

CORPUS HIPPOCRATICUM 'ON THE SACRED DISEASE'

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ABSTRACT

The Hippocratic Corpus was attributed to all branches of healing including internal medicine, surgery, and obstetrics. The Hippocratic collection of treatises (or corpus) was mostly written between 430 and 330 B.C. and some are later works. Some 600 years after Hippocrates, the Corpus were further systematized by Galen and later still by the Persian Islamic physician Avicenna and others. The Corpus provides an insight into the origin and development of rational medicine in the west.

Introduction

Hippocrates (460 - 356 B.C.) has been called "the Father of Modern Medicine." The Hippocratic Corpus was attributed to all branches of healing, including internal medicine, surgery and obstetrics. How much of the Hippocratic Corpus was genuinely by Hippocrates himself and how much was written later by others is a matter of conjecture. The Hippocratic Collection of treatises (or Corpus) was mostly written between 430 and 330 B.C. and some are later works; it comprises some 60-70 books, the most famous being "OF THE EPIDEMICS," "THE BOOK OF PROGNOSTICS," "ON THE SACRED DISEASE (Epilepsy)" and "ON AIRS, WATERS AND PLACES." "THE APHORISMS" is a collection of brief generalizations.

It is from the initial phrase of the first

aphorism that is derived the famous quotation - "Vita brevia, ars uero longa" (Life is short, art long).

The Corpus is an historical reconstruction over a period of time. Some 600 years after Hippocrates, the Corpus were further systematized by Galen (130 - 200 A.D.) and later still by the Persian Islamic physician Avicenna (980 - 1037 A.D.) and others, and their version of Corpus Hippocraticum was to influence European medical thought and practice for the next thousand years. The Corpus provides an insight into the origin and development of rational medicine in the West. Most authors agree that the great significance of Hippocratic medicine was its alternative account of the magic and sorcery of the priest healers of the Asklepian cult (the Temple Medicine). Magico - religious practice and recognition of divine miracle were

prevalent in the Greek society at that time. Greek Physicians were itinerant healers. The Corpus emphasized the importance of observing carefully phenomenon of the disease, attempting a rational approach to diagnosis while the treatment relied on the healing power of Nature (of course, not God or any supernatural force) and was directed at the patient as a whole - physical, mental and spiritual. The Corpus may be said to have introduced a rational approach to modern clinical medicine (Greek word - 'kline' meaning 'bed' or 'couch'). Prognosis or informed guess about the natural process of the disease was the most important part of the whole exercise. Physicians were not interested to treat somebody who was going to die and thereby not taking the blame or discredit.

The probable "Evolution" of Hippocratic Medicine is outlined in Table I.

The dates of the treatises in the Hippocratic Corpus cannot be fixed precisely. An approximate or suggested chronology is given in Table II.

Greek Culture

Authors agree that individualism was a dominating feature in the Greek society. It was the man as a whole that mattered. The idea was reflected in the practice of Greek medicine as well. The Hippocratic Corpus deals with man's relationship to man and to another power outside himself. In Greek writings, that power is Nature; God and other forces that can

be seen only with supernatural sight are excluded. This injunction to turn a blind eye to the possibility of a deity or mystical influence in causes and treatment of disease was the greatest contribution of the Hippocratic school. The Swiss medical historian Erwin Ackerknecht has called it "Medicine's Declaration of Independence."

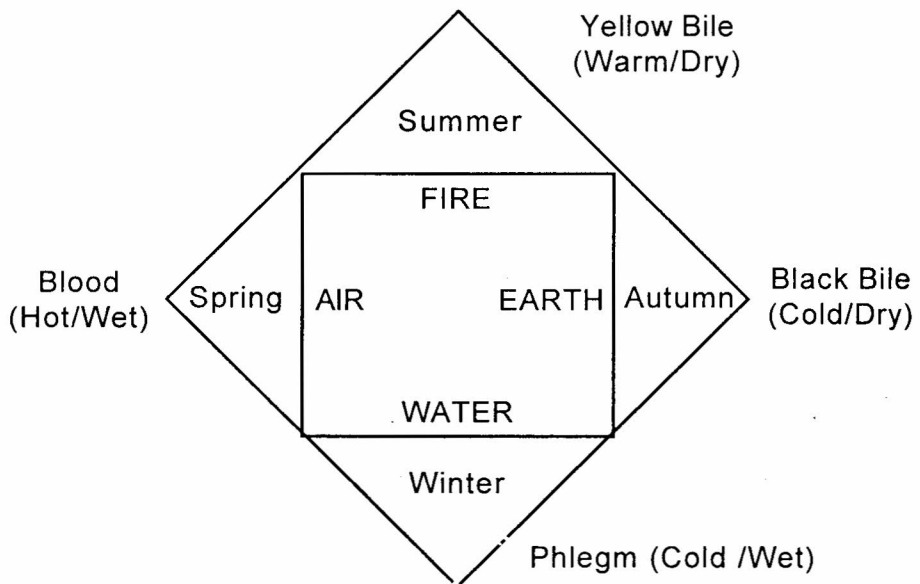
The Greeks were the first to believe that the universe functions by rational and reasonable rules and the nature is the sole regulator of man in health and disease and his environment in order to maintain the equilibrium. In disease, each set of symptoms has a specific cause or causes, and treatment must be directed towards correcting the circumstances or environs in which they appear, and not only the consequences of their presence. Thus, the setting in which the illness-takes place should be considered as important a factor as the manifestations of sickness themselves. Again, the individual and his environment claim the priority. Man is the product of his environment. Thus, the Hippocratic Corpus is a treasure house containing the earliest extant treatises in any language.

Fundamental Basis of Hippocratic Medicine

Nature seeks to maintain a condition of stability; its forces are constantly adjusting and readjusting the normal constituents of the body to preserve a balance among them. When this balance exists, we are healthy; imbalance leads

to sickness. According to Galen, Nature restores the state of equilibrium. Disease is caused by an imbalance among the four humours - blood, yellow bile, black bile and phlegm. These four primary fluids are said to be constantly renewed by

means of the food which is eaten and digested. The blood was thought to originate in the heart, yellow bile in the liver, the black bile in the spleen, and the phlegm in the brain. The humours bore a direct relationship to the four "elements"



- fire, air, earth and water, and therefore to the four "qualities" of hot, dry, cold and wet. Because of the role of the qualities, the body's equilibrium was influenced by the seasons as follows (postulated by Galen):

The basal state of humoural interaction affected personality and character of the individual. People's dispositions were described as sanguine, melancholic, bilious or phlegmatic, representing the

predominance of the four basic humours - blood, black bile, yellow, bile and phlegm respectively.

"The Sacred Disease" (Falling Sickness)

Falling Sickness may be termed as "Epilepsy" in modern medical terminology. In view of the above perspectives, it is a good piece to illustrate various aspects of Hippocratic Medicine.

This treatise attacks on the popular

superstition about epilepsy, to bitterly criticize witch-doctors, faith-healers, quacks, charlatans who called this disease - "sacred" and to be of divine origin (Ch, 1 & 2) and also to give an account of the natural history of the disease. It tried to expose the ignorance of those who tried to implicate a supernatural or divine element in the causation of this disease, with various illustrations.

Exposition of Pseudo-Physicians

The book begins with an attack on the ignorance, evil intentions of pseudo physicians in calling "epilepsy" - the Sacred Disease. "It is my opinion that those who first called this disease "sacred" were the sort of people we now call witch-doctors, faith-healers, quacks and Charlatans. These are exactly the people who pretend to be very pious and to be particularly wise. By invoking a divine element they were able to screen their own failure to give suitable treatment and so called this a "sacred" malady to conceal their ignorance of its nature." (Ch.2). The book highlights their opportunism as well. "... if he dies, they can excuse themselves by explaining that the gods are to blame while they themselves did nothing wrong." (Ch.2). The book totally rejected the sacred or divine nature of the disease. "I do not believe that the sacred disease is any more divine or sacred than any other disease but on the contrary, has specific characteristics and definite cause." (Ch.1). The cause of the disease is physical and is of organic nature. It is

for the treating physician to find out the cause and to offer relevant treatment.

Aetio Pathology

"The brain is the seat of this disease, as it is of other very violent diseases" (Ch. 6). It goes on describing the structure and functions of the brain (Ch. 17). The disease arises from the phlegmatic discharge that blocks the vessels communicating with the brain as postulated by the humoural theory. It attacks only those of phlegmatic disposition (Ch.5). It explains the disease as arising from a discharge from the brain and to support this theory, it suggests examining an animal, such as goat that has suffered from the disease (Ch. 14):

"If you cut open the head, you will find that the brain is wet, full of fluid and foul-smelling, convincing proof that disease and not the deity is harming the body." It is significant that the authors suggest empirical enquiry by opening the skull of a diseased goat to contribute to their knowledge.

The author of the "Sacred Disease" believes that epilepsy is more likely to occur when there is a change in the wind and he devotes Chapter 16 for describing the effects of the north and south winds, both outside and inside the body. This malady affects children as well (Ch.11).

Prognosis

It is an important aspect of Hippocratic medicine. "Adults neither die from an attack of this disease, nor does it leave them with palsy"... "Attacks of this disease in the aged are not fatal, nor

do they cause paralysis" (Ch. 12). These words of observations are interesting. "Like other diseases, it is hereditary." It seems that familial predirection of this disease did not escape the author's observation. The practice of prognosis which included not only foretelling the outcome of a disease, but also describing its past natural history, was an important psychological weapon.

Functions Of The Brain

Functions and dysfunctions of the brain are described in Ch.17 in understandable language. "It ought to be generally known that the source of our pleasure - merriment, laughter and amusement - as of our grief, pain, anxiety and tears, is none other than the brain. It is specially the organ which enables us to think, see, hear and to distinguish the ugly and the beautiful, the bad and the good, the pleasant and unpleasant." Mental disorder was also considered - "It is the brain too which is the seat of

madness and delirium....." Insomnia, memory, panic etc. are all attributed to the brain. At the end it is again balance and equilibrium that matter -." So long as the brain is still, a man is in his right mind."

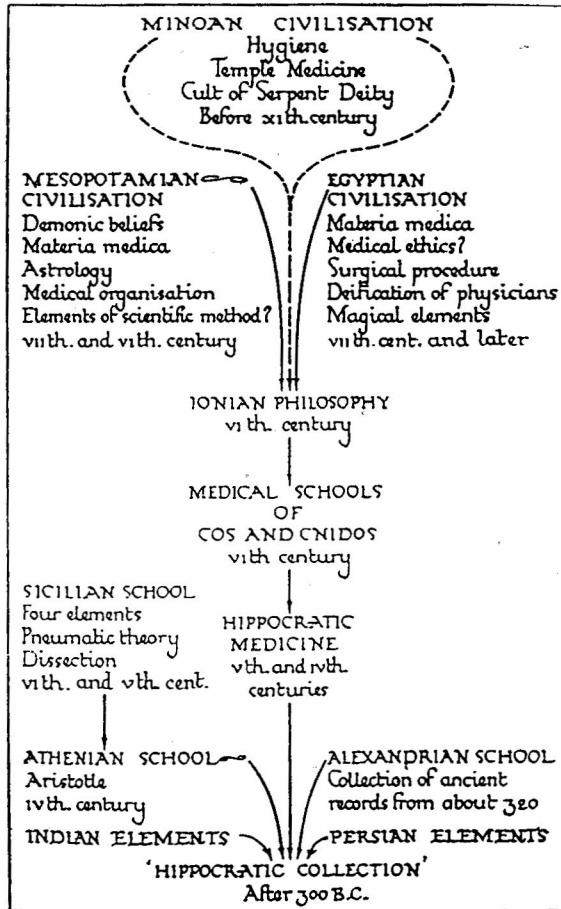
Affliction of brain by phlegm and by bile would give different types of disorders related to memory loss, vomiting, pain, behavioural disorders, etc. (Ch. 18).

Guidelines For Management

The author gives elaborate guidelines about how to treat this condition at the right time (Ch.21) - "A man with the knowledge of how to produce by means of a regimen dryness and moisture, cold and heat in the human body, could cure this disease too, provided he could distinguish the right moment for the application of the remedies. He would not need to resort to purifications and magic spells."

Here lies the essence of the rational basis of Hippocratic Medicine.

TABLE - 1 : EVOLUTION OF HIPPOCRATIC MEDICINE



SOURCE:

Singer, C. & Underwood, E.A.:

A short history of Medicine.

2nd Ed. 1962, Clarendon Press, Oxford.

TABLE II
CHRONOLOGY OF HIPPOCRATIC CORPUS

430 - 380 B.C.	400 350 B.C.	AFTER 330 B.C
1. "On Airs, water Places" 2. "On Ancient Medicine" 3. "On Breaths" 4. "Epidemics I & III" 5. "On Fractures" 6. "On Joints" 7. "On the Nature of Man" 8. "Prognostic" 9. "On Regimen in Acute Disease" 10. "On the Sacred Disease"	1. "On Diseases IV" 2. "On Generation" 3. "On the Nature of the Child"	1. "On the Heart" 2. "Precepts"

SOURCE: Lloyd, G.E.R. (1970): Early Greek Science: Thales to Aristotle. Norton & Co. New York/London.

सारांश

कार्पस हिप्पोक्रेटिकम “आन दि सेक्रेड डिज़ीज़

- सिसिर के मजुम्दार

कायचिकित्सा, शल्यचिकित्सा तथा प्रसव-विज्ञान सहित चिकित्सा शास्त्र की सभी शाखाओं का हिप्पोक्रेटिक कार्पस (ग्रंथ संग्रह) प्रतीक माना जाता है । अधिकांश हिप्पोक्रेटिक ग्रंथ-संग्रह के लेखन का कार्य ईसा पूर्व 430 एवं 330 वर्षों के मध्य काल में पूर्ण करलिया गया तथा कुछ ग्रंथ उसके बाद की कृतियां हैं । हिप्पोक्रेट के लगभग 600 वर्ष पश्चात गेलन द्वारा, तत्पश्चात ईरानी इस्तामी चिकित्सक अविसेन्ना तथा अन्य विद्वानों द्वारा उस हिप्पोक्रेटिक ग्रंथ-संग्रह को और भी सुव्यवस्थित किया गया । पश्चिम में तर्कसंगत चिकित्सा-शास्त्र के उद्भव एवं विकास की दिशा में हिप्पोक्रेटिक कार्पस अंतर्दृष्टि प्रदान करता है ।