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NOTES

ON SOME

ANCIENT GREEK MEDICAL VASES

FOR

CONTAINING LYKION;

AND ON

THE MODERN USE OF THE SAME DRUG IN INDIA.

BY

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DR SICHEL,
OF PARIS.

NOTES, ETC.

THE physicians and surgeons who, in ancient times, pursued their medical profession at Rome, and in different parts of the Roman empire, have left us various palpable relics of their craft. Thus, in the ruins of Pompeii and Herculaneum, numerous surgical instruments, pharmacy, and drug-bottles, etc., have been found; and elaborate drawings and accounts of these have lately been published by Savenko, Vulpes, Renzi, and others. On the sites of the old Roman cities and colonies throughout Western Europe, various surgical and medical relics of the same kind have been at different times discovered: as lancets, probes, cupping-glasses, scalpels, oculist-stamps, phials, etc. But of medicine, as it was still earlier exercised in Greece and in the Grecian colonies, few such tangible vestiges remain. We have, it is true, had carefully transmitted down to us the imperishable professional writings of Hippocrates and others of the purely Greek school; but time has spared few, or indeed almost no, material remnants of the professional instruments or vessels used by the ancient Greek surgeons and physicians.

Perhaps the great rarity of such archæological remains may serve as some apology for the present notice of some specimens of ancient Greek medical vessels or vases. Besides, the vases which I wish to describe are interesting in other points of view. They are all of them intended to contain one and the same drug, as shown by the inscriptions on their exterior; this drug was derived by the ancient Greeks chiefly from Hindostan,—one of the many points of evidence of the former freedom and frequency of the traffic between the south of Europe and India; and at the present day the same drug is still employed extensively and successfully, by the native practitioners of the East, for the very purposes for which it was, in former times, used by the medical practitioners of Greece.

The drug to which I allude is the *Indian Lycium* or *Lykion*, the *ΛΥΚΙΟΝ ΙΝΔΙΚΟΝ* of Dioscorides. In modern collections and writ-

ings, I know of four ancient vases or drug-bottles intended to contain this valued eye-medicine. If our museums, however, were properly searched, perhaps various other Greek vases, for the same or for similar medicines, would be detected. The four specimens of bottles or vases for *Lycium*, to which I have adverted, are the following:—

1. In the collection of Greek antiquities contained in the British Museum is a small vase, made of lead, and of the exact form and size represented in Plate I., Fig. 1. The vase is of a sub-ovoid form, and is somewhat above an inch in height, and about three quarters of an inch in breadth. An inscription, preceded by the ornament of a small tripod, encircles the middle of the vase. The inscription is in Greek letters, of which the following is a correct copy:—

ΛΥΚΙΟΝ ΠΑΡΑ ΜΟΥΣΑΙΟΥ

This inscription may be read as ΛΥΚΙΟΝ ΠΑΡΑ ΜΟΥΣΑΙΟΥ—the *Lycium* of *Paramusæus*—as suggested to me by Mr Birch, who first had the kindness to direct my attention to this vase; or, and perhaps more correctly, it may be rendered ΛΥΚΙΟΝ ΠΑΡΑ ΜΟΥΣΑΙΟΥ—the *Lycium* sold by *Musæus*. Mr Birch informs me, that he thinks he met with the name of *Paramusæus* as a medical practitioner in Fabricius' "Bibliotheca Græca." I have not been fortunate enough to detect the name in question, notwithstanding some considerable search through that learned work. On the other hand, the name of *Musæus*, or *Musæus*, is well known in Athenian biography. (See Fabricius' *Bibliotheca*, vol. i., pp. 120–133.) I should, perhaps, have already stated, that the vase in question was sent to the British Museum, among a collection of antiquities from Athens.

2. Through the kindness of M. Sichel of Paris, I am enabled to give, in Plate I., Fig. 2, an engraving of a second *Lycium* jar, not hitherto published, of nearly the same dimensions as the specimen contained in the British Museum. This second specimen is not made of lead, but of pottery-ware. It bears upon its side the inscription:—

ΗΡΑΚΛΕΙΟΥ
ΛΥΚΟΝ

This inscription—"the *Lycium* of *Heracleus*"—has the word ΛΥΚΟΝ spelt without the I; errors of this kind being, as is well known, very common in old Greek and Roman letterings.

3. M. Millin of Paris published, nearly forty years ago, an account of a similar vase, found at Tarentum, a well known Greek colony and settlement. ("Description d'un Vase trouvé à Tarente." Paris, 1814.) This vase is slightly larger than either of the above, but somewhat mutilated. It is made of clay, and has on its front, in Greek letters, the inscription *Lycium of Jason*.

Ι Λ C ° N ° C
Λ Υ Κ Ι ° Ν

The form and size of this jar are represented in Plate I., Fig. 3. M. Millin fancied, that probably this small vase or jar was intended as a child's toy; but two years after he wrote, M. Tochon d'Anneci gave an account of a similar jar, and first suggested that it must have been destined to contain a collyrium or an ointment—*destiné à contenir un collyre ou un onguent*. (See his "Dissertation sur l'Inscription Grecque, et sur les Pierres Antiques," etc. Paris, 1816.)

4. The vase described by M. Tochon is delineated in Plate I., Figs. 4, 5, and 6. It is of the same material, and nearly of the same size, but less mutilated than that previously delineated by M. Millin. It presents also in front the same inscription (see Fig. 5), namely,

Ι Λ C ° N ° C
Λ Υ Κ Ι ° Ν

M. Tochon believes, further, that this vase was found, like that of Millin, at Tarentum. At least, it was originally given to M. Tochon by a person who had resided for a long time in that city, and who had himself acquired the specimen there. M. Sichel has reason to think it not improbable that his specimen (Fig. 2) also came from Tarentum. And it is perhaps not uninteresting to remark, that Galen, Celsus, and various other old medical authors, repeatedly mention a Greek physician of the name of Heracleus or Heraclides, who practised at Tarentum, and was the author of various treatises on the *Materia Medica*, etc. (See an enumeration of his writings, etc., in Kühn's "Opuscula," vol. ii., p. 156, etc.) Among his large collection of collyria and medicines for diseases of the eye, Galen gives formulæ for making different eye medicines bearing the name of Heracleus, as, for example, two "*agglutinatoria pilorum Heraclidæ Tarentini*" (Ἡρακλείδου Ταραντίνου). See Kühn's edition of Galen, vol. xii., p. 741.

The medicine mentioned in the preceding inscriptions, the LYCIUM or ΛΥΚΙΟΝ, was a drug which enjoyed much favour among the ancients; and it was supposed to be possessed of great medical value and virtues. It was used principally as an astringent remedy to restrain inflammatory and other discharges. Dioscorides, Galen, Oribasius, and Paulus Ægineta, dilate upon the medicinal properties of the Lycium. Dioscorides recommends it as an astringent for the cure of various complaints, as obscurities of the cornea, psoriasis, and pruritus of the eyelids, purulent ears and tonsils, ulcers of the gums, chapped lips, fissure of the anus; in cæliac and dysenteric affections, both in draughts and clysters; in hæmoptysis and coughs; in female fluxes, hydrophobia, and so forth. The Indian variety, he states, cures inflammation of the spleen and jaundice, prevents menstruation, purges water, and is a counter-agent to deadly poisons. (*Dr Adams' Trans. of Paulus Ægineta*, vol. iii., p. 234.) Two varieties of Lycium were in use, one obtained from Lycia and Cappadocia, etc., and the other from India. The latter was regarded as by far the most valuable. Thus, when treating of the two varieties of Lycium, Galen mentions the Indian as the most powerful for all purposes — τὸ Ἰνδικὸν ἰσχυρότερόν ἐστιν εἰς ἅπαν. (*De Simp. Medicam.*, lib. vii. 64.) Such late writers as Paulus Ægineta, Ætius, etc., allude also to the superior value of the Indian variety. For instance, in Roxarius' edition of Oribasius it is stated, that the Indian Lykion "præstat ceteris et est efficacius." (*Medicin. Collect.*, lib. xi.) Avicenna, the celebrated Arabian physician, who gives a long account of the medical uses, etc., of Lykion, remarks, "Magis vincens, secundum existimationem, est quod Indicum est," etc.; and he compares its properties with that from Mecca. (*Canon Medicinæ*, lib. ii., cap. 398.)

Of all the uses to which the Lycium was applied in medicine, by far the most important was the employment of this drug, and particularly of the Indian variety, as a collyrium or local application to the eye, in the treatment of different varieties and forms of ophthalmic inflammation. Thus Scribonius Largus, the reputed body physician to the Emperor Claudius, and one of the most original among the ancient medical writers, declares that "he attributes to no collyrium whatever such great efficacy as to the genuine *Indian Lycium* used by itself. For if," says he, "near the commencement of ophthalmia, any one anoints himself with this collyrium, he will immediately—that is, on the same day—be freed from present pain and future swelling. It is unnecessary (he adds) to dilate on its

virtues, for a person experienced only in other collyria would scarcely credit the effects of this simple drug." (*De Composit. Medicamentorum*, cap. 3.) Marcellus lauds its powers in nearly the same words. (*De Medicam.*, lib. cap. 8.)

The Lykion, or Lycium, is still used extensively by the native medical practitioners of India, under the Hindoo name of *Rusot* or *Ruswut*. In a learned article on the nature of the *λύκιον* of Dioscorides, contained in the "Transactions of the Linnæan Society," vol. xvii., p. 82, Professor Royle has shown, that the Indian Lycium or Rusot is an inspissated extract, prepared from the wood or roots of several species of *Berberis*, as the *Berberis lycium*, *aristata*, etc., growing on the mountains and plains of Upper India, and principally procured from Nuggur-kote, near Lahore.¹ "On inquiring," says Dr Royle, "in the shops of the druggists in the bazaars of India, I everywhere learned that both the wood (*dar-huld*) and the extract Rusot were imported from the hills into the plains, and that large quantities continued to be brought from Nuggur-kote as well as other places." And he adds,—“The *Rusot* is at the present day procurable in every bazaar in India, and used by the native practitioners who are fond of applying it both in incipient and chronic inflammation of the eye; and in the latter state both simply and in combination with opium and alum. It is sometimes prescribed by European practitioners; and I have heard that it was found very efficacious by Mr M'Dowell in the ophthalmia of soldiers who had returned from the expedition to Egypt. I have myself occasionally prescribed it; and the native mode of application makes it particularly eligible in cases succeeding acute inflammation, where the eye remains much swollen. The extract is, by native practitioners, in such cases, rubbed to a proper consistence with a little water, sometimes with the addition of opium and alum, and applied in a thick layer over the swollen eyelids; the addition of a little oil I have found preferable, as preventing the too rapid dessication. Patients generally express themselves as experiencing considerable relief from the application.”

My friend, Dr Wise, the author of that learned work "Commen-

¹ The other variety of Lycium, described by Dioscorides as procured in Asia-Minor (Lycia, Cappadocia, etc.), is now generally supposed to be an extract from the *Rhamnus infectori*us, or other species of *Rhamnus*. See Professor Royle, in *Linnæan Transactions*, vol. xvii., p. 87; Dr Adams, in his admirable edition of *Paulus Ægineta*, vol. iii., p. 234.

taries on the Hindoo System of Medicine," some time ago brought to Scotland with him a small quantity of the Indian Lykion. I have seen one or two cases of recent conjunctival ophthalmia treated by the application of this Lykion, with speedy relief and cure. Dr Wise has been so good as furnish me with the following interesting letter regarding his own extended experience with it.

" The use (says Dr Wise) of the mixture of Lykion or Ruswut is very generally known over Hindostan, where diseases of the eye are common, and probably over Asia and Africa, if we are to believe that this was the black application employed with such success to the diseased eyes of our soldiers in Egypt. It is likewise probable that Dioscorides obtained it nearly two thousand years ago from the East, where the plant is indigenous, and introduced it into Europe. Having found great personal benefit from the application of the mixture of Lykion to my eyes when inflamed, I employed it extensively when superintendent of the Eye Infirmary, Calcutta ; and so convinced was I of its efficacy, that I brought a supply with me to Europe, with the intention of bringing it to the notice of the profession. I found you investigating the subject ; and at your suggestion, Dr Walker was so kind as to try the medicine, and I am sure will inform you of the results he saw derived from its use. The Indian mixture consists of equal weights of Lykion and burnt alum, with half the weight of opium. These ingredients are mixed with lemon-juice, and reduced to the consistence of cream, and applied round the eye-lids and over the eye-brow of the inflamed eyes. This mixture is washed off, and again applied twice in twenty-four hours ; and it was only when accompanied with fever, that aperients and other parts of the antiphlogistic regimen were required. In less urgent cases the mixture was only applied at night, and produced no inconvenience, unless when it dried, and the lids felt stiff, when it was softened by applying a little moisture. I found the Lykion mixture most useful in all cases of inflammation of the external tunics of the eye. When both eyes were inflamed, it was interesting to mark the advantage this simple remedy had when applied to one eye, while the usual remedies of leeches, blisters, etc., were applied to the other eye. Another most important application of the Lykion is when the ophthalmia is accompanied with severe pain. On such occasions, after applying the mixture, a piece of live charcoal (*gool*) produced the most soothing effect when approached near the eye. With this intention, the

charcoal was placed upon an earthen cup, and held on a wooden stand by the patient, and he approached or withdrew it from the eye according to his own feeling. The great relief in this case was in part from the anodyne effect of the opium."

Mr Walker has kindly given me the following note of his experience with the *Lykion* at the Edinburgh Eye Dispensary:—

"I have used (he writes me) the Indian *Lykion* in a considerable number of cases of eye disease. The affections in which I found it most useful were those of the conjunctiva, such as the simple, catarrhal, and pustular forms of inflammation. In them its action was well marked and beneficial, the disease generally subsiding in a day or two; sooner perhaps than it would have done under the ordinary treatment. I have had no opportunity of trying it in purulent ophthalmia; but I believe that in it also it would prove of service. Cases of slight rheumatic and catarrho-rheumatic inflammations have been benefited, but not cured, by it alone. In some affections of the eye-lids, as ophthalmia tarsi and chronic ophthalmia, it did good; but such cases often get well with very little treatment. I applied it to the eye-lids in the form of a paste, with opium and burnt alum, as recommended by Dr Wise. This was repeated two or three times a day. The patients generally complained of a burning and smarting of the lids after its application, similar to what is produced by a mustard blister."

The four ancient Greek vases, mentioned in the preceding notice, as inscribed with the name of the drug *Lykion* or *Lycium*, are each of very small dimensions, the plate representing all of them of their original sizes and forms. They are small, in consequence, in all probability, of the foreign drug which they contained being difficult to procure in large quantities, and being hence an article of high price in the markets of Greece and Italy. The value set upon the contained drug would seem to be indicated by another circumstance—namely, by the shape of the interior of the vases. In the specimens described by Millin and Tochon, the cavity of the jars is narrow and conical from above downwards, the mouth being wide, and the interior becoming more and more tapering and contracted as it descends downwards. The section of the interior of the vase of Tochon, given in Plate I., Fig. 6, represents this peculiar and deceitful form of the cavity. In consequence of this peculiarity in their form, these jars contained, in fact, much less of the *Lykion*

than their mere external appearance indicated. This remark, at least, holds true of the two vases from Tarentum bearing the name of *Jason*. The vase of *Museus* from Athens, belonging to the British Museum, appears more honest at least in its construction. The high price of the pure Lykion probably led also to the fact mentioned specially by Dioscorides (lib. i., cap. 133), Pliny (lib. xxiv., cap. 14), and Serapion (lib. ii., cap. 398), of the frequent adulteration of the drug. And, perhaps, as in similar inscriptions on some modern medicine-nostrums and packets, the names of the preparer or vendor, *Jason*, *Heracleus*, and *Museus*, stamped on the vases, were added in attestation of the purity and unadulterated character of the drug which these vases contained.