Chapter 7

Galen on Memory, Forgetting and Memory Loss*

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Setting the Scene

The field of memory studies has seen a considerable growth in recent years, with works stemming from such disciplines as psychology, neuroscience, cultural studies, history, epistemology, and philosophy of mind. In Classical Studies things are no different. Quite a few studies addressing memory in Graeco-Roman culture have been published in the last decades, approaching the topic from quite different points of view.1 However, Classicists and Historians of Ancient Philosophy and Medicine have undervalued the study of

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memory in ancient medical texts, even though one finds some remarks, almost always \textit{en passant}, in studies that have come out recently.\textsuperscript{2}

In fact, at a first glance, it seems there is not as much material to be found about memory in ancient medical texts as, for instance, in such authors as Plato, Aristotle and some Sophists. For these authors memory seems to have been no less alluring than it is to contemporary researchers. The contemporary interest in memory—alongside the role memory plays for collective self-understanding, often prompted by collective shared traumas—is to some extent due to an increase in memory deficits, such as Alzheimer’s, Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder, learning disabilities, etc., afflicting individuals in societies where the lifespan has increased to a very great extent. Employing a prolific conceptual apparatus, contemporary authors make use of different paradigms for examining different issues pertaining to memory: memory systems (long-term, short-term, working memory), brain plasticity, representation, encoding, forgetting, collective memory, cultural memory, etc.\textsuperscript{3} Memory is, so to speak, dissected according to the functions and roles a given society or group assigns to it.

In ancient Greece the conceptual apparatus is substantially different, but the interest in understanding memory seems also to have been related to

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  \item la mémoire et du temps', in \textit{Mythe et penseé chez les Grecs}, 109–36. One also finds important explorations in Detienne, M. (1967) \textit{Les Maîtres de Vérité dans la Grèce archaïque}.
  \item Roediger III, Henry L. and Wertsch, James V., ‘Creating a new discipline of memory studies’ \textit{Memory Studies} 2008 1, 9, 9–22.
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