ORIGINAL ARTICLE

Reflections on the History of Medicine from the Zero Point of History

Abstract
This study aims to evaluate the artifacts uncovered during excavations in the Şanlıurfa region, often referred to as the "zero point of history," from the perspective of the history of medicine, as exhibited in the Şanlıurfa Archaeology Museum.
The study adopts the historical research method, a qualitative research approach. The data consist of artifacts displayed in the Şanlıurfa Archaeology Museum, which underwent a comprehensive analysis. The analysis was conducted using qualitative data analysis techniques, with an emphasis on the historical context and significance of each artifact.
The museum showcases a wide array of artifacts spanning from the Paleolithic period to the present day, many of which provide significant insights into the history of medicine. Notable artifacts include female figurines, snake-head motifs, totem statues, human skeletons, period-specific jewelry and amulets, eye idols, and clay tablets, all of which contribute to understanding ancient medical practices.
A thorough analysis of the artifacts exhibited in the Şanlıurfa Archaeology Museum offers valuable insights into how ancient civilizations addressed health-related issues and developed treatment methods, thereby enriching our understanding of the history of medicine.

Key words: History of Medicine, Göbeklitepe, Ancient Medicine, Medical Anthropology, Artifacts

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Introduction

Şanlıurfa, located along the Silk Road, is one of the oldest cities in the history of civilization, dating back 12,000 years as a cultural center of the world (Karul, Kozbe, and Yavuzkır, 2021; Bozkuş, and Güler, 2022). The earliest name attributed to the Urfa region, as mentioned in Hittite cuneiform texts, is believed to be "*Hur Memleketleri*" (Demir, 2008, p. 23; Bozkuş, and Güler, 2022). For the city of Urfa, the Arabs referred to it as "*er-Ruha*," while the Armenians used the name "*Orhai*." During the Hellenistic period, the city was known in Greek as "*Edessa*" (Kurtoğlu, 2018, pp. 82-83). It is suggested that the modern name of the city, known as Urfa, derives from the Syriac "*Urhay*" (Demir, 2008, p. 23; Bozkuş, and Güler, 2022). In recognition of its courage and contributions during the War of Independence, the title "*Şanlı*" (meaning "*Glorious*") was bestowed upon Urfa in 1984, and since then, it has been called "*Şanlıurfa*."

As Evliya Çelebi[1] remarked, "*the tongue is at a loss to praise Urfa*" (Kurtoğlu, 2018, pp. 82-83). Throughout its history, Şanlıurfa has hosted significant cultures and civilizations, including the Eblaite, Akkadian, Sumerian, Old Babylonian, Hurrian-Mittani, Hittite, Aramaean, and Assyrian kingdoms. Urfa is a historically significant region, as it contains some of the world's oldest temples and sculpture workshops (Bozkuş, and Güler, 2022).

Şanlıurfa has been an important center throughout history, from prehistoric and ancient times to today, because of its strategic geographical location and position along trade and migration routes (Çelik, 2008). Excavations in the region conducted in 1894 uncovered numerous settlement sites dating back to the Paleolithic, Neolithic, Chalcolithic, Bronze, and Iron Ages (Çelik, 2008). Archaeological digs and research carried out in various regional locations show that it has been continuously inhabited from the Paleolithic period through the Islamic era. In 1997, excavations near Balıklıgöl in the Yeni Mahalle district showed that the city center of Urfa was established between 9400 and 8600 BC, based on radiocarbon (C14) analyses (Çelik, 2018). Some artifacts recovered from the region's excavations are displayed in the Archaeology Museum, which is part of our study. Although the region is rich in cultural, historical, and archaeological knowledge, researchers have noted a lack of similar depth in the field of medicine (Uncu, 2013).

The Şanlıurfa Museum was founded in 1969 in the central Şehitlik neighborhood. Because it lacked sufficient space for the region's archaeological treasures, the museum was relocated to a new building in the Halepli Bahçe area and opened to the public on May 24, 2015 (Karul, Kozbe, and Yavuzkır, 2021). Artifacts in the exhibition halls of the Şanlıurfa Archaeology Museum are arranged in a specific chronological order. When visitors enter, they first see findings and reconstructions from the Paleolithic Age, followed by items from the

1- Evliya Çelebi, a 17th-century Ottoman traveler and writer, is renowned for his detailed travelogue, Seyahatname, which provides invaluable insights into the cultural, social, and political life of his time (Çapar, 2019).

Neolithic, Chalcolithic, Bronze, and Iron Ages, along with important pieces from the Hellenistic, Roman, Byzantine, and Islamic periods.

This study aims to evaluate the artifacts obtained from excavations in the Urfa region, often referred to as the zero point of history, which are currently exhibited in the Şanlıurfa Archaeology Museum. It is hypothesized that these artifacts may offer valuable insights into the health conditions of the period from a medical history perspective.

Materials and Methods

This research was conducted to examine artifacts in the Şanlıurfa Archaeology Museum within the context of medical history. The study used a historical research method, which is a qualitative approach. The historical research method helps us understand the present by analyzing past events, documents, and artifacts. It is especially suitable for studying medical practices, tools, and documents from earlier periods, as in medical history. Data for the research were collected by examining artifacts in the museum and interviewing museum experts. All collected documents and photographs were sorted thematically and chronologically through a detailed analytical process. Data analysis was performed using qualitative techniques, with each document evaluated in its historical context. This process took six months, and the data were systematically organized to meet the study's goals.

Result

This section examines the artifacts displayed in the Şanlıurfa Archaeology Museum from a medical history perspective, organized in line with the museum's exhibition flow.

Paleolithic Age Findings

The entrance of the museum features reconstructions related to the Paleolithic Age (Figure 1). In addition to these reconstructions, the displays include pointed and cutting tools made from stones found in nature, which were used for hunting and self-defense (Figure 2).

Figure 1. Reconstructions depicting living conditions during the Paleolithic Age. Artifact displayed in the Şanlıurfa Archaeology Museum (*photograph is taken by Ayşe Gözde Gören, used with permission*)

Figure 2. Pointed and cutting tools made from stones found in nature. Artifact displayed in the Şanlıurfa Archaeology Museum (photograph is taken by Ayşe Gözde Gören, used with permission)

Neolithic Age Findings

After the Paleolithic Age, the museum features artifacts and reconstructions from the Neolithic Age. This section shows clay vessels used for food preparation and storage, typical of that period (Figure 3). It also includes reconstructions illustrating the start of farming, grinding grains into flour, and domesticating animals (Figure 4).

In the Neolithic Age section, the most striking artifact from a medical history perspective is the Female Figurine (Figure 5). Additionally, there are the Snake Head and Totem Statue, which include the important medical symbol of the snake (Figure 6).

Finally, notable artifacts from this era include a human skeleton (Figure 7) and examples of jewelry and amulets from the period (Figure 8).

Figure 3. Clay Vessels Used for Food Preparation and Storage. Artifact displayed in the Şanlıurfa Archaeology Museum (*photograph is taken by Ayşe Gözde Gören, used with permission*)

Figure 4. Reconstructions Depicting Agriculture and Animal Husbandry of the Era. Artifact displayed in the Şanlıurfa Archaeology Museum (photograph is taken by Ayşe Gözde Gören, used with permission)

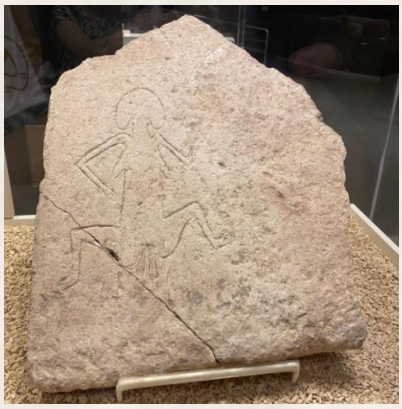

Figure 5. Female Figurine Artifact. Artifact displayed in the Şanlıurfa Archaeology Museum (photograph is taken by Ayşe Gözde Gören, used with permission)

Figure 6. Snake-Headed and Totem Statue. Artifact displayed in the Şanlıurfa Archaeology Museum (photograph is taken by Ayşe Gözde Gören, used with permission)

Figure 7. Human Skeleton. Artifact displayed in the Şanlıurfa Archaeology Museum (*photograph is taken by Ayşe Gözde Gören, used with permission*)

Figure 8. Examples of Jewelry and Amulets from the Era. Artifact displayed in the Şanlıurfa Archaeology Museum (*photograph is taken by Ayşe Gözde Gören, used with permission*)

Chalcolithic Age Findings

In the section displaying artifacts from the Chalcolithic Age, there are vessels and jars used for food storage that are more advanced than those from previous periods (Figure 9), a nearly complete human skeleton (Figure 10), and various sizes of eye idols (Figure 11), which are believed to have been used as amulets for protection against epidemics and to be placed in temples dedicated to deities that provide healing for eye diseases.

Figure 9. Vessels and Pottery Examples Used in the Chalcolithic Age. Artifact displayed in the Şanlıurfa Archaeology Museum (*photograph is taken by Ayşe Gözde Gören, used with permission*)

Figure 10. Human Skeleton. Artifact displayed in the Şanlıurfa Archaeology Museum (*photograph is taken by Ayşe Gözde Gören, used with permission*)

Figure 11. Eye Idol. Artifact displayed in the Şanlıurfa Archaeology Museum (*photograph is taken by Ayşe Gözde Gören, used with permission*)

Iron Age Findings

The Iron Age section of the museum contains important artifacts from a medical history perspective. This section features a portion of the 600 clay tablets excavated from the Sultantepe Mound. Within the scope of this study, the tablets related to medical history, as shown below, have been included for evaluation. (Figures 12-16)

Figure 12. Prescription for Stomach Ailments. Artifact displayed in the Şanlıurfa Archaeology Museum (*photograph is taken by Ayşe Gözde Gören, used with permission*)

Figure 13. Prescription for Chest Complaints. Artifact displayed in the Şanlıurfa Archaeology Museum (*photograph is taken by Ayşe Gözde Gören, used with permission*)

Figure 14. Religious Rituals, Prayers, and Incantations for Illness. Artifact displayed in the Şanlıurfa Archaeology Museum (*photograph is taken by Ayşe Gözde Gören, used with permission*)

Figure 15. Examples of Incantations and Prayers Against Malevolent Spirits. Artifact displayed in the Şanlıurfa Archaeology Museum (*photograph is taken by Ayşe Gözde Gören, used with permission*)

Figure 16. Examples of Prayers and Incantations. Artifact displayed in the Şanlıurfa Archaeology Museum (*photograph is taken by Ayşe Gözde Gören, used with permission*)

Another noteworthy artifact from the Iron Age is the Stele of King Nabonidus. A visual representation of the stele is provided in Figure 17.

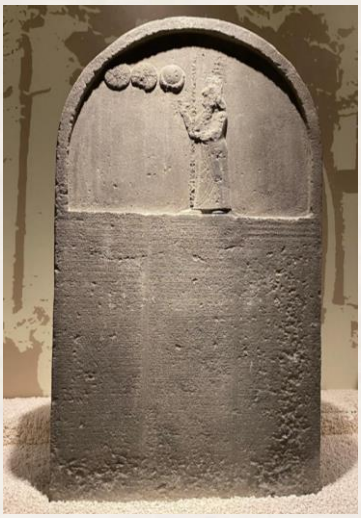

Figure 17. Stele of King Nabonidus Artifact displayed in the Şanlıurfa Archaeology Museum (*photograph is taken by Ayşe Gözde Gören, used with permission*)

Discussion

This section provides an evaluation of the artifacts examined at the Şanlıurfa Archaeology Museum from a medical history perspective, along with findings from the literature. The discussion is organized in chronological order based on the artifacts.

The historical journey at the Şanlıurfa Archaeology Museum begins with the Paleolithic period. The Paleolithic era, also referred to as the Old Stone Age or the Lithic Age, spans from approximately 3.3 million years ago to 11,500 BCE. It is further subdivided into distinct phases: the Lower Paleolithic, Middle Paleolithic, Upper Paleolithic, and Epipaleolithic periods (Karul, Kozbe, and Yavuzkır, 2021; Çelik, 2018). Şanlıurfa holds particular significance in terms of Paleolithic findings, establishing it as one of the crucial Paleolithic stations in Türkiye's prehistory (Kökten, 1952).

During the Paleolithic era, humans lived in small groups in caves, tents, and rock shelters.

They subsisted on wild plants and fruits gathered from nature and relied on hunting for their livelihood. The discovery of fire during this period is regarded as a significant turning point in human history, as it is believed that this discovery marked the beginning of the cognitive development of humans of that time (Arslantaş, 2014). The depictions in Figure 1 illustrate the typical lifestyles and behaviors of individuals during this era. Typically, men engaged in hunting, while women gathered plants and small animals. People of this time invented piercing and cutting tools from stones they found in nature for hunting and daily tasks. In the Lower Paleolithic, the longest phase of the Paleolithic era, people predominantly used tools made from flint. The tools shown in Figure 2 were employed for hunting and self-defense (Çelik, 2018; Karul, Kozbe, and Yavuzkır, 2021). Archaeological excavations in Anatolia have revealed that flint-cutting tools were also used in simple surgical procedures (Bozkaya, 2022). Given that diseases and injuries have existed as long as humanity itself, it is thought that the tools in Figure 2, or similar ones, may have been used by people of that period to treat minor wounds. The reliance on hunting and gathering for subsistence in the Paleolithic era forced humans to adopt a nomadic lifestyle (Aytan, 2021). It is believed that this mobile way of life could have had both positive and negative effects on health. However, no detailed findings regarding the health conditions of this period have been encountered in the museum exhibits. The informative texts, reconstructions, and artifacts displayed in this section of the museum appear to be organized in accordance with the literature data.

It is shown that Paleolithic individuals led a nomadic lifestyle, residing in tents, caves, and rock shelters, engaging in hunting, and subsisting on wild plants, fruits, and other readily available foods. Living conditions directly influenced individuals' dietary habits and health status. The harsh living conditions of this period are believed to have played a role in the development of diseases. The literature emphasizes that the most frequently encountered health issues during the Paleolithic era were traumas (Yücel, and Parlıtı, 2021; Eren, and Özer, 2018). However, the limited number of studies on skeletal remains from the Anatolian Paleolithic period and the scarcity of the retrieved skeletons have resulted in insufficient information about this era in the literature (Sağır, and Sağır, 2013). There is little information regarding this period in the Şanlıurfa region, and no findings from this era have been found in the museum.

Discussion of Findings Related to the Neolithic Era

The second stop of the Archaeology Museum is the Neolithic Age, also known as the New Stone or Polished Stone Age, which is considered one of the most significant turning points in human history. This period is recognized as the beginning of settled life and spans from 10,500 to 5,500 BCE (Çelik, 2018; Karul, Kozbe, and Yavuzkır, 2021). The Neolithic Age is divided into two phases: the Pre-Pottery Neolithic and the Pottery Neolithic. During this period, humans began to control and alter their environment, moving toward the cultivation of grains and food production. Particularly during the Pottery Neolithic Period, many village settlements based on agriculture and animal husbandry were established. With this transition, communities evolved from being gatherers of grains to a producer economy.

Located in the Urfa region, Göbekli Tepe, Balıklıgöl Höyüğü, Karahan Tepe, Nevali Çori, Hamzan Tepe, and Sefer Tepe are among the significant and early settlement sites of this period (Çelik, 2018; Karul, Kozbe, and Yavuzkır, 2021). The most notable of these settlements is Göbekli Tepe, described as the gathering center for the last hunter-gatherer groups and the world's earliest known temple site. Excavations at Göbekli Tepe were initiated in

1995 by Prof. Dr. Klaus Schmidt, while studies conducted by Prof. Dr. Harald Hauptmann at Nevali Çori have provided important data regarding the Neolithic Period in the region (Karul, Kozbe, and Yavuzkır, 2021).

During this period, significant transformations occurred in nutrition and living conditions. Important advancements were made in addressing food issues, including the production of clay vessels for storing and preparing food, the grinding of grains into flour, and the baking of bread from this flour. Additionally, a type of dish known as "*sulu aş*" emerged during this time (Çelik, 2018; Karul, Kozbe, and Yavuzkır, 2021).

The artifacts and displays showcased in the museum align with the information found in the literature. When evaluated in light of the literature, it is suggested that the changes in dietary habits during the Neolithic Period may have had significant effects on the human health of that era.

Research conducted on the skeletons obtained from archaeological excavations has shown that they provide significant data, particularly regarding how teeth reflect dietary habits and food preparation methods. One study indicates that with the advent of agriculture, the grinding of grains in stone mills could result in small fragments of the millstone mixing with food, potentially leading to severe wear on human teeth (Yılmaz Usta, 2015). A limited number of skeletons exhibited in the museum were examined to assess findings related to this type of diet and dental wear; however, no solid data was obtained in this regard. Furthermore, discussions with museum experts revealed that some of the skeletons recovered from the excavations are still under analysis, thus indicating that no definitive conclusions have been reached based on the available data (Interview with experts from Şanlıurfa Archaeology Museum, 2024).

The Fertile Crescent, known as the region where agriculture first developed, is home to the Karacadağ area, which is recognized as the primary origin of wheat, located between Urfa and Diyarbakır. Excavations in Urfa have shown that during the Pre-Pottery Neolithic period, subsistence was primarily based on hunting; however, the discovery of charred seed samples indicates that wheat and barley were utilized in agriculture (Çelik, 2018). Excavations at Gürcütepe and in the Harran Plain have also revealed that animals were domesticated during this period (Çelik, 2018).

It is known that agriculture and animal domestication significantly altered the lifestyles of people during this period and contributed to the spread of diseases. Domesticated animals have facilitated the transmission of diseases such as tuberculosis and brucellosis to humans (Ekinci, 2016). Additionally, it has been understood that the irrigation systems at Çatalhöyük increased the population of mosquitoes, thereby contributing to the spread of diseases such as malaria (Ekinci, 2016; Bayat, 2016).

In the Neolithic period, agricultural activities required high physical activity; thus, people's body strength-based lifestyle shifted over time with industrialization towards a more sedentary way of life. This change has led to some long-term negative effects on health, causing dysfunctions in body metabolism (Özen, 2021, p. 293). Although there is no direct evidence of these findings in the museum, it is believed that the living conditions of the period could have had similar effects. One of the most notable artifacts in the museum concerning the history of medicine in the Neolithic period is the female figurine piece shown in Figure 5. This figurine, dating back to the Pre-Pottery Neolithic period, was found in the Lion Building at Göbekli Tepe and is made of limestone. There are various interpretations regarding the figurine. It has been suggested that its head is shaped like an inverted heart,

that it features a bulging hairstyle, or that it resembles the head of an animal or a snake (Karul, Kozbe, and Yavuzkır, 2015; Hasdemir, 2021; Yenigül, 2022).

In the first interpretation, it is stated that the woman depicted in a crouching position is giving birth, with the umbilical cord of the baby emerging from the vagina. This interpretation suggests that the structure in which the figurine was found, surrounded by divine reliefs, represents a space where women could safely give birth, protected by divine forces. According to a second interpretation, however, the figurine does not represent a woman giving birth. This view argues that the breasts and abdomen of a woman giving birth would need to be depicted as larger. K. Schmidt has proposed that instead of a birth scene, the figurine depicts a preparation for sexual intercourse (Karul, Kozbe, and Yavuzkır, 2015; Hasdemir, 2021).

In an interview with the experts from the Şanlıurfa Archaeology Museum, it was mentioned that a research team from abroad interpreted this figurine as representing "*reverse birth*" (Interview with experts from Şanlıurfa Archaeology Museum, 2024). Although scenes of childbirth are commonly found in ancient Egypt, these figurines typically symbolize normal birth. If this figurine does indeed symbolize reverse birth, and considering that the artifacts from this period in the museum are predominantly male figures, it is suggested that the reverse birth figurine may have emerged for the first time at Göbeklitepe. This could indicate that such a birth was perceived as cursed in the society. The depiction of the woman's head in the form of a snake's head further strengthens the possibility that the figurine represents a "*cursed*" female figure.

In this section of the museum, two other notable artifacts are the totem statue and the serpent head (Figure 6). The totem statue features S-shaped serpent figures on both sides. The serpent head sculpture includes a serpent figure incorporated into the skull. The reliefs of the standing stones at Göbeklitepe depict various predatory animal figures, such as waterfowl, serpents, scorpions, and spiders, highlighting the significant role of the natural environment in the belief systems of the period (Karul, Kozbe, and Yavuzkır, 2021). Additionally, the serpent figures are noteworthy for reflecting the ancient understanding of medicine at the time and for indicating the long-standing importance of the serpent symbol in medical practices. In medical history, the serpent has held a significant place in terms of health and healing, and such figures carry symbolic value in representing the medical and ritual practices of the period.

Among the artifacts of the period, the jewelry and amulets shown in Figure 8 are particularly noteworthy. Amulets are protective objects worn on the body to guard against evil spirits and unwanted supernatural influences (Kotansky, 2019). In Mesopotamia, amulets were utilized, especially in certain rituals and medical practices, to promote healing. The people of the period perceived the causes of illnesses as evil spirits or divine wrath, and based on this belief, they organized protective rituals against diseases. In ancient Mesopotamia, amulets were not only used for protection against illnesses but also to assist individuals who had recovered in maintaining their health (Arslan, 2024; Bayat, 2016). It is believed that the artifacts exhibited in the museum are products of mystical beliefs and reflect the medical beliefs of the period. Furthermore, as in every era, it is evident that people showed an interest in artistic activities, which likely had positive effects on psychological well-being.

Discussion of Findings Related to the Chalcolithic Age

During this period, significant developments occurred, including the increased use of cop-

per alongside stone in tool-making, the emergence of the first copper weapons, the transformation of agrarian villages into cities, and the rise of city-states from agricultural societies (Karul, Kozbe, and Yavuzkır, 2021).

In the Şanlıurfa Archaeology Museum, Paleolithic artifacts are generally observed to be predominantly male-oriented, while figurines depicting females have been noted in the Neolithic and Chalcolithic periods. Among the noteworthy exhibits from this period, especially in terms of medical history, are the eye idols (Figure 11). It is believed that these eye idols were used as symbols of religious beliefs, worn for protection, offered to temples for favorable outcomes, and employed as amulets to ward off epidemics. Furthermore, it has been suggested that they were placed in temples dedicated to deities believed to cure eye ailments (Karul, Kozbe, and Yavuzkır, 2021). These artifacts are regarded as indicators of the mystical beliefs of the period.

In the Şanlıurfa region, only a few of the human and animal skeletons excavated are exhibited in the Archaeology Museum. One of the skeletons displayed in the museum is presented in Figure 10. Human skeletons serve as significant sources of information regarding the diseases of the period. Pathological examinations conducted by Sevim and colleagues on the skeletons from the Birecik Dam Rescue Excavation revealed infection-related bone lesions, joint disorders, and Schmorl's nodes (Sağır, and Sağır, 2013). Additionally, a female skull found at Kurban Höyük (Urfa, Halaf period, 5000 BC) showed evidence of head deformation through wrapping techniques (Yılmaz Usta, 2015), and the same individual exhibited dental abscesses and periodontal diseases (periodontitis) (Özbek, 1993).

Discussion of Findings Related to the Bronze Age

The Bronze Age is a period that began before 3300 BC and lasted until around 1200 BC (Sherratt, 1997). During this era, in addition to the inventions of previous periods, the use of bronze alloys increased, enabling the production of more effective weapons and intricately crafted jewelry (Çelik, 2018). The use of metals, particularly the widespread adoption of arsenical copper, emerged as a factor that could negatively impact the health of individuals during this period. Excavations in the Konuklu district of Şanlıurfa have uncovered settlement areas and artifacts dating to the Early and Middle Bronze Age (Çelik, 2018). Some of these findings are exhibited in the Archaeology Museum.

Another notable cultural aspect of the Bronze Age is the Gre Virike funerary culture. According to this belief system, items intended for use by the deceased in the afterlife, including food, drink, and various vessels, are placed in the grave, and seeds of grains and legumes are scattered in the burial site (Ökse, 2002; Karul, Kozbe, and Yavuzkır, 2021).

Discussion of Findings Related to the Iron Age

This period in Anatolia was characterized by the collapse of empires and the weakening of central state authority, which led to the fragmentation of the population into smaller groups, the abandonment of cities, and a consequent increase in the rural population. During this time, ironworking technology advanced, leading to the production of more effective weapons and tools, as well as the development of new military tactics (Karul, Kozbe, and Yavuzkır, 2021). However, it is believed that all these developments may have negatively impacted the health of society.

The most significant finding in this section of the museum is the clay tablets unearthed during the excavations at Sultantepe Mound. Sultantepe is one of the largest and most valu-

able settlements in Anatolia in terms of written sources, belonging to the New Assyrian Empire, one of the most powerful political structures in Mesopotamia. Approximately 600 clay tablets have been found in this area. These tablets provide important information about diseases and their treatments and hold unique archaeological value. Written in Akkadian, Assyrian, and Sumerian, these tablets cover a wide range of topics, from school exercise texts to contracts, and from incantations and prophecy texts to divine texts addressed to deities. Additionally, some tablets contain texts related to the medical practices of the time.

The cuneiform tablets from Sultantepe serve as an important resource not only for understanding the ancient literature, mythology, and religious life of Urfa but also for its medical history. Some of these tablets are exhibited in the Şanlıurfa Archaeology Museum, while the remainder is displayed in the Ankara Museum of Anatolian Civilizations and the Istanbul Archaeology Museum (Karul, Kozbe, and Yavuzkır, 2021; Ekinci, 2016). The clay tablets in the museum collection (Figures 12-16) include complaints related to stomach and chest ailments, as well as evidence that religious ceremonies, prayers, and incantations were performed for various diseases. These findings have been interpreted as a reflection of the mystical understanding and treatment approaches of the time.

In this section of the museum, an important artifact in the history of medicine is the Stele of King Nabonidus. Nabonidus, the last king of Babylon, is mentioned to have suffered from an illness during the early years of his reign (Kagnici, 2019). The first column on display in the museum contains the following statement: "*The people committed the greatest sin against the chief god; they despised him and spoke disrespectfully about him. They forgot the wrath of King Nannar, told lies, and engaged in deceit. Among them arose disease and famine, and the population dwindled...*" (Karul, Kozbe, and Yavuzkır, 2021). This statement suggests that there was an epidemic during this period, and the source of the illness was regarded as the wrath of God. In the second column, there is a text that indicates a mystical approach to treatment: "*From the reign of the Assyrian King Ashurbanipal to my son, the gift of my womb, Babylonian King Nabonidus, I express gratitude to the King of Gods, God Sin, who granted me 104 years of happiness. He enlightens me, opens my eyes, improves my understanding, and grants health to my hands and feet*" (Karul, Kozbe, and Yavuzkır, 2021).

King Nabonidus is known for his devotion to the cult of Sin. The cult of Sin is one of the most prevalent examples of ancient Near Eastern paganism, particularly establishing a strong belief system in the region of Harran and its surroundings (Demirci, 2005). The stelae and artifacts in this section of the museum serve as important resources for understanding the belief systems of the period and their effects on health.

The museum continues with sections dedicated to the Hellenistic Period, Roman Period, Eastern Roman Period, and Islamic Period after the Iron Age. However, due to the absence of distinct artifacts related to the history of medicine from these periods, they have not been included in the discussion.

Conclusion

Urfa and its surrounding region, as a historic centre of diverse civilizations, also hold significant importance in medical history. Archaeological findings from this area reveal ancient societies' perceptions of health, disease, and treatment practices, often blending mystical and practical elements. The Şanlıurfa Archaeology Museum showcases this evolution, displaying artifacts that illustrate changes in health practices from the Paleolithic

Age onward. Museum visits, especially to institutions like the Şanlıurfa Archaeology Museum, provide invaluable learning experiences, allowing students to connect past medical practices with contemporary medicine through direct engagement with historical artifacts. This experience fosters a deeper understanding of medicine's historical development, enhancing critical thinking in medical education.

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Authors' Contribution

The authors' contributions are as follows:

Şerife Yılmaz contributed to the conception and design of the work and to data acquisition. Şerife Yılmaz and Gamze Özbek Güven contributed to the analysis and interpretation of data. All authors have read and approved the final version of the manuscript.

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Conflict of Interest

None.

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