

On biographical sources relating to Galen, cited in S.G. Kovner's "The History of Ancient Medicine"

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Abstract. This article concerns the history of the creation of the first fundamental Russian publication on the history of medicine – "The History of Ancient Medicine" by S.G. Kovner, which was published in Kiev in 1878–1888. This publication was one of the first attempts to draw the attention of fellow countrymen (including representatives of the Russian medical community) to the need for studying the history of medicine as a scientific discipline and academic subject. In his research, Kovner paid particular attention to the source base and presented, apparently, a review of literature on the subject that was one of the most comprehensive for Russian historiography of the period. Most of the work is contained in sections that deal with the activities of two classics of ancient medicine – Hippocrates and Galen.

In the section devoted to Galen, his works are divided according to their degree of authenticity; works that Kovner considered not to belong to Galen are itemized. Information on the assembled works of Galen in European languages is presented and sources for Galen's biography are listed. The author points to the incorrect attribution of some sources. It is demonstrated that there are errors in two Latin sources for Kovner's bibliography of Galen. In one case, the publication is incorrectly dated and its scientific value is wrongly assessed, while in the second the source is wrongly attributed by Kovner to another author.

Keywords: history of medicine, history of scientific books, Galen, "The History of Ancient Medicine", S.G. Kovner

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The history of medicine as a scientific discipline arrives relatively late – no sooner than the middle of the 18th century. Although this does not mean that by that time no works had been dedicated to the various aspects of the history of medical theory and practice, in the absence of unanimity (that is, on scientific medical theory), which materialized only toward the end of the 17th century [1], such efforts did not allow for the recreation of a singular picture of the development of medicine.

Evidence of this can be found in the form of the first fundamental work on the history of medicine, published in Russia as *The History of Ancient Medicine* by S.G. Kovner (picture)¹

¹ The three editions have three different titles: the first, *The History of Medicine* (1878), the second, *Essays on the History of Medicine* (1883) and the third, *The History of Ancient Medicine* (1888). However, the page numeration in them is sequential so as to make them parts of a single book.

released in Kiev in 1878–1888.² Thanks to its scientific works, the medics of the Russian Empire, virtually for the first time, gained the opportunity to form an impression of the general course of the development of medical science in ancient times, as well as of a list of fundamental

² Saveliy Grigorievich Konver (1837, Vilno – 1896, Kiev). Upon graduating from the University of Kiev in 1865 (receiving the title of doctor with honors) he remained at the university for two years in "preparation for the title of professor"; in 1867, he was appointed city doctor in Yalutorovsk (Province of Tobolsk), and then transferred to Nezhin as a district doctor. In 1873, S.G. Konver was appointed chief doctor of the Nezhin Primary Hospital and doctor of the Bezborodko Lyceum. In 1879, Konver resigned from his position to dedicate himself to science (settling in Kiev in 1890). S.G. Konver wrote several scholarly works on medicine: *The History of Ancient Medicine*, *Medicine of the East*, *Medicine in Ancient Greece before Hippocrates*, *Hippocrates*, *Medicine from the death of Hippocrates to Galen Inclusive* (Kiev, 1878–1888), *The History of Medieval Medicine* (Kiev, 1893).

Publication Chronology of Works on the History of Medicine *

Source type (according to S.G. Kovner)	Amount of Publications by Century				Total
	XVI	XVII	XVIII	XIX	
Manuals, compendia and introductions		3	19 (2)	22 (20)	44 (22)
Dictionaries of the History of Medicine			2	2	4
Biographies	4	11	23	5	43
Literary/historical and biographical writings	2 (3)	5 (10)	14 (24)	5 (29)	26 (66)
Charts			1	5	6
Essays on the history of separate aspects of medicine			9	33	42
History of Medicine in Separate Countries			2	11	13
Various	1	6	11	7	25
Manuals and other compositions in Russian			1	8	9

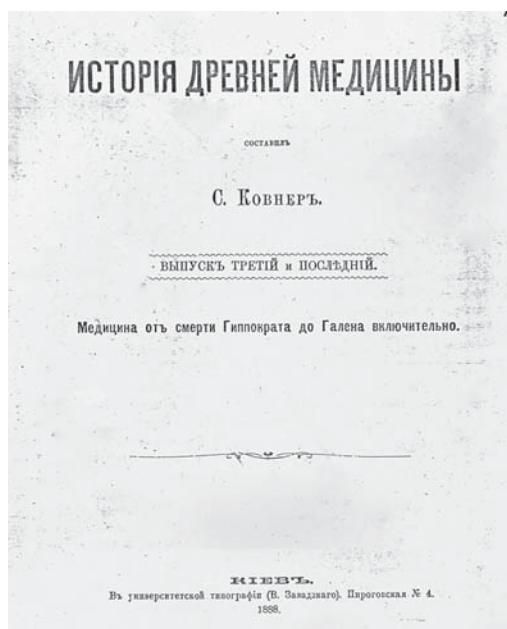
Note. *Data according to books included in the addendum to the first edition in parentheses.

works of the medical classics with a brief summary of their contents.³

In the foreword to the first edition, S.G. Kovner explains his desire to write a work on the history of medicine with two reasons: first, having emerged still in his student years under the impression of lectures on the history of medicine, read by the professor of the department of anatomy, A.P. Walter, “with the intention to devote himself to a subject that the majority of doctors and even the highest representatives of science considered to be a completely unnecessary luxury”, and, second, the almost complete absence of domestic (Russian) works on the history of medicine at the time.

S.G. Konver qualifies that, in his work, he was unable to “use all (*Konver’s emphasis – P.S.*) texts and, against his will, had to be limited to the processing of accessible <...> essays”. Nevertheless, he provides an impressive list comprising 300 sources that he relied on in his work. Included in the list were works that were available in the libraries of the Russian Empire, although by this time there were more works on the history of medicine in Europe (such particularly difficult-to-access works are provided in the appendix to the first part). The list provided by S.G. Konver attests the emergence of interest in Russia in the history of medicine at the end of the 17th century and the start of the 18th century.

³ In the list of literature, S.G. Konver provides ten works on the history of medicine in total, printed in Russian. Among them, only one work, dedicated to the history of Russian medicine, the three-volume *History of Medicine in Russia* by V. Richter, released in 1814–1820.



Title Page of S.G. Kovner’s
“The History of Ancient Medicine” (Kiev, 1888).

S.G. Konver divides all sources into nine groups,⁴ highlighting, from his point of view, the essential field of studies. These sources can be distributed according to time of appearance (see table below).

In this way, in the 18th century, compared to the previous century, the amount of publications

⁴ The sixth group (writings on the history of separate fields of medicine) is divided into nine sections according to field. The last three groups are highlighted in the addendum to the first edition.

grew by 50 percent. At the same time, new publications appeared by work type: dictionaries of the History of Medicine, chronological charts and essays on the history of separate aspects of medicine

S.G. Konver does not pay any special attention to the growth of the number of publications on the field of the history of medicine; to him, more important is the approach that various authors use. Analyzing their works, S.G. Konver evidently is one of the first in Russia to have formulated the fundamental concepts of the historiography of the history of medicine[2].⁵ In the 19th century, Russian historiography is in a nascent stage of formation, therefore S.G. Konver takes the works of Darenberg as an exemplar.⁶

From S.G. Konver's point of view, the subject of the history of medicine "in the most general sense" is defined as the observation of the general course of the development of the current field of human knowledge, its continuity and coherence as the result of centuries of experience as well as the factors that accelerated or stunted its development. Particularly in his opinion, the history of medicine should be considered as a singular history of the development of all medical sciences⁷ studied both in isolation and in the context of their interactions. S.G. Konver suggested to include three directions of study in the private history of medicine: a history of illnesses that shows "how they underwent changes over the centuries"; the history of medicine as an art; the history of medicine as a science, "laying out the gradual development of the various fields of medicine" [2, p. XXIX]. Based namely on these principles, S.G. Konver builds an "exposition of the history of medicine", highlighting sections dedicated to two forefathers of ancient medicine: Hippocrates and Galen. These sections are not only the most voluminous, but also contain detailed lists of their personal work as well as bibliographical lists of

the works on the history of medicine dedicated to them.⁸

To us, most interesting is the bibliography dedicated to Galen.⁹ We can compare the list of Galen's famous works in the 1870s (belonging and ascribed to this Roman doctor and philosopher) with those that are currently famous.

At present, Galen's contributions total 110 works [3]. This is a list rid of essays ascribed to him in various periods,¹⁰ the authorship of which was long considered dubious.

In the section dedicated to Galen, S.G. Konver provides a list of 142 works in which he highlights 83 "undoubtedly authentic essays" of this Roman doctor, 15 "essays of dubious authenticity", 19 "forged essays", 19 "different excerpts" and 6 remarks about the essays of the "Hippocrates Collection" [4, p. 826–832]. The titles of all works are provided in Greek with Latin translations, except in those cases where the Greek original is unknown.¹¹ Also presented is a list of the fundamental publications of the compilations of Galen's essays and their translations into Latin and other fundamental European languages.¹²

In this way, it may be said that the works of S.G. Konver present the most complete review of sources referencing Galen.

In his work, S.G. Konver apparently encountered objective difficulties because he did not work in European literature gatherings and, in his studies, he depended on the essays of European scientists (primarily those of his contemporaries) accessible to him on the history of medicine. In many cases, this led to error.

⁸ Nowhere does S.G. Konver mention that he used these works during the writing of his book. He places the list of used sources in the introduction to the work.

⁹ In the Department of the History of Medicine, National History and Culturology of I.M. Sechenov First Moscow state Medical University (where the author of this article works), The study of Galen's legacy is one of the leading areas of study.

¹⁰ For medical literature characterized by the presence of so-called pseudoauthors. Because of the scientific value of a book was directly related to its belonging to a classic in the current field, the author rarely placed his name in the book, but rather positioned the book as an exemplar of a classic work acquired once again.

¹¹ The originals are missing only for the last two sections: "Excerpts" and "Commentaries".

¹² It is interesting that the first print collection of Galen's works is indicated as one of the Latin translations, released in Europe – Venetian edition of 1490.

⁵ Here we consider historiography in two senses: as an aggregate of studies by history related by common characteristics (theme, issue, origin etc.) and as a scientific discipline that studies the development of historical science and historical thought.

⁶ The differences in the edition titles can be explained by S.G. Konver's changing views on the concept of historiography throughout his course of his work.

⁷ S.G. Konver also considers physics, chemistry and natural sciences as medical sciences.

For instance, S.G. Konver provides two Latin works as sources on the biography of Galen¹³: A. Werner's *Oratio de vita Galeni* (Viteb, 1750) and P. Labbe's¹⁴ *Elogium chronologicum Galeni* (Paris, 1660) [4]. These are the earliest of the essays mentioned by him: the rest of the literature falls under the 19th century.

The bibliographical search of publication data has led us to interesting results. The first source, *Report on the Life of Galen* (1750) does not exist in the form that Konver presents it. An exemplar located in the National Library of Austria¹⁵ entitled *Report on the Life of Galen, read by doctor of philosophy and doctor of medicine Abraham Werner in the presence of newly appointed doctors of medicine Georgius Agricola <...> and Fabian Sommer, <...> in the Academy of Wittenberg in eighth ides of April <...> 1570*,¹⁶ the year differs by the one indicated by Konver by 180 years.

It has proven almost impossible to find any data about the author of this work. It is only known that the doctor of medicine, Abraham Werner, over the course of the spring semester in 1570 fulfilled the duties of the Vice-Rector of the university in Wittenberg under the rector Stefan Hans von Putlitz. Most likely, the report on Galen was read by him in connection with the awarding of doctorate and master's degrees to the students of the University of Wittenberg. On this day particularly, Georgius Agricola from Amberg received the degree of doctor of medicine and was present during his speech.¹⁷ The second of the medical doctors mentioned in the heading, Fabian Sommer from Carlsbad, presented a message¹⁸ read by Heinrich Schneidewein, the son of one of the university professors.¹⁹ Ap-

parently the report mentioned by S.G. Konver was read by a dissertator and dedicated to the comparison of viewpoints of ancient medics and evangelists.

In this way, the current source represents a small (per volume, 37 pages in octavo, 25 of which appear in the report on Galen) publication whose contents are secondary in nature; such a work cannot be considered neither serious nor scientific. The second source provokes no fewer questions. Its name – *Claudii Galeni Chronologicum Elogium R.P. Philippo Labbeo Scriptore: ...*²⁰ – differs from the one provided by Konver.²¹ In the 68-page book, the pagination starts from the 12th page, format octavo. Jacque Mentel's letter is placed on the first pages (Iacobus Mentelius)²² to the “wisest and most scholarly husband” Phillippe Labbe,²³ in which the author of the letter praises the work dedicated to Galen, Eusebius, Alexander of Thrall, Hippocrates and others, providing extensive quotations in Greek.²⁴

The actual text begins on the 12th page (although in the book it is marked as the first). On the first page is a heading: “Of the noble husband Jacob Mentel, doctor of medicine from Paris, Claudius Galen, citizen of Pergamum, an outstanding figure of medicine, philosopher, philologist, orator, an outstanding critic, chronological statements <...> Philippe Labbe of Bourges, to the presbyter of the Society of Jesus, the gift is offered. Lutetia Paris, January Calends, A.D. MDCLX”.²⁵

Thus it follows from the title that the author of the book is not Phillippe Labbe, who was not involved in the history of medicine, but Jacque Mentel. On the book's title,²⁶ in addition to fact that the word SCRIPTORE is emphasized by italicization in a different font. Apparently, the printer thus wanted to note that Phillippe Labbe is the official writer, and not that he is the actual author of the book. From this point of view, this also confirms the quatrain on the second page²⁷:

¹³ Here the sources are understood under the framework of classification offered by S.O. Schmidt, which is to say that the book is a print source: one of several types of written records. [5].

¹⁴ Philippe Labbe (10.07.1607–17.03.1667) was a Jesuit and French scientist in the fields of history, theology, geography, and philology. His works (75 essays) primarily relate to history and the history of religion, with the most important of them dedicated to chronology.

¹⁵ K.K.Hofbibliothek Osterr. Nationalbibliothek.

¹⁶ *Oratio de Vita...* [6].

¹⁷ George Agricola (1530 Mimbach – 12.01.1575, Amberg), German physician and educator, friend of Philipp Melancthon.

¹⁸ *Quaestio Proposita Renunciato...*

¹⁹ Johan Schneidewein (1519–1568), lawyer, professor of the University of Witternberg, brother of Heinrich Schneidewein (1510–1580), chancellor in Weimar.

²⁰ *Claudii Galeni Chronologicum Elogium R.P. Philippo Labbeo Scriptore...* [7].

²¹ S.G. Konver indicates “Elogium chronologicum Galeni”.

²² Jacques Mentel (1599–1670) – doctor of medicine, professor of the faculty of medicine of the University of Paris

²³ *Sapientissimo Doctissimoque...*

²⁴ Letter from J. Mentel to P. Labbe

²⁵ *Viro Cl. Iac. Mentelio...*

²⁶ Title page of *Claudii...*

²⁷ Quatrain of J. Mentel, dedicated to Galen.

*Ad
Claud. Galenum
in
Iac. Mentelii V.CI.
Gratiam Reviviscentem,
Tetrastichon.*

Quam multis olim felici sorte dedisti,
Cum tibi nunc vitam, Magne Galene, daemus;
Mentelio hanc debes: cui maxima quaque professo
Hoc breue pro Xenii misimus Elogium.

Such a poetic address can only belong to the author of the work following this one. The subsequent 54 pages are personally dedicated to the biography of Galen, with references to specific places in his work, handed down on the pitch. In this way, the following conclusions may be made:

At least two sources in *The History of Ancient Medicine* of S.G. Konver are included by the author in a list of literature without any familiarization with them *de visu*, but only on the basis of their mentions by European authors.

The first of them, *Report on the Life of Galen, read by Abraham Werner*, is a speech performed by the vice-rector of the University of Wittenberg during the awarding of doctorate degrees to students of the university. It is not very informative in relation to the biography of Galen and is interesting merely in connection to those who participated in the event.

The second source, *Claudii Galeni Chronologicum Elogium* by P. Labbe, contains brief but interesting data on the history of medicine ascribed by S.G. Konver to a different author: he mistakenly accepted the dedication on the title page on behalf of the author (this apparently took place in the 19th century). The real author of this work is doctor of medicine Jacque Mentel.

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