Chapter XXXII

Diseases of Jews

The Jews are a people unlike any other, since they have no fixed abode but are to be found everywhere; they are simultaneously indolent and industrious; they neither plough nor harrow nor sow, nevertheless they reap. These people are also afflicted by various diseases and not, as is commonly believed, by an infirmity of birth or their perverse way of life but because of the work they carry out. It is also false to ascribe the smell that Jews give off as being innate or endemic. In fact, this smell is a result of their cramped homes and financial straits. When they lived in Jerusalem, where perfumes abounded, they were surely clean and sweet smelling.

Nearly all the Jews and lower classes that represent the majority in particular, do jobs where they either have to sit down or standing. They are cobblers and seamstresses, for they mend old garments, while the women in particular, whether single or married, earn their living as seamstresses. They do not spin, card, or weave and the only domestic task they know is needlework. But at this they excel and are able to make garments of wool, silk or any other kind of fabric without leaving any vestige of a seam; in Rome, this is called rinacciare. They manage to make their living by selling to an unwary populace the pieces of fabric they have cleverly sewn together as garments.

This work is extremely taxing on the eyes, specifically to the Jewish women who sew all day and deep into the night by the light of a small lamp with a thin wick as feeble as the lamp of a sepulchre. They not only suffer the effects of extensive sitting, but also suffer from a gradual weakening of their eyesight, and by the age of 40, they are nearly all half-blind if not myopic. In addition, in nearly all cities the Jews are forced to live in narrow alleyways
so throughout the year, the women place themselves by an open window to capture the light; this results in various ailments of the head, such as headache, earache and toothache, colds, sore throats and inflamed eyes. As time goes by, most of them, at least in the lower classes, are half-deaf and have sore eyes, which is what we also said previously about the shoemakers.

The men spend all day in their booths, sitting down patching together garments or standing up trying to sell their patchwork; they are nearly all cachectic, melancholic, and gloomy, and most have scabs. Even among the wealthier Jews, there are very few who do not suffer from some skin disease, such that this foul condition is considered intrinsic to their race as if inherited, such as the Elphantiasis that was once very common amongst the Jews.

Besides needlework, in Italy at least, Jews do another trade – remaking woollen mattresses. When the wool in the mattresses has become compressed and hard after being slept on every night for years, they put it on a wicker trellis to beat and shake it to make it softer and more comfortable to lie on. Going from house to house in the city, they make a considerable amount of money from this activity, but when they shake and card the old wool, which is frequently soiled with urine and excrement, they take in by mouth a great deal of filthy dust. This leads to serious ailments, such as violent coughing, dyspnoea, and nausea. I have met many poor souls who were reduced to incurable consumption through this kind of work; they themselves admitting that it was this trade that was their downfall. I believe that the dust is noxious not so much because the wool is old, but rather because of the impurities deposited by the bodies that had slept on the mattresses. It is for this very reason that when someone in the family dies, after their funeral all bed linen, garments, and anything else that was used during the illness is sent to the laundry to be reclaned and have stains removed; a Jew is also called to beat and clean the woollen mattresses in the open air. As is the case with pallbearers, the Jews cannot help take up some of this decomposing matter while working and, at the same time, the lungs incur a degree of injury.

Paper is made using linen and hemp garments that have become worn through use; they are left in water to soften, and then be pounded. This ingenious and admirable process was also used by the ancients who needed waxed wooden tablets, parchment, or
papyrus from Egypt upon which to write. These People, who gape after gain and often transact business related to commodities under public monopolies (as they used to do in antiquity, according to Juvenal), go up and down the streets in the city crying out for these old rags for a pittance; when they have collected enough, they sell them to paper makers. Once they have bought these rags, the Jews return home with their load where they then take the greatest care to make sure no wool or silk is among the rags, and if there is, they remove it, since it is not suitable for making paper (although in the Septalianum Museum one can see Chinese paper made of silk). They then place these dirty rags in huge piles in their workshops. It is awesome and indeed incredible just how terrible a stench is given off every time that mountain of filth is disturbed in order to fill up huge sacks to take these squalid goods to the paper factories.

Because of this work, they then fall ill with coughing, shortness of breath, nausea, and vertigo. Indeed, is there anything filthier or more revolting than a mound of all that filth, with the contaminated clothing of men, women, and corpses? Is there anything more pitiful or terrible than seeing them with their carts full of the remains of human misery and poverty?

We must therefore reflect on how these people can be helped so they do not suffer so terribly because of their trades. I personally believe that there is nothing healthier and more advisable for the women and men who do needlework than bodily exercise. There is nothing more effective at removing obstructions, increasing native heat, improving digestion, aiding transpiration, and eliminating scabs. Thus, the women, especially those who sew incessantly, should steal some hours from their work for the love of their health and reinvigorate their body and hands and, as the saying goes, they should give their eyes a rest to avoid a life of idleness and misery once they can no longer see. Women should be given frequent but mild purgatives, for example a soothing electuary or pills of aloes, rhubarb, or the like, to make sure an excessive quantity of humours does not accumulate in their bodies. From experience I have seen that blood-letting is not as good for them as purgatives; in fact, it takes little to sap their strength, and their blood, which is already lacking in vital spirits, becomes even weaker. Furthermore, these women themselves believe (and they are not mistaken), that there is nothing more harmful for weakened eyesight than blood letting.
They would much rather have their arms or legs cauterized and find this effective, because in this way nature finds an outlet to eliminate impurities gradually.

Those who go to collect rags and remake mattresses need more drastic remedies to make them expel the particles they have taken in, either from below or above, which is more expeditious. In particular, they should use antimony-containing preparations are best, or alexipharmics that combat poison, like vinegar of theriac, theriac itself and the like. While they are working, they should also rinse their mouths out with vinegar and water and cover their mouth and nose to make it more difficult for the atoms suspended in the air to enter their bodies.
Diseases of runners

In ancient times, when gymnastics was considered an art, not just for competitions but also for wars, one type of training that was included was running. Whether free-born or slaves, young boys would train and were taught running in public gymnasia and, in public games and performances, the fastest runner would be awarded the garland. In this fashion they were training for war, that is, as Vegetius would say, they were learning how “To throw themselves with greater force against the enemy, occupy strategic sites more quickly, forestall the enemy, and overtake the enemy in retreat”. These exercises are still common practice in Turkey today and the aims are the same-laudable military discipline through drilling in fast running. Plato wanted women to be trained in running as well, so they could also enter the military and defend their homeland. Princes and emperors (and according to Suetonius, Roman noblemen as well) had their own runners whom they called “foot servants”. Today, this is no longer customary, and it is only princes or noblemen who have servants they call lackeys, runners whose task is to quickly run ahead of the carriages or coaches or to deliver letters some place and return with a reply post-haste.

This sort of man is afflicted by various illnesses. Most suffer from hernias and asthma, the latter being an ailment that can frequently be observed in racehorses as well; and haemoptysis is evident not infrequently; Plautus writes that when complaining that his master had made him run so fast that he could barely breathe, the servant Acanthio said, “You have caused my lungs to rupture, I have been splitting blood for some time now”. To which his master Cremete replied, “If you swallow some resin from Egyptian honey, you will be cured immediately".
We know that in ancient times resinous remedies were already recommended for pulmonary illnesses. Runners also become skinny and of sallow complexion, since they consume the spirits in the blood and nutritional lymph through their sweating, just like hunting dogs. They are also afflicted by diseases of the head, so much so that Aristotle wondered why this should be, as movement usually pushes excrement downwards. The true cause for this phenomenon (what Settala, Guastavino and others have said on the subject aside) is that when one runs fast, the vesicles of the lung over-inflate and therefore blood from returning via the vena cava is impeded above the heart; this creates a sort of break that obstructs the free flow of the blood in the pulmonary vessels, so that, of necessity, it stagnates in the head, leading to serious illnesses. This does not happen if one runs moderately fast; on the contrary, in this case the humours are driven down inferiorly. Runners are very frequently afflicted by serious lung illnesses, such as pleurisy and pneumonia. This is because they are lightly clad and are exposed to both rain and wind; they are then drenched with sweat and then chilled through, so the pores of their skin become obstructed and they cannot but help becoming afflicted by mortal illnesses, especially of the respiratory organs, which are the most taxed during running and become overheated. Sometimes they pass bloody urine because a small vein in the kidney has burst. This is why Celsus advises against running if the kidneys are already damaged. They are also more liable to hernias because the peritoneum ruptures or is distended as a result of the pressure of the retained air. For this reason Paul of Aegina writes that those with buboes or a hernia should not run.

When running there is no doubt that more air is inhaled than exhaled. This is because the air must be held back within the thoracic cavity in order to maintain the strength needed to continue running. And we know that this strength is diminished when we relax the thoracic muscles to exhale, whereas when the thorax is inflated and the lungs distended, the tone of the muscles and fibres of the entire body is increased. However, if one runs for too long too quickly, and the lungs are always full of lots of air, the lung vesicles inflate, obstructing the blood going from the pulmonary vessels to the right cavity of the heart, since the ducts contract and become narrower. This leads to a rupture of the vessels and haemorrhage.
moptysis, as Galen himself observed. Both primary and secondary, or convulsive, paroxysms of asthma also occur, owing to the formation and diffusion of an acidic serum throughout the intercostal muscles, resulting in violent contractions. "My breathing is killing me, the panting is unbearable", says a runner in Plautus. This is why nowadays, when runners turn 40, they are made to retire and relegated to public hospitals.

I think the footmen we see today all over the city, running breathless ahead of their masters' carriages with great speed, are in the very same state as that described with such vivacity by Elio Sparziano in the life of Emperor Vero, who attached wings to his runners' shoulders and named them after the different winds. Indeed, the need to work and serve has given our runners wings to their feet, if not to their shoulders. I would like to quote the writer: "In addition to his countless other caprices, he often had wings attached to his runners, as if they were cupids, and he called them after the winds, Boreas, Nothus, Aquilo, Circius, and so on, making them run without relief or mercy".

Runners very often have an enlarged spleen, since the tissue of this organ loosens as a result of such agitated motion and takes in more blood than it can discharge. As a result, the serous humours that stagnate in its cavities produce inflammation. According to Pliny, in ancient times they used to cauterize runners to treat the spleen, since it interfered with their running. In Plautus, the slave I quoted above says, "The knees of the runner fail; the spleen is in revolt".

These are therefore the diseases of runners which, in actual fact, they themselves can either make better or worse depending on the excesses of their diets. Wearing a truss will easily protect them from a hernia before they are afflicted by this unfortunate and common ailment; they can also cure emaciation and muscle wasting not only with a soft and moistened diet, but also with gentle massage with oil and bathing, when they have enough time. Similar remedies will also stop any obstructions of the skin that they are subject to after extensive running and sweating. Blood letting will also be useful as a preventive measure for vessel ruptures and spitting blood; this remedy should certainly not be omitted when a runner is laid-up because of a serious illness. In runners, no organ is as overtaxed and weakened as the lungs. Hippocrates used to say, "Work for the joints, food for the flesh, sleep for the viscera". Indeed, the joints
are strengthened by movement and running, just as they are weakened and become sluggish from idleness and lack of any physical exercise, but the same cannot be said of the lungs, which become overheated and lose their natural tone after excessive running.

Heeding these remedies and admonitions would keep runners safe and sound. But this sort never resort to a doctor's help and advice, unless they are already confined to their beds or already afflicted by one of the diseases above and thus are unable to run. In such cases, the doctor should know what sort of exertion is involved.

When they are suffering from visceral obstructions, of the spleen in particular (once they have been given the remedies that remove blockages, for example iron preparations), they should go for walks. Hence, in Plautus when Cappadox the pimp complains to Palinurus that his spleen is girdling him and says, "My spleen is racked", the other replies, "go for a walk, for the spleen that's best".
Chapter XXXIV

Diseases of horsemen

We can certainly also place in the same category as runners, horsemen, who break and train horses in the hippodrome, and letter-carriers, who change horses and run from one place to another, bearing letters of a public or commercial nature. They are afflicted by the very same illnesses as runners, which we have just looked at. They are subject to hernias, asthma and sciatica in particular, which Hippocrates believed to be a characteristic of the Scythians because they spent their lives on horseback and, for this reason, they also became sterile. As Baillou rightly observed, constant horseback-riding usually leads to the rupture of vessels in the chest, and is so harmful to the kidneys that horsemen often pass blood with their urine as well as sometimes suffering from lumbar weakness. Hippocrates says: “Those who ride on horseback or go on foot are afflicted by lumbar and thigh weakness”. Horsemen also suffer from anal fissure and haemorrhoids, especially when they train horses and ride without a saddle. It is in reference to these illnesses that Martial alludes ironically: “Use the horse-cloth on your fast horse, oh huntsman, for if you ride bareback you will get haemorrhoids”.

I remember that once a young man who belonged to our Hippodrome, an elegant horseman, came to me much abashed and, calling heaven to bear witness to his honesty, told me that for some time he had been suffering from a sycosis of the anus. I told him not to worry, because nobody suspected anything so loathsome of him and that his ailment was caused by his vocation.

These workers also suffer from chronic ulcers, abnormally scarred and calloused, in the buttocks and medial thighs, as well as varicosities of the legs. Hippocrates describes an extremely interesting case on this subject, whom I would like to quote from the
version in Foes: "For six years, a man who lived near the fountain of Eleaclics suffered from hippuris, a swelling of the groin, varicose veins, and chronic defluxion to the hip and joints". Hippocrates therefore calls the disease caused by excessive riding hippuris, and according to the interpretation of Valles, this means a callous ulcer in the buttocks. So here we can see just how many ailments afflict horsemen and all those who ride excessively. It is not at all difficult to find the cause of these ills: violent shaking can upset the whole balance of the bodily economy, whether the solid or fluid components. As Lucilius puts it, all the viscera are "jolted violently by a plodding nag"; almost displaced from their natural positions, the natural flow of the whole blood mass is perturbed. This obviously leads to defluxation or stasis of the serum in the joints, rupture of vessels in the lungs and kidneys; while the delayed return of the blood results in ulcers and varicosities in the legs, since those who train horses, in particular, tense their thigh and leg muscles so they are not thrown off. On the other hand, if we consider the strength required of the rider to tense all his muscles so he remains in the saddle while the horse is galloping or being trained to do certain movements, which is something that requires the tonic contraction of the whole body and the marked contraction of the muscles, it is not at all surprising that those who ride are afflicted by the above-mentioned ailments.

Famous as a commentator on Hippocrates, when explaining the passage in which the great teacher talks of the influence of running a long distance on a gradual curve, slowing down, going round and round, and changing direction, Martianus provides an elegant formulation of just how harmful running in circles actually is, and he cites the example of those who ride horses. To use his own words: "Running in circles is more tiring because the body mass and weight lean to just one side, thus making the body extremely fatigued Horsemen can confirm this, because horses also tire much more if they run in a circle for over an hour than if they run in a straight line for two; running in circles exhausts horses completely and none of them can resist for more than half an hour, unless they are exceptionally strong". The main task of those who break and train horses is to pay the closest attention to training them to run in circles, "indefinitely", as Hippocrates calls it. Citing Hippocrates' example of the Scythians, above, it was noted that those who ride continuously become sterile
and impotent. This is because the hardiness of the loins and genital organs is enfeebled by such unremitting jolting. It would appear, however, that Aristotle disagreed, as he wrote that those who ride become libidinous through such continual heating and friction of the external genitalia. But this might taken to mean those who ride in moderation, at a fast pace or trot. Exertions beyond this are injurious, especially on horses that jolt severely or race, or to use Cassiodorus' expression for that kind of horses, *cursales*, i.e., those used to bear letters, which we call "post horses". The emperor Theodoric issued an edict forbidding such horses to be laden with more than one hundred pounds, since he thought it was absurd to "overload an animal one demands speed from".

It cannot be denied that a moderate and pleasant ride can also have numerous advantages, so much so that at times it even can prove effective against chronic illnesses. According to Hippocrates, moderate riding heats and dries the body as well as making one lose weight, while Avicenna recommends it for expelling kidney stones and stimulating urination. One of the more modern writers, Thomas Sydenham, extols the virtues of riding to remove obstructions in the liver and spleen. I remember I once cured a young horseman who had suffered from a febrile crisis followed by an affected spleen and a propensity to subject to dropsy; he took my advice and, even though he was still weak and looked awful, he went back to his work and within just one month was fully restored to health.

Coachmen also fall into the same class as horsemen, since carriage-driving is far from light labour; indeed, they have to keep the muscles in both arms in a state of constant tension and they have to keep a strong grip on the reins with both hands so they can control the horses. And if these actions are not coordinated with precision, Virgil's words describe what may happen: "The charioteer is dragged along by the horses, and the chariot heeds not the reins".

In ancient times, being a charioteer in games and spectacles was very prestigious, so much so that the princes themselves would sometimes drive. According to Suetonius, Nero would frequently drive a chariot on show, something Caligula would also do; the latter would not allow anyone else to drive a chariot unless he was a member of the Senate. Today we can still find noblemen who boast at how good they are driving for their own amusement.
I do not wish to bore the reader discussing how to treat the illnesses that afflict horsemen and post-riders. This can be found in the works on medical practice available to all. There is one recommendation I think important and that is, first and foremost to eliminate the cause of illness. I would simply like to give some suggestions that might be useful to those who ride. One should wear a truss to make sure that excessive riding does not lead to a hernia as a result of a ruptured or lax peritoneum. This is an easy way to reduce risk. The habit some riders have of using short stirrups is a good idea; especially if one is already suffering from a hernia and must ride, a short stirrup is obligatory. Should there be the slightest suspicion that a vessel in the thorax has burst or the kidneys and bladder are becoming distressed, this activity should be given up immediately, as nothing is more harmful to these organs than horseback riding.

There used to be a famous horseman called Ludovico Corbelli of Mirandola who was a regular Messapus at breaking and training horses. He was so skilled at training horses that he was summoned to the court of Phillip IV, King of Spain. After years of riding, he vomited a large amount of blood. All the doctors' attempts were in vain and within a few months he was reduced to such a state that they thought he might die in a matter of days. However, after refusing any other kind of food, I have no idea what instinct drove him, but he said he wanted pork and, after eating some, he soon felt better. He then adopted the habit of eating it boiled, usually from a sucking-pig, and with this kind of diet he lived for more than a year.
In populace cities, in particular sea-ports such as Venice, because of the confluence of a many people and a vast amount of merchandise from varied locales, one encounters a multitude of porters whose work is indispensable for loading and unloading goods from cargo-ships. Let us look at the diseases that afflict these "packmen", as Plautus calls them. Transporting such great burdens on their shoulders, these workers often suffer from a variety of serious illnesses. The great tension of all their muscles and those in the chest and abdomen in particular, forces them to hold in their breath without respiration, which often leads to the rupture of blood vessels in the chest. When they place their loads on their shoulders, the porters inhale a great deal of air but then exhale very little, which means that the lung vesicles inflate excessively, resulting in additional pressure on the pulmonary vasculature that conveys and receives blood, which means its is no longer able to function properly. It is therefore not surprising that the blood vessels rupture very easily from over-distension.

For the very same reason, the muscle tone in their chest and the texture of their lungs becomes defective and porters are prone to asthma. While carrying out autopsies, I have frequently observed that since they hold their breath for longer periods, the lungs of these workers adhere to the ribs. They also suffer from large varicosities in their legs. These are formed because blood circulation is delayed while flowing upwards, owing to the excessive tension in the leg and thigh muscles, thus leading to valvular dilation the veins. Moreover, as time goes by all these workers become hunch-backed because their dorsal vertebrae are constantly bent forwards and that position becomes habitual. Although they are unaware of
the rules of mechanics, nature itself has taught them that it is easier to carry loads upon their shoulders with their chest crooked-in, rather than in an upright position.

Porters also frequently suffer from hernias since holding one's breath often leads to the rupturing or dilation of the peritoneum. Hildan us describes the case of a carpenter whose omentum slipped down into the scrotum after lifting a heavy weight; he died just seven days later. Felix Platter believes porters are also subject to phthisis and describes the case of a stone-cutter and other workers who brought up blood by mouth after lifting a heavy weight.

Hippocrates describes a similar case: “A man had a fever immediately after having lifted an ass on a bet he had made. On the third, fourth, seventh and eighth day he lost blood and, at the decisive point, loose stools”. There is no doubt that it was lifting that weight that caused the porter to have a sudden fever, but Hippocrates gives no indication from which part of the body he lost the blood. In his comment, Valles believes the blood came from the nose and thinks this is why the fever ceased with the onset of loose stools, that is, on the basis of the aphorism, “No matter which part of the body it comes from, when there is a large haemorrhage, loose stools follow the gut usually relaxes”. In Epidemion, however, Hippocrates frequently provides the additional phrase “from the nostrils”. From whatever part of the body the blood originates, in the case of porters it is most likely to be from the chest, the nostrils, or from haemorrhoids, as a consequence serious subsequent illnesses.

In view of the great number of ills to which porters are afflicted due of their work, the practicing physician should know their characteristics so he can intervene with greater success when he is either asked for an opinion or finds the porter is already confined to his bed. Since these workers usually eat with great appetite to keep up their strength, as athletes also used to do, the first remedy to be applied is blood-letting and the prescription of any preparations that purge the stomach. They should also be given any remedy that alleviates fatigue, such as baths, massage, and the like. Porters should also be encouraged to wear a truss to reduce the risk of a hernia; they should not compete with one another, as they sometimes do, running risks such as Milo did to see who can lift the heaviest weights; as thus they may suffer the same fate as the man who lifted the ass for a bet.
At this point I would like to raise a problem of a mechanical nature. Why should porters find it easier to carry weights on one shoulder, bent and stooped forward – when standing upright would allow them to bear heavier weights without the danger of falling, in the same manner that columns and vertically placed beams are able to bear extremely heavy weights? Our peasant women carry hundreds of pounds of wares on their heads for miles when coming to the city, but they always stand upright and are careful not to change their position at all, otherwise they would collapse under the weight. Perhaps this is not the case with porters, because if they stood vertically, the weight would fall, rather than on the extremities, on the middle of the collar bone, which is very small and could easily break. When they stand bent and stooped forwards, the weight rests on a shoulder-blade, which is a large, broad and strong bone so that the pressure is less painful and there is less likelihood of a break. Is this perhaps why porters lean forward while walking, since they have discovered it is easier and safer to carry weights in this manner? This is very likely the case, since we know that it is less painful to bear a weight if it is borne by the whole hand rather than just a single finger, for example. A golden ball in the palm of your hand weighing one pound creates the sensation of greater pressure than a wooden ball of the same weight, since the golden ball is smaller, and therefore exerts its pressure over a smaller area than that of the wooden ball. So when the porter places the weight on his shoulder, as he leans forward it is easier to bear, because not only is it resting on a stronger part of the body, but also on more than one part rather than were the porter to stand upright; this applies to any kind of load, whether solid such as wood, or soft, such as a sack of wheat. Once the porters have lifted the weight, this is why they immediately bend forwards and stick out their buttocks so that the centre of gravity remains in a straight line. In Venice and Ferrara, I have observed that the porters do not carry sacks of wheat and other weights on one shoulder, as they do here, but on the neck and dorsal vertebrae, thus distributing the burden over their whole back. They say this is less tiring than carrying it on just one shoulder and there is also a certain logic to this. It is therefore true that “a load carried properly is lighter”.

As for women who carry great loads on their heads, they have to walk in an upright position because, were they to bend their
heads, the load would fall because it would no longer be in line. Furthermore, much to the amazement of those who see them, women are extremely adept at carrying large baskets on their heads; they walk upright and are agile because the weight is on the skull, which is a strong, arch-shaped bone that is positioned directly on the vertebrae.
Diseases of athletes

With the vicissitudes of passing time, many venerable institutions have fallen in disregard, such as the spectacles with athletes and gladiators, which were called games and entertainments, as if making a popular exhibition of the massacre of men, were a fun-filled and outstanding public show. Nevertheless, we shall now take a brief look at athletes and their illnesses, to show just how much attention ancient physicians paid to vocational diseases. No matter how much of a novice they are in the field of medicine, there is not one person who has set foot in a medical school that has not heard of Hippocrates’ famous saying “the condition of those who do exercise” etc., the interpretation of which baffled scholars for ages and resulted in such a wealth of comments that I would not dare add my own, especially as the renowned Luca Tozzi, once chief physician to the Pope, has put forward a sound and accurate interpretation of Hippocrates’ Aphorisms in the light of the latest dogma.

In ancient times, games were held so frequently that there were a considerable number of athletes and palaestrians. These games were not just for slaves, but also for the freeborn, adolescents from among the nobility who were trained by their teachers in various kinds of athletics. In one of Terence’s plays, when Parmeno offers Thais a youth he says, “Test him in literature, in gymnastics; in music, I assure you is the equal of a freeborn youth”.

Accidents frequently happened to athletes, thus they were in need of medical aid. The maladies they were subject to were apoplexy, cardiac syncope, suffocative catarrh, rupture of the chest vessels, and frequently, sudden death. The main cause for these maladies was the overabundance of humours and the distension of the vessels, hindering the movement of blood considerably, if
not completely abolish it. This resulted in an obstruction of the veins and, to use one of Hippocrates' expressions, "interceptions", with stagnation of the blood and stasis of all the humours, such as would lead, of necessity, to sudden death. This would happen frequently to athletes, as they would go straight from periods of inactivity and abundant meals to build up their strength to training and competition. Indeed, as Hippocrates so rightly says, it is much more dangerous "to go from idleness to exercise than from exercise to idleness". During periods of intense physical exercise the blood mass are heated and rarefied, thus the blood is less promptly ela-triated from the arteries into the veins, nor does the blood flow as quickly through the veins as through the arteries, especially when the vessels are congested.

In the case history of Biante, the "old man of Cos" gives us an idea of what athletes would eat and just how rich their diet was. "By nature of insatiable appetite, Biante the pugilist was often afflicted by choleric disorders, bringing up and passing bile. The cause for this ailment was meat, in particular underdone pork, as well as the excessive aromatic wine he would drink, taken together with cakes and honeyed sweetmeats, cucumber and melons, milk, and freshly hulled and crushed grain".

So this is how athletes would stuff themselves in order to put on weight and appear brawny. Aristotle wrote that athletes often had disproportionate forms because they could not digest and distribute such a great variety of food evenly, and Plato rightly said that they were sleepy, sluggish, and vertiginous.

More than once in his works, Galen condemns the athletic vocation, stating that it was dangerous to both the body and soul; this might have been because, as he himself said, he had learnt this at his own expense. Indeed, when Galen was thirty and was living in Rome, he was exercising in the gymnasium, perhaps in the vain belief of wanting to be considered a skilled wrestler, when he dislocated his shoulder. He thus endangered his own life, as we can see from his description of the treatments he received. He narrowly escaped being afflicted by convulsions; the dislocated part had to be rubbed with hot oil all day and all night, while he lay naked on a leather hide throughout the dog-days of summer.

Everyone is acquainted with the ancient remedies used to treat the diseases of athletes. Blood-letting, the chief method, was used
liberally, not so they might begin to renourish the body, but to stimulate the blood flow which, interrupted within the pulmonary vessels and carotid arteries, could be a cause of sudden death. Doctors would prescribe strong purgatives and very little food as soon as the worst of the illness was over; they also administered a variety of other remedies for both prevention and treatment, since they would so frequently manage those of this vocation.

The trainers would forbid the athletes any sexual activity to make sure they did not weaken their bodies, and it was even customary to place a fibula over their genitalia. Martial wrote a witty epigram on the subject of the Jew Menophilus who, while “He performed in the middle of the palestra in public view his fibula slipped, he was circumcised”. However, excessive abstinence from sexual activity and excessive food and drink made them listless since, as Pliny says, once their fibulae were removed and they resumed sexual activities, their former cheerfulness and vigour was restored. Indeed, according to Celsus, “Copulation must neither be too much desired nor feared; performed rarely it excites, frequently, it weakens”. Thus Hippocrates: “Work, food, drink, sleep, love – all in moderation”.

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