

Tanaffos journal tries its best to familiarize readers with Medical historical and cultural news of Iran from this volume on. Thousand years of ancient sciences in Iran before and after Islam and the leading role of scholars, academic and educational centers of Iran in development of various fields of science in the world are the topics that will be discussed continuously in the upcoming issues.

All enthusiasts and critics are respectfully required to send their points of views regarding the issue.

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Academy of Gondi-Shapur

Iranians have played an outstanding role in organization, development and evolution of science and skills. Iranians are considered pioneers in medicine. History of medicine in Iran dates back to the era before Islam, and the first medical education center in Iran was founded during the Sasanid era (third century AD) in Gondi-Shapur by Shāpur I (1, 2).

The Academy of Gondi-Shapur (in Persian: Dânešgāh Gondi-šāpur) was a renowned academy of learning in the city of Gondi-Shapur during late antiquity, the intellectual center of the Sassanid empire. It offered training in medicine, philosophy, theology and science. The faculties were versed not only in the Zoroastrian and Persian traditions, but in Greek and Indian learning as well (3-6).

According to The Cambridge History of Iran, it was the most important medical center of the ancient world (defined as Europe, the Mediterranean, and the Near East) during the 6th and 7th centuries (8).

The Rise of Gondi-Shapur:

Head of king Shāpur II (Sasanian dynasty, 4th century CE) made Gondi-Shapur the capital of his empire. Gondi-Shapur was one of the major cities in Khuzestan province of the Persian empire. The name Gondi-Shapur (Pahlavi Gund-ī Shāpūr) comes from the compound term Gund-ī Shāpur "better than Antioch". Most scholars believe Shāpur I, son of Ardashir (Artaxerxes), to have founded the city after defeating a Roman army led by Emperor Valerian . It was identified with extensive ruins in south of Shahabad, a village 14 km south-east of Dezful in the present-day province of Khuzestan, in southwest Iran, nearby the Karun river.(7,8)

The ninth king of the Sassanid Empire, Shāpur II, chose the city as his capital and built the world's oldest known medical center, which also included a university and a library with an estimated 400,000 books. Gondi-Shapur Hospital became the most important medical center during the 6th and 7th centuries and attracted many distinguished scientists from Greece, Egypt, India, and Rome.

Khosrow Anushiravan, who ascended the throne in 531 CE, added an observatory and a school of sciences to the Gondi-Shapur complex, where they taught medicine, anatomy, dentistry, astronomy, mathematics, philosophy, military commandship, architecture, craftsmanship, agriculture and irrigation, and geometry.

Scholars and graduates were later appointed to important governmental positions, and physicians needed a license to practice medicine.

The Sassanid king also set up some organizations to administrate the affairs of physicians, test them and grant them their academic degrees. Historical references indicate that newly graduated doctors would take special exams in order to obtain the right to practice. Anushiravan organized the world's first medical symposium in Ctesiphon in 550 CE, in which hundreds of physicians and religious figures from different countries participated.

Some five thousand students were studying at Gondi-Shapur during the reign of Anushiravan, with five hundred scholars teaching in different scientific fields.

Students were initially taught in Greek or Syriac but later, during the sixth century CE, the Pahlavi language was also added to the curriculum. Founded in 271 CE by the Sassanid king Shapur I, Gondi-Shapur was home to the world's oldest known teaching hospital, and also comprised a library and a university (7-9). It was under the rule of the Sassanid monarch Khusraw I (531-579 CE), called Anushiravan "The Immortal" and known to the Greeks and Romans as Chosroes, that Gondi-Shapur became known for medicine and erudition. The king commissioned the refugees and immigrants to translate Greek and Syriac texts into Pahlavi. They translated various works on medicine, astronomy, astrology, philosophy, and useful crafts. Anushiravan also turned towards the east, and sent the famous physician Borzouye to invite Indian and Chinese scholars to Gondi-Shapur. These visitors translated Indian texts on astronomy, astrology, mathematics and medicine and Chinese texts on herbal medicine and religion (8,10,11).

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