

Galen's storeroom, Rome's libraries, and the fire of A.D. 192

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Galen's treatise Περὶ ἀλυσίας ('On the avoidance of grief', or 'Freedom from grief') was considered completely lost until a few years ago. Only its title, mentioned by Galen in *On my own books* 13 (Kühn 19.45: *De indolentia*), and the transcription of a few lines survived, as fragments quoted in later Arabic and Hebrew works. Fortunately, in January 2005 the whole text was rediscovered, thanks to the curiosity of A. Pietrobelli in the Vlatadon monastery at Thessalonica, amongst many other works by Galen, transcribed in the manuscript *Vlatadon* 14. Dating to the 15th c. and of Constantinopolitan origin, this manuscript is available only on microfilm since it is forbidden to examine the original. Despite this problem, an excellent edition of the Greek text with French translation was published by V. Boudon-Millot in a volume in honour of J. Jouanna that appeared in April 2008.¹ The present article is intended to emphasize the importance of Galen's new treatise for Roman archaeology.

The fire of A.D. 192 and Galen's losses

The treatise's *raison d'être* is the question posed to Galen by a friend living in his native Pergamum who was surprised never to see him complain about his misfortunes, not even after the losses he had suffered from the fire which broke out in the centre of Rome before the assassination of Commodus. Galen mentions this fire in other treatises. It was already known that he had lost the first version of two books of *On composition of drugs according to kind*, that

were kept along with others in the storeroom on the Via Sacra when the whole Temple of Peace was burnt, as well as the great libraries on the Palatine;

he adds that

the books of many others too were destroyed at that time, and all of mine that were in that storeroom (*De compositione medicamentorum per genera* 1.1 [Kühn 13.362]).

In *On my own books* Galen complains twice about the destruction of his own writings. During his second and definitive stay in Rome he collected and brought into a coherent form all that he had learned from his teachers or discovered by himself:

I was still engaged in research on some topics, and I wrote a lot in connection with those researches, training myself in the solution of all sorts of medical and philosophical problems. But most of the material was lost in the great fire that consumed the Temple of Peace along with a number of other buildings (*De fibris propriis* 2 [Kühn 19.19]).

Later he confirms that he had written

a large number of other works purely as a personal exercise; of these some were lost in the fire which consumed the Temple of Peace (*De fibris propriis* 11 [Kühn 19.41]).²

1 V. Boudon-Millot, "Un traité perdu de Galien miraculeusement retrouvé, le *Sur l'inutilité de se chagriner*: texte grec et traduction française," in V. Boudon-Millot, A. Guardasole and C. Magdelaine (edd.), *La science médicale antique. Nouveaux regards. Études réunies en l'honneur de Jacques Jouanna* (Paris 2007) 73-123. I owe to the kindness of V. Boudon-Millot the possibility of reading her paper when it was in press. I refer to her edition whenever I mention the new treatise; for the other treatises by Galen, I refer to G. C. Kühn, *Galenus opera omnia* (Leipzig 1821-33), even though a new and more complete edition of *On my own books* has been published in V. Boudon-Millot, *Galenus. Tome I* (Paris 2007). I have quoted the original Greek text only to clarify some passages; if some sentences may sound ambiguous, this is mostly due to Galen's style. My presentation has been influenced by Galen's jumping from one topic to another and back: suffice it to know that the path of the fire, which is the starting point of my article, is described by Galen after 17 chapters (after all, he was not writing for archaeologists of the 21st c.). I am aware that following the order of the chapters would probably have avoided some repetitions, yet such an arrangement would be difficult to follow.

2 Galen mentions the fire of 192 also in *On my own books* 2 (Kühn 19.21), but not in relation to his storeroom.