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Solidism Doctrine and the Perception of Nervous System Diseases in the First Half of the 19th Century at Vilnius University

Vilnius University (VU) was founded in 1579 by the Jesuits in the city of Vilnius in the Grand Duchy of Lithuania. The Faculty of Medicine was founded in 1781, and special attention was paid to the promotion of natural sciences in accordance with the ideals of the Age of Enlightenment. The number of departments was doubled and foreign professors were invited to lecture at the University. Prominent scientists from Austria, Germany, Italy, England, and France began to travel in increasing numbers to Vilnius.

The aim of this study is to show how the doctrine of solidism was received and how it changed the perception, diagnosis, and treatment methods of nervous system (NS) diseases in the first half of the 19th century in Vilnius.

We first analysed 25 doctoral dissertations written in Latin on the subject of NS diseases and defended at VU. Then, we turned to the textbook *Praxeos medicae universae praecepta... continens doctrinam de morbis systematis nervosi in genere et de iis cerebri in specie* ('Practical Textbook of General Medicine ... Containing the Doctrine of Nervous System Diseases and the Special Diseases of the Cerebrum'), written by Joseph Frank (1771–1842) in Latin in Vilnius and published in 1818 in Leipzig.

This study is a historical–medical analysis and synthesis of the primary sources. It also uses comparative analysis, analogy, and descriptive methods.

The doctrine of humoralism, attributing all diseases to the imbalance of the four humors, was gradually replaced by the new doctrine of solidism (suggesting that fibers are the most important building

units of the body) at the beginning of the 18th century in Europe. However, humoralism was the most popular system of medicine in the 19th century in Vilnius. During this time, antiphlogistic treatment methods were widely used at the VU clinics. Bloodletting, the use of purgatives, leeches, cupping therapy, and diet adjustments were frequently employed as treatment options for patients with apoplexy, myelitis, St. Vitus' dance, epilepsy, encephalitis, tetanus, hydrophobia, and other NS diseases. Even though in Vilnius, as well as in other European clinics, the causes of NS diseases were usually sought in the cerebrum and spinal cord, using autopsy findings as an essential part of the anatomo-clinical method (the influence of solidism doctrine), autopsy findings usually revealed brain and spinal cord congestion with blood, confirming the inflammation theory of the nervous system.