

Chapter Three:

Lives in time: history, biography, bibliography

In this chapter I explore two related themes, reflecting on aspects of Graeco-Roman self-perception and self-presentation. First, I ask what conception Roman imperial – and to an extent also earlier – authors have of distinct periods of previous history, and of the period to which they themselves belong. Secondly, how do they chronicle or periodize their own lives or life’s work: to what extent is such chronicling tied to particular moments or dates, and to what extent aiming at an atemporal perspective, transcending their own time or indeed time-based narrative altogether?

The second topic could be considered from a number of further perspectives, which I only touch on here. Some of these perspectives are however worth mentioning briefly before proceeding, as suggesting further relevant background to our enquiry. I refer to the perspectives offered by horoscopal astrology; by the recording of human lifespans, as evidenced by funerary inscriptions; and by philosophical reflections on the passing of time and the appropriate attitude to it.

In astrology, it was considered important to know the precise hour of the birth in order to cast a horoscope successfully; a preoccupation with astrology will thus have contributed to the desire or need to record birth times with precision.¹

As regards funerary inscriptions, it is striking that a number of gravestones record the lifespan of the deceased in terms not just of years, months and days, but also of hours, and sometimes even fractions of hours. We note the occurrence of the term *scrupulus*, usually used for a very small weight, but here referring to a period of a 24th of an hour. The practice seems especially prevalent in cases of loss of a child, the authors of these intensely poignant memorials seemingly exercised to cling on to every last moment of the life that has gone, and such a full numerical account somehow contributing to the memorialization of the life of the departed loved one. (See figure 10.) So, to look at just a few striking cases:²

1 See Barton (1994a), (1994b) and (1995), the latter two works in particular laying out the complexities and variety of relevant information potentially relevant to the casting of horoscopes, including that of the emperor Augustus; specifically on the astrological demand for precision in relation to birth time, see Heilen (2020).

2 The texts are taken from the collection of such precise-lifespan memorials assembled and discussed by Luciani (2009). (See further Ehrlich 2012.) The first three are from Rome, the fourth from Pisa and the fifth from Numidia, and all date from somewhere between the second and



Figure 10: A Roman funerary inscription recording a lifespan of 75 years, 3 months, 5 days, 3-and-a-half hours (Luciani 2009, no. 11). Image source: Corbier and Gascoü (1995), 280, https://www.persee.fr/doc/antaf_0066-4871_1995_num_31_1_1239

Abuccius Silvanus lived 3 years, 6 months, 29 days and 6-and-a-half hours.

To Cornelia Thymele, their beloved daughter, her most unhappy parents.

Calpurnius Diceus and Secura. She lived 7 years, 2 months, 19 days and an hour and a half.

Eleutera lived 3 years, 28 days, 2-and-a-half hours.

To the deserving Silvana, who sleeps here, in peace. She lived 21 years, 3 months, 4 hours, 6 *scrupuli*.

Such monuments are not however confined to the very young; there is at least one opposite case, where precision contributes to the commemoration of a very long life:

Caecilius Felix lived 75 years, 3 months, 5 days, 3-and-a-half hours.

It is noteworthy, meanwhile, that such personal monuments in general do not, unlike their modern counterparts, contain *dating*, that is, any indication linking those years, months or hours to externally fixed points – a procedure which would be of relevance rather to the first of our two questions, that of the self-contextualization of ancient lives. Such dating – which typically functions by mentioning officials serving at a particular time, in the Roman world usually the consuls – tends to feature rather only in inscriptions of a public nature, those which proclaim a law, commemorate a victor, or dedicate a monument in the name the benefactor. The private time of these monuments of indi-

the fourth century CE. They appear there as nos. 3, 6, 20, 22 and 11. The practice seems common to pagan and Christian memorials of the period: the first two and the last cited here are pagan, the remaining two Christian. (For a much more comprehensive account of the recording of lifespans on Roman inscriptions, specifically Christian context, see Nordberg 1963.)

vidual lives seems thus to exist in a separate realm from that of public events, appointments and calendars.³

The evidence for both these preoccupations, that of horoscope-casting and that of the recording of the precise number of hours of a life, casts further light on the question considered in chapter 1, of the role of time-telling technologies in everyday lives. Indeed, it seems to suggest a significantly widespread role for these technologies, at least in certain critical contexts – the moments of birth and death. (It may very well indeed be that the two are intimately connected, that is, that the popular motivation for a close attention to the hour of birth, in particular, was, precisely, an astrological one.)

Meanwhile philosophers, especially Stoic ones, offer further perspectives on – and to some extent reversals of – popular attitudes to the valuing of the days and hours of a life, and to the human lifespan as a whole. And the ‘modern’ time-telling technology of the water-clock has a strong relevance here too. In Petronius’ *Satyricon* the rich host Trimalchio is introduced as an ‘exquisite fellow, with a clock in his dining room, and a trumpeter, so that he may always know how much life he has lost’; here the picture is a satirical one, although it presumably at some level reflects a genuine anxiety.⁴ The philosopher Seneca, on the other hand, while also bearing witness to this association of the draining of water from a *clepsydra* with the running-out of life, aims to transform the attendant preoccupation or anxiety: it is not the last bit of water that should concern us, the bit that has just run out; not the last moments, but the whole lifespan. Life has in fact been in a constant process of dripping away – death has been coming all along, we are dying all the time – so there is nothing special to frighten us about the last drops.⁵

Such a perception is, for Seneca, of a piece with the correct attitude to time itself, which involves a philosophically differential approach to past (to be grasped in the memory), present (to be appropriately utilized) and future (to be anticipated). The full achievement of this attitude to time indeed constitutes a liberation from normal human laws: such simultaneous mental comprehending of ‘all

³ There are exceptions: a consulate is mentioned for example in another of the inscriptions discussed by Luciani (2009: no. 18); but such mentions seem rare.

⁴ Petronius, *Satyricon* 26.

⁵ ‘cotidie morimur ... tunc quoque, cum crescimus, vita decrescit ... quemadmodum clepsydram non extremum stillicidium exhaurit, sed quidquid ante defluxit, sic ultima hora, qua esse desinimus, non sola mortem facit, sed sola consummat’, Seneca, *Moral Letters* 24.19–20. Water and river metaphors are widely used by Seneca to help induce the correct attitude to the flow of life, as explored by Armisen-Marchetti (1989); see further Miller (forthcoming), ch. 4.

times' is a vital attribute of the sage – one, that, in some crucial psychological sense, makes his life a long one.⁶

Other Stoic exhortatory arguments against the fear of death draw in different ways on these same notions of the fleeting nature of a life's moments, and of the relationship of these moments to the whole human lifespan. So, Epictetus encourages one not to think of oneself as eternity (*aiōn*) but rather 'as a part of the whole, as an hour is of a day; I must come about like an hour, and pass by like an hour'. Going further, Marcus Aurelius characterizes the 'time of human life' as merely a moment (*stigmē*), and describes human life as 'momentary' (*akariaios*), or a 'momentary section of eternity'.⁷

Such reflections are obviously designed to bring about a re-evaluation of our lives, based precisely on their temporal insignificance: our human lifespans are as nothing when considered in relation to eternity. Marcus, building on the Epictetan dictum that 'you can only lose what you have', elaborates a further argument, which can be summarized as follows. All that you *have* is the present (*to paron*), which is further characterized as 'momentary' (*akariaion*); in dying, therefore, you are losing neither past nor future; everyone who dies, then, loses exactly the same thing, namely that single, momentary present; so, considerations of the length, or nature, of the life previously lived, as well as considerations of a hypothetical future lost, are irrelevant.⁸

6 'transit tempus aliquod? – hoc recordatione comprehendit. instat? – hoc utitur. venturum est? – hoc praecipit. longam illi vitam facit omnium temporum in unum conlatio', Seneca, *The Brevity of Life* 15.5. For analysis of this Senecan process of mental mastery or 'appropriation' of time, past, present and future, see Armisen-Marchetti (1995).

7 Arrian, *Discourses of Epictetus* 2.5.13; Marcus Aurelius, *Meditations* 2.17; 2.6; 11.8; 5.24; cf. 3.36, where 'all present time is a moment of eternity'. For philosophical views of the nature of eternity itself see further below, chapter 5.

8 *Meditations* 2.14; cf. 3.10. Marcus' temporally-based argument, like Epictetus', is fundamentally instrumental or therapeutic in its nature, and does not engage explicitly with theoretical analyses of time, of the sort which had been given in earlier Stoicism (and into which I also do not enter here); it has attracted some criticism on the grounds of its alleged theoretical inadequacy. See Mouroutsou (2020) for a survey of previous literature and a theoretical defence of Marcus' position, based on the understanding of the present as 'plastic' (i.e. flexible in its precise extension) and of the verb 'have' in the above argument as crucially connected to what is 'up to us' in the Stoic sense: that is, what it means that we 'have' the present is precisely that our action within that present is under our control. Whatever its strengths or weaknesses when subjected to such analysis, however, it is the mental attitude aimed at, and the relationship of that to the attitudes abroad in Marcus' society, that concern us here. (There is, clearly, a potential connection between the argument discussed and the paradox of the 'ceasing instant', which we shall consider (albeit fleetingly) in chapter 5, although such a connection is not developed by Marcus.)

The mental reduction of our experienced lives to the present moment is not just of value in relation to the contemplation of death. Elsewhere, Marcus tells himself not to be led astray by ‘a mental impression (*phantasia*) of your whole life’, including the nature and magnitude of worries past and future, and to remind himself that it is, in fact, only the present that has the capacity to cause distress (since grief for the past and worry about the future are in fact both *present* events); moreover, the precise scope of this present can be diminished (*kata-smikrunetai*) by mental exercise. Still more positively, Marcus cajoles his soul to be satisfied with its true nature, in need of nothing external – and in particular to be satisfied with the *present* state and not feel the need for more *time*.⁹

The perception that all you lose at death is a single ‘moment’ – that the present moment is, in some psychologically important sense, all that a human life is – may seem opposed in its tendency to Seneca’s perception, just considered, that past, present and future in a life should all be appropriately valued, or to his claim that a life is conceptually made ‘long’ by such mental mastery. But both kinds of perception can perhaps be united within a broader view, or better, a broader recommended psychological approach. This approach is concerned above all to value the present moment, and in particular, the opportunity it brings for correct action and attitude, while not, however, being attached to the notion of the continuance of that moment into the future. At the same time, however – in that same moment, indeed – one may derive benefit from thoughts of both past and future, provided that such thoughts do not include a hankering after, or revived distress at, what has passed, on the one hand, or a preoccupation with future states which may or may not eventuate, on the other.

Whether we find the attitudes encouraged by these Stoic authors valuable, helpful, or indeed possible, the texts cited in their own way also bespeak – through their very attempts to counter it – a preoccupation with the constant passing of time and constantly diminishing available human lifespan, and to an extent also a preoccupation with its measurement.

My investigation in this chapter, however, will have a more specifically literary–intellectual focus, as opposed to one based in either broader perceptions or life practices, on the one hand, or philosophical speculations or recommendations, on the other. I shall consider these questions – that of the attitude to the past and that of the chronicling of lives – in the particular context of Roman imperial writing. And I shall take as my case study for the investigation the works of, and attitudes exemplified by, Galen – the author who gives fuller

⁹ *Meditations* 8.36; 10.1; the focus on the now and rejection of considerations of past and future recurs also at 12.3.

evidence than any other imperial-period author of both literary biography and bibliographical practice, while also being a *par excellence* representative of the classicizing literary and intellectual culture of his times, the so-called ‘Second Sophistic’.

The old and the new

We live in times far removed from the golden age of which our elders dream, of which the fables tell. The perception is a recurrent one, in a variety of cultures and chronological periods. In the Graeco-Roman world, its most famous version is, precisely, that of the mythical Golden Race, of which we are the distant and decadent successors.¹⁰ But it finds its counterpart in intellectual history too.

Both the scientific and the literary culture of the first centuries of our era were in a sense extremely backward-looking – based in an education in the language and literature of an age long past, looking to the classical greats of that past for inspiration and support, tending to prefer the authority of the old to the appeal of the new. The origins of this culture, or classicizing tendency, may themselves be traced to a period several centuries earlier, to the Hellenizing culture that took root from the third century BCE, and of which the Museum and Library of Alexandria were the most outstanding representative. It was at this period – and at this location especially – that a core set of ‘classical’ texts was established, and practices of scholarship and criticism developed, that remained central to the education and literary culture even of Galen’s time. There, then, if not before, we begin to find a distinction in the intellectual and literary context, between a previous, ‘classical’ age and the one we presently inhabit.

Within that Hellenistic era itself, the classicizing tendency held sway mainly in the area of literary texts. True, the same bibliophile techniques of scholarship

¹⁰ See Hesiod, *Works and Days* 109–201. The first race of humans was the golden one (109); ours, that of iron (176), is at four removes from it (after the silver, the bronze, and that of the heroes); and even this will become so decadent that it will be destroyed by a worse one (180–201). In the better-known version of Ovid (*Metamorphoses* 1.89–150) the present race, that of iron, is at three removes from the first (after silver and bronze). For further ancient versions, including parallel myths in other cultures, and for analysis of the Hesiodic account, see Most (1997). Most argues for a closer potential connection between the present race and that of the heroes, and a less inevitable and absolute decline, than one takes from a surface reading of the text; whether or not one finds that interpretation convincing, it seems clear that the myth was standardly understood in the ancient world in terms of irredeemable present-day decadence.

and criticism came to be applied also to ‘ancient’ scientific or medical texts, in particular those of the so-called Hippocratic corpus: indeed, it was at this period that such a corpus first came to be assembled, with a range of texts for various reasons attributed to the famous historical figure of Hippocrates.¹¹ But, for most of the Hellenistic period, at least, the interest in these was, precisely, a historical one: the texts were the subject of antiquarian or scholarly research, but were not at this stage taken as authoritative in any scientific sense. The notion, still familiar to us today, of Hippocrates as ‘father of medicine’ – and even, indeed, the notion that his work was in any important scientific sense different in kind from that of a range of other medical authors, of whom there were also extant texts – were to come much later. Moreover, this same period of the third and second centuries BCE was one of considerable medical *innovation* at Alexandria, by anatomical researchers such as Herophilus and Erasistratus, in particular (on whom, more later).

Things had changed by Galen’s time. At some point – albeit not in a way that commanded universal agreement – Hippocrates had ceased to be *merely* a focus of historical and scholarly interest and become *also* a source of medical authority. In Galen’s medical education, and most prominently of all within his own subsequent practice, scholarship and science are fused: empirically based arguments for the truth of a particular medical view fade into scholarly arguments for the proposition that Hippocrates espoused that view too, and vice versa.¹² Such arguments, as one would expect in relation to texts of a period more than 500 years before one’s own – a 500 years which have seen major advances, especially in anatomy – rely on a highly sophisticated repertory of scholarly and interpretive techniques and approaches. Techniques and approaches, indeed, which closely parallel those which, from late antique to contemporary times, have enabled members of particular religious communities to discern their own theological and philosophical views in biblical texts that belong to an age, and a social and intellectual context, far distant from their own

Such classicizing developments in medicine are, in very broad terms, paralleled by those in philosophy. Here too, while there were major innovations in the Hellenistic period, the main philosophical schools were established by the first century CE. Of course, there continue to be significant further innovations and original discussions, but from this point on these arise largely in a process of dia-

¹¹ See von Staden (1992), (2006); more broadly on the history of the ‘invention of Hippocrates’, Smith (1979).

¹² On this cultural background and Galen’s place in it see especially Lloyd (1993), von Staden (2004), (2009).

logue with and commentary on an existing body of texts, itself regarded as in some sense classical and authoritative.

More broadly, and if one considers Roman alongside Greek literary culture, Latin authors famously conceived their great works as closely modelled on the great Greek classics. Here too, originality lies in adaptation and transformation; innovation is often concealed behind the claim to be following in ancient footsteps. We shall pursue this theme – and the related one of the potentially atemporal self-image of the author – with a particular focus on Galen, who is one of the most prolific as well as most revealing representatives of the Greek literary culture of the Roman period, though we shall end the chapter with a comparison of Galen's attitude and self-positioning with those of another major intellectual and biographer of the imperial period, Porphyry. The themes investigated here could, of course, be considered in relation to a range of other imperial-period authors; I offer the analysis here as one which is both potentially representative of imperial literary and intellectual culture, on the one hand, and suggestive of further lines of research, on the other.¹³

Galen on the old and the new (1): the ideology of the ancient

A central theme in Galen's work, arising constantly in his references to predecessors, is the distinction between 'ancients', *palaioi* and 'younger' or 'more recent', *neōteroi*, authors, doctors especially. Neither term is completely univocal or straightforward in its reference; and there is, I shall argue, more than one conception of past time, and of self-positioning in relation to it, in play here.

As has been highlighted by much recent scholarship, Galen's approach to the previous tradition – connected with that culture of the Second Sophistic – is an archaizing or classicizing one, in which he both elevates the contribution of the great 'ancients', Hippocrates and Plato in particular, and presents himself as their avatar or equal, by contrast despising or neglecting the decadent *neōteroi*.¹⁴ This perception is undoubtedly true, as is the tendentially transtemporal view of Galen that emerges from it. At the same time – and in a way that has not been similarly acknowledged by scholarship – Galen presents us, alongside this idealistically and ideologically loaded view of past and present time, with a

¹³ On this literary and intellectual culture more broadly see Swain (1996); Goldhill (2001); Whitmarsh (2001); Richter and Johnson (2017).

¹⁴ See von Staden (1997); Vegetti (2001); more broadly on Galen's position in this cultural and intellectual landscape Gill, Whitmarsh and Wilkins (2009); Singer (2013): 4–17; (2014); (2019a); Mattern (2017).

much more historiographically neutral, indeed chronologically quite sophisticated, attempt at the periodization of past time. We shall proceed to examine both aspects of this Galenic historiography in what follows; the terms ‘ancient’ and ‘more recent’ are used in a fluid and shifting way – but nevertheless with distinctly identifiable senses according to different contexts – throughout Galen’s work.

To begin, then, with Galen’s idealized view of the past and the ‘ancients’. We shall talk further about the precise reference, or references, of the term *palaios* below; but underlying the terminology is, almost always, a sense of the ‘golden age’ which is, in a way, the counterpart in intellectual history of the Hesiodic golden age mentioned above. Indeed Galen even, as we shall see shortly, makes explicit reference to Hesiod’s golden age in his characterization of the classical period of Greek medicine. Broadly speaking, however, we may say that by *palaios* Galen means, on the medical side, above all Hippocrates, and on the philosophical side, above all Plato; but that further respected ancients may be added on both sides: on the former, such post-Hippocratic authorities as Diocles or Praxagoras: on the latter, Aristotle and Theophrastus, and sometimes even Stoics. In fact, Galen constructs a shifting ‘line of authority’ (in Vegetti’s phrase), assembling the maximum number of potentially respectable authority figures that can be called upon in support of any given position – and attacking others who ignore such an impressive display – even if some of these authority figures are individuals (like Chrysippus, Praxagoras, or even Aristotle) with whom he has profound disagreements in other areas.¹⁵

One of Galen’s most impressive works – central to his output and, arguably, that with which he made his reputation – is *The Doctrines of Hippocrates and Plato*. Both the intellectual project and its execution are quite remarkable. Here, Galen sets forth the essentials of his own physiological views on the functioning of the most important organs in the human body (the brain, the heart and the liver), on the nervous and vascular systems and on element theory.

¹⁵ See Vegetti (1999a), (1999b). So, for example, Plato and Aristotle are lined up against the Stoics on the issue of the fundamental division between rational and non-rational faculties or parts of the soul; Plato and Hippocrates are lined up against Aristotle, the Stoics and a range of medical authors, including Praxagoras, on the fact that the brain, not the heart, is the command-centre of the soul; Praxagoras and a large number of others are mentioned with approval (against, for example, Atomists, Methodists or Asclepiadeans) in the area of element theory and health prescriptions; even Chrysippus and the Stoics form part of the respected authority tradition in certain contexts, for example in their advocacy of a form of physicalism (in *The Soul’s Dependence on the Body*); and, as we shall see, in one case even Asclepiades forms part of a near-universal consensus against Erasistratus. See further note 25 below.

And he does so on the basis of detailed reference to the most up-to-date anatomical research, and his own dramatic public anatomical (in some cases vivisectional) demonstrations used to elucidate these. At the same time, however, the central aim of the work involves the establishment of at least three propositions which are, from a modern historical perspective, frankly absurd:¹⁶

- (1) Hippocrates and Plato were in agreement on their fundamental doctrines regarding the human body (and, in a sense, the soul)
- (2) Plato was indebted to Hippocrates for these views
- (3) Galen's views on anatomy and physiology were in their essentials anticipated by the ancients, by Hippocrates in particular.

And these perceptions are not just eccentricities or oddities of this work, a function of its particular purposes and stated aims – although, undoubtedly, the work is a rhetorical tour-de-force, breath-taking in the ingenuity of the arguments, and the scholarly expertise, which are marshalled in their pursuit. Rather, this self-perception and this historiographical perspective – Galen as the avatar of Hippocrates and Plato in his disinterested devotion to and assiduous pursuit of the truth, Hippocrates and Plato as anticipating Galen in the essentials of his anatomical, medical and philosophical views – run through Galen's whole career and literary output. Plato's philosophy of mind and ethics (sometimes called his moral psychology) underlie Galen's thought in those areas especially, although – as already remarked – he also claims the philosopher's agreement with the fundamentals of his own physiology of the brain, heart and liver, as well as of his element theory, and takes himself to be following Plato also in logical or scientific method. He claims Hippocrates' agreement, meanwhile, not just on the essentials of physiology but also in all matters to do with day-to-day healthcare, disease definition and clinical practice. And he does this *passim* throughout his scientific or philosophical writings on these different subjects, but also in the context of his voluminous commentaries on the Hippocratic writings, which constitute something like a third of his enormous output.¹⁷ (We have already seen just a few examples of the tensions involved in this retrojection of his own views onto Hippocrates, in the previous chapter.)

¹⁶ For analysis of the tensions that arise in this project see (alongside the work already cited of Smith, Lloyd, Vegetti and von Staden) Singer (1996), (2021).

¹⁷ Galen also wrote commentaries on Plato and Aristotle, though none of the latter has survived, and only one of the former, in fragmentary form.

The reality is that Galen is indebted for his anatomical education and views to a much more recent tradition – and indeed, that is something which, as we shall see, he elsewhere openly admits (while never resiling from the claim that such anatomical knowledge was in some way anticipated by Hippocrates centuries earlier).¹⁸ Yet that reality is completely obscured, put to one side, in the context of the construction of his intellectual heritage presented by *The Doctrines of Hippocrates and Plato*, and indeed in most of his major works.

This ideologically loaded approach to the history of medicine has some remarkable consequences, as already noted. Particularly striking is the construction of the intellectual and ethical milieu of the golden era of Greek medicine. This was the age of Hippocrates. One Galenic passage presents this construction of that past intellectual tradition – and disparagement of the present – with especial vividness.

If those who are going to be doctors have no need of geometry, astronomy, dialectic, music or any other of the noble studies, as the most venerable Thessalus proclaimed, nor even of long experience and familiarity with the practice of the art, then it will be open to anyone to become a doctor without difficulty. That is why cobblers, carpenters, dyers and smiths rush into the practice of medicine. They abandon their previous trades, lay out their wares and vie for pride of place. For this reason I myself actually hesitated before writing on the method of healing – the method begun by the men of old (*palaioi*), which those who came after them attempted to complete. In the old days there was indeed great strife, as the men of Cos and Cnidus competed with each other simply in the number of their discoveries. These were the two families of Asclepiads in Asia, once that in Rhodes had fallen away; and the doctors from Italy, Philistion, Empedocles, Pausanias and their followers, strove with them too, the strife being of that fine kind, which was praised by Hesiod. There were, then, these three wonderful groups of doctors vying with each other. The Coan one prospered, and had the largest number of followers, as well as the best, followed closely by the Cnidian; but that from Italy one was also of great worth. None of those individuals went at sunrise to the houses of the rich to greet them, nor to dine with them in the evening, but, as Hesiod has it –

one who lacks work will look on another
as rich – the one who labours to plough and to plant

– so too they constantly vied with each other, not to plough or plant the land, for these tasks would not be worthy of the race of the Asclepiads, though appropriate to the Ascrean poet, but to cultivate, continually increase and attempt to complete the art of Apollo and Asclepius.

Now, however, that noble strife has ceased, or at least there remains only a small, faint remnant of it among humankind; it has been replaced by the wicked kind, and there is none who can mend it or heal it. As Hesiod says:

¹⁸ See note 30 below.

Let not evil strife restrain your spirit from action.

This is the sort of strife which – as again the poet Hesiod puts it –

She raises her head, small at first, but later
it stretches to heaven as she bestrides the earth.

It is this strife that has driven Thessalus mad, so that he criticizes Hippocrates and the other Asclepiads, populating the wide theatre of the civilized world with his own books, then having himself judged within that theatre, winning the victory and being crowned over all the ancients, according to his own pronouncement.¹⁹

Three things are particularly worth noting here. One is the specific historical – and historically influential – view that Galen advances, whereby the schools of Cos and Cnidus, alongside the alternative views of Empedocles and Philistion, on the other side of Magna Graecia, represented the main strands in ancient medical thought. Secondly, we note that Galen's most rhetorically powerful elevation of the status of the ancients goes hand in hand with his most virulent attack on his arch-enemy, the leader of the Methodists, Thessalus. The two strands are inseparable: a key role of Galen's 'classicism' is precisely the refutation of rivals – above all, decadent, ill-educated, modern rivals. The third point to which I draw attention is the striking role taken by *competitiveness* in this passage. Central and recurrent in Galen's attack on contemporaries is their striving for status, their constant quarrelsome competitiveness. Here, in a neat reversal, *even competitiveness* was a positive thing in that distant, halcyon age.

Another aspect of the golden, pre-sectarian era, on Galen's account, is the preservation of knowledge within the family of the Asclepiads – the descendants of Asclepius – and the fact that such knowledge was handed down father to son. This, of course, takes us far from the present-day world of careerist sparring and self-publicizing – let alone the world in which an upstart cobbler or weaver could dare to aspire to the art of medicine.

So, in another text – and in the most strikingly ambitious historiographical move of all – Galen claims that the lack of writings on anatomy from that age is due, not to any lack of knowledge, but to the fact (arising precisely from that culture of successors within the medical family or guild) that such anatomical knowledge was so well known within that circle, and so securely transmitted within it, that no such writings were needed.

I do not blame the ancients for not writing on anatomical procedures, any more than I blame Marinus for doing so. For the former, it was unnecessary to write such notes for themselves or for others, since they were trained from childhood by their parents to dissect,

19 *The Therapeutic Method* 1.1 (X.5–7 K.)

as much as they were to read and write. The ancients – not just doctors, but also philosophers – had a serious engagement with the practice of anatomy. There was thus no fear that people who had learnt in this way would forget the manner of the procedures, any more than those who have practised the writing of letters from an early age would forget that. As time went on, however, it was decided to share the art not just with descendants, but with people outside the family ... once the childhood training was lost, it automatically followed that the learning deteriorated. ... It was after the art had ceased to be kept within the family of the Asclepiads, and had then become gradually worse through a series of such transmissions, that written materials were needed to ensure its preservation. ...²⁰

This, then, is how Galen characterizes the gulf between the level of knowledge of the ancients and that of subsequent generations. There is a distinct peculiarity of the argumentative procedure arising from this self-positioning – a peculiarity which can escape our notice precisely because it becomes so familiar to us as we read texts of this period. Galen prefers to take as his imagined interlocutors, and to conduct his polemics in relation to, individuals who lived and wrote between 650 and 350 years ago, rather than his own contemporaries, or even authors of the previous generation or two.

I give just two examples. Much of *The Doctrines of Hippocrates and Plato* is taken up with an extended refutation of the views of Chrysippus, the Stoic philosopher of the third century BCE; and this polemic is conducted in an *ad hominem* manner, as if the author were present in the debate and able to answer for himself. Chrysippus' internal inconsistencies, the inadequacy of his fundamental psychological model to do justice to observed and experienced reality, the inappropriateness of the literary sources to which he appeals to establish this model, and even particular failures or missed opportunities within this last attempted project – all are exposed, on the basis of close and detailed examination and dissection of Chrysippus' own writings.

Aristotle – who, as observed above, is in many ways an authority figure for Galen, one of, though by no means the chief amongst, his venerated *palaioi*, and whose work is crucial to Galen's especially in the areas of logical method and element theory – is subjected to a similar, though less extended, polemic in the context of his views on embryology. Here, too, Galen detects internal inconsistency and absurdity in the relevant views; and here too he addresses his centuries-old opponent as though participating in a live debate with him.

This is not to say that Galen refuses to engage with authors and doctors of more recent times. On the contrary: some of his most direct and violent attacks, as we have already seen, are reserved for contemporaries or doctors of 'more re-

²⁰ *Anatomical Procedures* 2.1 (II.280–1 K.)

cent' times (*neōteroi*), most prominently the rival Methodist sect, which enjoyed considerable popularity in his time, and their leader Thessalus, who worked, and established the principles of this new sect, in the middle of the first century CE. Of course, this hostility to the modish new school, and his attempt to embarrass them through the authority of figures from the fifth and fourth century BCE, is itself a very obvious assertion of classicism on Galen's part. It seems clear, indeed, that one central part of the Methodists' appeal, connected with their mantra that 'the whole of the art of medicine can be taught within six months', was precisely their *rejection* of such classicizing knowledge. Their claim, in other words, was that medicine could be practised equally – in fact more – successfully without all the scholarly apparatus and years of training that Galen insists on. There was an attractively minimalist theoretical model, making the claim to be able to deal with all clinical cases in practice, but *not* making the detailed knowledge claims made by a Galen about the internal composition and anatomy of the body – let alone the attendant knowledge of ancient authors and textual traditions. This rival school, then, not only enjoyed considerable success, in terms of its uptake by patients, but also in effect opened up the medical profession to a range of individuals of a very different level of education and from a very different background from Galen himself.

This situation raises an important question about the extent of ancient consensus on Hippocratic authority – a question to which it is difficult to give a precise answer. On the one hand, Galen's reverence for Hippocrates, and appeal to his authority, cannot be seen in isolation; it belongs closely, as already suggested, within the classicizing intellectual and literary culture of his time. In the more specific context of *medical* texts, meanwhile, rather than that of literary texts and authorities more broadly, there is clear evidence of other authors from Galen's own time, and the generations immediately before it, also appealing to the authority of Hippocrates, even while asserting very different views. Indeed, Galen's texts themselves, and the context and manner of citation of Hippocratic texts within them, also make clear that there are doctors with rival views who are, just as much as Galen is, claiming Hippocrates on their side in the assertion of those views.²¹ On the other hand, the example of the Methodists – alongside other practitioners, also from time to time glimpsed in Galen's writings – makes it clear that such a consensus on the practical medical value of Hippocrates was very far from universal. Galen's Hippocratically based polemics, then, are conducted partly against others who also claim Hippocratic authority but (in his view) do so wrongly, partly against those who reject it altogether.

21 See Lloyd (1993); von Staden (1989), (1997), (2006), (2009); Leith (2021).

Let us return, though, to the question of the *neōteroi*. I stated above that Galen prefers to express and position himself through dialogue with authors of a distant past, but that he also engages from time to time with the *neōteroi*; and we then looked at the example of Thessalus and the Methodists. Yet the example is in a sense unrepresentative. There is, in general, a rather clear difference between the way in which Galen talks of *palaioi* and that in which he talks of *neōteroi*. The former are distinct, named figures – the most frequently named, as we already saw, being Hippocrates and Plato, but with a few others, also named, in second or third rank. When it comes to the *neōteroi*, the situation is different. These are – with, as suggested, a few notable exceptions – shady, *unnamed* figures. When it comes to doctors of more recent times who have got things wrong in one way or another, Galen very frequently prefers to express his criticisms of such individuals in an obscure, anonymized manner, e.g. ‘some of the *neōteroi*’).

In doing so, he typically contrasts their long-windedness, illogicality, inability to construct coherent arguments and tendency to sophistical reasoning with the honesty and argumentative strengths of the ancients – again, often without making clear who, specifically, the target of such attacks is.²²

Recent scholarship on Galen has pointed to his *cultural* isolation at Rome – his self-identification as Greek, and self-insulation from things Roman or Latin.²³ We may, I suggest, speak equally of his *temporal* self-insulation – his sense of himself as belonging outside his own time, of conversing on an equal level with the greats of the classical Greek past, and by contrast embarrassed by, or attempting to obscure, any connection with or influence from his own or recent times – even though such influences were in some cases doubtless stronger.

Is it, then, that an author like Galen, positioning himself intellectually within centuries-old debates, and conducting discussions on a personal basis with figures from the classical Greek past, sees himself as *belonging to* that past – that he regards himself as in some sense belonging in that time? Or should one say,

²² Moreover, this is true even in some cases where Galen grudgingly *accepts* something from the *neōteroi*. For Galen is at times prepared to admit that some *neōteroi* they have got something right, or that a ‘neologism’ of theirs may be accepted into general use. In some such cases, indeed, it seems clear that he has in fact been strongly influenced by such *neōteroi* (even though it can, relatedly, be quite difficult to identify the individuals in question). One such example is the fourfold division of ‘materials of health’ into things taken, things done, things evacuated and things that come into contact with us from outside. Galen adopts this classification from ‘the most respectable of the *neōteroi*’ at *Health* 1.15, 36 Koch (VI.78 K.) and 5.10, 154–5 Koch (VI.358 K.). It seems that the distinction may derive from Galen’s near contemporaries Antyllus and Herodotus, though he mentions neither by name; see Singer (forthcoming).

²³ See Swain (1996); Mattern (2008): 49.

rather, that his self-positioning is *atemporal* in nature, that through his scholarship, understanding and classically inspired intellectual striving he has transcended time altogether – as, presumably, have those classical hero figures themselves? In theory, the latter seems the better interpretation; or perhaps one does not have to decide between the two perceptions: transcendence and a fixation upon the classics of the fifth and fourth centuries merge into one in this intellectual world-view (which is, of course, from our scholarly perspective, a world-view which belongs very clearly to a specific historical moment). It is instructive to consider Galen's own idealized representation of the arts and their practitioners, existing – outside time and space, one must imagine – in circles around the god Hermes:

The other band is a band of fine men: the practitioners of the arts. They do not run, nor do they shout, nor fight each other. In their midst is the god, and about him they are all ranged in order, never leaving the place that he has assigned them. Those nearest the god, forming a circle about him, are geometers, mathematicians, philosophers, doctors, astronomers and scholars. After them the second band: painters, sculptors, teachers, carpenters, architects and stone-workers; and after them the third order: all the other arts ... Socrates is among them, and Homer and Hippocrates, as well as Plato and his lovers; these are people to be revered like gods, as they are the god's subjects and servants. The others too, though, without exception receive the god's attention.²⁴

So, a broad picture has emerged of Galen's attitude to the past and, relatedly, four central features of his argumentative practice:

- (a) he exalts the ancients over the moderns;
- (b) he prefers to place his own views in relation to those of the former rather than those of the latter;
- (c) he contrasts the sound argumentative practices and ethical motivations of the former with the vanity, competitiveness and sophistical confusions of the latter;
- (d) he usually mentions the great *palaioi* clearly by name, while often referring to the *neōteroi* not just in disparaging, but also in vague and anonymizing, terms.

In this picture, then, we behold Galen the ideologue in his attitude to past and present time, and in his self-positioning within – or perhaps better, outside – it. It is a picture which reflects an undeniable, indeed absolutely central, aspect of his approach to the tradition and to his contemporaries.

²⁴ *An Exhortation to Follow the Arts* 5, 118–20 Barigazzi (I.6–7 K.).

Galen on the old and the new (2): historiography and periodization

Yet there is another side to the story – and one which is of considerable interest for our enquiry, as it sheds light on the view ancient authors had of distinct periods within their own past, on the development of the historiographical practice of periodization. For, alongside the ideological and indeed idealizing version of history just considered, there is another, wherein Galen is much more pragmatic and neutral – and indeed precise and informative – in his historical accounts, and in which the ‘old’ and the ‘new’ appear as straightforwardly chronological, rather than morally loaded, terms.

So, for example, Galen does not always line up ancients against moderns in his accounts of previous authority; the ‘line of authority’ can cross the *palaioi* / *neōteroi* distinction, as when the frequently suspect recent doctor Athenaeus is lined up alongside his more usually respected, and earlier, authorities, or when that frequent butt of his polemic, Asclepiades, forms part of a near-universal consensus against Erasistratus.²⁵ Moreover, there are clear cases where he takes his terminology or distinctions from moderns rather than ancients, even though he obscures the extent of this, or, in some cases where he admits it, is unspecific about *who*, in the recent tradition, he is indebted to.²⁶

There are also cases, especially in discussions of terminology, where references to the *neōteroi* are entirely neutral. It is not, in such cases, that they are being accused of obfuscation or confusion; it is simply that usage has changed since the times of Hippocrates, and we must be aware of this in order to avoid misunderstanding in our reading of those earlier texts. (An obvious example is the

²⁵ In the former case, Athenaeus is claimed as part of the broad consensus on the nature of the composition of the human body from the four fundamental qualities, alongside Diocles, Mnesitheus, Dieuches, ‘and practically all the best-reputed doctors ... and best philosophers’ (καὶ σχεδὸν πᾶσι τοῖς εὐδοκιμωτάτοις ἰατροῖς ... καὶ τῶν φιλοσόφων τοῖς ἀρίστοις), *The Therapeutic Method* 7.3 (X.462 K.). In the latter, Asclepiades is brought on side in favour of the therapeutic value of venesection, *Venesection, against Erasistratus* 5 (XI.163 K.). In the latter passage, indeed, the fact that even the constantly quarrelsome Asclepiades, who ‘rejects almost all previous views’, and is implacably anti-Hippocratic, nevertheless supports venesection, and that people who agree on practically everything else agree on this, itself strengthens the argument. For, as he adds, ‘I think nothing more worthy of trust than an agreement which involves no grounds for suspicion’ (ἐμοὶ μὲν γὰρ οὐδὲν εἶναι δοκεῖ πιστότερον ἀνυπόπτου συμφωνίας).

²⁶ See note 22 above. Further cases where he polemicizes against a recent author but in fact seems likely to be fundamentally indebted to him are those of Athenaeus, on whom see *Mixtures*, with the discussion of Singer and van der Eijk (2018) and, in pulse theory, Archigenes, on whom see von Staden (1991).

‘more recent’ usage, unproblematically adopted by Galen but as he admits unknown to Hippocrates, whereby arteries are referred to by the term *artēriai* and not, in a way undifferentiated from veins, as *phlebes*.) But we can go still further: there are in fact cases where the writings of the *neōteroi* are to be preferred to the those of the *palaioi*: this is because – in pharmacological writings, especially – a more recent writer will accumulate all the information from the earlier writers and add something of his own. In some cases, then, the writings of the *neōteroi* are simply better, more complete, or informed by further research or experience.²⁷ The sense of reverence for the ancients here sits – albeit perhaps rather awkwardly – alongside a notion of scientific progress which would be much more familiar to us today. But it is a notion which Galen explicitly accepts. Hippocrates made the best start, to be sure – and of course those moderns who ignore or criticize him are barking up the wrong tree – but you cannot expect the same person to start an art and to complete it. Here, there is a wholly legitimate and indeed necessary role for recent and contemporary authors in improving on and perfecting the ancient body of knowledge.²⁸

The case of anatomy – touched on above – is of particular interest here. In spite of (or as Galen might optimistically claim, consistently with) his claim that Hippocrates had a high level of anatomical knowledge, which however was never consigned to the page, Galen himself gained his own anatomical knowledge from a much more recent tradition, that of the ‘school of Quintus’, a set of teachers and texts of anatomy of the immediately preceding generations.²⁹ Nor does Galen – if one looks in the right places in his work – deny his indebtedness to this recent school; indeed he emphasizes his desperation, as a young man, to find and study with its best contemporary representatives, implying that he saw this as the only way to acquire a sound training in anatomy. Moreover, he is quite clear about the timeline, explicitly placing Quintus in the reign of Hadrian, and attributing the revival of anatomical activity to Marinus, on whose treatises Galen himself wrote extensive commentaries, immediately be-

²⁷ *The Composition of Drugs according to Place* 2.1 (XII.501 K.) and 6.9 (XII.988–9 K.).

²⁸ Consider the remark in *The Best Doctor is Also a Philosopher* (3): ‘It would be easy, for example, to learn thoroughly in a very few years what Hippocrates discovered over a very long period of time; and then to devote the rest of one’s life to the discovery of what remains’. For this Galenic view of scientific progress see Hankinson (1994).

²⁹ See von Staden (1992); Grmek and Gourevitch (1994); Singer (2019a); Salas (2021); Salas (forthcoming).

fore that.³⁰ It is, however, noteworthy that, with the exception of Marinus himself, he does not *explicitly* refer to them as *neōteroi*, even though they clearly are so according to his own periodization.

Which leads us, finally, to the most striking aspect of this alternative analysis of Galen's historicizing remarks – the analysis in terms of straightforward chronology as opposed to ideological self-positioning. For in fact Galen, in his account of previous medical authors, is capable of being surprisingly precise in his positioning of them within historical periods. To be sure, there are no precise birth or death dates in this kind of historiography, nor – with a few exceptions – references to datable periods or moments, such as a regnal period or its end. The few such references that there are, however, combine with a number of remarks about relative period and influence, enabling us to see that Galen in fact has a pretty clear picture of the succession of authors previous to and up to his own time, understood in terms of fairly precise historical periods.

In fact – in spite of what has been said above about the fluid nature of both *palaioi* and *neōteroi* – Galen at one point gives an exact date for the division between the two eras – namely, that of the death of Alexander.³¹

It is worth digressing here for a moment to consider some other well-known ancient connotations of the term *neōteroi*. To the reader of ancient literary texts it is particularly well known as the term applied to the 'new poets' of the first century BCE at Rome, poets who probably included Catullus and who took their inspiration from more recent rather than 'classical' sources.³² Specifically, the sources of this inspiration were the Hellenistic poets, for example Callimachus and Theocritus, who belonged, precisely, to the period immediately after the death of Alexander. Callimachus was a prominent scholar at the Library of Alexandria; and it is from this milieu – a milieu in which Galen too had studied, albeit several centuries later – that the scholarly distinction between *neōteroi* and *palaioi* itself arises.

30 See *Anatomical Procedures* 14.1, 167 Simon; at *The Doctrines of Hippocrates and Plato* 8.1, 480 De Lacy (V.650 K.) Marinus is characterized as 'the one who after the ancients restored anatomy, which had been neglected in the intervening time'.

31 See *Commentary on Hippocrates' Epidemics, book 6* 7, 399,10–11 Wenkebach/Pfaff, where he clarifies: 'by "more recent doctors" I mean all those who lived after the death of Alexander.' He mentions the death of Alexander as a temporal demarcator also at *Commentary on the Nature of the Human Being* 1.44, 55,10–14 Mewaldt (XV.105 K.).

32 Cicero uses both the Greek term *neōteroi* and the Latin *poetae novi* to refer to some poets of his time (*Letters to Atticus* 7.2.1; *The Orator* 161 (cf. 168 on 'antiqui')); there is some debate as to how precise a group he has in mind with these designations, and indeed whether Catullus is included.

Now, of course, it may be argued that this one particular gloss on the sense of the term *neōteroi*, appearing at one particular point in Galen’s extant work, should not be given excessive weight – even if it does, undoubtedly, provide a point of curiosity that the single precise criterion of periodization that Galen mentions – that of the death of Alexander – is one still used in historiographical periodizations today. Certainly, we must not expect that Galen elsewhere follows that specification with complete consistency; and indeed it would be wrong to look for absolute precision in the reference of a term – a comparative adjective, to boot – which, as we have already observed, is used in a variety of argumentative contexts, often with disparaging rhetorical force.

Nonetheless, by placing this remark alongside the others in which Galen refers to previous sources using the terminology of *palaios* or *neōteros*, a pretty consistent picture emerges, not just of the identity of those individuals who fall within the domain of each adjective, but also of their chronological relationship in more detail. In the following table, not every author mentioned by Galen has been included; the intention rather has been to include all those mentioned in the context of the use of the terms *palaios* and *neōteros*, and thus to clarify his understanding of historical periods as it emerges through the use of this classification.³³

TABLE 7: Galen’s periodization of the past

Broad designation or period	Further chronological divisions	Doctors	Notes on doctors	Philosophers
<i>palaioi</i>	Hippocratic period	Hippocrates and contemporaries: Euryphon, Philistion, Ariston, Pherecydes, Polybus	some of these actually pre-Hippocratic: <i>Commentary on Hippocrates’ Regimen in Acute Diseases</i> 1.17, 134–5; cf. <i>Commentary on Hippocrates’ Aphorisms</i> 1	Plato, Aristotle, Theophrastus

³³ It will be observed that the table is skimpy in the information given about philosophers, as opposed to doctors. Here Galen mentions fewer individuals, and perhaps operates with a less clear sense of relative date. In any case, I have not attempted, in this last column, to do justice to the chronological picture Galen may have in mind, e.g. as relates to Chrysippus and Posidonius; it seemed worthwhile, nevertheless, to include this last column, as there are a few very chronologically clear cases whom Galen does mention in this category.

TABLE 7: Galen's periodization of the past (*Continued*)

Broad designation or period	Further chronological divisions	Doctors	Notes on doctors	Philosophers
<i>palaioi</i>	earlier 'ancients'	[after Hippocrates, earlier period:] Diocles (4th), Praxagoras (4th) Pleistonicus (4th/3rd), Mnesitheus (4th), Dieuches (4th)	Most are mentioned without further specification, but seem to belong to earlier period by contrast with those in the following group	
	later 'ancients'	Philotimus, Eudemus, Herophilus	Classed as <i>palaioi</i> , but also as contemporaries of Erasistratus, by contrast with e.g. Diocles, Praxagoras; cf. <i>The Therapeutic Method</i> 1.3 (X.28 K.), where Philotimus and Herophilus are co-students and Praxagoras teacher of the former (or of Herophilus?)	
around the death of Alexander		Erasistratus	Classed as <i>palaioi</i> , e.g. <i>Simple Drugs</i> 1.29 (XI.433 K.); often listed alongside <i>neōteroi</i> though not explicitly <i>neōteros</i>	
<i>neōteroi</i>	earlier <i>neōteroi</i>	Asclepiades; Athenaeus		Favorinus; <i>neōteroi</i>
	later <i>neōteroi</i>	Archigenes, Agathinus, Marinus, [Quintus], Rufus, Sabinus	Archigenes and Agathinus particularly late <i>neōteroi</i> ; Marinus in century before Galen	Stoics are mentioned at VII.527 K.
	contemporaries	the Erasistrateans and Methodists at Rome		

A few points – some of them summarized in the fourth column of the table – are particularly worthy of note. One is that Galen has a fairly clear conception of a Hippocratic age: in discussion of the linguistic usage of that period, as well as of

the possible attribution of ‘Hippocratic’ works to other authors of a similar age, Philistion, Ariston, Euryphon and Pherecydes and Polybus emerge clearly as the relevant set of individuals – some direct contemporaries of the great man, some a little earlier or later. Then, we find later subdivisions, still *within* the period covered by the term *palaioi*. Diocles and Praxagoras consistently appear in lists of authorities as closely following Hippocrates; moreover, they are explicitly mentioned as belonging to an earlier phase than Philotimus, Herophilus and Eudemus, even though the latter are still *palaioi*.

There seem to be divisions within the age of the *neōteroi*, too. Of course, as observed already, the term can cover a broad range, and can even include Galen’s actual, unnamed, contemporaries – the Erasistrateans or Methodists currently practising in Rome. And the fixing of the starting-point of the era at the death of Alexander only adds to this sense: this is a span of more than 500 years to Galen’s own time. Still, there are further implied subdivisions; when Galen uses a phrase like ‘the *neōteroi* who came after him [sc. Erasistratus] right up to the followers or Archigenes’,³⁴ it seems that he means to place Archigenes and his followers in the most recent phase. And, as we have seen, Galen is explicit about placing Quintus (though he does not explicitly refer to him as a *neōteros*), in the reign of Hadrian, with Marinus a little older than him. Asclepiades, and probably Athenaeus, belong to a stage quite a bit earlier than that.

Most striking of all is the position of Erasistratus, who seems to be on the edge of the two periods; at least once he is referred to as *palaios*; at other times, while not explicitly placed in the category of *neōteroi*, he is mentioned alongside them. It is tempting to say that this liminal position reflects Galen’s ambivalent attitude to him: in some contexts a respected anatomical authority, to whom Galen seems clearly indebted in aspects of his own physiological theory, especially in the area of the nervous system, he is severely criticized for his inadequate account of physiological motions in the body, as well as for his outright rejection of venesection in all clinical cases. Now that we have gained some clarity about the nature of Galen’s chronological periodization, however, we might see Erasistratus’ liminal position rather as a function of that: his birth date was – according to modern scholarship at least – very close to that watershed of the death of Alexander; he was, probably, the first of the authors in the above table to be born after it.

³⁴ *Commentary on Hippocrates’ Aphorisms* 1 (XVIII.7 K.). This passage, which is about the views of Erasistratus, mentions Philotimus, Eudemus and Herophilus as roughly contemporary with him, as distinct from a group of earlier doctors, such as Diocles.

Thus, in spite of the strong ideological, nostalgic and idealizing account of the past, and the use of the terms *palaios* and *neōteros* within that account, we also see the parallel development within Galen of a strikingly ‘modern’ conception of distinct historical periods and their relationship.

Galen on his own age

What, then, of Galen’s own period: does this acquire a particular definition or status? As we have seen already in his nostalgia for a ‘golden age’, he regards his own as decadent. Most of his remarks along these lines – taking us back to the culturally embedded perception of a distant golden age from which our own represents a disastrous decline – do not depart greatly from the moralizing clichés that one encounters in many a literary text, texts of satire for example.³⁵ The main context of it, in Galen, is somewhat more specific than that: it is *intellectual* vanity or fraudulence and unethical behaviour in specifically *medical* contexts that exercise him particularly.

The extended quotation from *The Therapeutic Method* above gave a flavour of the recurrent rhetoric. The central points of this rhetoric recur in treatise after treatise (and in most concentrated form in *Affections and Errors*, in the *Exhortation* and in *The Best Doctor is Also a Philosopher*). People of today are more interested in money and reputation than in the arts in general, medicine in particular; they therefore attend on and flatter the rich to the detriment of both their characters and their practice of the art; intellectual and medical life is dominated by sectarian competitiveness, and by practitioners whose poor training in logic, or addiction to sophisticated argument, lead them into fatal error.

The positive ethical aspirations, for a truly philanthropic and disinterested doctor or intellectual, are summarized as follows (with plenty of reference to their contrasted opposites):

So, the person who wishes to attain to such a character will, necessarily, not only despise money, but also be extremely hardworking. And one cannot be hardworking if one is continually drinking or eating or indulging in sex: if, to put it briefly, one is a slave to genitals and belly. The true doctor has been found to be a lover of Self-restraint and a follower of Truth. Furthermore, he must train himself in logical method to know how many diseases there are, by species and by genus, and how, in each case, one is to discover an indication of the treatment. This same method also provides the foundations for knowledge of the

35 On Galen’s own relationship to the literary satire tradition, see Rosen (2010).

body's very nature ... He must, therefore, possess all the parts of philosophy: the logical, the physical and the ethical.³⁶

The partially autobiographical text *Prognosis* elaborates the picture of a society, medical society in particular, riven with rivalry and backstabbing, and adds the further accusation that fraudulent doctors who strive for success in society are driven by their ambition and jealousy to conspire against any genuine practitioner who comes along, slandering him, hounding him out of the city, or worse.³⁷

There is nothing here, of course, which is in any way specific to one particular period: the sense is a general one of ethical and intellectual decline – even though this sense is backed up by some extraordinarily vivid accounts of individual instances of rivalry and public confrontation, as well as of stupidity and intellectual incompetence. Again, none of this takes us very far from standard literary tropes of present-day corruption and decline, familiar from many another moralizing or satirical author.

Nor is there any sense, to counteract this, that Galen might – in spite of his close association with the emperor Marcus Aurelius, and *pace* Edward Gibbon – have discerned any positive aspect in the ‘spirit of his age’, that he might have thought of it as especially peaceful, prosperous, or well managed. Positive or negative remarks concerning the characters and behaviour of individual emperors (and other members of the imperial family) there are, but these remain just that: characterizations of a particular individual or of his or her effects on those around them, not in any sense broader reflections on the spirit of an age. It is not just that Galen has nothing elevated (on Gibbonian or other lines) to say about the age, considered in such political or cultural terms; he does not evince a negative or problematized account of it, in such terms, either. (One might think here of Dodds’ ‘age of anxiety’, or indeed more broadly of historical analyses which detect a cultural transition at this point, shifts or uncertainties related to the rise of Christianity, for example.)³⁸ Simply, any such a perspective is absent from his writings. An arguable exception is his account of the reign of Commodus, which, certainly, Galen characterizes as a reign of terror; but here, again, we are talking about his discussion of an individual tyrant and his behaviour, not any view of the age in a broader or more abstract sense. As for Galen’s attitude to Roman sovereignty, to the *pax Romana* in general, the most we can say, I think, is that he takes it as a fact of life, to be acknowledged and worked with

³⁶ *The Best Doctor is Also a Philosopher* 2–3.

³⁷ See especially *Prognosis* 1, 68–74 Nutton (XIV.601–4 K.), mentioning the case of Quintus, who was apparently expelled from Rome on a charge of having murdered his patients.

³⁸ Dodds (1965).

for practical purposes. If he makes an occasional remark, for example, about the extent of Roman rule, or about such-and-such a drug being imported from outside the *oikoumenē*, he seems to be speaking in purely factual or practical terms, to delineate actual geographical boundaries.³⁹ No sense arises from his work, either that things are well or badly governed on this dispensation or, indeed that things could be in any way imagined differently.

Again, we have the sense of an author culturally and mentally detached from his actual place and time – a time, indeed, that he is not concerned to delineate or characterize with any detail, other than the kind of detail provided by a range of standard moralizing clichés.

Galen on his own life and works

So, Galen appears in his own work as in a sense transcending his times – his oeuvre and his life's project existing in a classical Greek, perhaps better an atemporal realm, in which he hobnobs with the likes of Hippocrates – rather as he does, indeed, in many a later visual portrayal of him.

Yet, for all that, Galen is one of the most anecdotal and specific writers of antiquity, in the details he gives us of everyday, literary and intellectual life; and this applies too to his own autobiography. His two accounts of his own writings, indeed (which have been dubbed works of 'auto-bibliography') are – alongside the recently discovered account of his losses in the great fire of 192 CE, *Avoiding Distress* – amongst the most fascinating documents of the period, from the point of view of ancient biography and from that of ancient book culture.⁴⁰

³⁹ His remarks, considered in the previous chapter, about the prevalence of famine in rural areas 'amongst many of the peoples who are subject to Roman rule' (see 62–3 with nn. 53–4) could be read as critical of the economic and political status quo, but any such criticism is certainly not the point of those remarks, nor something made explicit. Other similar references to Roman rule seem straightforwardly neutral, intended simply to clarify points of nomenclature or translation, for example a reference to *silingnitis* and *semidalis* as the words used, 'by the Romans and almost all those over whom they rule', for the purest form of wheat or bread (*The Capacities of Foodstuffs* 1.2, 218 Helmreich, VI.483 K.), or another to the different measures in use 'before Roman power had been so widely extended' (*The Composition of Drugs according to Kind* 1.15, XIII.428–9 K.).

⁴⁰ For analysis of what these texts tell us not only about Galen's own practices, but about scholarship, libraries, book composition and book distribution in the ancient world more generally, see Singer (2019b).

There is, I think, a tension here – a tension between two different ways of chronicling or analysing one’s own work, and in the same process, of telling one’s own life story. On the one hand, the account is tied to individual, contingent datable events; on the other, what is being presented is not a narrative, but a curriculum, an order of instruction – an ideally interlocking system, in which the important thing is not the chronological order of the texts’ composition, but the fact that they permanently co-exist, in a perfect, perfectly cross-referrable, corpus.

The tension strikes us if we simply look at the series of chapter headings in *My Own Books*. Such titles as ‘works written during my first stay in Rome’, and the even more precise and contingent ‘books of my own composition which were given to me by certain parties on my return home’, sit alongside such titles as those of ch. 4, ‘works of anatomical science’, ch. 5, ‘books containing the activities and functions of the parts made apparent in anatomy’, ch. 6, ‘necessary study preliminary to the method of healing’, ch. 7, ‘works of therapeutics’, ch. 8: ‘works of prognostic science’. There is then a whole range of other such thematic chapter headings, including specific topics in philosophy (ch. 14: demonstration; ch. 15: ethics) and individual philosophical and medical authors (the Stoics, Epicurus, Erasistratus, Asclepiades). But those just cited, chapter headings 4–8, are particularly worthy of our attention. They indicate the way in which Galen organizes his works in an ideal paedagogic order, or order of instruction. For the student, the study of anatomy underlies that of physiology (‘activities and functions of the parts’), from which in turn one proceeds to the study ‘preliminary to the method of healing’ (which is, essentially, that of the physical composition of the body and the pathological changes that take place within it, thus including disease classification). From this one proceeds to the study of therapeutics proper, and so to prognosis (which focuses centrally on the study of the pulse and on that of crises and critical days, which we will revisit at some length in the next chapter).

As already indicated, this thematic organization of the corpus is not consistently followed. There is the partial chronological ordering of works already mentioned, especially in the early chapters of *My Own Books*; and the account of the Hippocratic commentaries in ch. 9, immediately following the ‘curriculum’ chapters (4–8) just summarized, digresses into an account of the original purpose, justification and intended readerships of the works in question, as well as the chronological order of their composition. And the rationale of composition, and in some cases of rewriting, of certain works is explained in terms of an original public argumentative context or of the original intended addressee, or sometimes the premature departure of this addressee. There are, moreover, a few ac-

tual titles of (lost) works which are tied to particular, more or less datable, events, although these are very much the exceptions.⁴¹

It should be noted, too, though the point cannot be explored here in detail, that there is a further tension: that between Galen's sense of the validity and solidity of his corpus as a paedagogic resource, and the repeated claims that he originally intended nothing for public distribution, that his works were distributed against his better judgement, and often written, again reluctantly, at the behest of friends or students.⁴²

There is, then, some toing and froing between a chronological and contingent account and a thematic one. But the thematic one dominates; and, more than that, the notion of an ideal order of medical instruction, of which Galen's own works are the ideal instantiation, is central to Galen's view of his works, far beyond the account given in *My Own Books*. There is, indeed, a work specifically entitled *The Order of My Own Books*, which again presents his works as constituting such a curriculum (although, in fact, *My Own Books* in several ways presents a clearer and fuller picture of this). But beyond these works of auto-bibliography, and indeed permeating his writings quite generally, we find a wealth of forward and backward references, which betoken the same fundamental Galenic sense of a stable and abiding corpus of his own works.

It will be worth our while to consider these cross-references in a bit more detail. What does it mean when an ancient author says, 'as we shall discuss in work X', or 'as was stated in work Y'? The obvious interpretation, from a modern perspective, might be a straightforward chronological one: work X has not yet been written, while work Y has. But this obvious interpretation may hide a more complex reality. Texts in the ancient world were, to a large extent, orally composed; technical medical treatises in particular may have an original context of oral instruction, of which the text which we have now is the written record or final version; texts could exist in a provisional form, distributed perhaps to a smaller inner circle, before reaching the stage of final 'publication' (itself not a straightforward concept in Graeco-Roman culture). Galen in fact gives us detailed evidence of all these processes, in the context of his own work.

41 Most notably, 'things said in public in the time of Pertinax', where, without further information, both the nature of the things said and the rationale for placing them under this particular heading must remain matters of speculation. Such a title as 'the discourse with Bacchides and Cyrus in the villa of Menarchus' is also one tied to a datable event, albeit only datable, presumably, to those in a small circle of acquaintances.

42 For analysis of Galen's self-presentation of his life and works, and of this apparently contradictory position, see Boudon-Millot (2009); Vegetti (2013): 31–52.

A forward reference to another text, of the form just mentioned, *could* also be taken as a reference to an existing work: it could be saying, in effect: we shall discuss this when we get to that point in the lecture course. At the very least, it indicates the existence of the work in outline, in planned form. Some of Galen's cross-references are ambiguous as to whether they indicate a particular work in which something has already been written, or rather define a separate subject area, the fact that this belongs to a different discussion. And, certainly – something that has provided a headache to those scholars who have struggled through this thorny terrain – the *chronological* picture arising from the totality of backward and forward cross-references is not a consistent one. Close analysis of all such references will lead to the conclusion that the same work is situated both in the past and in the future, with respect to a particular other work. The picture that emerges is, at the very least, one of texts existing in provisional form, and liable to constant updating (such cross-references can, of course, easily be added in the process of fairly superficial revision). One might, more strongly, be tempted to say that chronological future and past are not what are centrally at issue in such references; rather, these are a set of internal cross-references to a body of work conceived as existing trans-temporally.

And yet, linear biography is important too. Both in *My Own Books* and elsewhere, most notably in *Prognosis, Affections and Errors of the Soul* and – in relation to his anatomical education – *Anatomical Procedures*, Galen outlines the crucial moments and phases of his early education, in both philosophy and medicine. In his conception of his own biography, those developmental phases are essential in order, in a sense, to justify what follows. And there is a point to be considered here, perhaps also of wider interest for the construction of ancient biographies, and certainly of potential relevance to our discussion in the previous chapter of the conceptual division of life spans. For – whether by chance or not – at least two of the moments that Galen identifies as crucial turning-points in his own development coincide with ends of hebdomads.

It is on the completion of his fourteenth year, Galen says, that he 'began to attend the lectures of philosophers of my home city'.⁴³ That may indeed – as indicated by our previous discussion – be the normal age at which such 'secondary', or more specialized, school education would be expected to begin; in any case, it is one of the few actual chronological ages that Galen mentions in relation to his own biography. If we move, then, to the end of the fourth hebdomad, the completion of his 28th year, we already noted, in the previous chapter, that Galen marks this out as a turning-point in terms of his own personal health. But

⁴³ *Affections and Errors* 1.8, 28 De Boer (V.41 K.).

it coincides with a turning-point in his career, too. At the end of his 28th year, Galen had just finished a study tour, to Smyrna, Corinth and Alexandria, during which he acquired the basics of his anatomical and medical knowledge. At this point he returned to his home town and received his first appointment, as official doctor to the gladiators. The coincidence between the date of this appointment and the turning-point in his health has been noted in previous scholarship.⁴⁴ For it is not just his adoption of a more appropriate health regime that Galen dates to this moment; it is also a dramatic intervention by his patron god, Asclepius, who saved him from a potentially fatal abscess.⁴⁵

What has not been noted, however, is the coincidence between *both* these events – the completion of studies and commencement of career, on the one hand, and the divine intervention and transformation of health, on the other – with that precise hebdomadic moment, the end of his 28th year.

Other transitions and developments in Galen's life, on his own account, are in general not linked with precise ages or dates, and where they are, the significance is less obvious than that of the ages considered above. It is, however, worth noting a couple of events which Galen does tie to a particular age. Galen dates his return to Rome to the end of his 37th year. That is simply a contingent date, of no theoretical significance; but it is important to note what is being emphasized here. Galen has reached the age of maturity; the context of his mention of his 37th year is the reference to – and implied apology for – a number of works written *before* that, at a much earlier date, by implication at an age of immaturity. Even more specifically, he connects the limitations of a particular work with the fact that he was 'still quite young, in my 34th year', when he wrote it. It may be an overreading to insist on the hebdomadic date of 35 as in some way implied here, between Galen's period of still imperfectly educated adulthood and that of his full intellectual maturity. But certainly some such boundary is being drawn between works produced at the earlier periods, before the beginning of his second stay at Rome, and those which follow.

And – in a way related to both that point and one considered in the previous chapter, namely the greater vagueness that inevitably attends the division of life-spans in their *later*, as opposed to *earlier* phases – when we move into later phases of Galen's life and literary output, there are no such clear markers or watershed moments. What we know of the relative date of Galen's works – those earlier ones aside – is what can be deduced on the (problematic, as already dis-

⁴⁴ Pietrobelli (2013): 117.

⁴⁵ *My Own Books* 3, 142 Boudon-Millot (XIX.18–19 K.); cf. *Bloodletting against Erasistratus* 4 (XI.314–15 K.).

cussed) basis of cross-references, on the one hand, and on that of very occasional references to datable or roughly datable events – Marcus Aurelius’ absence from Rome (169–76), the fire in the Roman forum (192), the Antonine plague (much less definite) – on the other. The entire period from his late thirties onward, is presented, in an undifferentiated way, as that of his intellectual and medical maturity.

And this is the period of the vast majority of his writings. There is a point of importance to be considered here – a crucial point of difference, indeed, between this ancient approach to literary or intellectual biography and those which tend to dominate in modern scholarship. For what is *not* present, either explicitly or by implication, in Galen’s autobiography or auto-bibliography is a *developmental* account of his works. Modern scholarship is constantly exercised to produce such accounts, to find internal, and where possible external, justification for it in the works of an author. Galenic scholarship has been far from immune from the tendency. And such development accounts are remarkably resistant to counter-arguments or methodological criticisms pointing to either the poverty of evidence supporting them or the strong risk of circularity that they run.⁴⁶

Of course, it is open to modern scholars to argue for such developmental differences within the work of an author, if and when they find plausible evidence for it. Apart from the contingent fact, however, that the overwhelming majority of Galen’s works were written after the age of 40, we should also consider, as it were, the more methodological or ideological consideration: such a developmental analysis is foreign to the perceptions of the ancient literary or intellectual biography itself. Apart from the few half-apologies for slightly immature works of his youth, already mentioned, Galen very rarely gives an example of a scientific or philosophical question on which he has actually changed his mind.⁴⁷ Otherwise, there is nothing that suggests that the body of work should be understood – at least in Galen’s own self-conception – other than as a coherent system. In

⁴⁶ One thinks here of the methodological problems that attend developmental accounts of Plato’s work. In the case of Galen, a strong developmental account was first advanced by Moraux (1984), focussing on *The Soul’s Dependence on the Body* as the late culmination of his philosophical thought on the soul. Although, as I have argued elsewhere (2013), internal evidence of a significant difference in position between this work and others is at least highly questionable, and external evidence of its extreme lateness in Galen’s output is non-existent, the view of this text as ‘late’, or even as written towards the end of Galen’s life, has become firmly lodged in modern scholarship.

⁴⁷ Such a case – perhaps unique – is his account, in *The Shaping of the Embryo* (3, 66 Nickel, IV.663–4 K.) of his change of view on the order of formation of organs in the embryo since he wrote his earlier work, *Semen*.

terms of the planning and conceptualization of later work, equally, there is nothing that suggests the notion of a career path involving fundamental differences in direction or intellectual emphasis or interest over time.⁴⁸

Let me add, as a coda, a final consideration of some relevance to both the questions just considered, that of the chronological vagueness of Galen's autobiographical remarks about his own later life, and that of the possibility or not of dating his works sequentially. This final consideration concerns the plague, already touched on the previous chapter. On the one hand, we saw how his references to it are strikingly imprecise and open-ended (above, pp. 61–2): we have the sense of an ongoing event, or one which even if concluded had no clear or recorded moment of its ending. Such writing seems, in a way, of a piece with what has been said above about the absence of clear defining moments in Galen's later, as opposed to his earlier and formative, life. If the plague has definitively come to an end in Galen's lifetime, he does not mention that, nor regard that ending as a moment of significance or watershed in his own later life – let alone give us some other identifiable external event, by which that moment could be fixed.

It is rather paradoxical, then, that the plague has sometimes been claimed in previous scholarship as just such a watershed, to be used to assist in the dating of Galen's works, since it is, in fact, one of the few events external to his own life and medical practice that Galen *does* mention. That is: by using the traditional end date of the Antonine plague in 180 CE, in conjunction with Galen's few references to it as current or recent, scholars hoped to provide an approximate date, or more often a *terminus post quem*, for the works in which those references occur.⁴⁹ Since, however, those references themselves are in several cases vague in their temporality, their 'now' indeterminate between present and recent past, and since, moreover, modern scholarship has moved away from that

48 Of course, that is not to say that Galen has no concept of *finding more time* for particular projects at different times, nor indeed to say that a different focus or range of intellectual interests may arise from the concentration on such projects. In this context, we may – albeit speculatively – point to the ethical works, and also much of the pharmacological work, and perhaps some of the Hippocratic commentaries, as being a late-life project, for which time was found after the completion of the works of core curriculum, and perhaps even after retirement. (Relevant here is Galen's remark that he will complete his project of Hippocratic commentary writing, 'if I live', *The Order of My Own Books* 3, 98 Boudon-Millot (XIX.57 K.), although the date of this remark is not certain.) It should, however, be emphasized that such a periodization is indeed speculative, and that the crucial difference between these works and those of the core curriculum remains precisely that – the thematic or conceptual one.

49 See Bardong (1942), drawing on the earlier work of J. Ilberg.

clear end date of 180, such use of the plague as a clear demarcator for biographical or bibliographical purposes seems doomed.⁵⁰

We are left, then, with the former perception, that Galen's writing about the plague contributes to the unstructured, open-ended nature of his chronicling of the events of his mature life, largely devoid of clear markers or turning-points.

A parallel biography: Porphyry's *Life of Plotinus*

Our focus in this account of ancient intellectual bio-bibliography has been on Galen. This has been determined partly by reasons of space, and partly by the paucity of other closely parallel accounts – accounts, that is, from a similar period, which also discuss an intellectual's life history, and literary output, in detail. One such parallel, however, does suggest itself – that of Porphyry's *Life of Plotinus*, and it may be worth pointing to some analogies and disanalogies.

Of course, further such analogies could be made with a range of other biographical writings of the imperial period; any such broad survey is beyond my scope here. One thinks in particular of Plutarch's parallel-lives project, which is at once chronologically contingent and trans-temporal in its nature. It is hoped, however, that the case study here offered of Galenic autobiography, in conjunction with the parallel case of Porphyry, highlights some significant trends, and may be suggestive for future directions.⁵¹

Here, too, I shall argue, we find a tension between a contingent historiography, on the one hand, which ties the events and the writings of the subject's life to particular events, encounters and regnal periods, as well as providing contextual details of the original circumstances and peculiar context of a work's composition, preparation, or circulation, and a transtemporal one, on the other hand, considering the literary outcome of these contingent events and encounters as a solid and thematically interlocking corpus, communicating beyond its own time and, indeed, of eternal value.

50 On both the chronology of the plague and Galen's references to it, see Flemming (2019), who remarks that 'outbreaks certainly continued ... for decades thereafter' [sc., after the outbreaks of the 160s], and that the plague remains 'a feature of his writing at least into the 190s' (224).

51 Temporal attitudes in a range of ancient authors are explored in de Jong and Nünlist (2007). In his account of Philostratus' temporal narratives, Whitmarsh (2007) also suggests a fundamental dichotomy, namely one between 'regular' and 'paradigmatic' time (the former strictly chronological, the latter isolating especially important events). Such a dichotomy, while distinct from that which I suggest here in my analysis of Galen and Porphyry, perhaps functions in a somewhat parallel manner in the organization of and approach to events.

We may also point to some other common features of the ancient biographical project, especially in the way that divine favour intrudes into the narratives – albeit in very different contexts in the two cases – again in a sense taking us beyond normal time. Just as Asclepius' intervention shows his favour to the subject in Galen's own account of his early life, in the context of a delivery from death, so divine favour is shown to Plotinus by (among other things) the sudden appearance and disappearance of a snake, which by contrast indicates his auspicious delivery *to* death. (There is of course a disanalogy here too, both because the narration of a life by a disciple gives much greater scope for hagiography, and because Plotinus is in the nature of his perceived philosophical persona closer to the divine and a more likely subject for such theologically-based incidents.)

We encounter some difficulties at the outset. Plotinus himself is presented as, for philosophical reasons, resistant to the discussion of his own biography, especially details of birth and early life, including his precise birthday and birth date. (As if to counteract this reluctance, Porphyry seems exercised to produce a series of precise dates for moments in the master's life – his birth, his settling in Rome, his first writings.) Moreover, Plotinus, as a profoundly *atypical* student of philosophy, and, more generally, exemplar of Greek culture, bypasses the normal earlier developmental stages, and is certainly not undertaking philosophical studies at the age of 14; it seems dubious, too, whether any particular significance is to be attached to the specification of the 28th year as that in which Porphyry says that he *did* first turn to philosophy.

There are, I would suggest, just two main parallels between the presentation of Plotinus by Porphyry and Galen's self-presentation; but they are significant. First, Plotinus – even more so than Galen – goes through a variety of life experiences, travels and studies, and has reached late adulthood, before he writes anything. This is a biographical world where maturity is valued; there is no role for precocious genius. Secondly, and relatedly, his reluctance to write, the sense that he has to be persuaded to do so in some ways against his better judgement, is emphasized – emphasized by Porphyry in his account of Plotinus even more strongly than it is by Galen in his own case. The reasons for the reluctance are somewhat different within the two biographies, but there is a connection in both cases to the risks attendant on sending one's thoughts or writings into the world to be distorted and misunderstood.

Most crucially, Plotinus writes – or rather dictates – nothing before the age of maturity, and there is little sense that one should look for an internal development to the writings. Porphyry recounts that Plotinus moved to Rome at the age of forty, after his years of study with Ammonius and his expedition eastwards in the army of the emperor Gordian, and that for ten years he lectured

and communicated within a small circle while writing nothing. He thus wrote his first essays around the age of 50; but even when Porphyry arrived nine years later, he had only written the first 21.

When it comes to the account of those writings themselves, it is indeed interesting to compare the interplay of chronological and thematic considerations here with that found in Galen. At their first mention in the *Life* (4–6), Porphyry lays out the writings chronologically, adding such attendant background considerations as Porphyry’s presence or absence at the time, and the ruling emperor; again we get, as with Galen, a sense of the occasional and context-specific nature of their original composition. Yet, as is well known, Porphyry had the responsibility for the edition of Plotinus’ works, whereby he organized them, on thematic lines, into the ‘Enneads’ known to us today, in a way which obscures both relative chronology and original context. And there is no suggestion in the *Life* that such a chronology should be regarded as significant for *philosophical content*. Porphyry does, however, make a division into three phases, which differ in terms rather of *strength of capacity* – according to whether Plotinus was in his early manhood, his vigorous prime, or a state of bodily decline. The first essays were written ‘in his first life stage (*hēlikia*)’, the second, main set when he was ‘in his prime’, the last when he was ‘worn down by his body’ (6).

The mention of the ‘first life stage’ and ‘prime’ here are striking, and take us back to the discussion of the previous chapter. Yet we observe that their appearance here cannot correspond to any normal understanding of human biology. No traditional, let alone medical, division of life stages of the sort that we have considered would have a man entering the prime at the age of 59; and the terminology of ‘first life stage’ for the ten years before that is also, in normal terms, bizarre. What we seem to have is a philosophically specific – perhaps even Plotinus-specific – notion of the age of maturity. It is, however, possible to relate it to a remark Galen makes, about the psychic powers continuing or increasing in excellence at a later period, while the physical ones are in decline (see above, p. 50 with n. 35). The last few years of Plotinus’ life, however, are considered ones of a partial intellectual deterioration.

But in spite of this acknowledgement of a bodily and intellectual increase and diminution in energy, what is emphasized, again, is the maturity acquired *before* the writing project, on the one hand, and the coherence, the fundamentally atemporal nature, of the written work, on the other.

The tension between a chronological account, beset with contingent details of emperors, students, personal events and encounters, and physical challenges, and the atemporal solidity – the eternal validity – of the corpus, runs through the two works, Galen’s autobiography and Plotinus’ biography, in different

ways. In both, atemporality dominates – albeit an atemporality with the counterpoint of a series of interfering, contingent events. Both manifest certain features of the conception and patterning of an intellectual's life which are strikingly different from their modern counterparts.