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Neurological stamps

Hippocrates 460-377 BC

Hippocrates recognised diseases of the brain. He noted that the brain had two halves and was well supplied with blood vessels, some slender but two were stout. Hippocrates believed that these vessels contained air. Indeed, at that time, nerves were not distinguished from tendons or ligaments. The brain, however, was associated with intelligence, dreams, thoughts and epilepsy. It was assumed to have a cooling mechanism mediated by secretion of phlegm or, as it was also called, pituita.

At the time of Hippocrates it was known that a head wound could be followed by paralysis of the opposite side of the body, whilst spinal cord compression could cause anaesthesia and weakness as well as urinary and faecal retention. Hippocrates described peuperal hemiplegia, aphasia, migraine, irregular respiration from cerebral disease, febrile delirium, mania and melancholia. He also knew of the neurological sequelae of alcoholism and noted that "Unaccustomed attacks of anaesthesia and numbness are impending signs of apoplexy".

Hippocrates has been featured on stamps on a number of occasions. The illustrations here commemorate the reincorporation of the Dodecanese Islands into Greece. On the right is the plane tree at the centre of the town of Cos in the shade of which Hippocrates is reputed to have taught his pupils.

These stamps, the first in a series to be published in this journal, can be found in the catalogues of Stanley Gibbons (670 and 817) or Scott (514 and 657).

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