

## TRACES OF THE FLOOD

"The Roman author Celsus borrowed heavily from Hippocrates, including the techniques for setting fractures, traction, bandaging, amputation and trephination. Considerable skill and ingenuity went into the development of apparatus for the extension and counter-extension of fractures and dislocated limbs, and the famous 'Hippocratic Bench' with its range of adjustable fittings - levers, crossbars, windlasses, straps and cords..." 1

Various other methods of stretching and manipulating the body have been employed since antiquity which functioned like the Hippocratic Bench. Traces of the Flood focuses upon a rack-like ladder, which had purpose built pulleys and cables built into the framework, this was a device onto which patients were strapped. The earliest illustrations of this ladder appear in 'Codex Laurentianus LXXIV', by Apollonios of Cition (100 - 200 BC).

In the two thousand years since Apollonios, the mechanisms for realigning and adjusting the human skeleton have not altered radically because the human form remains unaltered. However far humans can travel or extend the capacity of the brain, or cure with miracle drugs, humans are still trapped within the same vessel, a vessel which can break and become diseased just as it did in ancient times.

In "Lehmann's Medizinische Handatlanten" by J.F. Lehmann, published in Germany in 1914, an illustration of a tubular steel 'Nebel' frame (used for applying plaster bandages to the rump), shows straps crossing from side to side like the steps of a ladder, a patient is strapped face down onto the apparatus. This device although used in different circumstances to the Hippocratic Bench and the Apollonios' ladder (of which it most resembles) shows clearly the legacy of history upon the medicine of this century.

"Internal surgery was hardly possible in those days (except perhaps lithotomy) and much of the surgeon's work was necessarily devoted to the reposition of bones and the healing of dislocations, which occurred in the games and the fights, either on the battlefield or in the arena." 2

In *Traces of the Flood* the 'Apollonios' ladder forms a horizontal trestle, with its ends resting on small rocky outcrops in stark stony landscapes. A person is attached to the device, attending the patient is a physician who is carrying out a traction procedure.

Three paintings of mountain ranges were made and photographed to accompany the ladder images where the human body is symbolically represented by striated massif, that resemble the muscle formations of anatomical illustrations from Diderot & d'Alembert's 1751-1772 encyclopaedia "Anatomie Chirurgie". The peaks form visual spines through the photographs when placed in consort with the ladder/patient images. The mountains appear to be reflected in the receding waters of the flood where the lower section of the photograph mirrors the top. Mountain scars (cliffs) scarred and re-shaped by nature - the patient scarred in conflict and re-shaped in nature.

Symbolically the ladder set between the rocks can be seen as a bridge spanning the centuries with man fixed in time and place, unable to turn back and facing an uncertain and difficult future.

1. *Doctors and Diseases in the Roman Empire* by Ralph Jackson, British Museum Press, 1988, page 24.

2. *Hellenistic Science and Culture in the Last Three Centuries B.C.* by George Sarton, Dover Publications, Inc. 1987, page 407.