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Articoli/Articles

BYZANTINE PSYCHOSOMATIC MEDICINE
(10th-15th CENTURY)

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SUMMARY

Original elements of the psychosomatic medicine are examined by the most important byzantine physicians and medico-philosophers during the 10th-15th centuries. These topics concern the psychosomatic unity of the human personality, the psychosomatic disturbances, diseases and interactions, organic diseases, which cause psychical disorders, psychical pathological reactions, which result in somatic diseases, the psychology of the depth of the soul, the psychosomatic pathogenetic reasons of psychiatric and neurological diseases and suicide, the influence of witchcraft on psychosomatic affections, maniac and demoniac patients. The psychosomatic treatment has a holistic preventive and curative character and encloses sanitary and dietary measures, physiotherapy, curative bathing, strong purgation, pharmaceutical preparations proportional to the disease, religious disposition, psychoanalysis and psychotherapy with dialogue and the contribution of the divine factor. The late byzantine medical science contributed mainly to the progress of the psychosomatic medicine and therapeutics. The saint woman physician Hermione (1st-2nd cent.) is considered as the protectress of psychosomatic medicine.

Important byzantine physicians and medico-philosophers especially during 10th-15th centuries research the psychosomatic unity of the human personality and the psychosomatic disturbances. They note organic diseases, which cause psychical dis-

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orders, psychical reactions, which result in somatic diseases, the psychology of the depth of the soul, the psychosomatic pathogenetic reasons of psychiatric and neurologic diseases and of suicide, the influence of witchcraft on psychosomatic affections, maniac and demoniac patients. The treatment has generally a holistic preventive and curative character.

1. *Psychosomatic unity*

The psychosomatic conjunction of the human personality as body and soul is emphasized by Michael Psellos¹ (11th cent.) and Nicephoros Blemmides² (13th cent.). Psellos³ also accepts the existence of body and soul already in the embryo. The psychosomatic influences on the central and sympathetic neural system are noted by Nicetas Stethatos⁴ (11th cent.).

2. *Psychosomatic disturbances*

According to byzantine medical legislation Basilica⁵ of the king Leo VI the Wise (10th cent.) and Constantinos Armenopoulos⁶ (14th cent.), when one of the two elements is ill suffers simultaneously and the other.

2.1 *Organic diseases cause psychical disorders*

Theophanes Nonos⁷ (19th cent.) considers that cerebral damages cause amnesia, migraine, fear⁸, melancholy and depression. He also describes⁹ diseases of the womb and disorders of menstruation, which result in hysteria and mental diseases. Joannes bishop of Presdrianon¹⁰ (12th cent.) notes the psychical disorders and insomnia due to hypoglycemia. According to Nicetas Choniates Acominatos¹¹ (13th cent.) heart diseases cause faintness and collapsus. Joannes Actuarius¹² (14th cent.) underlines that rotten blood and black bile result in mania and paranoia. According to Basilica organic diseases cause psychical passions and change the behaviour of the patient.

2.2 *Psychical pathological reactions cause somatic diseases*

Fevers and thin pulse are discerned by Synesios¹³ (11th cent.) due to psychical disturbances such as grief and chagrin. Nicolaos Myrepsos¹⁴ (13th cent.) and Neophytos Prodromenos¹⁵

(14th cent.) note that bad disposition and acute boiling black bile are reasons of cancers. Joannes Myrepsos¹⁶ (5th cent.) already believes that neuric factors cause ulcer of the stomach. Psychical confusion according to Michael Psellos causes paralysis of members of the body.

3. *Psychology of the depth of the soul*

Michael Psellos¹⁷ mentions the subconscious as an abyss of the soul. Into this depth all the psychosomatic experiences, secret memories and ideas and guilty desires are fallen and hidden. The anger, the psychical ulcers and calamities are sunk into the bottom of the soul and suddenly emerge and change the psychological behaviour. Psellos considers the anxiety as a result of the contrast between reason and unreasoned desires of the human being. He also discerns in the depth of the smouldering erotic passions and their psychosomatic reactions.

4. *Psychosomatic pathogenetic reasons of psychiatric and neurologic diseases.*

The morbid conditions of psychiatric and neurologic illnesses enclose acquired and congenital factors. Nons and Maximus Planudes¹⁸ (13th cent.) state that diseases of the gall are reasons of hypochondria, melancholy and frenzy. Nonos and Michael Psellos¹⁹ believe that trembling exists due to chill of the nerves or to fear and senility. According also to Nonos²⁰ diseases of the womb and disorders of menstruation cause hysteria and psychical diseases. Nicolaos Myrepsos notes the hysterical shock. Psellos²¹ considers epilepsy as a result of psychosomatic reasons and disorders. Joannes Actuarius²² states that rotten yellow bile or a melancholic humor cause dejection of the soul, depression, illusions, wild paranoia or with laugh. Theophilos²³ (14th cent.) refers to nightmare of the melancholic patients. Basilica²⁴ and Novella Constitutio²⁵ of Leo VI the Wise state that a hereditary factor influences the psychosomatic and psychiatric disorders. Nevertheless there are lucid intervals, when the patients have conscience of their actions and feelings. Joannes Chumnos²⁶ (13th cent.) underlines also the hereditary factor for the appearance of neuralgia and arthritis.

5. *Psychosomatic diseases and suicide*

Insufferable psychosomatic disorders such as hatred of the life, mental stress, intolerable pain, madness and mania constitute reasons of suicide for citizen or soldiers. Suicide or attempt is generally condemned and penalties are imposed, such as confiscation of property and inheritance and deprivation of the funeral church service, except in case of a psychical disease²⁷.

6. *Witchcraft, demoniac and psychosomatic affections*

According to the byzantine medical legislation intentional witchcraft can cause psychosomatic action, mania and paranoia. Besides magic and charming remedies result in psychosomatic disorders, frenzy, insanity, erotic mania. There is a distinction between the maniac infuriated patients due to pathological black bile humours and rotten saps, and the really demoniac or possessed enraged persons, who are very rare²⁸.

7. *Treatment of psychosomatic disorders*

The byzantine psychosomatic treatment has a holistic preventive and curative character and encloses sanitary and dietary measures, curative bathing, strong purgation, physiotherapy, pharmaceutical preparations, religious disposition, psychoanalysis and psychotherapy.

Joannes Argyropoulos²⁹ (15th cent.) supports the healthy disposition by all hygienic means. The diet according to Joannes Actuarius includes vegetables, fishes, chicken and bread with semolina. Hierophilos sophistes³⁰ (12th cent.) forbids fat, salty and preserved food. Bathing is recommended by Psellos³¹. Physiotherapy and purgation are used by Joannes Actuarius³² and Nonos³³ in amnesia, illusions, mental and psychical disorders. Pharmaceutical preparations are given proportionately to each disease. Nonos³⁴ and Psellos³⁵ suggest generally codeine. Symeon Seth³⁶ (11th cent.) recommends vinegar and the flesh of cranes in migraine, amnesia and frenzy; poultices of mastic tree, incense, myrrh and pumpkin are used in migraine by Cosmas Actuarius³⁷ (11th cent.), Romanos³⁸ (10th cent.), Basileios Meletiniotis³⁹ (14th cent.) and the monk Barlaam⁴⁰ (14th cent.).

According to Theodoros Prodromos³³ (12th cent.) and Nicephoros Blemmides³⁴ the treatment of swoon includes decoction of rose and vinegar. Joannes Actuarius⁴³ suggests in paranoia camphor, strong purgative remedies and gymnastics. Andreiomenos⁴⁴ (15th cent.) and Constantine Meletiniotes⁴⁵ (14th cent.) use in epilepsy a decoction and an antidote. In case of trembling Nicolaos Myrepsos⁴⁶ applies a method of fumigations and inhalations through a tube in the nose containing sage, myrrh, pepper, liquid of beaver. Psellos⁴⁷ suggests in melancholy the magnetic stone. Preventive remedies are given by Demetrios Pepagomenos⁴⁸ (13th cent.) such as cinnamon, mastic tree, casia, aloe in order to avoid the crisis of neuralgia and arthritis and proportional remedies by Syncellos⁴⁹ (10th cent.), Nicephoros⁵⁰ (10th cent.) and Nicolaos Myrepsos to avoid psychical disorders, paranoia and melancholy. Against the neurologic disturbances of alcoholism Nicolaos Myrepsos, Symeon Seth⁵¹ and Michael Psellos⁵² suggest a method of detoxification with a decoction of almonds, cabbage, amethyste stone.

Psychotherapy is a very important factor. Michael Psellos⁵³ tries to reveal the subconscious psychological disorders by dialogue and psychoanalysis. He attempts to succeed the ascent of the profound psychical wounds, calamities and erotic secret desires up to the surface for therapy. He also is interested in the salvation of the body and soul of the psychosomatic patient by prayers as a preventive and curative method and by the contribution of the divine relief.

Already Aetius Amidenus⁵⁴ (6th cent.) tried to succeed the revelation of the innermost psychological wounds and their consciousness for therapy by changing the reactions of the patient and by awakening him through strong means such as the dangerous and agonizing swing in the open sea and sailing. Paulus Aegineta⁵⁵ (7th cent.) took care of the psychosomatic hygiene, tranquillity and avoidance of the anguish of the people.

The saint woman physician Hermione⁵⁶ (1st-2nd cent.), who healed psychically and somatically the patients into an Inn-Hospital in Ephesus for free, is considered the protectress of psychosomatic medicine.

Conclusion

The byzantine medical science analyses and extends original elements of the psychosomatic medicine during 10th-15th cent. Important and effective medical topics concern the psychosomatic disorders, diseases and interactions. The therapy has a holistic preventive and curative character and includes sanitary and dietary measures, pharmaceutical preparations, physical and psychical factors, psychoanalysis and psychotherapy.

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