

THESSALUS ASTROLOGUS

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FORTUNA

There were in antiquity two famous physicians named Thessalus. The one was a Coan, the son of Hippocrates himself, and the other, a native of Tralles, flourished in Rome under Nero and founded the Methodic School so harshly and justly condemned by Galen (see H. Diller in *RE* VI A, 1 [1936], 165-182). Sometime after Galen — perhaps in the third or fourth century — a letter on astrological botany addressed to Caesar Augustus (in the Greek version) or to Germanicus Claudius (in the Latin translation) was forged on the model of Thessalus of Tralles' letter to Nero announcing his foundation of a *νέα αἰθρσις*, from which some excerpts are given by Galen (*Meth. med.* I 2 = X 7-8 ed. Kühn). This forged letter contains four sections: I. an introduction in which is given the personal history of Thessalus (Ia), and a dialogue between Thessalus and an apparition of Asclepius (Ib); II. a treatise on twelve zodiacal plants with recipes for their pharmacological uses; III. a similar treatise on seven planetary plants; and IV. an epilogue.

Several versions of this text are known in Greek:

A. There is no complete manuscript of this version, but a codex in Madrid (Bibl. Nac. 4631), copied by Constantine Lascaris at Messena in 1474, contains part I and

part II (to the middle of Cancer), ascribed to Harpocraton. This fragment has been published incompletely by C. Graux (*RPh*, NS 2, 1878, 65-77), and completely by P. Boudreaux (*Catalogus Codicum Astrologorum Graecorum* [henceforth *CCAG*] 8, 3, Bruxellis 1912, 134-143). This version, along with all other available Greek versions and Latin translations, has also been published by H.-V. Friedrich, *Thessalos von Tralles, Beiträge zur Klassischen Philologie* 28, Meisenheim am Glan 1968.

B. A shortened version of the text exists in Greek in two recensions:

B 1. A version containing Ib and II-IV is ascribed to Hermes Trismegistus. It was partially edited by C. F. Baehr in *Joannis Laurentii Philadelpheni Lydi De mensibus*, ed. G. Roether, Lipsiae et Darmstadii 1827, pp. 311-331, and in its entirety by P. Boudreaux (*CCAG* 8, 3, pp. 137-165) and by Friedrich.

B 2. A contaminated version containing Ib and II-IV, but inserting another text on planetary plants ascribed to Hermes Trismegistus after III. The text of III-IV was published by Cardinal Pitra (*Analecta Sacra et Classica*, vol. 5, Paris-Rome 1888, pt. 2, pp. 279-284), and the whole text by Boudreaux and Friedrich.

There is also at Munich a contaminated manuscript (Monac. gr. 542) of II published by Boudreaux and Friedrich, and a fragment

of III in a manuscript in London (British Museum, Royal ms. 16. C. II) published by M. H. Thomson (*Textes grecs inédits relatifs aux plantes*, Paris 1955, pp. 66-73) and by Friedrich.

The influence of the Greek text was not great. Aëtius quotes as from Orpheus (fr. 325-326 Kern; see M. Wellmann, *SPAW*, 1911, 838) some passages that are interpolated into Thessalus' text, but do not form part of the original. But the Latin translator of the *Coeranides* in 1169 knew the treatise as Thessalus' (L. Delatte, *Textes latins et vieux français relatifs aux Cyranides*, Liège-Paris 1942, p. 12), as did also the fourteenth century scribe of Vat. gr. 1144 (see P. Boudreaux in *Mél. d'arch. et d'hist.* 26, 1906, 351 and *CCAG* 8, 3, p. 134).

Additional Bibliography:

F. Cumont, "Écrits hermétiques II. Le médecin Thessalus et les plantes astrales d'Hermès Trismégiste", *RPh*, NS 42, 1918, 85-108; A. D. Nock, *Conversion*, Oxford 1933, pp. 108-111; A. Delatte, *Herbarius*, 2nd ed., Liège-Paris 1938, *passim*. A. J. Festugière, *La révélation d'Hermès Trismégiste*, vol. 1, 2nd ed., Paris 1950, pp. 56-59 and 143-155 (repeating much of his "L'expérience religieuse du médecin Thessalos", *Rev. Bibl.* 48, 1939, 45-77); idem, *Hermétisme et mystique païenne*, Paris 1967, pp. 141-180.

I. *De virtutibus herbarum*

TRANSLATIONS

1. ANONYMUS A

There are three Latin translations of Thessalus; the first is titled *Liber Thessali philosophi de virtutibus herbarum XVIII numero*. This is an anonymous translation of version A of the Greek made before the fourteenth century; the ascription of this translation to Raymond Lull or his followers by E. Meyer and V. Rose has little to recommend it (see Delatte, *Textes latins*, p. 5, and Cumont, *CCAG* 8, 4, p. 259, fn. 1). It was used in Padua by Jacobus de Dondis (1295-1359) in his *Aggregator* (see L. Thorndike, *Magic and Experimental Science*, vol. 2, p. 234), by Benedetto Rinio in his *Liber de*

simplicibus which he began at Venice in 1415 (in Marc. lat. VI 59 (2548); see I. Morelli, *Bibliotheca Manuscripta Graeca et Latina*, vol. 1, Bassani 1802, pp. 399-400, and J. Valentinelli, *Bibliotheca Manuscripta ad S. Marci Venetiarum*, vol. 5, Venetiis 1872, p. 63), and by Hieronymus Bonipartus in his (apparently non-extant) *Empirica* (see I. P. Tomasinus, *Bibliothecae Patavinae Manuscriptae Publicae et Privatae*, Utini 1639, pp. 137 and 141). There was also at least one manuscript of Thessalus' work in the library of Ioannes Rhodius of Padua in 1639 (see Tomasinus, p. 141), but we do not know its present location.

In the following excerpts the bracketed Roman numerals refer to the four sections into which the treatise was divided above.

[I]. [*Inc.*]: Thessalus philosophus Germanico Claudio regi et deo eterno salutem et amorem. O Caesar venerabilis, multis intromittentibus se in vita sua tradere multa aliena et ignota et nemine potente promissa ad finem perducere . . . / . . . et <hoc> quidem accidit propter diversam influentiam a diis secundum diversa loca et tempora.

[II]. Manifestum est, quod omnium stellarum est dominus et rex Sol . . . / . . . illud enim malagma mollificat dura apostemata et dislocatas iuncturas stringit.

[III]. De cichorea, que et girasol dicitur. Herba Solis, que heliotropium dicitur et girasol . . . / . . . confice sicca cum humidis et utere.

[IV]. Habes ergo in brevi tractatu materiam tibi firme traditam cuiusque passionis . . . / . . . [*Expl.*]: istis autem a deo tibi traditis age semper gratias deo et illa, que audivisti, de levi sequeris in operationibus tuis. amplius quesivi a sacerdote . . . verum tamen rogabam ipsum, ut veniret mecum, ut probaremus simul virtutes herbarum traditarum a deo, postquam venerit tempus collectionis. Explicit liber Thessali philosophi de virtutibus 19 herbarum.

Manuscripts:

(photo) Montpellier, Faculté de Médecine 277, s. XIV, ff. 31-35v (J. Corbett, *Catalogue des manuscrits alchimiques latins*, vol. 2, Bruxelles 1951, pp. 77-85).

Vaticanus lat. 11423, s. XV, ff. 36-43v and 48-56 (J. Ruyschaert, *Codices Vaticani*

Latini. Codices 11414-11709, In Bibliotheca Vaticana 1959, pp. 11-12).

(?) Berlin, Staatsbibliothek, Lat. fol. 573, f. 22 (Thorndike, vol. 2, p. 234, fn. 1; this manuscript cannot be verified. The Erfurt manuscript mentioned by Thorndike contains only Flaccus Africanus and not Thessalus).

Editions :

F. Cumont, *CCAG* 8, 4, Bruxellis 1922, pp. 253-262 (incomplete).

Friedrich, pp. 46-271 (divided into columns for the several versions).

2. ANONYMUS B

Liber secretorum Thessali (MS : Texili) de virtutibus 12 herbarum secundum influentiam, quam recipiunt a 12 caelestibus signis. Another anonymous translation of version A of the Greek made in or before the fifteenth century; part I is omitted.

[II]. [*Inc.*]: Et primum de collectione salviae secundum influentiam, quam recipit a Sole ipso existente in Ariete . . . / . . . sed de radice eius conficitur < . . . >. Explicit liber Thessali (MS : Texili) de proprietatibus 12 herbarum secundum influentiam, quam recipiunt a 12 signis caelestibus.

[III]. Incipit liber secundus Thessali (MS : Texili) de VII herbis cum earum proprietatibus secundum influentiam, quam recipiunt a VII planetis. Capitulum, in quo docetur tempus et modus collectionis predictarum herbarum. Superius in libro primo ostensum est tempus . . . De proprietatibus heliotropii id est girasolis (MS : mirasolis) secundum influentiam, quam recipit a Sole . . . / . . . confice sicca cum humidis et utere. Explicit liber secundus Thessali (MS : Tesili).

[IV]. Incipit quaedam admonitio Thessali (MS : Tesili). Habes igitur in hoc meo brevi tractatu medicinas tibi firme traditas cuiuslibet passionis . . . / . . . Inquit sacerdos : his autem omnibus a deo traditis age sibi grates semper et devote, quoniam de levi consequi poteris, que audivisti, in operibus tuis. Explicit secunda pars, in qua concludit auctor opus suum. Amplius quesivi a sacerdote . . . rogavi tamen ipsum, ut veniret ad probandum mecum virtutem herba-

rum a deo mihi traditarum. et postquam advenit tempus colligendi herbas, veni in Alexandriam . . . [*Expl.*]: quidam tamen ignorantes virtutem herbarum, que tradite erant per librum, reprehendebant nescientes finem, sed <postquam> tempus advenit, probavi coram eis, sicut promisi, et certificati sunt. Explicit liber secundus cum prooemio secretorum Thessali (MS : Tesili).

Manuscripts :

(photo) Wien, Nationalbibliothek, Lat. 3124, s. XV, ff. 49v-53 (*Tabulae codicum manuscriptorum*, vol. 2, Vindobonae 1868, p. 208). On f. 50v in the margin Albertus Magnus is quoted.

Edition :

Friedrich, pp. 67-272.

Doubtful edition :

J. B. Gesner (*Scriptores rei rusticae*, 2nd ed., Leipzig 1773, vol. 1, pp. LI-LII) notes an *As (Ars?) veterum nonnullorum, ut et mediae vergentisque aetatis scriptorum fere metricorum et medicorum, de re herbaria videlicet* by Andreas Rivinus (Lipsiae 1655), who also produced the first edition of the 1169 translation of the *Coeranides* (Lipsiae 1638; reprinted Frankfurt 1681). This volume, which Gesner claims to have seen, contained Columella, *Cultus horti*; Palladius, *De insitione*; Walafridus Strabo, *Hortulus*, with Septimius Severus, *Moretum*; Marcus, *De viribus herbarum*; anonymous Greek, *De facultatibus plantarum quarundam epos*; "Thessali mysterium ad Hermen, de XII herbis per XII signa zodiaci et de VII aliis secundum VII planetas"; Alexander, *De VII herbarum virtutibus*; Iohannes Mediolanensis, *Schola Salernitana*; *Thesaurus pauperum methodici Barb.*; Apuleius, *De nominibus et medicaminibus herbarum*; Antonius Musa, *De betonica*; and Vettius Valens, *De planetarum naturis, et quibus praesint in regno minerali, vegetabili et animali*. I have not been able to locate a copy of this book, but the occurrence of the name of the author, Thessalus, and the juxtaposition of Alexander's work as in both the Montpellier and the Wien manuscripts indicate that this was Anonymus A or Anonymus B, despite the fact that Rivinus says that the works in the book were published previously, which points to Anonymus C.

3. ANONYMUS C

Herbarum singulorum signorum zodiaci demonstratio necnon et stellarum errantium quae quid possit. An anonymous translation of version B 1 of the Greek made before 1528.

[II]. [*Inc.*]: Arietis eleisphacus. Prima herba eleisphacus multas virtutes habet . . . / . . . haec enim et sanat et purgat ulcera.

[III]. Manifestata est singulorum signorum herbarum virtus; necessariam duxi et singularum stellarum herbas tradere. Virtutes herbarum uniuscuiusque septem planetarum. Solis heliotropion . . . / . . . sicca humectis commisceas et uteris.

[IV]. Habes in conscriptione bene traditas tibi omnium passionum curas . . . / . . . [*Expl.*]: Cum ergo tanta me deus praeceptis suis docuisset, gratias agebam tam facili impetratione me omnem curam recepisse. percontabar autem . . . hi si prolixitatem temporis acceperint, nec deo ipsi parcent.

Editions:

Claudii Galeni Pergameni liber de plenitudine, In vico Iacobeo apud Christianum Wechel sub scuto Basileiensi M. D. XXVIII, ff. 35-42, of which I have seen the copy in the National Library of Medicine in Bethesda, Maryland (no. 1917 in the catalogue of sixteenth century printed books in that library by R. J. Durling). The contents of Wechel's edition are: part I, Galen, *De plenitudine*, ff. 1-13; Polybus, *De salubri victus ratione privatorum*, ff. 13v-14v; Apuleius, *De herbarum virtutibus*, ff. 15-34v; *Herbarum singulorum signorum zodiaci demonstratio* (= Thessalus), ff. 35-42 (Index on ff. 40v-42); Pliny, *Ad amicos de medicina*, f. 42v; and part II, Antonius Benivenius, *De abditis nonnullis ac mirandis morborum et sanationum causis*, ff. 1-21v.

Friedrich, pp. 72-273.