

Asklepiades z Bitynii i szkoła metodyków

Asclepiades of Bithynia and the methodist school of medicine

SUMMARY

In spite of current opinions diffused throughout handbooks of the history of medicine there was no essential theoretical affinity between Asclepiades and the representatives of the methodism. The practical attitude which was ostentatiously manifested by these physicians, i.e. Asclepiades and methodists, had its origin in the specific social conditions of Rome (in the first century B.C. and the first century A.D.) where their medical activity was developed.

According to the preserved, but still very insufficient, *testimonia* investigated in the article, Asclepiades was not the atomist. He linked the corpuscular conception with the continuum theorist approach, the notion of void was out of use; Asclepiades explicated the movement of particles by means of the antiperistasis principle. The Asclepiadean theoretical conception is therefore akin to that of Descartes and demonstrates the application of the mechanistic corpuscular theory to the explication of biological phenomena. The author discusses the possibility of interpreting in certain cases the leptomeres concept, usually connected with the notion of the void, as a capillary system. The Asclepiades' understanding of disease is traditional one; he considered a vessel blockage as a cause of disease, so his position seems to be close to the tracts *De flatibus* and *De morbo sacro* from *Corpus Hippocraticum*. The Asclepiadean interpretation of the disease differs from the Hippocratic disease conception at two points: 1) the blockage occurs on the microscopical level and 2) the great variety of the diseases is reduced to that unique cause, i.e. the blockage (aetiological reductionism). The author undertakes the reconstruction of the Asclepiadean soul concept and he interprets the soul in terms of leptomeres (in the traditional sense as confirmed by *testimonia*, that is as the subtle substance with finest particles i.e. *spiritus*).

The concept of particle which was so very characteristic feature of the Asclepiadean corpuscular theory is absent in the theoretical conception of the methodist doctors. They take instead the continuum theorist position and make use of the two concepts – *strictura* and *solutio*. The reconstruction of both concepts is based in the article upon *testimonia* found in the work of Caelius Aurelianus. The morbid states named *strictura* and *solutio* have a physical nature and they are changed by physical factors (movement, heat, cold and light). These states are ascribed by the methodists to the integral organismic structure that is a mechanical one. All changes that occur in this structure – normal (health) as well as abnormal (disease) – are nothing but a local movement. The theory of treatment applied by the methodist physicians was based on: 1) the ancient principle *contraria contrariis curantur*, 2) the assumption that the healing influence of the procedures and substances (foods and medicaments) employed by them can be reduced to physical action, 3) the principle of generalized treatment; the therapeutical action was to be extended over the whole mechanical system of organism, 4) the analepsis and the metasyncrisis principles which were applied in the case of

the chronic diseases. The method of the chronic diseases treatment invented by the methodist doctors was composed of two “cycles” – the restorative and metasyncritic cycle. The article provides an analysis of this method. It proves that the methodist conception of disease was the a causal and typological conception.

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