



ANTİK SANATTA FLEBOTOMİ İLE İLGİLİ MERMER BİR ADAK
A MARBLE VOTIVE REFERRING TO PHLEBOTOMY IN ANCIENT ART

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Abstract

Most gods and goddesses were believed to have the power to heal in the ancient Greek period. For this reason, people went to the healing temples in the name of various gods and goddesses for the treatment of their diseases. Among these temples, the Asklepios, the temples builded in the name of Asclepius, served men in the search for health. Patients who wish a treatment or have been treated in the temples offered a variety of votives to God. One of these inscriptions was discovered in the Askleion of Pergamon, one of the most important Asklepios of the period. The translation of the Greek inscription revealed that it was presented to Asclepius by the patient who took blood by phlebotomy. It is seen that the marble stone with the inscription on phlebotomy as a surgical treatment is a unique example. The use of phlebotomy method in the treatment of hypocratic scientific antique physicians in a period of religious and mystical treatment has attracted considerable attention.

Keywords: Asklepius, Asclepeion, Phlebotomy, Bloodletting, Temple Medicine, Votive, Inscribed Votive.

INTRODUCTION

During the polytheist Antic Greek period, every domain of social life was under Gods` and Goddesses` protection and reign. The source of Greek mysticism and religious medicine was also Greek mythology and gods. Moreover, they were believed to have power of rendering cure and healing. Thus, the people used to visit to the healing sanctuaries dedicated to the gods and goddesses for their diseases and disorders (Oberhelman, 2014). Gods and goddesses like Zeus, Apollon, Asklepius, Artemis, Eileitheia, Jupiter, Apollo, Aesculapius, Diana, Minerva, Liber and Juno in ancient Greece and Rome used to give healing in temples built in their name. Among them, the most famous was Asklepios (Greek: Asclepis, Latin: Aesculapius), who had reached the rank of God of Health and Medicine (**Figure 1**) (Versnel, 2011; Oberhelman, 2014; Whickkiser, 2003).

The temples that were built in the name of Asclepius, the god of health, were called Askleion and they functioned as antic hospital (Versnel, 2011; Gardner, 2017; Risse, 1999; Kellie, 1999). Patients who wished for treatment or have been treated in these temples have left money or gifts according to their financial situation and offered anatomical votives in the shape of organs or limbs (Wilder, 1904; Walton, 1894; Van Straten, 2000). One of these inscriptions was discovered in archaeological excavations in the Askleion of Pergamon, one of the most important ascension of the period (**Figure 2**) (Boehringer, 1969). In this article, we will try to evaluate this inscribed votive and its expressions in the framework of ancient medicine.

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ASKLEPIONS, THE TEMPLES IN THE NAME OF ASCLEPIUS, HEALTH OF GOD, AND TEMPLE MEDICINE

Among the gods rendering cure and healing, undoubtedly the most famous one is Asclepius (Aesculapius in Latin) who was promoted to Health and Medicine God. The temples that were built in the name of Asclepius, the god of health, were called Asklepion and they functioned as antic hospital (Versnel, 2011; Gardner, 2017; Risse, 1999; Kellie, 1999). The number of Asclepeions passed 330 in total between the time when they had emerged in 5th century B.C. and served until 3rd century A.D. (Aleshire, 1989; Gardner, 2017; Caton, 2014; Risse, 1999). Among the Asclepeions, the ones established in Epidaurus and Kos Island in Greece and Pergamon in Turkey had drawn much importance than the others as they were the most sophisticated (Risse, 1999; Hamilton, 2016; Caton, 2014; Wickkiser, 2008; Albert, 1978).

In Asclepeions, the healing centers of ancient world, sons of God Asclepius or his successors called as Asclepiads used to serve as priest physician, analyze dreams and apply cures (Lloyd, 1979; Gardner, 2017). Suggestion therapy was applied particularly to mental and psychosomatic disorders (somatoform disorders) after priests analyze the dreams of patients who incubated in abaton to have dreams (Israelowich, 2012; Harris, 2008). On the other hand, bodily diseases had been treated by thermal hydrotherapy, diet cures, physical exercises, regurgitation, clyster, phlebotomy (i.e. cupping, leech), various drug treatments and anaclasis diagnosis (Neuburger, 2016; Wilder, 1904; Kate, 2009; Guthrie, 1945; Carroll, 2016; Israelowich, 2012; Hamilton, 2016; Caton, 2014; McKenzie, 1914; Pausinas, 1875). Besides, surgical interventions had been applied to the cases required (Risse, 1999; Boehringer, 1969).



Figure 1. Statue of God Asclepius, Archeology Museum, Afyonkarahisar, Turkey

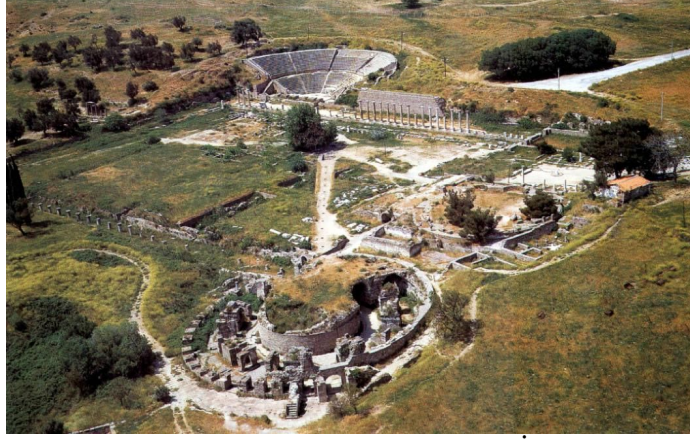


Figure 2. Relics of Pergamon Asclepeion, İzmir, Turkey

UNIQUE REPRESENTATION OF AN INSCRIPTION ABOUT PHLEBOTOMY IN ANCIENT ART

The reason why ancient people visited the temples and some other holy places was to worship to the gods, to solve some of their social problems and problems, and most importantly to seek solutions to health problems (Walton; 1894, Caton, 1900; Lloyd, 1979).

Patients who wished for treatment or have been treated in these temples have left money or gifts according to their financial situation and offered anatomical votives in the shape of organs or limbs (Wilder, 1904; Walton, 1894; Van Straten, 2000). One of the thankful inscriptions to the god was discovered in archaeological excavations at the Asklepeion of Pergamon, which was founded in 370 BC and lived its golden period in the 2nd century AD (Boehringer, 1969). The white marble inscription of the Roman period, which was discovered in 1933 and still exhibited in the Archaeological Museum of Pergamon, was clearly mentioned in a blood collection process (Figure 3). This inscription in the Asklepeion of Pergamum is the only example of a treatment. Translated from Greek into English has taken the following expression: "Iulius Meidias dedicated (this votive) as an obligation of God, when applied intramuscular phlebotomy."



Figure 3. Inscription on a marble tablet referring phlebotomy exhibited at Pergamon Museum of Archaeology



DISCUSSION

In Asclepeions, information about treatment methods applied in spiritual, physical and organic diseases has been learned from some of the inscriptions discovered in the temple areas, from the written works of the ancient writers of the period such as Aelius Aristides, Strabon and Pausanias. (Pausinas, 1875; Israelowich, 2012; Strabo, 1856; Van Straten, 2000; Retief, 2005).

“Phlebotomy”, composed of `phleps (phlepos)` meaning `vessel` and `tome (tomos)` meaning `incision` in Greek, had been extensively applied for many diseases like high fever, difficulty in breathing, varicoses, unbearable pain, muscular contraction and even for paralysis which is too difficult to cure. Phlebotomy not only provides disposal of dirty blood from the body but also helps the body be recovered from the disease (Baykan, 2012; Jouanna, 1999). Apart from these, blood excess (plethora, possibly polycythemia), congestion and varicose veins were known in ancient times and phlebotomy was performed as treatment (Rosner, 1986).

During the Ancient Greece and Roman Period, doctors and writers of the period such as Hippocrates (460-370 BC), Celsus (25 BC- 50 AD) and Galen (129-216 AD) have been important practitioners and advocates of phlebotomy (Turk & Allen, 1983; Nutton, 2004). The teaching of Hippocrates, which argued that the imbalance in body fluids would be improved by diet, exercise, vomiting, enema and taking blood, made blood taking an important treatment method (Hippocrates, 1846). Phlebotomy has continued as scientific applications based on medical evidence and accurate indications (Jouanna, 1999).

In today's medicine, polycythemia vera has been defined as a hematological disease that is associated with thrombosis caused by elevated hematocrit values and has a risk of vascular occlusion, myocardial infarction and cerebrovascular attack. As in some anticorid diseases, phlebotomy was seen in the initial treatment of uncomplicated polycythemia vera patients (Tefferi, 2003). However, the situation that attracts attention here has been the application of a blood-taking treatment that can be associated with scientific and secular medicine such as phlebotomy in a asclepeion where more religious and mystical treatments are carried out under the supervision of the gods. It has also been possible to explain the treatment of physical and organic diseases in the temples by influencing religious temple medicine from the popular folk medicine and scientific, secular hypocritical medicine practices of the period (Wickkiser, 2008; Neuburger, 2016; Wilder, 1904).

Phlebotomy applications in antic age had provided an increase in knowledge about vessels in time, where phlebotomy had been applied mostly to elbows and knees. On the other hand, phlebotomy operation at Pergamon Asclepeion had drawn attention as an interesting detail, which had been applied intramuscular or to biceps not to superficial veins around elbow area.

CONCLUSION

The temples of God of Health (Asclepius), Asclepeions, had constituted a primitive model of contemporary hospitals for mankind seeking for remedy and also performed a milestone in medical history.

Few of the inscribed votives, offered by the patients healed from diseases as thanksgiving to god, included what treatments and methods had been applied. Even this few number of instances provided us with understanding the types of treatments applied in antic age and developed medical knowledge. Since there is no any other inscription discovered in Anatolia and not any other sample describing phlebotomy, the aforementioned marble tablet stands out as matchless and unique.

In a asclepeion where religious and mystical treatments were performed, the use of a blood-taking treatment that could be associated with more scientific and secular medicine, such as phlebotomy, attracted considerable attention.

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