



SCHLIMMER, JOHANNES LODEWIK

SCHLIMMER, JOHANNES LODEWIK (b. Rotterdam, 22 August 1818; d. Tehran, 25 March 1876), a Dutch physician who served in Iran as an instructor of medicine at [Dār al-Fonun](#) and became a leading pioneer in the promotion of modern medicine in Iran. His *Terminologie Medico-Pharmaceutique* ([Figure 1](#)), published in 1874, helped standardize medical technical terms in Persian, thus guiding future generations of medical students in Iran.

Schlimmer's father was an elementary school teacher and not well-to-do (Gemeentearchief Rotterdam, akte 1373 [1818 081b]). Schlimmer received his elementary and high school education in Rotterdam and then studied medicine in Rotterdam and Leiden for four years (1835-39), but, for unknown reasons, did not complete his studies (Du Rieu, p. 1312; van Lieburg). According to Maḥmud Najmābādi (p. 1970, 574), he also studied philosophy and mathematics along with medicine. About 1840, he left for the Middle East and allegedly spent two years in Aleppo before leaving for Baghdad and eventually arriving in Rasht in 1844 (Najmābādi, 1970, pp. 575, 577), where he practiced medicine. Schlimmer must have arrived in Iran in or around 1844, since a Persian newspaper reported in 1876 (the year he died) that he had lived in Iran for thirty-two years (*Ruz-nāma-ye Irān* II, p. 1328).

In 1851, [Amir Kabir](#), the prime minister, in order to improve the quality of medical care and military hygiene in the army, appointed a physician,



European as well as Iranian, to each provincial military regiment (Floor, 2004, p. 189, n. 104). Schlimmer was appointed to [Gilan](#) with the annual salary of 150 *tumans* (Ādamiyat, p. 335; *Ruz-nāma-ye waqāye'-e ettefāqiya* I, p. 303 [no. 56, 5 Jomādā I 1268/26 February 1852]). Not much is known about his sojourn in Gilan, where he acquired a good reputation at Rasht among the poor and rich, due to his generous support and treatment of a poor man suffering from leprosy (Najmābādi, 1970, p. 575; see further Floor, 2013).

In January 1851, Schlimmer was among those chosen to teach at the Dār al-Fonun (Ādamiyat, p. 362), but in 1271/1854-55, he was serving as the physician of the Kerman regiment with the rank of colonel (E'temād-al-Salṭana, 1988, II, p. 1220). Thus, it seems likely that he continued to serve as military physician until April 1856, when **he** was appointed as deputy to [Jakob Eduard Polak](#) (*Ruz-nāma-ye waqāye'-e ettefāqiya* III, p. 1738 [4 Ša'bān 1272/10 April 1856]).

In June 1857, Schlimmer is mentioned as the king's personal physician (*ḥakim-bāši*) as well as an instructor at Dār al-Fonun (*Ruz-nāma-ye waqāye'-e ettefāqiya* III, p. 2185 [8 Šawwāl 1273/1 June 1857]); for a list of some of Schlimmer's students, see Maḥbubi Ardakāni, p. 303). Schlimmer also made an effort to introduce the manufacturing of glassware at the school, most likely to produce instruments for medical use, which was satirized in a distich quoted by [Mahdiqoli Mokber-al-Salṭana Hedāyat](#) (p. 58). Thus, it would appear that Schlimmer taught at Dār al-Fonun from 1856 until 1866, when Mirzā Rezā Tehrāni, who had done his studies in France, took over his teaching responsibilities (Najmābādi, 1970, pp. 577-78; Maḥbubi Ardakāni, I, p. 278). In 1863, the government sent him to Kashan to treat ill British telegraph workers there (*Ruz-nāma-ye Dawlat-e 'aliya-ye Irān* II, p. 657 [25 Ša'bān 1280/4 February 1884]).

After 1866, Schlimmer mostly practiced medicine and did research in Tehran, and made various trips to outlying provinces of Iran (e.g., Bandar 'Abbās, Baluchistan; Najmābādi, 1970, p. 578). During these journeys he collected data on local diseases such as guinea worm (*piyuk*, *rešta*), leprosy (*joḍām*), alep boils (*sālak*), vitiligo (*bors*; a rare skin disease), recurrent fever, choleric diarrhea, [cholera](#) of children, elephantiasis (*dā' al-fil*), and tinea (*kačali*), as well as on plants, in particular, medicinal ones (Najmābādi, 1970, p. 578; for details, see Schlimmer, 1970, s.vv.). In 1874, the government sent him to Kurdistan to verify whether the plague had entered Iran (*Ruz-nāma-ye Irān* I, p. 344 [7 Šafar 1289/16 April 1872]; Schlimmer, 1970, pp. 433-55).



Schlimmer thought that Iran offered interesting commercial opportunities for Dutch trade. As a result of his contact with an important merchant in Rotterdam, the Dutch government offered Schlimmer the function of honorary consul-general in Tehran, but he declined, as he did not have the means to keep a large establishment. It was then decided to establish a Dutch consulate at Bushehr ([Bušehr](#), q.v.), where Richard C. Keun was appointed as consul on 15 February 1868 (Archief MinBuiza, B 93 “Geschiedenis van het Consulaat-Generaal te Bender-Bushir”). On 24 February 1873, Schlimmer was appointed Dutch commercial agent in Tehran to keep an eye on Keun (Archief MinBuiza, B 149, Inventaris I, letter from Schlimmer to Ministry; Archief MinBuiza, B 93, “Geschiedenis van het Consulaat-Generaal te Bender-Bushir,” per Koninklijk Besluit of 24/02/1873). Despite his good intentions and efforts, Schlimmer was unable to produce any significant results for Dutch commercial interests. After his death the agency was not continued, and in 1878 Keun was appointed consul-general in Tehran (Floor, 1988, pp. 60-61).

Until the end of his life Schlimmer continued to work as a public health official and as a physician in private practice, mostly tending to the medical needs of the members of the royal court, despite the fact that he was described as ill-tempered (*kaj kolq*). He also had regular contacts with the Iranian elite outside the royal camp (E‘temād-al-Salṭana, 1966 [29 Jomādā I 1292/3 July 1875], pp. 3, 5-7, 12-13, 16 18-19). For his services the government of Iran awarded him the honorary rank of colonel and the Persian Lion and Sun order (on which, see [DECORATIONS](#)); the Russian government bestowed on him the Russian order of Stanislaus (Schlimmer, 1874, Frontispiece). Schlimmer died on 25 March 1876 (Archief MinBuiza, B 149, Keun to Willebois, 20/07/1876) and was buried in the Protestant cemetery in Akbarābād, west of Tehran (Najmābādi, 1970, p. 579).

Schlimmer was survived by his wife and his daughter (Archief MinBuiza B 149, St Petersburg to Ministry [31 July/12 August 1876]; Najmābādi, 1970, pp. 676-77). He had married a young, educated Armenian woman named Bāgdāgol. They had a son, Adolf, and a daughter, Māriānā. Adolf was educated at Dār al-Fonun and was selected by the government to be sent to Europe for further studies, but he died young (Najmābādi, 1970, p. 576; see further Floor, 2013). Māriānā married Mārkar Ārākeliān and had three children, two of whom were pharmacists, and the third, Āšot Ārākeliān, was professor at the Faculty of Letters and Humanities (Dāneškada-ye adabiyāt wa ‘olum-e ensāni) of Tehran University (Najmābādi, pp. 576-77).



Schlimmer died in poverty; even the auction of his property did not yield enough money to pay off his debts (Archief MinBuiza B 149, St. Petersburg to Ministry, 31 July/12 August 1876 [Georgian/Russian calendars]). His grandson had given Najmābādi the impression that Schlimmer's father was a distinguished, well-to-do person (*sarmāyadār-e saršenās*), which does not seem to be the case (Najmābādi, 1970, p. 575). Apart from some property, Mrs. Schlimmer had her husband's pension, although its collection was not without its problems. In the late 1920s when all pensions were cut, that of Schlimmer was reinstated by the order of Reżā Shah, due to his great services to Iran; after Mrs. Schlimmer's death, her daughter, Māriānā, received it as long as she lived (Najmābādi, 1970, pp. 576-77).

Schlimmer had an excellent reputation in Iran, because patients generally felt that he was effective. Iranian physicians also respected Schlimmer, because he in turn respected them and their methods (Najmābādi, 1970, pp. 578-79), although he criticized these when he thought they did not make any sense (e.g., see "Amaigrissement" and "Graisserie de la Bosse," in Schlimmer, 1970, pp. 32, 305). When these methods were useful, however, he even argued for their adoption in Europe. Furthermore, he stressed the importance of a dialogue between European and Iranian physicians, as well as the maintenance of the epistemology of Iranian traditional medicine (e.g., see "Recette," in Schlimmer, 1970, p. 482; also further, Ebrahimnejad, 2004, p. 106). Finally, Schlimmer correctly argued that scarlet fever (*maḵmalak*) occurred in Iran, despite the fact that all his European colleagues disagreed with him ("Scarlatine," in Schlimmer, 1970, pp. 501-3).

His most important contribution, however, was in helping the establishment of modern medical science in Iran. Some of the teachers of Dār al-Fonun wrote textbooks for their students, because there were no textbooks on modern Western medicine in Persian. Moreover, they realized the need to create a body of medical knowledge in Persian to modernize Iranian medical practice as well as to facilitate the transition from Islamic-Galenic to Western medical methods. Schlimmer wrote (1970, p. 229): "In the beginning of the teaching the absence of a scientific nomenclature in Persian was a great handicap."

Polak and Schlimmer initially taught most of their classes in French and wrote course materials, which were translated by students or translators working at Dār al-Fonun (*Ruz-nāma-ye waqāye'-e ettefāqiya* I, p. 630 [no. 105, 4 Jomādā I 1269/13 February 1853]; II, p. 1738 [no. 271, 4 Ša'bān 1272/10 April 1856]).



However, later they taught in Persian and had their course material translated into Persian. Between 1854 and 1875, four teachers wrote most of the available books and manuscripts to be used as teaching material at Dār al-Fonun. Schlimmer wrote the largest number (15) of manuscripts on various subjects, such as pharmacology, pathology, ophthalmology, and pediatrics (Arjaḥ et al., Index; Elgood, p. 502). Schlimmer printed some of these texts at his own expense, such *Serr al-ḥekma*, a book about human anatomy, and *Zinat al-abdān*, a book dealing with the effects of venereal diseases. These could be bought in the bazaar and at the author's home in the Sangalaj quarter (*Ruz-nāma-ye Dawlat-e 'aliya-ye Irān* I, pp. 509, 511 [17 Rajab 1279/8 January 1863 and 24 Rajab 1279/15 January 1863]; see also Shcheglova, I, pp. 307-8). He himself noted about his works that “even some traditional doctors have hastened to obtain copies of them” [Schlimmer, 1970, p. 230; see also Hedāyat, p. 58).

Works. Schlimmer's masterpiece is his *Terminologie Medico-Pharmaceutique*, a major pharmacopoeia. It was the embodiment of his teaching philosophy and became his legacy and the cherished guide for future generations of medical students in Iran. His contemporary, Mokḥber-al-Saltāna Hedāyat (p. 58), praised it as a very valuable book that deserved to be republished. It was eventually reprinted in 1970, and again in 2001. According to Cyril Elgood, “it was indeed a gigantic attempt to make the transition from Avicenna to Harvey less abrupt, to fit the old nomenclature to the new ideas, and to standardize the technical terms of the new university” (Elgood, p. 502). In this way, these pioneering teachers and translators, and in particular Schlimmer, created and codified much of the medical terminology used in Iran today. Being a public health official, Schlimmer was probably also the first to define the concept of public health (*ḥefẓ al-ṣeḥḥa*) in Persian.

The rest of his works, all published in Tehran, include: *Serr al-ḥekma*, lithographed, 1279/1862 (160 pp.); *Zinat al-abdān*, tr. Mirzā Taqī Khan Kāšāni, lithographed, 1279/1862 (205 pp.); *Šafā'īya*, tr. Mirzā 'Abd-al-Karim b. Ḥāj Esmā'il Yazdī, lithographed, 1280/1863 (593 pp.); *Loḡat-nāma* (Pers.-French dictionary), 1291/1874; *Qawā'ed al-amrāz* (on Pathology), lithographed, 1292/1875 (115 pp.); *Asbāb al-tadwia* (pharmacology), 1292/1875; *Meftāḥ al-ḵawāṣṣ* (the use of medication), n.d.; *Jalā' al-'oyun* (ophthalmology, 267 pp.), n.d.; *Adwia wa noskahā*, n.d.; *Amrāz al-ṣebyān*, n.d.; *Pātoloži*, n.d.; *Toḥfa-ye nāšeri*, n.d.; *Tašriḥ-e mādda-ye 'ašabi* (Anatomy of the nervous system), 1294/1877; *Qarābadayn* (Pharmacopoeia), 1292/1875; *Montakab al-šafā'īya*



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(Willem Floor)