Some time ago I had one of those welcome opportunities to recommend someone for a vacant position. The difficulty was that a nonpareil was required who would be not only an inspiring teacher and crack administrator but also a master of everything concerned with Islam and, in addition, well versed in several other Near Eastern fields. Such requests are not uncommon, and I therefore like to stress the fact that what we call Islamic studies is a very large field, much too large to be mastered by any one individual. The customary complaint of scholars, regardless of the particular vineyard they are cultivating, about neglect of their own field is certainly justified in the case of Islamic studies. It is, however, undeniable that within Islamic studies, the study of Muslim medicine has been reasonably well taken care of in the past and, in particular, in the last two decades. Outside the world of Islam, England and Germany are the countries with the largest share of accomplishments in this respect.

It is especially gratifying that many young scholars have been working on the history of Muslim medicine. Manuscripts have been discovered and described, and texts have been edited and translated. Two fundamental bibliographies have been published, both in the same year—1970. The one by Manfred Ullmann in Tübingen was originally intended as a general survey of the history of medicine in Islam, but its author realized that so much unknown material was buried in manuscripts or remained concealed, unrecognized and misunderstood, in the printed books that it was necessary first of all to provide sound bibliographical data.¹ The other work, by Fuat Sezgin of the University of Frankfurt a.M., was conceived within the general framework of a comprehensive history of Arabic literature to about the year 1000. The amount of hitherto unknown manuscript treasures described by Sezgin is indeed remarkable, but the author was also keenly aware of the absence of historical interpretation of the data and felt compelled to make the daring attempt to provide a kind of

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¹ The text of the Fielding H. Garrison Lecture, delivered on May 4, 1972, at the annual meeting of the American Association for the History of Medicine in Montreal, Canada, is offered here belatedly as a memento of what for me was a truly remarkable occasion.

provisional history of Muslim medicine in the early centuries of Islam.\(^2\) Both works make it clear that the study of the history of medicine in Islam is still in its beginning, that the source material has been identified only incompletely, that it has hardly been studied in sufficient detail or not been studied at all, and that the discoveries to be made and the problems to be solved are legion.

A comprehensive archive of microfilms of Near Eastern medical manuscripts does not yet exist as far as I know,\(^3\) and collaborative projects, such as a proper indexing of ar-Râzî’s vast \textit{Continens}, of which an Arabic text has now appeared in print, would not be easy to organize. Nevertheless, it is true that as far as Islamic studies as a whole are concerned, the historians of medicine have comparatively little reason to complain about the progress that has been made.

Quite a few of the scholars who are now making significant contributions to Muslim medical studies are general Islamicists rather than historians of medicine, and not without reason. The Arabic medical literature is of considerable importance for the Classicist who can recover from it lost works of Greek authors or use the Arabic translations for the textual criticism of preserved Greek texts, and this applies also to fields other than medicine. Philologists can gain valuable and much needed insights into Arabic lexicography and also, to a lesser degree, into Greek lexicography from comparing the Arabic translation of a Greek text with its Greek original. It is, however, something more basic than such externalities that attracts the student of Muslim civilization to the study of Arabic medicine. Intellectual activity in medieval Muslim civilization tended toward abstract thought and as a rule tried to keep away from the concrete details of human existence. Misguided mental acrobatics and arbitrary abstractions are not entirely absent from Arabic medicine, but, on the whole, it lures the student with an entirely satisfactory combination of profound intellectual concern and intimate contact with the realities facing the individual and the society in which he lived. The specter of having to work in the abstract void, which our outlook on life finds disquieting, is less threatening here than elsewhere in the study of Islam. Looking at Muslim physicians as they are mirrored in the literature, we see a happy union of all that was best in Muslim civilization in thought and action. S.D. Goitein has recently sung the praise of physicians in the Muslim orbit in these ringing words: “The


\(^3\) The Ma’had al-Makhṭûtât al-‘Arabiyyah in Cairo is in the process of publishing catalogues of its microfilms of medical manuscripts from collections in many countries. Two volumes have appeared so far (\textit{Fihrist al-makhṭûtât al-musawwarah} (Cairo 1959 and 1978)).