**THE CULT OF ASCLEPIOS IN MOESIA AND THRACIA**

**IN 1ST – 3RD CENT.** **A.D.**

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In the 1st century AD West Pont joined the Roman Empire as provinces Moesia and Thrace. This period was marked by spreading of the Roman ideology in Greek cities. Further cultural development of the latter was greatly influenced by it [1, р. 26]. This period was characterized by dramatic changes in a spiritual field of life, which caused the rise of peoples’ interest to their health. Medicine became widely popular. The temple medicine became a top interest for the society at that time [2, р. 374–375]. Concerning the significance of this period for the development of medicine in the Antique society, it is important to study peculiarities of the temple medicine in provinces Moesia and Thrace in the 1st–3rd centuries AD.

The temple medicine in the states of West Pont was widespread since the Hellenistic era [3, р. 2, 34; 4, р. 12]. It was closely connected with the cults of healing deities and involved irrational methods of treatment, those some methods of natural healing were used as well. The main specific feature of West Pont was its remoteness from the center of the Roman Empire therefore most of ancient traditions remained intact here, though some elements of the Roman influence can be traced.

In particular, it is important to point out the rise of peoples’ interest to the temple medicine which was represented here mostly by the cults of gods Apollo and Asclepios. The temples of Asclepios were at the same time healing centers. They were situated both in big cities and villages. The evidence of the presence of city temple was found in Odessos, Serdica and Mesembria [5, р. 76, 86; 3, р. 78; 6, р. 174]. Since Asclepios was associated with mineral springs, it was quite popular to build temples, dedicated to this deity near rivers, mineral springs and caves. Such a specific geographical location was connected with the treatment of the sick, which often involved water procedures. The best examples are temples in Pautalia, Slivnitsa and Pernik [7, р. 219]. It was as popular to build temples far from cities in picturesque places, surrounded by groves and gardens [8, р. 5]. The territory of the shrine was considered holy. Some categories of people (i.e. people, sick with incurable diseases, women-in-birth) were forbidden to enter it. The most prominent manifestation of the Roman cultural influence on West Pont was spreading of Egyptian healing cults [1, р. 23], which were popular in the Roman Empire at the time. The idea of the only god-savior was becoming more and more powerful during this period. Archeological funds give evidence about the existence of syncretic cults of Asclepios and Serapis (Egyptian god-healer) [9, р. 43]. The cult of Asclepios in West Pont was also influenced by local religions. In particular Asclepios was often depicted as Thracian horseman [10, р. 88]. It was due to the presence of Thracian elements among the population of the cities. For instance, the cult of Asclepios was very popular among Roman legionaries, which were based in Lower Moesia. Along with Roman citizens there were Thracians among the warriors, which also accepted the cult of healing deity [6, р. 54].

Thus, temple medicine in West Pont continued to develop throughout Roman times. The state cults of Asclepios existed almost in all cities. The latter were main healing centers. As a result of Roman influence Egyptian cults spread in West Pont and syncretized with the cults of Greek deities. The Thracian influence can also be traced.

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