

## HEALING WITH PLANTS AND THERMAL SPRINGS

## Treatment of kidney diseases in the thermal springs of Pithecusa during the XVIII Century



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## Abstract

The island of Pithecusa (Ischia) is a volcanic island in the Tyrrhenian Sea in the north end of the Gulf of Naples at about 30 kilometers from the same city. Pithecusa is very popular for its hot springs which even the ancients used. This report aims to analyze the renal therapeutic benefits of the Pithecusa thermal mineral spring through a review of two different manuscripts: i) "Di Napoli il seno cratero" (The gulf of Naples) of Domenico Antonio Parrino (1642-1708) and ii) "De' rimedi naturali che sono nell'isola di Pithecusa oggi detta Ischia" (On the natural cures of the island of Pithecusa known today as Ischia) of Giulio Iasolino (1583-1622). These two

manuscripts published during the 18th century and both manuscripts highlight the thermal virtues of the thermal springs of Pithecusa. In the past natural remedies were important in the treatment of different diseases including that of thermal springs dating back to ancient Rome. Thermal springs were used to treat spasms, skin diseases, hair loss and various renal ailments. Both manuscripts describe the thermal springs in Ischia and their therapeutic benefits in medical diseases.

**Key words:** hot springs, kidney, pithecusa, renal pathology

## Introduction

The volcanic island of Pithecusa (today called Ischia) is located about 17 miles to the southwest of Naples, on the western edge of the Gulf of Naples. It is a popular attraction particularly for the therapeutic benefits of its thermal mineral springs. In fact the thermal springs of Pithecusa are well known today not only to the islanders but also to the tourists it attracts for the treatment of different ailments including that of diseases of the kidneys. The therapeutic merits of the springs of Pithecusa have been known since ancient times. Two manuscripts (Figure 1, Figure 2): i) "Di Napoli il seno cratero" (*The gulf of Naples*) of Domenico Antonio Parrino (1642-1708) and ii) "De' rimedi naturali che sono nell'isola di Pithecusa oggi detta Ischia" (*On the natural cures of the island of Pithecusa known today as Ischia*) of Giulio Iasolino (1583-1622), published in the 18th century discuss in details the curative virtues of the Pithecusa hot springs in the prevention and cure of several renal diseases [1] [2].

## Thermal springs in Pithecusa

Parrino and Iasolino provide the precise sites where the hot spring of Pithecusa are located. In the book written by Iasolino, each described site is associated with its benefit to different kidney diseases. The treatment of kidney pain is associated with the following locations: "Bagno di soliceto", "bagno di Vimitello", "sudatorio di Barano (sweating bath of Barano)", "bagno di Gurgitello", "bagno di Nitroso" and "Fornello"; that of kidney stones with "sudatorio di Sant'Angelo", "bagno di Soliceto", "Carta Romana"

and "Giardino di Pontano", at that of renal ulcers (?infection) with "bagno di Spelonca", "bagno di Castiglione", "bagno di Fontana", "bagno di Ferro", "bagno di Succellaro" and "d'Ulmitello".

The rich mineral content of the waters were deemed effective in the treatment and improvement of kidney function, for curing kidney stones, for regulating diuresis and for their uricosuric properties. Among the main components were: sodium, calcium, chloride, sulphur and carbon. For instance, the hot springs close to the Aragonese Castle were described and cited as the most popular for their ability to dissolve kidney stones. Drinking the thermal spring water of Pithecusa was considered effective in the treatment of kidney and urinary tract pathologies, promoting the expulsion of kidney stones and preventing kidney stone formation.

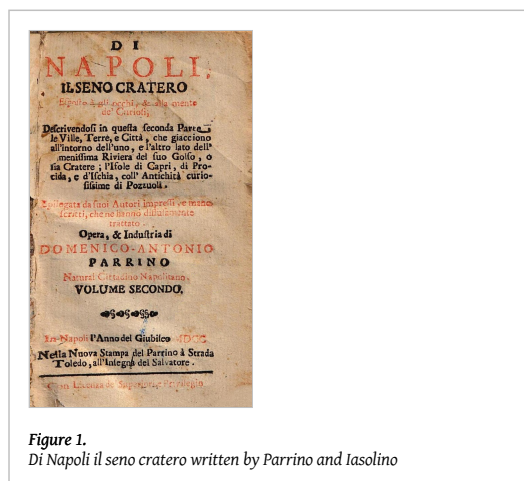


Figure 1.  
Di Napoli il seno cratero written by Parrino and Iasolino

Amongst the places that Guido Iasolino describes, he devotes twenty-two pages of his treatise to the thermal waters of Gurgitello (little vortex) that are located in Casamicciola Terme. The name of Gurgitello was given by the Romans (in Latin “gurgēs”) inspired by the hot stream that flowed outside and poured into the sea. Iasolino explained how those suffering from kidney stones were healed after taking a bath in the thermal waters of Gurgitello (Figure 3 - Figure 4).

As for the book written by Parrino, he describes all the thermal baths. Specifically he perfectly locates the area that nowadays is known as "Poseidon" garden, still fully operating as a thermal park. Parrino demonstrates the properties of hot springs as: 'Drinking cold water from the hot springs not only "open the kidneys" inducing a diuretic response and deflating the belly but also it seems to reduce kidney pain'. Finally during the description of the hot springs of the island, Parrino reports that many

famous people of the period had been to Ischia to enjoy the benefits of its thermal waters. Lastly both authors emphasize that the beneficial properties of the waters is due to the presence of sulfur.

## Conclusion

To conclude, this report highlights the popularity of Pithecusa in the 18<sup>th</sup> century as demonstrated in the attendance of famous people of the time, and illustrates the importance of natural remedies for the treatment of renal diseases in the 18<sup>th</sup> century.

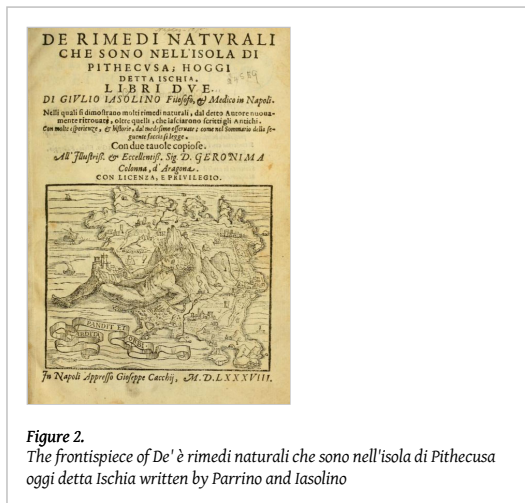


Figure 2.  
The frontispiece of *De' rimeredi naturali che sono nell'isola di Pithecusa oggi detta Ischia* written by Parrino and Iasolino

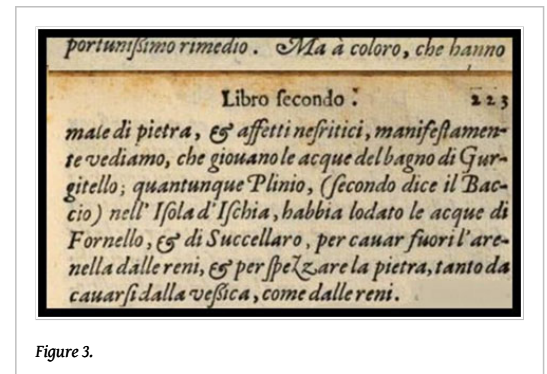


Figure 3.

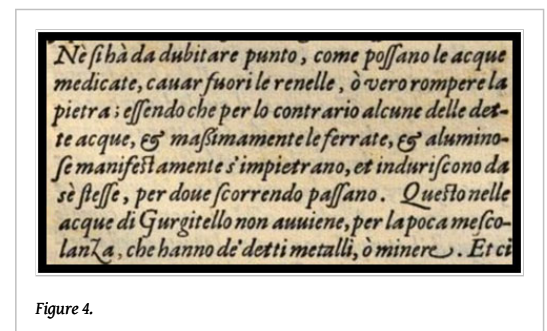


Figure 4.

## References

[1] “Di Napoli il seno cratero” of Domenico Antonio Parrino

[2] “De' rimeredi naturali che sono nell'isola di Pithecusa oggi detta Ischia” of Giulio Iasolino