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Introduction: Medicine beyond Galen in the Roman Empire and Late Antiquity

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The study of medicine in the Roman Empire and Late Antiquity is in the midst of an unprecedented boom. Not long ago, few besides specialists dared wade their way into the corpus of the period’s most significant figure, Galen of Pergamum, a task that still required engaging heavily with the massive edition of Karl Gottlob Kühn, published between 1821 and 1833.¹ Kühn’s edition remains the first place to turn for many texts in the corpus, but scholars can now benefit from other sources that make approaching Galen and his works a less daunting task. Chief among these are two biographies, a companion volume, and an ever-growing number of critical editions and translations, including the first volume of what will one day be a complete translation of his works into English.² There has also been more attention paid to later translations of the Galenic corpus, in Arabic, Latin, and other languages, with particular consideration of texts that are no longer extant in Greek.³ All of this work, which is very much an ongoing effort, is making Galen into a more accessible author, and providing late recognition of his great significance, something that he has long been denied in the curricula and research agendas of most Classics departments.

New trajectories of research are also developing beyond the Galenic corpus, and the idiosyncratic view that it offers of medicine in the Roman Empire. Galen’s often negative judgments about rival doctors and schools of medicine, especially, are being reconsidered and questioned. The much-reviled, but influential, Methodist school of medicine has benefitted particularly from this line of research. Recent studies have been devoted also to other doctors and medical authors, including Andromachus of Crete, an imperial physician who was active in the time of Nero. His later contemporary Rufus of Ephesus, too, has benefitted from new attention to his corpus, which held much greater significance for later readers than the small number of references to it by Galen might suggest. Attention has even been turned to the many dubia and spuria of the Galenic corpus, with an eye towards locating them in different places and contexts, and thereby filling out some of the many gaps in our knowledge of ancient medicine. Work on literary sources has been joined also by new examinations of the material remains of medicine, including in epigraphy. At the same time, there is more recognition of the important place held by medicine in the broader intellectual life of the Roman Empire. Doctors were ubiquitous presences in the gatherings of intellectuals, and medical knowledge is displayed in the works of scholars of many different specialties, as has become clear from studies of Seneca, Plutarch, and Plotinus, among others.

5 Margherita Cassia, Andromaco di Creta: Medicina e potere nella Roma neroniana, Storia e politica 71 (Acireale, 2012).
9 For studies of these three authors, see, respectively: Frédéric Le Blay, ‘Pneumatism in Seneca: An Example of Interaction between Physics and Medicine’, in Brigitte Maire (ed.), ‘Greek’ and ‘Roman’ in Latin Medical Texts: Studies in Cultural Change and Exchange in Ancient Medicine, Studies in Ancient Medicine 42 (Leiden and Boston, 2014), 63-76; Jacques Boulogne, ‘Plutarch...
gap that separated medicine from philosophy in the ancient world is now revealed as very small indeed, and the works of Galen and other medical authors are increasingly receiving attention from scholars of ancient philosophy. A wider world of Roman medicine beyond the Galenic corpus is now becoming clear thanks to the efforts of a growing number of scholars, working from many different disciplinary perspectives.

The study of Christianity holds an important place amidst these new approaches to medicine, particularly in the period of Late Antiquity. This is a consequence, in the first place, of more liberal definitions about what should qualify as part of the history of medicine. There is new willingness now among scholars to engage with religious healing in addition to secular medicine, and recognition that there was no clear boundary between the two in antiquity. Christian bishops and theologians, it is also clear, possessed more knowledge of medicine than was once believed. In short, the rhetoric that they used about being ‘physicians of the soul’ should be taken seriously. This means that a figure like John Chrysostom should be approached not only through the lens of theological study, but also as a practitioner of what Wendy Mayer calls ‘medico-philosophical psychic therapy’, much like Galen and other earlier doctors and philosophers.


14 See Wendy Mayer, ‘The Persistence in Late Antiquity of Medico-Philosophical Psychic Therapy’, JLA 8.2 (2015), 337-51; ead., ‘Shaping the Sick Soul: Reshaping the Identity of John
potential of Christian writings from Late Antiquity to reshape scholarly understandings of medicine in this period. For, though there was much continuity in medicine between the Roman Empire and Late Antiquity, when Galen’s works gained canonical status, there were also changes in medical education, in attitudes towards health and disease, and in the growing institutionalization of medicine via monastic hospitals.\textsuperscript{15} Late antique medicine, in sum, involved much more than the scholastic copying and excerpting of Galen’s works, as was once believed.\textsuperscript{16} Late Antiquity, instead, should be regarded as a rich – and still understudied – period for examination of the post-classical development and transformation of Greco-Roman medicine.

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In keeping with the foregoing survey, the articles in this volume attest to the broadening of horizons in the study of ancient medicine, and to the important place that Christian sources from Late Antiquity can have in it. Most of the articles were presented as papers in a series of workshops held in 2015 at the 17th International Patristics Conference in Oxford; four papers presented in other sessions at the conference on related topics have also been added to this volume. The workshops were organized under the auspices of ReMeDHe, a working group for the study of Religion, Medicine, Disability, and Health in Late Antiquity, which was established by Kristi Upson-Saia and Heidi Marx-Wolf. Other activities of this working group have, so far, included workshop sessions at meetings of the North American Patristic Society, a special issue of the \textit{Journal of Late Antiquity}, and an expanding website, which includes a list-serve and a bibliographic database for the study of Late Roman medicine.\textsuperscript{17} The activities of ReMeDHe, including the papers in this volume, therefore point to a growing interest in late antique medicine, and to the existence of a

Chrysostom’, in Geoffrey D. Dunn and Wendy Mayer (eds), \textit{Christians Shaping Identity from the Roman Empire to Byzantium: Studies Inspired by Pauline Allen}, Supplements to \textit{VChr} 132 (Leiden and Boston, 2015), 140-64.

\textsuperscript{15} On the development of hospitals, and changing attitudes towards health and disease in Late Antiquity, see Andrew T. Crislip, \textit{From Monastery to Hospital: Christian Monasticism & the Transformation of Health Care in Late Antiquity} (Ann Arbor, MI, 2005); \textit{id.}, \textit{Thorns in the Flesh: Illness and Sanctity in Late Ancient Christianity}, Divinations: Rereading Late Ancient Religion (Philadelphia, 2013). On medical education in Late Antiquity, see Peter E. Pormann, ‘Medical Education in Late Antiquity. From Alexandria to Montpelier’, in Manfred Horstmannhoff (ed.), \textit{Hippocrates and Medical Education}, Studies in Ancient Medicine 35 (Leiden and Boston, 2010), 419-41.

\textsuperscript{16} Compare the suggestion in Peter E. Pormann and Emilie Savage-Smith, \textit{Medieval Islamic Medicine} (Washington, D.C., 2007), 1, that Islamic medicine in the medieval period was ‘not simply a conduit for Greek ideas’, but rather ‘a venue for innovation and change’.

\textsuperscript{17} See <http://remedhe.com> (last accessed December 21, 2015).
large group of scholars who are working on this topic across the boundaries of patristics, the history of medicine, and late antique studies.

The volume’s articles are divided into four sections. The first of these includes two contributions addressing important methodological points. Christoph Markschies’ article serves as a prolegomenon of sorts to a larger research project on the transformation of ancient healing cults in Late Antiquity, focusing on the role that demons were believed to have in causing or preventing illnesses. In the process, the article challenges attempts to categorize different types of medicine as ‘folk’ or ‘scholarly’, and proposes that the reception of older ideas about medicine and demonology by Christians in Late Antiquity necessarily involved some transformation of these ideas. Ellen Muehlberger then tackles a similarly wide-ranging subject, suggesting that historians of medicine share an interest with scholars of late antique Christianity who work in the emerging field of theological anthropology, which is concerned with ideas about human beings, their bodies and souls, and their relationships to the divine. She proposes that scholars of ancient medicine and their counterparts in theological anthropology should read outside the traditional canons of their respective fields, and see what might be gained by approaching debates about Christology in light of prevailing medical ideas about the human body, and, in turn, by using Christological debates as sources to inform discussions about ancient anthropology, broadly conceived.

The second section of the volume includes five articles that address the interplay between Christian scholars and doctors, and Christian and medical thought. The first article, by the present author, reconsiders the popular claim that Galen had interactions with a group of Christians, called the Theodotians, who were his contemporaries at Rome. It argues that the Theodotians likely did use prevailing ideas about embryology in their Christological investigations, but that Galen would have had no interests in interacting with this group because of his elitist attitudes about scholarship and education. In the next article, Róbert Somos discusses evidence in the recently discovered set of homilies by Origen that sheds new light on this theologian’s ideas about the kidneys. Origen, Somos demonstrates, interpreted the kidneys in both an anatomical and spiritual sense, drawing on passages from the Hebrew Bible that mentioned them, and from prevailing ideas about renal function in medical thought, including claims that were explicitly rejected by Galen. Heidi Marx-Wolf then explores why bishops and other church leaders often identified themselves as ‘good physicians’. She proposes that this tendency was a consequence of the increased status held by doctors in Late Antiquity, and their self-presentation as experts who could provide total care to patients. Christian leaders, Marx-Wolf demonstrates, liked to think of themselves in similar terms.

Two final articles in this section explore the rhetoric surrounding the phrase ‘physicians of the soul’. Stefan Hodges-Kluck, first, identifies a common concern in the works of Basil and Caesarea and the Emperor Julian about the
images seen and words spoken and heard by students and scholars as part of their education. Hodges-Kluck argues that this concern was a result of ancient ideas about the existence of porous boundaries between body, mind, and soul, and the consequent need for a healthy soul to be nourished by what its body heard, saw, and said. Jessica Wright then turns attention to John Chrysostom, and his interest in the brain as the organ that had control over the rational soul in humans. As Wright argues, Chrysostom depicted the brain in his works as a vulnerable organ, something that might be influenced negatively by the impact of sights, smells, and other bodily processes. Like Basil and Julian, Chrysostom too was concerned with the care of the body because of its connections to the soul.

A third section follows with four articles addressing Christian perspectives on illness, disability, and death. First, Helen Rhee’s article examines the ‘sick roles’ of patients in a variety of late antique medical settings and institutions. While Late Antiquity was a period when illness was largely destigmatized, it also saw increased pressure placed on the sick to conform with ideals for sanctified behavior in Christian medical institutions. Rhee demonstrates that patients often resisted following these ideals. Brenda Llewellyn Ihssen then offers a study of The Miracles of St. Artemois, a seventh-century Byzantine text concerning a healing-cult specializing mostly in hernias and other diseases of the male genitalia. As Llewellyn Ihssen shows, this text displays a refreshingly humane attitude towards men suffering from such ailments, which in many other settings and historical contexts might have been regarded only with disgust.

Next, Meghan Henning shifts the focus of the section to disability, approaching Christian attitudes towards blindness, as portrayed in a group of non-canonical apocalyptic texts that mention the presence of blind people in hell. She demonstrates that these texts offer a harsh pedagogical and metaphorical lesson about blindness, presenting to readers the idea that it was a fitting punishment for people who made intellectual or ethical errors in life. Finally, Maria Doerfler examines how Christian authors, in their roles as ‘physicians of souls’, attempted to console the parents of dead children in Late Antiquity, a period when mortal illnesses were common, and infant mortality rate was high. She shows that bereaved parents were consoled not only with comments about the spiritual gains that might result from enduring the death of a child, but also with suggestions that deceased children might intercede directly with Christ on behalf of their parents, and even help to ensure that other children in the family might survive to adulthood.

The volume’s final section includes three articles that address changing ideas about virginity in Late Antiquity. Michael Rosenberg, first, addresses doubts concerning the value of anatomical tests for female virginity, as reflected in the apocryphal Protevangelium of James, the Mishnah, and an anonymous Syriac poem of the fifth century. Rosenberg situates these debates alongside earlier Jewish tests for virginity, and changing Christian ideas about the bodies of
virgin women, suggesting that the perspectives of Ambrose of Milan and other Christian authors of the fourth century were shaped not only by their familiarity with Greco-Roman medicine, but also older Jewish traditions about how virginity might be tested. Julia Kelto Lillis then discusses exegesis of the biblical phrase ‘opening the womb’, demonstrating that Christian writers of the fourth and fifth centuries interpreted this as a reference to the loss of a woman’s virginity. This interpretation, Kelto Lillis demonstrates, reveals a major shift from earlier Greco-Roman beliefs about virginity, which almost unanimously denied the existence of a vaginal hymen, and even the possibility that a woman’s body had any detectable signs of virginity. Caroline Musgrove’s article extends discussion of virginity and the hymen into the Alexandrian school of medicine in the seventh century, and the works of Stephanus of Athens. She demonstrates that Stephanus had to negotiate between canonical Hippocratic ideas about women’s bodies and the contradictory objections of the audiences for his lectures, who insisted in the existence of the hymen. Musgrove therefore shows that the practice of medicine in late antique Alexandria did more than parrot the wisdom of long-dead authorities. It was, instead, engaging with the changed circumstances of the seventh century, and, in the process, helping to demonstrate the continuing vitality of medicine in Late Antiquity.