

## Technical and Ethical Knowledge of Medicine in Achilles Tatius' *Leucippe and Clitophon*

Achilles Tatius makes numerous references to parts of the body and afflictions throughout *Leucippe and Clitophon*, and to no surprise, there are more doctors as characters than in the other ancient novels. Only two are named physicians, though there are three doctors and two pharmacologists in function. As four characters have a pass at diagnosing and curing the protagonist female Leucippe from a spell of madness, Tatius displays knowledge of technical medicine and medical ethics. He uses this knowledge to make subtle jokes about Methodists and other doctors who undergo expensive training but lack practical skill by having proper doctors fail at curing Leucippe while an elephant and a secondary Egyptian character are truly capable, noble healers.

The first explicitly named doctor is an Indian elephant who is called a quack because it demands payment before treatment (4.4). Shortly after the comparison of the elephant to a quack doctor, Leucippe is seized with madness and a military camp physician is summoned. While the physician is still on his way, it is Clitophon's male companion, Menelaus, who first recognizes the nature of the girl's affliction. His explanation is that while at such a young age the blood boils to such an extent that it can bubble out of the veins and flood the brain, preventing logical behavior (4.10). Whitmarsh interprets this episode as "a parody of a contemporary medical theory which attributed all illnesses to a surfeit of blood" and cites McLeod's (1969) article in which he links Menelaus' understanding of Leucippe's madness to Erastistratean dogma (165). Even though Menelaus knows highly technical medicine from a famous Alexandrian anatomist, his theory of disease and method of treatment ultimately fail.

When the camp doctor arrives he first decides to induce sleep, "for sleep serves as a cure for any illness" (Whitmarsh 68). Prescribing sleep would indicate that the doctor diagnosed

Leucippe with generic madness, except this illness should be accompanied by a fever, and sleep is not always considered the safest or an effective remedy (Celsus 3.11, Aurelianus *Acute Diseases* 1.64-66). The doctor, most likely a Methodist as most Roman army physicians were according to Celsus (1.pr.65), thus has not accurately diagnosed the illness nor has he inquired into the nature of the disease. The doctor then gives our protagonists a pill the size of a seed of vetch to be dissolved in oil and rubbed over her forehead. As Regine May (2014) points out, Tattius represents medical advice as recorded by Celsus in his *De Medicina*, but I will show that he does not follow Celsus closely. The only compounds the size of vetch seed he prescribes are anodynes for patients who are in too much pain to sleep. They are to be ingested rather than applied to the forehead and he highly warns against their use because they are harsh on the stomach (Celsus 5.25). Thus, in addition to not fully understanding Leucippe's disease, the doctor applies a drug contrarily to the manner and safety precaution our sources have preserved.

The two pharmacologists are Egyptians: one was an attendant and forced to administer a drug but forgot to dilute it, causing Leucippe's madness; the other a man claiming to be able to mix another drug that would cure her. The latter asks for money up front and successfully cures Leucippe. His ethical duty toward Clitophon is so strong that he even took the same dosage as Leucippe to prove its safety.

Tattius casts the doctor in this episode as what can best be described as a Roman military soldier who applies simple, gentle, Methodist-inspired practices, but his technical knowledge is lacking resulting in his misdiagnosis (or rather, no formal diagnosis at all). If there is a joke in the madness episode, it is that the Methodists were heavily reproached for their seeming disregard for medical theory and being overly interested in universal commonalities, that is, that all disease is caused by a bodily stricture, flux, or mixture of the two. Moreover, his cures are

likely inaccurate based on surviving evidence. Even though Tattius has set up the model for a quack doctor in his novel as asking a fee before rendering a service, it is in fact the military physician who is the quack because the elephant and the Egyptian pharmacist administer effective remedies.

### Bibliography

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