

A NEW FRAGMENT OF POSIDONIUS?

Galen's intellectual autobiography, *On my own opinions*, has challenged, and frustrated, potential editors for over a century. It is preserved in Greek excerpts, in a Latin translation made from the Arabic and with a spurious conclusion, and, for its last three chapters, in a passage of continuous Greek that circulated under the misleading title of *On the substance of the natural faculties*. Around 1340, the Italian translator Niccolò da Reggio made an extremely faithful Latin version from a Greek manuscript of the last two chapters. Although by itself no one source offers a complete text of the treatise, together they apparently cover it in its entirety. The Latino-arabic version, called variously *De sententiis*, *De sententiis medicorum*, and *De credulitate Galeni*, is the most extensive, but, as a comparison with the surviving Greek shows, it frequently departs considerably from the wording, and even general meaning, of the Greek. Indeed, without the availability of many parallel passages elsewhere in the Galenic corpus, much of this Latin translation would remain unintelligible.¹

In what is avowedly a summary of Galen's views on a variety of topics in medicine and philosophy it would be unreasonable to look for novelty. The main outlines of his medical theories were repeated at considerable length over at least fifty years of authorship, and, save for an obscure sentence on the arterial and venous system in the foetus, there is nothing on medicine in Galen's autobiography that is not to be found elsewhere. The haul for philosophy is more promising. We now have, albeit in translation, one of the sources from which later philosophers, in both Late Antiquity and Islam, drew their knowledge of Galen's agnostic views on the soul, creation, and god. We can see, for instance, how Galen tried to reconcile his own belief in a personal protecting deity with others' theological ideas, and how he wrestled with the relationship of body and soul. Yet even here, Galen's philosophical testament adds almost nothing to what scholars have already recovered from a variety of Islamic and Jewish sources.² His arguments are somewhat fuller, his illustrative examples more numerous, and his sentences more verbose, but Galen, as he declares in his preface, is concerned only to provide a guide to the authenticity and correct interpretation of writings circulating under his name. He is asserting what he believes, not arguing a case or seeking to promote a favourite theory against all objections. He aims for stability of doctrine, not novelty. An editor of *On my own opinions* is thus faced with a complex linguistic and textual puzzle and with the dispiriting certainty that, even if all the puzzle can be solved, the gain in new information about Galen or the authorities whom he followed is going to be meagre.

One passage which appears to provide new information of considerable interest is found in chapter 6, a discussion of nerves, in which Greek extracts help considerably

by the backdoor and so avoid the *cliens* waiting in his hall; there is a *cliens* who is an *umbra* at dinner in Juvenal 5.17. If the Archias who made Horace's couches had a reputation for short couches (so Porphyrio ad loc., p. 273, 19–20 Meyer), then Horace may have been hinting at the desirability of keeping the company small from the beginning of the invitation: line 1 *si potes Archiacis conuiua recumbere lectis*; but I much prefer Eidinow's explanation of *Archiacis* (op. cit. [n. 18], p. 191).

¹ For a general description of this treatise and the manuscripts, see V. Nutton, 'Galen's philosophical testament: *On my own opinions*', in J. Wiesner, (ed.), *Aristoteles. Werk und Wirkung. Band II Kommentierung, Überlieferung, Nachleben* (Berlin and New York, W. De Gruyter, 1987), pp. 27–51.

² See in particular, O. Temkin, *Galenism. Rise and decline of a medical philosophy* (Ithaca and London, Cornell University Press, 1973), pp. 51–94.

to interpret a Latin text that is full of Arabic technical terms mangled in the process of translation and transmission.³ The question arises of the sensitivity of nerves. Some people think that the nerves are more sensitive than flesh because of the dangerous consequences of any inflammation or swelling of the nerves since they are the offshoots of the chief sensitive parts. If a nerve is totally severed, there is no subsequent danger, because the source of sensation no longer shares in any inflammation. Other doctors have noted that one can sever a nerve without the patient realizing it, something that cannot occur when a fleshy part of the body is cut. Thus in venesection a hairlike nerve can often be cut accidentally without it being noticed, since the actual cutting of the vein produces pain and since the results of the damage to the nerve appear only gradually. Often it is only a subsequent spasm that shows that a nerve has become inflamed, when, at best, there has been earlier only a dull ache. The Greek ends at this point, but the Latin continues.

et secundum quod opinati sunt occasione elchadir que accidit ex apostemate nerui quod neruus sit magis sensibilis cum carne quam sit in se, ita reprobavit fisodis isto iudicio dicens neruum esse minime sensibilem. et si quis uult hoc perscrutari, inueniet neruum habere sensibilitatem. uerumptamen neruus non habet tantum de sensibilitate quantum habet membrum carnosum. et aliquando dicimus quod neruus sit magis sensibilis omnibus membris in infirmitate apostematum que accidit ipsis.⁴

Inasmuch as they thought, as a result of the numbness that comes from the inflammation of a nerve, that the nerve was more sensitive with flesh than of itself, *Fisodis* roundly attacked them, arguing that the nerve was in no way sensitive. But if one wishes to investigate this further, one will find the nerve to have sensitivity, but not as much as a fleshy part. And from time to time we say that the nerve is the most sensitive of all bodily parts by reason of the swellings that arise in them.

Who is the mysterious *Fisodis*, as the oldest manuscript, Paris, BN lat. 6865, c. 1350 = B, gives the name, or *Fisedis*? In this treatise Galen mentions several well-known physicians and philosophers, Empedocles, Hippocrates, Herophilus, Erasistratus, and Chrysippus, as well as the Stoics in general, and, in his elegant preface, the poet Parthenius. He does not refer to what might be termed minor figures, except for his controversy with Lycus of Macedon, and there is thus a presupposition that behind the garbled name hides a familiar doctor or philosopher to whom others might appeal for authority. Posidonius is the most obvious candidate, not least because the transition of Posidonius to Fisodis in Arabic would be extremely simple, through the omission of a single letter that would be easily confused with its neighbour:

فس فس فس f-s-d-n-s فس فس f-s-d-s.⁵

But did Posidonius hold the view that the nerves lacked sensation? Galen, who in *On the opinions of Hippocrates and Plato* makes much of Posidonius' differences with Chrysippus on psychology, says nothing about it there, but this is hardly surprising. Since in this treatise Galen was attempting to prove Chrysippus and the early Stoics

³ The Greek was first published by G. Helmreich, 'Galenī Περὶ τῶν ἐαυτῶ δοκούντων fragmenta inedita', *Philologus* lii, 1893, 433; important corrections and new readings were provided by K. Kalbfleisch, 'Zu Galenos', *ibid.*, lv, 1896, pp. 691–2.

⁴ Ch. 6, 9–10 in my forthcoming edition. Relevant MS. variants are: et ante ita add. DE fisodis B: fisedis OEC; fesedis D sensibilitatem] insensib-B verumptamen...carnosum om. C.

⁵ J. Ruska, 'Turba Philosophorum. Ein Beitrag zur Geschichte der Alchemie', *Quellen und Studien zur Geschichte der Naturwissenschaften und der Medizin* i (1931), pp. 18–30, offers a valuable guide to the vagaries of the transcription of Greek proper names via Arabic into mediaeval Latin. J. D. Latham, 'Arabic into Medieval Latin', *J. Semitic Studies* xvii (1972), 30–67, esp. 31–6, is also useful. In general, the Arabic copyists paid attention only to the first three roots of the name, and endings and vowels are often confused or omitted, e.g. in *On my own opinions* Chrysippus is represented throughout as some variant on 'Chresis'.

wrong by piling up examples of other philosophers who disagreed with them about the soul and the *hegemonikon*, his case would not have been well served by citing a view of Posidonius which Galen himself strongly opposed. There is, however, a possible hint that Posidonius may have refused all sensation to the nerves in a fragment from his *On gods* reported by Diogenes Laertius (Fr.21 Edelstein-Kidd). In it Posidonius declares that the divine wisdom and understanding, like the soul in humans, penetrates everywhere to a greater or lesser extent; for in some parts it appears as cohesion, as in bones and *neura*; in others as intelligence, as in the governing principle. Although the point at issue here is the variety of ways in which the divine wisdom operates in man, and not the particular bodily parts, there is an apparent opposition between bones and *neura*, on the one hand, and the governing principle, which to Galen at least was mediated through the nerves to the rest of the body. Even if, in this passage, Posidonius was referring to sinews, as Kidd translates, and not to nerves (for *neuron* can bear both meanings), there was nothing to prevent a misunderstanding or Galen from linking bones and nerves together in opposition to the *hegemonikon*.⁶

Such an argument, however, is highly speculative, for the role of the nerves in Posidonius' sensory psychology still remains obscure. At best one can say that there is nothing in the surviving fragments of Posidonius that directly contradicts Galen's interpretation or shows that Posidonius believed that the *neura* themselves possessed some form of sensation or sensitivity.

Before the ascription of this passage to Posidonius is accepted, one other possibility must be considered. Since the Latino-arabic version is full of misunderstandings and textual corruptions, it is possible that the name has been so grossly mangled in the process of translation and transmission that no weight can be placed on it at all, and hence that the theory should be credited to another thinker. The famous Asclepiades of Bithynia, according to Rufus of Ephesus, denied that there were sensory nerves, and Galen in his *Method of Healing*, and, at greater length, in Book 5 of his (lost) *On the opinions of Asclepiades* scornfully rejected his atomist explanation of pain and sensation.⁷ In terms of doctrine, then, the passage could well apply to Asclepiades; but the degree of corruption of his name in the Arabic and Latin in order to reach 'Fisodis' would have had to be far greater than that of any other name or technical term elsewhere in *De sententiis*. Given the simple transcriptional error required to produce 'Fisodis' out of Posidonius, the ascription to this scholar of a belief in the insensitivity of nerves still remains the likeliest option.

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⁶ I. G. Kidd, *Posidonius, Volume II: Commentary* (Cambridge University Press, 1988), pp. 140–42. Specific studies on Posidonius' theories of sense perception are unhelpful on this point: e.g. H. Cherniss, 'Galen and Posidonius' theory of vision', *Am. J. Philology* liv (1933), 154–61; M. Laffranque, *Poseidonios d'Apamée* (Paris, Presses universitaires de France, 1964), pp. 431–5.

⁷ Rufus, *Anat.*, p. 185 Daremberg-Ruelle; Galen, *Meth. med.* x.7: 10, pp. 851–3 K. Cf. J. T. Vallance, *The lost theory of Asclepiades of Bithynia* (Oxford, Clarendon Press, 1990), p. 37.

THE PRAETORSHIP AND CONSULAR CANDIDACY OF L. RUPILIUS

The praetorship of L. Rupilius is of great importance only to the biography of L. Rupilius. His consular candidacy has a wider significance, since his *repulsa* represents a reverse for his most prominent supporter, Scipio Aemilianus.