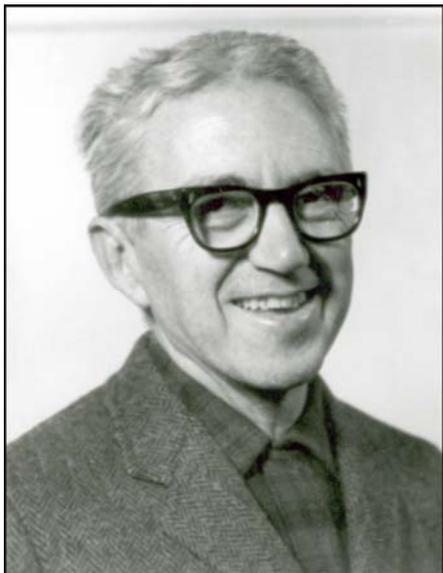


Martin Levey (1913–1970)



Martin Levey was born in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania, on May 18, 1913. He was educated at Temple University (B.A. 1934) and attended the University of Pennsylvania for three years studying chemistry, mathematics and foreign languages without taking a degree. Since the economy was still in a depressed state he took a chemical position in industry before entering the United States Merchant Marine. In 1943 he left the Merchant Marine since he desperately wished to be back in Philadelphia with its schools, museums, and opportunities for study. He returned to industrial chemistry, but, in 1949 entered Dropsie College to work for his Ph.D. In the year 1951–52 he was a fellow in the college and at the end of that term was granted the doctorate in history of science, having worked under Solomon Gandz.

Dropsie College was a unique institution in Philadelphia. It was endowed early in the twentieth century by the Hebrew community as a graduate school for Hebrew

Studies and Cognate Learning. It offered only the Ph.D. and stressed Semitic languages and cultures. Levey had mastered Hebrew and Yiddish at home, and German, French, Spanish, Italian, Latin and Greek in high school, college, and by self-study. At Dropsie he studied Arabic, Sumerian, Phoenician, Syriac, Ethiopic, Akkadian, Sanskrit, Persian, Turkish, Berber, and Urdu.

In 1952 he became an instructor in chemistry at Penn State College but after three years took the opportunity to teach mathematics and its history at his alma mater, Temple University. He was, however, frustrated at the lack of appreciation for historical studies among his associates and in 1959 obtained a National Science Foundation fellowship which he used for a year at the Institute for Advanced Study in Princeton, New Jersey. This research year paved the way for an appointment as a research associate in the Medical School at Yale. In 1965 he moved to Rockefeller University as an investigator in history of science and medicine. The next year was spent as a historian of science at the Institute for Advanced Study and finally, in 1966, he received the kind of appointment which he had been seeking, the professorship of history and semantics of science, in a new program being started at the State University of New York in Albany (SUNYA).

Here he was given an opportunity to set up a program, recruit staff, build up a library in the field, and pursue research. The full potential of the program never materialized, however, on account of a tightening economy. He did succeed in bringing in an associate, Jack Bulloff, to share the teaching load. Bulloff, who left a position as chief chemist at Battelle Memorial Institute for the SUNYA position, had a deep interest in analysis of technological trends and it was felt that the history of science program at SUNYA might be developed into one of broad scope, ranging from Levey's strength in ancient science to Bulloff's interest in modern problems involving application of scientific knowledge to technology. Unfortunately, the potential for growth of a vigorous department at SUNYA received a severe blow when Levey died in 1970 following surgery.

Levey published extensively during his career. Many of his papers on history of chemistry were published in the *Journal of Chemical Education*, *Isis*, and *Chymia*. In his later years, he undertook mostly major textual researches which resulted in books. His principal books are : *Chemistry and Chemical Technology in Ancient Mesopotamia* (1959); *Medieval Arabic Book-making and Its Relation to Early Chemistry and Pharmacology* (1962); *Kushyar ibn labban. Principles of Jindu Reckoning, A Translation of the Kitab fi usul hisab al-hind with Introduction and*

Notes (with Marvin Petruck, 1965); *The Medical Formulary or Aqrabadhin of al-Kindi* (1966); *Medieval Arabic Toxicology: The Book on Poisons of Ibn Al-Wahshiya, and Its Relation to Early Indian and Greek Texts* (1966); *The Medical Formulary of Al-Samarqandi and the Relation of Early Arabic Simples to Those Found in the Indigenous Medicine of the Near East and India* (with Noury Al-Khaledy, 1967); *Arabic Medical Ethics: A Treatise by Al-Ruhawi* (1967); and *A History of Arabic Pharmacology: An Introduction Based on Ancient and Medieval Sources* (1973).

Once Levey turned seriously to the history of science he became one of the most active members of HIST [in particular the Subdivision of Archaeological Chemistry] reading papers, organized symposia on archeological chemistry, and generally seeking to develop interest in the quality of work being done by historians of chemistry. He served HIST as councilor in the 1950s and in 1967 was chairman.

Martin Levey, a scholar in Semitic languages and chemistry, received the Dexter Award in 1965 for his numerous contributions to the history of chemistry, particularly for his work on texts and archeological artifacts of the ancient and medieval Middle East. [Levey also received the Edward Kremers Award of the American Institute of the History of Pharmacy in 1968 for his contributions to the history of pharmacy.]

Sources

The preceding text is taken from Aaron J. Ihde, *A Quarter Century of Dexter Awards*, 1981, unpublished manuscript. Copy in the University of Pennsylvania Library, QD21 .Q8 1981a; an abridged version can be found in *Bulletin for the History of Chemistry* 2 (1988): 14.

E. H. Thomson, "Martin Levey, 1913–1970," *Journal of the History of Medicine and Allied Sciences* 26 (1971): 444–445.

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