

History of Contemporary Medicine in Iran

A Brief Iranian Medical History through Commemorative Postage Stamps

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Abstract

Medical philately provides a useful medium for the study of medical history. There are a handful of Iranian stamps which have been issued with a medical theme. This report briefly reviews the history of Iranian medicine through Iranian commemorative postage stamps. Some notable stamps are presented.

Keywords: Iran • medical history • philately • postage stamps

Introduction

Beyond their original use for the payment of postage fare, postage stamps are always used as a propaganda medium with which to transfer messages to a broad audience.

Medical philately is the collection and study of commemorative postage stamps that have a medical theme.¹ They have been issued for more than a century. Medical philately comprises a vast spectrum of subjects from anthropology through leprosy to zoology² and provides a useful medium for the study of medical history.³ Commemorative stamps represent solid achievements and are effective at indicating special dates or events.

Different facets of medicine may be introduced to the general public by the theme and background of the stamps. The theme of the stamps might be people with a significant contribution to medicine, a medical discovery, reference to a medical event (to commemorate inaugurations or anniversaries), and to promote health programs and policies. The background of the stamps may demonstrate a

disease, a specialty, a medical instrument or equipment, and an organ or a limb. The stamps with a medical theme might be used as an educational tool for general public, and to raise funds for grants, researches and/or health programs.

The first Iranian postage stamps were issued in 1868.⁴ There have been a handful of Iranian stamps issued with a medical theme, therefore we can learn about Iran's medical history from this source. This report briefly reviews the history of Iranian medicine through Iranian commemorative postage stamps. A catalogue of Iranian stamps which has been developed by F.N. Farahbakhsh provides a useful guide for those with an interest in these stamps.⁴

Medical philately of Iran before the Islamic revolution

Iran issued 69 stamps with a medical theme prior to the Islamic Revolution of 1979; the first of which was issued in 1935. This stamp depicted the Sakhtsar Sanatorium and its message was a modern health system for Iran (Figure 1).⁴

Between 1948 and 1954 Iran issued five sets of stamps commemorating the Avicenna millennium.⁴ Each of the five sets depicted a period of Iran's history. Avicenna's (980 – 1037 AD)^{5,6} vignette was issued in 1954 and it can be credited as the first Iranian stamp with the theme of a medical



Figure 1. Sakhtsar Sanatorium; with message of modern health system for Iran, 1935

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Accepted for publication: 29 January 2009



Figure 2. Medical personalities on stamps. Avicenna (Ibn-Sina) 1954

personality (Figure 2).⁴ Zakariya Rhazi (Rhazes) (864 – 930 AD)⁵ who made a significant contribution to medicine, was honored for the 1100th anniversary of his birth on a stamp in 1964 and on the occasion of Iran's pharmacy day in 1978 (Figure 3).



Figure 3. Medical personalities on stamps; Rhazes 1964 and 1978

In order to observe the founding of some major medical education centers, commemorative stamps were issued. Nemazee Hospital, which was officially inaugurated in 1955 in Shiraz, had a set of stamps issued in 1956 for its commemoration.^{7,8} The first curriculum of the Midwifery School, established in Tehran, began to train ten trainees in 1919. The 50th anniversary of the foundation of the Midwifery School was commemorated on a stamp in 1970 (Figure 4).^{9,10}

One of the aims of issuing stamps with a medical theme might be raising funds for



Figure 4. The foundation of major educational centers on stamps, Nemazee Hospital in Shiraz, 1956, and Midwifery School 1970

contribution to health programs. Between 1950 and 1967 Iran issued a set of charity stamps (18 pieces with different values) with the picture of the former Red Lion and Sun (now the Red Crescent) to provide aid for tuberculosis sanatoriums (Figure 5).



Figure 5. The charity stamp, the former Red Lion and Sun Society, 1950 – 1967

A disease might be given prominence on stamps. Iran issued three sets of stamps for the eradication of malaria in 1960, 1962, and 1968 (Figure 6).



Figure 6. Diseases on stamps, prevention of malaria; 1960, 1962 and 1968

Nurses have also been honored with postage stamps that were issued on Nurse's Day in 1966. On the occasion of the 30th anniversary of the Social Service Organization in 1976, a nurse was also featured on a stamp (Figure 7).



Figure 7. Nurses on stamps; 1966 and 1976

Some stamps have been used to introduce health programs and policies to the general public. Figure 8 from the top left to bottom right demonstrates notable examples; family planning for prosperity in 1972, free health and education in



Figure 8. Stamps used to promote health programs and policies; 1972, 1974, 1976 and 1976

1974, campaign against cancer in 1976, and the prevention of blindness, also in 1976.

Feedback or reaction to international events has been featured on some Iranian stamps. The World Health Organization (WHO) and its related affairs, the Red Cross Society and its related affairs, and international medical federations have been commemorated on stamps. Figure 9 from the top left to bottom right demonstrates some notable examples: the anniversary of the Red Cross (1959, 1963), inauguration of WHO headquarters in Geneva (1966), The 20th anniversary of WHO (1968), World Heart Day (1972), 50th anniversary of the League of Red Cross Societies (1969), anniversary of WHO (1973), and anniversary of the World Mental Health Federation (1973).



Figure 9. Reaction to the international medical events on Iranian stamps; 1959, 1963, 1966, 1968, 1972, 1969, 1973, and 1973

The inaugurations of international medical congresses were the subjects of some Iranian stamps. Iran issued stamps to commemorate the sixth World Health Organization (WHO) congress (1956), the 6th Iranian Medical Congress at Ramsar (1957), the Middle and Near-East World Health Organization (WHO) Congress (1962), the 14th Medical Congress (1965), the 15th Medical



Figure 10. The inauguration of medical congresses; 1956, 1962, 1973, 1974 and 1975

Congress (1966), 22nd Red Cross Congress (1973), the 9th Near and Middle-East Medical Congress in Isfahan (1974), and the Fifth Biochemical Symposium (1975). Figure 10 presents some notable examples.

Medical associations, societies, federations and their activities may be introduced to the general public by stamps. The 2nd Iranian Dental Association Congress (1964), the 3rd Dental Congress (1965), and the 10th Annual Congress of the Iranian Dental Association (1972) were commemorated on stamps (Figure 11).



Figure 11. The inauguration of dentistry congresses; 1964, 1965, and 1972

The inaugurations of the 2nd (1967), the 4th (1971), and the 5th (1974) International Veterinary Congresses were commemorated on stamps (Figure 12).



Figure 12. The international medical seminar in 1983

Medical philately of Iran after the Islamic Revolution

Between February 1979 (after the Islamic Revolution) and December 2009, Iran has issued 23 stamps with a medical theme.

The first Iranian stamp after the Islamic revolution was issued for the International Medical Seminar in 1983 (Figure 13). Tribute has been paid to nurses on Nurses day in 1984 and 1987 by the printing of two stamps (Figure 14).



Figure 13. The International Medical Seminar, 1983



Figure 14. Nurses on stamps; 1984 and 1987

The 25th anniversary of the Association of Iranian Dentists was commemorated on a stamp in 1987 (Figure 15).



Figure 15. Anniversary of the Association of Iranian Dentists, 1987

Vaccination, which is an invaluable opportunity for the maintenance of children's health, has been featured in 1987. The stamps for World Health Day in 1987 depict the slogan; "Immunization: a chance for every child." Vaccination against poliomyelitis has been featured on a stamp in 1997. Child health mobilization has also been featured on a stamp in 1988 (Figure 16).



Figure 16. Vaccination, immunization and mobilization for child health; 1987, 1988, and 1997

Figure 17 shows remarkable examples of health programs and policies for the general public after



Figure 17. Health programs and policies after the Islamic Revolution; 1987, 1991, 1998, 2000, and 2003

the Islamic Revolution. The stamps from left to right are; welfare week in 1987, blood transfusion in 1991, supporting children suffering from cancer 1998, World Breast Feeding Day in 2000, and the 50th anniversary of Social Security Organization in 2003.

The memory of Dr. M. Gharib, the father of pediatrics in Iran was commemorated on a stamp in 1991. He had a significant contribution to contemporary pediatric medicine in Iran (Figure 18).



Figure 18. Dr. M Gharib, the father of pediatrics in Iran, 1991

Physician's Day in 2004 was commemorated by two stamps which depicted Avicenna and his mausoleum (Figure 19).



Figure 19. The occasion of Physician's Day, 2004

The International Congress of the History of Medicine in Islam and Iran was the subject of two stamps in 1993 (Figure 20).



Figure 20. The International Congress of the History of Medicine in Islam and Iran, 1992

Some stamps have been used to indicate a special international date. The WHO Day (1984), the World Health Day (1991), the World Health

Day (1994), and World Red Cross Day (1984) are notable examples. These stamps present the image of Iran as a world partner (Figure 21).



Figure 21. Reaction to the international public health events; 1984, 1984, 1991, and 1994

The 70th anniversary of the foundation of the Tehran University of Medical Sciences was commemorated in 2005 (Figure 22).



Figure 22. Tehran University of Medical Sciences, 2005

Conclusion

A country's lifetime medical history may be illustrated by commemorative postage stamps. With the newer methods of communication, fewer

commemorative stamps are used and the general public may never again see postage stamps with medical themes.¹¹ It is regrettable that not all the names and items of Iran's medical history have been featured on postage stamps.

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