

The first cases of cancer in antiquity

A. Karamanou, A. Diamadis, G. Androutsos

Department of History of Medicine, Faculty of Medicine, University of Athens, Greece

Summary

In this manuscript the existence of cancer-resembling lesions of benign tumors perceived as malignant lesions, and of cancer itself is not simply approached and analyzed as an individual problem of the affected person or animal, but as a general, not very well understood, medical problem. The aim of this essay is to evaluate the existence, the estimated prevalence and the perception of cancer in ancient times,

starting from the prehistoric times and stretching out up to ancient times. The main goal of this article is to remind us all that cancer, a disease very often considered as being an “epidemic” disease of modern times, actually affected human kind almost since its origin.

Key words: Ancient Egypt, Ancient Greece, cancer, Far East and South America, humoral theory, prehistoric times

Introduction

It is practically certain that mankind has been, since its origin, subjected to disturbances of the biological control of cell growth, which were clinically manifested as malignant tumors, leukaemia and other related conditions. However, the frequency of these ailments has not been necessarily the same in different eras and throughout the range of diversified geographic and socio-cultural environments. The term *cancer* is used to describe one of the most lethal diseases of modern times: in developed countries nowadays cancer is reckoned to be the cause of death for 2 out of 10 persons. The growth of such neoplasms often leaves traces on skeletons, either when a tumor derives from the bone tissue itself, or when bones are undermined by the expansion and spread of malignant soft tissue tumors.

Though it is true that the occurrence of cancer can be observed on human bones at any and every age, the fact remains that its presence is exceptional in specimens prior to the Renaissance. For the epochs stretching from the prehistoric times up to the 16th century, cancer's frequency of appearance is difficult to be quantified, but certainly is a lot less than 1 case out of every 1.000 specimens.

Since the late 19th century, cancer is perceived as a disease of modern times. Its origin seems to be vague regarding the sources of life. In any case, evidence of cancer's existence dates back to prehistory. Since an-

cient times, cancer is mentioned in multiple documents by taking the form of a terrifying disease. On top of this fact, the confusion between benign and malignant tumors raised anxiety and maintained a contradictory illusion of curability.

In most cases, cancer is presented as a monster, which never abandons its prey before leading it to the grave. In the humorous perception of evil, both the absence of a realistic view of life and the perception of a possible expulsion of the morbid “humors”, established cancer as a synonym to death warrant. Therefore, it can not be considered in any case as a coincidence the fact that the ancients chose to hold the “black bile”, which is the most dangerous of all “spirits”, responsible for the emergence of the most terrible diseases.

The prehistoric times

The vision that we have concerning cancer in prehistoric times is partial, given the fact that written documents do not exist. The only evidence comes from the examination of skeletal parts. We can, therefore, estimate the frequency of tumors only through the evaluation of their prevalence on these bones.

Although the existence of tumors in prehistoric times is indisputable, unfortunately only the “scars” of bone cancers are available to be evaluated today. A dinosaur skeleton discovered in Wyoming (USA) and some

exhibits of the pithecanthropus of Java simply provide nowadays evidence of the occurrence of osteosarcomas. A malignant tumour, cited in the upper end of the humerus of a warrior, who lived in the Neolithic period and whose skeleton was found at Münsingen (Switzerland) also proved to be an osteosarcoma. The study of the human bones that were excavated at Münsingen (Switzerland) led to the exact same conclusions [1].

Did cancer in fact affect the dinosaurs, as some scientists have too quickly asserted, or did it not? In fact Moodie discovered in the USA, and more precisely in Wyoming, a fragment of the tail of a dinosaur. This fragment is actually displayed as an exhibit at the Wellcome Museum of London; in this very same exhibit, a caudal vertebra, obviously hypertrophied compared to the adjacent vertebrae, can easily be identified. When the above mentioned lesion was forensically examined, its characteristics favored the diagnosis of a vascular tumor and most likely of a haemangioma. Yet historians of medicine still disagree on this matter: Walker considers this lesion as a malignant tumor, whereas Calvin Wells perceives it as being a simple exostose, corresponding to a fracture bulge [2].

It is intriguing to discuss about cancer in the era of the Pithecanthropus. A resembling to cancer lesion, which presented itself as a burgeoning exostose, was actually identified on the femur of a Pithecanthropus specimen. Walker interpreted the above mentioned lesion as a femoral osteosarcoma; Calvin Wells, on the other hand, interpreted it as an outgrowing exostose, similar to his previous interpretation of the dinosaur lesion [3].

Nevertheless, bone cancer existed indeed in the prehistoric times. The retrieved tumor found on the femur of a warrior, who was estimated to have lived during the Iron Age, at Münsingen, Switzerland, is believed to represent, beyond any doubt, an osteosarcoma (Figure 1). This very exhibit actually meets the same diagnostic rules that were applied to the diagnosis of the tumor discovered in the cave of the “dragon”, in Mixnitz, Austria [2].

Cranial tumors, in comparison to femoral tumors, cause a comparable difficulty regarding retrospective diagnoses. Coming face to face with radiographic “gaps”, one can easily hesitate between deciding for or against the diagnosis of either multiple myeloma or bone metastases of some kind of epithelial cancer. Indeed, a case of a Paleolithic skull with 7 holes, found in the Pyrenees, can justify the existence of the prementioned diagnostic dilemma. Brothwell, a specialist who studied this skull specimen, accentually supports the diagnosis of multiple myeloma rather than of epithelial tumor metastases. In fact, other punctured skulls, found in medieval burial sites, were similarly evaluated [1].

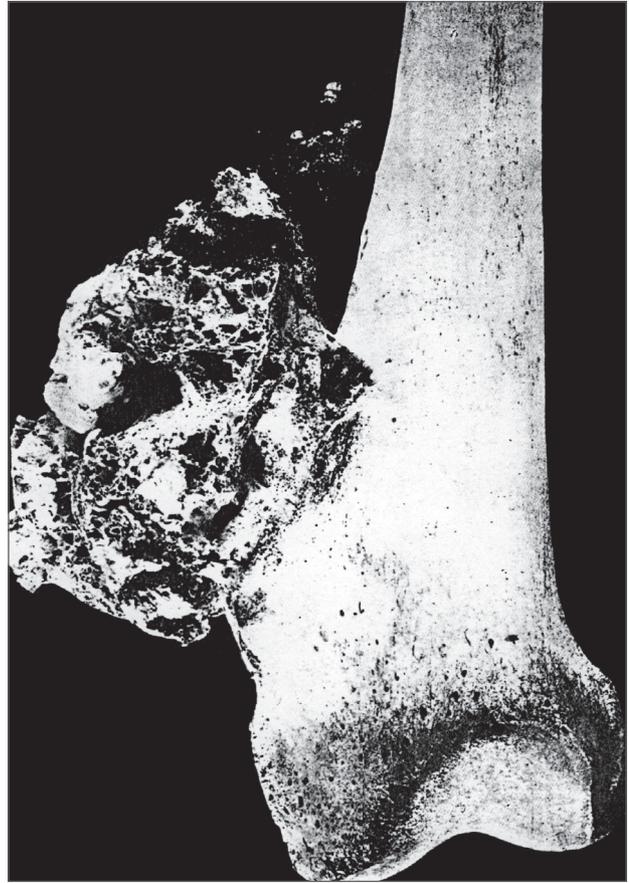


Figure 1. Bulky osteochondroma on a femoral bone.

Ancient Egypt

The data provided by the Ancient Egypt, in relation to cancer, is numerous. They derive, on one hand from the Egyptian papyruses and on the other hand from the Egyptian mummies [4].

The Edwin Smith's papyrus does not include any precise allusions related to cancer, even though it is considered to include numerous surgical reports. The botryoid tumor, which was discovered by Ruffer, seems to be an osteosarcoma, as suggested by its abundant vasculature [5]. The exostosis-like tumors of the femur and the humerus, found by Smith and Dawson in a cemetery of Ghiza, are very likely to be bulky osteosarcomas. Furthermore, the diagnosis of osteosarcoma can be accepted regarding a tumor of the facial skull bones, which was discovered on a skull retrieved also in Ghiza [6]. Leca discussed the possibility of a chondroma, after having discovered a huge tumor, which had infiltrated the basis of a skull and had invaded the ethmoid, sphenoid and vomer bones, as well as the orbits [7]. Ruffer discovered in the catacombs of Alexandria a large cauliflower tumor, whose vast vasculature was in accordance with the diagnosis of an osteosarcoma [5].

Salama and Hilmi, based on the same way of thinking, declared that a similar tumor, which was found in an adult skull in Ghiza, was actually an osteosarcoma, given the fact that the tumor occupied the orbit and had destroyed the entire left upper part of the temporal bone and a part of the maxilla [8].

In this sense, the term “tumor”, which was used for the first time in Galen’s manuscripts, during the 2nd century AD, appears to have been selected in lack of a better choice. Leyden’s papyrus contains some prayers to Uthu, who was considered to be the demon of inflammations and of tumors [4]. Yet in this document as well, there is no evidence available to indicate that the text was actually referring to cancer.

The papyrus of Ebers distinguishes “pus collections”, which are to be incised, both from the “tumors of blood vessels”, which are hard like stone and the “tumors of flesh or *aat*”, which must be cauterized. In the chapter *Study of tumors of various parts of the body*, the author dealt with various detailed information related to a dozen cases of tumors. Given the fact of the precise correspondence between meaning and ideograms (symptomatology) that characterized the Egyptians, one can read the following amazing description of lipomas:

“Study on the fat tumor. Whenever and in whichever part of an individual’s body you might discover a tumor of grease that caves in and consequently gets its original shape under the pressure of your fingers while the mass continues to tremble even when your hand is still, then you can be sure of the following: It is a tumor of fat. I am capable of dealing with that disease” [9].

At this point, it must be mentioned that the Egyptian medical knowledge and understanding was superior to the “rival” contemporary clinical approaches and this is a statement that can be mainly supported by the fact that lipomas were incorrectly regarded as malignant tumors up until the 18th century.

In the papyrus of Ebers, the inguinal hernia is described and diagnosed as following:

“Study on a tumor deriving from the skin tissue at the lowest point of the abdomen. When you find a tumor deriving from the skin tissue and cited at the lowest part of the abdomen, above the genitals, put your finger on it, explore the abdomen and palpate it with your fingers. Try to reduce the tumor. This action can indeed cause nausea. You will be then allowed to state the following: It is a tumour deriving from the skin of the patient’s abdomen” [4].

Finally, the cervical abscesses are described in the papyrus of Ebers as follows:

“If you look at a person with a swelling on the neck, who is suffering from both shoulder and head

aches and has a stiff and cumbersome neck so that he can not look at his abdomen while the neck appears to be paralyzed, then you can conclude: He has a tumor in the neck. If one forwards the above mentioned diagnosis to a surgeon, the latter can be advised as following: Use your knife, but be cautious in order to avoid blood vessels. Use your knife and then cauterize the tumor [9].

The above mentioned precaution is advised in order to prevent a potential bleeding. Therefore, there is an apparent and indisputable resemblance between the final chapter of the Ebers’ papyrus and Edwin Smith’s manuscripts as both texts present many similarities [6].

In the Kahun’s papyrus one can, beyond doubt, identify the first known description of the cancer of the uterus including both its particular ache pattern and its characteristic odour of burnt flesh, as well as the description of the ulcerated cancer of the vulva [9].

Finally, several Egyptian mummies present undeniable signs of the existence of bone tumors. Nonetheless, the description and characterization of cancer as a morbid and lethal disease did not actually emerge until the era of Pericles in Greece.

The Far East and South America

The Chinese civilization did not provide us, at least during the ancient times, with any evidence of study on cancer. We only know that the Chinese were the first ones to use mercury to treat abscesses and tumors.

The Indian civilization and medicine principles are neither widely understood, nor known. However, we know, based on some collections such as the *Ramayana* and the *Rig-Veda*, which Indian doctors already discussed about tumors at approximately 2,000 years B.C. It is true that they advocated the destruction of any corrosive lesions, based on the application of arsenic-comprised pharmaceutical concoctions, regardless of the fact that the use of these concoctions was, indeed, very often more dangerous than the cancer itself.

The Mohican civilization in Peru provided us actually with much more interesting documents, through and thanks to the retrieved Peruvian mummies, which are commonly dating back to the 5th century B.C. Actually, a forensic finding, discovered in 1923 on the skull of a man of an estimated 60 years of age, showed a fronto-parietal botryoid tumor with a huge outgrowth, which was ever since named after the mummy’s country of origin and therefore cited as the “tumor of Paucarcancha” (Figures 2 and 3) [10]. According to McCurdy, it is considered to be an osteosarcoma [11]. On the contrary, Moodie, who was based on the authority of M. Cushing, believed that it should be an exuberant hyperostosis



Figure 2. “Paucarcancha” tumor. Anterior view.

caused by a meningioma, another exhibit of which was identified on a Peruvian skull found in Chavina [12]. Furthermore, several skull exhibits of pre-Columbians have also been discovered and possess indication of multiple myeloma infiltration [10]. In the Mohican country some cancer drawings and enactments existed as well, such as a statuette that evidently figures an osteosarcoma of the zygomatic bone. An Inca skull bears the traces of a tumor that was probably a meningioma [11].

Ancient Greece

The words *karkinos*, *chancre*, *cancre*, *écrevisse*, *cancer* date back to the priests of Asclepios (*Asclepiads*) and are mentioned for the first time somewhere in the era of the 7th century B.C. These terms were used to designate a disease that had two specific characteristics: the presence of a lump mass, which could be ulcerated or not on its surface, and the absence of any tendency to spontaneous healing.

These masses were given the Greek name *KAPKINOS* (*karkinos*), which means *crab* or *crayfish*. Much has been discussed regarding the essence of this comparison between the formation of an inflammatory

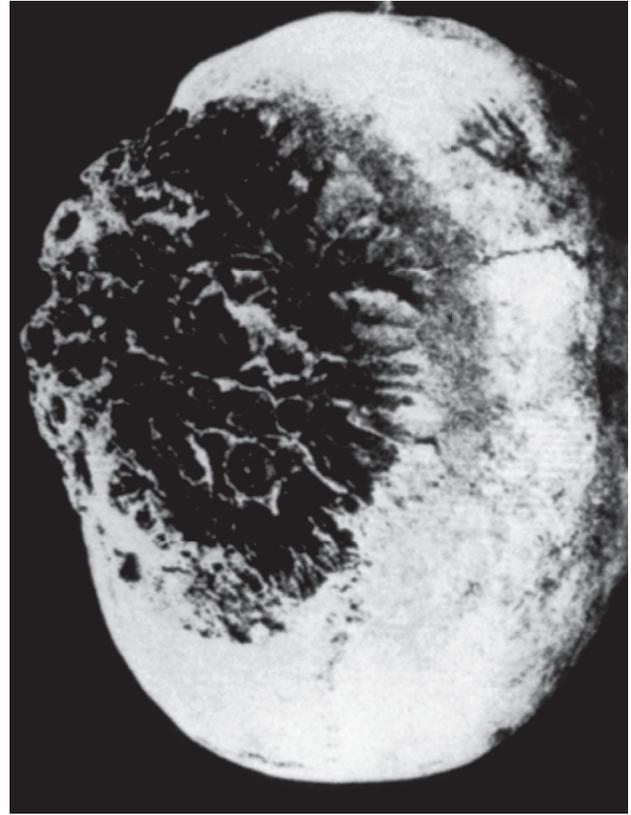


Figure 3. “Paucarcancha” tumor. Posterior view. It is difficult to argue whether this frontal-parental lesion, observed in a skull found in a Peruvian cemetery, is actually an osteosarcoma or a hyperostosis derived from the close contact to a meningioma, as Cushing believed.

tumor and crab. We must, nonetheless, always keep in mind the fact that the very same Greek word also meant a *cancer* or an *ulcer* [3].

It is in Herodotus’ manuscripts that the first reference to the torment of cancer is found:

“Some time later, Atossa, the daughter of Cyrus and wife to Darius, was suffering by a mammary tumor, which became ulcerated and was spreading more and more. As long as the wound was minimal, Atossa was hiding it by modesty and would not say anything to anyone regarding this matter, yet when she eventually realized that she was in danger, she brought Democedes and showed it to him. The latter promised Atossa that he would heal her wound, but made her swear to provide him with anything that he would later demand in return for his services” [13].

Indeed, in the 6th century B.C., Democedes from Croton, who had become a Persian prisoner after the defeat of Polycrates, in the service of whom Democedes was practising medicine, was called by King Darius and his wife Atossa, who was suffering from an ulcerated breast tumor. His dexterity was such that

the eradication of Atossa's breast tumor was finally successful. Also Darius would later gratify him with a considerable annuity. However, as shown by Ménétrier and Houdry, Atossa's "tumor" must not have been a cancer as it is more likely to have been a breast abscess or mastitis [14].

Later on, Hippocrates and his students used impressive details for the description and the actual evolution of everything that was considered a tumor. The original data can be found in the *Aphorisms* [15] and in the *Ancient medicine* [16].

The word *tumor* (greek *oncos*), invented by Galen in the 2nd century A.D., did not exist at that time, yet there is no doubt that Hippocrates and his students already knew about the severity of this disease, especially when it occurred in the breast or whenever it managed to provoke major dysfunctions of the body, due to its spreading [17].

The term *cancer* seems to have been the original nomenclature utilized for a variety of suspicious masses.

Several clinical descriptions of various diseases are listed in the Hippocratic corpus. In the second book, *About the diseases of women*, Hippocrates and his students describe a form of a generalized cancer:

"In the mammary glands hard tumors can be formed, some larger, others smaller: these tumors do not become suppressed, on the contrary they incessantly become harder; furthermore, there are also some hidden forms of cancer. At the point when cancer is formed, the mouth at first becomes bitter and whatever the women eat has a taste of bitterness; if they are given more food, they refuse to take it, and do disgusting things. Their intelligence and perception are disturbed, their eyes become dry and their eyesight is restrained. The pain spreads from the mammary gland to the jugular and under the shoulder blades. There is thirst. The nipple is dried, and the whole body is thin. The nostrils are not held straight, breathing is restricted while the smell is restrained. When the evil arrives at this point and it can no longer be cured, it causes the death of the patient" [18].

Although there is no sufficient evidence to indicate this fact, there is no doubt that the above-mentioned passage regards breast cancer.

"When the uterus is diverted or blocked, according to Hippocrates, the menstruations become abnormal and the illness begins with the complete abolition of the menstrual cycle; menstrual blood is then returned to the udder. Then, at the level of the breasts, hard tumors appear, which do not become suppressed but instead form occult cancers! At the same time, the lower abdomen rises to such an extent that women that are virgins imagine themselves to have become pregnant.

But after 8 to 9 months, the belly and the breasts sag. Then the cancer emerges" [19].

Based on the authority of Hippocrates, this theory would prevail in medicine for nearly 20 centuries to follow.

In the *Book of epidemics*, one can find the description of a case of a woman from Abdere, who is affected by a breast carcinoma.

"This woman, whose nipples sprung a bloody "humor", finally died when the flow stopped" [20].

It is important to mention that, according to Hippocrates's way of thinking:

"The onset of cancer is related to the termination of a bloody evacuation, or of the haemorrhoid or menstrual flow, which eventually leads to the corruption of "humors". The phenomenon is symptomatic in breast cancers, which develop and form when the menstrual flow is obstructed by a deviation or a blockage of the uterus. The blood is then forwarded to the breasts, where it exerts a compression while this process is actually the origin of the disease" [21].

This is the first observation on the hormonal dependence of the breast and the uterus.

Modern medicine confirms the diagnosis of *KAPKINΩMA* (*karkinoma*) proposed by the ancient Greek physician [22]. The case in question was probably an epithelioma. Breast cancer, with typical lymphatic spread and cachexia, is well described in another text from the Hippocratic corpus [23]. Indeed, it looks as though then, just as now, it was a relatively common disease in women of a certain age.

On several occasions, the Hippocratic collection also mentions the existence of cancers of the inner organs. According to the authors of this collection:

"The disease begins to take possession of these viscera, when they become hard and hot and then these viscera protrude outside the genitals and the groins, which latter on harden. Finally, when ulcers form, following childbirth, it is to be feared that they do not announce cancer and begin treatment on the spot" [24].

But in most cases, since it is the borderline of the lesion that actually hardens, this passage is probably simply referring to some kind of benign tumor or to a hard lesion, whose progression can still be delayed or even halted.

Hippocrates, who was an incomparable and very skilled observer, described the first cases of the cancer of the face and of the throat, the nasal polyps, which are a "kind of cancer" that must be cauterized, as well as the stomach cancer. Furthermore, by stating that stomach cancer's hallmark is *MEAAINA* (*melaena*), he became the first one ever to accurately and authentically describe the disease.

And this is not everything. Hippocrates, by being

a talented nosologist, described the distinction between two types of diseases: *KAPKINOS* (*karkinos*) on one hand, which is an ulcerated, *de novo* formed tumor, and encloses, apart from the indisputable forms of cancer, a number of various lesions (benign tumors, ulcerated leg varices); and *KAPKINΩMA* (*karkinoma*), on the other hand, which is the invasive form of tumors, expanding more or less rapidly and leading to certain death. Hippocrates opposed the swollen and ulcerated *KAPKINOS* to the *ΣΚΙΠΠΟΣ* (*skirros*), namely the indurated cancer. Furthermore, he perceived the occult form of cancer as a unique entity. And given the fact that Hippocrates was mainly concerned with prognosis, not only did he affirm the incurability of occult cancer, but also declared that the affected patients could live longer if they were not treated surgically and would die more quickly if the tumors were cauterized.

According to Hippocrates, evil has 3 degrees of clinical significance: the *karkinos*, or benign mass; the *skirros*, which designates a type of cancer still curable; and the *karkinoma*, which best fits to the notion that we have about cancer today and whose propensity to expand can only be limited by death. Hippocrates related to the last category of carcinoma the “occult” forms of cancer, in order to designate that these “occult” forms do not appear on the surface of the skin:

“In the mammary glands hard tumors are formed, some larger, others smaller; their growth is not suppressed, on the contrary they continuously become tougher; then the formation of the hidden forms of cancer cause weight loss and death” [25].

To our knowledge, no certain case of a malignant tumor has been identified to date on ancient Greek bones. Angel [26] mentions a possible case of cancer metastases in one skeleton of the Late Bronze Age. As for neighboring areas, an Etruscan example of malignant cranial metastasis has been reported by Capasso [27] during the 3rd European Congress of the Paleopathological Association at Caen in 1980. Aside from a few benign tumors, notably 2 osteomas of the femur in Karatas, the osteoarchaeological evidence for neoplastic diseases in Greek prehistory and history is extremely poor. However, one should not draw hasty conclusions from this reality. Some works of art appear to show that the Greeks knew of and portrayed both breast cancer and sarcoma of the orbit, but such diagnoses of the medical archaeology are not unimpeachable. On the other hand, literary sources offer abundant, reliable information on the existence of various malignant tumors in the classical period. However, their frequency was so limited that the absence of traces of malignant tumors in the osteoarchaeological record is not surprising [26]. Considering the total number of skeletons that have

been examined, the current negative result does not allow us to state positively, for example, that cancer was rarer in Greece than in certain geographic and cultural regions for which there are positive paleopathological finds (Prehistoric Iran and Northern Europe, Pharaonic Egypt, and Pre-Columbian America). The infrequency of appearance of malignant diseases in the ancient populations when compared with our contemporary societies is partly explicable in terms of differences in average life expectancy, chemical pollution, and the quantity and nature of some particular forms of radiation. All these circumstances are undeniably significant, but it does not appear that they adequately account for the magnitude of the change in the frequency of appearance from then to now. Whatever the solution, genetic factors seem to be less responsible than the environmental ones.

One Hippocratic author speaks of ulcers (*HELKEA*) that seem particularly dangerous. According to Paul Diogen, they sound like cancer [28]. Unfortunately, the Greek text contains no details that would make it possible to support such a diagnosis. Serious ulcerations of the genital organs are produced by tuberculosis, chancroid and neoplastic diseases.

Cancers of the penis or the vulva are not clearly described until the Imperial period (Celsus, Galen, etc.), but it is hard to believe that they have not existed since the remotest times in human history. When the Hippocratic writers speak of discharges resembling beef glaze that are so corrosive that they produce skin ulcerations, the modern physician immediately thinks of the cancer of the uterus [24]. The diagnosis is very likely, if not certain. Finally, it is difficult to know what to make out of the “disease of the genital organs” contracted by Otanes, a Persian general of the 5th century B.C. [3].

In all the known cases, the symptomatology is based on concrete observation of pulmonary tuberculosis, but it also includes clinical experience with cavities and suppurating ailments that are not tuberculosis: abscesses, fistulated empyemas, excavating cancers, and so forth. The first type of consumption which is described in *Diseases II* corresponds perfectly to the serious forms of caseous tuberculosis in the adult, but at the same time it also corresponds to the clinical appearances of a pulmonary abscess or a bronchopulmonary cancer.

However, the cure provided by the physician Democedes that proved effective without the need of mutilating the breast leads one to suppose that Atossa’s disease was a case of mastitis and not a malignant tumor. In fact Herodotus, who is always very precise in his choice of technical terms, avoids speaking of cancer in this instance and instead uses the term *phūma*, which can designate an abscess as well as a neoplasm. As for the *ikhor*, the word signifies the sero-purulent discharge from a

wound, or the “humors” of an animal flesh, etc. Recent philological research has shown that even in Homer the word *ikhor* refers to such a liquid and not to “the blood of the gods”, as is commonly thought [29].

The theory of humors

Up until the 17th century A.D., Hippocrates’s definitions served as a basis for the study of cancer, and it is the framework in which he subjected cancer that led to the manifestation of cancer as a pathological entity increasingly individualized. However, Hippocrates had not given even a minor explanation for this phenomenon. Mankind would have to wait until Galen and the appearance of his *Treatise on Tumors* in order for this morbid process to be finally analyzed in relation to its causes.

The theory of the “humors” derived from an ingenious representation of the body, health and disease. During Galen’s 2,000 years lasting career, his theories would victoriously resist both to the “chimiatic” theory of Paracelsus in the 16th century and the “vitalism” theory of Montpellier, but in the 18th century it became much more difficult for Galen’s theories to compete with the “lymphatism” theory, especially within the field of oncological doctrines, where the theory of the infiltrated lymph eventually became authoritative.

Nonetheless, the theory of the “humors” was not a novelty at the time of Hippocrates. It is found once again in the work of Anaxagoras and even in the Pythagorean philosophy. But when it came to the theories of the precursors of Hippocrates, their theory regarding “humors” included no more than a single “humor” with diverse properties.

According to Hippocrates, the body is composed of 4 cardinal “humors”: the *phlegm*, the *blood*, the *yellow bile* and the abhorrent *black bile*. Good health flourishes through the balance of moods: this is exactly what was called *KPAΣΙΣ* (*crasis, crise*).

In all cases, healing is the work of nature while the man of art should confine himself into assisting the nature in its efforts. “The healing process intervenes into the *critical* days thanks to the mixing of the “humors”. The mixing of the “humors” is translated into a rising of the temperature (fever), while the phenomenal expression of the latter is termed as *crisis*. During the days of *crises*, the *cooked* “humors” are expelled by the sweat, the sputum, the urine, the vomiting, the skin rashes or any other deposit (abscesses, local gangrene, erysipelas). When the evacuation is impossible, the morbid principle spreads throughout the whole body: this is the emigration or *metastasis*.”

Yet it seems that the phenomenon of “humor”

mixing is not produced because of the immense cruelty of the morbid “humors”. The disease is therefore chronic, incurable or even fatal. This is the origin of the malignancy of tumors, and more specifically of carcinomas or resistant to therapy tumors.

“The soft tumors are advantageous; bleedings (namely the resistant ones) are bad” [30].

It was actually the Asclepiads, who used the term *karkinos* for this dreadful disease, which is regarded as one of the greatest scourges of mankind. They designated in this way all the tumors, on the basis of invasiveness and rapid expansion, as these factors can ultimately determine the arrival of death. But why did the Greeks give these tumors the name *karkinos*, a word that means “crab”? Is it because they had compared the legs of a crab to the dilated veins, the congested lymphatics, as well as the vascular “sub-sequences” of cancer, which deviate by radiating around a tumor, a principle mass that represents the main body of an animal? Did they not think, on the contrary, that a tissue eating animal, which makes the sick suffer, could manipulate them in a misleading way?

Conclusion

When taking under consideration all the above-mentioned information, it becomes easily understood that tumors, both benign and malignant, certainly do not constitute a disease of the modern eras. The appearance of this abnormal cell growth is actually as ancient as history itself, regardless of the high frequency of cancer cases nowadays, when countless external factors intervene. The aim of this article was to highlight the fact that we are battling against a disease that was actually “torturing” and leading people to death since ancient times. Whether or not an effective cure for this “eternal” disease, with its endless subtypes and localizations, will ever be found, remains to be answered. We must all keep in mind that abnormal cell growth and the appearance of cancer cells was and remains a disease of *Homo sapiens* since his erection.

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Correspondence to: G. Androutsos, MD. 1 Ipeirou Street, 104 33 Athens, Greece. Fax: +30 210 8235710, E-mail: Lyon48@otenet.gr