

Our debt to Islam's medics: Amazing collection goes on show

May 1 2013

A remarkable collection of manuscripts, going on public display for the first time, is to graphically illustrate the West's debt to the medieval medics of Islam.

The collection, held at the Royal College of Physicians (RCP) in London, will depict the medical traditions that developed in the golden age of Islam from the 9th century to the 17th century.

Curated by Professor Peter E Pormann from The University of Manchester, the exhibition explains how medical tradition developed in Europe and the Middle East.

Called "The mirror of health: discovering medicine in the golden age of Islam," the exhibition is open from 1 May to 25 October 2013.

Professor Pormann said: "When we look deep into the medical tradition of Islamic lands, we recognise many reflections with today – which is why we called the exhibition 'Mirror of health'.

"The Islamic medics not only transmitted and translated medical thought and practice from [ancient Greece](#), but also innovated and changed the science.

"This enabled medicine to evolve over the centuries into the truly sophisticated science we know today."

He added: "Islamic medicine drew heavily on ancient Greek knowledge, which is why Roman physician and philosopher, Galen plays a prominent role in the show.

"It was after all Galen who classified the medical doctrine which states that the body's health depends on the balance of the four humours: black bile, yellow bile, blood and phlegm.

"Indeed from Galen's time, Arabic emerged as a true language of science that went beyond country and creed."

Displayed alongside manuscripts and imagery dating from the 13th century, are objects and artefacts on loan by kind permission from the collections of the Science Museum, London, Gonville & Caius College, Cambridge, The Bodleian Library, Oxford and Eton College, Windsor.

Pamela Forde, is Archive manager at the Royal College of Physicians, the oldest medical college in England

Its collections provide a pictorial and sculptural record of presidents, fellows and other physicians associated with the RCP, from its foundation in 1518 to the present.

She said: "This exhibition presents the newly researched collection for the first time and explores the medical traditions that developed in the heartland of Islam from the 9th century to the 17th century.

"Throughout the Renaissance, Arabic learning was the dominant medical trend and it was during this period that the RCP was founded in 1518.

"The [exhibition](#) also celebrates the collectors and cataloguers of the RCP collections during the Renaissance and the Enlightenment, and charts the continued interest in Arabic medical traditions though to the 20th

century."

More information: www.rcplondon.ac.uk/mirror-headlines-golden-age-islam

Provided by University of Manchester

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