

I WISH I HAD AN ASPIRIN!^{*} REFLECTIONS OF ASPIRIN[®] IN TURKISH LITERATURE

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Pharmacy historians' search for Aspirin[®], by and large, come to similar results with well-known dates and facts; the first stable, pure acetylsalicylic acid was synthesized in 1897 by German chemist Felix Hoffman (1868-1946), started being manufactured and marketed in 1899, first in powder form and then as tablets since 1915, and, after years of patent wars and ferocious rivalry, it eventually became the most commercially successful pharmaceutical product in history.^{1,2,3,4,5} From medical and pharmaceutical perspectives, hundreds of publications appear about this medicine every year, and, today, we definitely know more about it than at any time before. What we have neglected, however, is a bit different: the cultural impact of this wonder drug upon society. Many questions have been raised: How has this medicine been perceived by its consumers? How did this affect people's usage behavior with respect to Aspirin[®]? Was this perception influenced by Bayer's product positioning strategy in the market? There are many other similar questions.

In fact, understanding people's perception – mostly as a result of a subliminal process – of any medicine is a step forward in better comprehending their consumption behavior and their compliance with drug regimes.^{6,7} In addition to physicians' and pharmacists' roles as health-care providers, patients themselves are also actively involved with their drug therapy process, as they

finally decide on how, how much, and when to take medicine. For this reason, patients' perceptions and personal beliefs are thought to play a vital role in the treatment process. Bearing this in mind, this article aims to take a closer look at reflections of Aspirin[®] in Turkish literature, where clues are expected to shed some light on the history of Turkish pharmacy as well as to investigate whether literature can serve to better understand a pharmaceutical product from another perspective.⁸



One of the earliest Aspirin advertisements in the 1920s written both in old Turkish (using Arabic script) and French: "Bayer's Aspirin relieves all sort of pains" (H. Tekiner Collection)

Apart from the personal notes made by the researcher himself about Aspirin[®] from his personal readings during the last five years, the following steps have been followed to identify the books that this medicine was cited in: searching Behçet Necatigil's *The Dictionary of Turkish Literary Works*⁹ for pharmacy-related entries, examining all Turkish dictionaries giving example sentences for each entry with relevant references, performing a keyword search for "aspirin" through available Turkish e-books online, consulting with the researcher's personal acquaintances who are known for their keen interest in

^{*} Nazım Hikmet, *Simavne Kadısı Oğlu Şeyh Bedreddin Destanı* (The epic of Sheikh Bedreddin, son of the judge of Simavne) in *Benerci Kendini Niçin öldürdü?* [Why did Benerci kill himself?], 8th edition, Yapı Kredi Yay., İstanbul 2009, p.224 (First edition 1936).

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¹ Diarmuid Jeffreys, *Aspirin – Mucize İlacın Çarpıcı Öyküsü*. Translated by Mefkure Bayatlı, İstanbul 2005.

² Olivier Lafont, "Du saule à l'aspirine," *Revue d'Histoire de la Pharmacie*, 354 (2007), 209-216.

³ Patrice Queneau, "L'aspirine: elle a marché sur la lune!," *Médecine*, 2-6 (2006), 253-255.

⁴ Thijs J. Rinsema, "One hundred years of Aspirin," *Medical History*, 43 (1999), 502-507.

⁵ Uwe Zundorf Langenfeld, *100 Years of Aspirin – The Future Has Just Begun*. Leverkusen 1997.

⁶ Compliance is thought to be determined by the previous knowledge and attitudes of the patient. As stated in Becker's Health Belief Model (HBM), the likelihood of patients' following their drug regime is related to their motivation and incentive to do so. See: Susan Griffith, "A review of the factors associated with patient compliance and the taking of prescribed medicines," *Br J Gen Pract*, 40 (1990), 114-116.

⁷ A patient's personal faith in the efficacy of his/her medicine and personal motivation are thought to be associated with compliance. See: Marshall H. Becker & Lois A. Maiman, "Sociobehavioral Determinants of Compliance with Health and Medical Care Recommendations," *Medical Care*, 13-1 (1975), 10-24.

⁸ As a natural result of the subject's profundity, this article, however, shall be content with presenting some representative aspects of Aspirin[®] in Turkey.

⁹ Behçet Necatigil, *Edebiyatımızda Eserler Sözlüğü*. 9th edition, İstanbul 2005.

reading to determine whether they have come across “aspirin” in any of the books they have read.

When deciding on which texts to discuss in this article, at least one of the following criteria was considered regarding the works of famous Turkish authors: information on Aspirin® in different contexts, historical value, and different time periods. Hence, 16 literary examples were chosen from a total of 89. In terms of translation, when an English translation of any work already exists, excerpts were taken directly from the original translations and are presented in square brackets, in contrast to those translated by the researcher himself. Once the books to cite were chosen, related excerpts were classified in accordance with their relevance to various aspects of medicine under the following titles: Bayer and its Turkish rivals; medical use; different pharmaceutical forms and doses; side effects and misuse; and idioms, slang, and meaning differentiations. Short biographies of the authors are also provided before related excerpts from their books are given.

Brief history of Aspirin® in Turkey

Articles written on the history of Aspirin® in Turkey unanimously agree that this medicine appeared in the Turkish market with the rise of the Republic in 1923.¹⁰⁻¹¹ While it is true that this medicine was licensed¹² in 1923 and started being publicly advertised in 1925, our findings indicate an earlier date. In fact, Aspirin’s® reputation arrived in the Ottoman Empire soon after its mass production began in Germany. In 1902, an article about the medical properties of this medicine was published in a medical bulletin in Istanbul.¹³ During this initial period, Aspirin’s® active ingredient, acetylsalicylic acid, was also called “*hâmuz-ı asetil safsaf*” or “*hâmuz-ı safsafın asetik eteri*,” in accordance with the traditional chemical nomenclature system of the time.¹⁴ Physicians, however, preferred to simply prescribe its brand name, Aspirin®, because it was easy.¹⁵

¹⁰ Gökhan Akçura, *Aspirin® Türkiye Tanıtım Serüveni (1925-1944)*. Istanbul 1994.

¹¹ Şafak Altun, *Türkiye’de Yabancı Sermayenin Tarihsel Gelişimi*. Istanbul 2007, p.75.

¹² Anonymous, *1262 Numaraları İspençiyari ve Tıbbi Müstahzarlar Hakkındaki Kanunun Neşri Tarihinden 31.12.1929 Tarihine Kadar Ruhsatnamesi Verilen Yerli ve Ecnebi Müstahzarat Listesi*. Ankara 1930. (Aspirin® was licensed with no. 7/21 under the name Aspirine Tablettes I.G. of Farbenindustrie A.G.).

¹³ Anonymous, *Hamidiye Etfal Hastane-i Aliyyesinin İstatistik Mecmua-i Tıbbiyesi – Annales médicales et bulletin de statistique de l’Hôpital des Enfants Hamidié*. 3rd volume, Istanbul 1902.

¹⁴ Ekrem Kadri Unat et al., *Osmanlıca Tıp Terimleri Sözlüğü*. Ankara 2004.

¹⁵ Some aspirin prescriptions and invoices date back to 1910, 1913, 1918, and 1921 in Gülnur and Mert Sandalcı’s Turkish history of pharmacy collection. See: Mert Sandalcı, *Belgelerle Türk Eczacılığı I 1840-1948 (1)*. Istanbul 1997, p.113; Mert Sandalcı, *Belgelerle Türk Eczacılığı II 1840-1948 (1)*. Istanbul 1998, p.58; Gülnur Sandalcı & Mert Sandalcı, *Belgelerle Türk Eczacılığı II 1840-1948 (2)*. Istanbul 2003, p.173; Mert Sandalcı, *Belgelerle Türk Eczacılığı III 1840-1948 (1)*. Istanbul 1999, p.179.

The name Aspirine (with an additional “e” at the end) was also used since this spelling fit the correct pronunciation of the name of this medicine in French, which was the major scientific language of that period. Old prescriptions and invoices dating back to the 1910s in Gülnur and Mert Sandalcı’s history of pharmacy collection indicate that the name was replaced with “Aspirin[e] Bayer” a decade later when its Turkish imitators entered the market. The rivalry can also be presumed from the frequent warnings on Bayer’s advertisements of this period: “*Caution to red label and original packaging with the Bayer trademark.*”



An example of deceptive advertising using the name Bayer similar to the Bayer Company in Germany, while this name was deliberately used by pharmacist Hüsnü [Bayer] (1903-1969) after the Surname Law of 1934 allowed him to legally benefit from Bayer’s vast popularity.

(*Farmakolog*, 1949)

Beginning in 1925, Bayer’s representative in Istanbul, Widmann and Associates Co., handled Aspirin® separately from the rest of Bayer’s products in the market and positioned this small tablet as a popular heal-all medicine.¹⁶ It was in the same year that Aspirin’s® major rival, “Nevrozin Celal,” was introduced to the market by its license owner, pharmacist Celal Ergun [İhtifalci] (1901-1989). Although the name of this medicine was – unusually – not similar to Aspirin®, “Nevrozin Celal” soon became thoroughly popular as the Turkish

¹⁶ Bayer had another representative firm, Max Unz Inc., in the city of Izmir, as well. See: Akçura [ref. 10], p.28.

aspirin.¹⁷ Soon, two more licensed products joined the race: pharmacist Salih Necati [Emgen]'s (1885-1948) "Aspirol Necati"¹⁸ (License no: 12/70) and pharmacist Ömer Kenan [Erem]'s (1890-1949) "Assipin Kenan"¹⁹ (License no: 6/85).

This strong rivalry may be the reason that Bayer's advertisement strategy was so aggressive and densely focused on the public rather than physicians and pharmacists during these years.²⁰ As a part of this strategy, two very famous artists were commissioned to create Aspirin® ads: calligrapher Hamid [Aytaç] (1891-1982) and graphic designer İhap Hulusi [Görey] (1898-1986).²¹⁻²²⁻²³ Furthermore, Bayer didn't neglect promotion to medical professionals. To keep the medical media in its hands, Bayer began patronizing a medical journal, *Tedavi Notları*²⁴ (*Treatment Notes*), in 1925.

The 1930s brought Bayer some new and additional challenges to struggle with, in part because of the Great Depression that began in 1929. After the Surname Law of 1934 was implemented in Turkey, some pharmacists took surnames similar to the names of popular drug companies, and, since the name Bayer was among the most appropriate ones for Turkish spelling, it was often selected.²⁵⁻²⁶ The underlying idea was clear: to deceive Turkish customers to

¹⁷ A 1927 advertisement introduced 'Nevrozin Celal' as a "genuine Turkish aspirin." See: Gülten Dinç & Nil Sari, "Advertisement of Pharmaceutical Productions in Turkey 1910-1928," *T Klin J Med Ethics, Law and History* 10 (2002), 20-25.

¹⁸ Anonymous, [ref. 12] 1930.

¹⁹ Ibid.

²⁰ The early popularity of Aspirin in 1920s Turkey is clearly seen in the diary of Mustafa Kemal [Atatürk] (1881-1938), founder and first president of the Republic of Turkey, from a short note he wrote on March 23, 1922: [I'm ill. Antalya deputies Mustafa and Tahsin Beys visited. The doctor came. Gave aspirin.] See: Mustafa Kemal Atatürk, *Atatürk'ün Bütün Eserleri (5 Ekim 1921 – 5 Mayıs 1922)* [The Complete Works of Atatürk (5 October 1921 – 5 May 1922)]. Istanbul 2003, p. 72.

²¹ Akçura, [ref. 10], p.42.

²² Ender Merter, *80. Yılında Cumhuriyet'i Afişleyen Adam – İhap Hulusi Görey*. Istanbul 2003, pp.48-49.

²³ When Arabic alphabet was replaced with the Latin one after the Alphabet Reform of 1928, Hamid had to give his place to İhap Hulusi.

²⁴ This name was replaced with *Dirim Aylık Tıp Dergisi* (Dirim Monthly Medical Journal) after 1936. See: Akçura, [ref. 10], p.28.

²⁵ Here are the names of 12 Turkish pharmacists who took "Bayer" as a surname after the Law of 1934: Adnan Bayer, Ali Vetem Bayer, Celal Macid Bayer, Hüsnü Rıza Bayer, İbrahim Hamit Bayer, İsmet Bayer [later changed to Somer], Mehmed Fuat Bayer, Muammer Bayer, Neşet Bayer, Reşat M. Bayer, Süheyl Nuri Bayer, and Tefvik Bayer. See: Mert Sandalcı, *Belgelerle Türk Eczacılığı V – Eczacılar ve Ecz Depoları*, Istanbul 2006, pp.47-48.

²⁶ There is an interesting example of another German company, E. Merck, since a pharmacist took "Emerk" as a surname – hence being named Ali Emerk – which would allow him to write "Emerk" on his pharmaceutical preparations. See: Mert Sandalcı, *Belgelerle Türk Eczacılığı V – Eczacılar ve Ecz Depoları*. Istanbul 2006, p.95.

make them believe that they still used an original Bayer Inc. product. Hence, a series of patent disputes started between Bayer Inc. and Bayer-surnamed Turkish pharmacists.²⁷

The World War II years were also harsh for Bayer in Turkey, both for political and economic reasons. Even though Turkey did not enter the war, Bayer officials left the country in 1944, and Dr. Feridun Frik (1899-1989), who had worked with Bayer since 1928, took responsibility for continuing Bayer's business in Turkey.

The 1950s started with a promising atmosphere in Turkey since the war was over; the country's first democratic elections were held and a new party (the Democrat Party), which encouraged supported free enterprise, took over the government. These years witnessed some extraordinary changes in terms of pharmacy as well: the first national drug factory was established in 1952, new pharmacy laws²⁸ were implemented in 1953 and 1956, and the Turkish Pharmacists' Association was officially founded in Ankara in 1956. However, this seeming spring weather was not so real in truth: the state was in great need of external financial support, particularly to import vital pharmaceutical products (and even some major raw materials) from abroad. This economic uncertainty immediately triggered Aspirin's® fall into the black market with extremely high prices.²⁹⁻³⁰ Aspirin's® sales out of pharmacies, particularly in grocery stores and tobacco shops,³¹ contributed to its "auction" in the black market until out-of-pharmacy sales were forbidden in 1954.³²

²⁷ Two cases can exemplify this: the first was a case against pharmacist Fuat Bayer's medicine "Uspirin." Bayer won this case, and Mr. Fuat Bayer had to modify the name of his product to "Asemiron." The second is a case against pharmacist İsmet Bayer's "Asabrin." Upon losing this case, Mr. Bayer changed his surname to Somer. See: Mert Sandalcı, *Belgelerle Türk Eczacılığı II 1840-1948 (1)*. Istanbul 1998, p.160; Gülnur Sandalcı & Mert Sandalcı, *Belgelerle Türk Eczacılığı IV 1840-1948 (2)*. Istanbul 2001, p.187.

²⁸ The Pharmacy and Pharmacists Law no. 6197 (1953) and the Turkish Pharmacists' Association Law no. 6643 (1956).

²⁹ Anonymous, "Nezle ve Grip Salgını [Cold and Flu Pandemy]," *Milliyet Gazetesi*, 5 September 1953, p.2.

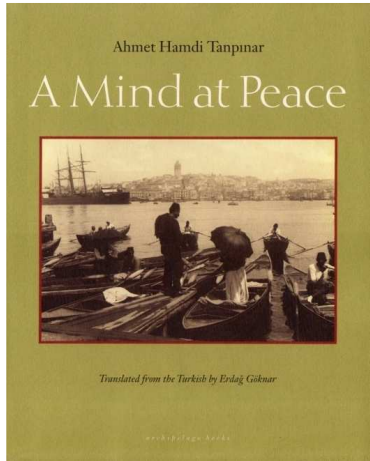
³⁰ A news article published in a 1955 newspaper may contribute to an understanding of how greatly it was demanded at that time. According to this article, 17.5 kg Aspirin was stolen from a drug warehouse in Istanbul. Anonymous, "Aspirin Hırsızları [Aspirin Burglars]," *Milliyet Gazetesi*, 23 February 1955, p.3.

³¹ Two literary examples discuss this. First is a sentence from Ayfer Tunç's memoir, *My Parents Will Visit You If You Are Not Occupied* (serious pharmaceutical products such as Gripin, Aspirin, and Optalidon used to be sold even in grocery stores). See: Ayfer Tunç, *Bir Maniniz Yoksa Annemler Size Gelecek*. Istanbul 2001, p.356. The second is Mehmet Seyda's novel *The Mistress*, depicting life of a miner (Selçuk ran immediately and bought some aspirin from the grocery store). See: Mehmet Seyda, *Kapatma*. Istanbul 1982, p.151.

³² Anonymous, "Bakkal ve Tütüncüler Aspirin Satamıyacak [Grocery and Tobacco Shops Shall Not Sell Aspirin]," *Milliyet Gazetesi*, 9 February 1954, p.2.

From the 1960s to the 1990s, Aspirin's® previous fame was almost forgotten due to the entrance of new analgesics with fewer side-effects into the market. The 1990s, however, marked a peak in Aspirin's® popularity as new research studies suggested its previously unknown benefits. This was likely the second birth of this wonder drug after 90 years. As of today, there are 27 products with acetylsalicylic acid as an active ingredient in the Turkish market. Some of them still keep the old tradition of bearing aspirin-like names, such as Asinpirine®, Ataspin®, Ecopirin®, Pharmaspirin®, etc.³³

On Bayer and its Turkish rivals



The cover page of *A Mind at Peace*, first published in 1949

Ahmet Hamdi Tanpınar (1901-1962) is considered as one of the most significant Turkish novelists of the 20th century, successfully combining both Eastern and Western cultures in his writings. After graduating from the Istanbul University Faculty of Letters in 1923, he worked as a high school teacher until 1939. He was a Member of Parliament from 1942 to 1946. His major work, *Huzur (A Mind at Peace)*, is both a historical novel and a love story concerning a family in the years after the rise of the Turkish Republic in 1923. Set in changing times, the protagonist, Mümtaz, wants to preserve the past. After his parents' death, he becomes a devotee of Turkish literature and falls in love

with Nuran, an unattainable woman. Yaşar, a character in Tanpınar's book *A Mind at Peace*, was a pill addict

"To be sure, Yaşar sensed this lofty ideal, embracing it heart and soul. Thanks to six years of patient research, many physiological functions that happened involuntarily with others, occurred as an effect of pills for Yaşar. He slept using pills, he attained the clarity of wakefulness with the few **aspirin** he took upon waking, he worked up an appetite with pills, he digested with pills, he defecated with pills, he made love with pills, and he desired with pills. Companies like Roche, **Bayer**, and Merck were the mainstays of his life."³⁴

³³ Anonymous, RxMediaPharma® 2010 interaktif ilaç bilgi kaynağı, www.rxmediapharma.com, retrieved on January 2, 2011.

³⁴ Ahmet Hamdi Tanpınar, *A Mind at Peace*. Translated by Erdağ Gökner, New York 2008, pp.181-184.

Attilâ İlhan (1925-2005) is a famous Turkish poet and novelist who lived and worked in Paris between 1949 and 1965 and later worked as a journalist in Turkey. His poetry, while modernist in its use of highly sophisticated language, often refers to Ottoman poetry, music, and history. He also wrote some successful novels, among which *Wolves Table* (first published in 1963) is based on the growing dirty relationships between the business, media, and entertainment sectors parallel to the country's process of capitalization in the 1950s. The protagonist, Mahmut Ersoy, is a journalist who tries to explore this illegal structuring and is murdered at the end.

[Ominous smoke in my head. Two **aspirin**, useless! Are these **aspirin**? Chalk powder. I wish there was **Bayer**... They are furious at me because I like Germans. I've even been blacklisted. Why? Because I continued to do business with Tauber und Kleist Company during the war.]³⁵

Adalet Ağaoğlu (1929-) is a playwright, author, and one of Turkey's most prized female novelists. After completing a degree in French literature from Ankara University, she worked for over 20 years for the Turkish Radio and TV Corporation. First published in 1976, *The Delicate Rose of My Mind* is one of Ağaoğlu's masterworks, in which she tells the story of a day-trip taken by Bayram, a Turkish *Gastarbeiter* (guest worker) in Germany, who comes back to his homeland with a brand new Mercedes car. The novel is based on the happenings and incidents surrounding Bayram – as he associates with his car – obsessed with his prestige to raise an upper class until bitterly realizing that he has always been the same person. The following is a conversation that occurs at the Turkish border between a customs officer and Veli's wife about German Aspirin®:

[Who would have a headache but me? **Turkish aspirin** did make my stomach burn. You should have **German aspirin**. Give me two; I'll take... Veli's wife immediately started to search one of her plastic bags. "I also have headaches frequently... This is the nature of a voyage. One becomes terribly exhausted, sir. Fortunately, I put a bottle in my bag. Now we have come. Without any trouble, thank God. Now we are in our country, thank God. I don't have a headache anymore. If not, I don't care. (...) The customs officer quickly puts a whole bottle of aspirin into his pocket: If I ask the store clerk, he will hem and haw. In fact, there are hundreds of bottles in the store. A couple of them can't be broken. The store is bleeding water anyhow. Everywhere becomes water-logged after rain. What is the **aspirin**? It is dissolved in water and goes with the dribble.]³⁶

³⁵ Attilâ İlhan, *Kurtlar Sofrası [Wolves Table]*. 4th edition, Ankara 1995, p.109.

³⁶ Adalet Ağaoğlu, *Fikrimin İnce Gülü [Delicate Rose of My Mind]*. Istanbul 1993, p.28.

Kerime Nadir (1917-1984), a famous female writer of love novels, gives us another example of the rivalry between Bayer's Aspirin® and one of its Turkish counterparts in her book *The Silver Cypress*, first published in 1960.

- [– Give me a box of **Bayer Aspirin**.
– No **Bayer**; there is only Kenan.
– Give me whatever there is.]³⁷

On aspirin's medical use

According to the books we searched, Aspirin's® medical use is driven by its analgesic effect as well as for flu and fever. There are also examples of its use as home remedies.

Nazım Hikmet [Ran] (1901-1963) is one of the most important and influential figures in 20th-century Turkish literature. His works have been translated into more than fifty languages. His first poetry book, *Song of the Sundrivers*, appeared in 1928. A decade later, in 1938, he was sentenced to 28 years in prison due to his political beliefs but was freed in 1950, after which he moved to the Soviet Union. This year, he was awarded with the International Peace Prize, along with Pablo Picasso, Paul Robeson, and Pablo Neruda. In exile, he remained remarkably creative, involving himself with theatre and broadcasting until his death in Moscow in 1963.³⁸ As Göksu and Timms (1999) stated, Nazım was not only a communist committed to revolution but a romantic who was passionately in love with his country and his people, with nature, and with women. His poetry created a new blend of lyrical, dramatic, and rhetorical elements.³⁹

Nazım once cited aspirin in his masterpiece work, *The Epic of Sheikh Bedreddin, the Son of the Judge of Simavne* (first published in 1936) which is the story of a 15th century revolutionary religious leader in Anatolia who advocated community ownership, social and judicial equality, and refusal to pay the high taxes demanded by the local representatives of the central Ottoman government. In this work, we find the author reading a book written on this epic, in prison, late at night. He finds himself distracted by the clanking chains of the other prisoners in nearby cells, who are under threat of execution. Nazım's mood becomes anguished as he struggles to absorb the ideas of

³⁷ Kerime Nadir, *Gümüş Selvi* [The Silver Cypress]. Istanbul 1960, p.84.

³⁸ "Nazım Hikmet," *Encyclopedia Britannica*, retrieved December 14, 2010, from Encyclopedia Britannica Online: <http://www.britannica.com/EBchecked/topic/265653/Nazim-Hikmet>

³⁹ Talat Sait Halman, *A Millennium of Turkish Literature*. Edited by Jayne L. Warner, Ankara 2008, p.125.

Bedreddin and his disciple Börklüce Mustafa.⁴⁰ The following is a short excerpt from this work citing aspirin's effect as a painkiller:

[I wish I had an **aspirin**. My palms burn. My head is full with Bedreddin and Börklüce Mustafa. If I can strain myself, [I] don't have this blinding **headache**; in the noise of ceaseless clashing of swords, the neighing of horses, the cracking of whips, I would be able to see the faces of Bedreddin and Mustafa like two shining promises of hope amid the screams of women and children.]⁴¹



Aspirin® advertisements mostly emphasized its analgesic effect for headaches (1932)

Reşat Nuri Güntekin (1889-1956) is a Turkish writer whose realistic novels have acquired vast popularity during the last 70 years and been filmed several times in Turkey. After graduating from the Istanbul University Faculty of Letters, he worked as a teacher and administrator at high schools for a while, then as an inspector at the Ministry of National Education. Later, he served as a deputy and cultural attaché to Paris (1950) when he served as the Turkish representative to UNESCO. Among his literary works, *Notes of Anatolia* (first published in 1936) is the sole example of his travel writings dating back to the 1930s. In the following excerpt, he indicated the practice of self-treatment for the flu in those days.

⁴⁰ Saim Göksu & Edward Timms, *Romantic Communist – The Life and Work of Nazım Hikmet*. New York 1999.

⁴¹ Nazım Hikmet, *Simavne Kadısı Oğlu Şeyh Bedreddin Destanı* [The epic of Sheikh Bedreddin, the son of the judge of Simavne] in *Benerci Kendini Niçin Öldürdü?* [Why did Benerci kill himself?]. 8th edition, Yapı Kredi Yay., Istanbul 2009, p.224.

[Flu treatment without a doctor is well-known: Getting into bed in a guarded room after taking **aspirin**; and hardly sweating under a chunk of blanket, rug, coat, and whatever you find. But not catching a cold after sweating... For those who get sick far from home, sweating is easy, but not catching a cold then is as outside of physical laws as jumping and not falling to the ground.]⁴²

In addition to her work as a screen writer, cinematographer, and producer for many films, television series, and advertisements, Ayşe Kulin (1941-) is particularly well-known for her bestselling novels. In her novel *Füreyâ* (first published in 2000), Ayşe Kulin tells the life story of Turkey's first female ceramic artist, Füreyâ Koral (1910-1997). The following is an example of aspirin's use as antipyretic in this book⁴³:

["I think I've got a **fever**, mom," said Füreyâ. "Give me the thermometer." Füreyâ took the thermometer that Hakkiye Hanım brought and placed it under her armpit. She looked at it shortly thereafter, quickly shaking it before her mother could see, and walked through to the bathroom to wash it. "What was your temperature?" asked her mother. "Around 37° C," replied Füreyâ. "Shall I give you **aspirin**?" "I'm going out, mommy. I'll take it when I get home," said Füreyâ.]⁴⁴

The first Turkish recipient of the Nobel Prize in Literature in 2006, Orhan Pamuk (1952-) is one of the most renowned Turkish novelists today. His work has sold over seven million books in 46 languages. Although he graduated from the University of Istanbul with a degree in journalism in 1976, he has never done any other job except writing. Many of his works show an understanding of traditional Turkish Islamic culture tempered by a belief that Turkey's future lies in the West.⁴⁵

In his book *The New Life* (first published in 1995), Pamuk tells the story of Osman, a young engineering student in Istanbul who encounters a book that truly changes his life. Together with Janan (the heroine, who is also a reader of the book), they embark on an adventurous, metaphysical journey through Turkey, going aimlessly from city to city in the pursuit of this "new life," as

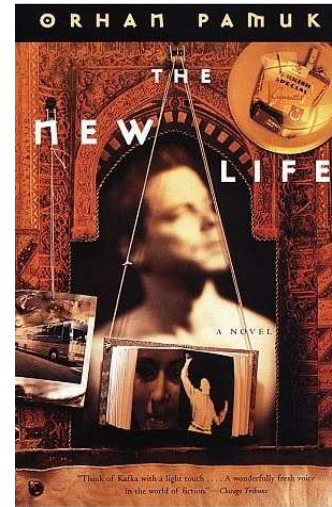
⁴² Reşat Nuri Güntekin, *Anadolu Notları* [Notes of Anatolia]. Istanbul 1993, p.81.

⁴³ Interestingly, Ayşe Kulin referred to Aspirin in almost all of her books. When I met with Mrs. Kulin at the 2010 Book Fair in Frankfurt, Germany, and told her about my observation, she told me that she grew up using aspirin.

⁴⁴ Ayşe Kulin., *Füreyâ* [Füreyâ]. 72nd edition, Istanbul 2009, p.270.

⁴⁵ "Orhan Pamuk," *Encyclopedia Britannica*, retrieved December 15, 2010, from Encyclopedia Britannica Online: <http://www.britannica.com/EBchecked/topic/1019818/Orhan-Pamuk>

promised by the book.⁴⁶ The following is an excerpt about Janan's use of aspirin for the common cold (accompanied by drinking linden flower tea), which is still practiced in Turkey as a home remedy for cold and fever.



Orhan Pamuk cited aspirin in two of his novels: *The Silent House* and *The New Life*

"Suddenly a lot of possibilities that were not part of my plans appeared before me. I went down to the kitchen at one in the morning. Negotiating among hulking pots and phantoms in the half light, I came upon a saucepan in which I made **tea with the dried linden flowers** I found in a jar, imagining all the while how I was going to tell Janan that the best way to ward off a **cold** was to crawl under the blanket with someone. And later, as I rifled through the medicine bottles on the sideboard where Janan had directed me, looking for an **aspirin**, I was thinking that if I too were to get sick, then we wouldn't have to leave the room for days. A curtain moved and some slippers sounded on the floor. (...) She was asleep. I found myself pacing. Looking at the time pouring water of the pitcher, gazing at Janan, floundering. Taking an **aspirin** for the hell of it. Placing my hand on her forehead to gauge her temperature again and again whenever she opened her eyes."⁴⁷

On aspirin's different pharmaceutical forms & doses

In most cases, we see that literary characters use two aspirin *tablets* (sometimes called *comprimé* in French) together. However, other amounts and forms are mentioned as well: the first case is **Çocuk Aspirini** [Children's Aspirin – Aspirin 100 mg tablet] in novelist Ahmet Ümit's book *The Night Was with Naked Feet*,⁴⁸ first published in 1992. The second is **Aspirin Plus-C** [400 mg effervescent tablet] in columnist Hasan Pulum's book *Events and People (1979-1984)*⁴⁹, first published in 1987, which is a compilation of his articles published in a newspaper.

On aspirin's side effects and misuse

Oktay Rifat [Horozcu] (1914-1988) is a Turkish poet and writer who had a great influence on modern Turkish poetry. He is the founder of the *Garip*

⁴⁶ Halman [ref. 39], p.174.

⁴⁷ Orhan Pamuk, *The New Life*. Translated by Güneli Gün, New York 1998, pp.174-175.

⁴⁸ Ahmet Ümit, *Çıplak Ayaklı Gece* [The Night Was With Naked Feet]. Istanbul 2005.

⁴⁹ Hasan Pulum, *Olaylar ve İnsanlar* [Events and People]. Ankara 1987, p.58.

[Strange] Movement together with Orhan Veli Kanık (1914-1950) and Melih Cevdet Anday (1915-2002). After graduating from the Ankara University Faculty of Law, he went to Paris to pursue his PhD but came back without completing his degree due to the outbreak of World War II. In his book *Mr. Lear* (first published in 1982), Oktay Rifat tells the story of an 80-year-old man who ponders the question of how to divide his estate between his daughters, similarly to Shakespeare's tragedy *King Lear*, which the book is named after. There is a part citing aspirin's major side effect, burning the stomach, as follows:

[- "Is there any **aspirin**?" he asked.

- "Yes, there is," I said. "Over the toilette shelf. But take it after dissolving; it **burns the stomach.**" We don't have a medicine chest.]⁵⁰

Ayşe Kulin's book *Bir Gün* (literally *One Day*, translated to English as *Face to Face*, first published in 2005) is about a Turkish woman journalist visiting a Kurdish woman political prisoner in prison. Their encounter lasts one whole day, and these two women face the everlasting dispute of their roots through historical flashbacks. Here we encounter a young woman attempting to commit suicide by taking too many aspirin tablets.

One morning, when I finally got my strength back, I left house after Alişan had gone to work and walked to the chemist to buy some **aspirin**. I returned home, put a mug of water by my bedside and started to take the **aspirin** one by one. I don't know how many I had taken when I suddenly remembered my grandmother's corpse. Her wrinkled face had turned a dirty yellow. They had tied up her jaw and had put a knife on her chest. (...) Then I thought of Alişan seeing my corpse when he returned home. That's how he would remember me, laying there in my own excrement and with saliva all over my face.⁵¹

Aspirin in Turkish idioms, slang, and meaning differentiations

More interesting than everything stated above, we see that the word "aspirin" – apart from being one of the few trademark products having an entry in Turkish dictionaries – has even entered slang expressions in Turkish. According to Aktunç's *Dictionary of Turkish Slang*,⁵² **aspirin** has the meaning of "**small car**" [such as the classic VW (Volkswagen) types, the Citroën 2CV (deux chevaux), etc.], also called "road louse" in slang language. The origin of this may have be the fact that aspirin, like most small cars, is the product of a German company. Here are some more examples indicating other uses of

⁵⁰ Oktay Rifat, *Bay Lear* [Mr. Lear]. Istanbul 2008, p.111.

⁵¹ Ayşe Kulin, *Face to Face*. Translated by John W. Baker, Istanbul 2008, pp.67-68.

⁵² Hulki Aktunç, *Türkçenin Büyük Argo Sözlüğü (Tanımlarıyla)*. Istanbul 2010, p.45.

aspirin with different meanings: These Turkish expressions and their meaning are as follows:

Aspirin gibi her derde deva olmak:⁵³ **Heal-all like an aspirin.**

Aspirin tableti etkisi yapmak:⁵⁴ [This word] **produced an aspirin tablet effect** [on the young woman]

Bayat aspirin deyyus:⁵⁵ [Do talk about, Şerbet, Şerbet Hanım. Talk, then we see your ass, **staled aspirin pimp**...]

Boşuna aspirin yutmamak (lit. doing things consciously):⁵⁶ [What did you think, I even know more. **I don't take aspirin in vain.** You understand?]

Discussion

The arts, literature in particular, have increasingly been used for medical purposes, especially in the last three decades; as therapy, as an aid to health promotion in communities; and in medical education to develop the ethical sense of students.⁵⁷ In addition to these three purposes, literature's historical narrative is valuable to us as pharmacy historians as well.

Although similar endeavors have already been undertaken to reveal pharmacy's reflection in literature, starting mainly in the 1920s by Prof. Georg Urdang (1882-1960), today, the resources dealing with this subject are rather limited to German, English, and French materials. Since pharmacy practices and pharmaceutical products may differ from country to country, using the same literary examples in the aforementioned languages will not always work for those countries having different cultural backgrounds and, hence, they might be unappealing to the taste of local readers. This idea is also supported by those local examples cited above: Bayer Aspirin's® rivalry with its Turkish counterpart "Assipin Kenan"; aspirin's use as a part of folk medicine together with linden flower tea, and new Turkish idioms and slang derived from aspirin, etc.

From a historical perspective, advertisements defaming Aspirin® to show the effectiveness of one of its Turkish rivals, *Nevrozin Celal*, is a typical example of unfair competition between domestic and foreign drug

⁵³ Ahmet Ümit, *Kar Kokusu* [The Smell of the Snow]. 9th edition, Istanbul 2005, pp.71-72.

⁵⁴ Avni Givda, *Erguvanlar, Ihlamurlar Öyküsü ve Başka Öyküler*. Istanbul 1970, p.16.

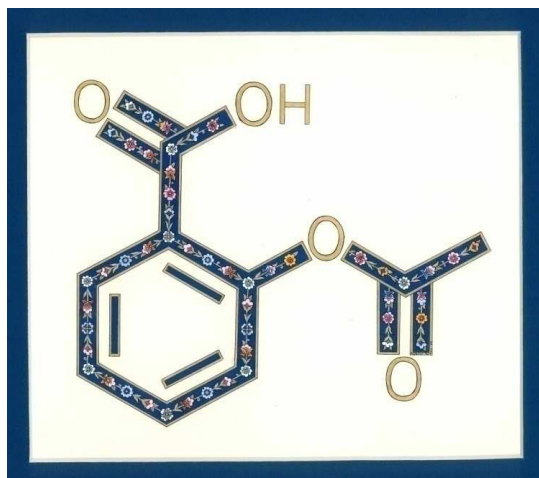
⁵⁵ Vecdi Çiracıoğlu, *Serseri Standartları Sempozyumu*. Istanbul 2004, p.296.

⁵⁶ Nezihe Meriç, Çalgıcı [The Musician] in *Öykü Antolojisi* [Anthology of Short Stories]. Istanbul 2001, p.153.

⁵⁷ Robin Downie, "The role of literature in medical education – A commentary on the poem: Roswell, Hanger 84," *JME*, 25 (1999), 529-531.

manufacturers. The situation can be traced easily in other drug advertisements of the day, which, by and large, focused on the cheapness of domestic products and the harmful effects of draining capital to other countries. This reminds us of Turkey's prohibition on importing drugs from abroad as a result of state support for domestic manufacturers in the early period of the Republic. As discussed by Dinç and Sarı (2002), this was a period when national products were regarded as having great importance and value as a reaction against capitulation.⁵⁸

Moreover, while Aspirin® (with a capital "A") is a registered trademark of Bayer, aspirin is a generic name in some countries, including Turkey. This slight difference, however, has always caused confusion among consumers, as it has among the authors of the books we examined. It is not surprising that, in our examples, even when Bayer Aspirin® was mentioned, the name was always written with lower-case letters.⁵⁹



Aspirin's popularity in Turkish art is not limited to literature. Here is an example of a classic work of the art of illumination (tezhîp), a painting of the chemical structure of Aspirin. (H. Tekiner Collection)

It has been found that aspirin-related citations in literature predominantly refer to aspirin's medical use in its early period in Turkey. While aspirin's analgesic and antipyretic effects were highlighted, its anti-inflammatory, anti-platelet, and anti-rheumatic effects were ignored. Furthermore, aspirin has recently been advocated as an ally in the fight against cancer, for use in treating

⁵⁸ Dinç & Sarı [ref. 17], p.24.

⁵⁹ The only exceptions are Ahmet Ümit's books, but he didn't use the trademark sign after "Aspirin," either.

diabetes, and as an agent to combat preeclampsia,⁶⁰ uses that were also ignored in literary examples. Why were these effects ignored?

First, it is assumed that Aspirin's® popularity should have declined after the market releases of paracetamol in 1956 and ibuprofen in 1969.⁶¹ Second, none of the aforementioned authors were doctors or had a previous medical education, and, apparently, they were mostly influenced by Bayer's product positioning strategy during the period from 1930-1960.

Conclusion

We conclude that Aspirin® has deeply penetrated Turkish literature as a common wonder drug with unattainable results in relieving pain and fever. Its gorgeous popularity can also be seen in idioms and slang language, which is, indeed, rather rare for any other pharmaceutical product in the market. Despite being often criticized as subjective, this article confirms that literary works are worth examining in terms of the history of pharmacy due to the information they provide about a pharmaceutical product as well as the hidden clues embedded within the text to understand a distinct period.

To reach more accurate and overall results on Aspirin's® reflection in literature with a broader frame, it is suggested that the subject be considered with respect to different countries, different cultures, and different languages. This seems to be the best way to compare and comprehend cross-cultural varieties of different perceptions of the same medicine. In addition, pharmacy in literature can be included in pharmacy education and given a place in the pharmacy curriculum as a facultative course.

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I wish I had an Aspirin! Reflections of Aspirin® in Turkish literature

Literary works have increasingly been used for medical purposes, especially in the last three decades: as therapy, as an aid to health promotion in communities, and in medical education to develop the ethical sense of students. In addition, literature's historical narrative may also provide information about

⁶⁰ Kyriacos Costa Nicolaou & Tamsyn Montagnon, *Molecules That Changed the World – A Brief History of the Art and Science of Synthesis and Its Impact on Society*. Weinheim 2008, pp.22-27.

⁶¹ Jeffreys [ref. 1].

the history of medicine and pharmacy. Aspirin® being one of the most popular analgesic products of the previous centuries, this article aims to investigate how Aspirin® penetrated Turkish literature by examining 16 literary examples from a historical perspective. These examples can be classified in accordance with their relevance to various aspects: Bayer and its Turkish rivals; Aspirin's® medical uses; its various pharmaceutical forms and doses; its side effects and misuse; and its presence in idioms, slang, and meaning differentiations. We conclude that Aspirin® has deeply penetrated Turkish literature as a common wonder drug with unattainable results in relieving pain and fever. Its widespread popularity can also be seen in its use in idioms and slang language, which is, indeed, rather rare for any other pharmaceutical product on the market.

Key words: Analgesics, Antipyretics, Aspirin®, Literature, Drugs, Pharmacy history

Keşke bir Aspirin olsaydı! Aspirin®'in Türk edebiyatındaki yansımaları

Edebiyatın tedavi edici, toplumu sağlık konusunda bilgilendirici ve tıp ve eczacılık öğrencilerine etik bakış açısını kazandırıcı bir araç olarak tıbbi amaçlı kullanımı, özellikle son otuz yılda büyük artış göstermiştir. Bunlara ek olarak edebiyattan, tarihsel anlatı niteliğiyle de zaman zaman tıp ve eczacılık tarihine ilişkin bilgi edinilebilmektedir. Geçtiğimiz yüzyılın en popüler ağrı kesicilerinden biri olan Aspirin®'in Türk edebiyatında nasıl temsil edildiğini anlamayı amaçlayan bu makalede 16 edebi örnek tarihsel bir bakış açısıyla incelenmiştir. Örneklerde Aspirin®'in işlendiği konular şu şekilde sınıflandırılabilir: Bayer ve Türkiye'deki rakipleri; Aspirin®'in tıbbi kullanımı; çeşitli farmasötik form ve dozlar; yan etki ve suiistimaller; ayrıca deyim, argo ve anlam kaymaları. Sonuç olarak Aspirin®'in halkın oldukça yaygın şekilde kullandığı bir mucizevî ağrıkesici-ateş düşürücü ilaç olarak Türk edebiyatına derinden nüfuz ettiği anlaşılmıştır. Aspirin® kelimesinin diğer ilaç isimlerinin aksine Türkçe deyim ve argo literatürüne girmiş olması da ilacın Türk toplumunda kazanmış olduğu yüksek popülaritenin bir diğer kanıtıdır.

Anahtar Sözcükler: Ağrıkesiciler, Aspirin®, Ateş düşürücüler, Eczacılık tarihi, Edebiyat, İlaç.