



A REVIEW ON THE HAMMAM: A REGIMEN FROM ASCLEPIONS

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ABSTRACT

The bathing was almost universally followed practice in antiquity. It was of religious, cultural as well as therapeutic values. Before scientific medicine, Asclepiions were the healing temples, which were always built near a river or spring and worked as today's clinic and hospitals, where water was used for therapeutic purposes. Hippocrates also described the different kinds of water as well as the therapeutic property of bathing. In the Roman and Arabic periods, Hammam was too popular and it was social practice. The bathing Houses were highly sophisticated building. The physicians of medieval age also considered hammam as one of the important resins in the art of healing. They were described as the different kind of Hammam and their therapeutic importance.

KEYWORDS: Hammam, Asclepiions, Unani system of medicine

INTRODUCTION

HISTORICAL BACKGROUND

In antiquity, baths were called holy and Heraclea because the patient felt the strength and the physical uplift after the bath. Athena found beauty and youth by taking a bath in the Odyssey and Hercules regains his lost strength while he took bath in the springs of Edipsos. Bath has described in Homer's Iliad and Odyssey. In ancient Greek mythology, baths purified, healed, and offered strength. Historically bathing practice is traced in antiquity, much before the origin of organized medicine. Water was used for therapeutic purposes in Asclepieia. Asclepiions were the healing temples of Asclepius (God of medicine). Asclepiions were always built near a river or spring and worked as a health care facility like today's clinics and hospitals and the healers-priests of Asclepius served as physicians (healer). Asclepieia of Epidaurus and Kos were the most famous. In antiquity, baths were called holy and Heraclea because the patient felt the strength and the physical uplift after the bath.^{1,2}

In ancient Greek and Roman civilization, the bathing practice was much more than the body cleaning and hygiene. It was part of religious mythology and was also used for therapeutic purposes.³ Thermalism was born in the ancient Greek and experienced its golden age in the Roman period. Water vapors were used by women to be more beautiful in Egypt. The co-regent of ancient Egypt, Cleopatra used to make wraps with mud from the Dead Sea, to maintain her legendary beauty.⁴ The emperor Augustus was treated by the Greek physician Antonius Musa with cold baths to cure typhoid fever.⁵ The First Hammam of the Islamic period was built in Syria during the period of Qusair-e-Amra.⁶



Figure 1. Hammam of Qusair-e-Amra, Jordan
(https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Qusayr_%27Amra)

HAMMAM

Water is one of the four basic constituting elements of the body. Hammam is an Arabic word derived from *Hamm* means *heat producer*. The word hammam is used to denote bathroom or toilets in many dialects of vernacular Arabic. But in the Unani system of Medicine, the term Hammam is used for a hot bath and used for therapeutic purposes or preventive measures. Hammam (bath) has a specific procedure, in which bather use the frigidarium (cold bath), the tepidarium (warm bath), and the caldarium (hot bath) and spend sometimes in each one of the bath-chamber. Bathhouses were had much more facility than hygiene and body cleaning.

Laconia was the name of the steam bath in ancient Greek. It was built as a circular room with a conical dome-shaped roof. For heating, heated rocks placed into a central tray or fires underneath the floor was used. Then Water was poured onto the hot rocks or floor to create steam. Sometimes leaves, branches, or oils of medicinal herbs such as Bay Laurel, Fir, Pine, or Juniper were used to meet therapeutic purposes.³

According to the Hippocratic theory of medicine, the disease is the result of an imbalance in body humour. To restore health, he advised changing the habits and environment, including bathing, perspiration, walking, and massages. He described the chemical and organoleptic property of water in his work "De is, a quiz at loci".⁴

Hippocrates has described the therapeutic properties of cold and hot water in his famous treaty, the *Airs, Waters and Places*.¹ Bathing was the Way of Life; it was incorporated with spots and entertainment to refresh the tiredness of hard day's work. Few baths were gender-wise segregated, but many others weren't.

The sweating process could be enhanced by previously massaging the body with oils medicated with these or other essences, or by quaffing a cup of hot diaphoretic herb tea like Peppermint or Elder flowers before entering the steam bath.³

Hence, a steam bath, aromatherapy, hot baths all were practiced in ancient Greece and Rome.⁷

BATH-HOUSES (HAMMAM)

Bath-houses are also called Hammam. These were highly sophisticated building built by excellent engineering skills. It is believed that Bath-houses should be ancient building with vaults, arches, and galleries. It should be spacious and furnished with sweet water. Its temperature should be adjusted to suit the temperament of the bather. According to Lane's bathhouse described in "Arabian Nights," was a sophisticated building with several apartments, with mosaic or tessellated pavements, composed of white and black marble, and pieces of fine red tile, and sometimes other materials. Several rounds, glazed apertures, for the admission of light were made in the dome of the inner apartment.⁸

In "Painting in Islam" Sir Thomas Arnold quotes some medical scholars that The ideal bath "should contain pictures of high artistic merit and great beauty, representing pairs of lovers, gardens, beds of flowers, fine galloping horses and wild beasts, for pictures such as these are potent in strengthening the powers of the body, whether animal, natural, or spiritual." There are three vital principles in the body—the vital (quwa Haiwanya), the spiritual (Quwa Nafsania), and the natural (Quwa Tabbya). The painted pictures of fighting and war and galloping horses, and the snoring of wild beasts potentialize the vital power. The pictures of love, a reflection of the lover on his beloved, and the couple embracing each other enhance the potential of the spiritual power. The gardens, beautiful trees, and bright flowers potentialize the natural power.⁸

1. The Maslakh (Apodyteriu or Disrobing room or stripping-place) is the first apartment. This is located on either side of the caldarium. The temperament of this bath chamber is Moatadil (Moderate).^{8,9}

2. The Tepidarium, - This is a closed room all around, named Tepidarium due to tepid dry vapors. It is a warm room to promote perspiration after undressing. In the Centre, there is a fountain of cold water. The temperature of this room is kept constant between 37-39 degrees Celsius and with low humidity about 20% to emit a pleasant temperature. The wide benches or platforms encased with marble for relaxation. These are furnished with mattresses and cushions for the higher and middle classes and with mats for the poorer sort. Bather stayed here to rarify their humors usually

bather stays 30 minutes here but may stay up to 60 minutes broken into few sessions.^{8,10,11}

3. The Hararah (Caldarium or Laconicum) the word caldarium is derived from the Latin word *caleo*, meaning "to be hot". This room was similar to the foregoing but higher in temperature, heated by a hypocaust, an under floor heating system using tunnels with hot air, heated by a furnace tended by slaves. This is the main bath chamber in the bath-house used as a hot-water bath or for saunas or steam rooms. Here hot bath was taken in a solium (tub) or piscian (basin). The bather enters into the hararah wearing wooden sole sandals, a large napkin around the loins, a second-round the head, a third over the chest, and a fourth covering the back, the attendant removes the towels except the first. Hence the temperature of this room may less than 50–55 °C (122–131 °F). The temperament of this bath chamber is Har-Yabis (Hot and Dry).

There were private rooms along caldarium, which has multipurpose use like private baths, poetry readings, rhetoricians, etc. A garden, lounging rooms, gymnasiums, small halls, and exedrae as (lecture and reading rooms) were attached to it.^{8,11,12} Lane's description from the "Arabian Nights," that Hararah is square-shaped, generally in form of a cross, central chief portion of the hammam in the inner division of the building. A hot water fountain is in its center, rising from a base encased with marble, which is used as a seat.⁸

4. Frigidarium or *Cella frigidaria* – The word frigidarium derived from the Latin word *frigeo*, which means "to be cold". This was the room where the final cold-water bath was taken or used as a swimming pool after that the skin was scraped with a strigilis, rubbed with a linen cloth, and anointed with oil. For open-air bathing pools, there was a host of smaller baths connected to the main room. The temperament of this bath chamber is Barid Ratab (Cold and Wet).^{9,11,12}

PROCEDURE OF HAMMAM

There is a proper procedure of Hammam, which should be followed by the bather. The bather should enter the first room and after that in the second and third rooms gradually, in each room he must spend some time so that body adapts the temperament of that room. He must not stay for a long duration on Hararah or Caldarium. Bather should take food and or drink of cold temperament either before or afterward Hammam. Bathing is not allowed just after taking food or on empty stomach. During and just after Hammam cold water should not drink.^{6,8}

THE ACTION OF THE HAMMAM

The natural action of the bath is Har Ratab (Hot and Wet). The air of the bathroom has a warming, and the water of the bath has a moistening effect on the body. But the natural effect of the bath can be changed by changing the environment and duration of the bath. The effect of bath is also different for people with different types of temperament. Long duration stays in Hammam dissolves heartrate Gharizia (innate heat) and result in a cold temperament of the body. Bath on empty stomach causes dryness while in the full stomach causes wetness. A cold air bath disperses the innate heat and dries the substance of the tissues.

According to Hippocrates Cold bath taken while fasting imparts warmth and moisture and if taken after a meal, it produces coldness in the body and removes moisture. A hot bath took while fasting, its action is attendant and refrigerant and does not impart moisture, while If taken after a meal, the bath is heating and

moistens the body. A warm bath is soothing and has a warming and softening effect. It is beneficial for everyone. The most suitable time for it is before food, and after exercise. Bath during fasting conditions will render the body extremely dry and make the person thin and debilitated. Bath after a heavy meal will make bather stout, by drawing the humors towards the subcutaneous tissues bath after the first digestion has completed and before a sense of hunger returns is beneficial and produces a medium degree of stoutness.^{6,8,9}

DISADVANTAGES OF HAMMAM

Every person has their body temperament (Mizaj). The temperature of air and the timing of Hammam should be decided according to the temperament of the bather. Hammam is contraindicated in the person who has a hot temperament, Tafarruq Ittesal, or Hummae Yufooni or that condition in which Madda Marz (morbid matter) does not get ready to eliminate from the body. If the right procedure is not followed in bathing it may produce certain harmful effects, such as it weakens the heart and nerves, induces nausea and vomiting, disperses the morbid matter towards the weaker organ, it may cause sexual debility.⁶ Hippocrates has described that too cold water may cause serious intestinal disorders, while too hot or stagnant water often causes fever.²

TYPES OF HAMMAM

There are various types of Hammam according to temperament and water used. The desired feature can be obtained by changing the environment and or adding agents of the therapeutic property.

1. Hammam barid (cold bath) – it is beneficial to the Hot (Har) temperament person. It causes the movement of Hararat e ghariziyah towards inside (Jism e Batin) of the body and thus increases digestive power. It strengthens the nerves and heart
2. Hammam bukhari (vapor bath) - It opens the pores of the skin and increases the sweating and thus helps to remove the toxins from the body. It is used to relieve the pain usually of musculoskeletal origin. It helps to reduce body weight and strengthens the nerves.
3. Hammam har (hot bath) - It softens the skin and opens the pores of the skin and causes sweating. This is beneficial for Osteoarthritis, Amenorrhoea, Renal pain, Obesity.
4. Hammam ramli (sand bath) - In this type of bath some parts of the body are immersed under the sand or sometimes Sea sand is sprinkled over the body. Due to the absorptive property of Sea sand, it is beneficial in ascites.
5. Hammam shamsi (sunbath) - In this type, the body is directly exposed to sunlight. It facilitates the absorption of calcium and thus provides strength to the bone. Usually, 15-30 minutes of morning direct sunlight is advised.^{6,8}

TYPES OF HAMMAM ACCORDING TO WATER USE

Hammam Ma'a Barid - in this type of Hammam Cold water is being used. It reduces the excess body heat and provides strength to the heart.

Hammam Ma'a Bahri - in this type of Hammam Seawater is used. Different types of salts are naturally present in seawater. It acts as diluents for the vicious matter.

Hammam Ma'a Boriqi - in this type of Hammam salty water (Ma'a Boriqi) is used. It is beneficial in Ascitis as it acts as a divergent of morbid matter.

Hammam Ma'a Kibriti – in this type of Hammam sulfur-rich Water (Ma'a Kibriti) is used. Due to the property of sulfur this type of Hammam acts as Mohallil and Mulattif. It is useful in Irqe Madani, Falij, Rasha. It helps in reduction of the intense pain. It is also used in chronic ulcers, Kalf, Bahaq, Bars. It is also recommended in the rigidity of the uterus.

Hammam Ma'a Nutruni - In this type of Hammam, Bore Armani (a type of mineral) is mix in water. It acts as diluents for the vicious matter.

Hammam Ma'a Ramawi - In this type of Hammam ashes are being mixed in water. Its benefits are similar to Hammam Ma'a Boriqi.

Hammam Ma'a Nuhasi - When in this Hammam copper is being mixed in water, is called Hammam Ma'a Nuhasi. This is recommended in Amraz-e-Baridah wa Ratbah like Wajaul Mafasil, Niqras, Istirkha, Ribu, Damamil, Busur, and renal ailments.

Hammam Ma'a Hadidi – in this type of Hammam Ferrous oxide rich water (Ma'a Hadidi) is used. It is recommended in Amraz-e-Baridah wa Ratbah, in renal problems and beneficial in gastric and spleen problems.

Hammam Ma'a Qafri - In this type of Hammam Hijrul Yahood (a mineral origin drug) is used in the water of Hammam, it is thought to be beneficial in strengthening muscle and other organs.

Hammam Ma'a Shibiah - wa Zajiah - in this type of Hammam water rich in Alum (Ma'a Shibiah wa Zajiah) is used. This is beneficial in epistaxis, edema, per rectal, and per vaginal bleeding.

Hammam e wahli (Mud bath). In this case, the body is immersed in mud or the mud is rubbed on the body. It absorbs toxins from the body therefore very useful in preventing many diseases. It also has healing properties. It improves blood circulation and beneficial in skin diseases e.g. psoriasis, rosacea.^{6,8}

CONCLUSION

Hammam is a well-established regimen of the Unani system of medicine due to its therapeutic effects. It is practiced since the pre-Hippocratic era as in temple medicine. To achieve the desired therapeutic effect, the environment and procedure of hammam should be maintained accordingly. Its misuse can harm; hence it should be taken under expert supervision.

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