

## POPULAR HEALERS

*Misko Zivic, Sasa Zivic and Misa Zivic*

Popular medicine appeared in ancient times. The skills of a popular healer were passed from generation to generation. They were people of all kinds: barbers, witch doctors, fortune tellers, Moslem priests, clergymen, monks, herb gatherers and wound healers. Even the rulers "healed" others when there was a serious wound to heal. The most popular one in Nis was Deruni Baba ("there was no prayer that God would not fulfil to Deruni Baba"). The people were helping each other with superstition. *Acta Medica Medianae* 2007;46(1):23-24.

**Key words:** popular healers, Deruni Baba, superstitio

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There were many diseases in ancient times. There was no medical help around. People were trying to help each other as much as they could and as much they knew. That is where popular medicine came from. Not every man could be a popular healer. The skills of popular healers were preserved and passed on from one generation to another within the family members. (1,2,3)

They were people of all kinds: barbers, witch doctors, fortunetellers, Moslem priests, clergymen, monks, herb gatherers, wound healers... (4,5,6,7), and sometimes the ruler himself, too. (8) There were various people: "...often they were tramps, cheaters..." who used to come to the exhibitions, fairs, markets, and religious gatherings..."(9)

The country had no medical doctor or the pharmacist.

Barbers were the first who people would ask for and who were respected by the authorities.

Dr. J. Safarik wrote the following to the Minister of Inner Affairs on March 23<sup>rd</sup> in 1867:

"... I was present when Mr. Acim Medovic gave lectures and exams on the basics of simple surgery to the barbers and their assistants.... general knowledge of human body, the skill of making bandages and the study of body wounds and first help they can give ... to make them become good surgical assistants...."(2)

They used to draw blood with antlers or leeches, pull teeth, rub or apply medicaments, perform simple medical operations..."(4)

The commander of the Medical Corps Headquarters sent the following telegram to The Minister of Defence in 1876:

"... Not being possible to employ the appropriate personnel in all hospitals, we kindly ask Mr. Minister to issue an order to have one attendant of the infantry and one barber employed". (10)

Laza K. Lazarevic, medical corps major, reported to the commander of the Medical Corps Headquarters:

"...I visited all the houses where the hospitals are situated. I found 753 beds set in the town. The barracks are still empty. They have been furnishing the big barrack since yesterday. I have to have it painted and washed before we put in the wounded patients. I issued the order to have all barbers from the places under our jurisdiction transferred into this alternative hospital in Nis because there is no real sick attendant here... I issued the order to place the fence in front of the hospital...(10)

The essence of the magic ethno-medicine and ethno-pharmacy is to heal by witchcrafts, prayer herbs and rituals.

Witch doctor, fortune teller or herb healer used to cure by the herbs. The most important herb was basil.

Before they went into the process of healing they used to read the prayer.

The fortune teller used to either hold the cross in one hand or give it to the sick person. There is the part of the healing prayer that used to be repeated constantly:

"I tell you the fortune, to tell you not; I spell to dispel; the wood, the stone to dispel and (the name) to save. Give, give up and return to where you came from". (5)

There were many popular healers in Nis at that time.

Each and every one had its own "specialty".

The barber Salca healed headaches by drawing blood with leeches; healed stomach aches by putting small pots on the stomach and healed cold by putting glasses on the back and chests. Barber Hadzi Steva healed bleeding from the nose by having the patient sniff in the powder of unknown content. Bold Marija healed scabs on the head using the balm of soot and lard. "Doctor" Stanko put together dislocated joints and broken bones. The baker Mika healed mumps by sticking blue paper over the neck. "Doctor" Zika healed all wounds and illnesses, especially venereal applying various herbs. (11)

The most famous of all was Deruna Baba.

One chosen by God according to the lows of Mohamed:

"...There was no prayer that God did not want to fulfil to Deruni Baba... he had healing hands and could cure all kinds of diseases..."(12)

According to tradition it is known that he has foreseen the exact day of the death of Mahmud pasha, the ruler of Nis pashadom. (2)

His tomb by the Belgrade town gate was destroyed in 1883.

Is there anyone who did not hear of Cirana and her son Hakim Toma, who used to heal Milos Obrenovic 1807 of seventeen wounds that he had got from the attack on Uzice.

He helped many people in the First and Second Serbian Uprising. (4,13)

When it is talked about the superstition, Milos Obrenovic cannot be avoided.

When his son Milan was ill in 1834 he gave the order to the courts to release all the prisoners no matter what the reason for their punishment was... and to tell them that the reason for their release is to pray for the health of his beloved son..."(4,13)

Vuk Karadzic wrote:

"...When someone gets sick in Serbian population... they hardly ask for doctors, but for the priest or the monk to read him/her the prayer, short or long. The short one used to be read to ease the pain in head, fever and other minor si-

cknesses; and the long prayer used to be read when the patient is not conscious and aware of his/her surroundings and talk nonsense and has fears..."(2)

St. Roman Djuniski healed many diseases by prayers"... watching over the patient, prescribing them to eat raw food without meat fat and constantly praying to God to take the devil and evil spirits from them... for the sake of health and happiness of the Serbian country and Eparchy of Nis..."(14)

Despite all that, diseases were flourishing: tuberculosis, typhoid fever, dysentery, scarlet fever and malaria as well as others.

The medicaments varied: onion, hyacinth, cabbage, sawdust of the stags' antlers, brandy, white wormwood, klamath weed and sometimes urine. (10,15)

Milosav Zdravkovic wrote to Milos Obrenovic:

"... We hear there are many people who suffer from heart diseases in Kragujevac, but we advise it would be good to have Master Milan drunk goat's urine and let him drink though it is very bitter. Let him rinse the mouth with some brandy afterwards and have him taken a sip or two..."(15)

Long live the people in its superstition!  
Such were the times!

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## NARODNI VIDARI

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Narodna medicina ponikla je u davnim vremenima. Posao narodnog vidara prenosio se s kolena na koleno. Oni su bili svakojaki: berberi, vračari, bajalnici, hodže, sveštenici, kaluđeri, travari, ranari i hećimi. I vladari kada ljuta rana pritisne. U Nišu je najpoznatiji bio Deruni Baba („nije bilo molbe koju Bog ne bi hteo Deruni Babi ispuniti“). Narod se ispomagao sujeverjem i praznoverjem. *Acta Medica Medianae 2007; 46(1):23-24.*

**ključne reči:** narodni vidari, Deruni Baba, sujeverje, praznoverje