



REVIEW ARTICLE

On the origin of *Ammon's horn* ☆,☆☆

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KEYWORDS

Ammon's horn;
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Abstract

Introduction: Greek and Roman worship of their gods and myths go back to Ancient Egyptian times. Images engraved in Greco-Roman coinage range from references to the assassination of Caesar and legendary stories like the arrival of a snake shaped demi-god Aesculapius to save the Romans from the plague, to invocations of major deities including Apollo the physician or Ammon the protector.

Development: Depicted with the horns of a ram, Ammon was adopted by the Greeks as an epithet of Zeus and later incorporated by the Romans as Jupiter. References to the cult of Ammon appear on tetradrachms minted for Alexander The Great and on provincial Roman coins struck under Claudius. It is thrilling to hold a coin depicting Marcus Aurelius with Salus on the reverse and think that it could have been handed to Galen in payment for his services. However, it is rare to find figures other than rulers on coins and the physician of Pergamum is no exception. Inspired by the Renaissance school of Padua, French anatomists in the Enlightenment (Garengot in 1742 and Flurant in 1752) continued reviving ancient myths and named the curve-shaped-inner portion of the temporal lobe *Ammon's horn*. Outstanding scholars who studied this primitive structure of the brain included Lorente de Nó and his mentor Cajal, whose portrait appeared on fifty-pesetas notes issued in 1935.

Conclusions: As primary sources of great archaeological and artistic value, Greco-Roman coins provide information about the origins of the myths and gods of classical antiquity and continue to inspire the arts and sciences to this day.

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PALABRAS CLAVE

Asta de Amón;
Historia de la
neurología;

Sobre el origen del *asta de Amón*

Resumen

Introducción: El culto a los dioses y su recreación artística en Grecia y Roma se remontan al Antiguo Egipto, según podemos comprobar al estudiar las monedas antiguas. Grandes

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☆☆ This article presents an extended version of different lectures on numismatics and medicine delivered in the 3rd and 7th Neurohistory Sessions organised by the SEN. It also draws from the abstract *On the origin of Ammon's horn*, which was accepted for presentation at the 26th Congress of the EFNS, Stockholm, 2012.

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Lóbulo temporal;
Numismática médica

efemérides como el asesinato de César o leyendas como la llegada de Asclepio transformado en serpiente para liberar a Roma de una plaga, alternan en la numismática grecorromana con invocaciones a deidades mayores como Apolo el médico (en épocas de grandes epidemias) o el egipcio Amón.

Desarrollo: Caracterizado con las astas de un carnero, Amón fue asimilado como epíteto de Zeus en Grecia y de Júpiter en Roma, tal como reflejan los antiguos tetradracmas de Alejandro Magno y las medallas consulares de Claudio. Resulta emocionante sostener un denario de Marco Aurelio con La Salud personificada y pensar que acaso fue entregado a Galeno como pago por sus servicios. No obstante, apenas existen tributos numismáticos a personas alejadas del poder como el gran médico de Pérgamo. Los anatomistas ilustrados franceses (Garengot en 1742 y Flurant en 1752), heredando la costumbre de la escuela renacentista de Padua de recuperar mitos y dioses de la Antigüedad Clásica, denominaron a la retorcida corteza temporal *asta de Amón*. Entre los estudiosos de esta primitiva estructura cerebral destacan Lorente de Nó y su maestro Cajal, cuya divinizada efigie domina en los billetes de 50 pesetas emitidos en 1935.

Conclusiones: La numismática grecorromana, en tanto que asequible fuente arqueológica y artística de primer orden, nos informa acerca del origen de los mitos de la Antigüedad, los cuales continúan inspirando a las artes y las ciencias.

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Introduction

“Jesus held up a coin/with Tiberius in profile./A profile without love—/power in circulation.”¹

According to an ancient African legend, mythology and history become indistinguishable after seven generations. Throughout its long history, Greco-Roman civilisation followed the custom of using metal images to immortalise the fortunes, ephemerides, patron saints, monuments, allegories, and diverse symbols, especially during the high Roman Empire. This resulted in the creation of numerous coins regarded as having great artistic and archaeological importance, and these pieces shed light on both the history and legends of ancient times. Pivotal deeds such as the assassination of Julius Caesar on the ides of March, the conquest of Judea, the eruption of Vesuvius, and the arrival of the Greco-Roman demigod Asclepius, in serpent form, to Tiber Island to save Rome from an epidemic mingle with the achievements of emperors or invocations of major gods such as Apollo the physician (during great plagues) or the Egyptian god Amun.

Nevertheless, devotional practices and the artistic depictions of the gods in Greece and Rome are rooted in Ancient Egypt. As such, temples dedicated to Egyptian gods were not uncommon in the Roman Empire. One example is the Temple of Isis in Baelo Claudia in Hispania; its ruins are found next to those of the Forum and the garum factories around the Bay of Bolonia in the province of Cádiz.

Procedure

“I swear by Apollo, the healer, Asclepius, Hygieia, and Panacea...”²

The sixth century BCE witnessed the rise of a new current in opposing disease, one that went beyond folk empiricism or

mere superstition and which took the healer Asclepius as its reference.³ A century later, along the western coast of Asia Minor and its nearby islands, we find a type of medicine based on rational ideas inspired by pre-Socratic philosophers: the *tehkne iatrike* (τέχνη ιατρική) of the Hippocratic physicians, later known as *ars medica* among the Romans, consisting in taking action based on knowing why that action should be taken. The ideas of rational medicine and irrational religious beliefs coexisted harmoniously in ancient times; both forms were opposed to charlatanism, and both sprang from the same source. Together, they represent the basis of Western medicine. As the cornerstone of its ethical foundation, the precursor to modern deontological codes, and a faithful reflection of reason devoted to the service of medicine, the Hippocratic Oath recalls how the rational approach was incorporated into the irrational and religion-based earlier practices by invoking the Greek (and Roman) gods in its opening paragraph.⁴

Medicine in Greco-Roman numismatics

You, who were the embodiment and ensign/ of Hispania, the Matron holding/ in her right hand, your symbolic harvest/ on the denarii and bronze coins of Hadrian,/ who with Italica honoured this land...⁵

Among the many numismatic references to mythology, we can find personifications of provinces including Hispania, Germania, Britannia, and Gallia, and also representations of traits or virtues such as Hope, Loyalty, Nobleness, or Health. Greek coins minted from the fifth century BCE typically represent Asclepius as a bearded man with a serpent (identified as *Zamenis longissimus*) entwined around his staff. A tetradrachm piece struck in Athens in the second century BCE (Fig. 1) features the god of medicine as described above with the Athenian owl on the reverse. Hygieia, the Greek goddess of health and the mythological daughter of Asclepius, was worshipped from the third century BCE and

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