THE HUNT FOR GALEN’S SHADOW
Alexander of Aphrodisias, De anima
94.7-100.17 Bruns Reconsidered

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1. After long years of comparative neglect, Galen of Pergamon (129-c. 210 CE) is being re-discovered as a philosopher in his own right. This re-appraisal is to be applauded, not least because he was taken seriously as a philosopher in his own day and beyond.¹ In fact, our earliest extant testimonies—a mere handful—concern his influence in regard to philosophical, not medical matters. Most notable are those from (or relating to) the important Peripatetic philosopher Alexander of Aphrodisias, who was Galen’s junior by about a generation.² These testimonies have encouraged a comparison between their surviving writings from a doctrinal point of view. Thus Donini has argued convincingly that Alexander at De anima 24.18-26³ engages in an (implicit) polemical dialogue with Galen (notably his Quod animi more) on the view of the soul as a harmony of the body.⁴

The question of Galen’s presence also arises in regard to the closing section of the De anima (94.7-100.17), which is concerned with the question where in our body the centre of command, or, as it was called, the ‘regent part’ (ἡγεμονικόν) of the soul, is located.⁵

Alexander presents a battery of arguments in favour of the Aristotelian view that the regent part resides in the heart rather than the

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* I regard it as an honour and a privilege to be able to dedicate this article to my esteemed teacher on his sixtieth birthday.

² Alexander dedicated his De fato to the emperors Septimius Severus and Caracalla (164.3 ff. Br.), who exercised joint rule between 198 and 209 CE. These are the only firm dates we have with regard to his life and career; cf. Todd (1976) 1. It is a fair assumption that he was born in the 150’s or 160’s. Galen was born in 129 and presumably died some time after 210: see Nutton (1984) 323; id., (1987) 46 ff.
³ References give page- and line-number of the standard edition by I. Bruns in the CAG-series (Suppl. II, pars I, Berlin 1887).
⁵ On this long-standing controversy in ancient philosophy and medicine see Mansfeld (1990), Tieleman (1996) xxxiiiff.
brain. A few decades earlier, Galen had devoted no less than four books (viz. I-III and VI) of his *On the doctrines of Hippocrates and Plato* (hereafter *PHP*) to the same issue. Drawing on his dialectical skills and extensive anatomical knowledge, he delivered a thundering vindication of the Platonic tripartition and trilocication. That is to say, he established the brain as the seat of Plato’s rational part (commonly identified with the regent part), refuting in the process the main Stoic and Peripatetic arguments in favour of the cardiocentric theory.

Naturally enough, it has been suggested that Alexander wrote the last section of *De an.* in conscious opposition to Galen. Some scholars have even commented unfavourably on the strength of what is considered Alexander’s response to Galen’s challenge. In view of what is otherwise known of Alexander’s reactions to Galen’s work and of the impact of *PHP*, it is quite plausible that Alexander had the argument of *PHP* forced upon his attention.

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6 *PHP* books I-VI were written during Galen’s first stay in Rome, i.e. between 162 and 166 CE, see De Lacy (1978) 46-48. Alexander’s *De anima* is usually dated to the final period of his career; see Moraux (1978) 304-5; Donini (1982) 231; cf. supra, n. 2.


8 Cf. Alex. *De an.* 98.24ff., Gal., *PHP* II 5.81.


12 See esp. *PHP* VII 1.1-4: books I-VI circulated among Peripatetics, Stoics and physicians and, if we may believe Galen, had already convinced some of these opponents. On the Peripatetic section of his audience see also II 3.23. In fact, books I-VI were written at the request of a Peripatetic, viz. Flavius Boethus, see *Lib. Prop.* 1, SM II p.96.19ff. Müller; cf. also *De praecogn.* 2.24, 5.9, 5.19 with Nutton *ad loc.*