Dr. Hossein Mirshamsi whose contributions to vaccine development during WWII was a monumental service to public health of Iran, and due credit is given to another great public health figure of this country, Dr. Chamseddin Mofidi. The brief history of the discovery of the circulation of blood was very informative and enchanting.

The more I delved into the book, the harder it was to put it down. So I read it carefully from cover to cover, skipping my own contributions, as they would have been a let-down. After a while it became obvious that this work goes beyond a "collection" of essays. It is actually a compendium about what went on for nearly a century in Iran during one of its more tumultuous historical periods. A good part of the Book is devoted to what went on in Shiraz, especially during the time I was there. The whole book tends to speak well of those who had something to do with evolution of medicine in the twentieth century.

Iranian Medicine can boast more about its ancient history – clearly the most illustrious in the world – than its most recent, purely scientific accomplishments. But then, this country's entry into the modern world of medical science began with the inauguration of Tehran University 80 years ago. Unfortunately national and global political and economic forces crept into the very fabric of academic medicine of Iran. I personally think, really hope, that ever so slowly, Iran's younger generation of medical men and women, will succeed in joining forces to revive our illustrious medical past. Perhaps, they will come to prefer the painful challenges here in their homeland, to the peaceful but well-trodden socio-scientific paths available to them overseas. Here, to quote Cecil Rhodes, "There is so much to do and so little done". I truly cannot think of a better intellectual stimulus for the upcoming Iranian medical people than Dr. Azizi's Book.

I hope that someday Dr. Mohammad Hossein Azizi will undertake the daunting task of writing the complete History of Iranian Medicine. And I am sure he will appreciate the value of what he and his editorial team under the direction of Ms. Shokoofeh Borzabadi have already managed to put together. Towards the end, I could not help thinking that this Book is really an "Anthology".

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Dear Editor-in-Chief: Today I received by mail a most wonderful gift sent from Archives of Internal Medicine and The Academy of Medical Sciences of I. R. Iran. The gift is an incredible book that has been compiled by Dr. Azizi with your support. I had a chance to browse through it and it is clearly a great piece of work. I thank and congratulate you for your outstanding accomplishment.

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