

Health sciences emblems and their origins*

Sağlık bilimleri amblemleri ve kökenleri

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Dear Editor;

Our article "From Dar Al-Shifas to Present Health Institutions Symbol Snake (Darüşşifalardan Günümüz Sağlık Kurumlarına Yılan Sembolü)" was accepted and published in the 9th volume 1st issue of your respectable journal in 2019. After the literature search, writing and printing stages of this article, we acquired some new information and visuals that support the objectives of the research and contribute to the subject and literature and would like to present these to the readers.

Told in legends, epics, tales and mythologies and presented in visual and written form in sculptures, figures, coins, reliefs, frescos, paintings and texts, the snake figure has attracted and interested humans for centuries.^{1,2} The snake has been related to health, medicine and eternal life in many civilizations since the ancient times. The snake figure was chosen as the symbol of many professions, institutions, and establishments in the fields of health and medicine.³⁻⁶ Today, the snake is included in the emblem of mainly medicine and its subdisciplines (such as forensic medicine, nuclear medicine, pharmacology, toxicology, medical history) and many occupations, branches, institutions and organizations in health field such as nursing, dentistry, pharmacy, veterinary, health sciences, health ministry, medical associations, specialty associations and hospitals in our country.

Cleanness, precaution, protectiveness, curativeness, health, cure, welfare, medical profession, happiness, well-being, rejuvenation, longevity, immortality, good fortune, luck, physical power, and strength can be named among positive health-related characteristics attributed to the snake in many different civilizations in history.⁷⁻¹¹ These adjectives attributed to the snake and especially its regeneration and rejuvenation through skin shedding caused its identification with medicine, health, youth, longevity, and immortality.^{7,12}

The snake and the dragon, which is its exaggeratedly enlarged and more scarifying totally imaginary and legendary form, have frequently been featured in Turkish mythology, stories, and works (**Figure 1**).^{10,13} Snake and dragon were also present in the "Calendar with 12 Animals" used by Ancient Turks.^{5,14} Orkhon Monuments have a double snake (dragon) motif wrapped around each other.⁷ The motive of two intertwining snakes or dragons was accepted as the symbol of happiness, recovery, welfare and good

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fortune in Central Asian Turks.^{1,9,15,16} We come across this symbol in health institutions, temples, emperor emblems, and daily life (**Figure 2**). It is known that there were double snake or dragon motives on the doors and the walls of Dar Al-Shifas, which were the hospitals of the Anatolian Seljuk Empire period.^{17,18} The word "mar" means snake in Persian, and the dar-al-shifas with the snake motives on their walls were called "Maristan", building with snake, hospital).¹⁷⁻¹⁹



Figure 1a. Coin with Dragon: Sultan Nasireddin Artuk Arslan, Artuklu Turkish Principality, Mardin, copper coin dating back to 1202-1203 AD. Front face: Image of a dragon on the tail of a lion man. **Figure 1b.** Coin with Snake: Mehmed the Conqueror (Mehmed II) Ottoman Empire, Ayasuluk (Ephesus), copper coin dating back to 1448 AD. Front face: Snake figure.



Figure 2a. Terracota medicine container with health knot, Urfa Harran Ruin, Seljukian Period (XIIth century AD.) **Figure 2b.** Bronze health bowl with health knot motive, Seljukian Period (XIIth century AD).

The snake figures used in the emblems of some Turkish health occupations, institutions and doctors today are not the figures of snakes wrapped around the rods of mythological gods used by Western societies (figure of a snake wrapped around the rod, which was the symbol of the god of health Asclepius and the figures of double snakes wrapped around the rod called Caduceus, which was the symbol of the messenger god Hermes), they mostly date back to the Anatolian Seljuks (**Figure 3**). The snake figures here were originated from Seljukian snake figures especially happiness or well-being chain figures formed by two snakes or dragons wrapped together called the healing knot by the Turks.¹⁵

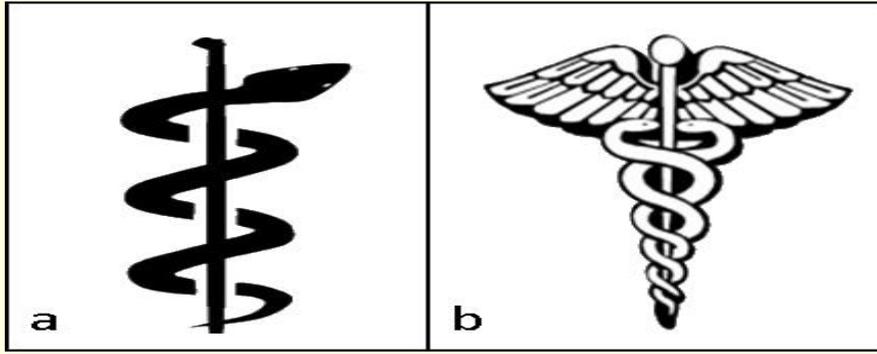


Figure 3a. Asclepius' symbol; snake wrapped around a rod. **Figure 3b.** Hermes' symbol; double snakes wrapped around his rod called Caduceus.

Snake symbols were examined on the inscriptions, doors and walls of main Anatolian Seljuk Dar Al-Shifas including Eminüddin Darl Al-Shifa (Mardin 1122 AD), Konya Dar Al-Shifa (XII-XIIIth century AD), Gevher Nesibe Dar Al-Shifa (Çifte Medrese, Kayseri 1206 AD), I. İzzeddin Keykavus Dar Al-Shifa (Sivas 1217 AD), Turan Melik Dar Al-Shifa (Divriği- Sivas 1228 AD), Cemalettin Ferruh Dar Al-Shifa (Çankırı 1235 AD), Pervaneoğlu Ali Dar Al-Shifa (Kastamonu 1272 AD) and Muineddin Pervane Dar Al-Shifa (Tokat XIIIth century). Today, the snake figures used by health care professions and institutions in their own emblems were compared with the snake figures of dar al-shifas in terms of similarity and origin.

The emblem of the Istanbul Faculty of Medicine (Çapa) in Istanbul University, which is the oldest medical faculty in our country, includes two intertwining snakes and was drawn by the ordinary Prof. Dr Ahmet Süheyl Ünver, inspired by the double intertwining snakes-dragons located on the entrance wall of the Dar Al-Shifa built in Çankırı in 1235 by Lala Cemaeddin Ferruh, who was the vizier of Sultan Alaaddin Keykubad I (**Figure 4**).^{15,20} Most medical faculties that were opened later created similar emblems using this drawing (**Figure 5**).

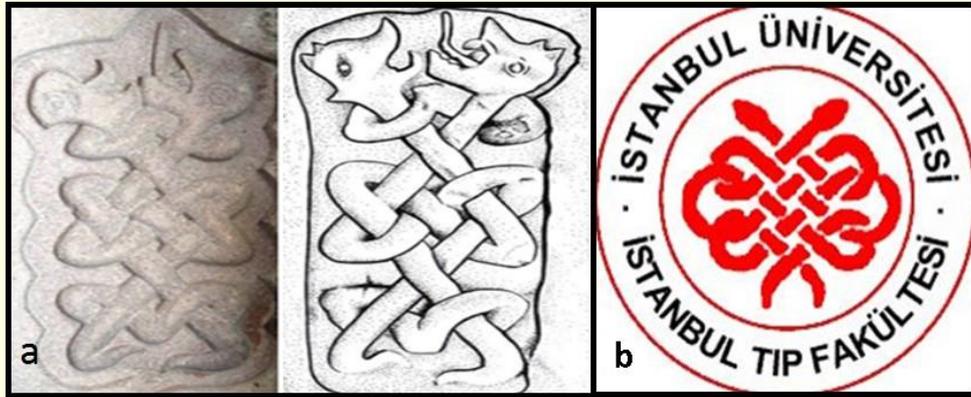


Figure 4a. Çankırı Atabey Cemalettin Ferruh Dar Al-Shifas 1235 AD. Original Rrelief and schematized image of the motive of two intertwining snakes located at the entrance of Stone Masjid. **Figure 4b.** Emblem of İstanbul University Faculty of Medicine which is the first medical faculty of our country.

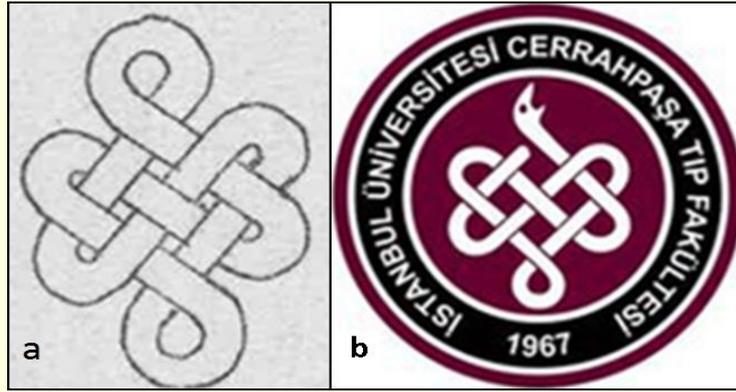


Figure 5a. Schematized image of Seljukian period health knot. **Figure 5b.** Emblem of İstanbul University Cerrahpaşa Faculty of Medicine.

The emblem of the Faculty of Medicine in Ankara University, which is another important Medical Faculty in our country, was again inspired by another snake motive of the Anatolian Seljukian period. In their own emblem, they used the two opposite snakes present in the stone reliefs with snake-dragon motives exhibited in Konya İnce Minareli Medrese museum. Each of these snake figures had one knot on their bodies and one curve on their lower parts, and the medical faculty emblem had similar knots and curves (**Figure 6**). In the note present in the book "Süheyl Ünver'in Konya Defterleri", it was stated that the Faculty of Medicine in Ankara University had an emblem drawn by Süheyl Ünver, inspired by the fresco reliefs that were found in Konya Karatay and had motives similar to the snakes on stone reliefs.^{8,21}

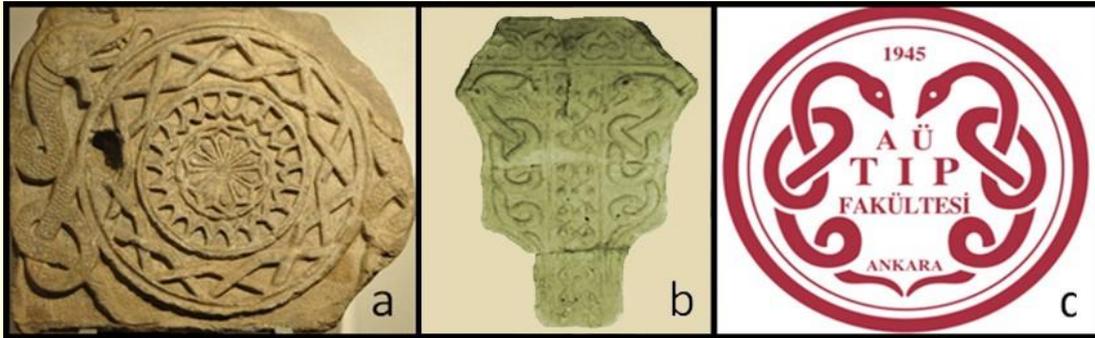


Figure 6a. Universe iconography of two snakes facing each other from Konya Dar Al-Shifa which is exhibited in Konya İnce Minareli Medrese Museum (XII-XIIIth century AD). Snake motive on the right side of the iconography with impaired integrity **Figure 6b.** Stone relief of two snakes facing each other from Anatolian Seljukian period (probably from Konya Dar Al-Shifa) exhibited in Konya İnce Minareli Medrese Museum (XII-XIIIth century AD) **Figure 6c.** Emblem of Ankara University Faculty of Medicine.

It was also noticed that the Medical Faculty in Erciyes University had an emblem that was almost the same with the relief of two snake motives facing each other on Kayseri Gevher Nesibe Dar Al-Shifa (Çifte Medrese), which was another important hospital of the Anatolian Seljukian period (**Figure 7**). This shows us that the Medical Faculty in Erciyes University took its emblem from Kayseri Gevher Nesibe Dal Al-Shifa.²²

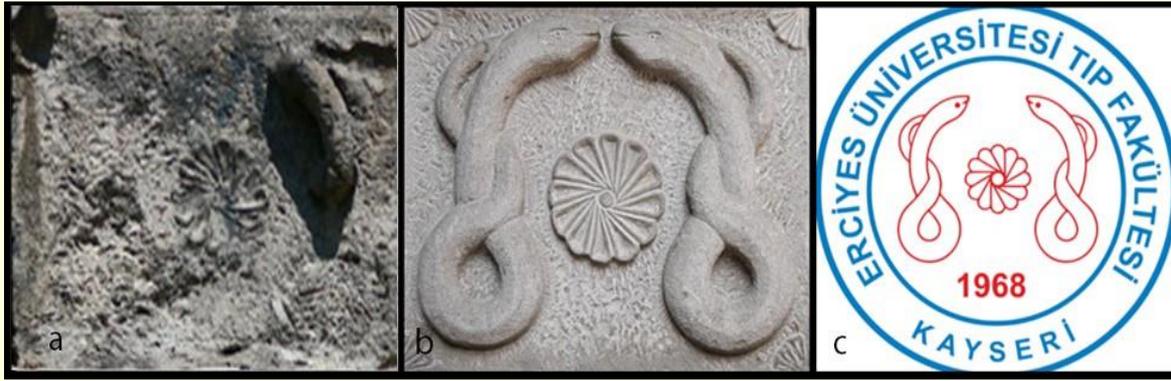


Figure 7a. Worn original relief with a motive of two snakes facing each other located at the crown gate entrance, Kayseri Gevher Nesibe Dar Al-Shifa and Madrasah (Çifte Medrese, 1206 AD) **Figure 7b.** A stone relief of two snake motives reconstructed based on its original form. **Figure 7c.** Emblem of Erciyes University Faculty of Medicine.

It was observed that emblems of Faculties of Dentistry and many Dentistry institutions generally contain two intertwining snake figures as in Faculties of Medicine (**Figure 8**). This shows us that they were formed in a very similar way, being inspired by the emblems of faculties of medicine.



Figure 8. Emblem of Ege University Faculty of Dentistry.

The emblems used by faculties and institutions of pharmacy were almost the same as the snake figure intertwining the fountain, resembling a goblet made of stone and emptying its poison in the goblet, which was located in Çankırı Cemaleddin Ferruh Dar Al-Shifa, and is exhibited in Çankırı Museum today (**Figure 9**).²⁰



Figure 9a. Snake figure intertwining a stone goblet and emptying its poison in the goblet which was found in Çankırı Cemaleddin Ferruh Dar Al-Shifa (1235 AD) and is exhibited in Çankırı Museum. **Figure 9b.** Emblem of Ankara University Faculty of Pharmacy.

In their journey starting from Central Asia and reaching Anatolia, Turks brought along the snake figure representing health and happiness. Meanings of health, cure, and welfare attributed to snakes since the

Ancient times were attributed to the snake by Anatolian Seljukian Turks, and the snake figure was accepted in the Turkish culture and beliefs and was similarly made the symbol of health and medicine.

The snake was the constant element of most emblems used by health professions and institutions in our country. It was again observed that the emblems of main health disciplines such as pharmacy and dentistry, especially the most well-established medical faculties of our country, dated back to Anatolian Seljukian Dar Al-Shifas. Apart from these, different snake figures intertwining a tree, branch, stick, wand, pencil, torch, itself or one another were present in the symbols of other professions and institutions in the field of health.

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