

THE HOLISTIC THRACIAN HEALING ART OF ZALMOXIS

Nikola Pirovski*, Plamen Kalinov**

* *Laboratory of Anthropology, Department of Anatomy, Faculty of Medicine, Thrace University, Stara Zagora, 6000, Bulgaria¹*

** *Aroniada-Agro EOOD, Ruse, Bulgaria*

Abstract

The Thracians had a unique and effective medical art and philosophical understanding, whose vivid exponent was Zalmoxis-Sitalcus (444-424 BC). A study from modern positions of our heritage, of the holistic Thracian healing art of Zalmoxis, and its use in the training and practice of Bulgarian physicians and society, can be done through a pharmacognostic and therapeutic study of some of the medicinal plants and their products used in the ancient Thracian phytomedicine, together with the methods of psychotherapeutic use of speech and resonance music therapy. The results focus our attention on a mental state of complete calm, of hope and without fear, achieved through psychology (altered states of consciousness), phytotherapy (wine-soaked *Peganum harmala* L., *Trigonella foenum-graecum* L., *Ledum palustre* L., *Olibanum*), and music therapy (the 7/8 rhythm of the male Thracian *Rachenitsa* dance). His practice was helpful to reprogram conscious and focus in the present situation. The traditions are still alive and usable and are being built on, for example the use of chokeberry in modern herbal medicine as an analogue to the use of elderberry in ancient times.

Keywords: *Zalmoxis, Ζάλμοξις, Salmoxis, treatment, medicine, Thrace*

Introduction

The history of medicine is thousands of years old, and our publication is only a brief philosophical and historical-medical overview. It reflects a short but important period of the existence of the Odris Thracian kingdom, which is one of the ancestors of the Bulgarians [1]. The lands of the Kingdom of Odris are between the Adriatic and Black seas and encompass all Thrace from the upper reaches of the Tonzos River (Tunja) to the mouth of the Hebros River (Maritsa) with their adjacent lands and parts of the Rhodopi, Sakar and Strandzha mountains, as well as the Thracians from the ancient Hellenic colonies on the Aegean, Marmara and Black seas. Also from the mouth of the Mesta river in the Aegean sea to the mouth of the Danube river in the Black sea. The list of their kings: Teres (490-464 BC); Teres Sparadok (464-444 BC); Sitalcus- Zalmoxis (444-424 BC); Sevt I (424-407 BC); Hebriselm (390-384 BC); Kotis I (383-359 BC); Sevt III (3309-300 BC) and a number of others, the last of whom was the Thracian ruler Remetalcus III (AD 44-45).

With an army of up to 150,000 people and continuous struggles to preserve their land, the Thracians had a unique and effective medical art and philosophical understanding, whose vivid exponent was Zalmoxis-Sitalcus (444-424 BC). At that time, there was a struggle between two main philosophical trends, which determined the understanding and methods in medicine: the materialistic "line of Democritus" with representatives Thales, Anaximander, Anaximenes, Leucippus, Democritus and the idealistic "line of Plato" with representatives Pythagoras, Socrates, Plato [2].

Materialistic medical schools have presented health as the result of a balance between opposite principles, disease as a disturbance of this balance, and from there comes the sentence "the opposite is treated with the opposite" (*contraria contrariis curantur*). Here is also Hippocrates (460-377 BC) with his books and principles dealing with the history of disease, the beginning of the clinical approach and the basic principles of treatment: *primum non nocere*; *contraria contrariis curantur*; compliance with the law of measure; maximum use of the healing possibilities of nature while taking into account the individuality of the patient (*natura sanat, medicus curat*) [2].

Zalmoxis – the Thracian king and priest of immortality and sacred rites for self-improvement, along the endless spiral of Life and Knowledge, in the incessantly dying and reborn nature, in his

¹Stara Zagora, 11 Armeyska Street, nikola.pirovski@trakia-uni.bg

medical art goes even further [3]. In this process of the eternal sacred circle "life - death", he gives and instils the emotion, the faith, the sensual imagination, that physical death is only part of an endless open spiral of immortality, in which the soul does not die, but passes into different phases and into better worlds according to the natural laws of the Great mother goddess Cybele. This way he overcomes fear, and the reason that makes people tolerate evil and injustice. Today we would define this as a psychosomatic treatment of diseases, and it is known that there is no disease without a psychosomatic etiological component. Thus, Zalmoxis' medicine also includes psychotherapy and suggestion, because "The Soul and the Body are invariably connected and to treat only the body without healing the soul is unthinkable." And also: "Don't let anyone convince you to heal the head, if he has not previously given you his Soul, so that it may first be healed through the Word" [4].

In the search for new and valid models for medicine, our heritage of the holistic Thracian healing art of Zalmoxis is valuable and should be promoted in the training and practice of Bulgarian doctors and social society.

Materials and Methods

Pharmacognostic and therapeutic study of some of the medicinal plants and their products used in ancient Thracian phytomedicine, together with methods of psychotherapeutic use of speech and resonance music therapy.

Results and discussion

In the "History of Bithynia", Arrian writes that "Thrace was a nymph adept in bayania (a healing rite with the recitation of verbal formulas in a certain way) and herbs, and could, on the one hand, remove suffering through herbs, and on the other hand, to cause them'. Thrace was the personification of Thracian women - beautiful, knowledgeable, with a knife in her bosom and love in her heart, brave warriors and bewitching men, followers of the Great Mother Goddess. In this process, in addition to the authority of the healer, purposeful gestures and words were also of great importance, the combination of which in a strictly defined ritual brought the necessary predisposing feeling of calmness and protection. This has helped to eliminate the mechanism of fear and self-programming according to the most negative scenario and the reasons for it, which existed in the imagination of the person [3,4].

There is a good report on the Thracian names of herbs from 2020 [5], and from Prof. Miladin Apostolov from 2007 [6]. This is a main topic in the sci-fiction book- The Immortality of Zalmoxis. From a historical point of view, the most valuable book in this case is "On Simple Plants" (Peri haplon pharmakon or Des implicibus remediis) by the Roman military physician Pedanius Dioscorides [7] of the time of Claudius and Vespasian. In it, he describes all the 827 medicinal products of plant, mineral and animal origin known at the time. The most commonly used medicinal plants by the Thracians were: wormwood, hellebore, pometica, buzalak (elder), wild thyme, gorse, blackberry, yarrow, reed, bramble, nettle, mullet, bay laurel (*Laurus nobilis*, snake flower, Apollo's herb). The potion and smoke from the leaves of these herbs, suppress the thinking and the will of a person, cause hallucinations, put people to sleep and have a "truth serum" effect, etc. They are still used today by our modern medicine.

In order to illustrate the Thracian psycho- and phyto- medicine, we comment on some phytotherapeutic practices and customs of the ancient Thracians. They were using mostly a fine red wine, the gift from "god Dionysius", with herbs soaked in it. Good example is the ritual drink with *Peganum harmala* L. (harmala) seeds (with DMT), and fenugreek seeds (with essential oil and trigonelline). An aerosol (smoke) of plants on an ember in the Andreon (the room for men only), from frankincense - aromatic plant resins and leaves, or marsh ice flowers, are another examples. Simultaneously in the Andreon, a designated priest sings and the melody is reflected in the stone dome and in the stone rows on the walls. The superimposed sound, through the precise pauses,

rhythms and especially pronounced syllables and words with the echo, increases the resonance. The wine in the glasses begins to vibrate and the same vibrations begin to synchronize the heartbeat, breathing and muscle twitches of the people in this closed resonator space, their thoughts are concentrated in one rhythm. They do not feel like separate people any more, they feel the space in the Andreon as part of a common womb, in which they have found themselves as part of a common organism, calm and strong in their community, so necessary for each of them in their lives. Their state of expanded consciousness, the feeling of common consciousness, united by the Great Mother Goddess with the Earth, with fertility, with eternal new birth, with rebirth and from here with immortality, allows self-improvement and decision-making for the continuation of life and the union of all Thracians.

This combination of phytotherapy and the methods of psychotherapeutic use of speech and resonance music therapy is very characteristic and unique among the ancient Thracians. Unique is the 7/8 rhythm of the male Thracian Ratchenitza dance, a "ring" dance, with the first extended part - 3+2+2, which every eight steps is replaced by the rhythm of the female version with the third extended part - 2+2+3. This is the secret code in this rhythm - the sacred number seven represents the masculine principle - the forces that operate in humanity - perfection, creativity, mind, knowledge, wisdom, abundance and love. The sacred number eight represents Spirit, Mother Nature, authority, power, tension, control, fulfillment, organization, and success, connection between the physical and spiritual worlds, eternity and infinity. Understanding and performing the 7/8 rhythm in exactly this sequence and interrelationship shows the maturity and wholeness of a person living in unity with himself, with other people and with nature, which is the basis of holistic health [4].

Conclusions

This short philosophical and historical-medical overview of the holistic Thracian healing art of Zalmoxis shows the value of the Bulgarian heritage left to us by the ancient Thracians, which we not only can, but are obliged to use and pass on to future generations. Effort in this direction is the Encyclopedia of ancient Thrace and Thracians [8]. The recently conducted international European gene study of the Y-chromosomes, the haplotype and the genetic marker EM78-alpha at the age of about 7800 years, which were passed only from father to son, proves that about twenty percent of today's Bulgarian men are carriers of a gene, which has no analogue anywhere in the world [9]. That is why we can be proud and bear the responsibility as continuers of Zalmoxis' will: "Have no fear, have hope, teach this to others with your own experience to make them free and conscious defenders on their land, not slaves to other people's personal interests and teaches them unity between soul, will and actions for the sake of others, because in order to heal the person, the group of people, the whole society, you have to treat the soul, the spirit, and the body, simultaneously and by different means" [2,4]. There are researchers that recognize that the Bulgarians are the heirs of Orpheus, Linus, Eumolpus, Tamir and Zalmoxis. The cult of Zalmoxis was widespread among the northern and southern Thracians and by the Hippolytus' testimony we know that the Celtic Druids based their religion on his teachings [10]. Some authors also discuss the connections of the Thracians with Iran [11]. At a time of cults, this holistic healing art had the features of a religion [12].

Elderberry (*Sambucus niger*) was one of the main ingredients in the wine-based ritual drinks of Zalmoxis' time, which is still available in the form of juices and nutritional supplements. The traditions are still alive and usable and are being built upon, an example being the use of aronia as an elderberry analogue. Aronia is a modern agricultural crop, unknown in ancient times, but rich in anthocyanins and flavanoids, found in high concentrations in red wine [13].

In classes and lectures with an emphasis on our cultural heritage, students have the opportunity to reflect upon important issues such as philosophy, science, political structure, art, trade, etc. This improves their interest and motivation and help them to build up their awareness about the world –

past and present, and find their place as citizens of Europe and proud carriers of a rich cultural and historical heritage [14].

Statement for Potential Conflicts of Interest

There is no conflict of interest.

Acknowledgements

Scientific project 16/24, Medical Faculty, Trakia University, Stara Zagora, Bulgaria

References

1. Popov DP. Zalmoksis: religion and society of the Thracians. University publishing "Kliment Okhridski", Sofia, 1989.
2. Sorokina TS. History of medicine, a short course of lectures. Moscow, 1988.
3. Yordanova M. Healing and Sacred Medicine in Ancient Thrace (Autosaved). Academia.edu, https://www.academia.edu/30109056/Healing_and_Sacred_Medicine_in_Ancient_Thrace_Autosaved_, Last accessed 28.06.24
4. Pirovski LT, Pirovska AL. The Immortality of Zalmoxis. BON, Blagoevgrad, 2024, ISBN 978-954-395-323-3.
5. Serafimov P. The nympe Thrace and the herbs of Bulgaria. Sparotok, https://sparotok.blogspot.com/2014/11/blog-post_19.html, Last accessed 28.06.24
6. Apostolov M. Pedanius Dioskurides and the Thracian herbs. Bulgarian medical practice, 7/2007: 60
7. Riddle JM. Dioscorides on pharmacy and medicine. University of Texas Press, Austin, TX, 1985.
8. Popov D. Encyclopedia of ancient Thrace and Thracians: <https://www.thracians.net/religion-bg-bg/57-%D0%B1%D0%BE%D0%B3%D0%BE%D0%B2%D0%B5%D1%82%D0%B5/310-%D0%B7%D0%B0%D0%BB%D0%BC%D0%BE%D0%BA%D1%81%D0%B8%D1%81-zalmoxis>, Last accessed 28.06.24
9. Yaneva M. A genetic analysis of the people currently inhabiting the country of Bulgaria. 2015
10. Serafimov P, The thracian Zalmoxis— teacher of Europe. Sparotok, https://sparotok.blogspot.com/2014/12/blog-post_16.html, Last accessed 28.06.24
11. Darchiey AV. To the question of Scythian influences on religious representations of Thracians: Zalmoxis. Journal of Contemporary Research, 2018, (12.13), 73-74.
12. Popov D. Thracian religion, „East-West“, 2014, p.413, Bulgarian, ISBN 978-619-152-349-8
13. Kalinov P. Aroniada. <https://aronia-bg.com/bg/2015/07/23/lechebni-efekti-na-plodovete-ot-aronia-melanocarpa/>, Last visit 04/23/2024
14. Kasnakova Tz, Arnaudova A. The knowledge about the ancient world in the education of students of pedagogy. Trakia Journal of Sciences, 4.4 (2006): 8-19.