

Historical Perspectives

Professor Tigani El Mahi: Short biography and photos

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- Born in El Kawa (White Nile Province) in April 1911 [1,2].
- Graduated from the Kitchener School of Medicine in 1935.
- Joined the Sudan Medical Service and worked in Omdurman, Khartoum, Wadi Halfa and Kosti.
- He was granted the Diploma in Psychological Medicine in July 1949 from the United Kingdom (UK).
- On return back home he founded the clinic for Nervous Disorders in Khartoum North.
- From 1959 to 1964 he joined the WHO-EMRO as a Regional Adviser in Mental Health.
- In 1964 he was chosen as Member and Rotational President of the Supreme Council of State.
- In 1969 the University of Khartoum (U of K) offered him the chair of Psychiatry in the Faculty of Medicine which he held up until his death.
- He was the first Sudanese Psychiatrist, and hence, known as the father of African Psychiatry.
- He conducted numerous original studies on psychological medicine. His visionary community mental health services and their incorporation in the general health have been expressed in his scientific contributions decades ahead of their formal endorsement by the international community [3-5].
- El Mahi also participated in several international conferences such as the 1st Conference on Education of Psychological Medicine where he participated as President, a UN sponsored conference held in Geneva on the application of science and technology in developing countries, and another on the effect of social change on psychological health in New York.
- He also delivered more than forty lectures at American universities and institutes during his stay in USA.
- He was elected President of the Sudan Doctors' Union and was a member of the Academy of Arabic in Cairo. Moreover, he has also been granted a DSc degree by the University of Colombia in the USA and a DSc degree by the University of Khartoum
- El Mahi also mastered a number of languages. In addition to his native Arabic he was also competent in English, Latin, Hausa and Persian.
- He compiled a personal library which was classified as one of the most valuable libraries acquired by an individual in the world. The collection itself contains about 19,000 items, 6000 documents which include maps dating to 500 years ago, and 20,000 letters, 5000 of which are rare copies. In 1972 the library was gifted

to the Khartoum University Library. A specially designated area accommodates Dr. Tigani El Mahi's Library.

- El Mahi's collection included some of General Gordon's correspondences together with some of

his personal notes. The collection is the largest of its type. Professor El Mahi presented some of these items to Queen Elizabeth II during her visit to Sudan in February 1964 (Photos 1 and 2)[6,7].

Photo 1 - February 1965: Queen Elizabeth II and Dr Tigani El Mahi cheerfully greeted by the Sudanese including school children.



Photo 2 - Queen Elizabeth II, Prince Philip Duke of Edinburgh and Dr Tigani El Mahi during the Queen's visit to Sudan (February 1965). Third from left: Dr Abdel Halim Mohamed, Member of the Supreme Council of State and pioneer physician [6,7].

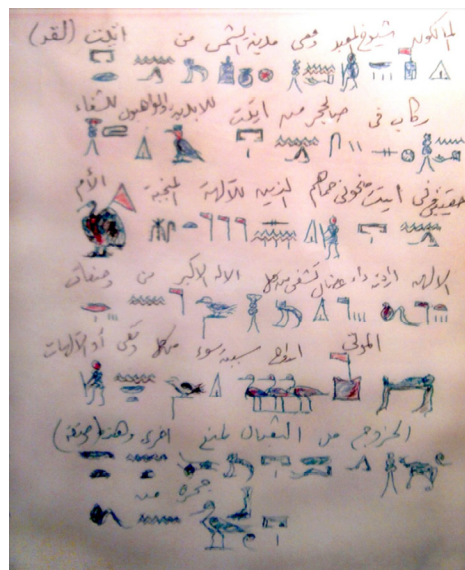
- El Mahi’s library also contains 2000 coins some of which date back to the times of Alexander the Great.
- A rare collection of stamps also forms part of the library together with rare artistic tableaux.
- Committees of which El Mahi was a member include: The WHO Committee on Mental Health, The Executive Committee of the International Union of Health , The Scientific Council for Technical Assistance and other scientific bodies.
- His original publication “Introduction to the History of Arab Medicine” was greatly praised by physicians and academics across the Arab World.
- He was a man of varied talents and interests. He was best known for his encyclopedic knowledge of history, sciences, literature and poetry, especially those of Sudan, Arab, Muslim, and the Old World (Photo 3)[8,9].



Photo 3: Prof Tigani El Mahi (sitting, first from right) with members of the Arts Symposium including Prof. Abdalla Eltayeb [8,9] , Scholar and Winner of the Year 2000 King Faisal International Prize in Arabic Language and Literature (sitting, first from left) , Ibrahim Al Abbadi (traditional Sudanese poetry scholar (sitting, middle) , Abdalla Hamid El Amin (Convenor of the Arts Symposium, sitting second from right), and Mohamed Elmahdi Elmajzob (renown Sudanese and Arab poet; standing first from left).

- He was an Egyptologist (Photo 4); he pioneered the studies of ethnopsychiatry and traditional medicine in the Sudan.
- He died in the early hours of Thursday morning 8 January 1970.

Photo 4 - Prof Tigani El Mahi was a man of varied talents and interests. He was an Egyptologist and the photo shows one of his translations of hieroglyphic transcript into Arabic.



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