

## Historical Highlights on Mental Health Education in Iraq

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### Summary:

This article aims to cast a shadow over the history of mental health education and training in Iraq and a projection of Islamic scientific heritage in Baghdad during the seventh century. It also discloses the foundation of first teaching and training centers in psychiatry focusing on the marked contribution of the pioneer psychiatrists. Introduction. Up to our knowledge there is no elaborate published literature focusing on historical role of Iraq in mental health education and training and its current reality apart from scares data about mental health in Mediterranean region as a whole. In this article, we try calling the attention to the outstanding contribution of Iraq in mental health and medical education in general which appeared to be established during the golden era of Abbasid Caliphs in Baghdad during the seventh century. After several decades of scientific and cultural deterioration associated with Ottomans colonization, Baghdad intellectuals started to build the first medical school in Iraq at the end of twentieth century, teaching mental illnesses as part of the curriculum took place and continue to progress through establishing the national training programs.

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### Mental health discipline in Islamic era:

Despite the presence of vast literatures documenting Arab Muslims medical heritage, concise related articles are few due to spreading of the original references along the western scientific institutes which made access to them difficult by Arab authors, and the destruction that followed Mongols invading troops to Baghdad at 1230 A.C where burning of approximately 8000 books took place, the second great cultural centers was Cordoba in Spain was also effected by ruining thousands of its library contents by the radical Europeans fighters. The pre-Islamic beliefs of adversity of supernatural agents e.g. the devil, the evil spirits, the envying( eyes) of some human being as the etiological factors for mental illnesses, continue to thrive after the inception of Islam, the Arabic word (mass min al jinnoon) refers to possession of al(jinn) which is a kind of supernatural spirit that may lead to insanity and doesn't necessarily means (demons) or evil in nature, it appeared as rational to label process of psychosis(1). Clear report of psychiatry as specialty or discipline of its own is not available. Around the seventh century the Abbasid rulers showed respect and support for doctors and scientists, this was first manifested by the caliph Abo-Jaafar Al-Mansour 754 A.C. as he asked for (Georges Bin Bakhtesha) the famous doctor in Persian city Judishapur to be assigned as chief doctor in Baghdad, the Bakhitishoa family continue to serve the caliphs and ministers as private doctors for 200 years in Baghdad(2). Holistic approach contribute to the training of Arab doctors who were required to study and pass the certain scientific test in order to be licensed to practice medicine, a firm distinction was set between qualified doctors and magicians and jugglers. The seeds for enlightenment were shown in Iraq as

Baghdad was the destination for medical students from all over the world where the first general hospital that serve mentally ill patients was established around 982 A.C called Al Bamarstan Al Uthhdie. Following are some of the distinguished hospitals in chronological sequences:

- Total number of qualified physicians in Baghdad was 680 at 908-932 A.C
- The first general hospital was (Al Bamarstan Al Barmakee) 780A.C built by Yehia Bin Khalid Al Barmakee.
- (Bemarstan Al Rasheed) 786-809 A.C by the great caliph Haroon Al Rasheed who patronized medical and scientific establishments.
- Al Bamarstan Al Uthhdie( 982) by Uothid - Al Dawla Al Bouihee, which used to include a psychiatric ward to be considered as the first psychiatric unit in the world (Bemarstan Al Majaneen). (3,4)

Tutors used to teach medicine for free, it was observed that mentally ill patients (al majaneen) were treated with empathy, applying some form of psychotherapy and sometimes using herbal remedy or music, physical punishments and restrains were not reported.

The most distinguished academic institute was Al-Mustanserria school (university) which included medical faculty school for philosophy, art, mathematics, astrology, and other scientific disciplines, it was built by the Abbasid caliph (Al Mustanser Belaa), called after his name at 1233 A.C, which was located in the center of Baghdad by the river side. Ceased to be heard off in 1638 A.C. Baghdad was also the place where many scientific and medical institutes were established like libraries that offers translation and publishing facilities, the most remarkable one was build by the Caliph (Haroon Al Rasheed) 890 A.C called (Bait Al

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Hikma) : (house of wisdom) , flourished during the era of the caliph( Al Maumoon) ,said to contain around 8 thousands of books and literatures related to medicine , it was totally burned and destroyed at 1258A.C by the Invading Mogul troops which undid the achievement of centuries

Al Rhazes (865-925A.C) and Av-Senna (980-1037A.C) were luminaries in medical education

,they left us many medical manuscripts and books about the basics of medicine , medical ethics, there were numerous articles concerning psychiatric disorders and its classification and treatments as written in (Al Kanoon Fe AlTob) , which was called the bible of medicine by the physicians in Europe and the other great book ( Al Hawee ) ( 3,4)



**Al-Mustanserria school in Baghdad-Iraq**

#### **Modern educational system in psychiatry**

After centuries of deterioration in Iraq under Ottoman colonization, British mandate took place in 1917 with periods of conflicts and political unrest, modern medicine with some primary psychiatric services were perhaps first offered by colonial army and Christian missionaries in the capital and big cities ,however the actual launching of mental health education and training programs originate after laying the foundation of Baghdad medical college at 1927(5) .



**First graduates of Baghdad medical school 1932**

The first qualified psychiatrist that joined the mental health service in Iraq was Jack Aubody Shaby , he was among the first batch of medical graduates from the royal college of medicine in modern Iraq at 1932 . He was born in 1908 to a Jewish family in Basra. He graduated his high school from Queen Victoria the renowned college in Alexandria –Egypt 1925. He worked as a government clerk for one year then enrolled in the college of medicine with the first batch in 1927. After graduation he was sent by the government on scholarship to UK to study psychiatry in October 1932 . He returned to Iraq in February 1934 as a qualified psychiatrist and was appointed as the first qualified psychiatrist in (Dar Al-Shafaa) mental institute. He also started his private clinic after being licensed to practice his specialty in that year. He was assigned to teach medical students at the neurosciences clinic with Dr Al-Witry at 1936, who became the dean of the college later .He, was promoted to the assistant professor title during 1942(6). He was the first to establish a private psychiatric hospital called (Dar Al-Rasheed ) at 1943 and organized the electro convulsive therapy (ECT) services . He was

assigned as a director of (Dar Al-Shefaa ) mental hospital .He attended to represent Iraq in the British psychiatric conference in London 1947. A confidential report was found in his file praising his conduct and scientific achievement by the college deanery(7). At 1951 he contributed and was in charge of the first psychiatric ward in the royal teaching hospital with younger colleagues, Dr Saffa Al-Deen Hamid and Ali Kamal of Palestinian nationality who became his successor and developed a renowned name in the Arab world .He retired from the college upon his request for medical reasons in 1954 but continued the career in his private practice until 1972 when he eventually immigrated to UK to work in (Brixton) prison clinic in London until his death 1982(8). These three pioneers can be considered the first who organized the educational system in Iraqi mental health by their establishment of teaching psychiatric sessions in wards and kept on tutoring ,training students and residents in addition to their clinical work in mental health hospitals (AL-Shammaiaa) and the Royal Teaching Hospital(9).



#### Conclusion:

It is realized through this study that Baghdad had a remote approach to mental health education and training since the 7-8 th century where trainees in medicine in general came from all over the world to its educational foundations ,however after decades of deterioration ,young system of mental health training was established at twentieth century The pioneer qualified psychiatrists started proper educational system in psychiatry at the end of 1930.

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