

# Luis García Ballester and Galen

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Why scholars choose their particular areas of study is a fascinating question. Sometimes it is the example (or even the order) of an influential teacher, sometimes family connections or pride in one's locality, sometimes a pure accident that prevented an earlier plan from being followed and led to the discovery of neglected documents in an unfashionable library or archive, sometimes even the unexpected kindness of a custodian. Why a young Spanish medical student with a passion for history should have chosen in the 1960s to write a thesis, a book, and several articles on a distant Greek physician, Galen of Pergamum, is not at all obvious. Luis García Ballester, over the years I knew him, gave me a variety of different, but compatible, answers to this question (1). The first was the encouragement of his friend and teacher López Piñero, who emphasised the value of making accessible again the writings of arguably the greatest, and certainly the most prolific, medical writer of Antiquity. The second was his familiarity with the work of Laín Entralgo, who was trying to understand the essence of the clinical practice of ancient Greek and Roman physicians in part as a model for modern medicine (2), and whose emphasis on the «therapy of the word» bridged the gap between

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(1) The earliest offprint I have from him is dated February 1972.

(2) Such an ideology was far from unusual in Laín's generation; it is apparent, e.g. in the work of Owsei Temkin and Ludwig Edelstein.

the medicine of the mind and that of the body. Luis once jokingly remarked that he had been sent away once by Laín to improve his Greek and learn more about Galen. When he returned later, suitably chastened, he found a different Laín, willing to welcome him back and to impart his own wisdom to his young pupil. The third reason was a desire to know something about an author and physician who had had such an impact on the subsequent history of medicine.

This wish to explore and to rescue from undeserved neglect some major historical figure or process was characteristic of all Luis García Ballester's work, no matter what its period. He had a general inquisitiveness, a desire to find things out, to ask questions, and to go in search of interesting material. But to do this successfully was an incredibly difficult task, especially forty years ago, when Spain was just beginning to emerge from intellectual isolation. It required, first, an enormous commitment of time, energy, and patience. To read Galen is hard because of his sheer prolixity. The twenty-volumes in the standard edition of Galen, in Greek with a Latin version beneath, constitute roughly 10 per cent of all that survives of Greek literature from Classical Greece and Rome before AD 300. Comparable blocks of material, like Plutarch, Aristotle, or even the Hippocratic Corpus, are left far behind in length by the ever-productive Galen. Access to these writings is not always easy, even after a modern reprint of the 1821-1832 edition, and in the 1960s they had to be studied almost entirely in the original Greek without the assistance of a modern translation. Even with fluent Greek and Latin (for a few texts were available only in medieval Latin versions), this was a massive job.

It had also to be carried out very much in isolation, with few of the aids that the historian of ancient medicine enjoys today. In 1965, no more than a handful of scholars were working on this subject worldwide: and of them, only Fridolf Kudlien was publishing frequently. The focus in Germany, with Hans Diller, Karl Deichgräber, and their students, was on the making of editions, some of them slowly appearing in the Berlin Corpus Medicorum Graecorum. Across the Atlantic, Ludwig Edelstein's last years were full of personal travail, although the posthumous republication of his selected essays *Ancient Medicine* in 1967 gave an added stimulus to others' research. Owsei Temkin's magisterial *Galenism*

(1973) was still in the future. Younger colleagues were just entering the field, with notable clusters developing in Paris (around Fernand Robert and Jacques Jouanna), Cambridge (with Geoffrey Lloyd), and Pisa (with Vincenzo di Benedetto). But their interest was largely centred on the Hippocratic Corpus, or on philosophical ideas, and, as yet, little had been done to bring any of these groups together. The first such meeting, the Strasbourg Colloque Hippocratique, did not take place until 1972, the first on Galen not until 1979. Communication of results was fitful and slow. How singularly fortunate Luis García Ballester was to have access to Laín was perhaps not clear at the time, for Laín was one of the very few senior scholars with a wide-ranging appreciation of ancient medicine, and of Galen, from the standpoint of a medical historian.

I stress «medical historian», for with the exception of Temkin all these scholars had been trained as classicists and none had had much exposure to medicine (although Lloyd's father was a doctor). Among medical men, Galen's stock had fallen even lower than among philologists. He was remembered only for his dogmatism, his pedantry, and, occasionally, his work on anatomy and surgery. A handful of articles on Galen appeared each year in the medical press and in medico-historical journals, few of great quality, apart from an occasional piece of translation. To confess an interest in Galen was to become immediately an exotic object of concern. One might with pride profess respect for Hippocrates, the father of medicine and the creator of the *Oath*, and even for the ancient Greeks, innovative medical thinkers to a man, but Galen was, of course, a Roman, a very late arrival on the scene at a time when decadence had already set in. After all, did he not attend one of the maddest of all Roman emperors, the bloodthirsty Commodus?

This sense of academic isolation is mirrored in the secondary literature available at the time. If editions were still produced to a high standard, albeit slowly, for much information and any thorough discussion one had to go back to work done in the 1920s or even the 1890s, and to engage with the generation of Wilamowitz before the first World War rather than with writers from the 1950s and 1960s. There was no multi-volume survey of all aspects of Roman medicine, including Galen, such as is now available in *Band 37* of *Aufstieg und Niedergang der römischen*

*Welt*, 1993—, no comprehensive bibliography of the Corpus Galenicum in its various guises, and no adequate index. Chasing Galenic references in Greek involved laborious cross-checking between the 22 volumes in the standard 1821-1832 edition of C. G. Kühn, the renaissance Latin index of Brasavola (which, shortened by two thirds, was the basis for Kühn's index), and one of the later Giuntine editions of the Latin Galen. Even then, one was likely to miss much, especially among the tracts that had not made their way into Kühn, especially those translated from oriental languages into German or English.

Luis García Ballester's work on Galen in the late 1960s and early 1970s needs to be understood against this background of near-total isolation, intellectual as well as geographic. Laín could help, but as the bibliography to *Alma y enfermedad* (1968/1972) shows, much that was available in Spain was of outdated or of poor quality. If it was difficult at that time to study Galen in the well-stocked and internationally-focussed libraries in Cambridge (where I first began to read Galen in 1966), it must have been even harder in Madrid, Valencia, or Granada. That the situation for a young researcher in ancient medicine today is so much more favourable owes not a little to Luis García Ballester's efforts and example.

Three strands can be distinguished in Luis García Ballester's work on Galen. One, the most traditional, is largely descriptive, but with an eye to the significance of Galen within the history of medicine. Thus his studies of Galen's anatomy and physiology lead up to the sketch of Galen in Laín's *Historia universal de la medicina* (1972), and culminate in the same year with the little *Galeno en la sociedad y en la ciencia de su tiempo*, Madrid, Guadarrama, 1972 (3). Typical of his writing, this study

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- (3) GARCÍA BALLESTER, L. El hipocratismo de Galeno. *Bol. Soc. Esp. Hist. Med.*, 1968, 8, 22-28; GARCÍA BALLESTER, L. La utilización de Platón y Aristóteles en los escritos tardíos de Galeno. *Episteme*, 1971, 5, 112-120; GARCÍA BALLESTER, L. De la anatomía alejandrina al «Corpus Galenianum». *Medicina e Historia*, 1974, serie 2, 37, 2-16; GARCÍA BALLESTER, L. Aproximación genética a la obra anatómica de Galeno. *Asclepio*, 1971, 23, 191-209; GARCÍA BALLESTER, L. Galeo. *Ir*: Pedro Laín Entralgo (ed.), *Historia universal de la medicina*, Madrid, Salvat, 1972, vol. 2, pp. 209-267.

compresses brilliantly into a small space a massive amount of information, accurately and clearly presented. Its aim is to place Galen in context as a physician of his day, a theme that was only just beginning to be explored elsewhere. It still remains a very useful short guide to Galen, and its superiority to the 1954 *Galen of Pergamum* by George Sarton is marked on every page. It is a pity that plans to bring out an English translation in the late 1970s fell through, since, such has been the pace of Galenic scholarship, many sections now have a slightly old-fashioned air. Its strength, however, still remains its overall vision of Galen as a medical man of the second century, a follower, but also a developer, of Hippocrates.

The emphasis on the medical side of Galen's writings is typical of the second strand in Luis García Ballester's interests. The title of his thesis, a translation with notes and exposition of one of Galen's last works, makes his bias plain. Instead of the Galenic book title «That the soul's habits depend on the body's temperament», as one might expect, we are introduced to a problem, the relationship between «soul and disease», and Galen's attempts to understand it (4). In this tract Galen comes closest of all to a physicalist interpretation of the soul, although in the end he claims to be agnostic. How to set this text in the wider context of Galen's ideas is still controversial—I remember a vigorous exchange on the subject between Luis García Ballester and Geoffrey Lloyd at the 1986 Pavia conference—but that was not the main concern of the thesis. Rather, it was a study in psychology, trying to reconstruct the clinical practice of Galen face to face with mental and physical disorder and trying to work out a way of restoring the patient to health. It was an approach that drew on his own experience as a doctor and with illness, and which he developed further in a series of articles,

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(4) GARCÍA BALLESTER, L. *Alma y enfermedad en la obra de Galeno. Traducción y comentario del escrito «Quod animi mores corporis temperamenta sequantur»*, Ph. D. Dissertation, Universidad de Valencia, 1968; summarised as «Alma y enfermedad en la obra de Galeno», *Medicina Española*, 1969, 61, 38-45; published (with slight changes), Valencia-Granada, Cuadernos Hispánicos de Historia de la Medicina y de la Ciencia [Serie A (Monografías), n<sup>o</sup>. XII], 1972.

notably in papers at the 1979 and 1986 Galen conferences (5). He drew attention to Galen's methods of diagnosis as examples of the strengths and limitations of an ancient physician at work in the social context of the second century.

These studies came as a breath of fresh air. They took Galen seriously as a practical doctor rather than as a theoretician or a mere wordsmith, and demonstrated to classical philologists the advantages of coming to Galen from a medical base. They remind us continually of the tension between the world of concepts and the world of disease, and, by stressing Galen at work, they also show how he was at times led to modify some of his own doctrines in the interests of therapy. We have, alas, lost the major study that Luis García Ballester discussed with me in the 1980s that would have concentrated on Galen's classification of diseases, symptoms and causes, but some of his convictions can be discerned in the studies by and with his Granada pupil, Rosa María Moreno Rodríguez (6).

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- (5) GARCÍA BALLESTER, L. Lo médico y lo filosófico-moral en las relaciones entre alma y enfermedad. *Asclepio*, 1968, 20, 99-134; GARCÍA BALLESTER, L. La «psique» en el somaticismo médico de la Antigüedad: la actitud de Galeno. *Episteme*, 1969, 3, 195-209; GARCÍA BALLESTER, L. Medicina y ética en la obra de Galeno. *Medicina Española*, 1969, 62, 280-288; GARCÍA BALLESTER, L. La historia clínica en la patología galénica. *Medicina Española*, 1970, 63, 155-160; GARCÍA BALLESTER, L. Galen as a medical practitioner: problems in diagnosis. In: Vivian Nutton (ed.), *Galen: problems and prospects*, London, The Wellcome Institute for the History of Medicine, 1981, pp. 13-46; GARCÍA BALLESTER, L. Soul and body, disease of the soul and disease of the body in Galen's medical thought. In: Paola Manuli; Mario Vegetti (eds.), *Le Opere psicologiche di Galeno*, Naples, Bibliopolis, 1988, pp. 117-152; GARCÍA BALLESTER, L. Galen as a clinician: his methods in diagnosis. In: Wolfgang Haase; Hildegard Temporini (eds.), *Aufstieg und Niedergang der römischen Welt*, Teil II, Band 37, 2, Berlin-New York, Walter De Gruyter, 1994, pp. 1636-1671; GARCÍA BALLESTER, L. Elementos para la construcción de las historias clínicas en Galeno. *Dynamis*, 1995, 15, 47-65; GARCÍA BALLESTER, L. Introducciones. In: GALENO, *Sobre la localización de las enfermedades (De locis affectis)*, Madrid, Gredos, 1997, pp. 1-120.
- (6) MORENO RODRÍGUEZ, Rosa M.<sup>a</sup>; GARCÍA BALLESTER, Luis. El dolor en la teoría y práctica médicas de Galeno. *Dynamis*, 1982, 2, 3-24; MORENO RODRÍGUEZ, Rosa M.<sup>a</sup> El concepto de *diáthesis parà physin* (estado preternatural) en la patología de Galeno. *Dynamis*, 1983, 3, 7-27; MORENO RODRÍGUEZ, Rosa M.<sup>a</sup> *El*

By the mid 1980s his interest in Galen had shifted away from the Roman bedside to the use of Galen by various authors in later periods. His 1989 Berlin paper considered the origin within the Galenic Corpus of the theory of the six non-naturals, the major therapeutic classification in the Middle Ages. His suggestion, that the theory as it came to be followed then was the result of a realignment of genuinely Galenic material by late Alexandrian scholars, has proved convincing, emphasising, as it does, the way in which Galenism developed (7). This switch of interest both provoked and was provoked by his work on Arnau and Montpellier. His readers were never allowed to forget that Galen's texts had a changing history of different interpretation, and that one must look at each layer of interpretation on its own terms. Each generation, whether pontificating schoolmen in the thirteenth century or frightened, semi-literate Moriscos in the sixteenth, found something within the Galenic Corpus that was valuable to them. The notion of Galen, or Galenism, as a living force within the history of medicine was one of Luis García Ballester's legacies to us.

Scholarship demands scholars, interaction, and encouragement. As a participant and co-organiser of some of the international meetings on Galen, Luis García Ballester was always ready to help in many ways, not just in discussion. He encouraged others to join him in his investigations, not least those who knew about medieval Arabic or Hebrew, and he

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*concepto de discrasia en la patología galénica*, Ph.D. Diss., Universidad de Granada, 1984; MORENO RODRÍGUEZ, Rosa M.<sup>a</sup> La teoría de las discrasias y su función diagnóstica y terapéutica en la obra de Galeno. *Asclepio*, 1985, 37, 105-131; MORENO RODRÍGUEZ, Rosa M.<sup>a</sup> Acerca de la cualidad del calor innato en las fiebres, según Galeno. *Dynamis*, 1985-1986, 5-6, 11-30; MORENO RODRÍGUEZ, Rosa M.<sup>a</sup> El concepto galénico de causa en la doctrina médica. Su significado en el contexto científico-social. *Dynamis*, 1987-1988, 7-8, 25-57.

- (7) GARCÍA BALLESTER, Luis. On the origin of the «six non-natural things» in Galen. In: Jutta Kollesch; Diethard Nickel (eds.), *Galen und das hellenistische Erbe*, Stuttgart, Steiner, 1993, pp. 105-116. See also MARTÍNEZ GÁZQUEZ, José; GARCÍA BALLESTER, Luis. Las *epistulae* de flebotomía y los calendarios en el galenismo práctico de los siglos XIII y XIV en la Corona de Aragón. In: Juan Antonio López Férrez (ed.), *Galenos: obra, pensamiento e influencia*, Madrid, UNED, 1991, pp. 281-290.

cared about those who shared his passion for Galen. Two brief examples will suffice. The Galen conference in East Berlin in 1989 began in tragedy. The main organiser, Georg Harig, had died suddenly only a few brief weeks before, and all were apprehensive about how his widow, Jutta Kollesch, would cope. It was Luis García Ballester who put into words what participants thought and who helped to make the conference a celebration as well as a memorial of what Georg Harig had done. It was Luis García Ballester to whom another scholar, Paola Manuli, turned on that occasion for strength to continue at the conference, knowing she had only a few more months to live. Such generosity of spirit, one hopes, would have been appreciated by Galen himself.