

Notes on History of Psoriasis

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To write, even briefly, of the history of this disease across the centuries becomes a difficult task because a complete treatise on the history of Dermatology has not yet been made. Let's look at the elements that are available in order to trace a historical profile of this clinical condition.

Clearly, the term psoriasis derives from "psora", meaning scale. Such term has been used in the course of time to indicate various diseases, characterized by the presence of cutaneous lesions of varying appearance, covered by scales. Already in the works of Hippocrates we can find this term, used to indicate a scaly rash localized on the face and genitals. Later, in Roman times, we can find mention of various dermatological conditions, but cannot trace a clinical picture referable to psoriasis as we intend it today. A precise idea of the status of medicine in this epoch can be found in the work of Aulo Cornelio Celso, "De re medica", written in the first century A.D. This work describes the various diseases known in that period. Of interest to us, in book 5, chapter 28, we can find "piaghe nate per corrompere alcune parti del corpo" (wounds born to corrupt some parts of the body), such as carboncello, foruncoli, ulcers, abscesses, fistole, pustole, rognia, impetigene, papule and vitiligo. In this treatise we can find, for the first time, mention of two conditions which can be referred to as psoriasis. In fact, when referring to the various types of impetigini (paragraph 17) he writes: "...l'altra specie è peggiore, quasi somigliante alle papule, ma più aspra e rossa, avente diverse figure; forma nella parte posteriore della cute delle squamette, il prurito è maggiore... ed a certi fissi tempi appare e si dilegua..." ("...the other type is worse, almost identical with papule, but harsher and red, having different shapes; forms on the exterior part of the skin small scales, the itch is greater... and appears and disappears at certain fixed times ..."). Another quote concerns vitiligini (paragraph 19) which are distinguished in alfo, melas and leuce; "dicesi alfo allorché ha color bianco... intanto che sembra come tante gocce sparse..." ("called alfo because of the white coloring... seeming like various drops...").

In later times, in the writings of Galeno, Ezio, Oribasio, Attuario, Paolo di Egina, we sometimes find the word psoriasis used to indicate various scaly rashes, of completely different nature; thus the recurrent terms "leuce, scabies, lepra, alphas, impetigene, lichen and elephantiasi", for example, were used to indicate chronic skin diseases very different one from the other, serious or not, characterized by localized conditions compromising the skin, in which large quantities of scales were also present.

In the epoch of Arab medicine, which reached its zenith between the VIII and XI centuries, various illustrious persons contributed with their work to the progress of medical knowledge of that period. Among these, we must remember Rhazes, Haly Abbas, author of "Liber regius", in which dermatology is especially discussed, Avicenna, Albucasis and Maimonide, as

some of the most important. Their works also discuss diseases which are characteristic of the skin and the terms "morphaea, albaras, serpedo" have been used to indicate, in particular, skin diseases characterized by spots, chapped skin and itching, covered by lamelle forforacee or rounded scales, similar to fish scales. The term "usagro" is also mentioned to define those chronic conditions of the skin in which a great quantity of such scales are present.

In order to clarify the terminology, we can today state that the condition that was the lepra of the ancients, that very serious deforming disease which had its maximum spread in medieval times, had various names such as: Zaraath, Lepra Arabum, Lepra Vulgaris, Elephantiasi dei Greci and in such conditions it was possible to distinguish also such clinical pictures as alphas, melas, leuke. But, the term "lepra" also included other chronic skin inflammations, not dangerous, covered by scales, that had nothing to do with the real leprosy. All of this only increased the confusion of terms and concepts.

In the Middle Ages, western medicine was mainly empirical, monastic, astrological and in part also magical. References to dermatological diseases can already be found among the Maestri of the ancient Scuola Salernitana, such as Costantion Africano; subsequently, various other authors studied these conditions, such as Henri de Mondeville, Yperman, Guy de Chauliac, Bernard de Gordon and John Arden, but in their work we do not find important contributions to the history of dermatology, since the literature in these centuries consists basically of collections or comments of ancient Greek and Arab texts.

During the Renaissance, the dermatology studies also had a positive influence from the renovative spirit present in the scholars of that period. Among the authors of that period, Girolamo Mercuriale (1530–1606) deserves particular mention: author of important works, he is also considered today the founder of modern dermatology since, in his treatise "De morbis cutaneis" he was the first to create a morphological classification of these diseases. In the second chapter of this book, which covers skin diseases, itching, scabies, leprosy and lichens are lucidly described; concerning leprosy, he writes that it differs from scabies because the latter presents only small corpuscoli and dandruff, while the former is characterized by the presence of scales similar to those of fish.

However, confusion persists over descriptions of these various forms of disease.

During the 17th and 18th centuries medicine became experimental. The discovery of the microscope permitted the description of structures which were previously unknown; there was progress and important contribution to various fields of knowledge. Concerning dermatology, we must remember Jean Astruc (1684–1766), and Joseph Plenck (1735–1807) author of "Doctrina de morbis cutaneis" proposing for the first time a systemic classification of dermatological diseases in 14

classes. But even with these authors, psoriasis does not seem to be defined; the use of the term "lepra" continues to indicate various diseases which leave the skin in a "disgusting" condition or diseases which were particularly resistant to treatment. Uncertainty persists between what was intended with leprosy, psora and psoriasis.

The Englishman Robert Willan (1757–1813) finally shed light on the problem. He was an author of basic works in this field, among which a 1799 treatise of great historical value being the first to have coloured illustrations of skin diseases. Willan distinguishes these conditions, classifying them from the point of view of objective examination, introducing a terminology which was to remain valid for a long time. The dermatoses are divided into seven orders; the second is of interest to us, characterized by scales, which includes: lepra, psoriasis, pitiriasi and ittiosi; he has the merit of being the first to indicate the clinical character of psoriasis and to have it termed by name and description as a separate disease, including all the squamous dermatoses of the skin, differing from leprosy. However, a few concepts still connected with the past persist in his writings: he felt, for example, that the diseases which he called lepra and psoriasis were the lepra and psora of the ancient Greek authors. Referring to the ancient writings of Paolo di Egina, stating that lepra formed circular spots on which appeared scales similar to those of fish and that the psora instead is more superficial and multi-formed, covered by a dandruff-like substance, he distinguished this squamous disease into two different morbid states defined as "lepra graecorum" the condition characterized by circular, ring-like spots, differentiating it from the other "psora leprosa" or better still, "psoriasis".

Notwithstanding this much discussed division of psoriasis into two different diseases, the terminology proposed by Willan

was kept for a long time in dermatology; subsequently, the work of others such as Fuchs, Simon, Alibert and Hebra, just to name a few of the most important ones, recognized the indivisibility of these two clinical pictures and it was felt that the single term psoriasis or *Lepra Willani* should unite the various clinical aspects of the disease being discussed. Hebra, particularly, proved how the circular form held to be characteristic of leprosy could be present also in psoriasis, although these two forms were not considered to be different – nor should there have been subdivisions between the different types.

Therefore it was only around 1830–40 that the disease had its first precise definition.

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ABSTRACT

Epidermal Self-maintenance in Psoriasis

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Knowledge is accumulating on the bioregulatory factors of epidermal tissue, but we do not yet really understand how epidermal self-maintenance takes place. A kinematic model

which helps elucidate both the mechanism of this self-maintenance and the formal pathogenesis of aberrations, are proposed in the present paper.