

WAS LOKMAN HEKİM ALCMAEON?

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I.Ü. Kütüphane ve Dok. D. Bşk.

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Introduction

This paper looks at the relationship between *Lokman Hekim*, a well-known figure in Islamic culture and folkloric medicine, and Alcmaeon of Croton, an ancient philosopher and physician. Lokman Hekim is also mentioned in the *Qoran*, but not as a physician. Islamic tradition referred to him as a physician, and Alcmaeon as a philosopher and a physician.

Phonetically the consonants L, K, M, N exist in the word Alcmaeon as well as Lokman. Alcmaeon was from Croton and belonged to the School of Pythagoras together with Hippase and Socrates. Amiri asserted that Lokman was one of the first philosopher-physicians who taught Empedocles.

As a Pythagorean philosopher-physician, Alcmaeon depicted health as harmony among the bodily humors, in a style similar to Lokman Hekim, who recommends a modest way of life and disapproves of self-pride and arrogance. The paper will deal with the common characteristics of these two figures of ancient cultural and philosophical heritage based on written and traditional sources.

Lokman and Alcmaeon as Physician-Philosophers

Physician Lokman is a legendary figure regarded as the father of medicine for Islamic tradition as well as in pre-Islamic cultures. He was believed to have miraculous powers to cure patients, to heal diseased people, and to formulate panaceas utilizing natural substances; he was also regarded as a figure leading mankind to sagacity, and teaching them medicine¹. He was compared with Galen with respect to his healing powers, and also with Aisopos for his poetical faculties². In Anatolian and Middle Eastern tradition, *Physician Lokman* is a philosopher-physician who attained spiritual secrets of life and immortality (although he lost the prescription for this).

Based on pre-Islamic and Islamic sources as well as classical theories of philosophy, what makes us think that Lokman Hekim might be the same figure as Alcmaeon, one of the mystical philosophers of ancient Greece, is the fact that they both share the same philosophical point of view, and the same stance towards life, and belong to neighbouring cultures. Alcmaeon from Croton belonged to the Pythagorean school of philosophy and he was also known as a physician philosopher who adopted the basic principles of Pythagore and Hippase³.

According to Amiri (a 10th century Middle Eastern scholar), one the philosophical sources shaping Pythagorean philosophy lies in the thought of the disciples of the Prophet Solomon. Against the claim that philosophical sciences are of foreign origin, Amiri puts forward that the first person deserving to be called a philosopher in the *Qoran* is Lokman the Physician, who taught philosophical sciences (*hikmet*) to Empedocles. He adds that Socrates, the greatest teacher of

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philosophy other than Plato and Aristotle, had been a pupil of Pythagoras, who had been enlightened by the disciples of the Prophet Solomon. In the view of Amiri those who acquired the characteristics requisite to a philosopher-physician were Lokman, Empedocles, Pythagoras, Socrates and Plato⁴.

As a Pythagorean physician, Alcmaeon defined the concept of harmony as evolving from the bodily humours, like all other followers of Empedocles. He originated the influential quasi-political theory of medicine, one version of which developed in pathology which, through Galen, dominated medieval and early modern medicine. In Alcmaeon's version, four powers (hot, cold, dry, wet) are naturally in balance because their strengths are everywhere in correct proportion in the healthy body. A disturbance of the balance in any way means a damaging preponderance of one or more powers which causes conflict. That is, disease; the variety of diseases and their different natures, are to be explained by the variety of ways and places in which the right proportion may be disturbed⁵. This is the crux of the similarity between Lokman and Alcmaeon.

In the view of Islamic texts, Physician Lokman advises his son never to be boastful, never to lead a vain life, never to be fond of self-praise. Likewise, the mottos of the Pythagorean school of medicine are reflected in the aforementioned words of Lokman Hekim. They both counsel shunning insubstantial and vain reputation, and self-indulgence⁶, and share the same esoteric way of life. As the only physician from the first generation of the Pythagorean school, Alcmaeon was also known as a philosopher who pondered the basic principles of medicine and influenced Christian thought all through the Middle Ages. Taking into consideration the consonants in both of their names, one might easily find phonetic resemblance between the letters L, K(C), M, A, N, both in *Lokman* and *Alcmaeon*.

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Conclusion

In conclusion, the 10th century scholar Amiri treats Physician Lokman and Pythagore together in the same context, which is surely not by mere coincidence but a deliberate choice based on the reason that they both lived in the same age and city. The fact that Pythagoras learned from the Prophet Solomon's followers gives evidence of the impact of Egyptian and Middle Eastern philosophical thought on classical Greek philosophy, which was reflected in Amiri's writings and era. There is no reference to Physician Lokman in the New Testament. Therefore while reciting Lokman among the Greek philosophers, the Islamic authors were based on neither the *Old Testament* nor the *New Testament*. Alcmaeon was never forgotten throughout the time of the Roman Empire, while Lokman was remembered in legends, folkloric tales and hearsay.

We are inclined to think that Alcmaeon might have been a figure that affected the intellectual characteristics ascribed to *Lokman Hekim*, based on his philosophical ideas and healing powers. The common features of those two figures may serve as an example of the components of collective subconscious of interacting cultures, namely Ancient Greek philosophy and Middle Eastern pre-Islamic and Islamic thoughts and beliefs.

Notes

- 1- "Lokman Hekim", *Meydan Larousse*, vol. 8, Istanbul 1972, p: 41;
- 2- Ibid, p: 41; "Lokman", *Anabritannica*, vol. 14, Istanbul 1989, p: 562.
- 3- Pierre Riffard, *L'Esoterisme*, edition Pierre Lafont, Paris 1990, p: 152.
- 4- Kasım Turhan, *Amiri ve Felsefesi*, published by Marmara Univ. İlahiyat Fak., No: 52, Istanbul 1992, p: 241.
- 5- J. Mansfeld, "Alcmaeon: Physikos or Physician?", *Kephalaion Studies in Greek Philosophy a Continuation offered to Prof.C.D. Vogel* (Assen 1975), The Oxford Companion to Philosophy, Oxford Univ. Press. 1995.
- 6- Bernard Heller, "Lokman", *İslam Ansiklopedisi*, published by the Ministry of Education (date has not been stated).

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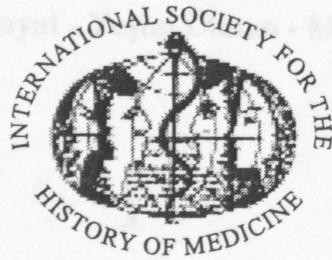
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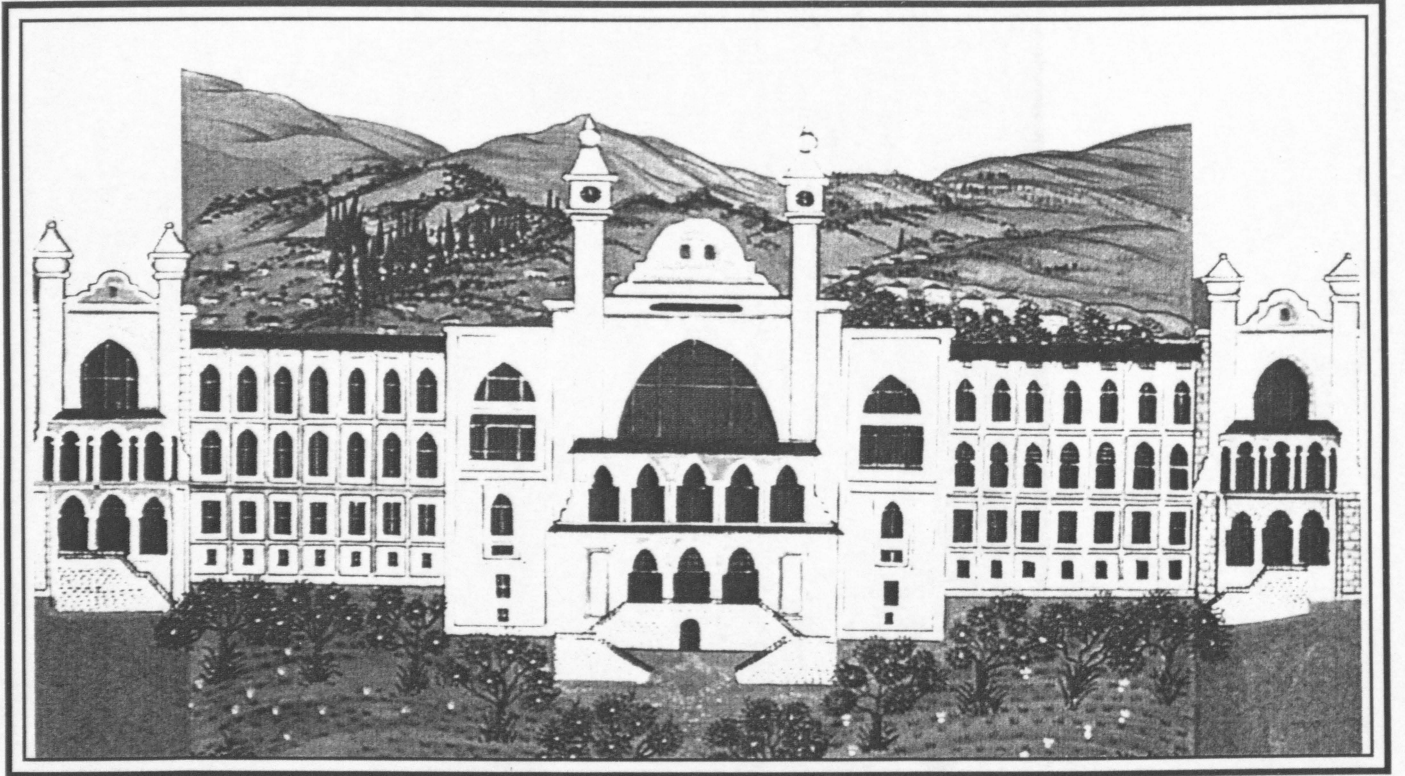
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