RE: Ibn al-Nafis: Discoverer of the pulmonary circulation

To the Editor: I read with great interest and pleasure the article on ibn Nafis in Issue 5 of Volume 27 (2007) of the *Annals of Saudi Medicine*.¹ Two related points provoked my attention:

(1) The cover plate:

For the last few years, I have been collecting reprints of papers containing reproductions similar to the cover plate. Sudhoff²⁻⁶ called these drawings the *Five Anatomy Charts of the Arabs* (The skeleton, the muscles, the arteries, the veins and the organs; some sets contain a sixth chart depicting a pregnant woman with her foetus). I have so far collected 17 sets.

You can imagine my delight when I saw your cover and thought that here we may have yet another set, the 18th. My fascination however was short-lived when I was unable (1) to find the reference to the source of your beautiful cover plate; (2) to know whether it belongs to a set of five or of six charts; and (3) to know the title of the manuscript that contained it and its location.

My intention is to study all available sets of charts in order to see the relation of each set to the others, to determine which precedes which, and to try to interpret them, weigh their significance, and ponder the origin or origins of this interesting phenomenon of representing a squatting human figure with a mongoloid face in an anatomical chart. After closely examining a few original sets, including the one in my library,³⁻⁶ I came to the preliminary conclusion that almost all the sets are drawn on the same kind and the same size of paper, with the same kind of ink and Persian calligraphy, and have been inserted in various parts of different books without any corresponding mention in the text. My initial uncritical thought is that these drawings are the work of an Persian scribe-artist of Mongolian descent who fabricated them around 1350 AD and marketed them to be used by the binders in book-stores to improve the sales of their books, and consequently have no great intrinsic scientific value.

(2) The article of Drs Amr and Tbakhi about ibn nafīs on pages 385-7:

Three points in this very beautiful article deserve some comment:

(a) In the first paragraph of the article two conflicting versions (two different villages) are given for the origin of the family of ibn nafīs: the first is Alqurashiyya, a village near Damascus, and the second is Qarash, a village beyond the River Oxus.

The truth of the matter is that whoever started the myth of "the village near Damascus" has never given the exact name nor the exact location of this village; and all my persistent efforts to locate the village either in geographical texts or on the ground have remained futile, hence my reluctance to accept this theory, which has been repeatedly

copied by one author after another without any verification.

The second version is more acceptable after the following comment: today, the actual Arabic name of Qarash is [qwrush]; it is not a village but a large town, called Cyrrhus and Kyrros in Greek, founded by Seleucus Nicator, one of Alexander the Great's generals on the bank of the 'afryn river in the northernmost west part of Syria; it was the place where the famous twin brother-physicians, Saint Cosma and Saint Damian, were buried; today it is an uninhabited town and is in complete ruins, just a tourist attraction.

(b) The legend for the figure reproduced on page 386 of kitab al-mujiz does not give any particulars about the beautiful manuscript such as its date, location, scribe, etc.

(c) The exact quotation for reference number 9 on page 387 should have been "Haddad Sami I" and not "Haddad TE".

Farid S. Haddad, MD
Rancho Palos Verdes, California
USA

REFERENCES

1. Amr SS, Tbakhi A. Ibn al-Nafis: Discoverer of the pulmonary circulation. *Ann Saudi Med*. 2007; 385-7.
2. Haddad Farid S: Cover Plate. *Ann Rep Orient Hosp* 1966 19 Front cover.
3. Haddad Farid S: Indices of the first 24 Annual Reports. *Ann Rep Orient Hosp* 1972 24 45.
4. Haddad Farid S and Biesterfeldt HH: *fihris al-ma-JTuwTaAt alTibbiyya al'arabiyya fi maktaba alduktuwr saAmiy ibraAhim HaddaAd* [Catalogue of the Arabic Medical Manuscripts in the library of Dr Sami Ibrahim Haddad] Aleppo: Aleppo University, Institute of the History of Arabic Science, 1984, plates 11 and 12.
5. Haddad Farid S: Arab andrology and sexology (Paper read at the XXXth International Congress of the History of Medicine at Düsseldorf on 86 09 05). *Actes [Proceedings of the XXXth International Congress of the History of Medicine]* Leverkusen, Vicom 1988 1253-64.
6. Sudhoff Karl: *Die fünf anatomischen Abbildung der Baseler Provenzalischen Handschrift*, Leipzig: Barth, 1908 p 28.
6. Haddad Sami I: *Journées médicales de la santé*. *Ann Rep Orient Hosp* 1949 2 8-12.