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MEDICAL ORATIONS IN THE 17TH CENTURY TARTU¹

Brief summary

Upon establishment of the University of Tartu in 1632, one of the three higher faculties at the new university was the Faculty of Medicine. However, the first student of medicine arrived to Tartu only in 1637. We probably would have no knowledge about the Faculty of Medicine in Tartu during its first decade of existence, if no medical works were available from that period. Fortunately, two orations dealing with medical themes were compiled in Tartu between 1632 and 1642. Both speeches were presented by students of theology, and this article analyses the motives and rhetoric used in these orations.

Keywords: early modern period, history of universities, University of Tartu, medicine in the early modern period, orations at the early modern universities.

Introduction

In the seventeenth century, the universities in the Swedish Kingdom, as well as elsewhere were mostly humanistic-theological in their educational ideal, and their first aim was to educate clergymen. The University of Tartu was no exception, and during its initial period of functioning between 1632 and 1656 (*Academia Gustaviana* period), at least one quarter of its students chose the career of a clergyman (Tering 1984, 95). During this period, many pastors were educated for service in Estonia and Latvia (about 250) (Talve 2004, 146). Theologians also led in the number of professorships as compared to other faculties. The largest faculty was the Faculty of Theology, with two ordinary and two extraordinary professors, and the first theologian had the highest salary amongst all professors (Piirimäe 2009, 164).

The Faculty of Medicine at *Academia Gustaviana*, on the other hand, in the seventeenth century attracted very few students. The reasons for the lack of students included the absence of an anatomical theatre, which hindered tuition in the field of medicine, and the problems of finding employment as a physician – thus, it was not surprising that the number

of medical students was low. There were only two persons who had studied medicine at *Academia Gustaviana* and later worked as physicians. In total, approximately 1 000 students studied at the Swedish University of Tartu during its first period of existence (1632–1656) (Tering 1984, 20).

Medicine at *Academia Gustaviana*

At most of the 17th-century universities in Europe, medical teaching was of a lesser importance, since in Europe at the time academic medicine and surgery were still separated and some surgeons were present in every town. Thus, there was no need for more than one or two physicians to serve a single town. Few students specialized in medicine, and if they did, they had to study in the best universities of Europe (Rein 2010, 303). The leading universities in the field of medicine during the seventeenth century were the universities of Leiden and Utrecht in the Netherlands (Tering 2008, 271–272), also the University of Padua in Italy and the University of Jena in Germany (Tering 2010, 288–298). At the universities of the Swedish Empire (Uppsala, Tartu, Åbo) the tuition instruction in the field of medicine in the first half of the 17th century was rather poor (Rein 2014, 43).

Comparing the total number of disputations and orations compiled in *Academia Gustaviana* – 498 printed disputations and 222 orations – the number of medical works was insignificant: 2 (3) disputations² and 2 orations (Jaanson 2000, 42). The question of disciplinary boundaries clearly was of a pedagogical value to both students and professors, and, accordingly, several disputations in Tartu were solely devoted to the definition and classification of disciplines (Friedenthal; Piirimäe 2015, 66). In the case of the orations presented in Tartu, they followed the same scheme.

As there was a dearth of medicine students at the Swedish University of Tartu, the works about *ars medica* at that time were most frequently presented by students of theology and future clergymen, who probably did not have much contact with medicine in their future profession, medicine being just an extra field of interest for them. 1632, when the University of Tartu was founded, did not bring any positive contribution to the medical faculty of the university. An outstanding scholar, who was intended to be the first professor of medicine in Tartu, died before the inauguration of the new university (Rein 2011, 78). The first student of medicine arrived to Tartu in 1637, i.e., five years after establishment of the university (Tering 1984, 292).

According to the constitution of the university, teaching of medicine was based on ancient authors and their commentaries (*Constitutiones* 1997, 56). For example, the study of chemistry was not included in the curriculum of the medical faculty, although it was extensively discussed in Europe at that time.

The constitution reveals that the medical faculty was to have two professorships (*Constitutiones* 1997, 56), while in reality only one professor of medicine was employed. The position of the professor of medicine sometimes even remained vacant.

Although the first constitution of the University of Tartu declared that there had to be one dissection of a human cadaver per year (*Constitutiones* 1997, 56), it was plausible that these dissections never took place during the first period of the university's work. Up to the 19th century, only corpses of criminals or of the extremely poor were sanctioned for dissection (Kallinen 1995, 234), and, since Tartu was a relatively peaceful place, it was likely that the corpses of criminals were scarce.

In such a situation, when instruction at the medical faculty did not prosper, the professor of medicine had to use creative promotion in order to demonstrate his faculty in a better light than it really deserved.

The first professor of medicine Johann Below at *Academia Gustaviana*

The first professor of medicine at *Academia Gustaviana* was Johann Below (Johannes Belovius, 1601–1668), who held that post from 1632 to 1642. He was born in Rostock, studied at the universities of Wittenberg, Greifswald and Rostock (Dumschat 2006, 562), and became a doctor of medicine at the University of Rostock in 1628 with the dissertation "*De variolis et morbillis theses inaugurales*". In his thesis, smallpox and measles are described by Below from the point of view of ancient humorism (Fabricius; Below 1628). This is also the only confirmed work known to have been written by him. Johann Below originated from a family that provided several physicians to Europe (*Svenskt biografiskt lexikon* 1922, 130), including Johann Below's nephew, Jakob Friedrich Below (1669–1716), who later also became a professor of medicine at the University of Tartu.

In Tartu, Johann Below communicated with people who were interested in the mysticism of nature (Rein 2011, 103). It is surmised that he

was interested in Paracelsus' doctrine (*Tartu Ülikooli ajalugu I* 1982, 183). As no educated doctors resided in Tartu at that time, Below's main occupation was that of a town physician. At the same time, he was *medicus ordinarius* at the royal court of law. Learned men with a doctoral degree like Johann Below were enticed to Tartu with advantageous perquisites, and could acquire a high social position in Livonia, being considered the greatest experts in their field (Tering 1982, 590). After his Tartu period, Below for some time stayed in Riga, and thus his name is also connected with the history of medicine in Latvia (Viksna 1977, 35). Later, in 1643, Below travelled to Moscow, as he was invited to be a personal doctor of the Russian Tsars (Dumschat 2006, 563). At the end of his life, he returned to Rostock, where he died in 1668 (Brennsohn 1905, 94).

As the students of medicine in Tartu were scarce, Johann Below delivered lectures on anatomy and botany to students of other faculties (Buchholtz 1853, 169). No medical disputations were written or defended in Tartu during Below's professorship, but there are two orations from that period dealing with medical themes presented by students of theology. The first one was entitled "*Oratio de medicina*" and the second one "*Oratio de homine*".

Oration at *Academia Gustaviana*

There is a remarkable amount of printed orations originating from *Academia Gustaviana* (Jaanson 2000, 47). Oration presented at *Academia Gustaviana* belonged to the studies of rhetoric and were held on the order of Professor of Rhetoric Laurentius Ludenius (1592–1654), whose task it was to supervise and help students in this field. The professor of rhetoric was also responsible for the themes of these speeches (Rein 2011, 105). The contents of the orations held in Tartu are estimated to have been banal (Sandblad 1976, 218), but some of these provide historical information about Tartu, and thus they can be considered unique historical sources.

The orations were presented before the chancellor, professors, students, town magistrates and guests, and the purpose was to train logical composition of a subject matter and a skill in performance. The themes were conventional and usually abstract, like *oratio de pace, de musica, de ira, de angelis, de pietate, de paupertate, de anima*. Included were also "*Oratio de medicina*" and "*Oratio de homine*". Consequently, we would not claim there is any connection between the medical faculty and these two orations, as these academic speeches rather belonged to the studies of rhetoric.

“Oratio de medicina”

“*Oratio de medicina*” was presented on 31 October 1637. Three weeks earlier, the first student of medicine was immatriculated to the University of Tartu, and this event obviously influenced the presentation of a speech with a medical theme. The student who delivered “*Oratio de medicina*”, Friedrich Hein (Fridericus Heinius, ?–1666), came from Rostock, like Professor of Medicine Johann Below, and he was a son of Heinrich Hein (Henricus Heinius, ca 1590–1666), professor of law at *Academia Gustaviana*. Obvious influences can be recognized in his speech, e.g. “*Oratio de medicina*” claims that lawyers are the doctors of a society.

Hinc notum est, quod Jurisconsulti, & sanae in Respublica Leges, soepius vocentur Medici atque Medicina Rerum publicarum.

Ut enim Medicina, membra putrida, & aliis nocentia, tollit, ne aliis noceant sanis; Sic etiam a Jurisconsultis & Prudentibus Viris, Sanctisque Legibus, ex urbe & orbe mali sunt tollendi, si Rem publicam salvam esse velint.

(Hein 1637, A4–A4 verso)

Lawyers and laws remove vices from a town and the world in order to keep the state healthy. There is a parallel here with amputation in medicine.

Friedrich Hein began his speech “*De medicina*” with the statement that we all daily see fragility of the human body and, therefore, it clearly suffers easily from all kinds of changes, diseases among them. The author continued with a lament about the misery of human life and about the fact that diseases afflict people (Hein 1637, A3–A3 verso).

Friedrich Hein emphasised: it was praiseworthy that many of us, i.e. Europeans, had dedicated themselves to medical studies – *Hinc apud nos Europaeos laudabilis haec consuetudo inolevit, ut plurimi dentur, qui Medicae Artis studio sunt addicti* (Hein 1637, A3 verso). We should here remind that in fact almost nobody studied at the medical faculty in Tartu at the time and the first student of medicine had arrived only a few weeks earlier.

Friedrich Hein praised Tartu’s medical conditions, mild climate and vigorous growth of herbs, and he exhorted his audience to witness the dissections that were being carried out there.

Etenim, versamur in sancto hoc Auditorio Academico-Medico, in quo publice Docentes identidem audimus Medicos ingeniosissimos. Vos Auditores inclyti,

testes estis Anatomicae sectionis in corporibus soepius institutae: Vos testes estis, quod quoties per aeris licuit temperiem, herbatim progredi, qui in Regia hac Academia Gustaviana, quae Dorpati est ad Embeccam, vivimus, subinde tempore verno & aestivo fuerimus solliti.

(Hein 1637, B1)

This description of medical conditions is interesting, as no dissections of human cadavers are known at the period of *Academia Gustaviana* in Tartu, however, dissections of animals probably took place at that time. The oration hints at these events.

Instruction in the field of medicine was rather poor and episodic in Tartu, but the author of the speech stressed that not all the nations had doctors at hand at all times and pointed to the Babylonian example in Herodotus' Book I. 197, containing a description of the Babylonian treatment of diseases – namely, all the sick persons were brought to the market place, so that everyone could give advice to these persons on how to heal their afflictions. Thus, admittedly, the conditions in Tartu were not the worst.

Next, the author highlighted the role of theology and theologians in the process of healing – *scimus, & quotidie audimus, quod Reverendi sint Theologi, qui dicunt, quod sint Medicus & Medicina, quae vocatur Spiritualis* (Hein 1637, A4). Since the student presenting the speech was studying theology himself, it was no surprise that he turned to these themes. The most outstanding doctor, according to the orator, was God. Hein emphasised that Jesus often healed incurable diseases with a single word and gave these abilities also to his disciples. The name of Jesus was a synonym for health.

Etenim, incurabiles morbos verbo solo curavit, & potestatem curandi omnes infirmitates dedit Apostolis suis, prout passim in libris Evangelistarum legitur.

(Hein 1637, B3 verso)

Etenim, nomen ipsum JESUS, nihil aliud est, quam salus: quandoquidem ipse salvum fecit populum a peccatis.

(Hein 1637, A4)

The author also claimed that the first doctor, according to pagans, was Apollo, who was honoured as the god of physicians – *ethnicorum communis fuit opinio, quod ante Apollinem non habuerint medicum, quem proinde velut Medicorum Deum Divino cultu honoraverunt* (Hein 1637, B1).

In the seventeenth century, medicine and physicians were not considered all-powerful – curing diseases was generally considered just one task of medical science, the other one being medicine’s prophylactic function, which was even more important. Diseases were divided into curable and incurable ones.

Medicinam, Artem esse effectivam, quae experimento & ratione sanitatem in corpore humano conservat, & morbum sanabilem removet.

(Hein 1637, B1 verso)

Dicitur tandem quod Ars Medica morbum omnem sanabilem removeat. Etenim, ab eventu solet morbus dividi in incurabilem sive Lethalem, & in curabilem sive salutarem.

(Hein 1637, B2)

Medicine is a noble art, and this is indicated by the fact that several rulers have practised it – for example, Mithridates, king of Pontus, while several outstanding philosophers like Democritus, Plato and Aristotle have written about medicine (Hein 1637, C2 verso–C3).

Hein’s disputation concluded with a congratulation composed by the first student of medicine at the University of Tartu – David Cunitius.³ Interestingly, he exhorted the author to continue with medical themes (Hein 1637, C4 verso), while he himself did not present any medical work at *Academia Gustaviana*.

“*Oratio de medicina*” could thus be interpreted as an attempt not only to praise medicine in Tartu, but also to embellish the situation. The student Friedrich Hein who presented it, came from Rostock, like Professor of Medicine Johann Below, and he was the son of another professor at the University of Tartu, seem to corroborate this suggestion.

“*Oratio de homine*”

Oration “*De homine*” by Segvardus Olai Wallander was given at *Academia Gustaviana* on 28 March 1640. The author originated from Mariestad in Sweden, and came to Tartu for studies in 1637 (Tering 1984, 173).

The introduction of Segvardus Wallander’s speech described human life as a midway between the life of angels and animals – *Vita Hominum media inter Vitam et Angelorum, et Vitam pecorum ...* (Wallander 1640, A2).

The author continued his speech with rhetoric about the misery of human life, pointing to the story of Croesus and Solon as told by Herodotus in his “Histories” I. 30–56, 71–88. Wallander claimed that the Latin word “*homo*” had come from the word “*humus*” and explained the double nature of Man – consisting of the body and soul. In connection with Man’s origin from the mud of the earth, the author explained the influences of different elements – air, fire, water and earth – on humans and the connection of these elements to human anatomy and the four tempers, thus pointing to the harmony of microcosm and macrocosm (Wallander 1640, B1 *verso*).

At a first glance, it is difficult to see any connection with medicine in this speech, as the approach is rather theological. However, the central part of Wallander’s oration is a kind of anatomical-physiological compendium that extends over three pages, and conventional rhetoric seems to have been forgotten here (Sandblad 1976, 219).

Corpus autem Humanum Organicum, plurimis instructum est partibus, quae dicuntur Materiales.

Etenim sunt partes similes, OSSA, partes siccissimae, fulciantes & alia membra munientes: Est CARTILAGO, Osse mollior, quodammodo flexilis, ut in auribus apparet: Est LIGAMENTUM, quod quasi filum durius, ossa inter se colligat: Est TENDO, pars ligamenti, arbitrario artuum motu inseriens ...

Hinc sunt partes corporis dissimiles, inter quas est CAPUT, sedes illa sensuum, cujus externae partes sunt CRANIUM, & FACIES continens Frontem, Tempora, Aures, & oculos, in parte superiore, & Genas, Nasum, ac Os, in parte inferior.

(Wallander 1640, B2)

The author apparently belonged amongst the few students who had attended some lectures in the medical faculty and took advantage of the opportunity to demonstrate his knowledge of that field. The lengthy and thorough anatomical descriptions in the academic speech also reveal that lectures on anatomy were really delivered at the University of Tartu during the first years after its establishment. Due to lack of students at the medical faculty, it could have been vice versa.

Wallander also enumerated the internal anatomy of the human body, describing the rational soul and abilities of man:

Partes humani corporis, quas contentas vocamus, sunt Humores & Spiritus ... Sic cum corporis Humani Organici partes cognoverimus: non ignorabimus, quod illud ipsum Anima Rationali informetur ... Sane, Anima Rationalis non abolet in homine Animam vegetantem & sentientem, sed perficit.

(Wallander 1640, B3 verso)

Habet Homo facultatem sentiendi, prout res conjunguntur ipsi animae, per vim apprehensivam tam sensuum exteriorum, quam interiorum ... Habet Homo facultatem intelligendi ac volendi.

(Wallander 1640, B4).

While Wallander's speech was dedicated to a human being in general, there were some references to women, as well: *Deus Evam, e latere Adami sumpta costa, in adjutorium viri creavit* (Wallander 1640, B1) ... *dicente Aristotile, Foemina sit Mas imperfectus* (Wallander 1640, C1). The author attributed the statement that a woman is an imperfect man to Aristotle; however, this assertion cannot be found in philosopher's texts.

The final part of the speech "*Oratio de homine*" was rather pessimistic. The author ended his narrative by enumerating the factors that corrupt men: *Est Homo Homini soepius Lupus. Sunt Morbi, qui Hominem atterunt. Est Mors quae absumit* (Wallander 1640, C2).

Finally, "*Oratio de homine*" can be considered a symbiosis of a medical and theological approach to the subject matter, i. e. the human being. It appears that the author of the speech was really interested in medical themes and displayed knowledge of human anatomy.

Conclusions

Today, we are accustomed to medicine as a practical field. The academic speeches presented in the 17th century Tartu provide an insight that at the time the words strongly prevailed over actions. The orations of medical contents were held in order to describe, glorify and praise medicine in a situation, where it did not in fact flourish. Words were the means used in this period to improve the situation.

Although the picture presented in "*Oratio de medicina*" and "*Oratio de homine*" probably does not exactly correspond to the historical reality, nevertheless, we should not underestimate the importance of these two orations held at the University of Tartu in the first half of the 17th century. These academic speeches are the only sources indicating

that instruction in the field of medicine really had taken place during the university's first decade of existence (1632–1642). Notably, those who expounded on medical themes during this time were neither professors nor students of medicine.

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- ² The first medical disputation at the University of Tartu was presented before the inauguration of the university, see Raicus 1631.
- ³ Cultor fidelis Paeonii Chori/ HEINI, diserto quod λόγῳ evehis/ Artem hanc sacratam, quam ipse Apollo/ Primitus excoluit Verendus;/ Rem tune praestas ingenuis Viris/ Gratam, Juventae Pieridum sacrae/ Arti decoram, olim JEHOVAE/ Fructifero tribuendam honore?/ Sic perge. Momos nil facito malos,/ Instar canum qui soepe petunt Bonos./ Virtute tanta macte semper,/ Opto pio studio vigorem!/ τῆς φιλίας ἐνεκα deproperabat/ DAVID CUNITIUS Freienwaldio/ Pomeranus

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MEDICĪNAI VELTĪTĀS RUNAS 17. GS. TARTU

KOPSAVILKUMS

17. gadsimtā Tartu Universitātē medicīniskā izglītība tikpat kā nebija attīstīta, ja to salīdzina ar teoloģisko izglītību, tiesību zinātnēm un rētoriku. Visai maz bija arī tādu studentu, kuri studēja Medicīnas fakultātē Gustava akadēmijā (*Academia Gustaviana*) Tērbatā. Medicīniskus darbus, kas koncentrēti Tartu, galvenokārt sacerējuši studenti, kuri apguva teoloģiju un gatavojās kļūt par garīdzniekiem. Gustava akadēmijā pirmais zināmais profesors medicīnā bija Johans Belovs (*Johann Below*, 1601–1668); viņš strādājis šajā amatā no 1632. līdz 1642. gadam. Tā kā viņa profesūras laikā tikpat kā nav bijis medicīnas studentu, Johans Belovs lasījis lekcijas anatomijā un botānikā citu fakultāšu studentiem. Belova profesūras laikā nekādi zinātniski pētījumi nav sarakstīti vai aizstāvēti, taču no minētā perioda saglabājušās divas runas, kurās skartas medicīnas tēmas, proti, Fridriha Heina *Runa par medicīnu (Oratio de medicina, 1637)* un Segvarda Valandera *Runa par cilvēku (Oratio de homine, 1640)*. Šīs runas var tikt vērtētas kā medicīniskās un teoloģiskās pieejas simbioze medicīnas disciplinā.