

F. Eliza GLAZE

Galen's 'De sectis' and the Early Medieval 'Epistola peri hereseon': A Tenuous Survival of Late Ancient Scholasticism

This paper presents fresh evidence of an additional, limited influence of Galen's introductory text "De sectis ad introducendos" in the early medieval Latin West. A Latin commentary on Galen's text survives in two manuscripts of the ninth century, one of them a fragment; it is attributed to Agnellus of Ravenna, and has been edited by Davies, Westerink and others in the Arethusa Monographs series published at SUNY Buffalo. The small number of surviving manuscripts and their provenance suggests that the Agnellus commentary exerted little influence over the minds of early medieval medical thinkers and writers. Despite occasional historiographic assumptions to the contrary, it was not widely known or cited. Both surviving manuscripts of the Agnellus commentary are of Italian origin. One remained in Italy, while the other traveled no further than Reichenau.

But another strain of influence, hitherto unexamined, survives in the short treatise called "Epistola peri hereseon," or "The Letter on the Sects." It first appears in a very important manuscript produced in Frankish territory c. 850, perhaps at St. Denis. This manuscript is Paris BN lat. 11219, which has been analyzed codicologically by Manuel Enrique Vazquez Bujan in his studies of the Hippocratic treatises found within its pages. The "Epistola" appears in several additional manuscripts, including London BL Sloane 2839, Vatican BAV lat. 4421, and Paris BN lat. 14025. The importance of the "Epistola" is that it demonstrates a further strain of influence of the late ancient lectures on Galen, but only up to a point. It was not Galen's text itself that attracted our unknown author: the words of that medical giant of antiquity do not appear in our early medieval extract. Instead, the anonymous compiler repeated passages from the introductory portions of the Agnellus commentary, chiefly a brief medical history listing prominent sectarians of antiquity, definitions of medicine attributed to Hippocrates, Aristotle, Plato, Alexander Philalethes, and Herophilus, and a thumb-nail sketch of the "divisions" of medicine, both practical and theoretical. This repetition of scholastic diaphanousness apparently troubled our compiler, for it degenerates to near-nonsense before ending abruptly. The "Epistola" concludes with a slightly altered assertion of the text's probity taken straight from Cassius Felix.

In this paper I will explore these fascinating parallels to the Agnellus commentary on Galen, showing which passages were borrowed and which left out. I will dwell briefly upon the many and various corruptions in the manuscripts, and the scribes' difficulties with Greek technical terminology that they betray. Finally, I will discuss the Greek erotematic pedagogical prompts (delta and mu sigla) that survive in one manuscript, revealing how this late ancient text was transmitted from the schoolrooms of the sixth century to the monastic scriptoria of the early Middle Ages.