

ЕПИЛЕПСИЈА ИЗА МАНАСТИРСКИХ ВРАТА (У СРПСКИМ СРЕДЊОВЕКОВНИМ БОЛНИЦАМА)

EPILEPSY BEHIND MONASTERY DOORS (IN SERBIAN MEDIEVAL HOSPITALS)



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This monograph presents epilepsy from the aspect of history of medicine and forms of treatment of this disease in the middle ages, which were applied in Serbian monastery hospitals. Methods of scientific and spiritual Serbian medieval medicine were analyzed, including the data on *iatrosophia* and apocryphal medicine. The research was conducted mostly on the basis of the data available in the medieval medical texts and codices, old Serbian hagiographies and other available historical documents for this research, partly including the data from historical novels and oral traditions.

Through a long period of human history the patients suffering from epilepsy and psychological ailments (especially psychosis and epilepsy) had similar fate right until the emergence of exorcism (casting out of evil spirits, for example by means of prayer, skull trepanning, physical abuse, and even burning at the stake); sometimes the diseases were not even differentiated and some of the proclaimed saints were afflicted.

The problem of social stigma of people with mental disorders and epilepsy throughout history was explained here in detail, including the

spiritual aspect of this problem along with the spiritual understanding of the disease and epilepsy, which is the reason why many sought help and understanding “behind the monastery doors”.

In the Middle Ages the patients suffering from epilepsy were treated in monasteries and monastery hospitals, which led to the formation of special departments for the treatment of epilepsy (In the Hilandar monastery and Stephen of Decani monastery). Monastery hospitals were presented in detail, featuring special departments, that is, rooms where epilepsy patients were housed (grand mal, our debt to our savior “nedug”). Special attention was paid to the interpretation of the term and the healing of “nedug”. The monograph pays special attention to the treatment of somnambulists (Matthew 17, 15–18), which partly encompasses the clinical picture of epilepsy.

Serbian medieval monastery hospital introduced Serbian medicine into the family of European medicine, but also had the advantage of having special departments for treatment of patients suffering from epilepsy and psychological disorders (Hospital in the monastery

of Hilandar, Dečani hospital, later monastery hospital of St. Naum at the lake Ohrid). This group of hospitals includes Lazarome, hospital of the monastery St. Roman near Ražanj and hospital of the St. Prohor Pčinjski monastery).

The way of treatment of neuropsychiatric diseases, which was wide-spread in Byzantium, eventually came to Serbia. All forms of treatment, basically, stem from ancient Greek medicine, that is, from the treatment in Aesculap temples, which included spiritual medicine, scientific medicine of that time, favorable climatic conditions and surgical methods (for example, skull trepanning).

Monastery hospitals applied together scientific and spiritual (religious) medicine. Therapy procedures in monastery hospitals included: scientific medicine of that time with the application of medicinal herbs, animal and inorganic materials, surgical methods (skull trepanation) and methods of spiritual healing (fasting, confession, prayer, Holy Communion, Saint's relics (unction oil), cults of saints and the belief in God).

In Serbian medieval countries the belief in the healing power of the relics of the saints, unction oil of the Saints, touching of the grave sites of the Saints (St. Simeon, Saint Sava, St. Stephan of Dečani), which was described in detail in their biographies. Uction oil in Serbian mediaeval hospitals had (and has) the role of panacea ("all cure" for all diseases).

In our medieval medical texts the opinion of Hippocrates (459-377) was one which was most highly valued and most often cited – Hippocrates's understanding of epilepsy as the affliction of the brain was universally adopted.

As the most reliable proof that the scientific pharmacy has been cultivated in Serbia is the existence of the pharmacy in Kotor. The Pharmacy and the pharmacists, according to the surviving monuments, are mentioned for the first time during the reign of Stephen of Dečani in 1326.

The pharmacology of the mediaeval medicine used around 300 of medicinal herbs. For

the treatment of epilepsy the following medicinal herbs were used: nightshade /*Atropa belladonna*, henbane /*Hyosyamus niger*, Chamomile /*Chamomilla matricaria*, sage /*Salvia officinalis*, aloe (*Aloe vera*), danewort (root) /*Sambucus ebulus*, comfrey /*Symphitum officinalis*, Valerian /*Valleriana officinalis*, Rose /*Rosa gallica*, *Rosa canina*), milfoil /*Achillea millefolium*, yew /*Taxus baccata*. The narcotic effects of opium, henbane, nightshade and mandrake were also known. Medicinal herbs were also cultivated around monasteries. In monastery hospital for the treatment of epilepsy, 16 medicinal herbs were used ("holy herbs"), some of which were cultivated around monasteries, which offers possibilities for modern research.

The greatest number of medicinal herbs that were used for the treatment of epilepsy in the medieval medicine had a sedative effect on the central nervous system as well as the favorable physiological contribution for the treatment.

Fitotherapy which was applied in Serbian medieval lands achieved its highest level of development due to the fact that it was applied in monastery hospitals. At that time, fitotherapy was in the domain of the scientific medicine of that time and under the influence of medical schools from Salerno and Montpellier, with the presence of direct influences of ancient Greek medicine through the works of Hippocrates and Dioscorides.

Archeological research of the remains of the hospital next to the monastery of St. George in Dabar confirmed the application of surgical methods in Serbian medieval medicine. A skull with signs of trepanation was found buried next to the monastery but for now there is no confirmation whether the surgical procedures have been performed within the monastery hospital.

The forms of treatment of epilepsy in spiritual (religious) medicine of the medieval Serbia, as well as the relationship of the Serbian Orthodox church towards epilepsy patients differed only in comparison to the religious

medicine of the west. Inquisition methods of exorcism, which in the West included burning at the stake, were not used.

The law included the statute of limitations, meaning the time that can be counted as valid for initiation and completion of any legal affair: “Deaf, mute, insane... are not limited by time; their time can be counted from the time they are relieved of their affliction” (chapter 64, line 38) (“The regulations of St. Sava concerning the protection disenfranchised and socially endangered”). From the above mentioned, it can be concluded that the possible treatment (and healing) even for the most serious diseases was expected. The question here is which patients were considered mad (suffering from psychosis, epilepsy, epilepsy and psychosis or other diseases, or thought to be possessed by an evil spirit)? For some of them the possibility of healing was expected, meaning that their time will start to flow when “they are relieved of affliction” (diseases / “furies”, meaning, “unclean spirits”, “fallen spirits”, “nedug”) so they were excluded from the statute of limitations of legal regulations.

The knowledge of medieval medicine, centuries of folk experience and the results of experimental researches give a basis for further multidisciplinary research about the possible application of certain medical herbs because of: sedative effect on CNS (for example. Valerian / *Valeriana officinalis*), favorable effect on the immune system (sage / *Salvia officinalis*, basil / *Ocimum basilicum*, white mistletoe / *Viscum album*, St. John's wort / *Hypericum perforatum*, garlic / *Allium sativum*) and favorable

effect on regional cerebral microcirculation (ginkgo / *Ginkgo biloba*, calamus / *Acorus calamus*, common rue / *Ruta graveolens*).

Modern medicine and epileptology did not accept spiritual interpretation of disease and epilepsy, but this research as whole points to the need for spiritual reexamination regarding the results of current quantum information research. The research in the field of the quantum physics confirms the strength of prayer and the sign of cross on the change of structure of water (which makes believable and offers explanation of the detailed account of how St. Sava miraculously healed his brother Stephen / “*The life of St. Sava*” – Theodosius of Hilandar).

This monograph paid special attention to miraculous healings of “nedug” by St. Sava, which can also include healing of epilepsy. Miraculous healings performed by St. Sava can be considered today from the aspect of scientific medieval medicine, religious medicine, but also from the aspect of fringe areas of science (in the field of quantum information research).

The level of development of medicine and types of treatment of epilepsy in Serbian monastery hospitals are not significantly different compared to the medicine of the West and Byzantine medicine.

In Serbian medieval monastery hospitals, in order to treat epilepsy, both scientific medicines of the East and West were applied, but along with the positive Byzantine influences in the broadest sense (which encompasses the influence of ancient Greek culture and spiritual medicine).

Предмет монографије је представљање епилепсије са аспекта историје медицине и видова лечења ове болести који су примењивани у српским манастирским болницама у средњем веку. Анализирани су методе научне и духовне српске средњовековне медицине.

Српске средњовековне манастирске болнице имале су посебна одељења за лечење оболелих од епилепсије, на пример у Хиландару и Дечанима. У манастирским болницама, а касније и у манастирима, лечени су оболели од епилепсије и психозе који су ту налазили утеху и заштиту, с обзиром на стигму која је одувек пратила оболеле од ове болести. У лечењу оболелих од епилепсије примењиване су истовремено методе научне и духовне (верске) медицине. Ауторка значајну пажњу посвећује проблему стигме оболелих од епилепсије кроз историју, посебно у средњем веку,

укључујући и духовно поимање болести и епилепсије, однос медицине и хришћанства, као и савремена квантно информациона истраживања.

Фитотерапија је представљала основни вид лечења епилепсије у оквиру научне медицине. У манастирским болницама за лечење епилепсије употребљавано је 16 лековитих, „светих“ трава, од којих су неке гајене око манастира. Највећи број лековитих биљака који је употребљиван за лечење епилепсије у средњовековној медицини има седативно дејство на централни нервни систем, као и повољан психолошки допринос у лечењу.

Ауторка посебно истиче да српска средњовековна медицина није заостајала за тадашњом европском научном медицином, али је и предјачила садржајем позитивних примеса античке медицине.