48 - THE OBESITY AND THE PROBLEMATIZATION OF CORPULENCE IN THE MIDDLE AGES

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INTRODUCTION

There was a significant rupture between the problematization of intemperance and corporal aesthetics, in the Antiquity, and the gluttony and corpulence, in christianity. The diference between pagan and christian ethics-moral seems to have been the displacement of a matter of good use for a condemnation of desire and pleasure, as Foucault (1998a, 2006) suggested. Agostinho, for example, still in century III-IV, would have preached the abstinence in all forms and asserted that like food would be a sin (HISTORY CHANNEL, 2009).

This displacement or rupture, caused by the concept of sin, seems to have occurred still in the fourth century. In addition to Augustinho, Pôntico would have done a list of various temptations to which the human soul was exposed. Summarizing the most dangerous, he reached eight could lead the manking to hell, among which was the gluttony. In the same century, the monastic christian movement would have intensified the concern to abandon themselves to the senses, setting strict rules about food and drink (HISTORY CHANNEL, 2009). Finally, in the same way, Prudêncio publish the book Soul's Battle, which presents the alegoric battle between the vices and virtues. The temperance is presented as the opposite of profligacy, which would have included the gluttony (WIKIPEDIA, 2011).

It's clear, therefore, the influence of vices and virtues' pagan notion in christian sin's idea. Even naming these first convictions of sin may be a retrospective projection. The word sin only became to be used after the sixth century, when the pope Gregory diminished the Pôntico's list of temptations to seven, changed the name to sins and stated them deadly or main (HISTORY CHANNEL, 2009).

Beyond all theological and institutional support to the christianization of vices and virtues' doctrine, gluttony's condemnation also seems to have articulated the pagan philosofical medicine or medical philosophy among the first christian apologists. For Pôntico, for example, the gluttony was a sin because the overeating affect the abbility to pray. He would have writen that the excess of food dulling the mind like the fog hides Sun's rays. For Gregory, the gluttony would be deadly to physical and spiritual life. He would have writen that the virtues of soul are destroyed if the stomach wasn't repressed (HISTORY CHANNEL, 2009). Two quotes echo another – bulk belly diminishes the sense – attributed to Eusebio Sofrônio Jerônimo, in the fourth century (MANNUZIO, 1585; ROTERODAMUM, 1534; HIERONYMUS, 2011). All these statements were supported by physiological explanations inside the medical doctrine of humors since the first century.

Also the ideia that overeating kills, cause or worsen diseases will continue throughout the medieval, supported by both humoral and moral convictions. As examples, there is John, King of England, in the thirteenth century, which would have writen that his illness was exacerbated by his pernicious gluttony; and Eduard IV, in the fifteenth century, wich died of unknown causes and the blame was attributed to his gluttony (HISTORY CHANNEL, 2009). These statements which link the gluttony's sin with the dead must be understood in a moral and religious context, since there wasn't scientific methodology. Even if the valor attributed of both knowledge wasn't put in question, can not be attributed to those sentences similar interpretations to the contemporary scientific statements with the same content.

Also cause or aggravate the diseases or lead to death, there were punishments to the gluttons. In literature, Dante Aliguieri, at the beginning of fourteenth century, dramatized the horrors that awaited the gluttons in his epic poem The Divine Comedy. On the third circle of hell, the gluttons were kept forever under the snow, while a freezing and impure rain, exhaled a foul odor, fall on them. Cérbero, a three-head dog, guard the “criminals” sinners, wich howl like dogs in cages. The guide fills his hand with land and launches it in gluttons' throats. (HISTORY CHANNEL, 2009; ALIGUIERI, 2003).

Around the year 1200, christian theologians create a list called the seven heavenly virtues. The temperance meant moderation and abstinence and was placed in opposition of gluttony. Unlike paganism, in christianity this conception of virtue acquires an ascetic aspect of condemnation to pleasure and desire, beside to become an apology to mortification of the body connected to metaphysical explanations. This ascetic tendency, which would have be developed mainly inside of monastic movement, as suggested by Foucault (1998a), would already be present between the conceptions of the founders of the church. Some of them, as stated by Magner (2005), would have afirm that the god spirit wasn't find in healthy bodies. There are also reports of women who later were sanctified in lead this ideal of abstemious temperance to the extreme, as Catarina de Siena, Clara de Assis and Verônica, who starving for god, receiving the nickname of anorexic saints (HISTORY CHANNEL, 2009).

Aquino (1984, p.305-6), in the thirteenth century, describe sin as “appetite for a perishable commodity that you want all jumbled up, and in whose possession one delights, consequently, all jumbled up”, in which the gluttony was carnal sin, instead of a spiritual sin – also the pleasure or the wellness come from food, in other words, from the “tact body”. Nevertheless, the gluttony wouldn't be worst sins of the flesh because it wouldn't absorb the reason as the “fornication”. The danger of gluttony comes from the fact that it would be like a precursor of other sins (HISTORY CHANNEL, 2009). In this case, there is a justification similar to presented by ancient and medieval medicine: in the same way that excessive food produce pletora (excessive blood), which leads to pathologies, the gluttony could lead to other sins, especially retated to sexuality. Both cases the discourses support a reprimand, interdict and condemn of the intemperance or gluttony.

Furthermore, there weren't a look on a biological way to the body or quantitative evaluation's measures, so, it was impossible that something like the contemporary discourse of obesity. Even the word obesus and its derivations had been used in the medieval and can be find in documents, this term didn't have the semantics that will be attributed to its during the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, when it will be associated with corporal mass measure, or in the twentieth century, which will be related to Body Mass Index (BMI). Obesus, in latin, would be one of the declinations of ob edere – address the food – and, generally, come with the word nimia – excessively. In other words, obesus or obesus nimia refer to the one who addresses to food or eat excessively. Considering such reservations, records of such terms found during the medieval period must be understood as equivalent to gluttony under strong influence of moral condemnation within the christian theological framework. Despite this

condemnation was upheld by the humoral theory, it's considered that these concepts differ significantly from the contemporary pathologizing discourse of obesity, especially by reference to a êthos – a way of doing things, in other words, the act of overeat and not to the body or body constitution.

It also must be emphasizhed that during the Middle Ages and even the end of it there were high rates of mortality, which would be three times more than today. The war, the epidemic infectious diseases and the starvation were the main reasons. (MAGNER, 2005). Instead of concerns about excessive corpulence caused by food abundance, the fear of hunger would characterize better the history of western civilization until the twentieth century (DELUMEAU, 2002). During medieval period, the corpulence and the gluttony would have been uncommon concerns, practically exclusive to the rich classes, in other words, of the church and nobility. But even those who belonged to nobility and church, apparently, the corpulence and gluttony were never approved because of ethics, aesthetics, moral and religious convictions, not by health motivations.

Nevertheless, Repetto (1998) reports the cases of a nobleman and a king that would have problems with the "obesity". Considering a reservation about the term used by Repetto (1998), we considered such propositions to test the hypothesis that the excessive corpulence and the corporal fat were seen like diseases – even the medieval pathological concept was different from modern. The methodological approach was pendulous: speeches of this author to opposition to historical sources and other historians.

SANCHO

In the first case, Repetto (1998, p.6) comments about a king of Leon's province called Sancho I, who would had reigned between 958 and 960. The author affirms that Sancho would have been "consider inapt to be extremely fat" and he "was deposed by your own court" by this reason. After this, your grandmother would have sought a treatment with an arab physician – Hisdai Ibm Shaprut – of neighbor reign – Córdoba – and achieved the "cure" for grandson through a drug that inhibit the appetite. After weight loss, Sancho would have regained his kingdom and unified Leão and Córdoba. Finally, he still affirms that the king would have known as "Sancho I, the fat".

The source of these informations comes from an article of Hopkins and Lehman (1995), which they answer an article of Lascaratos (1995), reporting the monarch's case as the first medical treatment of obesity. These authors quote Potok (1978), who tells the history about the life and influence of the jew physician – and not arab, like Repetto (1998) afirmed – Hasdai Ibn Shaprut – instead of Hisdai, like Potok (1978) and Repetto (1998) spelled.

The first subject – the nickname of the king – presents a consensus among the sources consulted. The monarch would have received the nickname "crasso" or "fat". As in portuguese, the word crasso, in latin, means gross, thick, big or great. Already the adjective "fat" seems to have kept, in the iberian countries, the same semantics as in portuguese, related to fat. One of the sources refers directly to "too much fat" of the king (LLLESCAS, 1577, p.244), while other quotes the monarch was "very gross of flesh" (CARION, 1553, p.385-6) or "oddly gross" (LLLESCAS, 1577, p.244).

About the deposition of Sancho I, only one of the ancient sources found affirms that the reason would have been the corpulence (CASTRO, 1762). Herculano (1853) asserts the ambition of Ordonho e Fernando Gonçalves the cause of deposition of the king. While Carion (1553) doesn't comment anything about the reason. Lllescas (1577, p.244) states that the reason of the deposition was the fact that the king was "muy niño quando su padre murio; y tambien porque a penas era tonido por legitimo", in other words, because of the king's age and legitimity of the king's right to throne. Finally, another source affirms that would have been because of defeat to the muslims in 957, when he would have lost the nobility's support, which depose him and coronate his brother (WIKIPEDIA, 2011).

There is consensus among the sources about the monarch's fugue to Navarra and after Córdoba. He would have rearm yourself with the aid of local king and regained the power in 960, reigning until his death in the year 966 (CARION, 1553; LLLESCAS, 1577; HERCULANO, 1753). According to Carion (1553) and Lllescas (1577), there was a treatment by the physician of Córdobas' King, but they don't mention any name. Other source mentions that que physician intervention would have been, mainly, a diplomatic aid in the resumption of the power (WIKIPEDIA, 2011).

There was another portuguese king – Afonso II – who received the same nickname as Sancho I. Nevertheless, he wasn't depose, which suggests that the corpulence wasn't, in fact, a reason "able to overthrow tyrants", as Repetto (1998, p.4) states, neither during the Roman Empire nor thousand years after this.

So, according to the sources, evidences and the historical context, we conclude that the question of Sancho's corpulence or fat, hardly, would have been the reason of his deposition, suggesting that the probably reasons were the defeat for arabs, his age or legitimity. In view of Afonso II received the same nickname and he wasn't submited to any treatment, it's more likely that the role of physician was more political than medical. There is a semantics decontextualization in use of term obesity in Repetto (1998) and Hopkins and Lehman (1995) texts. Nowadays, the word obesity has a different meaning and these authors are retrospectively procjeting a meaning and the value wich the authors attribute to that body characteristic. We conclude, finally, Sancho's case doesn't support the proposition that affirms obesity was a concern in medieval period, problematized in the same way as contemporary and there was a patologizing discourse of obesity at the Middle Ages.

GAVALAS

The second case cited by Repetto (1998, p.6) tells the history of a nobleman - "Gavelas" - who would have had "problems to get marry with his fiancee, who rejected him because she thought he was fat and flaccid". The narrative follows:

The desperate and unhappy fiance ordered to come a famous physician from Italy, who charged him a large sum. Under the guidance of physician, Gavelas abandon all tasks and responsabilities to engage only to follow his instructions: baths, emetic drugs, purgatives, exercises and a restrictive diet. He lost weight and weakenead, but got married with your lady – another happy ending related to weight loss (REPETTO, 1998, p.6).

The source of this informations is the article of Lascaratos (1995). Several differences are found between this article and Repetto (1998). Firstly, in Lascaratos (1995) text, there is a broad historical context related a political conflicts involving the crisis of sucession to the throne that ocurred after the death of Andronicus. Cantacuzenus – not Cantecuzenus, as Repetto (1998) spells – was involved. Anne de Savoy, widow, would have designated her son, minor, emperor, receiving the support of Apocaucus, who was designated as governor of Constantinopla and neighboring towns. Cantacuzenus would have self declared emperor of Didymotichus, in Trácia, setting up a sucession crisis liable to civil war.

Gavalas, foreign minister, supported, first, Cantacuzenus and, after, changed his aid. The new governor of Constantinopla, seeking the Gavalas loyalty, designated him to a high position and promised him his daughter in marriage in order Gavalas wars against Cantacuzenus. Some time later, Apocaucus seemed to keep his promise. However, the fiancee and her mother would have declared "the fiance was very fat" (LASCARATOS, 1995, p.54). Repetto (1998) added deliberately the word flaccid and hid the influence of the fiancee mother in history.

According to Cantacuzenus' report, who became enemy of Apocaucus and Gavalas, Apocaucus would have suggest to Gavalas look for a physician because in this way “his belly would vanish and he would seem more slender and worthy for love because in this way he seemed disgust with his flesh's assimetry”; so, a italian physician would come and Gavalas “appealed to most ridiculous actions to conquer his fiancee love”, as “baths, drugs, vomits, purgatives and a rigorous diet”; some time later, “the patience became tired and weak, despite your belly shrinks very little. Cantacuzenus, as a historian and a interested party, confirmed that obesity was a pretext because Apocaucus tried to destroy politically Gavalas” (CANTACUZENUS apud LASCARATOS, 1995, p.54).

The article of Lascaratos (1995) used by Repetto (1998) doesn't assert Gavalas would have married. We don't know how this author derived this information. Nevertheless, in his report, this information integrates the history giving a happy ending related to weight loss. Beside, Repetto (1998) hides the political context related to weight loss and makes it seems like nowadays concerns, naturalizing the problem historically. Nevetherless, the reason of weigh loss would have been aesthetics, because of the flesh's assimetry.

By resorting to the source of Lascaratos (1995), the book Historiae Bizantinae by John VI Cantecuzenus (apud SCHOPENI, 1831, p.493), emperor of Bizâncio between 1347 and 1354, the greek and latin excerpts don't use words related to fat. The latin word obeso appears only once as similar to polisarquia. This term, in greek, is a lexical construction composed by juxtaposition of poli – many or abundant – and sarco – flesh. So, polisarquia is an adjective means “fleshy” (FERREIRA, 1984), which can be understand in a biological or moral way. In view of the translation was realise conducted in 1831, the adjective obeso can be considered an inappropriate choice to greek semantics. Even less appropriate was the total semantics decontextualization conducted by Lascaratos (1995) and Repetto (1998), who used words related to fat and obesity.

According to report, there was a link between “fleshy” and physical and political power – nevertheless it's considered ugly. There aren't references to fat in excerpt that justifie the use of word obesity. Finally, we refute the suggestions of some authors that this case is equivalent to contemporary patologizing discourse about obesity. There weren't body mass quantification, BMI and excessive fat's idea, which would be the conceptual core of obesity. Beside the condition wasn't considered a pathology.

CONCLUSION

The references and documents used by arguing that there was the concept of obesity in the Middle Ages and it was considered a disease, as today, don't support such claims. The problematization of body volume in the cases analysed wasn't pathological, but aesthetics, moral or religious. There weren't body mass quantification or BMI, used by contemporary description of obesity's concept. So, we consider the statements about the medieval period come from a historical and linguistic decontextualization.

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THE OBESITY AND THE PROBLEMATIZATION OF CORPULENCE IN THE MIDDLE AGES

ABSTRACT

This article's aim was analyse the historical sources of medieval's obesity statements refer by some authors. The main focus was about the statement that the concept already existed in the Middle Age and the condition was considerated a pathology, as today. The methodology applied was the historiography. Based on the documents, the conclusions were that the concept didn't exist and the problematization relapse on the act of overeating, wich was seen as a sin. Beside, analysis of the material wasn't found a patological problematization of corporal fat, as those authors suggest. It follows, so, that the statements about medieval's obesity came of historical and linguistics descontextualization.

KEY-WORDS: obesity, history, pathology.

L'OBÉSITÉ ET LE PROBLÉMATISATION DE LA CORPULENCE AU MOYEN AGE
RÉSUMÉ

L'objectif de cette étude était d'analyser les sources historiques utilisées par certains auteurs à l'appui des déclarations sur l'obésité à l'époque médiévale. L'accent à été mis sur le motif qu'un tel concept existait au Moyen Age et que la condicion doit être considérée comme une pathologie, comme aujourd'hui. La méthodologie utilisée a éte l'historiographie. Les conclusions, à partir des documents trouvés, ont été que le concept de l'obésité n'existait pas et tombe questionnement sur l'acte de manger avec excès, ce qui était considéré comme un péché. En outre, l'analyse du matériel n'a pas été trouve une problemátisation pathologique de graisse corporelle, comme ces auteurs le suggèrent. On conclut, enfin, que les allégations sur l'obésité à l'époque médiévale provient de l'décontextualisation historique et linguistique.

MOTS-CLÉS: obésité, histoire, pathologie.

LA OBESIDAD Y LA PROBLEMATIZACIÓN DE LA CORPULENCIA EN LA EDAD MEDIA
RESUMEN

El objetivo del presente estudio fue analizar las fuentes históricas utilizadas por algunos autores para apoyar las declaraciones acerca de la obesidad en la época medieval. El enfoque principal fue en el argumento de que tal concepto existe en la Edad Media y que la condición fue considerada una enfermidad, así como en la actualidad. La metodologia utilizada fue la historiografia. Las conclusiones alcanzadas, a partir de los documentos encontrados, fueron que no existia el concepto de obesidad y el cuestionamiento recae sobre el acto de comer en exceso, lo cual fue visto como un pecado. Además, no se ha encontrado em el análisis del material un cuestionamiento patológico de grasa corporal, que estos autores sugieren. Se concluye, finalmente, que las afirmaciones acerca de la obesidad en la Edad Media vinieron de la descontextualización histórica y lingüística.

PALAVRAS-CLAVE: obesidad, historia, patología.

A OBESIDADE E A PROBLEMATIZAÇÃO DA CORPULÊNCIA NA IDADE MÉDIA
RESUMO

O objetivo deste artigo foi analisar as fontes históricas utilizadas por alguns autores para sustentar enunciados sobre a obesidade no período medieval. O foco principal foi sobre a alegação de que tal conceito já existia na Idade Média e de que a condição seria considerada uma patologia, assim como atualmente. A metodologia utilizada foi a historiografia. As conclusões alcançadas, a partir dos documentos encontrados, foram que o conceito de obesidade não existia e a problematização recaia sobre o ato de comer excessivamente, que era visto como um pecado. Além disso, na análise do material não foi encontrada uma problematização patológica da gordura corporal, como tais autores sugerem. Conclui-se, enfim, que as alegações a respeito da obesidade no período medieval provinham de descontextualizações históricas e linguísticas.

PALAVRAS-CHAVE: obesidade, história, patologia.