

Healing in the Changes of Time - Bezoar

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People have always suffered from pain. They tried to get rid of illnesses or subdue pain by various ways and means. In the Middle Ages, we encounter a wide range of unusual miracle cures. One of them was a bezoar. The word comes from Persian pad-zahr, pazahr (پادزهر, bezau, Arab. bāzahr, bazahar, lat. Lapis Bezoar), meaning antidote, which is a medicine that counteracts a particular poison.



Figures 1-4.: Bezoar, popular ancient medicine. The popularity of this medicine spread in Europe mostly in the 16th century. Bezoar was considered a panacea for a wide range of ailments

The origins of this cure are not exactly known. However, it probably originates from Persia or East India. One of the first mentions of the bezoar comes from an Arab doctor, surgeon, and poet, Ibn Zuhrih, also known as Avenzoar (1094 - 1162 AD), who described bezoar's healing effects in his work *Al-Taysir fil-Mudāwāt Wat-Tadbīr*. Bezoar was a stomach stone, a formation that was created in the gastrointestinal system of some animals, especially ruminants. It consisted of undigested food residues such as twigs, plant fibres, fur, resin, calcium, and phosphate. The original lapis bezoar orientale was obtained from a Persian wild goat or antelope; bezoars from a Peruvian llama, a Greek and Pakistani chamois, a stag, an ox, a cow, or a sheep were less valuable. One to six stones could be found in the body of one animal. After obtaining the bezoar from the animal's body, it was crushed into a fine powder, which was dissolved in wine and drunk. The cure did not have a tang; it was of various shapes, oftentimes oval, and its surface was almost always smooth and shiny; it varied in size - from the smallest stones the size of peas and hazelnut to a pigeon or chicken egg. The colour was also variable - whitish, grey, yellow, golden brown, greenish, and brown.



Figure 4.: Bezoar had the strength of a universal antidote to any poison in the world

Although this magical medicine had its roots in ancient history (in the writings of ancient doctors), Europe was not introduced to this medicine until the 11th century through Arab doctors and merchants. The bezoar was mentioned in pharmacopoeias from the end of the 14th century to the end of the 18th century. The “magic stone” was sold at a rather high price, which was “balanced in gold,” so it could not be missing in any “modern” pharmacy. It was believed that ingesting a small bit could cure any disease. The drug was primarily used as a universal antidote, but it was also used against epilepsy or to protect against the plague. Supposedly, the bezoar helped strengthen the nerves, heart, and brain; it was effective against nausea, various pains, indigestion, etc. It was rumoured that any poison could be neutralized when poured into a drinking glass that contained bezoar. Bezoar stone was often imitated by counterfeiters by deliberately introducing an indigestible stone-shaped object into the digestive tract of an animal. Belief in the miraculous effect of the medicine, even though it came from the entrails of animals, did not discourage kings, nobles, magnates, or wealthy merchants, who sought it out mainly for fear of poisoning. Inventive merchants made beautiful amulets from bezoar stones as early as the 16th century. They were in the form of various pendants, rings, jewellery, which were to protect the owner from diseases, evil forces, and misfortune.



Figures 5-6: Bezoar amulet against all diseases; the one who carried it was protected against cuts, stab wounds, gunshot wounds, and evil spirits



Figure 7.: A round bezoar stone or egg set on a gold or silver tripod was a popular talisman

Illustrations were used from the following Internet websites:

<https://cs.wikipedia.org/wiki/Bezoár>

<http://www.sciencemuseum.org.uk/hommedia.ashx?id=9410&size=Large>

<https://www.hp-lexicon.org/thing/bezoar/>

<http://mediklend.ru/kamen-bezoar/>

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