

Martins LAIZANS

## **Superstitiosa Amuleta Reijcimus: Basilius Plinius and the Cure for Incubus**

Basilius Plinius (~1570—1605) was a humanist and a poet from Riga, Livonia (contemporary Latvia). After becoming doctor medicinae in Wittenberg, he returned to Riga in 1604 where he was appointed the official city physician. The textual heritage by Basilius Plinius mostly consists of Neo-Latin didactic poetry on topics of the natural sciences (e.g., *De Ventis* (“On Winds”), *De Venenis* (“On Poisons”) etc.). One work in his corpus stands apart from all his other texts as it is a thesis medica. This text *De Incubo* (“On the Incubus”; 1600 Wittenberg) is divided into two parts — Thesis (21 paragraphs) and Curatio (12 paragraphs) where the history of the name ‘incubus’, the ancient and medieval opinions on the phenomenon, and the cures for the incubus are described.

Theories on the nature, causes and cure for the incubus have been present since Aristotle. Already at the beginning of the 14th century Bernard de Gordon in his *Lilium medicinae* tried to get rid of the prevalent supernatural and superstitious explanations about incubus. Also Basilius Plinius in his work *De Incubo* where he refers to numerous ancient (Dioscorides, Oribasius etc.) and medieval (Paulus Aegineta, Avicenna etc.) authorities and treats the topic of incubus in a Galenic manner (e.g., incubus being caused by bad vapors that move from the stomach to the head), tries to avoid all explanations of incubus being a demon or other supernatural being. Basilius Plinius in his work attempts to treat this topic in a rational manner that was not self-evident in Early Modern times, as it was still quite often described as a demonic sexual assault.

Thus this paper will explore the ideas on incubus proposed by Basilius Plinius and will be compared with the conceptions on this phenomenon by other Early Modern physicians (e.g., Ercole Sassonia, Girolamo Capivaccio, Johannes Wier), showing the attempt to “reject superstitious amulets”.

*University of Latvia, Faculty of Humanities*  
*martins.laizans@lu.lv*