Andrés Piquer and the Neo-Hippocratic Teaching of Medicine in Eighteenth Century Spain

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Summary

Eighteenth century Spain witnessed a revaluation of the Hippocratic works as a result of the growing criticism of the Galenism dominant in the Spanish University of the time. Probably the most important author in this reformist trend was Andrés Piquer y Arrufat (1711-1772), eclectic philosopher, university professor and doctor to the Kings Fernando VI and Carlos III.

His desire to transform medical university instruction following Hippocrates’ rules led him to make some of the first Hippocratic treatises from ancient Greek to Spanish, for the first time. Among these treatises, the translation and commentary of Epidemics 1 and 3, and partially of Epidemics 2, are especially noteworthy. This medical and philological work relates not only to Hippocrates but also to the medical concepts of Thomas Sydenham, the English Hippocrates. The Clinical Histories and descriptions of katastasies in his Observationes medicae (London, 1676) exerted a great influence not only on A. Piquer but also on many Spanish doctors. Moreover, the works of Herman Boerhaave and especially of his pupil Gerhard van Swieten left their imprint on the ideas of the Spanish doctor.

Besides his translations, A. Piquer wrote many treatises based on Hippocratic teaching for university students, in Latin as well as in Spanish. His Praxis Medica was translated into Portuguese and his Tratado de las calenturas (About the fevers) into French.

Nowadays, historians generally agree that the seventeenth century was a period of political and economic decline for the Spanish Empire, especially in its second half. As the sickly and handicapped Charles II,

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the last king of the House of Habsburg, neared death without producing an heir, the European monarchies started intriguing to control the Spanish realms, plotting in the Spanish Court to obtain the inheritance of the throne. In accord with what Charles II stated in his will when he died in November 1700, the Duke of Anjou, grandson of French King Louis XIV, was elected as his successor and became Philip V, the first Bourbon to occupy the Spanish throne. Austria, Holland and England refused to recognize Philip V and signed a Treaty of Alliance in 1701. The War of Spanish Succession broke out when the allied armies invaded Spain in order to drive out the Bourbon king and to establish the Archduke Charles, the Austrian pretender to the throne. The Treaty of Utrecht (1713) marked the end of the hostilities. Under the treaty, Philip would be crowned king. Spain paid the price of its defeat in dominions; Spain lost all its European possessions and gave Britain Gibraltar and special privileges in trade with America.

The reign of Philip V (1700-1746)\(^2\) ushered in the Spain of the Enlightenment a period of harmonious foreign relations, reforms and interior development. Due to the collaboration of France, Spain won back Naples and Sicily. His son, Ferdinand VI (1746-1759), was concerned with the domestic recovery of the country rather than the extension of its power in Europe. He defended a policy of neutrality and he urged the construction of a powerful fleet to protect Spanish interests in America. As Ferdinand VI died without an heir, his successor was his half-brother Charles III (1759-1788), who had already been king of Naples. Charles III turned his attention to internal problems, launching a programme of far-reaching economic, cultural and religious reforms. He introduced the very latest in urban reform ideas from his native Naples. This was the time when Madrid was transformed into a modern city. Although there were riots in Madrid and other provinces against the programme’s implementation, the nation’s intellectuals were receptive to the ideas of the Enlightenment and the Encyclopaedia of Diderot and d’Alembert. Charles III died in 1788, a year before the outbreak of the French Revolution. His son, Charles IV (1788-1808), was a weak man, who was not able to carry through the reforms begun by his father.

There is no doubt that the first Bourbons aimed at improving social conditions in Spain, after the moral and political stagnation of the last kings of the House of Habsburg, a period of crisis which nevertheless

\(^2\) In 1724 Philip V abdicated in favour of his son Louis I, who died a few months later in the same year. Because of this misfortune, Philip V occupied the throne again.