

Academy of Gundishapur

From Wikipedia

The **Academy of Gundishapur** (in [Persian](#): دانشگاه گندیشاپور) was a renowned center of learning in the city of [Gundeshapur](#) during [late antiquity](#), the intellectual center of the [Sassanid empire](#). It offered training in medicine, philosophy, theology and science. The faculty were versed not only in the Zoroastrian and Persian traditions, but in Greek and Indian learning as well. According to *The Cambridge History of Iran*, it was the most important medical center of the ancient world (defined as Europe, the Mediterranean, and the Near East) during the 6th and 7th centuries. (Vol 4, p396. [ISBN 0-521-20093-8](#)).

History

In 489 CE, the Nestorian established scientific center in [Edessa](#), was transferred to [Vansibin](#) ^[1], also known as "[Nisibīn](#)", then under Persian rule with its secular faculties at [Gundishapur](#), Khuzestan. Here, scholars, together with Pagan philosophers banished by Justinian from [Athens](#) carried out important research in Medicine, Astronomy, and Mathematics". (*Hill, p.4*)

However, it was under the rule of the Sassanid monarch [Khusraw](#) (531-579 CE), called *Anushiravan* literally "Immortal Soul" and known to the Greeks and Romans as *Chosroes*, that Gondeshapur became known for medicine and erudition. Khusraw I gave refuge to various Greek [philosophers](#), Syriac-speaking Christians and [Nestorians](#) fleeing religious persecution by the [Byzantine empire](#). The Sassanids had long battled the Romans and Byzantines for control of present day [Iraq](#) and [Syria](#) and were naturally disposed to welcome the refugees.

The king commissioned the refugees to translate Greek and Syriac texts into [Pahlavi](#). They translated various works on medicine, astronomy, philosophy, and useful crafts. The philosophers are said to have been unhappy in Persia, however, and later returned to Greece.

Anushiravan also turned towards the east, and sent the famous physician [Borzouye](#) to invite Indian and Chinese scholars to Gondeshapur. These visitors translated Indian texts on astronomy, astrology, mathematics and medicine and Chinese texts on herbal medicine and religion. Borzouye is said to have himself translated the [Pañcatantra](#) from Sanskrit into Persian as *Kelile vae Demne*.

Significance of Gondeshapur

According to Cyril Elgood in *A Medical History of Persia*, "to a very large extent, the credit for the whole hospital system must be given to Persia" (Cambridge University Press, p. 173).

In addition to systemizing medical treatment and knowledge, the scholars of the academy also transformed medical education; rather than apprenticing with just one physician, medical students were required to work in the hospital under the supervision of the whole medical faculty. There is even evidence that graduates had to pass exams in order to practice as accredited Gondeshapur physicians (as recorded in an Arabic text, the *Tarikhu l-Hikama*).

George Ghevarghese Joseph, in his *Crest of the Peacock* (Princeton University Press, 2000) claims that Gondeshapur also had a pivotal role in the history of mathematics.

Gondeshapur Under Muslim Rule

The Sassanid dynasty fell to Muslim Arab armies in [638 CE](#). The academy survived the change of rulers and persisted for several centuries as a Muslim institute of higher learning. It was later rivaled by an institute established at the [Abbasid](#) capital of [Baghdad](#). In [832 CE](#), [Caliph al-Ma'mūn](#) founded the famous *Baytu l-Hikma*, the [House of Wisdom](#). There the methods of Gondishapur were emulated; indeed, the House of Wisdom was staffed with graduates of the older Academy of Gondeshapur. It is believed that the House of Wisdom was disbanded under [Al-Mutawakkil](#), Al-Ma'mūn's successor. However, by that time the intellectual center of the Abbasid Caliphate had definitively shifted to Baghdad, as henceforth there are few references in contemporary literature to universities or hospitals at Gondeshapur.

The significance of the center gradually declined. According to LeStrange's 1905 compendium of Arab geographers, *The Lands of the Eastern Caliphate*, the 10th century writer Muqaddasi described Gondeshapur as falling into ruins (LeStrange, 1905, p. 238).

Famous Physicians of Gondeshapur

- [Borzoye](#), chief physician of Khusraw I.
- [Bukhtishu](#), a Nestorian Persian Christian.
- [Masawaiyh](#), a Nestorian Persian Christian.
- [Sarakhsi, Ahmad Tayyeb](#), died 900 CE.
- [Sahl, Shapur ibn](#). a Nestorian Persian Christian. Wrote one of the first medical books on antidotes, titled the *Aqradhīn*.
- [Nafi ibn al-Harith](#) ([E. Browne](#), *Islamic Medicine*, 2002, p.11, [ISBN 81-87570-19-9](#))

Modern Gondeshapur

Under the [Pahlavi dynasty](#), the heritage of Gondeshapur was memorialized by the founding of the *Jondishapour University* and its twin institution *Jondishapur University of Medical Sciences*, near the city of [Ahvaz](#) in 1959. [\[2\]](#) [\[3\]](#) Jondishapur University was renamed to [Shahid Chamran University of Ahvaz](#) in 1981 in honor of [Mostafa Chamran](#).

The first woman ever to be appointed as vice-chancellor in a university in Iran, **Dr. Tal'at Basāri**, was appointed at this university in the mid 1960s, and starting 1968, plans for the modern campus were designed by famed architect [Kamran Diba](#) [\[4\]](#).

Ancient Gondeshapur is also slated for an archaeological investigation. Experts from the Archaeological Research Center of [Iran's Cultural Heritage Organization](#) and the Oriental Institute of the [University of Chicago](#) plan to start excavations in early [2006](#) [\[5\]](#).

Sources

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