Galen of Pergamum: A Witness of Scribonius Largus’ Œuvre

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Abstract

In this study, we examine two pharmacological recipes, transmitted in Latin in §50–52 of Scribonius Largus’ Book of Recipes, and in Greek in §3.3 of Galen’s pharmacological work entitled On the Composition of Drugs according to Places (De compositione medicamentorum secundum locos). The aim of our study is to demonstrate the importance of taking into account the history of texts with respect to both primary and secondary sources, for the establishment of the text, before resorting to indirect sources, however obvious or illustrious they may be.

While preparing the edition of Galen’s treatise entitled On the Composition of Drugs according to Places (De compositione medicamentorum secundum locos), we found that Kühn’s text in volumes 12–13 of his monumental edition is often misleading and that one needs to resort to medieval manuscripts in order to benefit from Galen’s account as an indirect source of other earlier authors.

We would like to direct attention to a recipe that appeared in this Galenic treatise under the name of Scribonius Largus, a well-known recipe for those who specialise in Scribonius’ work, who often refer to this recipe when trying to resolve a highly problematic passage in the Book of Recipes (Compositiones) tradition.

Our study will focus on §50–52 of the Book of Recipes, as they were edited by Sergio Sconocchia,1 Georg Helmreich, and Joëlle Jouanna-Bouchet:

※ Translated by Paige Mitchell, subsequently revised by Jon Wilcox. All translations from Greek and Latin are mine.

1 Sconocchia (1983: 32, 4–33, 3). It should be noted that only the units of Sconocchia’s apparatus criticus that are of interest to our argument are included here.
50. For the foul odour of the nose (which the Greeks called ozainan), one must cook in one pound of clarified honey a quarter pound of verdigris or a quarter pound of copper scale or one ounce and a half of these two ingredients and administer the remedy in its liquid form using a feather. For polyps, when they come from the brain, these ingredients, in the same quantities but in dry form, are effective.

51. For polyps, equal amounts of burnt msys, burnt copper-ore, burnt copper flower, sory, copper scales, ground and passed through a sieve, are effective. This dry medication is often applied to the nostrils, using a feather, and illnesses of this type heal because they are alleviated each day.

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\(a\) cum sint . . . faciunt praemissis uerbis ad polypos, huc transp. E. Cecchini e c. 51 fine . . . post emendantur (l.11) perperam tradunt TR || b ad polypos misy usti, chalcitidis ustae, aeris flos usti, soreos, aeris squamae paria pondera tusa et cribrata sicco medicamento etc. scripsi || ad polipos misi usti cachtidis ustae aeris flost ustum sors aeris squamae tusa cribrata sicco etc.

\(T\) || ad polypos misy ustum, chalcitis usta, aeris flos, ustum sori, aeris squama tusa, cribrata, si eo etc. R || ad polypos sanandos: misui ustum, chalcitidis ustae, aeris [usti] squamam, pari- bus ponderibus siccata haec bene teres et eo pulvere uteris adsidue M || vocabula si eo . . . a cerebro a M omissa deleuit Cornarius || ad polypos, cum sint a cerebro, misy ustui . . . cribrata, paribus ponderibus siccata, bene faciunt si eo . . . attenuata cotidie emendantur Rhod.

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3 Translation of G. Helmreich’s edition (only the differences with respect to the translation of Sconocchia’s text are listed): “burnt copper flower, sory . . . ground and passed through the sieve. If one applies this medication regularly to the nostrils, using a feather, one is able to cure illnesses of this type; . . . given that polyps come from the brain, the dry ingredients in equal quantities, offer good results.” Translation of J. Jouanna-Bouchet’s edition (only the differences with respect to the translation of Sconocchia’s text are listed): “burnt copper flower, sory . . . given that polyps come from the brain, the dry ingredients in equal quantities, offer good results.”

4 T= codex Toletanus Capit. 98.12, sixteenth c. in.; R= editio princeps Ioannis Ruellii, Lutetiae Parisiorum 1528; M= Marcelli de medicamentis, Niedermann/Liechtenhan (1968 2nd ed.), Berlin; Rhod. = Ioannes Rhodius, editor of Compositiones in Padua, in 1655. Regarding