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GALEN AND THE PARCHMENT CODEX:
A NOTE ON THE TEXT OF *DE INDOLENTIA* 33

The publication in 2007 of a manuscript containing a complete text of Galen's *De indolentia* (Περὶ ἀλυπίας) has stimulated a renewed interest in Galen as a source for Roman book culture. Galen's reflections on the loss of his possessions in the fire of 192 CE include a number of insights about the physical forms of books and the process of composition and editing. One passage in the newly discovered text (*De indolentia* 33) is especially important for the discussion of the early history of the codex format. It was originally published in the following way:

Τούτων <δὲ> τῶν φαρμάκων πάντων αἱ γραφαὶ κατὰ δύο διφθέρας πυκτὰς ἐφυλάττοντο μετὰ πάσης ἀσφαλείας ἄστινας τῶν κληρονομησάντων τις αὐτὸς φίλτατος ὢν ἐμοὶ μήτε αἰτηθεὶς αὐτομάτως ἔδωκεν.¹

The editors translated the passage: "Les recettes de tous ces remèdes étaient conservées avec tout le soin voulu sur deux carnets de parchemin que l'un des héritiers qui se trouvait

1. Boudon-Millot 2007, 93.

lui-même m’être très attaché me donna spontanément sans que je lui aie demandé.”² The relevant phrase for my purposes is δύο διφθέρας πικτάς. In a study that appeared in 2010, Matthew Nicholls translated these words as “two parchment codices,” a rather more robust understanding than “deux carnets de parchemin.” Nicholls also noted that “these were more than just low-status notebooks: they were highly prized objects whose provenance and contents moved Galen to describe them carefully among his list of treasured possessions lost in the fire.”³ Whether we are dealing here with proper parchment codices or with less formal collections of notes is a matter of considerable interest in the early history of the codex. Given the sparsity of references to the codex format in the surviving literature of the second century, a description of high-value codices by a knowledgeable author such as Galen would be quite important.⁴ The matter has been further complicated by the fact that one of the words in question has been emended in more recent editions of the text.

The edition of Kotzia and Sotiroudis that appeared in 2010 printed the same words as the original edition, δύο διφθέρας πικτάς. In the Budé edition of Boudon-Millot, Jouanna, and Pietrobelli (also published in 2010), the text was emended to read δύο διφθέρας π<τ>υκτάς. This emendation was accepted in the same form in the editions of Garofalo and Lami (2012), Vegetti (2013), and Brodersen (2015). The brackets have been dropped altogether in the most recent edition of Polemis and Xenophontos (2023): δύο διφθέρας πικτάς.⁵

On the one hand, an emendation here makes good sense. With the addition of a single letter, the editors of the Budé edition have removed awkwardness by changing the noun πικτάς to the adjective πικτάς.⁶ At the same time, the proposed change results in a word from the πικτ- stem (words related to folding) rather than the πικτ- stem (words generally related to boxing and fists), an adjustment that appears to make sense, given the context. And the emendation is palaeographically plausible, as the loss of τ after π is only a small visual difference in some Greek scripts.⁷

On the other hand, an emendation at this point in the text is perhaps surprising, given the presence of a very similar turn of phrase in *De compositione medicamentorum secundum locos* 12.423, in which Galen describes a medical recipe found ἐν πικτίδι

2. Shortly after the initial publication, Pier Luigi Tucci provided an English translation of this passage: “The recipes of all these remedies were collected with all the necessary care in two folders of parchment that one of his heirs, who happened to be very attached to me, gave me spontaneously as a gift, without me having asked for them” (Tucci 2008, 146).

3. Nicholls 2010, 380. As Nicholls notes, the value of the objects in this case stems from the value of the recipes themselves. That they were “preserved with great care” (ἐφυλάττοντο μετὰ πάσης ἀσφαλείας) seems to indicate that the physical form of the recipes reflected this value. Nicholls elsewhere refers to the δύο διφθέρας πικτάς as “stoutly bound parchment codices” (p. 382).

4. At *De indolentia* 34 and 35, Galen uses the single word διφθέραι to describe a similar collection of medical recipes that once belonged to a certain physician called Eumenes. At *De indolentia* 37, Galen appears to refer to both the collection of Eumenes and the δύο διφθέρας πικτάς collectively as αἱ διφθέραι πᾶσαι. Thus, the word διφθέραι by itself seems to refer to the same physical form as πικταὶ διφθέραι. It is also notable that Galen describes the διφθέραι of Eumenes as sufficiently valuable to be passed on as an inheritance.

5. I am aware of only two dissents from this emendation, Lorusso 2011 and Soldati 2017.

6. An adjectival form of the word (πικτός, -ά, -όν) seems not to exist.

7. In the manuscript that preserves *De indolentia* (Vlatadon 14), however, the combination of τ after π is very distinctive, with the τ rising high above the upper notational line (see, for instance, fol. 14v, lines 11 and 18). The hypothetical loss of the τ would have been more likely to occur at a stage when the text was copied in majuscules.

διφθέρα (or, in some manuscripts, ἐν πικτῆ διφθέρα).⁸ In fact, in a lengthy note defending the emendation to π<τ>υκτάς in *De indolentia*, the editors of the Budé edition also proposed to emend the reference in *De compositione medicamentorum secundum locos* as well: “πυκτίδι (lege πυκτίδι) διφθέρα.”⁹ The case here is weaker, as the word πυκτίς is not, to the best of my knowledge, otherwise attested.¹⁰ Also, the need to apply the same emendation to two passages with very different transmission histories signals that we should be cautious.

The emendation is thus intelligent, though not without problems. But is emendation actually *necessary* here? The point is worth debating because the emendation results in a phrase that can be most literally rendered as “folded parchments.” Such an understanding can still be taken to refer to codices in an oblique way.¹¹ Some interpreters, however, have leaned heavily on the emendation to argue that Galen refers to loose (unbound) pieces of folded parchment. For instance, the book historian Germaine Warkentin has emphasized “the physical structure implied by the key term πυκτάς ‘folded,’” and argued as follows:

The translators of *De Indolentia* have provided various equivalents for the specific Greek words Galen uses to describe his recipes: δύο διφθέρας πυκτάς (‘duo diphtheras ptuktas’). The dictionary definition is not controversial: ‘two parchments folded’. . . . [F]rom a codicological perspective the lost recipes were not codices, *livres*, or leather folders, they were simple folded notes of parchment. In an age that was only just conquering the lay-out of a codex, to say nothing of binding it, they would have been bundled parchments, possibly tied as was the custom with a *linum* or thread.¹²

I would suggest that before reading too deeply into the significance of the (emended) term πυκτός, we give the actual manuscript reading of διφθέρας πυκτάς another chance. I believe a plausible case can be made that διφθέραι πυκταί (and διφθέραι πυκτίδες) could be used to describe bound parchment codices.

The combination of any of the terms under consideration is apparently quite rare in surviving Greek literature. A *TLG* search for πυκτ and διφθε in a ten-word proximity turns up only the reference to the emended text of *De indolentia*. A search for πυκτ and διφθε under the same conditions yields the reference to πυκτίδι διφθέρα in Kühn’s edition of Galen’s *De compositione medicamentorum secundum locos* 12.423 and only one additional reference, which is very late but perhaps still informative—a letter of Michael

8. Kühn (1826, 423) prints ἐκ πυκτίδι διφθέρα. Presumably the ἐκ is simply a printing error for an intended ἐν, but the absence of a proper critical edition prevents a full investigation. Of the three manuscripts I was able to consult, I can report the following readings: Biblioteca Apostolica Vaticana Pal.gr. 54 (fol. 112v): ἐν πικτῆ διφθέρα, Bibliothèque nationale de France grec 2155 (fol. 7r): ἐν πικτῆ διφθέρα, and Biblioteca Medicea Laurenziana Plut. 75.17 (fol. 23v): ἐν πυκτίδι διφθέρα.

9. Boudon-Millot, Jouanna, and Pietrobelli 2010, 103–5.

10. The word is not found in the *TLG*, though it is interesting to note that as a part of Herodianus’ discussion of words beginning with πτυ-, πυκτίς and πυκτίον occur, both without the first *tau* and both glossed as τὸ βιβλίον (in the edition of Boissonade 1819, 117).

11. The editors of the Budé edition, even with the emended text, opt for understanding both the phrase in *De indolentia* and the phrase in *De comp. med. sec. loc.* as references to codices, specifying only that they were not intended for publication: “Il est manifeste que les deux grandes collections de recettes de médicaments dont Galien est entré en possession sont des codices de parchemin, l’une étant en deux tomes, l’autre en un seul. . . . Certes, il ne s’agit pas d’ouvrages qui étaient destinés à la publication” (Boudon-Millot, Jouanna, and Pietrobelli 2010, 104). Vivian Nutton translates “two folded parchment volumes,” but offers nuance in a footnote (2013, 87–88): “Although the words could mean two leather folders (into which the doctor could place slips of papyrus), it is more likely that this is an early example of a parchment (*charta pergamena*) book in codex form, used, like merchants’ and lawyers’ notebooks, for private reference purposes, and increasingly for wider circulation.”

12. Warkentin 2022, 18–19.

Psellos to Ioannes, the metropolitan of Euchita, written in the middle of the eleventh century. The letter concludes with the following words: Ὁ δὲ γε Μύρων οὕτω σοι τὰς ἐπιστολάς (ὡς φησι) βιβλίον πεποιήται, ποιῆ δὲ ταύτας ἐπινυκτίους λανθάνων ἐμέ· καὶ παρ' ὀλίγας τῶν διφθερῶν τὸ ἐντεῦθεν πυκτίον ἐστί.¹³ The sense seems to be that Myron has almost completed the task of putting together a collection of letters, described as both a book (βιβλίον) and a volume (πυκτίον) made up of parchments (διφθερῶν).

Given the lack of comparable phrasing in surviving Greek literature more contemporary with Galen, it is worth noting that from an etymological standpoint, both πυκταὶ διφθέραι and πυκτίδες διφθέραι would serve as fairly close equivalents for the Latin designation *pugillares membranei*, which is generally understood as referring to parchment codices and is attested by Martial several decades before Galen's time.¹⁴ In that case, we might think of the phrase as a Greek rendering of a Latin technical term for a bound parchment codex. Such a conclusion was reached by Agostino Soldati already in 2017, and I wish to add further evidence to the case.¹⁵ To do so, I address two possible objections to this hypothesis.

First, suggesting that the Greek phrase derives from the Latin *pugillares membranei* immediately raises the question of why Galen would not simply use the loan word *μεμβράνα*. The reason may be that the loan word was not yet widely used in Galen's time. The term is absent in Galen's surviving corpus, and all three occurrences that may be earlier than or contemporary with Galen are in some way problematic.¹⁶ 2 Timothy 4:13 is usually cited as the sole first-century example of the term *μεμβράνα*. Yet, most scholars of early Christianity have for decades regarded the letter as a later composition written in the name of the Apostle Paul, certainly after the first century and perhaps as late as the second half of the second century.¹⁷ The word *μεμβράνα* occurs in P.Petaus 30, but the date of this letter is uncertain. Although it was published as part of the archive of Petaus (182–187 CE), it is not clear that it actually belongs to this archive (which was purchased on the antiquities market and not scientifically excavated). While the documents of the archive tend to mention a cohesive cast of characters, none of the names in P.Petaus 30 connect with any names attested in the archive.¹⁸ The handwriting is not inconsistent with a late second- or early third-century date, but that is the most we can say. Finally, the word occurs in fragment 14 of the second-century historian Charax of Pergamon, but

13. The letter is no. 190 in Kurtz and Drexl 1941 and no. 176 in Papaioannou 2019. I cite the text from the latter. This letter is preserved in Bodleian Library MS. Barocci 131. Two observations about this passage (on fol. 198r) bear mentioning. First, there is no doubt that the reading is *πυκτίον* (and not *πυκτίον*). Second, where Papaioannou reads *βιβλίον*, the edition of Kurtz and Drexl has only ellipses. The manuscript contains a symbol after the words *ὡς φησι* that Kurtz and Drexl reproduce in the critical apparatus as *ιτ̄* (?). If Papaioannou is correct that the symbol is indeed an abbreviation for *βιβλίον*, the whole passage might be rendered thus: "Myron has not yet, as he says, made the letters into a book for you, but he is making these during the night away from my supervision, and the resulting volume lacks just a few of the parchments."

14. Galen is not especially known for using Latinisms, though they occur in his corpus on occasion. See Nutton 2020, 41.

15. Soldati 2017. I came to this conclusion without the benefit of Soldati's excellent article, and the fact that we arrived at this solution independently increases my confidence in its plausibility.

16. For a collection of references, see Dickey 2023, 288.

17. 2 Timothy was reportedly not a part of the earliest collection of the letters of Paul whose contents are known, the collection associated with Marcion of Sinope, who was active in Rome in the middle of the second century. And in fact, a reasonable case can be made that 2 Timothy (along with 1 Timothy and Titus) was composed specifically in response to the writings of Marcion. See Knox 1942, 73–76.

18. See Turner 1973, 36–38. Abbreviations of papyrological works follow the conventions in the "Checklist of Editions" at <https://papyri.info/docs/checklist>.

this fragment is an extract from the writings of Eustathius of Thessalonica (twelfth century), and the simple verbs used to introduce the views of Charax (λέγει, φησί) do not really indicate that we are dealing with an exact quotation of Charax.¹⁹ Thus, if the loan word *μειβράνα* had not yet become common in the second century, it is fairly easy to imagine a bookish Greek writer in a Roman setting rendering the Latin phrase *pugillares membranei* as *πικταὶ διφθέρα*.

The second potential objection concerns the viability of the Latin designation *pugillares membranei* itself. The phrase appears twice in Martial's *Apophoreta* (in the *lemmata* for 14.7 and 14.184, to be discussed in detail below). Over the last few decades, some scholars have objected in quite strong terms to using the writings of Martial as direct evidence for the social history of Rome in the first century. For instance, D. P. Fowler has warned that the objects described in Martial's poems "have no existence outside Martial's poetry."²⁰ Sarah Blake is even more forceful when it comes to Martial's descriptions of parchment codices: "Clearly the Books series of the *Apophoreta* is artfully constructed, metapoetic, and in no way can be taken at face value as the introduction of a new codex form."²¹ I agree that caution is necessary when drawing potential connections between literary sources (especially poetic sources) and material artifacts, but at least in the case of Martial's references to books (both rolls and codices), I think these kinds of arguments are overstated.²² What is the evidence? While Martial appears to make several references to the parchment codex as a form, the particular designation *pugillares membranei* is attested only two times, both in the *Apophoreta*.²³ We find the phrase in the *lemmata* for 14.7 (*pugillares membranei*) and 14.184 (*Homerus in pugillaribus membraneis*). In the case of the *Apophoreta*, we can be reasonably confident that these *lemmata* go back to the time of the composition of the text, since they are mentioned explicitly in the text of the second poem in the collection.²⁴ The relevant *lemmata* appear in slightly different forms in the surviving manuscripts of the *Apophoreta*, but there is a general agreement across the three main textual clusters, and there is no compelling reason to doubt the reading either at 14.7 or at 14.184.²⁵ Thus, the substantive adjective *pugillares* is modified by the adjective *membranei*.²⁶ In Martial's usage, the phrase describes two different classes of manuscript. In 14.7, the object in view is a reusable parchment book:

Esse puta ceras, licet haec membrana vocetur:
delebis, quotiens scripta novare voles.

19. For the text of Eustathius, see Müller 1882, 340.

20. Fowler 1995, 55.

21. Blake 2014, 89.

22. I am more inclined toward the position of Kathleen Coleman, who advocates for dialogue between the material remains and Martial's poetry (2006, vi): "Martial lived in a material world of objects and images, and even when the surviving evidence of that world is not precisely contemporary, it can still illuminate scraps of verse that are frustratingly opaque on the page."

23. The classic treatment of Martial's evidence for the codex is Roberts and Skeat 1983, 24–29.

24. 14.2.3–4: *lemmata si quaeris cur sint ascripta, docebo: ut, si malueris, lemmata sola legas* ("If you inquire why *lemmata* are added, I will say: So that you, if you prefer, can read only the *lemmata*!"). For Martial's Latin here and elsewhere, I cite from the Teubner edition of Shackleton Bailey 1990 (my translation).

25. For the *lemma* at 14.7, some representatives of both the α group and the β group have the full text—*pugillares membranei*; for instance, Leiden University Library, VLQ 86 (fol. 104v) and Berlin Staatsbibliothek, Ms. lat. fol. 612 (fol. 55v). For 14.184, the evidence is less uniform. From the α group, Leiden University Library, VLQ 86 (fol. 105r) has *omerus in pugillaribus membrani*. From the β group, Biblioteca Medicea Laurenziana Plut. 35.39 (fol. 212r) has *Homerus i(n) pugillari membrana*. The manuscripts of the γ group have more abbreviated forms: *pugilli* and *membra* (or *membran*).

26. In Galen's Greek phrases, we find instead two nouns in apposition.

Suppose it wax, though it be called parchment.
You will erase whenever you want to write afresh.²⁷

In 14.184, we instead encounter what is apparently a relatively large parchment codex:

Ilias et Priami regnis inimicus Ulixes
multiplici pariter condita pelle latent.

The *Iliad* and Ulysses, foe to Priam's realm,
lie together, stored in many layers of skin.²⁸

Despite the difference in contents, the physical form seems to be the same in both cases. Martial appears to envision bound books (as the analogy to wax tablets in 14.7 indicates).

That Martial was not alone in using this terminology is suggested by the report of a very similar configuration in an inscription from Calabria (*CIL* X.6, now lost), in which a number of objects are dedicated to Apollo. Among them are *pugillares membranaceos operculis eboreis*, apparently meaning parchment codices with ivory covers, though I am unaware of other occurrences of the word *operculum* with that sense in the Roman period.²⁹ In any event, we seem to be dealing with relatively high-value items, the type of objects whose donation is recorded in stone. The inscription unfortunately lacks a clear date, but most estimates place it roughly contemporary with Martial.³⁰ There thus seems to be reasonably secure evidence that this terminology was in use both in Martial's Rome and more widely in Italy (and referred to actual objects).

If it is plausible to understand *πικταὶ διφθέραι* as a gloss of the Latin *pugillares membranei*, then the emendation of *πικτάς* at *De indolentia* 33 may not be necessary after all.³¹ This Greek phrase may have been an early effort at describing a developing technology that stood in continuity with the parchment codices that Martial had described in the first century.³²

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27. The translation is drawn from the Loeb edition of Shackleton Bailey (1993).

28. Again, the translation is that of Shackleton Bailey (1993), who appears to take *pariter* as indicating a single codex containing both the *Iliad* and the *Odyssey*. It would also be possible to understand a reference to a set of two codices, as seems to be implied in the translation of Sanders (1938, 106): "The *Iliad* and Ulysses hostile to the realm of Priam lie hid each alike in a many leaved codex" and that of the old Loeb edition of Ker (1920): "The *Iliad* and the tale of Ulysses, foe to Priam's realm, both lie stored in many-folded skins."

29. This is the text as printed in *CIL* X. The various drawings and transcriptions from which the *CIL* text is derived report different forms of the adjective: *membranacios*, *membranatios*, *membranicios*, and *membranarios*. Whatever the precise form may have been, the meaning seems reasonably clear.

30. The Eagle Project (EDR171375) assigns the inscription to the first or second century CE. The *TLL* (s.v. *pugillaris*) also gives first or second century CE. The Trismegistos database (TM 511936) gives a date of first century CE. A date of first century BCE to first century CE is given in Miller 1978, 208. I am aware of two scholars who place the inscription in the second century CE (Sartori 1953, 138; Cook 1971, 263).

31. Furthermore, if *δύο διφθέρας πικτάς* is in fact the correct reading at *De indolentia* 33, it is also worth considering whether the variant reading *ἐν πικτῇ διφθέρᾳ* should be adopted at *De comp. med. sec. loc.* 12.423.

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