

Conference Report

International conference on Malay medical manuscripts 2015

The first International Conference on Malay Medical Manuscripts (ICOMMM) 2015 was held at the Banquet Hall, Office of the Campus Director (OCD), International Islamic University of Malaysia (IIUM) Kuantan Campus on 8-9th September 2015. It was officiated by the Deputy Rector (Academic and Planning) of IIUM, Prof. Dr. Torla Haji Hassan in the presence of the Deputy Director of IIUM Kuantan Campus, Deans of Kulliyah of Allied Health Sciences, Kulliyah of Pharmacy and Kulliyah of Science, as well as the Director of Integrated Centre for Research Animal Care and Use (ICRACU).

The conference was organised by the Islamisation of Human Knowledge (IOHK) Unit of Kulliyah of Allied Health Sciences, the Islamic Medical Manuscripts of the Malay Archipelago Research and Information (IMARAH) Unit, and The Islamic Manuscript Association (TIMA), Cambridge, United Kingdom. Other key partners include Klasika Media-Akademi Jawi and Radio of Institut Kefahaman Islam Malaysia (IKIM.fm).

The Conference in 2015 coincides with the 120th anniversary of the publication of a Malay medical text, *Tayyib al-Ihsan*, written by a Malay scholar of encyclopaedic knowledge, Sheikh Ahmad al-Fatani. This sets the primary motivation behind the organisation of the conference which includes the study of the history, developments, and achievements of Malay medicine through available manuscripts. The conference also hoped to facilitate the collection of what has been done with regards to Malay medical manuscripts including conservation, cataloguing, transliteration, digitisation, analysis, and benchwork experiments based on manuscript data. In doing so, participants can improve and

contextualise their knowledge, enabling learning of the inspiration, experiences and interpretation of the people of the past in tackling the problems of their time and relate how these could be adopted and actualised in today's medical practice.

The conference was well attended from Day 1 with the hall packed with academics, students, members from governmental institutions and NGOs such as Perpustakaan Negara Malaysia, Forest Research Institute of Malaysia (FRIM), and Yayasan Restu. In total, the conference had 148 registered participants, 92 of which were walk-in participants. While there was a very strong and eager participation from the IIUM community, participants also came from eleven other universities, both locally and from Indonesia and Egypt.

Four keynote presentations were held during the conference. The first Opening Keynote Speech was delivered by Dr. Harun Mat Piah, a noted researcher of Malay Medical Manuscripts, who talked on "*Kitab Tib – Ilmu Perubatan Melayu dari Naskhah-naskhah Lama: Tradisi and Bidang Pembicaraan.*" This was a good introduction to the types of known texts, in the different techniques and interpretations of those texts, and interesting updates on on-going research by the speaker. The second keynote speech delivered by Prof. Dr. Hairudin Harun, Deputy President of Asia e-University and a pioneer in medical history in Malaysia, was equally captivating and provided the historical and philosophical components to the ethos of the Malay medical manuscript research. Prof. Oman Fathurrahman, a philology specialist at Syarif Hidayatullah Islamic University, Jakarta and Head of Masyarakat Pernaskahan Nusantara, provided the larger picture of the study on medical manuscripts within the Nusantara context. Most interesting is his disclosure of a group of previously unknown Mindanawon manuscripts from Southern Philippines. The last Keynote Speaker, Prof. Faridah Abdul Rashid, from Universiti Sains Malaysia, delivered a wonderful presentation of her Research Methodology and Challenges in Obtaining Historical Medical Biographies. Her work is astoundingly original, and touched on an aspect of medical history which is commonly neglected, and which cannot do without recourse to old documents as well as oral sources. It also provides an inspiration to those who are hesitant in doing inter-disciplinary research involving medical history, particularly medical manuscripts. The strong interest generated from these presentations could be gauged from the endless questions coming

from the audience. This was despite an allocation of 30 minutes, plus a 15 minute question-and-answer slot per speaker.

A total of 12 papers were originally accepted for the conference. However, due to health and technical problems, some oral presenters had to withdraw at the last minute, leaving the conference with only eight oral presentations. These presentations covered most of the important themes in Malay medicine such as the source and origin, the content and physical descriptions of surviving texts, and theological aspects. There were also two presentations that dealt specifically with anatomy and dentistry in Malay medical manuscripts, with suggestions on how such knowledge were presented within the context of Islamisation of human knowledge. An interesting presentation on ergonomics was a highlight of the conference as ergonomics is a newly-emerging sub-discipline and the presentation underlines the need to further investigate the history of ergonomics in the Malay Archipelago. A final presentation on Dar al-'Ishqi, a medicinal river in Aceh, discussed an interesting phenomenon which could spark new research in the background of the rise of new health concepts such as biophilia, biomimicry, and sustainable design.

During the conference, there were numerous book exhibitions and stalls which were set up by Klasika Media-Akademi Jawi, Khazanah Fathaniyyah, and Yayasan Restu at the back of the Banquet Hall. These publishers sold among other books the newly-published transliterated copy of *Tayyib al-Ihsan*, books by the keynote speakers and other related publications. The conference was preceded by a pre-conference workshop on Jawi literacy co-organised with Klasika Media-Akademi Jawi, and concluded with a social trip to Sungai Lembing, which once had the longest tin mines in the world, and the site of a hill retreat for British colonial officers.

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