

HEALING METHODS IN CHRISTIAN RELIGIOUS BUILDINGS BELIEVED TO HAVE HEALING POWER IN BITHYNIA REGION*

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ABSTRACT

Since its existence, mankind has sought various solutions to diseases that his power and knowledge cannot afford, and believed in healing power of dreams, water, religious objects, icons, votive offerings, murals, and saints, etc in situations where medical knowledge falls short. The aim of this study is to examine the healing methods in six churches in the Bithynia region. In this context, primarily healing rituals from the ancient times were examined, and the gods/goddesses believed to have healing power in the Greek and Roman periods and their methods were introduced. The powers of the gods and goddesses, believed to have healing powers in paganism, continued when the Christian belief began to spread and later with Jesus, Mary, and saints. It is seen that the healing stories told in ancient sources are similar to those the Bible and holy texts. However, it is seen that different applications were preferred in healing methods, especially when mental illness and epilepsy were perceived as the intrusion of the devil or the seizure of one's soul. Within the scope of this study, the healing methods in five churches in Bursa (Kumyaka (Sige), Archangels Church; Karacabey, Uluabat (Ulubat), St. Michael Church; Gemlik Panagia Phaneromene Church; İznik Koimesis Church; Tepecik Archangel Michael Church), and in one church in Balıkesir (Erdek, Kapıdağ Yarımadası Panagia Phaneromene Monastery Church) are discussed comparatively in line with the information given in the travel books. As a result, it has been revealed that the treatments applied especially to mental patients in the structures examined have similar applications. In this study, these applications were examined in detail. Since the subject is the healing methods in the churches, detailed architectural presentations of the buildings were not presented; only the healing methods were mentioned.

BİTHYNİA BÖLGESİNDE İYİLEŞTİRİCİ GÜCÜ OLDUĞUNA İNANILAN HRİSTİYAN DİNİ YAPILARINDA ŞİFA YÖNTEMLERİ

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ÖZ

İnsanoğlu varoluşundan itibaren gücünün ve bilgisinin yetemediği hastalıklara çeşitli çözüm yolları aramış, tıbbi bilgilerin yeterli olmadığı yerlerde zaman zaman rüyaların, suyun, dini objelerin, ikonaların, adakların, duvar resimlerinin, aziz ve azizelerin vb. iyileştirici gücü olduğuna inanmışlardır. Bu çalışmanın amacı Bithynia bölgesinde bulunan altı kilisedeki iyileştirme yöntemlerini incelemektir. Bu bağlamda öncelikle antik dönemlerden itibaren iyileştirme ritüelleri incelenmiş, Yunan ve Roma dönemlerindeki iyileştirici gücü olduğuna inanılan tanrılar/tanrıçalar ve yöntemleri tanıtılmıştır. Paganizmde iyileştirme gücü olduğuna inanılan tanrı ve tanrıçaların güçleri, Hristiyanlık inancı yayılmaya başladığında ve sonrasında da İsa, Meryem, aziz ve azizelerle devam etmiştir. Antik dönem kaynaklarında anlatılan iyileştirme hikayelerinin benzerlerinin İncil'de ve kutsal metinlerde de yer aldığı görülmektedir. Bununla birlikte özellikle akıl hastalığının ve epilepsinin, insanın içine şeytanın girmesi veya ruhunun ele geçirilmesi olarak algılanmasıyla da iyileştirme yöntemlerinde değişik uygulamalar tercih edildiği görülmektedir. Bu çalışma kapsamında Bursa'da bulunan beş yapıdaki (Kumyaka (Sige), Başmelekler Kilisesi; Karacabey, Uluabat (Ulubat), Aziz Mikhael Kilisesi; Gemlik Panagia Phaneromene Kilisesi; İznik Koimesis Kilisesi; Tepecik Başmelek Mikhael Kilisesi), Balıkesir'de ise bir yapıdaki (Erdek, Kapıdağ Yarımadası Panagia Phaneromene Manastırı Kilisesi) iyileştirme yöntemleri seyahatnamelerde aktarılan bilgiler doğrultusunda karşılaştırmalı olarak ele alınmıştır. Sonuç olarak incelenen yapılardaki özellikle akıl hastalarına uygulanan tedavilerin benzer uygulamalara sahip olduğu ortaya çıkmıştır. Çalışmada bu uygulamalar detaylı olarak incelenmiştir. Konu, yapılardaki iyileştirme yöntemleri olduğu için yapıların detaylı mimari tanımları yapılmamış, yalnızca iyileştirme yöntemlerine değinilmiştir.

* This study is dedicated to my dear aunt Prof. Dr. Ayla Saykan Aysev, who recently retired from academia after having worked in the Department of Child and Adolescent Psychiatry, Faculty of Medicine at Ankara University for four decades.

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INTRODUCTION

Since its existence, mankind has sought various cures to diseases and believed in the healing powers of dreams, water, religious objects, icons, votive offerings, wall paintings, and saints, etc. in situations where science falls short.

In ancient Greece, people who believed that Gods had a healing power, which was a cultural norm heavily influenced by Byzantine Art commonly prayed to Gods to recover from their illnesses, as well as made votive and various offerings. During Homer's era, the Monarch of Trikala (Thessaly), Asclepius became famous for his powers of healing along with his surgeon sons, Podaleiros and Makhaon. Asclepius's healing powers granted him a mythological identity as his fame spread, which culminated in his ordination as a son of Apollo, and the god of physicians (Bayat, 2010, p. 103). His daughter Hygieia, who symbolizes health, and his son Telesphoros (child god), the interpreter of dreams, were secondary gods around Asclepius (Bayat, 2010, p. 106) (**Fig. 1**).



Fig. 1. Diptych with Asclepius and Hygieia, National Museums Liverpool, World Liverpool (Maguire, 2008, p. 74)

In ancient times, it was believed that dreams had a healing power especially for those who did not have children, those who were paralyzed, and those with a herniated disc or cervical disc hernia. Treatment in dreams first emerged in the 4th century BC at the Temple of Asclepius in Epidauros, Greece, and then spread to Greek and Roman temples (Déroche, 2015, p. 13). People first dreamed in guesthouses outside the temple, and later began to stay inside the temples. Various cleansing rituals were performed before patients fell asleep in asclepieions, and then the priest-physicians used to interpret the dreams of the patients (Bayat, 2010, p. 106). With the adoption of Christianity, the cult of Asclepius continued its existence within the Christian faith. The savior (soter/soteria) (**Fig. 2**) feature of Asclepius was given to Jesus, and the tradition of falling asleep in asclepieions continued in certain churches in Italy and Greece on specific days of the year (Bayat, 2010, p. 108). When we look at the healing beliefs in the early years of Christianity, it is apparent that similar characteristics exist within paganism.



Fig. 2. Personification of Soteria, Hatay Archaeological Museum (inv. 977)

During the height of the Christian Church's power, it was considered a grave sin to explain healing narratives using natural reason rather than attributing healing narratives to God's miraculous intervention. For this reason, to heal, people slept in churches, prayed for miracles, visited the tombs of the healing saints and touched their belongings (Bayat, 2010, p. 156) in the hopes of receiving God's healing power. In Christianity, it was believed that Jesus, the Virgin Mary, and the archangels had healing power on behalf of God. Particularly, it is stated in the four Gospels that Jesus healed many diseases (scoliosis, paralysis, blindness, edema, leprosy, mental illness, etc.) and revived the dead (Luka, 7:11-15, Luka, 5:1-9, Johanna, 11:1-46, Luka, 5:28-36 ect.) (**Fig. 3**).



Fig. 3. Resurrection of Lazarus, Athens, Byzantine and Christian Museum (Kalafati, 2010, p. 166)

In addition to this, Jesus also gave the apostles the authority to heal. To illustrate, Apostle Philippos is known to revive two dead people, heal someone with leprosy and a paralyzed patient (Ševčenko, 2015, p. 29). In Christianity, it was believed that saints had healing power on behalf of God as well. St. Nicholas, who was thought to have been born in A.D. 250 in Patara, was known to heal a young person of a mental disability, and the pregnancy of an infertile woman, etc. (Dabovich, 1898, p. 45-56; Ötügen, 2010, p. 187). Many stories are told about St. Kosmas, and also called as Anargyroi (Strati, 2015, p. 218)¹, St. Damianos, St. Kyros, St. Ioannes, St. Sampson, St. Hermolaos, St. Diomedes, St. Panteleimon, St. Mokios, St. Akinitos, St. Thallalaos, St. Tryphon, St. Philonilla, St. Hermione and St. Apollonia who are believed to have miraculously healed his patients like Asclepius without expecting any compensation (Kazhdan and Ševčenko, 1991, p. 85; Strati, 2015, p. 218) (wages, gifts, etc.). For example, St. Kosmas and St. Damianos, who were also twin brothers, it was believed that their miracles continued after their death. They, healed diseases like blindness, paralysis, injury, fracture, dislocation, tuberculosis, malaria, typhus, diphtheria and etc. (Friedlaender and Friedlaender, 2016, p. 1766). Additionally, the physician St. Panteleimon, who died a martyr, healed the blind, the paralyzed, cured the mentally disabled, and resurrected a young person who was bitten by a viper (Dabovich, 1898, p. 31, 34-35). Further, the healing stories of many Saints were a common subject of religious art and icons (**Fig. 4**).

¹ Anargyros, whose plural is Anargyrio, means "without silver", in other words penniless (A. Strati, "Kastoria'da Anargyroi'yi Onurlandırmak", (Ed. B. Pitarakis), *Hayat Kısa, Sanat Uzun Bizans'ta Şifa Sanatı*, 218-27, Pera Müzesi Yayınları (İstanbul 2015) 218.



Fig. 4. Vita icon of St. Panteleimon (Strati, 2015, p. 226)

The center of this icon shows the standing, full-length, and frontal figure of St. Panteleimon. The Saint holds a medical lancet in his right hand and an open, rectangular medicine chest in his left. He wears a full-length, dark blue tunic with a short, pink pleated overtunic and a red cloak decorated with gold rhomboid motifs. The hems, cuffs, and neckline of the tunics have gold bands edged in pearls. His apparel is completed by a single band, depicted in the form of two strips hanging from the neck, which is typical of physician's dress (Strati, 2015, p. 226). In some scenes depicting the life of the Saint, it shows the subject as "the dead child bitten by a snake rises (second scene), the healing of the blind (sixth scene), the healing of the paralytic in the presence of the emperor (tenth scene)" are depicted.

In Christianity, it is believed that the images in the icons and the wall paintings depicting Jesus, Mary, Archangels and saints also had a healing power. This belief lasted through out the Byzantine Empire. The belief turned into frenzy, people desperately hoped that the icons and paintings would heal them. Due to this fervent belief, they started to eat plaster of the wall paintings. Such cases caused the prohibition of depictions and the emergence of Iconoclasmus Period (726-843) (Brubaker and Haldon, 2001; Lowden, 1998, p. 207-228).

It is evident that healing practices based on science and religious beliefs supported each other in the Byzantine Empire. Byzantines used medicine and magic together against diseases. Physicians advised their patients to use medical amulets at times when their medical knowledge fell short (Pitarakis, 2015, p. 44). In the Byzantine Empire, especially in Constantinople and in various parts of Anatolia, it was believed that monasteries and churches, which were dedicated to saints, who had healing powers, were believed to heal diseases¹. Relatives of the patients, who used to think that mental illnesses and epilepsy were the result of Satan's capture of one's body, were known to consult clergymen in monasteries. The healing method performed in churches varies according to the seriousness of the disease. While a simple consultation was sufficient for patients with fracture or dislocation problems; high fever and other basic diseases required patients to stay in the church for two or three days. Some serious illnesses, such as mental illnesses, patients were prescribed to diet for forty days sometimes while enchained. This act of healing was specifically observed in five structures in Bursa, and in one structure in Balıkesir.

Healing Methods Believed To Have Healing Power In Building In Bithynia Region

The southern shores of the Sea of Marmara and the northwest of Anatolia adjacent to this sea are called Bithynia in historical sources (Fig. 5). The name and borders of the region have changed many times over time. However, Bithynia is an area of approximately 20 thousand km, bordered by the Bosphorus and the Black Sea in the north, the Marmara Sea and the Karadere River in the west, the Uluabat Lake and the northern slopes of Uludağ in the south, and the middle parts of the Sakarya River to the east (Pekak, 2009, p. 11).

¹ It is known that there was more than one building dedicated to St. Cosmas, St. Damianos and St. Panteleimon in Constantinople and their healing powers continued in these structures after their deaths.



Fig 5. Bithynia (Umar, 2004, p. 22)

Bithynia played a great role in Byzantine political and religious history due to its proximity to the capital, and the fact that important trade and expedition routes passed through the region. The region started to become Christian as of the 1st century, and in the following centuries it became one of the most important centers of Byzantine religious life. In addition to religiously and politically important cities such as Iznik and Izmit, settlements such as Gemlik, Mudanya and Bursa have also become important religious centers (Pekak, 2009, p. 13).

The knowledge that churches within the Bithynia Region are believed to contain healing powers has survived to the present day thanks to the notes written by the travelers. Travelers, who visited the region at various times, documented the information they obtained from the local people in the region and the religious officials as they travelled. In line with documented travel notes, it was determined that various diseases were treated and healing methods were performed in five churches in Bursa (Kumyaka (Sige), Archangels Church; Karacabey, Uluabat (Ulubat), St. Michael Church; Gemlik Panagia Phaneromene Church; İznik Koimesis Church; Tepecik Archangel Michael Church) and in one church in Balıkesir (Erdek, Kapıdağ Peninsula Panagia Phaneromene Monastery Church). In each of these churches, the priests cured the mentally ill using similar methods.

Archangel Church in Kumkaya (Sige), Bursa is the first church believed to possess a curative power over mental illnesses (Fig.6). It was also stated by the itinerants who travelled to this area that this structure, dating back to 780 and expanded many times including 19th century, possessed a healing power for various other illnesses as well including high fever, fracture or dislocation problems, and also mental illnesses. Among these researchers, Covell, Spon and Wheler, who visited this structure in 17th century, remarked that there was a spring called 'Christos', and it worked miracles (Covell, 1998, p. 142; Spon and Wheler, 1678, p. 275). While MacFarlane stated that patients used to stay in the church for two or three days and slept on mattresses positioned near the altar, sometimes chained before the icon of Cappadocian St. Georgios (MacFarlane, 1850, p. 87-88). Hamilton remarked that patients used to perform a diet for at least forty days, enchained in west chapel (healing cell), and priests used to sing them hymns (Hamilton, 1906, p. 221) (Fig.7a-b., Fig.8). While Hasluck remarked that the depiction of Archangel Michael had a healing power, and the patients used to perform a diet for forty days (Hasluck, 1910, p. 63), Buchwald stated that this structure was the richest church in Bursa and around because it was believed to miraculously heal mental illnesses (Buchwald, 1969, p. 69).



Fig.6. Bursa, Kumyaka (Sige), The Church of the Archangels (Archangeloi)



Fig.7a-b. The Church of the Archangels (Archangeloi), Healing Cell

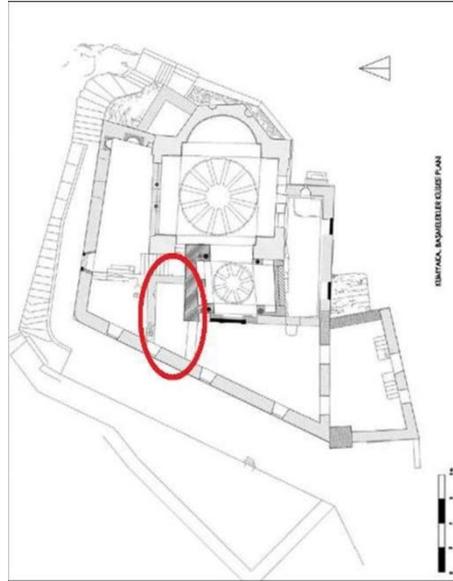
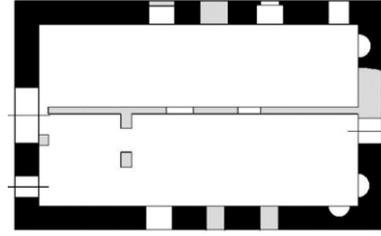


Fig.8. The Church of the Archangels (Archangeloi), Healing Cell, Plan

The second church with healing properties is St. Michael Church, in Ulubat Village, Karacabey, Bursa. According to the epitaph in this structure, it was rebuilt in 1843 (Ötüken et al.,1986, p. 394-395) (Fig.9-10). Stephan Gerlach, who visited Turkey between 1573 and 1576, came to Uluabat in October 1576. While talking about the six churches in Uluabat, Gerlach, also referred to the Church of St. Michael and stated that there were depictions of St. Machael and other saints in the building (Gerlach, 2017, p. 443). It was also believed that various illnesses were cured here, including mentally ill patients who were healed by either Archangel Michael or Mary (Hamilton, 1906, p. 219). MacFarlane, who visited the region in 1847, points out that it was believed to be the healing power of the depictions of Mary and saints placed before the altar that would physically heal the patients. A traveler stated that two children, who were surrounded by candles blessed by the priests during their visit to the church, were lying on the mattresses in front of the sacred depictions. One of these children was a boy, who fell off a horse and injured his knee, and the other one was a girl with a high fever (MacFarlane, 1850, p. 410-411). Hasluck stated that mentally ill patients were tied to a beam in the west of the church, and the treatment lasted between forty and sixty days (Hasluck, 1910, p. 78-80).



Fig. 9. St. Michael Church (Yıldız, 2018, p. 270)



0 1 2 3 4 5 m

Michael Archestrategos Kilisesi Planı

E.YILDIZ - E. KARADENİZ
16.12.2012

■ Yapının Orijinal Duvarları
■ Yapılan Sonradan Eklenenler

Fig. 10. St. Michael Church (Yıldız, 2018, p. 271)

The third church is Panagia Phaneromene Monastery Church (Panagia Theotokos Faneromeni Monastery-Kirazli Monastery) in Kapıdağ Peninsula, Erdek, Balıkesir (Fig.11a-b-c). Although the holy festival in the church, dated to the 19th century, was held on May 22nd; healing practices were taking place all year round. Here, the patients would diet for forty days while enchained and holding a depiction of Mary. Priests would also pray. It is stated that a woman with a mental illness recovered with this method. It is among the stories that apart from Christians, Muslims also believed in the healing power of the church. It is believed that a Muslim father came to visit the church every year to express his gratitude after his blind son was healed (Hamilton, 1906, p. 221).



Fig.11a-b-c. Panagia Phaneromene Monastery Church

Another church is Panagia Phaneromene Church in Gemlik, Bursa. Patients used to come to this structure at any time of the year, and particularly mental patients were made to perform a diet for forty days. It is believed that the depiction of Mary had a miraculous healing power in this church as well (Hamilton, 1906, p. 222).

The fifth church believed to have a healing power is Koimesis Church in İznik, Bursa (Fig.12-13). Here, patients used to perform a diet for three days and nights. Those who were prone to violence were enchained to the southern column in the structure, which was confirmed by researchers to have been built in the 8th century (De Maffei, 2004, p. 109-117; Eyice, 1988, p. 20; Ötüken et al., 1986, p. 233; Hamilton, 1906, p. 222).



Fig. 12. The Koimesis Church (Schmit, 1927, Tafel II)

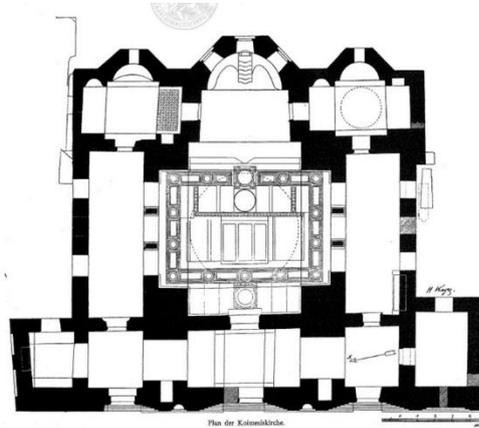


Fig. 13. The Koimesis Church, plan (Schmit, 1927, Tafel IV)

The last church is Archangel Michael (Taksiarkhi) Church in Tepecik, Bursa. According to local people, it is stated that there are two churches in Tepecik. The buildings could not survive due to the fire that broke out in the region in the 19th century and the earthquake of 1855. The structure dedicated to St. Michael was believed to have a therapeutic power over many diseases as well as mental illnesses, and not only Christians but also Muslims used to come to visit this structure for treatment (Hamilton, 1906, p. 222). It is known that mental illnesses were treated here, and the same methods practiced in other churches were also adopted here (Hasluck, 1929, p. 66).

CONCLUSION

In the sources that have survived to the present day, it is stated that in the first cultures, diseases were believed to be caused by the entry of the devil into the body and the treatment of the disease was only done by removing this devil from the body with prayers. It is stated that magic and religion had important effects in the field of medicine in Ancient Egypt and Mesopotamia, and there were applications that could be considered more scientific in Egyptian medicine, especially in the field of surgery, compared to Mesopotamia (Sayılı, 1991, p. 24-28).

The archeological evidence dated back to the Stone Age suggested a causal link between disease and the belief of evil spirits. The holes found in human skulls were interpreted as exit points through which evil spirits leave the body (Morrison and Bennett, 2006, p. 4). This view has changed in the time of the ancient Greek in which the relationship of body and mind was understood in a different way. Hippocrates, a Greek physician, saw the body and mind as a whole and linked illness to the “the balance between four circulating bodily fluids (called humours): yellow bile, phlegm, blood and black bile” rather than assuming a connection between illness and evil spirits (Morrison and Bennett, 2006, p. 5).

Galen, who is another Greek physician, contributed to Hippocrates's view by highlighting the physical basis of all types of illnesses. In Galen's view, bodily humours listed above affect four primary temperaments which are "the sanguine, the choleric, the phlegmatic and the melancholic" and these four temperaments might influence the ways of experiencing particular illnesses (Marks et al., 2000, p. 76-77).

The course of health and illness significantly changed in the early Middle Ages when Galen's conceptualizations became less influential. In this period, illness was considered as linked to spirituality and faith. Illness was believed to be "God's punishment for misdeeds, or... the result of evil spirits entering one's soul" (Morrison, 2006, p. 5). In this religiously-informed view, the church and the priests were seen as the authorities to fix health through the removal of demons. Individuals, on the other hand, were not assigned authority on their own health. Since the medical developments were restricted and scientific explorations of illnesses were banned, illnesses were primarily explained with reference to mystical reasons. This causal relationship informed the treatments such as "self-punishment, abstinence from sin, prayer or hard work" (Morrison, 2006, p. 5).

As a result, it is known that since its existence, mankind has tried to find a way to recover from diseases or to get rid of conditions that his power and knowledge were unable to cure. In ancient times, human beings used to pray to Asclepius to keep healthy. In later years, humans would also pray to Jesus, Mary and saints for the very same reason. This belief has survived until today with some variations. In some situations where people cannot explain it with their reason or experiences, and therefore remain helpless- especially in inexorable diseases- dreams, water, religious objects and votives' healing power has been an indication of people's need to hold on to something since ancient times. In this sense, people have resorted to the healing power of God- who has an almighty power- both for themselves and their relatives when they feel helpless, and they sought cure for their illnesses.

In ancient times, especially mental illnesses were seen as the evil spirits' capturing the human body, and the diseases were believed to be a punishment extended to sinful people by God. When the healing methods in the six structures that are in the scope of this research were examined, it is determined that similar treatment methods were practiced for mental illnesses with minor differences. Mentally ill people were firstly made to perform a diet, and then enchained for a certain period of time (this period varies between three and sixty days) in Church of the Archangel, Church of St. Michael, Panagia Phaneromene Monastery and Church of Koimesis (**Fig.14**).



Fig. 14. St. Euthymios heals a demoniac¹. Parekklesion of St. Euthymios at the Basilica of St. Demetrios, Thessaloniki (Merantzias, 2015, p. 181-191).

During this process, hymns were sung by the priests, and the treatment continued with or without chains, depending on the healing process (**Fig.15**).

¹ In this example, it is seen that the patient is chained.



Fig 15. Collars for the insane, Athens, Benaki Museum (Pitarakis, 2015, p. 334-363)¹

Apart from the churches examined in the study, there are buildings in Anatolia where different treatments are applied for mental patients. It is known that mental patients were treated with music, especially in the Seljuk and Ottoman Periods. Damascus Nureddin Hospital, Kayseri Gevher Nesibe Medical Madrasa and Maristan, Divriği Great Mosque and Hospital, Amasya Hospital are the leading structures where mentally ill people were treated with music during the Seljuk Period. In the Ottoman Period, II. Fatih Hospital and Edirne Bayezid Hospital it is known that the method of treatment with music was used in.

As a result of the research, whilst healing power of some of the structures was attributed to a sacred water source, some others were attributed to sacred descriptions. To illustrate, while it is believed that the image of Archangel Michael in Church of the Archangels had a healing power, it was believed that the patients were healed by the Archangel Michael or Mary at the St. Michael Church, and also it was believed that the depiction of the Mary in Gemlik Panagia Phaneromene Church had the same effect as in the Church of St. Michael. As a result of the research conducted, it was realized that abovementioned healing methods continued to be used even in the 19th century when various medical treatment methods were developed, and not only the Christian, but also the Muslim believed in the healing powers of religious structures like Archangels Church, Panagia Phaneromene Monastery Church in Kapıdağ Peninsula and Tepecik Archangel Michael (Taksiarkhi) Church.

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¹ These collars consist of two semicircular pieces of silver, closed with hinges and pin, and have a slender chain attached. They are neck collars once used to restrain mentally ill person in a symbolic gesture at holy places offering the hope of a cure. The Byzantines believed that the mentally ill were possessed by demons, so the afflicted were bound with chains in the churches of the healing Saint in the hope that the Saint might visit them in a nighttime vision and vision and exorcise their demons and illness. In antiquity, this curative process of incubation usually took place in an asclepion, a healing temple dedicated to the god Asclepius. (B. Pitarakis, "Hastalıkla Savaşmak, Sağlığı Pekiştirmek", (Ed. B. Pitarakis), *Hayat Kısa, Sanat Uzun Bizans'ta Şifa Sanatı*, Pera Müzesi Yayınları (İstanbul 2015) 334- 63.

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