

THE USAGE OF MYTHONYMS: A SURVEY AMONG MEDICAL STUDENTS

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ABSTRACT

Mythonyms are anatomical terms with mythological background. Although they are commonly not included in the official Terminologia Anatomica, their usage is widespread and sometime surpasses the usage of the nomenclature term. With the present study, we aim to investigate the awareness of medical students regarding mythonyms, using a standardized survey. Respondents compared a list of Latin/nomenclature and Bulgarian/mythonymic names and evaluated the preference for either.

With the present study, we aim to investigate the knowledge of young medical students regarding mythonyms, using a standardized survey. We aimed to quest what is most commonly used among mythonyms, Latin or Bulgarian names.

Most of the objects included in this study have Latin equivalents in modern anatomical nomenclature. They provide an insight in the history of anatomy. Our data, obtained from a young sample, with above average education regarding anatomy and physiology, is highly valuable and suggests that alongside mythonyms, latin names are still commonly used.

Key words: *mythonym, myth, anatomical nomenclature, Terminologia anatomica*

INTRODUCTION

Anatomy is a science with great descriptive performance. However, along with describing, it also provides names for the objects described. For this, names are picked, in the utilitarian way, according to the function and location of the object, or sometimes more vague, because the body part resembles a known object, or because it reminds the anatomist of a classical story from the mythology. Despite the fact that Terminologia Anatomica (10) is the global standard for correct gross anatomical nomenclature in humans, many anatomical structures remain commonly known with names not present in this standard reference work. An object's name might be a source of sterling information regarding the discoverer, the story of the discovery or it may lead even further away back in time. A great number of structures in the human body are named after a person, thing or even a place. Such terms are referred to as "eponyms" (2, 9). A subsection of the eponyms are the "mythonyms". The particularity of those terms is the association with mythology. This study provides the opportunity to inquire into the cognition of medical students about the anatomical terminology. Mythonyms are classified, according to their usage, into anatomical, physiological, pathological, psychiatric and psychological groups (7).

MATERIAL AND METHODS

The present study was carried out among medical students from the Medical Faculty of Trakia University in Stara Zagora, Bulgaria. The students were using standard anatomical textbooks in Bulgarian (1) to accompany their regular lectures.

The research method used consisted in a standardized questionnaire regarding the knowledge and usage of mythonyms among medical students and their observations on the anatomical terms most commonly used in medically-focused environment. Respondents compared a list of Latin/nomenclature and Bulgarian/mythonymic names and evaluated the preference for either. The participants in the survey were first- up to fourth-year students, whereas most of them were second-

year students (48%). The anonymity of the participants was kept, which led to no rejection rate. However, some questions were left unanswered.

RESULTS

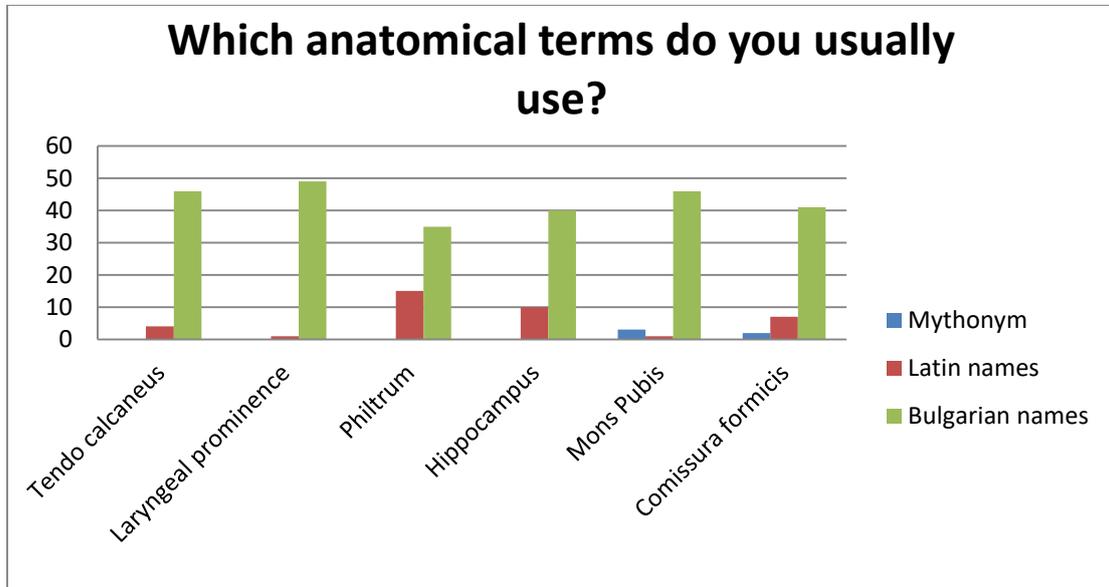


Figure 1. Data regarding the usage of terminology

The majority of participants stated that they most commonly use Bulgarian names of the aforementioned structures in Figure 1. Despite knowing the mythonymic equivalents of the terms they indicated that in the medical field they are rarely used, contrariwise to their usage among people without medical education.

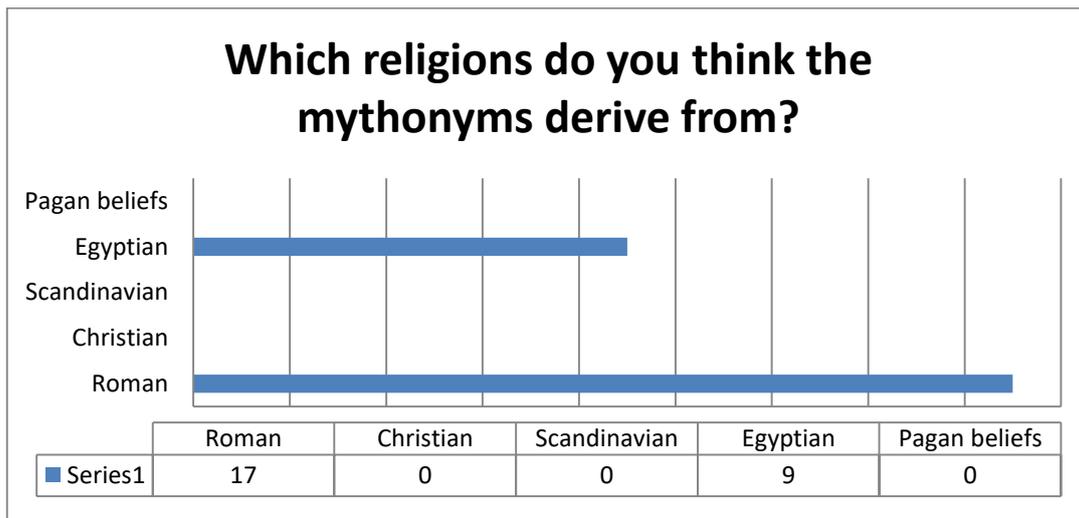


Figure 2. Opinions on the mythological background of the mythonyms

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The majority of the answers regarding the origin of the mythonyms pointed out to the Roman mythology and some pointed to the Egyptian. However, the general respond rate of the question was just 52%.

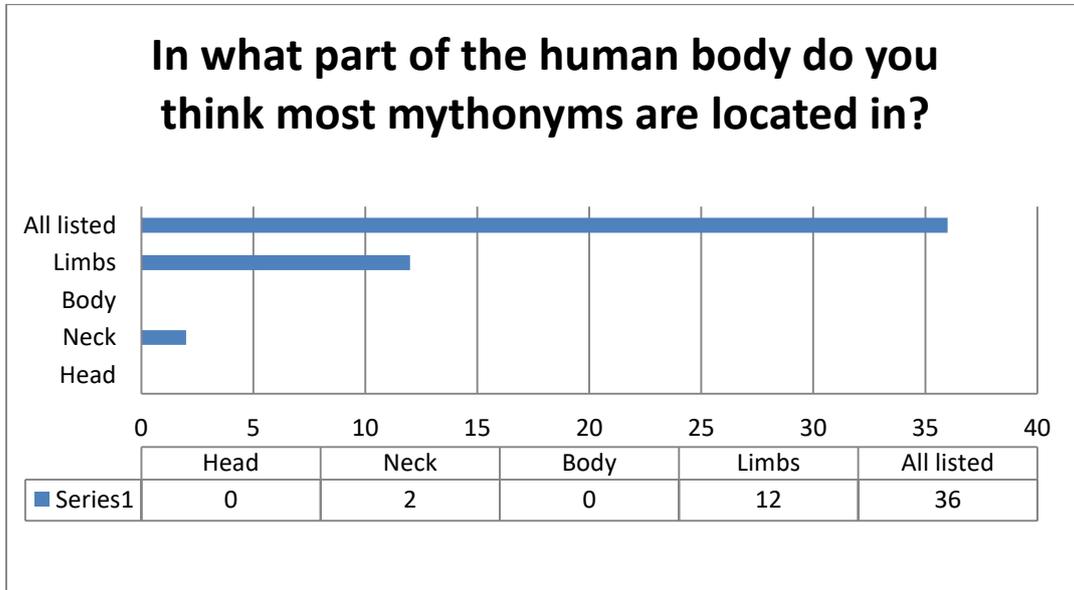


Figure 3. Opinions on the location of the structures with mythonymic names

Regarding the location of the structures motioned in Figure 1 the prevailing answer was that they were spread around the whole body. Most of the terms from the excerpt are located in the head. However, there are many mythonyms associated with objects in various parts of the human body.

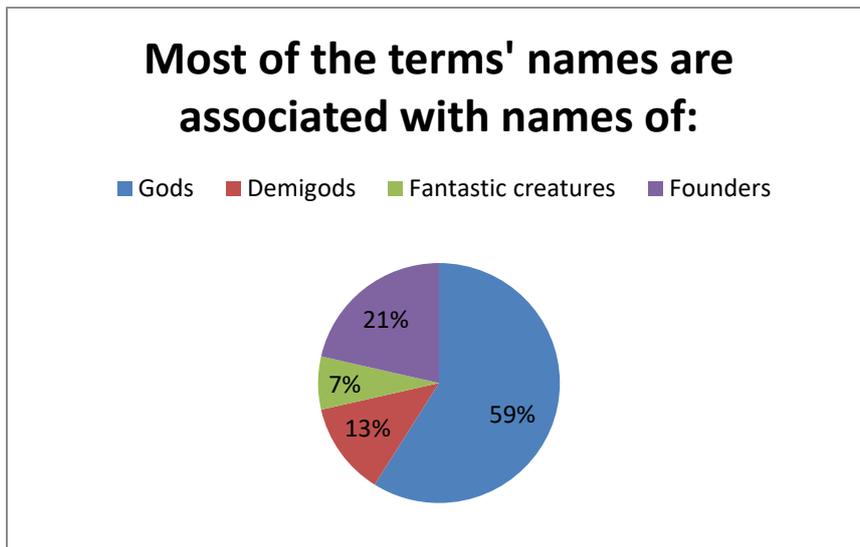


Figure 4. General opinion of the mythological figure associated with the corresponding mythonym.

The results show that according to the students the majority of mythonyms are associated with gods from various mythologies. This applies to mythonyms such as Ammon's horn (4), the Iris (6) and the Cupid's bow (8) for example. A lesser percentage showed that mythonyms can also be associated to demigods, fantastic creatures or supposed discoverers of the anatomical objects.

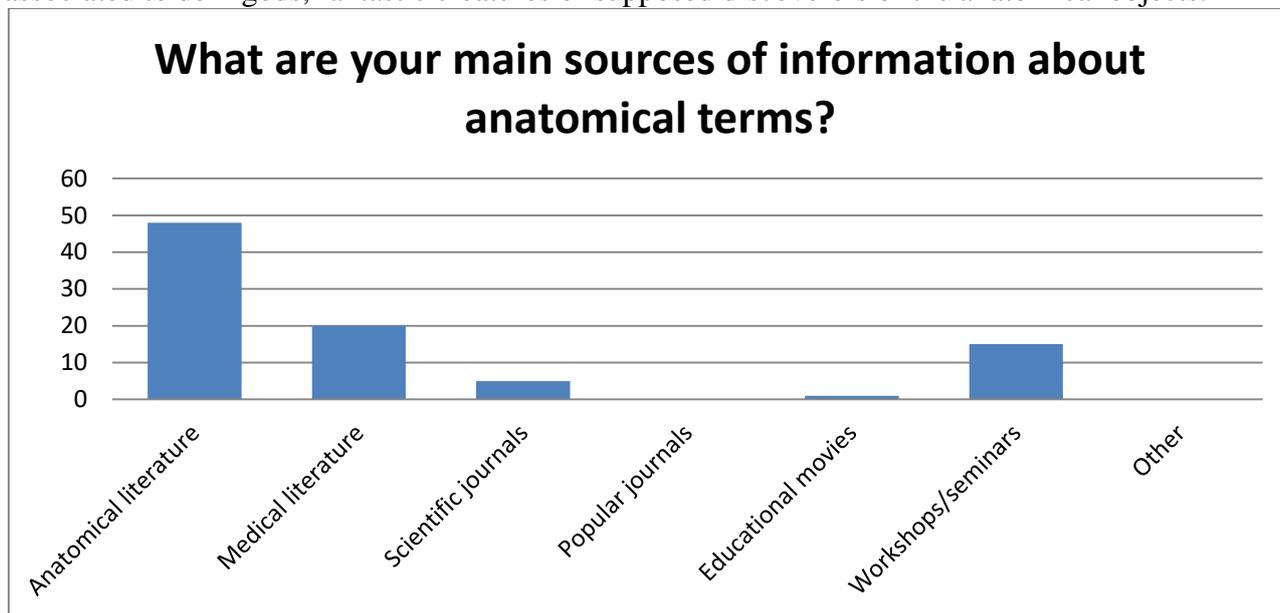


Figure 5. Main sources of information regarding to anatomical terminology

DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSIONS

This research aimed to investigate how used are mythonyms to this day. Despite the fact that most people with medical education find themselves to be using mostly Bulgarian or Latin terminology, their knowledge about eponyms is quite significant. However, in their medical practice, specialists use mythonyms or eponyms, which are more comprehensible to patients. In fact, eponyms are so inexhaustibly used in contemporary life. In many cases (e.g. with the iris), their use is so widespread that they are not always recognized as eponyms (11).

Appropriate and uniform use of nomenclature of a clinical disorder is vital for its identification and classification. There are many controversial opinions on whether eponyms should continue to be a part of the medical terminology or should be abandoned as a thing of the past (3, 5). Even though it is quite difficult to find a simple explanation about the origin of those mythonyms, the fact that they are still used in modern medicine and medical literature is outstanding. Soon the question whether future generations of medical specialist will continue to remain acquainted to eponyms, will arise (6). In either case, mythonyms provide an interesting insight in the history of anatomy and medicine in general. Our data, obtained from a young sample, with above average education regarding anatomy and physiology suggests that Latin terms and mythonyms, are commonly used interchangeably.

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