

RESEARCH PROPOSAL ABOUT SKIN CONDITIONS IN ANTIQUITY AND THE CONTRIBUTION OF PAPYRI TO MEDICAL KNOWLEDGE

Introduction and reasoning:

Although the foundations of medical science were established in the 5th century B.C., during the heyday of democracy and simultaneously with the flourishing of the literary genres, its advancement didn't stop there but it continued to progress and adapt to the new facts in accordance with the era and people's needs. Ancient Greek medicine, based on an empirical and logical model, affected and was influenced by the Roman medicine while later mixed with the Egyptian element, which greatly defined and released from superstitions.

The cause for the thesis statement concerning skin conditions in the light of papyrology was the growing interest of the scientific community for medicine in antiquity and the fact that skin and the associated diseases remained in the shadow for many years. Given that skin was not originally conceived as a human organ in its own right, but rather as a surface that encloses all the vital human organs, it was not well appreciated by the ancient doctors and practitioners. Nevertheless, skin offered the privilege of the easy examination to the practitioner, since due to its length and its sensitivity it was easily accessible for observation.

People would always suffer from skin disorders, since they were directly exposed to extraneous factors. Allergenic substances as well as injuries of every kind brought about lesions, while there were many diseases that affected skin, such as lichen or leprosy. The presence of cutaneous conditions were always evident which becomes apparent through the ancient manuscripts with treatises and medical prescriptions that address to each corresponding case, starting with the Edwin-Smith and Ebers papyri, which include prescriptions with mere dermatological content.

Purpose:

The interest in dermatology was intensified not only over the course of the years and along with the evolution of scientific knowledge, but also with the establishing of a field that specializes in cutaneous issues. This research proposal aims at studying skin conditions in general, as they were conceived by the ancient doctor/practitioner and written in treatises and papyri documents in order to show the means and the way

in which people used to tackle dermatological conditions and thus, the basis on which modern medicine is based.

Therefore, this research proposal is to analyze and present the facts that offer abundant knowledge about the way in which skin conditions were conceived in antiquity, setting light on unknown or underestimated aspects of the subject. At the same time, distinctions and common references of notions will be emphasised, so that the procedure of assimilation and the evolution of knowledge will be more understandable.

Originality:

The originality of the subject lies in the fact that there is no monograph that analyzes it in depth, while the corresponding articles are restricted to using only typical texts, like the Edwin- Smith and Ebers papyri, while later material is not mentioned. The discussion of the subject, in the present case, will take place in the light of philology which automatically means that literary and primary material in Greek will be presented.

Sources:

The sources which will be used are avowedly literary texts and treatises in ancient Greek (and Latin) written by doctors and experts in medical issues, as well as bibliographical references and studies (monographs and articles) that contribute to the progress and realization of this proposal. Additionally and simultaneously with the abovementioned, primary material- texts written on papyrus and other means (shells and parchments) that offer information related to the subject will be used.

Planning and Methodology:

The completion of the research proposal lies in the collection and analysis of primary material (ancient manuscripts) and secondary sources (bibliographical research). After collecting the primary material, a qualitative analysis of the facts will follow, while commenting and presenting of the bibliographical sources will be applied.

In order for the dissertation to be completed, it is, also, necessary to follow a sequence while presenting and analyzing the facts, so that we can ensure the validity of the information as much as possible. For this reason, it is important for the doctoral thesis to start from an overview of medical art in antiquity, taking into account the variability and complexity of the medical “profession”. At the same time, popular diseases of antiquity should be mentioned, always in accordance with the evidence

that we own. The main part of the dissertation will be dedicated to dermatological conditions, which is the subject of the thesis statement. At the beginning, we will attempt to approach the term *d'erma* (skin) lexicographically, and we will try to explain how it was conceived and how it was treated in practice through references from texts and treatises. Subsequently, we will discuss the various kinds of diseases and the means that people had at their disposal in order to treat them, as they are mainly mentioned in the papyrological documents, but also in ancient texts and treatises. We will, then, discuss about formulations and techniques, as well as substances that occur quite often and in a broad range of documents and sources.

Conclusion:

The primary purpose of the dissertation is to try to crystallize medical knowledge in antiquity, setting light on an admittedly broad field, this of dermatology. It is, also, considered a challenge, if we think about the fact that we will make use of a variety of ancient manuscripts written in Greek. The research proposal aspires to offer a handbook of dermatological conditions by studying the monuments of written word. Such an endeavor will help, primarily, the philologists by exploiting various texts, and secondarily, medical science through setting the base for its advancement and knowledge, in general, since the more we know about the past the better we can deal with the future.

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