



BYZANTINE PHYSICIAN-SAINTS:
THE STS. COSMAS AND DAMIAN
CHURCH IN EYÜP



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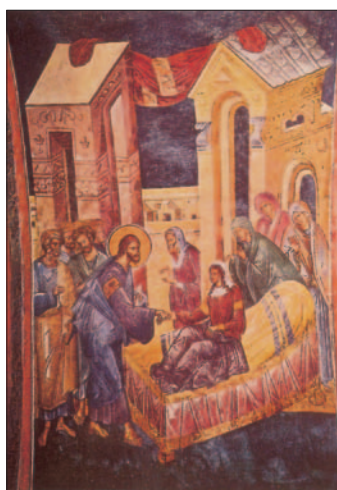
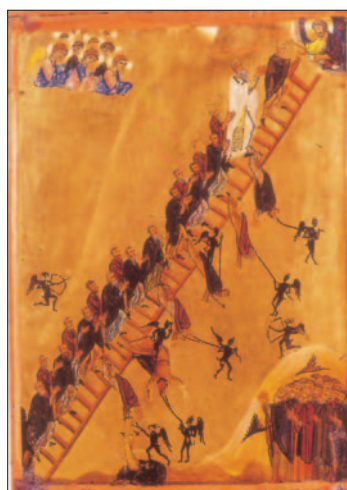


Illustration 1. Blackberry bush, illustrated manuscript, Dioskorides, *De Materia Medica*, 10th century copy, 39 x 29 cm.

Illustration 2. Evil spirits, detail from the icon of Ioannes Klimaks on the subject of the ladder to heaven, Sina Katherina Monastery, Tempera on wood, 12th century.

Illustration 3. The miracle of Jesus reviving the daughter of Jarius, Kariye Museum, detail from the chapel frescoes, 14th century.

The Eastern Roman Empire, or Byzantine Empire as it is called today, reigned over all of Anatolia, the Balkans, Italy, Greece, Syria and North Africa during the entire period of the Middle Ages, and was a civilization that was the world power of its time. One can find many conflicting factors side by side in Byzantine culture and civilization: for example, polytheistic pagan beliefs alongside monotheistic Christian belief, the Latin roots of Rome alongside the Eastern Greek culture and local cultures due to its widespread geography, all intermingled within Byzantine culture. One can also observe the reciprocal influences that resulted from their contact (although it sometimes involved warfare) with the neighbors at their boundaries.

In order to protect and cure themselves of illness, the Byzantines practiced medical procedures that had their roots in the Greco-Roman tradition, but these were augmented by practices that were based on faith.¹ Although limited, some information is available about Byzantine medicine and medical facilities.² Foremost among the sources of our information about Byzantine medical practice are manuscripts, monastery charters (*typikon*), the chronicles written by historians and the lives of the saints (*vitae*). During the Byzantine period, copies were made of books written about medicine during the Greek and Roman periods. One of these books is the handwritten manuscript, now in Vienna, that was copied with the support of a 6th-century noblewoman

named Juliana Anicia; the illustrated Dioskorides manuscript describes animals as well as health-giving plants³ (Illustration 1).

Among the archaeological documentation regarding medicine that has come down to our time are the tools used by Roman and Byzantine physicians in their operations⁴ (knives, bone-cutters, spatulas, hooks, needles, tweezers, probes, forceps and containers for bleeding) and the ivory, wooden or leather cases used by the physicians to carry their tools and medicine bottles.⁵ We can also observe evidence of their professions in the gravestones of practicing professional male and female physicians, (*mediciatros*), wet-nurses and midwives.⁶

Monastery charters provide information about institutions connected to them, such as hospitals, homes for lepers, poorhouses and orphanages and about the personnel who worked there. For example, in the charter of the Pantokrator Monastery,⁷ mention is made of the sections of Constantinople's largest hospital, which worked in conjunction with the monastery, and of the physicians and other aides who worked there and of the resources provided to the patients. In Byzantine times, the Konstantin Lips Monastery hospital was located on the north shore of the Lykos brook, the present location of Vatan Caddesi.⁸ In addition to hospitals, there were buildings called *Ksenedokion* or *Xenon*, used to billet travelers or the elderly, where sick people could also go for treatment. During the fires that broke out

1. A.M. Talbot - G. Vikan, "Healing," *The Oxford Dictionary of Byzantium* 2 (1991), (Eds. A. Kazhdan et al.), p. 905.

2. For detailed information on Byzantine Hospitals, see T.S. Miller, *The Birth of the Hospital in the Byzantine Empire*, Baltimore-London, 1997.

3. S. Eyce, "Bizans hastanelerine dair," *TAÇ* 1/3 (1986), pp. 10 and 15, note 64. (E. Diez, "Die miniaturen des Wiener Dioskurides," J. Strzowski, *Ursprung und Sieg der Altbyzantinischen Kunst*, Vienna 1903, p.4. This valuable manuscript was purchased in Istanbul from a Jew and brought to Vienna by Ambassador O. Ghiselin de Busbecq (1522-1592). See *Vier Briefe aus der Turkei*, translated from Latin by H. Cahit Yalçın, Istanbul, 1939, p. 315.)

4. R. Jackson, *Roma İmparatorluğu'nda Doktorlar ve Hastalıklar*, (Doctors and Disease in the Roman Empire), (trans. Ş. Mumcu), Homer Yayınları, Istanbul 1999, pp. 110-111 (Ill.27), pp. 115 and 118 (Ill.29), p. 112, Ill. 28 shows a marble plaque found at the Athens Askleion with a relief of a hinged wooden box of sur-

Illustration 4. The miracle of Jesus healing the leper, Kariye Museum, detail of interior narthex mosaic, 14th century.



gical tools containing five lancets and bone levers and two bleeding bowls. For medical tools at the Istanbul Archaeological Museum, see N. Atakan, "Anadolu'da tıp aletleri ve araç-gereçleri" (Medical tools and instruments in Anatolia), *Istanbul Arkeoloji Müzeleri Geçmişten Günümüze Tıp Sergisi*, 38. Uluslararası Tıp Tarihi Kongresi, Istanbul, 2002, pp. 1-3 and 8-17.

5. G. Vikan, "Art, medicine, and magic in early Byzantium," *Dumbarton Oaks Papers* 38 (1984), 65, note 3.

6. For the gravestone of the physician Marcus, found in Afyon, currently exhibited at the Bursa Archeological Museum, (env.no.379), see Eyice 1986, p. 5, Ill.1; for Roman and Byzantine gravestones of physicians, midwives and wet-nurses, see Jackson 1999, p. 83, Ill. 21 and p. 97, Ill.25a. and 25b.

7. G. Schreiber, "Byzantinisches und abendlandisches hospital. Zur spitalordnung des Pantocrator und zur Byzantinischen Medizin," *Byzantinische Zeitschrift* 42 (1943), pp. 116-49 and 373-6; (Ed.) J.Thomas - A. Constantinides, *Byzantine Monastic Foundation Documents II*, (DOS XXXV, Harvard University) 2000, pp. 734-5.

8. Eyice 1986, p.11.

9. Prokopios, *Istanbul'da Justinianus Döneminde Yapılar, Birinci Kitap*, (Pref. and trans. by E.Özbayoglu), Arkeoloji Sanat Yayınları, Istanbul 1994, p.25; W. Müller-Wiener, *Istanbul'un Tarihsel Topografyası*, Istanbul, 2001, p. 22. For archaeological excavations on this subject, see F. Dirimtekin, "Les fouilles faites a Istanbul," *Cahiers*

during the Nika Revolt (January, 532) many patients who were staying at the Sampson Ksenedokion next to the Haghia Eirene Church died in the flames.⁹ As for rest homes for the elderly, they could be found on hillsides on both sides of the Bosphorus.¹¹

We know that, in spite of different beliefs, there existed a trade in physicians among different countries. At the beginning of the 14th century, Orhan Bey had a Byzantine physician named Taronites. During the illness of the Emperor Andronikos Palaiologus (1328-41), three Turkish physicians were consulted along with the court physicians.

In the chronicles of Byzantine historians such as Prokopios, Theophanes, Anna Komnena, Iannes Kinnamos and Mikhael Psellos, information can be found about illnesses of the emperors, physicians and medical institutions.¹² In addition to the above, the lives (vitae) of the saints, who were of great importance in Christianity, are among the sources of information about Byzantine medicine.

The Byzantines believed that the primary causes of all types of illness were devils and other evil spirits (Ill. 2.) One could be delivered from illness and other types of complaint only

through the intervention and assistance of God and of Jesus, who is believed to be one with God. There are many stories in the Bible about miraculous cures performed by Jesus, among them raising of the dead and curing of the blind, the crippled, lepers, women suffering hemorrhage, and the man who became insane because he was possessed by evil spirits (Ill. 3-4-5.) Like the polytheistic god of health Asklepios, Jesus was able to heal the sick, and like Zeus, He was able to raise them from the dead.

The saints, an inseparable part of Christian belief and culture, were holy persons who rejected all worldly goods for their faith, lived for their beliefs, suffered cruelty and oppression of all kinds and in the end even sacrificed their lives. They did not carry the negative influences of the material world that was directed by the devil.¹³ For this reason, they were closer to God than other people were, and were graced with superhuman powers. Apart from being an example for believers with their characteristics of Christianity and goodness, they were believed to have the power of intercession between God and humankind.¹⁴ Like Jesus and the prophets of the Old Testament, they performed miracles. They were more necessary to people in this world than in the other. The saints not only performed miraculous cures, but by crossing the boundaries of time and space they were able to support and protect believers even after their deaths.¹⁵ It was believed that they protected cities from enemy invasions, and from natural disasters like drought, flood, earthquake, wind and fire, crossed rivers, eliminated famine, enriched the soil, protected crops from infestations of locusts and insects, tamed wild animals, and protected people from illness and other evils.¹⁶ We see cities and persons who take certain saints and other holy persons as special patrons of regions, cities and groups of people. For example, Demetrios is the patron saint of the city of Thessalonica. He protected the city from numerous enemy invasions and his holy relics continue to provide recovery in the church dedicated to him. In the 5-6th cen-

turies, the noblewomen of the well-known Theodosius family had a very strong devotion to the Mesopotamian Saint Polyeuktos, and Juliana Anicia, a member of the family, brought the saint's relics to Constantinople and constructed a large monastery church dedicated to him in the X. Region, near her own palace.¹⁷



The pieces of the True Cross on which Jesus was crucified, his bloody shroud, the veil and belt of Mary, holy relics of the apostles, the bones, hair, beard and clothing of the saints and any object which came in contact with them were considered relics, and were believed to have healing powers.¹⁸ Apart from these objects, the portable paintings of these holy people displayed in churches (known as icons) were considered intermediaries having a direct connection with the individual portrayed and consequently capable of performing miracles.

The literature is full of stories about the sudden cures experienced by those searching relief who visited the churches of the cross and tombs in the Holy Lands and stayed in their guest-houses or spent the night on their thresholds.

Certain saints were particularly well known for curing illness and relieving distress.

One of the most famous destinations for miraculous cures was the Mount of Miracles near Antakya (Antioch) where St. Symeon Stylites spent his life atop a column

(Ill. 7). St. Symeon was buried next to the column where he had lived all his life; within a short time, a monastery was founded at this holy site. It was the most popular destination for pilgrimage during the 6th-7th centuries. Pilgrims acquired dust or soil (*konis*) from the area surrounding the column where he had lived, medallions called eulogin that showed the saint atop his column, and lamp oil or water from the monastery well inside small lead or earthenware flasks, bringing them home as souvenirs of their pilgrimage (Ill. 8-9). In addition, votive offerings left at the site in the form of metal plaques, ceremonial crucifixes, medallions and censers engraved with prayers for health and forgiveness testify to the miraculous healing power of this site. Representations of St. Symeon Stylites show him atop a column with a



Illustration 5. The miracle of Jesus healing the blind man, mosaic, Ravenna St. Apollinaire Nuovo Church, 6th century.

Illustration 6. St. Demetrios and children under his protection, detail of mosaic, Thessalonica Hagios Demetrios Church, 7th century.

Archeologiques, 13 (1962), pp.161-85.

10. For detailed information see S. Eyice, *Bizans Devrinde Boğaziçi*, Istanbul, 1974.

11. Eyice 1986, p.9.

12. Prokopios 1994, p.35; Anna Komnena, *Alexiad*, *Malazgirt'in Sonrası*, (Trans. B. Umar), İnkilap Kitapevi, Istanbul 1996, p. 453, 515; I. Demirkent, (Ed.) *Mikhael Psellos'un Khronografyası*, Türk Tarih Kurumu Basımevi, Ankara 1992; (Ed.) I.Demirkent, *Ioannes Kinnamos'un Historia'sı*, Türk Tarih Kurumu Basımevi, Ankara 2001, p.139. The chronicles written by Byzantine historians

Illustration 7. The column carved out of rock where St. Symeon Stylites spent his life and ruins of nearby buildings, Mount of Miracles, Antakya, late 5th - 6th century.

Illustration 8. St. Symeon Stylites and his followers, miniature from the Menologion of Basileos II (272 folios), gold on vellum executed in tempera technique.





Illustration 9. Basalt relief stele dedicated to St. Symeon Stylites, Damascus National Museum, eulogia with representations of the saint.

deal primarily with the emperors' illnesses and treatment. For example, Prokopios writes of Justinian's enlargement and renovation of the Kosmas and Damianos Monastery in Kosmidion as a manifestation of his gratitude for relief from the pain in his knee. Mikhael Psellos describes in his *Chronography* the gout which caused great suffering to Konstantin Monamakhos. Anna Komnena writes of the death of her father, the Emperor Alexius I, in the Mangana Palace after a serious illness.

13. P. Brown, "The rise and function of the holy man in late antiquity," *Society and the Holy in Late Antiquity*,

Illustration 10. Sts. Cosmas and Damian icon, Istanbul Ayasofya Museum, 17-18th century.

Illustration 11. Biographical icon of St. Panteleimon, Sina Katherina Monastery, early 13th century, 102 x 72 cm.

Illustration 12. Plaque dedicated to St. Hermolaos, copper relief and engraving, Washington, D.C., Dumbarton Oaks Collection (Env.no.87.2), early 11th century.

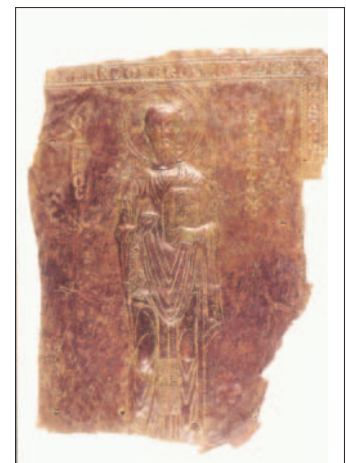
ladder against it or with a figure holding a censer standing next to him, an indication of the importance of incense to this cult of sainthood. Incense was believed to speed the prayers to God and play a role in dispersing evil spirits.²⁰

The literature relates numerous miracles of healing among St. Symeon Stylites' miracles. Two of the many miraculous cures mentioned in Byzantine sources involve rubbing soil from the monastery on the body, curing paralysis in one instance and in another, healing the body of a young man whose belly had swollen almost to the point of exploding.²¹

Among the most important of the saints believed to be responsible for miraculous cures are those saints known as Anargyroi. The majority of these saints helped people by serving as physicians during their earthly lives. The reason for giving these saints the title of Anargyroi, which means "silverless," is that

they treated their patients without accepting payment. Among the saints who practiced medicine, the most famous are the Arab brothers Cosmas and Damian (Ill. 10) and the Nicomedian (the present town of İzmit) son of a Roman senator, Panteleimon,²² (Ill. 11). Other anargyroi saints are Abbakyrus (Kyros), Ioannes (John), the relatively unknown Antiokhos of Sebaste (Sivas?),²³ the monk Hermolaos (Ill. 12), who baptized Panteleimon and although not a physician himself is accepted as one of the anargyroi, and Hermippos and Hermokrates²⁴ who are remembered along with him, as well as the less well known Thalelaios.²⁵ Representations of these saints are characteristically found on the walls of the apse of the church, sometimes simply a portrait, sometimes within compositions portraying their miracles. Representations of Cosmas, Damian, Panteleimon and Hermolaos are widespread. In some buildings, all the physician saints are shown together, side by side.

Votive plaques, icons and ceremonial crosses, made for the purpose of gaining health or in thanksgiving for it, generally include representations of the physician saints and inscriptions,²⁶ (Ill. 13). Among the votive offerings from the Byzantine period that have come down to us, the most famous is in the treasury of the San Marco Church in Venice, the 10th century enameled gold crown of Emperor Leo VI. On this type of votive offering, one finds inscriptions expressing the desire for health and (bust) portraits of the saints together with other holy per-



sons of importance to the Christian religion.

Portraits of the saints and instructive scenes from their lives (birth, miracles and martyrdom) can be found alongside one another in biographical icons.²⁷

In anargyroi representations, these saints generally are portrayed wearing the physician's cape and holding the cylindrical or rectangular box containing their medical instruments or accepting the crown of martyrdom (Ill. 14). Remaining faithful to the general structure of Byzantine representational art, certain characteristic types have been created for the physician saints. Depictions of Saints Cosmas and Damian generally portray them as dark-skinned, slender, shorthaired and sometimes completely bald and middle aged. As for Panteleimon, he is portrayed as a young man with brown wavy hair. St Hermalaos is generally portrayed as a middle-aged bearded man in the robes of a bishop or a monk, holding a codex in the form of a roll.

The twin brothers of Arab origin whose names are always mentioned together, Cosmas and Damian, were born in Aigai (Adana, Yumurtalık) and practiced medicine in the area between Silifke and Adana (known in earlier



periods and during the Middle Ages as Cilicia), healing their patients without charge. They were executed because they were Christians during the reign of the Roman Emperors Diocletian and Maximian (late 3rd/early 4th century). Christians celebrate their feast day on 17 October, the day of their martyrdom. Their relics were brought to Constantinople in the 15th century, and at least two churches were constructed and dedicated to them, in Zeugma (Unkapanı?) and in Kosmidion (Eyüp). At the same time, a church was also built in their name in Rome.²⁸ The Emperor Justinian had constructed the Khrysokeramos (Golden Tile) Church dedicated to St. panteleimon near Üsküdar. There was also a monastery located near Stauros (Beylerbeyi) dedicated to St. Hermolaos.²⁹

The cult of Saints Cosmas and Damian was widely revered throughout the Byzantine Empire. Many stories are told of incidents, particularly between the 6th and 12th centuries, involving numerous miraculous cures effected through the intervention of these saints, by means of their icons displayed on the walls of the churches, their portraits, their relics or through visions of these saints in dreams.³⁰

Illustration 13. Sts. Cosmas and Damian are portrayed together with other saints on a ceremonial crucifix found in Edirne. Niello and gold veneer on silver, 10-11th century, Athens Benaki Museum (T.A.146 env.no.), 58 x 46.5 cm.

(Ed. P. Brown), Los Angeles 1982, p. 151.

14. For detailed information on this subject, see R. Cormack, *Writing Gold. Byzantine Society and its Icons*, London, 1985.

15. M. W. Dickie, "Narrative patterns in Christian Hagiography," *Greek, Roman and Byzantine Studies* 40 (1990), pp. 83-98.

16. A. Kazhdan, "Holy and miracle workers," *Byzantine Magic*, (Ed. H. Maguire), Washington D.C. 1995, pp. 73-81.

17. P. Magdalino, "Aristocratic oikoi in the tenth and eleventh regions of Constantinople," (Ed. N. Necipoğlu), *Monuments, Topography and Everyday Life*, Brill 2000, p. 59.

18. For example, Prokopios (1994, p. 35) writes that the terrible pain in the Emperor Iustinianos's knee was relieved by the sacred oil which flowed from the reliquary of the bones of the Forty Martyrs of Sivas.

19. J. Mécèrian, "Le monastère de Saint Simeon le Stylite du Mont Admirable," *Actes du Vie Congrès International d'Etudes Byzantines II*, Paris, 1951, pp. 299-302.

20. G. Vikan, "Icons and icon piety in early Byzantium," *Byzantine East, Latin West, Art Historical Studies in Honor of Kurt Weitzmann*. (Eds. D. Moriki - S. Curcic), Princeton 1995, p. 573.

Illustration 14. Sts. Cosmas-Damian Basilica, Rome, apse mosaic, Saints Cosmas and Damian standing next to Jesus, 5th century.



21. Vikan 1984, pp. 67-8.
22. A. Kazhdan - N. Peterson Sevckenko, "Panteleemon," *The Oxford Dictionary of Byzantium*, (Eds. A.Kazhdan et al) 3 (1991), pp. 1572-3; E. Dalleggio d'Alessio, "Le tombeau de Saint Panteleemon a Nicomedia," *Actes du Vie Congrès International d'Etudes Byzantines II*, Paris 1951, pp. 95-100.
23. Vikan 1984, p. 65, note 1.
24. S.A. Boyd, "Ex-voto therapy," *AETOS, Studies in Honor of Cyrill Mango*, Stuttgart - Leipzig 1998, p. 18.
25. Boyd 1998, p. 20; J.A. Cotsonis, *Byzantine Figural Processional Cross*, Washington D.C. 1994, p.52.
26. L. Bouras, *The Cross of Adrianople*, Benaki Museum, Athens, 1979, p.25; *The Glory of Byzantium: Art and Culture of the Middle Byzantine Era, A.D. 843-1271*, (Eds. H.C. Evans-W.D. Wixos), New York 1997, pp. 159-60.
27. Evans-Wixos 1997, p. 379.
28. A. Kazhdan - N.Peterson Sevckenko, "Kosmas - Damianos," *The Oxford Dictionary of Byzantium 2* (1991), (Eds. A.Kazhdan et al.), p. 1151.
29. Prokopios 1994, p. 38; Eyice, 1974, p. 54.
30. C. Mango, "The Art of the Byzantine Empire 312-1453. Sources and Documents," (Ed. H.W.Janson), New Jersey, 1972, pp. 138-9.
31. Prokopios 1994, pp. 33-4.
32. N.Özaslan, "Eyüp'ün Kuruluşu ve Fetih Öncesindeki Durumu," *Arkeoloji ve Sanat* 96 (2000), pp. 24-5.
33. A.M. Talbot, "Kosmas and Damianos Monastery," *The Oxford Dictionary of Byzantium* (Eds. A.Kazhdan et al.) 1 (1991), p. 1151.

The most famous of the churches dedicated to Saints Cosmas and Damian, formerly known as the Kosmidion Church, is located in Eyüp. Paulinus, a close friend of the emperor Theodosius II, constructed this monastery during the second half of the 5th century on property that he owned in the city suburb of Kosmidion. During the Byzantine period, Kosmidion was a suburban settlement rather close to the XIV. Region of Blachernae. The sources do not clearly indicate the exact location of the church. However, the famous 6th century historian Prokopios gives us information about its location. Prokopios states that the Emperor Justinian, sick and nearly dying, experienced a healing apparition of the two saints and as an expression of his gratitude, completely changed the church dedicated to Saints Cosmas and Damian, located on a rather steep site at the end of the bay, and reconstructed it in its entirety.³¹

From the information provided by Prokopios, one can conclude that the church must have been on the steep slope behind the Eyüp Mosque. In the chronicles of the historian Paschale, he states that, during the siege of the city by the Avars in the year 626, this building was pillaged and destroyed along with the churches in Blachernae.³²

The Emperor Mikhael IV repaired the religious building at that location in 1041. After leaving his duties as emperor, Mikhael entered the monastery, choosing to spend the remainder of his life as a monk, and was subsequently buried there.

At the end of the 13th century, Theodora, widow of Mikhael VIII, restored the church once again. The Kosmidion Cosmas and Damian church was an important center of interest, especially during the late Byzantine period, and continued to exist in part, if not in its entirety, up until the conquest of Constantinople.³³