Areteus, a Greek was born in Cappadocia, a Roman province in Asia Minor. Records are unclear as to the precise date of his birth. He was a contemporary of Galen in the 130-200 A.D. and studied in Alexandria. Although he was a prolific writer, only a few translations of his original communications remain, *De causis et signis morborum* being the only available treatise.

A sound clinician, he rejected the idle speculations and superstitions and added his personal experiences and observations to the Aphorisms of Hippocrates. His school of medicine was Eclectic, which combined the best of Empiricism and Methodism. The heart was regarded as the central organ of man, the site of soul. In this, he accepted the philosophy of *pneuma*.

Areteus identified a number of diseases. He was one of the first to describe the cardiac murmurs and was probably the first to practice direct auscultation of the chest. Diabetes, a Greek term signifying a siphon, was described (note the stamp background) as: melting down of flesh and limbs in urine. Once the disease is fully established, death rapidly supervenes. Thirst is unquenchable. Restlessness and nausea are terminal symptoms. It is more common among women. The development of dropsy and anasarca is also identified in a diabetic (nephropathy).

His account of ominous nature of chronic cough with hemoptysis leaves little doubt that pulmonary tuberculosis (phthisis) was the morbid state. Trephine was used in the treatment of intractable epilepsy, if measures like application of heat and bleeding from forehead vein were ineffective. Mental aberrations were divided into mania, melancholia and stable insanity.

Diagnosis and treatment of Podagra (gout) was described, white hellebore, a powerful purge, was given empirically. The tale of an Olympic runner having gout, who was a victor in the game, between acute attacks, is given in this section. Endocrinology was not overlooked. A possible case of hypopituitarism was also described.

Areteus’s writings have meaning, in relation to practice of medicine today. A critical bedside observer, he reported morbid processes and refused useless speculations - a sound procedure from ancient Capadocia!

Contributed by
JV Pai-Dhungat, Falguni Parikh; Dept. of Medicine, TN Medical College & BYL Nair Ch. Hospital, Mumbai 400 008.