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“Ah... Galeno ¡qué hiciste con tus monas!”

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Claudius Galen, whose name means “calm”, a decision his father made in opposition to his wife’s character, summarized classical antiquity with his work, a sum of Hippocratic, Hellenistic and Greco-Roman medicine, a synthesis that would last for fourteen centuries, until the Renaissance.

His work was a mixture of compilations, observations and dissection and vivisection studies, mainly in animals. He worked in swine, oxen, cats, horses, lions, wolves, sheep, dogs and even an elephant, but he based his experience mainly on monkeys (anthropoid). Thus, the shapes of the aortic arch and superior vena cava division were taken from this animal. Except during his stay in Alexandria, only in few occasions did he have access to the study of the human body, as dissection was forbidden in all the Roman Empire. He confirms it in his own words: “A river passed over a grave carelessly built some months before, easily destroyed it, and tearing with the impulse of the waters a whole corpse, with already rotten flesh, but with the bones still tightly bound, dragged it face down through the length of a stadium. After the river reached a high-banked waterway, the corpse stopped, and presented itself to our eyes such as a physician would have prepared it to teach young students”.

Until the first decades of the XVI century, although the teaching of anatomy had received some contributions, in general it remained bound to Galenic tradition.

Andreas Vesalius had the virtue of establishing a new order in anatomy. He furnished his knowledge with the spirit of research and the direct confirmation on the corpse. His own words: “*anatomical dissection can be used to prove speculation*” represent a change in the objectivity of the scientific methods at that time.

The fundamental work of Vessalius: “*De humanis corporis fabrica, libri septem*” (Basel), which would change the traditional medical concepts, was dedicated to King Charles V of Spain, when his author was only 28 years old. This-663-page text, written in Latin consists of VII books and 300 illustrations apparently drawn by Johann Stephan Van Calcar (circa 1546) who was a disciple of Tizian (1477-1576).

Vessalius enjoyed great fame, despite the criticisms of Galen’s supporters, who reacted to his asser-

tion that Galen had never dissected himself a human body. This contestation to his work deeply depressed him, leading him to burn most of his medical writings. He became an expert professional of the wealthy class, including King Henry IV, who during a tournament organized celebrating his daughter Elizabeth of Valois’ marriage to Philip II, suffered the impact of a spear on his cranium (1559). He recognized in the trauma a backlash mechanism on the King’s brain, with a fatal outcome.

We will consider the value of Vessalius regarding blood circulation. There were two editions of the “*Fabrica*”. In the first (1543) he describes the inferior mesenteric arteries and the hemorrhoid vein. When speaking of the heart and expressly referring to the left atrio-ventricular valve, he says that it can be “*very well compared with a bishop’s miter*”.

Although he expresses never to have observed the septum’s pores, he admits them by writing, “*the interventricular septum is formed by the most compact substances of the heart. There are abundant cavities in its two faces. As far as the senses can perceive, none of them passes from the right ventricle to the left ventricle... we should, therefore, stand in awe of the Creator’s activity, that makes the blood transpire from the right to the left ventricle through passages that escape the eye*”. Conversely, in the second edition of the “*Fabrica*”, published in 1555, he emphatically denies the existence of this communication, when he declares verbatim “*although sometimes these small holes are evident, none, as far as the senses can grasp, passes from the right ventricle to the left ventricle*”.

He works ceaselessly in his “*Cátedra*”. He studies, dissects and meticulously records his observations, using as material executed criminals, according to the provision of judge Marcoantonio Contarini. At first, he accepted the morphology originating from Galen, but he discovered his errors as he broadened his dissections, understanding that the Pergamese had described the anatomy based on animal dissection: “*Ah... Galen what you did with your female monkeys!*” he would later state in his masterpiece. His stay in Padua would end abruptly after dissecting two nuns. Already in the outskirts of the city, he took off his boots and blowing the soles he exclaimed: “*I don’t even want to carry the dust of Padua*”.