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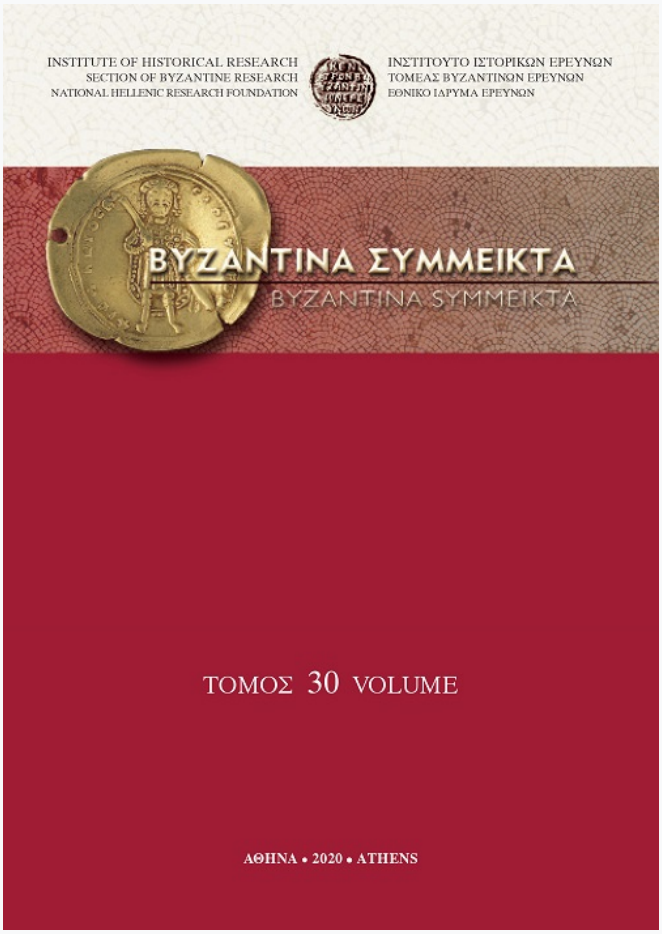

Book Review: Greek Medical Literature and its Readers from Hippocrates to Islam and Byzantium, edited by P. BOURAS -VALLIANATOS and S. XENOPHONTOS (Centre for Hellenic Studies, Kings' College London), London 2018

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Greek Medical Literature and its Readers. From Hippocrates to Islam and Byzantium, edited by P. Bouras-Vallianatos and S. Xenophontos (Centre for Hellenic Studies, Kings' College London), London 2018, pp. x + 239. ISBN 978-1-4724-8791-9 (hbk). 978-1-351-20527-6 (ebk)

The volume in consideration results from an international conference on *Greek medical texts and their audience: perception, transmission, reception*, held on December 12-13, 2014 at King's College London. The event focused on the relation between Greek medical literature and its readers and brought together experts on different aspects of this topic; but some of the papers unfortunately were not submitted for publication.

The book is edited by the conference organizers, Petros Bouras-Vallianatos and Sophia Xenophontos. The elegant volume (with hardcover, that is adorned with an image from a manuscript of mid-15th century [Bononiensis 3632, f. 35v], depicting Hippocrates teaching his students) is published by the Centre for Hellenic Studies of King's College at London, under the editorial encouragement and support of Michael Trapp, as the series editor.

As the editors note in their introduction (p. 1), the connection of medical works with their audience is a matter not so well studied, in spite of the recently growing research in the area of ancient medical literature. This volume aims to contribute to the clarification of the publicum's role in the contextualisation of Greek medical texts by examining the various ways of interaction between authors and readers. The book may be considered as a first step towards this direction, since many important issues concerning the impact of Greek medical texts on contemporary and later audiences require further investigation.

Concerning the context of the volume, initially brief *curricula* of the editors and the author of each chapter are included, as well as the preface and the introduction by the editors. Next, the chapters of each Part of the volume follow. The book is

divided into four parts according to the historical and cultural timespan of the text. Parts I and II include chapters pertaining to medical works of the Classical and Roman Imperial period, while Parts III and IV deal with the introduction and circulation of Greek medical works in the Islamic and Byzantine world. References are given at the end of each chapter. Finally the book concludes with an Index of terms, words and names.

Part I consists of three chapters, dealing respectively with a) Alcmaeon's of Croton (5th century BC) treatise *περὶ φύσεως* (*On Nature*), probably the first medical text in Greek; b) the pseudo-hippocratic text *Περὶ Φυσῶν* (*On Winds*) and c) the well-known *Ἐπιδημίαι* (*Epidemics*) of Hippocrates. In the first chapter ("Alcmaeon and his addressees. Revisiting the incipit", pp. 1-29) Stavros Kouloumentas [hereafter: K.] examines Alcmaeon's of Croton treatise, and especially its incipit, the longest surviving extract from this work, which runs as follows: ... *ἦν δὲ Πειρίθου υἱός, ὡς αὐτὸς ἐναρχόμενος τοῦ συγγράμματός φησιν. «Ἀλκμαίων* Κροτωνιήτης τάδε ἔλεξε Πειρίθου υἱός *Βροτίνῳ καὶ Λέοντι καὶ Βαθύλλῳ περὶ τῶν ἀφανέων περὶ τῶν θνητῶν σαφήνειαν μὲν θεοὶ ἔχοντι, ὡς δὲ ἀνθρώποις τεκμαίρεσθαι»* ..... K. surveys the suggestions proposed about the punctuation and interpretation of the passage, collects the scanty evidence on the identity of Alcmaeon's addressees mentioned in this extract and offers very useful insights about the nature of the work in general. Alcmaeon allegedly was connected with the Pythagoreans, so K. offers a new interpretation of the treatise's target groups, such as «a narrow and specialised audience including members of a Pythagorean group, active in the same competitive setting as Alcmaeon, although their relationship is not clearly specified in the incipit», and «a broader and less specialized audience including any attendee at contemporary philosophical contests» (pp. 21-22).

In the second chapter ("Gone with the wind. Laughter and audience of the Hippocratic treatises", pp. 30-47) Laurence Totelin (hereafter T.) explores the short text *Περὶ Φυσῶν* (*On Winds,* or rather *On Breaths,* as it is translated with more precision elsewhere[1]), an anonymous medical treatise of the fifth century BC, later inserted between the texts of the Hippocratic corpus. In this text, which preserves a high rhetorical character, the unknown author expounds the theory that the body is nourished by food, drink and above all by air (*πνεῦμα*), and describes the effects of breaths on the body. T. argues that people with no medical training were well acquainted with medical texts in antiquity, either by reading them themselves or

1. E.g. the Loeb edition ecc.

by listening to an aloud reading to a group; they would most likely have found the references to the wind and bloated bellies amusing (though the Hippocratic authors would have never intended them to appear as humorous), recalling the comic plays: medical terms denoting farting were normally found in ancient comedy and satire, and ancient comedians –and Aristophanes in particular– took advantage of the comic potential found in the theories and therapies described in the Hippocratic treatises in order to provoke the laughter of the spectators.

In the third chapter ("The professional audiences of the Hippocratic *Epidemics* Patient cases in Hippocratic scientific communication", pp. 48-64) Chiara Thumiger [hereafter CT] examines the patient reports found in the seven books of the *Ἐπιδημίαι* [*Epidemics*]. These reports display the medical history of individual patients from the very beginning of the illness to death or recovery, with emphasis on the clinical dimension of the medical art. Of particular interest is the comparison with modern approaches to clinical training, especially that relating to a doctor's communication with his patients. CT emphasizes that Hippocratic authors addressed an audience of medical professionals and, as contemporary medical practice was mainly dependent on oral learning and teaching, she considers the medical cases as manifestations of "mnemonic effort". Indeed Hippocratic *Epidemics*, despite the ambiguities and historical uncertainties about the texts' composition and transmission, were very firmly delimited as professional and medical, communicating no more than pure *data*. CT concludes that "the reception of an individual intellect –as a future student, a training doctor– characterizes the audience of these texts, motivates and even determines, concretely, their very existence" (p. 58).

Two chapters form the Part II of the book; they deal with medical texts from the Roman Imperial period, namely Galen and Pseudo-Alexander of Aphrodisias. In the first study ("Galen's *Exhortation to the Study of Medicine*. An educational work for prospective medical students", pp. 67-93) Sophia Xenophontos [hereafter X.] offers a concise analysis of Galen's rather overlooked treatise *Προτρεπτικὸς ἐπ' ἰατρικὴν τέχνην* (*Exhortation to the study of Medicine*) underlining the author's identity as a moralist and soul-doctor. It is known that this Galenic treatise consisted of two parts, of which we dispose only the first, being an introductory essay on the benefits of acquiring skills in the arts, while the second part focused on the art of medicine. X. argues that in this text rhetoric to a large extent facilitates philosophical instruction; she discusses also Galen's moralizing methods and the educational elements of the essay: in all probability its intended audience consisted of beginners in philosophy, who were being moved to continue their professional

studies in medicine. X. also emphasizes on the close interplay of the treatise with a number of philosophical texts –and most notably Plutarch– and concludes that "Even if Galen's affiliation to Plutarch is not conscious or direct (which I think is), it does have something to tell us about the former's sustained work in the area of moral philosophy and its envisaged impact on his contemporary philosophical and intellectual landscape" (p. 82).

In the second study ("An interpretation of the preface to *Medical Puzzles and Natural Problems* 1 by Pseudo-Alexander of Aphrodisias in light of medical education", pp. 94-109) Michiel Meeusen [hereafter M.] turns his attention to another didactic work, the spurious collection *Ἰατρικὰ ἀπορήματα καὶ φυσικὰ προβλήματα* (*Medical Puzzles and Natural Problems*) ascribed to Alexander of Aphrodisias, a collection from the early centuries AD, which has attracted very little scholarly attention. The text shows great affinity with the so called *Ἐρωταποκρίσεις,* the question and answer literature. M. focuses on the preface to the treatise's first book, which has a clear paedagogic and educational motivation, and testifies a dynamic relationship between author and student / reader in the context of a medical school setting through the application of proper methods that intended to attract the reader's concentration.

Subject of the two chapters of Part III are the translations of Greek medical literature -and particularly Galen- to Arabic, in the context of the so-called Graeco-Arabic translation movement[2], when, from the mid-eighth century, and for roughly two centuries, a wide range of Greek philosophical, scientific and medical texts were translated into Arabic, sometimes directly and sometimes through a Syriac intermediary. Towards this achievement very important is the role of the 9th century scholar Ḥunayn ibn Isḥāq, a Nestorian Christian, and of his epigones. In the first chapter ("The user-friendly Galen Ḥunayn ibn Isḥāq and the adaptation of Greek medicine for a new audience", pp. 113-130) Uwe Vagelpohl [hereafter V.] examines the metaphrastic techniques of Ḥunayn, who not only commanded ancient Greek, but was also a practising physician. His methods can be summarised in the following three cases: amplification of the prototype in various ways, clarification of it through additional information and annotations (which vary in length from a line or two to several manuscript pages), and, finally, reworking of the material in the form of summaries, as the prototypes were long and detailed,

2. For the details see *inter alios* D. Gutas, *Greek Thought, Arabic Culture. The Graeco-Arabic Translation Movement in Baghdad and Early 'Abbasid Society* (*2nd-4th / 8th-10th centuries*), (London and New York, 1998).

often including a large amount of material that was irrelevant for medical practice. Characteristic examples on each case illuminate the translator's method. Since the translated Galenic texts were meant to be used by practising physicians for diagnostic and therapeutic purposes, Ḥunayn adapted the original texts according to the needs of his audience, taking care to be as accurate as possible. Furthermore, he individualized the translations' style to the stylistic preferences of the patron who commissioned them.

In the second chapter ("Medical knowledge as proof of the Creator's wisdom and the Arabic reception of Galen's *On the Usefulness of the Parts*", pp. 131-139) Elvira Wakelnig [hereafter W.] studies the Arabic translation of Galen's treatise *Περὶ χρείας τῶν ἐν ἀνθρώπου σώματι μορίων* (*On the Userfulness of the Parts*), which was most probably made by Ḥubaysh ibn al- Ḥasan (Ḥunayn's nephew) in the mid-ninth century (following four earlier translations of the work in Syriac). In this case the translator focuses exclusively on the role of the Creator rather than on Galen's emphasis on personified Nature. The Galenic work was received more as a philosophical-theological treatise than a strictly physiological text and this resulted to a circulation of the text beyond the strict medical circles, among scholars, theologians and philosophers. Similar, but, to a smaller extent, is the case of another Galenic treatise, *Περὶ ἀνατομικῶν ἐγχειρήσεων* (*On Anatomical Procedures*), the books IX-XV of which, as it is known, survive only in the aforementioned Ḥubaysh's translation.

The Byzantine world lays in the center of Part IV of the volume, with the last two chapters of the book. In the first study ("Physician versus physician: Comparing the audience of *On the Constitution of Man* by Meletios and *Epitome on the Nature of Men* by Leo the Physician", pp. 153-179) Erica Gielen [hereafter G.] compares two Byzantine texts, the treatise *περὶ τῆς τοῦ ἀνθρώπου κατασκευῆς* (*Constitution of Man*) by Meletios (probably early 9th century) and the *Σύνοψις εἰς τὴν φύσιν τῶν ἀνθρώπων* (*Epitome on the Nature of Men*) by Leo the Physician (of the same date?). The first text has a rich textual tradition, while the second is transmitted by only one manuscript. G. discusses two case studies starting from Meletios's and Leo's statements on the human head and brain, in order to elucidate the relationship between the two texts and their impact to their respective audiences, evidently quite different. Meletios enriches the Galenic material on the anatomy and physiology of various parts of the body with quotations from the Church Fathers. On the other hand Leo highlights the medical terminology and definitions, reducing Meletios's Christian approach and adapting his text mostly to a professional audience.

The last chapter of the volume ("Reading Galen in Byzantium. The fate of *Therapeutics to Glaucon*", pp. 180-229) by Petros Bouras-Vallianatos [henceforth B.-V.] concentrates on Galen's treatise *τῶν πρὸς Γλαύκωνα Θεραπευτικῶν* (*Therapeutics to Glaucon*). After offering some basic details about the Galenic text B.-V. examines its textual tradition in Byzantium. B.-V. offers not only a mere presentation of the manuscripts, but insists also on the various layouts and formats used by the scribes to arrange the Galenic text and the relevant scholia in the page. In this way *the mise-en-page* comes as a "visual aid" to help the reader and the user of the manuscript in general. Nine plates with photos from manuscripts with characteristic examples complete this part of the study. B.-V. then proceeds to the study of the byzantine commentaries on the *Therapeutics to Glaucon,* showing that the commentators, by integrating their own views in the interpretation of the text, offered a new perspective on its understanding and ensured its transmission. Finally, the last section of this chapter deals with Byzantine medical handbooks. Considering the fact that *Therapeutics to Glaucon* inspired Byzantine medical authors, B.-V. intends to show how Galenic knowledge was transmitted in medical manuals throughout the Byzantine era. An Appendix to this chapter offers a very interesting synoptic presentation of a Galenic passage as it was adapted by Oribasios, Aetios of Amida and Alexander of Tralles in their medical handbooks, and gives a better idea on the way Galenic material was modified and rearranged. It is concluded that "Future studies should take a comparative look at the presence of various genres of classical literature in Byzantium and juxtapose evidence from other medieval examples, for instance in Latin or in Arabic, which could elucidate further our understanding of both the revival of classical literature and the accessibility of classical texts in medieval milieus" (p. 197).

In sum, this volume enriches the bibliography and adds a significant title to the research into the complexities of Greek medical writings from the fifth century BC down to the fourteenth century AD, their reception and their influence on various intellectual *milieus*. Anyone interested in Greek medical tradition will gain a great profit from the book.

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