

## MAHOMET ALLUM: AUSTRALIA'S LEADING HERBALIST-BENEFACTOR?

Dr Daud Abdul-Fattah Batchelor\*

**Abstract:** Mahomet Allum, an Afghan herbalist whose family practised medicine over centuries, arrived in 1891 and spent most of his life in Australia, eventually settling in Adelaide. He endeared himself especially to the poor and labour class, treating their illnesses efficaciously without payment. He donated effusively to charities and disseminated Islamic knowledge. He was demonstrably one of Australia's greatest herbalist-benefactors.

Allum criticised contemporary Australian medical practices – he pioneered campaigning in Australia against the inhumane use of live animals for vivisection and pathological testing, and injecting animal serums into humans. He stood on his principles in the ensuing challenge between tradition and modernity, which ended in court with him being convicted for claiming to be a 'physician,' which witnesses denied. The accounts reviewed suggest Mahomet Allum's herbalist skill was likely superior to many Western medical outcomes in the 1930s, implying that the healing capabilities of traditional Afghan *cum* Islamic medicine were only equalled in the past century. Allum was a rarity in challenging the prevailing view of European racial superiority. His reported shortcomings were that he lost no opportunity to promote himself and his often extreme criticism of 'Western' medicine, including vaccinations. Sadly, his wife died from smallpox, for which effective vaccination had been discovered and used in Ottoman Turkey before 1700.

**Keywords:** *Adelaide, Afghan, Australian, herbalist, Muslim, Mahomet Allum*

### INTRODUCTION

Findings for this biographical study are based on primary and secondary sources, especially historical newspaper articles. There was some difficulty in finding primary source materials. Allum reportedly could not read or write, although he published articles about healing and Islam. His wife and friends helped him with these, which presumably represent Allum's primary input. Also, many newspaper articles quote his personal comments and views, occasionally from interviews.

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\* Adjunct fellow at the International Institute of Advanced Islamic Studies, Malaysia, Kuala Lumpur, and regional editor (Australasia) for the *Islam and Civilisational Renewal Journal* and columnist with the *Australasian Muslim Times*.

Valuable articles about Mahomet Allum were published in 1934-35 editions of Singapore magazine, *Genuine Islam*. Madeleine Brunato's 1972 book, *Mahomet Allum: Afghan Camel-driver, Herbalist, and Healer in Australia*,<sup>1</sup> provided some additional insights obtained from interviews with some of his former associates after his death. Unfortunately, Brunato did not critically address the questionable accusation by the presiding magistrate in Allum's 1935-36 court trial, that led her to state some "derided and declared [Allum] a charlatan."<sup>2</sup> Evidence in this article shows the presiding magistrate was manifestly incorrect. Mahomet Allum was surely no charlatan.

Given he was a controversial personality, this article provides a balanced assessment of Mahomet Allum's life and work, from his own account and the words of people whom he helped and with whom he was associated. Where different versions exist about his life, this writer takes the most credible position.

The study also examines and tentatively answers the question, "What did Mahomet Allum, as an Afghan Muslim immigrant, contribute to Australian society in its pioneer days?" From the extensive healing and welfare, he provided to Australian society, does he deserve the high accolade of being "Australia's leading herbalist-benefactor?" It is possible he was Australia's greatest herbalist. Mahomet Allum, with his fellow Afghan cameleers, were part of a great Muslim heritage in Australia that also involved ancient seafarers to our northern shores.

## THE EARLY YEARS

Mahomet Allum was born around 1858 in Kandahar, the then proud Pashtun capital of Afghanistan. King Mahmud Shah Durrani gifted his grandfather in 1801 for medical services.<sup>3</sup> Having independent means<sup>4</sup> and selling horses to the British Army enabled Allum to travel widely.<sup>5</sup> Allum arrived in Australia in 1891.<sup>6</sup> Being multiskilled on arrival, he became a hawker on the goldfields, camel driver, station hand in Queensland, storekeeper and sailor. When the Coolgardie Gold Rush erupted in 1892, he formed a large camel team carrying water inland. When the water pipeline came to Kalgoorlie, his business collapsed. His camels then carried stores and water to other goldfields.<sup>7</sup> "Allum travelled the length and breadth of Australia with camel trains, crossing from Coolgardie gold fields to Brisbane, and back, down to Bourke ... and over the vast Nullarbor Desert to Perth."<sup>8</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Madeleine Brunato, *Mahomet Allum: Afghan Camel-driver, Herbalist, and Healer in Australia* (Leabrook: Investigator Press, 1972).

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid*, 4.

<sup>3</sup> "A Holy Man Passes By. Fremantle Sees Mahomet Allum, Healer and Philanthropist," *Mirror*, November 5, 1932, 8.

<sup>4</sup> "Another Case of Mahomet Allum's Magnificent Generosity Brought to Light. Humanity's Benefactor," *The Mail*, December 1, 1934, 22.

<sup>5</sup> Brunato, *Mahomet Allum*, 14.

<sup>6</sup> His first entry date, according to his testimony at the 1935-36 court trial.

<sup>7</sup> Frank Clune, "Clune's Column," *Smith's Weekly*, January 21, 1950, 5.

<sup>8</sup> Brunato, *Mahomet Allum*, 19.

Allum recounted one particularly soulful event, which reflects on his attachment to His Protector from whom he sought help in a time of dire need:

he got separated from his team, and lost in the desert, with one riding camel, trying to take a short-cut across the mountains. 'I had no water or food for three days. It was a moonlight night, in the middle of summer, and very hot. I tethered my camel, spread out my swag, and prayed to Almighty Allah. You the Mighty, I'm your creature. If it's my time to go, I'm ready. But if it's your wish, please send me water ...' While he prayed, rain fell and filled the rock-holes, so he and the camel had a long drink. 'Then I slept ... and I heard a voice saying, don't you worry, let the camel go. God is good. Follow the camel.' So I let the camel go, and followed him all day, until he led me to my own team. Thank you a million times, Allah!'<sup>9</sup>

Allum later carted ore from Cloncurry to Burketown in Queensland. When the railway came to Cloncurry, he transported stores from there to Brunette Downs and Alexandria Downs. His big bull camels could carry up to 350kg weight. The heaviest freight he carried on a camel were two pianos packed on either side. He prided himself in being a good cameleer. He moved south to Broken Hill at the end of World War I. Wherever he went, he carried his medicines and treated sick people free, for the "love of Allah."<sup>10</sup>

He ran a drapery business in Lismore, NSW, but lost a court action there in 1910 over the unlawful seizure of his property.<sup>11</sup> Allum experienced outright racism. The Brisbane *Truth* in 1913 published Allum's complaint citing "villainous charges" by the AUSN Company – 50% extra charged for his shipping passage from Burketown to Townsville because he was not "white." Allum asked, "Being an Afghan and Moslem, I should like to know whether this is what is called justice in this country?"<sup>12</sup>

Brunato narrated, "On his journeying with camels, he saw much misery, sickness and poverty. He treated the sick with herbs he always carried with him, and helped their poverty by giving away most of his earnings." People were told, "this [is] a man they could ask for help and not be refused."<sup>13</sup> Allum worked underground in Broken Hill's mines as he wanted to know first-hand about miners' ailments. His philanthropy and the fame of his healing ability spread all over the region.<sup>14</sup>

In the 1930s he was described as "a tall, thin man with aquiline nose, dark piercing eyes, thin hands, jet black hair and an appearance of great strength and virility ... with a personality

<sup>9</sup> Clune, "Clune's Column," 5.

<sup>10</sup> Ibid.

<sup>11</sup> "Lismore Circuit Court. Alleged Perjury," *Casino and Kyogle Courier*, October 26, 1910, 3.

<sup>12</sup> "Allum Annoyed. A Moslem Plaint. Curses the A.U.S.N. Co. Injurious Differentiation," *Truth*, April 6, 1913, 6.

<sup>13</sup> Brunato, *Mahomet Allum*, 21.

<sup>14</sup> "Wonder Man Still Continues his Mission of Mercy," *Sport*, November 22, 1934, 4.

that inspires confidence and affectionate regard.”<sup>15</sup> He wore a gold-coloured turban,<sup>16</sup> with a few priceless gems adorning his “well-formed hands.”<sup>17</sup>

## HIS ADELAIDE HERBALIST PRACTICE

Around 1928, he set-up his business *cum* residence at 181 Sturt Street. Adelaide would be home for most of his remaining life. He quickly built an enviable reputation. Thousands called him endearingly “Humanity’s Benefactor,” “Wonder Man” and Adelaide’s “Uncrowned King.”<sup>18</sup> Later, the affection changed as he was termed “a foreigner, the most discussed man (except Hitler)” (1941)<sup>19</sup> and “Australia’s most bizarre personality” (1946).<sup>20</sup>

Mahomet Allum’s practice was in Adelaide’s poorer, working class quarters. Working hours were 9am to 6pm. His premises closed on Wednesdays, when he spent time at the nearby mosque.<sup>21</sup> Contemporary articles depict the scene his patients encountered: “In the waiting room, beautifully decorated with flowers, the gift of grateful patients, a canary in a cage sings ... With cheery smiles girls in attendance renew supplies of medicine and arrange for interviews with Mahomet Allum.”<sup>22</sup> “His smile is something to remember. ...it is this self-assurance of Divine Guidance permeating his work which, reflected in his face as much as his expressions, carried conviction to his interviewer.”<sup>23</sup> Many who visited his practice had prepared to scoff, but left with “a new-born faith in this humble, plainly-spoken man.”<sup>24</sup>

Allum’s practice, scrupulously clean, was further described in one paid advertisement:

In the windows read scores of testimonials. ... A young Australian steps forward to announce our arrival. And now we are face to face with the Samaritan of Sturt Street ... One glance into the soft, black eye puts the stranger at his ease immediately. With raven hair ... and noble demeanour, Mahomet Allum’s personality emanates from him like a golden aureole. ‘God is good!’ is his answer, when one wonders at his sleepless nights of benevolence. ‘I am an unqualified practitioner.’ ... Everything is spick and span. The sacred Koran, protected by rare satin, rests on his mantelpiece like a benediction. The atmosphere is like the man himself – wholesome and pure.<sup>25</sup>

Allum made effective use of advertising and sympathetic Australians who respected his work. Journalists in Adelaide and Perth, who themselves or their friends had been cured by him, praised Allum in print. They effused about “the Wonder Man who has given relief and, in

<sup>15</sup> “A Holy Man Passes By,” 8.

<sup>16</sup> Jabby, “Mahomet Allum – The Wonder Man. An Appreciative Impression of a Remarkable Personality,” *Mirror*, June 16, 1934, 11.

<sup>17</sup> “Taxation Department. On Return Searched by Customs Officials,” *Sport*, September 20, 1934, 3.

<sup>18</sup> “Allum Mahomet. Adelaide’s ‘Uncrowned King,’” *Voice*, April 18, 1936, 8.

<sup>19</sup> [“Paragraph about Mahomet Allum”], *The Bunyip*, September 5, 1941, 4.

<sup>20</sup> “Mahomet Cures the Infidels and Fathered a Daughter at 83,” *Smith’s Weekly*, June 15, 1946, 23.

<sup>21</sup> “Wonder Man Still Continues his Mission of Mercy,” 4.

<sup>22</sup> “Mahomet Allum. Honored in his own Country. The Man who Declined to be a Millionaire – Six Hundred Patients Call Daily,” *Sunday Times*, February 10, 1935, 17.

<sup>23</sup> “Benefactor of the Poor. Healer of the Sick,” *Sport*, November 1, 1934, 3.

<sup>24</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>25</sup> Walter Teare, “Mahomet Allam. The Man,” *News*, August 27, 1932, 5.

many cases permanent cure to thousands of suffering people ... after many of them had been given up by medical men as hopeless,”<sup>26</sup> and he “has been a greater benefactor to our sick and indigent population than probably any other individual who visited this continent.”<sup>27</sup>

Rich and poor alike flocked to him in their thousands. The highest daily tally recorded was 900 patients,<sup>28</sup> which probably represented the number waiting outside his door for an appointment. Shortly after establishing his practice, Allum was so ‘swamped’ he could not treat any new patients for some time.<sup>29</sup> One paper asserted, “there is not a medical practitioner in Australia today with such a huge army of patients...”<sup>30</sup> When asked what he could cure, he replied “very nearly everything ... except Death!”<sup>31</sup> The media observed in 1934 that, unlike many other successful professionals, Allum maintained the simple lifestyle he led when he first visited Australia.<sup>32</sup>

## EVALUATING HIS STYLE OF PRACTICE

Mahomet Allum’s approach to healing was conducted on a high level, when we appreciate that having good health is one of humanity’s greatest blessings. Prophet Muhammad (pbuh) advised, “Ask Allah SWT for forgiveness and health, for after being granted certainty, one is given nothing better than health.”<sup>33</sup>

Allum was certainly an efficacious healer, especially for ailments that Western-trained doctors had difficulty treating. Patients were asked to sign a document before a Justice of the Peace, giving the names of doctors who treated them previously. Testimonials on average listed eight doctors before the person approached Allum and was cured.<sup>34</sup> By 1934, he had received 32,000 such testimonials.<sup>35</sup> If each represented one person in South Australia, this meant he had treated 5% of South Australia’s population.<sup>36</sup> By 1941, he reportedly had effected 80,000 cures.<sup>37</sup>

Not only did he help cure people whom Western doctors could not, but he never accepted payment for his advice or medicines. If visitors wished, they could leave a voluntary donation. Allum distributed donations accumulated to the needy or through charitable institutions. His generosity was a legend. The significance of such character is reflected in the Prophet’s (pbuh)

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<sup>26</sup> Jabby, “Mahomet Allum – The Wonder Man,” 11.

<sup>27</sup> “Taxation Department,” 3.

<sup>28</sup> “Mahomet Cures the Infidels,” 23.

<sup>29</sup> “An Appeal by Mahomet Allum,” *Advertiser and Register*, April 11, 1931, 18.

<sup>30</sup> “Wonder Man Still Continues his Mission of Mercy,” 4.

<sup>31</sup> Clune, “Clune’s Column,” 5.

<sup>32</sup> Con Noonan, “Benefactor of the Poor. Healer of the Sick,” *Sport*, November 1, 1934, 3.

<sup>33</sup> Tirmidhi, Hadith 2478. Tirmidhi assessed it as a *hasan* tradition.

<sup>34</sup> “The Man Who Fights the Doctors. Mahomet Allum. Uncrowned King of Adelaide,” *Sunday Times*, September 15, 1935, 20.

<sup>35</sup> Noonan, “Benefactor of the Poor,” 3.

<sup>36</sup> This is only indicative since some testimonials were from non-South Australian residents.

<sup>37</sup> “Mahomet Allum, 83 Has Baby Daughter,” *Mirror*, August 23, 1941, 1.

words: “The best of people are those who bring most benefit to the rest of mankind” (Daraqutni).<sup>38</sup>

Allum frequently gave credit that it was God who heals not himself. He followed the examples of Prophets Muhammad and Jesus (pbuh). Mahomet Allum’s character was acclaimed by commentators as being “‘Christ-like’ in his unselfish sacrifice,”<sup>39</sup> and “more like Christ than any other man he had known.”<sup>40</sup> South Australia’s Police Commissioner called him an “honorable Christian, charitable gentleman.”<sup>41</sup> One journalist affirmed, “‘God bless Mahomet Allum’ is a prayer said every day by innumerable grateful Christians of all classes and sects in South Australia and other States.”<sup>42</sup> The significance of his life-work is enhanced when it is considered his deeds were directed mostly towards ensuring the well-being of people not of his own race or religion – he was a universal healer and benefactor.

Until the mid-40s, Allum had strong public support. One journalist effused: “More than half of the members of both Houses of the Australian Parliament are amongst his staunch personal friends, and two-thirds of the population of [South Australia].”<sup>43</sup> A sincere admirer and friend was Lady Gowrie,<sup>44</sup> wife of South Australia’s Governor Hore-Ruthven (1928-1934) and Australia’s longest serving Governor-General (1936-1945). The State Police Commissioner, senior police officers and high judiciary members also acclaimed his character, herbalist skills and charitable contributions.<sup>45</sup> A Christian clergyman wrote:

I have been greatly impressed by his works, faith and labour of love during the past three years, during which it has been my privilege ... to investigate evidence of his unbounded generosity to the poor, suffering and needy, and also letters from grateful patients from many parts of this State who have been cured of various ailments by his herbal remedies. His Divinely directed diagnoses are simply marvellous.<sup>46</sup>

## MEDICAL METHODS

As a herbalist, Mahomet Allum practised alternative medicine that combined traditional Afghan treatments with ‘Prophetic’ medicine. Indications of the basis of these approaches are provided in books, such as *As-Suyuti’s Medicine of the Prophet (pbuh)*,<sup>47</sup> *The Book of Sufi Healing*,<sup>48</sup> and *Twelve Years with the Sufi Herb Doctors*,<sup>49</sup> the latter mentioning Afghanistan

<sup>38</sup> Al-Tabarani, (874-971 CE), *Al-Mu’jam al-Awsat* [A Weighty Word], Hadith 5937. *Hasan* (good) according to Al-Albani.

<sup>39</sup> Teare, “Mahomet Allum. The Man,” 5.

<sup>40</sup> “Police Chief’s Evidence in Allum Case. Knows Defendant Well, He Says. ‘A Christian Charitable Gentleman.’ Cure of Boy Related,” *News*, November 28, 1935, 11.

<sup>41</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>42</sup> “Allum Mahomet. Adelaide’s ‘Uncrowned King’,” 8.

<sup>43</sup> “Adelaide’s Wonder Man. Mahomet Allum’s baby scoops society,” *Voice*, June 17, 1944, 4.

<sup>44</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>45</sup> “Benefactor of the Poor,” 3.

<sup>46</sup> “Another Case of Mahomet Allum’s Magnificent Generosity Brought to Light,” 22.

<sup>47</sup> Jalalu’-Din Abd’ur-Rahman As-Suyuti, *Medicine of the Prophet (pbuh)* (London: Ta-Ha Publishers, 1994).

<sup>48</sup> Hakim Moinuddin Chishti, *The Book of Sufi Healing* (New York: Inner Traditions International, 1985).

<sup>49</sup> Najib Siddiqi, *Twelve Years with the Sufi Herb Doctors* (London: Octagon Press, 1983).

is “the long-term and enduring centre of Sufi herbal studies.”<sup>50</sup> Prior to the 1979 Soviet invasion, traditional mainstream Islam in Afghanistan, like other parts of the Indian sub-continent, was strongly permeated by Sufism, which would have influenced Allum’s outlook, regardless of whether he was a member of a Sufi brotherhood.<sup>51</sup> The herbalist tradition that was known to have been passed down Allum’s family over the centuries to him would have undoubtedly incorporated Islamic Sufic elements.

Allum believed the hadith “For every disease there is a cure.”<sup>52</sup> Allum discerned more by observation than from the patient’s report. Allum’s successful approach involved telling patients they could be cured, and by declaring ‘God is good.’ Allum stressed that only God can cure and a patient first needs to think well of God and recognise their dependence on God who has power to cure all.

Medicines used in his treatments included: honey, *costus* and ‘black seed’ as general cures, the latter for cold and coughs; olive oil for gallstones; and cottonseed oil for many external complaints. Henna cured wounds and bruises. He considered ‘cupping’ useful for general rheumatism and headaches. He spoke of treatment for ‘enchantment’ resulting from a “disease caused by bad looks of men.”<sup>53</sup> Many Western ailments he believed were caused by an “unclean stomach.” He used a mixture comprising butter, honey and senna to purge patients’ bowels.<sup>54</sup> Allum criticised immunisation as being “useless.”<sup>55</sup>

## SOCIETY’S BENEFACTOR

Mahomet Allum gained the love of Adelaide’s poor and needy and its children and prisoners through frequent acts of *sadaqah* (charity) – feeding and clothing them – in line with Muhammad’s (pbuh) advice: “Renounce the world and God will love you. Renounce what people possess and people will love you.”<sup>56</sup> He provided relief for the unemployed living in ‘humpies’ on the Torrens River banks. He liked to give charitable gifts at Christmas<sup>57</sup> and the end of Ramadan month. The Tax Office assessed in 1934 that he had given away a minimum of £15,000.

Working class organisations and the police effusively supported Allum as they appreciated the broad societal benefit from his work. One journalist wrote: “Assuredly Australia has reason to be grateful for the continued residence in this land of such a wonderful benefactor.”<sup>58</sup> Later,

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<sup>50</sup> Ibid., 4.

<sup>51</sup> See e.g. Olivier Roy, *Islam and Resistance in Afghanistan*, 2nd ed. (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 1990), 37-44. Christine Stevens also believes Mahomet Allum “appears to have been at least oriented towards Sufism.” Christine Stevens, *Tin Mosques & Ghantowns* (Alice Springs: Paul Fitzsimons, 2002), 198.

<sup>52</sup> Abu Dawud, *Tibb* 11, Hadith 3874.

<sup>53</sup> Brunato, *Mahomet Allum*, 35-38.

<sup>54</sup> Ibid., 53.

<sup>55</sup> Ibid., 37.

<sup>56</sup> *Sunan Ibn Majah*, Hadith 4102. *Sahih* (authentic) according to Al-Albani.

<sup>57</sup> ‘Few indeed were the organisations for the welfare of children that at Christmas did not receive a cheque from Mahomet Allum for the purchase of toys.’ See “Mahomet Allum,” *Sport*, January 17, 1935, 11.

<sup>58</sup> Ibid.

when there were concerns he may leave Australia for good, another opined: “if he goes away, we will never see the like of his equal in Adelaide again. Philanthropists and kind-hearted men like Mahomet Allum are few and far between.”<sup>59</sup>

## AUTHORITIES’ RESPONSE TO ALLUM’S BENEFICENCE

Allum’s star had risen and some elements seemed displeased. During the worst five years of the Great Depression, he distributed charity totalling £15,000. Using a conservative consumer price index approach, this in 2017 would equal AUD 1.3 million or AUD 254,000 annually.<sup>60</sup> The government, however, taxed him £500 on these gifts.

Allum was dismayed and felt he should leave Australia. However, Adelaide’s Lord Mayor, Members of Parliament, ministers of religion, business and professional men, and police officers of high rank besought him to remain. A petition signed by 19,000 people was presented to Mahomet Allam, beseeching him to reconsider and return to Australia at an early date.<sup>61</sup>

This public tribute confirmed Allum’s healing capabilities, charity and character. Allum then announced he would only make a brief visit to Afghanistan and left in June 1934 to return shortly thereafter. Thousands were overjoyed with this news.<sup>62</sup>

## CRITIQUE OF ‘WESTERN’ MEDICINE

The South Australian Worker remarked, “Tales of sickness and suffering daily fill [Allum’s] ears – stories of amputations by ambitious surgeons, and of injections of animal serums by experimental faddists.”<sup>63</sup> Allum criticised Western medical practices, condemning vaccinations, amputations and serum injections. He contended that nature provides herbal remedies for every illness. He rejected animal experiments, e.g. a rabbit “is injected with patient’s sputum and put in a basket in a dark hospital corridor and developments awaited until it contracts a virulent disease, or is killed ... any right-minded person knows it is devilish.”<sup>64</sup>

In Adelaide’s *Mirror*, he effused,

Over 30,000 people have sent testimonials thanking me for having restored them to health when doctors failed... I will give £500 to charity if any can be shown to be false. Hundreds of patients have signed sworn declarations that as many as 36 doctors failed to cure them before they came to me... Names of the doctors concerned are on exhibited declarations. I challenge medical profession members to take up this matter if I have done wrong in exposing the inefficiency of their methods and success of mine.<sup>65</sup>

<sup>59</sup> Walter Teare, “Mahomet Allum,” *Voice*, December 18, 1937, 2.

<sup>60</sup> “Five Ways to Compute the Relative Value of Australian Amounts, 1828 to the Present,” *Measuring Worth*, accessed November 15, 2018, <https://www.measuringworth.com/index.php>.

<sup>61</sup> “Taxation Department,” 3.

<sup>62</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>63</sup> “The Story of Mahomed Allum. Adelaide’s Uncrowned King. Most Picturesque Personality in Australia,” *Genuine Islam* (June/July 1936): 53.

<sup>64</sup> *Ibid.*, 52.

<sup>65</sup> *Ibid.*, 53.



Among those who had formerly treated his patients were some of Australia's leading doctors.

Journalists exacerbated the developing conflict, e.g.

Mahomet Allum ... has proven a thorn in the side of the Australian doctor for the past six years. That one man should achieve success where another has admitted failure is naturally galling to the unsuccessful man. When the latter's failure means also loss of large fees which the other disdains, the humiliation is all the greater.<sup>66</sup>

The journalist surmised that, at an international medical conference then underway in Melbourne, deliberations would likely address the issue of competition from herbalists, such as Mahomet Allum.

### **ALLUM CHARGED WITH 'IMPOSTURE AS A PHYSICIAN'**

The authorities charged and tried Mahomet Allum in 1935-1936 in the State Police Court with 'Imposture as a physician' under the *Medical Practitioners Act 1919*. ALP parliamentarian, Mr Riches, questioned whether Allum's pending prosecution was motivated by 'persecution' against him.<sup>67</sup>

Allum readied over 40 witnesses to attest that he never represented himself as a doctor.<sup>68</sup> Defence witnesses included Police Commissioner Brig-Gen R Leane, Brig-Gen Price-Weir (Secretary, Adelaide Benevolent Society) and Police Superintendent Wylie Nation. The latter, on being asked whether he knew of any cause to launch a prosecution against Allum under the *Medical Practitioners Act*, replied "No. I never considered he was committing a breach." He added, 'His one big fault and weakness is his love for publicity and his vanity... Otherwise he is working and doing good day and night.' Price-Weir confirmed Allum's reputation as "a good, very generous and kind-hearted man."<sup>69</sup> Mr Philcox defending Allum commented, "It was strange that after so many people had been sent to Allum by the police [for treatment] this charge should be laid." He believed Allum was being persecuted by the British Medical Association.<sup>70</sup> The prosecutor spoke about Allum's 'vindictive methods' against the medical profession.<sup>71</sup>

Mr Muirhead, presiding magistrate, convicted and fined Allum £45 plus costs. He stated in his judgement that, "he lends himself to a medical imposture; he is a quack." And, "The truth

<sup>66</sup> "The Man Who Fights the Doctors," 20.

<sup>67</sup> "Charge Against Mahomet Allum. Reference in House," *News*, November 21, 1935, 11.

<sup>68</sup> Valmai A Hankel, "Allum, Mahomet (1858-1964)," in *Australian Dictionary of Biography, National Centre of Biography* (Canberra: Australian National University, 1979), accessed November 20, 2018, <http://adb.anu.edu.au/biography/allum-mahomet-5006>.

<sup>69</sup> "Senna for Medicine Purchases by Allum. Fiancee Tells," *News*, December 3, 1935, 1.

<sup>70</sup> "Police Chief's Evidence in Allum Case," 11.

<sup>71</sup> Hankel, "Allum, Mahomet (1858-1964)."

is that, in effect, he charges his patients for services and advice given, and medicine and drugs supplied.”<sup>72</sup> However, the publicity provided Allum many new customers.<sup>73</sup>

Given the *Medical Practitioners Act* intentionally promotes the Western medical profession, this writer does not question this judgement. Nevertheless, two statements by the presiding magistrate reflect negatively on his own credibility and thus on his judgement. First, he ruled Allum was a ‘quack’. The Cambridge Dictionary defines ‘quack’ as “a person who *dishonestly pretends* to have medical skills or knowledge.”<sup>74</sup> Such cannot be ascribed to Allum since evidence was accepted that he required patients to sign a document before he treated them acknowledging he was *not* a legally qualified medical practitioner.<sup>75</sup> His reputation as an excellent ‘healer’ was confirmed by 30,000 testimonials. In one case, Detective Correll told the court his young son suffered severe fits; 14 qualified doctors could not help and he was told nothing could cure him. Correll took the boy to Allum. Correll said a ‘miracle’ happened and his son was cured. He believed Allum must get his power from God. In responding to the Prosecutor, Correll said “If the law says that a man like him should be punished for the good he has done, then I think the law is wrong.”<sup>76</sup> Second, it was affirmed in numerous testimonials and media reports that Allum never charged for his advice or medicines. So, the presiding magistrate’s assertions were incorrect and besmirched Allum’s good reputation. It is surely time that restitution is made to Allum’s unjustly damaged reputation.

Following the litigation, Allum decided to settle in Afghanistan, especially after high-placed Afghans invited him to return. After his departure, however, 10,000 Australians (including the Gowries) petitioned him, imploring him to return – which he did.<sup>77</sup> It seems he had committed so much of his life to helping build the Australian nation that he felt part of it with fellow Australians.

## PRACTISING AND PRESENTING ISLAM

Allum was active in local Muslim community affairs. The Perth Mosque, built in 1905-06, was the second in an Australian capital after Adelaide Mosque. Allum helped establish the former and became an administrator of the latter.<sup>78</sup>

Devoutly Muslim, Allum, sent letters to newspapers and published pamphlets about Islam. Con Noonan wrote: “When I read some of the beautiful Muslim literature which I received

<sup>72</sup> “Mahomet Allum Fined £45. Scathing Remarks of Magistrate ‘Worst case Ever Under My Notice’,” *News*, January 23, 1936.

<sup>73</sup> “Allum, Mahomet 1858?-1964,” SA Memory, State Library of South Australia, accessed November 19, 2018, <http://www.samemory.sa.gov.au/site/page.cfm?c=2379>.

<sup>74</sup> Cambridge Dictionary Online, s.v. “Quack,” accessed November 16, 2018, <https://dictionary.cambridge.org/dictionary/english/quack>.

<sup>75</sup> “Police Court. Mahomet Allum Prosecution. ‘Not Guilty,’” *Recorder*, November 28, 1935, 1.

<sup>76</sup> “Police Chief’s Evidence in Allum Case,” 11.

<sup>77</sup> “Mahomet Cures the Infidels,” 23.

<sup>78</sup> Amirul Husni Affifudin. *Historical Archaeological Report: Mohamet Allum Khan* (South Australia: Flinders University, 2018), 24, accessed November 14, 2018, [https://www.researchgate.net/publication/327836127\\_Historical\\_Archaeology\\_Report\\_Mohamet\\_Allum\\_Khan](https://www.researchgate.net/publication/327836127_Historical_Archaeology_Report_Mohamet_Allum_Khan).

from you, it does not surprise me that one who, as yourself, lives up to those lofty ideals, should be honoured and respected by all.”<sup>79</sup>

Allum’s secretary, Halimah Schwerdt, became the first European lady in Australia to publicly embrace Islam.<sup>80</sup> She wrote “Here in Australia where it is rare to come in general contact with anyone of the Muslim faith, I consider myself extremely lucky when I met Mahomet Allum.”<sup>81</sup> She was engaged to Allum in 1935-37,<sup>82</sup> but the wedding seems not to have eventuated.

Directing his patients to believe it is God that heals inculcated a belief and love of God. Similarly, in helping the needy of another race in treatments, charity and goodwill, he practically demonstrated the character of the biblical ‘Good Samaritan’. One journalist opined,

He ... practices the Doctrine of Love of God in the first place, and secondly, of his fellow-man. He believes in the Muslim faith, which teaches that by prayer and fasting, by loving and helping all mankind, may a man qualify to enter Paradise.<sup>83</sup>

Once after returning from *hajj* (pilgrimage), Allum bought 14 grave-sites at Centennial Park Cemetery, allocating places for poor Muslims who could be interred beside him.<sup>84</sup>

The Qur’an states: “Who is worthier of being listened to than one who calls to God, works righteous deeds, and says, ‘I am of those who bow in Islam?’” (41:33). Mahomet Allum’s actions and life example certainly seem to satisfy criteria given in this verse to be an inviter to Islam (*da’i*), worthy of being listened to.

## HIS FAMILY LIFE AND LOSS

In 1940, Allum married Jean Emsley. His wife, previously a nurse, had been in hospital suffering from severe dermatitis. A poor orphan, she went to Mahomet Allum, who cured her where doctors had failed.<sup>85</sup> Jean read much about Islam, became interested and embraced Islam.<sup>86</sup> In August 1941, Allum, 83, and Jean, 19, welcomed the birth of Bebe Nora. The same year, Allum received a request from Afghanistan’s King to return home to an honoured position. But he refused, saying, “I am not going back. Here [Australia] is my home.”<sup>87</sup>

Around this stage of his life, Allum’s nature changed somewhat from living a ‘simple’ life to becoming a wealthy Australian resident – public opinion about him also began to change. Where previously he had no car, he now owned a £2,500 Daimler similar to the British King’s.

<sup>79</sup> “Mahomet Allum. Honored in his own Country,” 17.

<sup>80</sup> “Islam in Australia,” *Genuine Islam* (August 1936).

<sup>81</sup> Bilal Cleland, “Muslims in Australia: A Brief History (Excerpts),” accessed November 17, 2018, [http://www.multiculturalaustralia.edu.au/doc/cleland\\_islam.pdf](http://www.multiculturalaustralia.edu.au/doc/cleland_islam.pdf).

<sup>82</sup> “Mahomet Allum in Witness Box,” *News*, July 5, 1937, 8.

<sup>83</sup> “Mahomet Allum. Honored in his own Country,” 17.

<sup>84</sup> “Adelaide’s ‘Wonder Man.’ Mahomet Allum’s Tombstone,” *Voice*, March 9, 1940, 5.

<sup>85</sup> “Mahomet Allum, 83 Has Baby Daughter,” 1.

<sup>86</sup> Brunato, *Mahomet Allum*, 60.

<sup>87</sup> “A Father at 83! Miracle Man’s,” *Truth*, August 24, 1941, 19.

A reporter overstatingly wrote, “Despite his generosity, Allum possesses jewels worth a king’s ransom ...”<sup>88</sup> In 1942, two windows at his residence were broken by youths.<sup>89</sup>

In 1943, he experienced personal difficulties, becoming seriously ill:

I know what is wrong with me. Some months ago I felt that people were looking at me like a hawk-eye. It affected me ... ‘Maybe some time I have sinned against God and this is my punishment. God is good.

His home was also burgled with the disappearance of his ‘famed’ jewellery. Police caught the culprits.<sup>90</sup> Later, he regained good health.

He entered his child in a baby contest in 1944 to raise funds for the Torrens House Appeal he supported, and Bebe Nora won first prize for the under-five age section. On winning, he added another £50 donation. The reporting journalist intimated this “confounded and embarrassed the defeated blue bloods,” which comment perhaps reflected or exacerbated discord between Allum and part of Adelaide’s elite.<sup>91</sup> Allum maintained in the face of difficulties that he was like ‘the deep sea’: “People call me what they like – I still love them.”<sup>92</sup>

Allum announced in 1946 that he would take his family to Afghanistan, so his daughter could study herbalism and later take over his Australian practice.<sup>93</sup> In 1954, while overseas, all family members became infected by smallpox and Jean died. They had not been vaccinated.<sup>94</sup> Allum announced he was returning to Adelaide – “All my friends are here” – and because his daughter was unhappy in Afghanistan without friends.<sup>95</sup>

## TWILIGHT YEARS

The last decade of Allum’s life in Adelaide would be difficult for him. He bought a new ‘modern’ house at 68 Anzac Highway, Everard Park.<sup>96</sup> Sadly, his daughter became estranged from him and he saw little, if any, of her again until he was on his death bed.<sup>97</sup>

He continued his practice, but infirmity reduced patient numbers. He enjoyed the company of old friends and former patients. An acquaintance observed, “Apart from a little rheumatism... I never saw him to be ill, and considered him to be a good advertisement for his treatments and way of life.”<sup>98</sup>

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<sup>88</sup> “Mahomet Cures the Infidels,” 23.

<sup>89</sup> “Mahomet Allum’s Windows Broken,” *Advertiser*, January 7, 1942, 11.

<sup>90</sup> “Mahomet Allum Loses Health, Jewels,” *Mirror*, November 13, 1943, 18.

<sup>91</sup> “Adelaide’s Wonder Man,” 4.

<sup>92</sup> “Mahomet Cures the Infidels,” 23.

<sup>93</sup> “To Afghanistan to be Educated,” Perth: *Sunday Times*, September 15, 1946, 9.

<sup>94</sup> “Mahomet Allum’s Wife Thought Dead,” *News*, March 26, 1954, 3.

<sup>95</sup> “Mahomet Allum is Back in Adelaide,” *Barrier Miner*, September 25, 1954, 1.

<sup>96</sup> Brunato, *Mahomet Allum*, 61.

<sup>97</sup> *Ibid.*, 62.

<sup>98</sup> *Ibid.*, 52.

Australia legislated in 1901 that ‘non-whites’ were barred from citizenship. In 1957, however, changes allowed non-Europeans with 15 years residence to become citizens.<sup>99</sup> Allum would have qualified, but submitted no application, “either because he decided it was not worthwhile or because he was unaware that the law had been changed.”<sup>100</sup>

The 1950s and 1960s were times when racism heightened in Australia. This writer’s acquaintance with Australian Afghan and Indian families identified strategies they took to survive the racism and bullying. Two examples reflect Allum’s own experience. First, when Allum left for Afghanistan, Sydney’s *Truth* wrote: “The country gave him much – a young attractive wife, a daughter when he was 86 [*sic*], wealth, a Daimler car and a chauffeur to drive it – and a reputation in Adelaide as a man with magic healing power.”<sup>101</sup> However, they were achieved not by the ‘country,’ but by God’s grace and Allum’s ‘sweat.’ Rather, he has not been given suitable recognition for his works as an Australian nation-builder and benefactor.

Another example is referenced in the book *Historic South-West Corner, Adelaide*. Many children walked to Sturt Street School past Allum’s house, it narrates,

if Mahomet was on the footpath calling his daughter, Bébé, into the house we would run like the wind because, as the childish legend had it, if you looked him straight in the eyes you would be strung up by the neck atop one [of Adelaide's Islamic mosque minarets].<sup>102</sup>

This ‘legend,’ probably an adult fabrication, smacks of racism since his eyes that helped diagnose the ailments of multitudes of thankful Adelaideans, became instead a malevolent threat. This writer questions whether it is proper for Adelaide’s corporate body to promote such a view about one who was demonstrably an outstanding benefactor to Adelaide’s citizens.

By 1964, his health had greatly deteriorated. On 21 March, Mahomet Allum “slipped quietly away”<sup>103</sup> at the certified age of 106 years. The funeral procession from the mosque to Centennial Park stretched for over one mile.<sup>104</sup> His estate was mostly willed to children’s charities.<sup>105</sup>

## DISCUSSION

The abundant evidence, including tens of thousands of testimonials that confirm recovered good health of patients from Allum’s Islamic herbalist treatment and the failure of their previous Western treatments, indicate convincingly that Allum’s methods were superior to many of his Western medical contemporaries in the 1920s and 1930s and were only equalled

<sup>99</sup> European Parliament, “Fact Sheet 8 - Abolition of the 'White Australia' Policy,” last reviewed November 2010, accessed November 18, 2018, [http://www.europarl.europa.eu/meetdocs/2009\\_2014/documents/danz/dv/0220\\_13\\_1/0220\\_13\\_1en.pdf](http://www.europarl.europa.eu/meetdocs/2009_2014/documents/danz/dv/0220_13_1/0220_13_1en.pdf).

<sup>100</sup> Brunato, *Mahomet Allum*, 24-27.

<sup>101</sup> “Now He’s Leaving Land of Worry,” *Truth*, June 8, 1952, 3.

<sup>102</sup> Bridget Jolly, *Historic South West Corner, Adelaide, South Australia* (Adelaide: Corporation of the City of Adelaide, 2005), 33, accessed November 18, 2018, [https://www.cityofadelaide.com.au/assets/documents/South\\_West\\_Corner\\_Historic\\_Booklet.pdf](https://www.cityofadelaide.com.au/assets/documents/South_West_Corner_Historic_Booklet.pdf).

<sup>103</sup> Brunato, *Mahomet Allum*, 63.

<sup>104</sup> “Mahomet Allum—A Most Unusual Man,” *The West Torrens Historian* 7, no. 3 (2015): 2.

<sup>105</sup> Hankel, “Allum, Mahomet (1858-1964).”

later. Indeed, Muslim medical practice led the world for 800 years – the major work of outstanding physician, Ibn Sina (980-1037 CE), translated into Latin as the *Canon of Medicine*, was the dominant text for teaching medicine in Europe, continuing in some areas until the 19th century.<sup>106</sup>

Allum was mistaken on some of his positions. Sadly, his wife died of smallpox for which effective vaccination had been used in Ottoman Turkey before 1700.<sup>107</sup> Allum needed to acknowledge the progress being made with many new medical treatments appearing in the West.

Mahomet Allum displayed ‘Pashtunwali’ culture, which exemplifies hospitality, courage, and being active in defending one’s property and honour. Amirul Husni believed Allum showcased Pashtun identity in his upstanding interaction with authorities and in always welcoming patients regardless of status; showing generosity to the poor; and displaying bravery in upholding his beliefs.<sup>108</sup> Having experienced prejudice first-hand in Australia, it was to his credit that he critiqued such abuse. He once challenged, “if any Britisher can prove to me that he is white and I am black, I will unreservedly give him £500.”<sup>109</sup> Allum’s friend, Con Noonan, supported him, “the question of racial color is but, at most, comparative, and people are supposed to be judged by their actions!”<sup>110</sup>

## CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Mahomet Allum Khan, a very notable character, became well-known for dispensing herbal treatments and advice without payment, although he accepted voluntary donations and gifted charities handsomely. He claimed the healing gift was handed down in his family over centuries. Daily attendance outside his herbal practise averaged 500-600.<sup>111</sup> The public’s acclaim and testimonials confirm his popularity, effective healing and charity.

To determine whether Allum was Australia’s leading herbalist-benefactor requires a comparative study of Australian herbalists. However, it appears to be so given his long residence (70 years) in Australia, during which time he treated large numbers of Australians and disbursed charity generously, which helped alleviate the pain and financial difficulties of Australia’s sick and needy, particularly during the Great Depression years. *Genuine Islam* recorded a fitting testament to him from the *South Australian Worker*:

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<sup>106</sup> “The Significance of Ibn Sina’s Canon of Medicine in the Arab and Western Worlds,” *Science and Its Times: Understanding the Social Significance of Scientific Discovery*. Encyclopedia.com, accessed November 21, 2018, <https://www.encyclopedia.com/science/encyclopedias-almanacs-transcripts-and-maps/significance-ibn-sinas-canon-medicine-arab-and-western-worlds>.

<sup>107</sup> Salah Zaimeche, Salim Al-Hassani and Ahmed Salem, “Lady Montagu and the Introduction of Smallpox Inoculation to England,” *Muslim Heritage*, accessed November 18, 2018, <http://www.muslimheritage.com/article/lady-montagu-and-introduction-smallpox-inoculation-england>.

<sup>108</sup> Affifudin, *Historical Archaeological Report*, 19-21.

<sup>109</sup> Brunato, *Mahomet Allum*, 40.

<sup>110</sup> Noonan, “Benefactor of the Poor,” 3.

<sup>111</sup> “The Man Who Fights the Doctors,” 20.

Australia has produced many men of note – statesmen, pioneers, professional men – but it has been left to a visitor, from a far-off land, to show us what we owe to the sick and poor of Adelaide. The efforts of our greatest philanthropists dwarf into insignificance when we take into consideration the magnitude of the work of Mahomet Allum.<sup>112</sup>

Although his offer was declined, Allum offered his skills to help the recovery of the ailing King George VI.<sup>113</sup> The question arises, “Wasn’t Mahomet Allum in reality as much an Australian as any citizen?” A journalist in 1935 reasonably posited,

Were one of our own race performing even a tithe of the good work which, in his quiet unassuming way Mahomet Allum is doing, he would be lauded to the skies. Knighthoods have been bestowed for a great deal less.<sup>114</sup>

The present study finds that biographical summaries do not credit the scale and breadth of Allum’s charitable work, especially during the Great Depression years, and uncritically accept the 1936 court judgement against him. This writer believes he clearly deserves a more balanced reappraisal by historians and suitable posthumous recognition by the nation for his demonstrated great and long-standing services as an herbalist and benefactor to Australians of all backgrounds.

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<sup>112</sup> “The Story of Mahomed Allum,” 52.

<sup>113</sup> “Offer to Treat the King,” *News*, October 1, 1951, 2.

<sup>114</sup> “Mahomet Allum. Honored in His Own Country,” 17.

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