

Archeology and urology: testimonies of the IV-III century b.C. on La Peyronie's disease

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SUMMARY: Archeology and urology: testimonies of the IV-III century b.C. on La Peyronie's disease.

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The discovery of two archaeological objects describing La Peyronie's disease. They come from the archaeological excavation of Pantanacci (Lanuvio, south of Rome), that has returned numerous objects of medical representation dating back to the IV-III sec. B.C.

KEY WORDS: Archeology - Urology - La Peyronie - Pantanacci.

A votive deposit, dedicated to a healthy divinity, was found near Lanuvio (south east of Rome), along the Appia street, in a locality called Pantanacci, during archaeological excavations, in 2012 (1). The stipe offerings dates back to the IV-III century b.C.

The recovery of more than two thousand clay *ex-voto*, many of which were anatomical objects, makes this deposit one of the most important findings in recent years.

These *terracottas* are produced in series: heads, male and female genitals, mouths with tongues and eyes and feet; even if few specimens seem to be personalized.

Some of these, in particular two male genitals, faithfully reproduce the pathology of *induratio penis plastica*, also known as La Peyronie's disease by the doctor Francois Gigot de la Peyronie (1678-1747) who first described this disease, in 1743 (*l'abus des plaisirs ardents*) (8).

The fibrotic plaque produces deviations in relation to its position, in some cases it also thickens in a

circle creating a rim around the penis. The two objects correspond exactly to the most frequent variations that are noticed in modern population. One of the two object shows the same curvature of the penis of about ninety degrees, the flexion being located at about half of the penile shaft.

The other objects shows the same curvature (ninety degrees), but at its base. The dimensions of the spherical objects are about 5cm of diameter for both, while the height is 9cm (Figure 1), and 8cm (Figure 2).

In general, the *induratio penis plastica* originates from microtraumas exerted on the male genital that stimulate and inflame the corpora cavernosa, triggering a production of fibrous tissue on the connective of the albuginea and which starts to become a hard plaque, which in turn exerts a skin curvature (*recurvatum penis*), and at the same time a shortening of the penile shaft.

In history, Peyronie's disease is described, already with Vesalius (1514-1564), and Nicholas Tulp (1594-1674), but there is no evidence of iconography or other representation that shows the disease.

An interesting image of the penile curve refers to the 1684 print *Miografia nova of John Browne*, is filed at the medical library of the faculty of medicine in Paris (9).

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Figure 1 - Curvature of the penis plastica induratio.

There is no presence of ancient archaeological finds in which pathologies affecting the male genitals are described, while swellings appear on the glans dating back to IV-III century BC (3); phimosis on both adult and adolescents penises were discovered in votive objects dating back to the VI-B.C. to II A.C. (2), a scrotal hydrocele IV sec. B.C. (7), a scrotal varicocele



Figure 2 - Less common variant.

(2), a bipeniens malformation (7), a penile hypertrophies (7) and least but not last an interesting surgical technique of the circumcision IV sec. B.C. (2, 6). Thus, for the first time, these IV-III century artifacts appear to give us an account of this further disease in a context of medical knowledge propagated in the areas of southern Etruria (4, 6).

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