

Information about Macedonian medicine in ancient Greece

To the Editor: Ancient Greek Macedonians were highly interested in the improvement of their physical and psychological health. At first, they worshiped the mythical god Asclepius and his daughter Hygieia (Fig. 1, 2). In at least 24 places in northern Greece, in Halkidiki, Thessaloniki, Kozani, Kavala, Thassos, Serres and other places, archaeological findings were related to Asclepius [1].

Macedonian kings were also interested in the development of medicine, for the sake of their fellow citizens and their soldiers [2]. Characteristic examples are the close relations of Hippocrates with king Perdikas (5th century B.C.) and of Nicomachus (Aristotle's father being a physician) with king Amintas.

Alexander the Great had as his personal physician, the famous physician Philippos of Acarnania. An incident between Alexander and Philippos of Acarnania shows the respect of Macedonian kings to their doctors: Alexander became ill after a bath in the frozen river Cydnus (near ancient Tarsus). At this time he received a letter from his general Parmenion for not

to trust his physician. Alexander gave this letter to Philippos to read it and while Philippos was reading it and was rather frightened, he saw Alexander drinking the medicine he had given him. We may note that Alexander the Great as a student of Aristotle had a general education about medicine.

Archaeological findings revealed two funerary monuments of physicians: a doctor from Thasos, who practiced in Pella as a public physician during the 3rd quarter of the 4th century B.C. and a physician named Alexander, who lived in the 1st half of the 5th century A.D. The tomb of a third physician, probably a surgeon, excavated in Pydna, near mount Olympus (3rd century BC) [3] also indicates the importance of physicians in Macedonia.

Archaeological findings, like surgical knives, from the Hellenistic and Roman periods, found in the city of Veria, also showed the respect of Ancient Greeks to medicine and to their physicians [4-7]. An example is the skeleton of a young woman with an anterior cranial hole found in Veria (Fig. 3). This trauma was attributed to a delicate surgical operation, perhaps performed to alleviate endocranial pressure [7-10].

The authors declare that they have no conflicts of interest.

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Figure 1. A. Statue of Hygieia with a snake found in Thessaloniki [11]. **B.** Another found in Dion [12]



Figure 2. A. Inscribed potsherds from Antisara with the name of ΑΣΚΛΗΠΙΟΣ, found in modern Kalamitsa, Kavala, in 1980 [13]. **B.** Head of Asclepius from Dion [14]



Figure 3. A. The young girl's body from Veria at Georgiou Seferi street and **B.** her trepanned skull. Reproduced with kind permission from Dr. Graikos.

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Vaitsa Giannouli¹, MSc, Nikolaos Syrmos² MD, MSc

1. *Cognitive Psychology and Neuropsychology, Aristotle University of Thessaloniki, Macedonia, Greece* 2. *Physical Activity and Quality of Life Aristotle University of Thessaloniki, Macedonia, Greece*

Vaitsa Giannouli MSc,
Arkadiou 11, Drama Greece. E-mail: giannouliv@hotmail.com

Hell J Nucl Med 2011; 14(3): 324-325

Abstracted: 10 November 2011



The White Tower of Thessaloniki in the 18th century was on a small island and fortified by strong walls.