
History of Contemporary Medicine in Iran

DR. JOHAN LOUIS SCHLIMMER (1819 – 1881): THE EMINENT PROFESSOR OF MODERN MEDICINE AT DAR AL-FONUN SCHOOL

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During the reign of the fourth Qajar king, Naser-ad-Din Shah (who reigned from 1848–1896), the Chief Minister, Amir Kabir, was involved in modernization of Iran. He founded the first modern higher educational institute in Iran the so called “*Dar al-Fonun*” (House of Techniques) in 1851. One of the subjects taught there was medicine; now, it is considered a major step in promulgation of modern medicine in Iran. Initially, students studying at Dar al-Fonun were mainly taught by Austrians with the aid of local translators. However, after 1860, teachers in the field of medicine were multinational.^{1–3}

Two years before founding of Dar al-Fonun, some European physicians were employed to practice medicine in Iran. Among these was Dr. Johan Louis Schlimmer, a Dutch physician. He was born in 1819 and graduated from the Medical School of Leiden in Holland. After coming to Iran in 1849, he was first sent to Talesh. Then, he worked in Rashat, Guilan Province, in the North of Iran, where he was engaged in the treatment of patients with leprosy for a few years. Then, in 1855, he became the vicegerent of Dr. Jacob Eduard Polak (1818 – 1891) at Dar al-Fonun. Dr. Polak was a famous Austrian medical teacher at Dar al-Fonun. After Dr. Ernest Cloquet (1818 – 1855), the former French king special physician, has passed away, Dr. Polak was assigned for the position. So, Dr. Schlimmer joined the teaching staff at Dar al-Fonun in 1855 and worked there until 1864. Initially, he taught most of his classes

and wrote course materials in French. Later on, Dr. Schlimmer learned Persian language to more effectively teach the students. He was an efficient physician and a superb teacher. He also studied endemic diseases such as leprosy and cholera in Iran, and was responsible for the clinical training of medical students at the “*Marizkhaneh-ye-Dowlati*” (the State Hospital) which was founded in 1852.^{3–6}

His idea was to furnish the students with a solid background of medical sciences so that they could manage the most common diseases and perform simple surgeries, as well as continue their studies abroad after graduation. Dr. Schlimmer believed that although many people could be knowledgeable in medical sciences, few of them were able to put their knowledge into practice.⁴

The main contribution of Dr. Schlimmer to modern medicine in Iran was his scientific publications. Between 1854 and 1875, four professors at Dar al-Fonun, including the Austrian physician, Dr. Polak, the French doctor, Dr. Joseph Desire Tholozan, the German physicians Dr. Albo and Dr. Schlimmer wrote most of the available books and manuscripts for use as teaching materials. Dr. Schlimmer wrote on various medical subjects such as pharmacology, pathology, ophthalmology, internal medicine and pediatrics.³ In 1874, he published his famous book entitled “*Terminologie Medico-Pharmaceutique et Anthropologique Francaise-Persane*” (Figure 1). It had been started as a small dictionary of Persian equivalents for the common French medical terms. Later on, it had grown into a major pharmacopoeia.⁴ Dr. Mirza Ali Akbar Khan Nafisi (1835–1914) helped Dr. Schlimmer in writing a Persian to French medical dictionary.⁷ This dictionary was republished by Tehran University Press in 1970.⁸ In this way, Dr. Schlimmer, a pioneer teacher at

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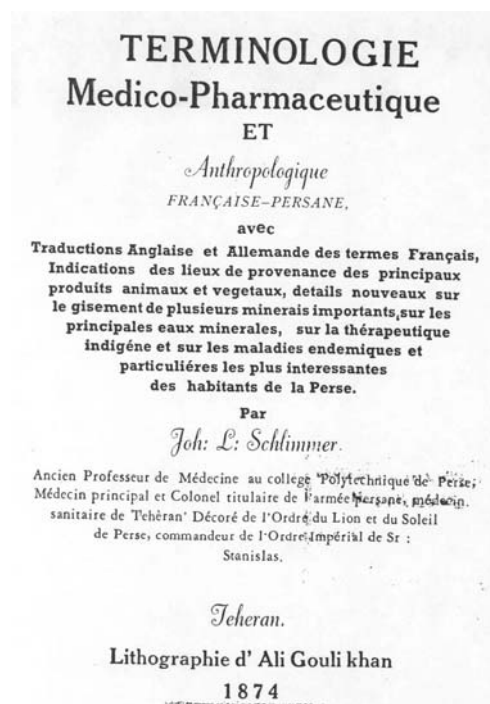


Figure 1. The front page of Dr. Schlimmer's book, "*Terminologie Medico-Pharmaceutique et Francaise-Persane*" (1874).

Dar al-Fonun, created much of the modern medical terminology used in Iran. To better understand how to serve his students by better translating western medical concepts into Persian, Dr. Schlimmer also made a great effort to learn how Persian doctors deal with their patients. Contrary to Dr. Tholozan, who advocated the total abandonment of traditional theories, Dr. Schlimmer believed in creating a dialogue between traditional and modern medicine so that the European physicians could understand traditional terms.³

Dr. Schlimmer has published the following medical works:^{3,6}

- "*Serr al-Hekmah*" (the Secret of Medicine), 1279AH/1862;
- "*Zinat al-Abdan*" (on Skin Diseases), 1279 AH/1862;
- "*Shafaiyeh*" (on Remedies), 1284 AH/1867;
- "*Loghatnameh*" (Persian-French Medical Dictionary), 1291 AH/1874;
- "*Qavaed al-Amraz*" (Rules of Diseases, on Pathology), 1292 AH/1875;
- "*Meftah al-Khavas*" (on Pharmacology), undated;
- "*Jala al-Oyun*" (Ophthalmology), undated.
- "*Adviyeh and Noskheha*" (Drugs and Prescrip-

tions), undated;

- "*Asbab al-Adviyeh*" (Drugs), 1292 AH/1875;
- "*Amraz al-Sebyan*" (Children's Diseases), undated;
- Pathology, undated;
- "*Tohfeh-ye-Nasari*" (Nasari's Gift), undated;
- "*Tashrih-e Madeh-ye Asabi*" (Anatomy of the Nervous System), 1294AH/1877;
- "*Jala al-Oyun*" (Ophthalmology), 1277 AH/1860;
- "*Serr al-Hekmah*" (the Secret of Medical Sciences), undated;
- "*Shafaiyeh*" (Curative Medicine), 1274 AH/1857;
- "*Qarabadeyn*" (Pharmacopoeia), 1292 AH/1875.

After nine years of teaching medicine at Dar al-Fonun, Dr. Schlimmer continued practicing medicine in Iran. This was how he spent more than half of his fruitful life in Iran. Dr. Schlimmer traveled to most parts of Iran. He married an Armenian and gave birth to two children. Unfortunately, his son died when he was young. His daughter married and had two children. One of the grandchildren of Dr. Schlimmer became a professor of literature at Tehran University. Dr. Schlimmer passed away in 1881 at the age of 62. He was buried in Tehran.⁷ As an eminent professor of modern medicine at Dar al-Fonun, his memory is alive ever after in Iran's contemporary history of medicine.

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