

Editorial Άρθρο Σύνταξης

The History of Greek Psychiatry through the texts of those who have shaped it

Modern Greek Psychiatry was shaped during the 19th century, to a considerable degree by the contribution and the writings of physicians of Greek origin who studied or worked at Universities or Medical Centers abroad. There, they were exposed to the influence of a metabolized form of Ancient Greek medical and philosophical tradition (along with the advances in medical knowledge of that time). This may be perceived as a counter – loan to match the original loan provided to the West by the medico-philosophical thinking of Ancient Greece that was “exported” to the West through the scholars who emigrated there following the fall of the Byzantine Empire in 1453. It is interesting that the mythical figure of the Greek revolution against the Turkish occupation (1820s), General Theodoros Kolokotronis, had a similar opinion about the first part of the above procedure (i.e. the exportation of knowledge from Greece to the West) when he wrote “The scholars and some merchants left for Europe and the educated ones enlightened the foreigners with the wisdom of the ancestors”.

The modern profile of Greek Psychiatry was shaped in part by the introduction of knowledge from abroad (“metakenosis”- transfusion was the expression used by Adamantios Korais, a prominent Greek scholar of that time). The body of knowledge that was transfused consisted of fundamental fragments of medical knowledge, the medico-philosophical thinking of Ancient Greece as elaborated in Western Europe, along with the philosophical thinking of the “Enlightenment”.

Modern Psychiatry that was born in the West at the dawn of the 19th Century was founded on this very background that eventually constituted the foundation of Modern Greek Psychiatry as well.

An important publication pertaining to the above issues is the book “Anthology of Greek Psychiatric Texts”, edited by George Christodoulou, Dimitris Ploumbidis and Athanasios Karavatos under the auspices of the World Psychiatric Association. The book is largely based on a similar book produced by the Hellenic Psychiatric Association in 2006 that was received enthusiastically by the greek public. In this edition, a careful selection of representative texts of the Greek psychiatric production from ancient greek times to the ‘50s has been carried out. It follows similar editions of the World Psychiatric Association pertaining to French, Spanish, Italian and German psychiatric texts.

The “Anthology of Greek Psychiatric Texts” contains a broad variety of contributions ranging from Ancient Greek texts to animal magnetism, hypnosis, “hysteritis”, psychoanalysis and psychopathology of hunger, fear and anxiety (reference to the period of the German occupation of Greece). It covers a chronological range from ancient times up to the decade of the dawn of modern psychopharmacology.

We hope that our decision to translate into English the often cumbersome and difficult Greek psychiatric texts will be appreciated by the English-speaking readership. Their familiarization with the dawn of Psychiatry as reflected in many of the texts of the "Anthology" will hopefully help them understand the evolution and the dynamics not only of Greek Psychiatry but also of Psychiatry as a discipline in its wholeness.

G.N. Christodoulou

Professor of Psychiatry, University of Athens

D.N. Ploumpidis

Assoc. Professor of Psychiatry, University of Athens

A. Karavatos

Professor of Psychiatry, University of Thessaloniki

References

- *Διήγησις συμβάντων της Ελληνικής Φυλής από το 1770 έως το 1856*. Υπαγόρευσε Θεόδωρος Κωνσταντίνου Κολοκοτρώνης, Τύποις Χ. Νικολαΐδου Φιλαδέλφως, 1846
- Christodoulou GN, Ploumpidis DN, Karavatos A. *Anthology of Greek Psychiatric Texts*. Beta Medical Arts, Athens, 2011
- Καράβατος Αθ., Πλουμπίδης ΔΝ, Χριστοδούλου ΓΝ. *Ανθολόγιο Ελληνικών Ψυχιατρικών Κειμένων*. ΒΗΤΑ Ιατρικές Εκδόσεις, Αθήνα, 2006