



Anna Odrzywolska¹

The Cultural Importance of Water from the Perspective of 16th Century Polish Medical Guides

Abstract

Water had a special cultural significance in human life. Water was a cheap and widely available resource for everyone. Water has fulfilled a wide variety of functions over the centuries. People even believed in the magical properties of water. The water also had a symbolic effect - it cleansed the body from sins. However, it was during this period in Western Europe that drinking water was considered harmful to health. In spite of this, in the 16th century the poorest peasants and monks who lived the harsh monastery life were drinking water in Poland, also the monarchs from the Jagiellonian dynasty, who were afraid of poison, drank water. However, the richer social strata drank beer or, more rarely, wine. It was believed that stagnant water (in reservoirs) was spreading epidemics. The authors of medical guides claimed that drinking such water could cause infertility, dysentery and other diseases. Only boiling the water was a way to improve its properties. To eliminate the smell they were adding garlic, salt, and vinegar, the Tartars brought from Asia the custom of adding so-called Tatar herb, later called calamus, and other herbs (eg. mint, sage) were also added to the water.

Key words: water, medical guides, history of medicine

Introduction

Over the centuries, water has served a number of functions – not just biological, but sociocultural as well. It is essential for humans and other life forms to live. In the *Bible*, it was the primal matter (*materia prima*),

¹ Dr hab. Anna Odrzywolska, prof. UJD, Wydział Humanistyczny, Instytut Historii, Uniwersytet Humanistyczno-Przyrodniczy im. Jana Długosza w Częstochowie, al. Armii Krajowej 36a, 42-200 Częstochowa, e-mail: a.odrzywolska@ujd.edu.pl, nr ORCID: 0000-0003-2833-7820.

from which subsequent elements of the earth emerged; it also symbolised the Flood, but embodied life and fertility, as well. The symbolism of water also includes notions of human life beginning in water, for a foetus spends the first months of its life in its mother's aquatic environment. Images of water were invoked during attempts at describing human nature. Clear running water was supposed to embody a person who lives without abandoning themselves to sin. A person who followed a sinful life was likened to stagnant, dark and poisoned water, also referred to as 'dead water', in contrast to running water, which was referred to as 'living water'. In Christian symbolism, water is regarded as an exemplification of the body cleansing itself of Original Sin through the ceremony of baptism and re-birth into a new life (Kalnická 2002: 87; Kowalski 2007: 609–615; Łucarz 2014: 11 et seq). There also exists the term 'water of life'. It refers to wealth and poverty, where the presence of water is tantamount to wealth, whereas lack of it signifies poverty. Water was present in mythologies, accompanying the motif of transition from a world inhabited by living beings to the world of the dead. In the Middle Ages too, symbolism referring to life and death appeared, where life was associated with living, running water, whereas death was associated with dead, stagnant and dirty water (Kalnická 2002: 88–89). Water was also one of the elements – besides air, fire and earth – which was established by ancient philosophers. For ancient and ensuing cultures, access to water determined the selection of places suitable for settlement. At each stage of the development of civilisation, a supply of drinking water had to be ensured. The presence or lack of access to water often determined the quality of life of entire societies, as well as the course and results of military campaigns (Schneeberger 1564: 117–119, 125). Today, 'water conflicts', 'water wars' and 'water crises' are discussed with increasing frequency, noting that the access to water resources may likely cause some armed conflicts in the future.

As can be seen, the topic of water can be researched with regard to various aspects. In the following paper I would like to focus chiefly on the cultural significance of water and on how it was used in the 16th-century Polish medicine. As the source materials for discussing this topic, I will use medical and economic guides published by Polish printing houses in the 16th century in which the topic of water in the context of human health appeared. When writing on water, the authors of medical and economic treatises used the findings of Greek and Roman medical authorities. They also cited medieval authors, who had also usually referred to the knowledge of ancient scholars. In the works by modern authors, the influence of the opinions of Galen, Hippocrates, Avicenna and Aulus Cornelius Celsus can often be observed.

Water as a Drink

Water was a cheap product which was affordable for anyone. However, in the Polish consciousness, drinking water was considered to be harmful to one's health. In Poland, water was drunk by the destitute, chiefly peasants, who often lacked access to clean water. Water was also sometimes the choice of monks, who led an austere monastic life. However, interestingly enough, water was also consumed by monarchs from the Jagiellonian dynasty, who were afraid of poison, for it is known that water changes its colour, smell and taste upon the addition of a poisonous substance. However, generally speaking, the upper class quenched their daily thirst with beer or – less frequently – wine.

The direct correlation between the quality of the water drunk and a person's health was observed very early. A guide by the physician and agronomist Petrus de Crescentius, included a number of tips on what kind of water should be drunk and what kind should be avoided for health reasons. The work itself dates back to ca. 1300; it was originally published in 1471. It was not until 1549 that it appeared on the Polish publishing market (Kamper-Warejko 2017: 153–169; Kamper-Warejko 2009: 73). Crescentius used chiefly the works of Palladius (5th century) and of Greek and Roman authors (such as Vitruvius and Martial, Columella). The author considered spring water, spurting directly from earth or from a rock, as the healthiest for humans. He believed water flowing from a rock to be better, as it did not become saturated with mould, which could sometimes be found in the ground. He considered water that had additionally been exposed to sunlight and wind, which supposedly gave it special properties, to be perfect. He also wrote on the drinking of river water. However, he stressed that it was better to drink water which ran through a clean or rocky river channel. He also permitted the drinking of rainwater, which he believed to be worse than the above. According to the author, the method used for acquiring and storing water significantly affected its quality. Rainwater had a short shelf life, not being fit for storage for too long. Following the example of Hippocrates, Crescentius suggested that water be filtered through sand and boiled prior to drinking (Sowina 2009: 25, 28, 30; Hippocrates 2014: 22–23).

Running water, preferably spring water, also referred to as 'living water', was more highly regarded. Drinking such water was believed to be the healthiest for the body. There also existed a belief, that proved to be well founded, that water standing in water reservoirs spread epidemics. It was referred to – in order to distinguish it from 'living water' – as 'dead water' (Marcin z Urzędowa 1595: 430). The authors of medical

guides asserted that drinking such lake water could cause numerous diseases and ailments. Crescentius detailed the properties of ‘dead water’, noting that such water was actually a mixture of rainwater and water melted from snow and ice, and was subject to sunlight and wind. Putrefaction also occurred in it. Hence he absolutely advised against quenching one’s thirst with such water. He warned that it caused gall bladder ailments, hydropsy, spleen disease, liver impairment, dysentery – manifesting itself in persistent diarrhoea – and pulmonary ulceration. He also asserted that drinking standing water could cause infertility, difficult childbirth and birth of ill babies. He also cautioned the elderly against the drinking of such water (Sowina 2009: 33–34).

Boiling water was recommended in order to improve its properties. This method was practised as early as in the Middle Ages. Boiled water was believed to be healthier and not to cause flatulence or other digestive ailments. It was supposedly more easily digestible, devoid of heavy harmful substances and permeated through the body more quickly (de’ Crescenzi 1549: 10; Syreniusz 1613: 976; Schneeberger 1564: 131–135). However, sources suggest that raw water was also drunk, but only that which had good properties. A guide by an anonymous author contained a warning against drinking raw, non-boiled water from a well on an empty stomach in June. In July, it was recommended to add garlic and sage to the well water (*Dobrego zdrowia rządzienie* 1532: 19). Those recommendations were most likely dictated by the desire to prevent poisonings, as standing well water was often murky and smelly.

The temperature of the water to be drunk was also important for health. According to Marcin Siennik, the author of a herbal guide published in 1568, drinking very cold water supposedly harmed the stomach. When having stomach problems, at the first stage of the ailments, one had to not only refrain from eating heavy meals, but also to abandon drinking. Thereafter, the patient was to be given warm water, which could include honey or herbs such as the leaves of the curly dock. Following such treatment, one had to lie calmly in bed and wait until there was an improvement. According to the author, drinking grated berries with rainwater also helped alleviate stomach problems (Siennik 1568: 369; Schneeberger 1564: 127). Therefore, medical guides noted that the water could not be too cold. However, cool water was believed to improve appetite and strengthen the stomach. Conversely, warm water was supposedly detrimental to digestion and caused food to swim in the stomach, thereby prolonging digestive processes. Supposedly, it also provoked vomiting. It was asserted that whilst warmed-up water drunk in the morning prior to ingestion of the first meal had purgative properties,

it also weakened the operation of internal organs responsible for digestion. Crescentius was convinced that hot water ruined the body and could even cause dropsy and tuberculosis (de' Crescenzi 1549: 11–12).

People who lived in the 16th century did not always have access to good drinking water. Hence they had to develop several methods for improving its appearance and taste. A method to improve the quality of murky water was to place clean sand on the bottom of a water container. The residue formed on the bottom was soaked up by the sand. Water was also sometimes distilled in an alembic, which was used chiefly to manufacture high-proof alcoholic beverages (Sowina 2009: 31).

Garlic, salt or vinegar were added to it in order to eliminate the unpleasant smell. In addition, Crescentius also wrote on alum, which supposedly had water-decontaminating properties (P. de' Crescenzi 1549: 13). From Asian Tatars came the custom of adding the so-called 'Tatar herb', later called calamus. Other aromatic herbs, e.g. mint (Latin: *Mentha*) or sage (Latin: *Salvia*) were also added to water which was undrinkable due to its unacceptable taste or smell. Szymon Syreniusz, the author of the Polish herbal, on which he had worked for 30 years (ca. 1578–613), recommended – following Pliny – putting an herb called pennyroyal (Latin: *Pulegium*) into bad water (Syreniusz 1613: 478). The same author recommended putting grated garlic (Latin: *Alium*), which had decontaminating properties, into smelly water (Syreniusz 1613: 1227). Another method for improving the quality of bad water was to add to it a handful of barley and soak it or boil the water containing it (Syreniusz 1613: 976). In fact, such barley water often constituted the basis for manufacturing compound medicaments (Szostak 2006: 275).

Water as an Ingredient

Medical and economic guides stressed the importance of the quality of water added to every-day food. Water was the main ingredient of soups and was added to sauces, porridges and many other cooked dishes. It was indispensable to bread manufacture. It was used for soaking peas, which were among the most commonly eaten vegetables in 16th-century Polish cuisine. Cucumbers and grated cold beetroots were also marinated in water. Almonds were also soaked in water first, and only then was marzipan (to which medicinal properties were attributed) made. Many more applications of water in cuisine could be listed. However, the goal here is simply to highlight the central role played by water in people's everyday lives.

Recommendations for beer-brewing methods have been preserved in particularly great numbers. Syreniusz bemoaned the fact that people who manufactured beer often used standing water to produce it – from lakes, ponds or even bogs, due to a lack of better water. He noted that such water tended to be smelly and contained unhealthy substances. Whilst beer brewed with such water did have richer taste sometimes, it clearly had a negative impact on a person's health. As a result of drinking such a beverage, people could suffer from skin pimples, ulcers, lichens, leprosy or scurvy. Hence he recommended using running or well water to brew beer. In order to enhance its taste, it could be boiled together with the hop (Syreniusz 1613: 944–945).

The problem of water quality was a significant issue, especially in cities and towns, which housed large populations, and the urban wells were not always able to satisfy the needs of all inhabitants. Sources sometimes contained some information stating that river water was used not only for hygiene, but also for food-related purposes (Sowina 2009: 66). It goes without saying that such practices often directly caused epidemic outbreaks. The purity of river water left much to be desired, especially when we realise that craftsmen (e.g. tanner)'s workshops were located in direct proximity of rivers, significantly contributing to pollution of river waters.

Water as a Medication Ingredient

In Polish Renaissance herbals, many opinions not only on everyday drinking of water, but also on its use for the manufacture of medications, can be found. Water was appreciated as a medicine applied both inside and outside of the body. It was used for water therapy. Water with additives in the form of herbal extracts, infusions or macerates was also used.

Marcin Siennik recommended using boiled-water-based herbal infusions. A basil infusion supposedly helped with nausea and heart diseases. Sometimes, water was used for diluting the juice used for treatment. For example, diarrhoea was supposedly cured by a decoction of rainwater and basil (Latin: *Basilicum*) seeds, boiled with blackthorn (Latin: *Prunus spinosa*) juice and used in the form of a beverage (Siennik 1568: 28). Poultices and suppositories were also based upon boiled water and herbs. Tormentil (Latin: *Potentilla tormentilla*) roots were also boiled in rainwater, and the extract was then applied on a sponge to a woman's intimate parts, thereby stopping excessive bleeding during menstruation (Siennik 1568: 176). An extract of common mugwort (Latin: *Artemisia*

vulgaris) and plantain (Latin: *Plantago maior*) leaves, placed in the form of a warm poultice on the womb was meant to stimulate women and improve fertility. Similar effects were ascribed to intrauterine suppositories made from the same ingredients (Siennik 1568: 28). An extract of water and fennel seeds added to rose mead supposedly warmed and cleaned the stomach, and helped phlegmatic people. Rainwater with added rose petal sugar supposedly stopped retching. Bastard balm (Latin: *Melittis melissophyllum*) and plantain seeds were also boiled in rainwater to treat dysentery [diarrhoea] (Siennik 1568: 98). Drinking an extract of pomegranate (Latin: *Malum granatum*) fruit with rainwater supposedly stopped blood spitting (Siennik 1568: 215). Water was also needed for manufacturing syrups from plant materials, with added sugar or honey for a better taste (Szostak 2006: 269). Boiling of rose flowers in water with sugar and ingestion of that syrup on an empty stomach supposedly stopped diarrhoea and strengthened the stomach, heart and mind (Siennik 1568: 144). Water was also used to dissolve dust or sawdust from agarwood, which had to be drunk for improved digestion and a stronger stomach (Siennik 1568: 192). Arabic gum was also dissolved in warm water and the tongue was soaked in that medicine in order to ease dryness (Siennik 1568: 222). Water-based herbal macerates were also made (Siennik 1568: 234). Water, or more precisely, herbal (e.g. bay leaf- or rose-based) water infusions were also used for inhalation in case of upper respiratory tract problems (Siennik 1568: 208).

Sometimes, water was but one of several solvents – for example, when wine vinegar was also required to mix with finely grated camphor. This medicine supposedly stopped nosebleeds and was used in the form of external poultices applied to the forehead, neck and liver (Siennik 1568: 221; Szostak 2006: 292–293). Wine was also sometimes added to water besides vinegar, for example, in the case of medicines manufactured with animal dung added in (Odrzywolska-Kidawa, 2016a: 70–71). A water extract of plant – and sometimes also animal (e.g. dog dung) – ingredients was also applied to wounds and pimples. The water had to be warm, and as it was applied outside of the body, there was no need to use clear spring water. In this case, the author of the herbal noted that river or well water was suitable for making this decoction (Siennik 1568: 388). Water plant extracts also served as mouthwashes for cleaning the oral cavity, gums and teeth (Szostak 2006: 291). Water with additions was also used for cosmetic purposes. Water obtained after having been boiled with broad bean (Latin: *Vicia Faba*) was supposedly used for washing one's face and cleansing one's skin (Siennik 1568: 209).

Water was added in the process of manufacturing medicinal wine and medicinal vinegar. Water vapour was used for distilling plant materials and for manufacturing vodkas and aromatic waters (Szostak 2006: 250–266). Besides a liquid form, medicines with added water or water herbal decoctions assumed the forms of gruel, emulsions or suspensions. For example, rainwater or water decoction of barley with added arabic gum and mucilage are components which were used for manufacturing gruel medicines (Szostak 2006: 275). Spring water was used for manufacturing medicines in the form of various emulsions and suspensions (Szostak 2006: 276). Some recipes for external-use drops also contained water (Szostak 2006: 281). Sprinkling of a verbena (Latin: *Verbena*) extract on a patient improved their mood and had a calming effect (Sienik 1568: 185).

Those are just a few of the plenitude of examples contained in Polish herbals for using water as a solvent for herbs, from which medicines and cosmetic preparations were made. Proper water temperature was important to the progress and effectiveness of treatment, as water which was too cold supposedly harmed the body; boiled water or water vapour was often used. Sometimes, herbals recommended using rainwater, river water or well water. However, usually there was no such annotation, hence one may assume that whatever kind of water was available was used for manufacturing those medicines which included water. It is also apparent that herbal medicines with added water were applied in various manners: usually as a drink to be taken internally, external poultice, ointment, drops, but also in the form of enemas (Szostak 2006: 295–298).

Water for Sanitary Purposes

The approach to bodily hygiene is also closely associated with research into the use of water. This was the period when two opposing opinions were clashing in Europe. Ever since the Middle Ages, hygienic standards consisting in the daily washing of hands (in the morning, prior to and following a meal, prior to going to bed), face and legs and in the weekly (on average) bathing of the entire body existed in Poland.

Conversely, in 16th-century Western Europe, the opinion that water baths had an adverse effect on the human body was predominant. According to that theory, during long baths, hot water supposedly opened in the permeable skin some ducts through which harmful substances allegedly got inside the body (the concept of germs, bacteria or viruses was unknown). It was believed that as a result, the body became susceptible

to all kinds of diseases and epidemics. European theorists cautioned that whole-body ablutions deprived the skin of its protective layer, disrupted the balance of bodily fluids and weakened the body, consequently shortening one's lifespan (Vigarello 2012: 9, 13–23; Lebrun 1997: 134, 147). Such opinions first began to spread to the Polish royal court, where physicians educated at Western universities, who were treating the wealthiest members of the society, sounded a warning to limit the frequency of baths. Physicians who preferred regular visits to a bath house were suspected of a lack of medical expertise and of using erroneous treatment methods.

The changes in the approach to the issue of bathing were exemplified by the Jagiellonian dynasty, who ruled in Poland, Lithuania, Bohemia and Hungary. Those rulers themselves often enjoyed going to a bath house. They also had a custom of whipping themselves with birch twigs to stimulate their circulation (Stróżecki 1933: 31). However, in the 16th century, they too began following the rule against using a bath house for longer than necessary, for they realised that water and high temperature weakened the body. The last representative of that family, Sigismund II Augustus (1548–1572) cautioned his beloved wife Barbara Radziwiłł against long baths (*Zbiór pamiątek historycznych* 1822: 30). However, in general, it can be said that the state of hygiene at the Polish court appeared decidedly better than in Western Europe in that era.

In 16th-century medical guides addressed to a broader audience, no tendencies leading to limitation of bathing and hygiene could yet be observed. Herbals contained some information on the benefits of bathing. Some reservations only concerned entering a bath house with a full stomach, as it could induce vomiting. Steam baths were also cautioned against in case of some health problems, e.g. eye or tooth issues, catarrh or headache. The anonymous author of the guide *Regimen sanitatis medicorum parisiensium* asserted that periodic visits to a bath house worsened one's eyesight (*Dobrego zdrowia rządzenie* 1532: 13; Falimirz 1534: 45v, 46, 47v, 48v, 49). Following a visit to a bath house, relaxation and avoidance of intimate contact were recommended. Attempts at instilling a certain annual cycle ritual were also made. Certain months were allegedly better for bathing at a bath house (e.g. January, May, July), whereas in others, limitation of the frequency of visits there was recommended. However, although it was recommended to visit a bath house less frequently in December, the need to constantly maintain cleanliness of one's body was still stressed (*Dobrego zdrowia rządzenie* 1532: 15–20). Therefore, an

analysis of medical guides and herbals shows that novel ideas from Western Europe, which recommended the avoidance of baths, were fortunately not supported by Polish authors of medical guides. The source material examined shows specific hygienic standards and the hygienic practices of that era.

Some periods in a person's life required particular care for bodily hygiene. This applied to women who were unsuccessful in trying for a baby. Bathing in water with herbs was a treatment which was supposed to cure infertility. Specifically selected herbal mixtures had a calming and relaxing effect and improved the blood supply to a woman's intimate parts; they also cured inflammatory conditions. Bathing was also recommended to pregnant women who were preparing for childbirth. Physicians recommended daily baths with herbs ten days prior to the planned birth. Specific herbs supposedly had a relaxing effect (Falimirz 1534: 19v). Such a bath prepared a woman's body for childbirth and often helped during the first stage of labour. Giving a newborn their first bath in water with herbs was also a tradition. Foreigners who visited Poland (for example Robert South, who visited Poland in 1674) also stressed the fact that children were regularly bathed, which had a positive impact on their physical development (Basista 2004: 354; Odrzywolska-Kidawa 2016b: 392–393).

The great importance of the custom of bathing in the 16th-century Polish society is evidenced by the number of public baths, which were well-organised and often connected to the town/city's waterworks. The decrease in the number of public bath houses due to the plague and syphilis forced the construction of private baths located inside people's houses (Stróżecki 1933: 27–28). The situation was different in villages where, aside from places marked off as bathing houses, people bathed in summer in brooks, rivers, lakes and ponds, as well as near the well (Modrzewski 2003: 360).

Water was also used for everyday washing of hands and other bodily parts. There existed a custom of washing one's hands before eating. Washing of hands after eating was also recommended, which was justified if one takes into consideration the fact that cutlery was not always used during meals (Odrzywolska-Kidawa 2016b: 407–412). Moralists also recommended remembering to wash one's legs and hair often. The appearance of a hairstyle was particularly important for women, who, wishing to have thicker hair, rinsed it with herbal water infusions. Herbals also contained recipes for how to maintain cleanliness of the oral cavity using clean water, water with added herbal infusions, or water with salt (Falimirz 1534: 11).

Water Therapy

Let us not forget another important form of use of water in the period examined, namely the use of hot springs in medicine. Water therapy has a long history. One can find archaeological remains and written sources evidencing the use of water in therapies dating as far back as ancient cultures and civilisations (Assyria, Babylonia, Egypt, Persia). In his treatise *On Airs, Waters, and Places*, Hippocrates noted the effectiveness of treating bodily indispositions with water (Hippocrates 2014: 12–21). A broader scope of water therapy was recommended by Asclepiades of Bithynia, who, aside from cold water, recommended the use of warm water in the form of steam inhalations, showers, baths and drinking treatments. Ancient Romans regarded water as a medicine to be ingested internally, and also used it for frequent and regular baths. Galen had a similar recommendation (*Leczenie wodą według Pryszyca*: 3).

In 16th-century Poland, the properties of hot springs began to be researched. The author of the first treatise on the properties of hot springs was Wojciech Oczko, the physician of Polish kings, in 1578 (Dywan 2013: 39–65; Odrzywolska-Kidawa 2017: 257–276). He combined a theoretical knowledge derived from ancient authors with his own empirical studies. He characterised various types of waters: hot, cold, sulphuric, copper, iron, silver, calcareous and salty. He examined water in terms of its taste, smell, colour and transparency, as he was convinced that all of those factors had an effect on people's health condition. He also realised that not all spring waters were suited for treating people. Drinking of some of them could even cause death (Oczko 1881: 486, 495).

He detailed hydrotherapy treatments with which he intended to treat his patients. Water was supposed to be applied in the form of tub baths, showers, or pouring of water onto specific points on the head or on other bodily parts which required medical intervention. He also proposed water and mud compresses, drinking treatments and enemas. Those diverse treatment methods depended upon the ailment from which a patient was suffering. The scope of the diseases, ailments and bodily inconveniences curable with water was extremely broad – from skin diseases and articular and muscular pains to neurological, respiratory, digestive, urinary and sexual problems. He also proposed supplementary water therapy for syphilis patients as well as for women with high-risk pregnancies. Spring waters supposedly cured ENT diseases, gums and teeth. Drinking of water allegedly decreased fever in a pa-

tient's body, removed toxins and purified the body from the inside. Hydrotherapy supposedly resulted in sweating, vomiting and bowel movement, allowing the health condition of a patient to improve significantly. According to the physician, water was characterised by its ability to bring to the surface diseases which had previously been stuck inside the body. The medical guide also contained tips on the temperature of the water used during the treatment. Determination of the proper water temperature supposedly depended upon a patient's age, sex and temperament assigned to them according to the principles of humorism (Oczko 1881: 45–51, 501–505, 514, 520).

He also included some interesting observations on hot spring water therapy. He cautioned against overuse of that therapy method and forbade the addition of such water to food. The duration of sulphuric water therapy also depended upon the disease from which a patient was suffering. Proper dosage was supposed to be followed. A patient had to drink between 1.5 and 4 litres of such water (Oczko 1881: 498, 510). Water therapy was supposed to be supplemented by ingesting medicines prescribed by a physician (Mazur 1958: 47–53). Detailed recommendations pertained not only to the course of the therapy itself, but also to such elements as relaxation, clothing, defecation, sleep and rest following treatments, physical activity, diet and sexual abstinence (Oczko 1881: 521–522).

Oczko predicted initial worsening of a patient's condition, but provided ready-made recipes on how to help. One of the methods was supposedly a sulphuric water enema with added herbs; another was simply to suspend the therapy for several days until the negative symptoms ceased (Oczko 1881: 512, 529). That detailed treatise on the hot springs flowing in Poland-Lithuania shows that in the 16th century, great potential was seen in water therapy.

Conclusions

As I have attempted to demonstrate, water was constantly present in the daily life, cuisine and medicine of the 16th-century Poland. Healthy water was distinguished from water harmful to one's health. Water was both used as it was and processed as needed. On the one hand, it was something natural; on the other hand, there existed a strong conviction among people who lived in the examined era that it was extremely important to the functioning of individuals and entire societies.

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ośmiory, o tajemnych a skrytych Lekarstwiech [...] [*Herbal, That Is Description of Local, Foreign and Oversea Herbs: Their Powers and How to Use Them Both for Preservation of Human Health and for Curing Various Diseases: Now Revised in Accordance with Modern Herbals and other Good Physicians. Eight Volumes Added by Aleksy Pedemontan on Mysterious and Secret Medicines*], printed by Mikołaj Szarffenberg, Kraków.

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Kulturowe znaczenie wody z perspektywy XVI-wiecznych polskich przewodników medycznych

Streszczenie

Woda od najdawniejszych czasów miała szczególne znaczenie kulturowe w życiu człowieka. Była tanim i dostępnym dla każdego dobrem. Przez wieki spełniała wiele funkcji. Ludzie wierzyli nawet w jej magiczne działanie. Miała też efekt symboliczny – oczyszczała ciało z grzechów. Jednak w omawianym okresie w zachodniej Europie zaczęto uważać, że picie wody jest szkodliwe dla zdrowia. Mimo takiej opinii w XVI w. wodę pitną w Polsce pili najbiedniejsi chłopcy i mnisi żyjący w ciężkim rygorze klasztornym, ale też monarchowie z dynastii Jagiellonów, którzy obawiali się trucizny. Jednak bogatsze warstwy społeczne piły piwo lub rzadziej wino. Wierzono, że stojąca woda (w zbiornikach) rozprzestrzenia epidemie. Autorzy poradników medycznych twierdzili, że picie takiej wody może powodować bezpłodność, czerwonkę i inne choroby. Dopiero gotowanie wody było sposobem na poprawę jej właściwości. Aby wyeliminować nieprzyjemny zapach, dodawano czosnek, sól i ocet. Z Azji od Tatarów przybył zwyczaj dodawania tzw. zioła tatarskiego, zwanego później tatarakiem. Do wody dodawano również inne zioła (np. miętę, szałwię). Bardziej ceniona była woda płynąca („woda żywa”), gdyż uważano, że picie takiej wody jest zdrowsze.

Słowa kluczowe: woda, przewodniki medyczne, historia medycyny