

Hamar, Tomáš

On terminology of disease in the work of Caelius Aurelianus

Graeco-Latina Brunensia. 2014, vol. 19, iss. 1, pp. [51]-59

ISSN 1803-7402 (print); ISSN 2336-4424 (online)

Stable URL (handle): <https://hdl.handle.net/11222.digilib/130048>

Access Date: 29. 11. 2024

Version: 20220831

Terms of use: Digital Library of the Faculty of Arts, Masaryk University provides access to digitized documents strictly for personal use, unless otherwise specified.

TOMÁŠ HAMAR

(COMENIUS UNIVERSITY IN BRATISLAVA)

ON TERMINOLOGY OF *DISEASE* IN THE WORK OF CAELIUS AURELIANUS

The use of Latin and Greek terms in medical sciences has a long tradition – as long as the Western medicine itself. For practical reasons, particularly because of its accuracy and internationality, the use of Latin-Greek medical terminology has survived to this day, but the current state of medical terminology and its status in ancient times differ significantly – despite their apparent continuity. Until now, medical terminology has been based on two roots: Latin, which most anatomical terms originate in, and Greek, which is mostly used in the clinical pathological field. In the work of Caelius Aurelianus De morbis acutis et chronicis libri VIII, we can find both roots of modern medical terminology. This text is namely a translation of the now lost Greek “medical textbook” on diseases by Soran: Περὶ ὀξείων καὶ χρονίων παθῶν (On Acute and Chronic Diseases). The terms from the field of pathology occupy the central position in the work of Caelius Aurelianus and appear almost always along with their Greek synonyms, and thus the index of pathological terms in this work provides a very good basis for the research of medical terminology development.

Keywords: *Medical terminology, Caelius Aurelianus, Soran of Ephesos, Aulus Cornelius Celsus, Historical lexicology of Latin language, Acute diseases, Chronic diseases*

The contemporary Latin medical terminology, as well as the modern western medicine itself is built on the foundations of the medical arts in Antiquity. The Greek and Latin terms are currently used in medical research by scientists as well as in hospitals by medical practitioners, not only out of respect for the cultural roots of medicine, but especially because of their internationality and exactness. They are the key-stones of communication among professionals in the medical field for whom it is essential to know exactly what each of the terms represents in today's medical reality. Medical terminology as a system is a tool used by doctors as a means of communicating vital information and making the communication clear and precise. The main task of a classical philologist in the service of medi-

cal terminology is to sharpen this tool and to make it ready for its effective use. It is important to follow the evolution of the terms, find their origins in ancient classical literature to justify why particularly these terms survived the lexical evolution and have been preserved up to this day in their original form. The understanding of the principles and the context in the course of proceeding of technical terminology is a prerequisite for sustaining its continuity. Since probably no other science is developing as fast as medicine, new diseases, treatments etc. are being discovered on a daily basis, the linguist's task is to reflect and answer to these changes in the terminology. Recent medical terms are the result of cooperation between a physician and a linguist; this cooperation became even more necessary as medical terminology tends to eliminate eponyms. In order to be able to assist the development of modern medical terminology, it is necessary not only to maintain contact with professionals in the medical field and to respond to their requirements, but it is equally important to confront the medical texts, in which the technical terminology has its origins. One of the most valuable ancient texts in the field of pathology that we have access to is the work of Caelius Aurelianus. Its value lies not only in the great range of diseases that are dealt with in his medical text, but also in the fact that his books represent a dialogue between two languages in which the roots of the medical terminology of both antique and modern can be traced back.

Caelius Aurelianus was a Roman citizen who lived in the fifth century A.D. in the town Sicca in the African province Numidia. There is very little information about his life – it is not even certain whether he was a practicing physician or merely an author of medical texts.¹ The one thing we know about this author for sure is that his master-piece *On Acute and Chronic Diseases* (*De morbis acutis et chronicis libri VIII*) is actually a translation of the now lost Greek “medical textbook” about diseases *Περὶ ὀξέων καὶ χρονίων παθῶν* by Soran of Ephesos (1st/2nd century A.D.). Both authors are considered to be the chief representatives of the *Methodist school*² and their work serves us as one of the main sources for reconstructing the teachings of this ancient school of medicine.³ To what extent the work of Soran has been altered in the process of translating, and perhaps adapting, by Cae-

¹ BENDZ (1954: 13).

² The name of this Greek school of medicine (Μεθοδικοί) varies in the specialized English literature: Methodist School of Medicine, Methodic School of Medicine, Methodical School of Medicine. In this article I am using the term applied by the editor and translator of the work of Caelius Aurelianus – E. Drabkin.

³ The reconstruction of the teachings of Methodist School of Medicine was summarized and explained in MEYER-STEINIG (1916).

lius Aurelianus remains uncertain in spite of the endeavours of philologists across centuries.

The work *On Acute and Chronic diseases* consists of two parts: *Celeres sive acutae passiones* deals with fourteen acute diseases in three books and *Tardae sive chronicae passiones* consists of five books and covers forty-four chronic diseases. Caelius Aurelianus describes not only the disease itself and its treatment but, (for the philologists) more importantly, he heads every chapter with the analysis of its Greek name and the Latin counterpart.

This work represents an extraordinarily rich source of the views of Methodist School representatives at the peak of the school's development. It must have been a valuable guide to specialized pathology and therapy providing information about the entire pathology – the general pathological beliefs about the specific symptomatology and diagnosis of the research methods. It contains the main treatment principles – not only the general ones but also the specific ways of treatment, descriptions of dietary, hygienic, physical-mechanical and pharmacological healing procedures. The structure of the work is based on the teaching of the Methodist School. This can be observed already in the very title of the books: there is a strict distinction between acute and chronic diseases there. It is a manifestation of the subdivision of diseases made by Themison, one of the earlier representatives of the Methodist School of medicine. Further, the diseases are separated into two groups: diseases accompanied by fever and diseases without fever. The diseases are presented in a conventional order *a capite ad calcem* (from top to toe – in the equivalent English expression) – this hierarchy is clearer in the chronic diseases, as acute diseases affect the whole body. Nevertheless, there is a tendency to follow this principle also in the chapters about acute diseases. In the treatise on individual diseases, the author always proceeds according to a fixed scheme. He begins with the most detailed but not always relevant definition of the term for disease, where the views of various early doctors are reiterated very often. A brief aetiology is most likely to follow. Then, extraordinarily careful symptomatology is presented, which is followed by diagnosis and differential diagnosis. Frequently, pathological and anatomical details are mentioned. The end of each chapter comprises detailed treatment options. The presentation of diseases is portrayed very vividly thanks to the frequent literary notes. The views of the other authors on various issues are subjected to sharp criticism and the author often comes to the conclusion, that the teachings of the Methodist School of Medicine offer the best concept and treatment of individual diseases.

Names of diseases

The pathological terminology in this work is immensely extensive. It is rich in terms of Greek and Latin origin describing various diseases, symptoms and treatments. This paper does not focus on terms dealing with particular diseases but those describing the general meaning of illness.

Hippocrates used the term νοῦσος for disease. The most frequently used Greek word for disease in Soran's time was πάθος. It is possible to witness this basic terminological shift in the names of two works of these authors on the same topic: Hippocrates wrote the treatise entitled τὰ δὲ ἀμφὶ γυναικείων νοῦσων (*On the Diseases of Women*) and Soran wrote περὶ γυναικείων παθῶν (*Gynaecology or On Diseases of Women*).⁴ A very similar shift occurred also with the Latin terms *morbus* and *passio* – in the work *De Medicina* by Celsus we can read:

*Provisis omnibus, quae pertinent ad universa genera morborum, ad singulorum curationes veniam. Hos autem in duas species Graeci diviserunt, aliosque ex his acutos, alios longos esse dixerunt.*⁵

*(Having dealt with all that pertains to whole classes of diseases taken together, I come to the treatment of diseases one by one. Now the Greeks divided these into two species, terming some acute, others chronic.)*⁶

Celsus uses the term *morbus* to describe a disease, while Caelius Aurelianus already uses the term *passio*. The adjectives used to distinguish the two main groups of diseases vary as well: in most cases, the terms *morbus acutus* and *morbus longus* (signifying chronic diseases) are substituted by the terms *passio celeris* and *passio tarda* in the work of Celsus. The substitution of the word *morbus* by the word *passio* was not absolute. Even the usage of these terms in the title of this opus is confusing: Encyclopaedia Britannica names the work as: *Caelii Aureliani De morbis chronicis et acutis*, while the oldest available edition of the book is entitled *Caelii Aureliani methodici siccensis liber celerum vel acutarum passionum qua licuit diligentia recognitus, atque nunc primum in lucem aeditus* (Paris, Simon de Colines 1533).

In the work of Caelius Aurelianus both terms are used, although there is an eminent difference in the frequency of the usage of the words. The word

⁴ VIETMEIER (1937: 29).

⁵ *Celsus Lib. III. 1.1.*

⁶ Translation of W. G. Spencer (1978).

morbus is used only forty-eight times while the word *passio* is used more than one thousand two hundred times. Other general terms for disease used in the work are *aegritudo* used twenty-seven times and *infirmitas* used only a single time.

One cannot say that the words *morbus* and *passio* are absolute synonyms, and the best evidence to illustrate this statement is a sentence from the preface to the five books of *Tardae sive chronicae passiones*, in which both terms are used:

Chronicae autem vel tardae passionis morbi, qui iam praeiudicio quodam corpora possederint, solius medici peritiam poscunt, cum neque natura neque fortuna solvantur.

Diseases of a chronic or a long-term ailment that have taken over the bodies after a preliminary decision require a qualified doctor; since they do not disappear neither by nature nor by a stroke of luck.

In this particular case the word *passio* is the more general expression denoting the whole group of chronic diseases and the word *morbus* stands for individual ailments in this group. When we put the focus on the contextual usage of the terms *passio* and *morbus* and the adjectives used to describe these terms, we can establish their positions in the system of terminology used by Caelius Aurelianus.

Nine adjectives are used to specify the term *morbus*, and in this context they can be divided into three basic groups:

1. Adjectives that describe the course of disease and its gravity:

acutus (818,22),⁷ *antecedens* (902,16), *facilis* (28,15), *interfectius* (28,15), *periculosus* (818,22)

2. Adjectives that refer to a specific disease or a body part affected by the disease:

pleumonicus (910,31), *pleuriticus* (910,31)

3. Adjectives, which are a part of lexicalized units and their meaning changes radically when coupled with the term *morbus*:

regius (678,8) – original meaning: related to a king, queen or royalty

⁷ The quotation data in the brackets indicate the page and the line in the most recent edition of the work of Aurelianus Caelius. 1990–1993. *Akute Krankheiten. Chronische Krankheiten.*

morbus regius – a disease that is believed to be treated only by a touch of a royal person – in the work of Caelius Aurelianus it is *jaundice*

arquatus (678,8) – related to rainbow (*arcuus/arcus*)

morbus arquatus – a disease, in which the skin turns to the yellow color of the rainbow – *jaundice*

The term *morbus* in the work of Caelius Aurelianus is used mainly in reproducing the theories of other physicians, for example Asclepiades (28,15) or in lexicalized units, the main characteristic of which is their idiomatic meaning.

Due to the high frequency of the word *passio* there is a much higher number of adjectives used to specify this term, and, therefore, the exact and contextual meaning of it can be better determined. Sixty-seven adjectives describing the word *passio* could be found in the text and they can be divided into four groups:

1. Adjectives referring to single body parts, which are affected by an ailment:

renalis (884,18), *ventriculosa* (784,24), *articularis* (854,5)

2. Adjectives derived from the name of a disease:

cataleptica (178,5), *hydrophobica* (290,14), *lethargica* (20,15), *paralytica* (552,28), *phrenitica* (20,8), *phthisica* (542,20), *synanchica* (226, 19), *tetanica* (340,24)

3. Adjectives describing the course of the disease from the aspect of time:

continua (356,3), *futura* (34,11), *genuina* (852,5), *chronia* (590,11), *chronica* (154,12), *imminens* (34,31), *nova* (290,19), *nova vel emergens* (786,19), *novella* (818,15), *perfecta* (680,11), *praesens* (36,26), *puerilis* (464,4), *recens* (598,29), *secunda* (226,22), *tarda* (554,8), *tardans* (822,2)

4. Adjectives describing the course of the disease from the aspect of degree or gravity:

difficilis (776,22), *gravis atque difficilis* (552,23), *gravis atque periculosa* (252,5), *gravis atque perniciosa* (156,32), *incurabilis* (426,28), *magna* (242,1), *maligna* (250,7), *parva* (260,15), *periculosa* (252,4), *principalis* (56,22), *tanta* (342,6), *vehemens* (682,9), *vexabilis* (360, 15)

The semantics of the adjectives is more complicated than their principal aspect, which it cannot be reduced to. One of the ways to determine and categorize the meaning of adjectives related to the term *passio* is their se-

mantic analysis with the help of a chart listing some factors relevant to the course of a disease:

Semantic analysis of some adjectives based of specific lexemes:⁸

adjective	attribute of time	attribute of gravity	possibility of general / non medicinal/ use	reference to a body part	reference to a specific disease
<i>imminens</i>	+	+	+	-	-
<i>complexa</i>	-	-	+	-	-
<i>phrenetica</i>	-	-	-	-	+
<i>pleuritica</i>	-	-	-	+	+
<i>incurabilis</i>	-	+	-	-	-

As we can see in the sample chart, a very wide range of adjective groups can be made tracing the factors that determine their meaning. Using this method we can draw the following conclusions about the word *passio* in the work of Caelius Aurelianus:

1. In contrast to the term *morbus*, the term *passio* is not once used as a part of a lexicalized unit, which can be considered a validation of the fact that the term *morbus* belongs to an older layer of Latin medical terminology.
2. The adjectives referring to a body part or a disease coupled with the term *passio* are often used as synonyms to the terms from which they are derived, e.g.

hydrophobia = *passio hydrophobica* (290,14)

lethargo/lethargia = *passio lethargica* (20,15)

paralysis = *passio paralytica* (552,28)

phrenitis = *passio phrenitica* (20,8)

Following hypothesis results from the observation of the word pairs: The expressions with the word *passio* differ from the original names of diseases in emphasized processuality and are used in a meaning when *decursus morbi* is meant rather than the disease itself. Following the contextual comparison of the terms describing the disease and their counterparts with the term *passio* + *derived adjective*, no evidence about this type of discrepancy was

⁸ This type of semantic analysis was based on the lexico-semantic research, which was made on the material of Slovak language in the work of V. Blanár e.g. BLANÁR (1984: 78).

found in the meaning of these terms. The terms are interchangeable in all contexts, and, therefore, the conclusion to this particular problem is that the varieties of the pathological term using the word *passio* are merely stylistic elements used to avoid the repetition of the same term for the name of the disease. Here, we can see a nice example of a radical shift in the understanding of texts of technical nature: in modern day, scientific and medical writing synonyms in particular are less than welcome due to the endeavour to establish a clear communication among professionals; on the other hand, the text of Caelius Aurelianus has the ambition to be not only scientifically relevant but also aesthetically appealing.

The current pathological terminology has its roots in the medical texts of Antiquity. The determination and exploration of the original meaning of terms used to the present day contribute to a more comprehensive understanding of the survival of an “extinct language”. Every language as a system is a very comprehensive phenomenon with multiple layers and facets. In Latin medical terminology we have at our hand an example of an undisturbed continuity in development of a language to the present day that is waiting to be explored. The applicative value of this endeavour lies not only in better understanding of the fact that a technical subsystem of a highly developed language has survived up to this day, but also in revelation of the characteristics of a very viable terminological system, which should be henceforward applied in the process of creating modern technical terms, not merely in the field of clinic and pathology.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

- AURELIANUS, CAELIUS. 1990–1993. *Akute Krankheiten. Chronische Krankheiten*. BENDZ, GERHARD [ED.]. Berlin: Akademie Verlag.
- BENDZ, GERHARD. 1954. *Emendationen zu Caelius Aurelianus*. Lund: GWK Gleerup.
- BLANÁR, VINCENT. 1984. *Lexikáлно-sémantická rekonštrukcia*. Bratislava: Veda.
- CELSUS (AULUS CORNELIUS CELSUS). 1978. *De medicina I–VIII*. W. G. SPENCER [TRAD.]. London – Cambridge (Mass.): Harvard University Press.
- DRABKIN, ISRAEL EDWARD. 1945. “Notes on the Text of Caelius Aurelianus.” In HEWITT, JOSEPH WILLIAM [ED.]. *Transactions and Proceedings of the American Philological Association* 76, Lancaster: Lancaster Press, 299–320.
- MEYER-STEINEG, THEODOR. 1916. *Das medizinische System der Methodiker: eine Vorstudie zu Caelius Aurelianus “De morbis acutis et chronicis”*. Jena: Gustav Fischer.
- VIETMEIER, KARL. 1937. *Beobachtungen über Caelius Aurelianus als Übersetzer medizinischer Fachausdrücke verlorener griechischer Schriften des methodischen Arztes Soranos von Ephesos*. Diss., Univ. Münster.

RESUMÉ

Dielo Caelia Aureliana *Celerum passionum libri III, Tardarum passionum libri V* je latinským prekladom lekárskeho spisu gréckeho lekára Sórana z Efezu Περί ὀξέων καὶ χρόνιων παθῶν (*O akútnych a chronických chorobách*). V tomto diele sa autor venuje opisu, diagnostike, symptomatike a liečeniu 15 akútnych a 44 chronických chorôb. Okrem označení individuálnych ochorení používa aj termíny spadajúce do všeobecnej patológie, preložiteľné slovom „choroba, ochorenie“. Článok sa zaoberá analýzou termínov z oblasti klinickej patológie, konkrétne skúma prídavné mená, ktorými sú slová denotujúce ochorenie (*morbis* a *passio*) rozvíjané. Ich excerptiou, sémantickou analýzou a kategorizáciou objasňuje ich použitie v konkrétnom vývojovom stupni latinskej lekárskej terminológie.

