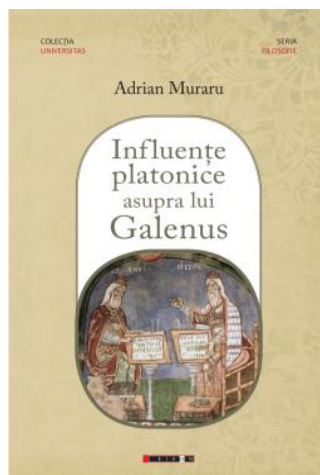


**A comprehensive research
on the scientific and
philosophical contributions
of Galen: The influence of
Plato's ideas**

Vicențiu Buzduga*



Adrian Muraru, *Influente platonice asupra lui Galenus / Platonic Influences on Galen*. Bucharest: Eikon Press, 2019. Pp. 215.

This veritable introductory handbook on Galenic thought and practice opens towards different degrees of understanding the fascinated work belonging to one of the most important physicians and philosophers of all time in the world. The author, an outstanding researcher and professor in the field of ancient Greek and Roman philosophy (and not merely), Adrian Muraru has devoted several years to it, trying to find and collect as much as possible from the preserved cultural heritage of Galen of Pergamon (c. 129 – 210).

The book contains fragments in the original language, and the volume of bibliographic references is impressive. The reader who is not familiar with Old Greek and Latin will be deprived of the full pleasure to understanding some meanings, quotes and titles of works, because Adrian Muraru, who is also an expert in classical languages,

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addresses especially to those already familiar with the philosophical literature of the European antiquity; therefore, he did not consider it appropriate to offer translations.

The two major themes of this work concern the effort to reveal the Platonic influences on Galen's writings and the need to re-evaluate Platonism before Plotinus.

This complex work is divided into five chapters, leading from Aelius (or Claudius) Galenus' biography, through his philosophical writings, stressing on Platonic influences on his gnoseology and psychology, to the final part, which is a pertinent analysis of the Platonism taken over by this ancient thinker and practitioner.

The main source of information regarding Galen's biography is represented by the autobiographical mentions found sporadically in his works (mostly the medical ones, have withstood in time), less the indications from the works of the Late Antiquity or the Middle Ages. The works of the contemporary British historian of medicine Vivian Nutton are widely used as some of the most referential ones for Galen's biography.

The reading becomes very captivating due to the detailed description of the professional evolution of the doctor originating from Pergamon during the Roman Empire, along with incursions in the socio-cultural actuality of that period. There is a rich information as regards that Galen was frequently involved in disputes on his beliefs about the epistemic necessity of a logic-mathematical model that is eventually required in the formation of an efficient doctor.

The second chapter of the book displays a list of titles of Galen's philosophical works – in logic, ethics and philosophical doctrines, almost all being lost -, along with a brief analysis of each one. The effort of Professor Muraru to intuit a possible content just knowing the titles at his disposal is clearly remarkable. A peculiar attention is focused on the analysis of Galen's position in Middle Platonism, his eclecticism and a philosophical identity (declared in his works as Platonism), based on examples from writings and the educational path he followed.

The distance between the Platonism of second century AD and the current perception of this doctrine, to which Galen's Middle Platonism is added, justifies a prudent attitude. The Platonic influences in Galen's gnoseology are to be found in relation with sources of knowledge, the dominance of the intellect in the knowledge act, some problems such as the origin of pleasure and pain, etc. The analytical method (of the

division) proposed by Plato guides toward application in any matter, including medical diagnosis; and it was used by Galen, for whom knowing means having the “right method” (namely, the analytical method). In this sense, the author gives four justifications that imply differences in the endeavour of understanding the modern and the ancient reader’s status.

The question of Galenic psychology is analyzed starting from Galen’s trust that there is a cause of voluntary movement and perception thanks to the senses. Adrian Muraru develops a very rigorous descriptive support, taking into account the tri-partition and the tri-location of the soul, the substance, the movements and the nature of the embryo. It’s worth noting that because the agnosticism, Galen could not decide on the nature of the soul’s substance: is it material or immaterial, implicitly whether the soul is mortal or not.

A difficult mission that this book has to carry is made by the great distance in time, the alteration of terminology and of a lot of meaningfulness, the lack of many Galenic texts (lost cross the centuries), the standardization of the modern perception of the Platonic work, etc.

In order to determine part of the Platonic influences in Galen’s work, a clarification on Platonism is needed. Galen had access to Platonism long after Plato and was influenced by many Platonic teachers and writers that were in dissonant positions.

If there were no writing requirements focused on the main themes, probably we would have found some of the significant discoveries and methods attributed to Galen, part of them being fortunately preserved till today in modern medicine.

This book has the merit of holding the readers’ attention, as a very carefully written text, with many robust arguments that come from a serious knowledge, a deep meditation and personal interpretation the author does thoroughly reveal. There is no doubt this new publication signed by Adrian Muraru will catch the interest of anyone keen Greek and Roman antiquity, as regards philosophy, as well as medicine. It stands as a pivotal extended bibliographic source concerning the history of medicine, so useful especially for nowadays students; and, at the same time, it is a very welcome book for researchers in the field of history of philosophy, bringing a plus of enlightenment in the continuous effort to approaching and comprehending much more and much better great ideas and directions of human thought, on the one side; and to disclosing significant opportunities to put them in act for

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the common good of humanity, on the other side. Actually, even it is not explicitly said by the author, this seems to make the main – or at least part of – reason for which such not at all easy investigation has been realized.