

## KOPSTER

An etching by Cornelius Dusart (1660-1704). New Haven, Yale Medical Library, Clements C. Fry Collection.

Cornelius Dusart, both painter and engraver, studied under Adriaan Van Ostade, well known as a prolific painter and engraver of peasant subjects. Dusart, who was himself a spirited portrayer of peasant life, often depicted dancing, drinking, and amorous amusements. He etched this more painful scene in the same year that he made studies of the village surgeon and the village doctor.

The art of cupping, with its long tradition,<sup>1</sup> was a cure-all not limited to the poorer classes. Thomas Mapleson, Cupper to His Royal Highness, the Prince Regent, described techniques identical with those seen here.<sup>2</sup> The cupper, or kopster, has on her right a basin and a lamp. Over the lighted lamp she would heat the glasses for an instant before applying them. The cups she uses had one hole and could not be sucked by mouth. She holds a piece of flax in her left hand, which would be lighted and slipped beneath the cup. This method had the disadvantage of burning the skin.

It is not surprising that the cupper is a woman. At the time of this print some operations of minor surgery, cupping in particular,<sup>3</sup> were often turned over to women (the common French word for a cupper is indeed feminine, *la ventouseuse*), but since the patient is also a woman, and may have suffered from some female disorder, she may have turned to a female practitioner in preference to a male surgeon. The paunchy scarifier, however, is a man. He stands sharpening his lancet and looking attentively at the cupper, for he must be ready to make several shallow incisions as soon as a purple tumor has been raised beneath the cup. The cup will then be reapplied to draw out blood from the wound. The scarifier has a large enema syringe in his belt, and the "bill of fare" tacked over the fireplace mentions clysters as well as cupping. A bleeding bowl, to be used for phlebotomy, rests on the mantle. Why he wears a urinal on his head, or why his companion wears a funnel, it is not easy to say.

Cupping was said to relieve giddiness, *lactis abundantia*, snake bite, the colic, gout, and other ailments. Culpeper says it was not to be practised during the full moon.<sup>4</sup> The part to be cupped was determined by the diagnosis. For example, cupping of the foot, as seen here, or the soles of the feet, was used for the cure of female disorders, as well as gout, migraine, and sciatica. Experiments on the great toe usually referred to bladder disease, whereas the little toe was connected with heaviness of the limbs and apoplexy, or so says Culpeper.<sup>4</sup> The theory of cupping seemed to be twofold: (1) to divert blood from the afflicted part and (2) to suck out the disease directly. Thus lesions of the foot might be treated by scarification of the loins, whereas colic could be treated by cupping around the navel. Cupping with scarification, unlike phlebotomy, might withdraw arterial as well as venous blood.

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<sup>1</sup> Aphorisms for its use are attached to the name of Hippocrates.

<sup>2</sup> Thomas Mapleson. *Treatise on the art of cupping*. London, G. Sidney, 1813.

<sup>3</sup> Paul Richer. *L'art et la médecine*. Paris, Gaultier, Magnier & Cie.,

<sup>4</sup> Nicholas Culpeper, M. Ruland, & Abdiah Cole. *Two treatises: The first of blood-letting and . . . the second of cupping and scarifying*. . . . London, John Streater, 1672.



KOPSTER

Zet jy de koppen maar, zei dikke Piet tot Iryn.  
Ik sleep de rhylen vast: het zal haar heel cureeren.

En word Iys slan en helpt geen veurschootband noch rijn.  
Dan zal ik aansonds met myn spuytiding haar klyfseeren.  
A.B.

