LESBIANTIQUITY

ISSUE 32

c. 90-170 & 400-500 AD / August 2024 AD

CAELIUS AURELIANUS TRANSLATING

SORANOS

A DISEASE OF THE MIND

LESBIANTIQUITY © Georgina Barker (Portknockie: Sapphizdat, 2024)

Caelius Aurelianus translation, introduction, and notes © Nick Winters 2024

Latin text from: Gerhard Bendz, ed., Caelius Aurelianus: Akute Krankheiten Buch I–III; Chronische Krankheiten Buch I–V, trans. Ingeborg Pape, Corpus medicorum latinorum, Vol. 1 (Berlin: Akademie, 1990)

Back cover art: 'Root & Branch Tree' © Emily Setzer 2024

THE TRANSLATOR

Professor Nick Winters

I am a classicist and former physicist specializing in ancient mathematics and science. I am an assistant professor in the Northwestern University Department of Classics. I gained my PhD from Duke University in 2020, and was an associate fellow at the American School of Classical Studies at Athens in 2022–23. I am an editor of the undergraduate research journal Philomathes and a member of the Hellenic Institute for Cultural Diplomacy and the Trans in Classics organization.



CAELIUS AURELIANUS / ΣΩΡΑΝΟΣ "Ο "ΕΦΕΣΙΟΣ

The following text has come to us filtered through several earlier layers of transmission, all of which have unfortunately been lost. The original work On Chronic Diseases was written in Greek by Soranos of Ephesos in the 1st or 2nd century A.D. At some point during the 5th century (though even the century is uncertain), Caelius Aurelianus translated On Chronic Diseases from Greek into Latin. His manuscript was preserved and copied through the middle gaes. until Johannes Sichart produced a printed edition of it in 1529.1 Apart from a few scattered fragments, 2 the entire manuscript tradition has been lost, and Sichart's editio princeps is now the earliest version of the text that survives. The passage below therefore represents an extensive collaboration between author, translator, and many generations of scribes and editors, in which we are unable to be certain of exactly who is responsible for which parts of the text. What we do know is that Sichart was a strict editor - keen to reproduce the manuscripts faithfully, and slow to impose his own changes or conjectures.³ For this reason, we can at least hope that Sichart's text is a close reproduction of Caelius'.

The original author of the text, Soranos of Ephesos, was a well-regarded Greek physician of the Methodic (or Methodist) school, who flourished shortly before the birth of Galen (A.D. 129). The proportion of Soranos' work that survives does not do justice to his widespread popularity, but he is often quoted or translated by other authors, including Caelius Aurelianus, who adapted Soranos' Medical Questions and Gynecology (both now fragmentary), as well as his three books On Acute Diseases and five books On Chronic Diseases (more or less complete).

¹ Published by Heinrich Petri, Basle.

² Drabkin (1950) p. xii.

³ Bendz (1990) pp. 13–14; Drabkin (1950) p. xiii.

Of Caelius Aurelianus himself, we know almost nothing. The early editions of his works (all translations of Soranos) say that he came from the town of Sicca in North Africa.⁴ He is generally dated to the 5th century A.D., based on the style of his Latin.⁵ Because Soranos' text has been lost, it is difficult to say how much of Caelius' On Chronic Diseases is a faithful translation, and how much is his own work. Overall, I find it safer to consider Caelius' On Chronic Diseases as an adaptation rather than a direct translation, so I refer to him rather than Soranos when discussing word choice or phrasing in the notes.

As a text of the Methodic school, On Chronic Diseases generally follows a simple theory of constriction or loosening of parts of the body, both in its account of the origins of a disease and in its proposed cure (though the underlying theory was less important to the Methodics than the ability to diagnose and differentiate various diseases by their symptoms). Most chapters follow a similar pattern: (1) the name and definition of the disease, (2) the origin and symptoms of the disease, (3) how to distinguish the disease from other similar afflictions, (4) how to cure it according to the Methodic school, and (5) why the approaches of the other schools are inferior.

The passage below on 'pathic' male homosexuality, the final chapter of Book 4 of On Chronic Diseases, is unusual in that it does not quite follow the pattern of the other chapters. Caelius begins with the name and definition of the disease, but nearly all of the remaining chapter is a discussion of its origin, and no medical cure is offered. Only minimal attention is given to symptoms in §2, and the only suggestion for a cure is that the mind must be 'coerced' (§7). Caelius' primary concern seems to be to show that pathic homosexuality should be understood more as a mental disorder than a physical one. He also expresses an uncharacteristic degree of moral disgust

⁴ Bendz (1990) p. 12.

⁵ Drabkin (1950) pp. xiv-xv; Bendz (1990) p. 12.

in a book that is otherwise quite matter-of-fact about both mental and physical illness.

Finally, it is important to note that Caelius' understanding of homosexuality does not correspond exactly to modern usage. First of all, 'homosexuality' is not a precise word for the condition that he is describing. Being a malthakos has at least as much to do with the patient's own gender as with the gender of their sexual partner. Although it falls under the umbrella of homosexuality, because it refers to men who take a passive or receptive sexual role with male partners, there seems to be no disorder at all perceived in the men who have intercourse with malthakoi. Rather, the disorder lies in men who assume a 'feminine' role, including sexual position, gender expression (§2), and in some cases a power dynamic in which the malthakos is the submissive partner (§3). Caelius always refers to malthakoi with a pair of Latin words: molles and subactos, the former indicating generally feminized behavior and the latter more explicitly indicating the receptive (also understood as the submissive) sexual role (Title, §1, §10, §15). The words molles and subactos are always paired by the conjunction 'or' (sive or sev), implying that they are essentially to be understood as synonyms (or more precisely that, although they evoke different symptoms, they both refer to the same disease).

Likewise, when comparing malthakoi to tribades, the women whom Caelius represents as disordered are the ones who take an active sexual role with other women, and who act as the pursuers in their same-sex relationships – in other words, the women who behave in a 'masculine' way. Gender and sexuality cannot be fully distinguished from each other in this understanding, both because sexual roles themselves are strongly gendered, and because (for Caelius at least) the disordered sexual role implies a same-sex partner (that is, he does not seem to have an idea that in a male-female couple the male could be the passive partner and the female the active).

The other notable feature of this text is that Caelius entertains the idea that malthakoi and tribades may be what they are from birth. They are described multiple times as people of a 'double sex/gender' or an otherwise 'mixed', 'split', or 'twin' constitution (§5, §12, §13, §16), which produces an interest in both active and passive sexual roles (except in the case where a man is incapable of performing the active role). Although Caelius interprets homosexuality primarily as a mental perversion, his conclusion in §15 that the 'greater part of the blame' lies with the patients' minds at least allows for the possibility of a naturally inborn condition.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

Barth, Adversariorum commentariorum libri LX (Frankfurt: 1624, col. 1969)

Bendz, Gerhard, ed., Caelius Aurelianus: Akute Krankheiten Buch I–III; Chronische Krankheiten Buch I–V, trans. Ingeborg Pape, Corpus medicorum latinorum, Vol. 1 (Berlin: Akademie, 1990)

Diels, Hermann, ed., Parmenides Lehrgedicht; Griechisch und Deutsch (Berlin: G. Reimer, 1897)

Drabkin, I. E., Caelius Aurelianus on Acute Diseases and on Chronic Diseases (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1950)

ROOT & BRANCH READING GUIDE

Our translations branch out to explore
a variety of options for the text:
any variants in the original $\langle Greek \rangle$ texts
and the various possible meanings in English.

Our translations are rooted in the words
of the original text, replicating when possible
word order, root meanings of words, and
grammatical gender $\begin{bmatrix} n \\ m \end{bmatrix}$ of words about people.

You, the reader, will choose which branches you prefer to follow.

THE CAELIUS AURELIANUS TEXT READING GUIDE

Any changes to the text are noted, including variant readings (except for some minor issues of punctuation and some minor aesthetic choices).

For ease of reading, the paragraphs are divided and numbered, and each paragraph in the Latin is capitalized.

Purple = a textual variant in the Latin, which may or may not warrant translation variants.

(Parentheses) = asides in the text itself.

[Square brackets] = words added to the translation for clarity.

ON CHRONIC DISEASES 4.9

THE GREEKS CALL MALTHAKOI

[1] Men who are
$$<$$
 soft $>$ or $($ pathics $>$, the Greeks

have called malthakoi - those whom

no man easily believes truly
$$\langle \text{are sick} \rangle$$

no one [m] can easily believe truly belong to the category of men.

[2] For this [condition] did not enter human $\langle \text{customs} \rangle$ from nature,

parts to which it had no right > to obscene uses; when there is
no moderation in desire, no hope of satiety, then to each individual



DE MOLLIBVS SIVE SVBACTIS, QVOS GRAECI MALTHACOS VOCANT

- [1] Molles sive subactos Graeci malthacos vocaverunt, $\langle \text{aegros} \rangle$ quidem esse nullus facile virorum credit.
- [2] Non enim hoc humanos ex natura uenit in mores, sed pulso pudore libido etiam indebitas partes obscoenis usibus subiugauit, cum nullus cupiditati modus, nulla satietati<s> spes est, singulis

NOTES

1 aegros; sick: Barth's (1624/1969) emendation. The alternate reading of aegros for quos only makes sense when applied to the first translation of the relative clause, 'no man...' (rather than 'no one ... the category of men').

'his own Sparta is not enough' – even though divine providence has destined the places of our body for certain $\langle \text{functions} \rangle$ - and in make use of adopt wish for choose willfully take on women, which do not belong to the diseases are foreign of the body, but are instead a corrupt mind's \prec defects $\stackrel{\cdot}{\succ}$. [3] For often (getting < swollen > for | lusting after being excited by fearing | fearing | fearing | swollen > for | for | fearing | fe (respecting revering certain men to whom they are strongly obliged lower in status), straightaway, having transformed in very little time, they seek to show the signs of (maleness) - in which, since they do not potency the way of it how to moderate it >,

Sparta<e> non sufficiunt sua<e>, etiamsi nostri corporis loca diuina providentia certis destinavit officiis, tum denique \(\frac{\text{utentes}}{\text{volentes}} \) ueste atque gressu et aliis femininis rebus, quae sunt a passionibus corporis aliena, sed potius corruptae mentis uitia.

[3] Nam saepe
tumentes uel, quod est difficile, uerentes quosdam, quibus forte deferunt<ur>
urilitatis quaerunt indicia demonstrare; cuius quia modum nesciunt,

- 2 his own Sparta is not enough: this is a reference to Euripides, Σπάρτην ἔλαχες κείνην κοσμεῖ, 'Sparta is your lot, govern it well' (fragment 723). It was already proverbial by Cicero's time (ad Atticum I.20.3), meaning 'be content with your own portion'.
- 2 utentes/uolentes; adopt / make use of / have recourse to / wish for / choose / willfully take on: utentes is Bendz's conjecture for uolentes, which is not grammatical, but is the reading of the authoritative first edition (Johannes Sichart, 1529).
- 2 diseases/sufferings/passions: passiones is the term used throughout the text to refer to diseases of every sort, so 'diseases' should be taken as the preferred translation. I have included the variants 'sufferings' and 'passions', in the one case to convey some of the breadth and nuance of passio (a more general, less strictly medical term than 'disease' in English), and in the other to convey both the erotic element that may be more present in this particular chapter than in others, and the potential religious element that Caelius seems to have incorporated into his translation of the original text.
- 3 tumentes/timentes; lusting after / getting hard/swollen for / being excited by / fearing: although Bendz reads timentes here, it is the marginal correction of only one editor (Rovilium 1567); tumentes is the consensus of other editors, including Drabkin, so I have listed it first as the preferred reading.
- 3 uerentes; revering/respecting/fearing: if timentes is read above, then 'revering' / 'respecting' are the preferred translations. If tumentes is read, then any of the three translations for uerentes may be preferred. Uereor as 'fear' carries a sense of awe or reverence, whereas timeo is more simply 'fear a greater power or a possible harm or danger'.

they are carried away by excess, and do more than accords with

$$\langle \frac{\text{virtue}}{\text{masculinity}} \rangle$$
, and involve themselves in greater $\begin{cases} \frac{\text{errors}}{\text{sins}} \\ \frac{\text{faults}}{\text{faults}} \end{cases}$.

[4] And so, accordingly, this is settled in our judgement: that these

[5] For just as the women called 'tribades' (because they engage

(join mix) with women than with men, and pursue them [f]

although they may be deserted [f] by or temporarily relieved [f] of



rursum nimietate sublati plus quoque, quam virtuti convenit, faciunt et maioribus se peccatis involuunt.

- [4] Constat itaque etiam hoc nostro iudicio hos uera sentire. est enim, ut Soranus ait, malignae ac foedissimae mentis passio.
- [5] Nam sicut feminae tribades appellatae, quod utramque uenerem exerceant, mulieribus magis quam uiris misceri festinant et easdem inuidentia $\langle paene \rangle$ uirili sectantur et, cum passione fuerint desertae seu temporaliter relevatae,

- 5 On Caelius' view of tribades, see my introduction (above, p. 3). The comparison he draws here between tribades and malthakoi suggests that some (or most?) of what he says elsewhere about malthakoi could, conversely, be taken to apply to tribades too.
- 5 inuidentia; tenacity/jealousy/blindness/single-mindedness: the readings 'blindness' and 'single-mindedness' attempt to highlight the etymology of inuidentia ('not-seeing'). 'Jealousy' or 'envy' is the most common reading (cf. inuidia), and 'tenacity' conveys the overall sense of the word in the context.
- 5 pene; penis: instead of paene, 'almost', Sichart prints pene, which must be understood as nothing more than a spelling variant of paene. However, the possibility of a double entendre should at least be considered, given the word's proximity to uirili and the likelihood that it appeared in the manuscripts. Although in no way grammatical, the pun would invoke something like 'they pursue women, with envy for a male penis'. The same pun would have been available to Soranos with the word ἀνδρεία.

ea quaerunt aliis obicere, quae pati noscuntur, iuuamini

Lumilitatis duplici sexu confectae

, uelut frequenter

ebrietate corruptae in nouas libidinis formas erumpentes,

[6] consuetudine turpi nutritae, sui sexus iniuriis gaudent; sic illi

comparatione talium animi passione iactari noscuntur.

5 iuuamini humilitatis/humilitate duplici sexu confectae/confectam; with the aid of their baseness, they are weakened/destroyed/consumed by their double sex/gender / with their baseness as an aid, they accomplish/consummate/fulfil [their passion] by means of their double sex/gender: Drabkin and Bendz both lament the obscurity of this passage. The first reading is Bendz's conjecture, and the reading in purple is taken directly from Sichart. In my translation, I have taken iuuamini as an (incorrect) ablative form of iuuamen, being otherwise unable to make grammatical sense of the passage without accepting a more drastic emendation. One other option is to take iuuamini humilitate with the previous phrase, producing: 'they seek to do to others those things which they know how to receive, for aid in their baseness' (or any similarly sensible reading of the listed variants).

5, 6, 12, 13 sexus; sex/gender: this is meant in the taxonomic sense and not as coitus.

[7] For it is rightly thought that there is no cure of the body that can be provided > for the purpose of driving away this suffering disease passion, but instead the soul mind must be coerced controlled corrected restrained by such a great disgrace downfall of faults is disturbed vexed. [8] For no one has [ever] corrected a (wanton body body feeling the itch) by taking the woman's role feminizing it bor has assuaged being effeminate or has assuaged tamed it by the touch of a male
unmentionable part, but commonly, one following tolerates copes with

a complaint or pain by other following means resources.



- [7] Nam neque ulla curatio corporis depellendae passionis causa recte putatur adhibenda, sed potius animus coercendus, qui tanta peccatorum labe uexatur.
- [8] Nemo enim pruriens corpus feminando correxit uel uirilis ueretri tactu mitigauit, sed communiter querelam siue dolorem alia ex materia tolerauit.

8 For no one has [ever] corrected a wanton/lustful body by ... the touch of a male unmentionable/private part, but commonly, one tolerates/endures/copes with a complaint or pain by other means/cures/resources: Drabkin suggests that the sense here could be that if someone gains relief from discomfort by physical means (particularly by anal penetration), then the problem was not sexual to begin with. Although this understanding is difficult to derive from the Latin, it does clarify both the previous and the following paragraphs. In support of Drabkin's interpretation is Caelius' use of querelam ('complaint') and dolorem ('pain') instead of passionem ('disease/suffering/passion') to describe the patient's discomfort. Querela and dolor are not necessarily more physical in connotation than passio, but they notably appear only here in the entire chapter, suggesting a purposeful distinction on Caelius' part.

[9] So even the record given by Clodius of a cure is clearly about ascarides, which (as we taught in the writing on intestinal worms) are little worms that spawn in the rectum.

[10] Parmenides, in the books that he wrote on nature, says that,

by a (mis)fortune in
because of an accident in
as a result of the circumstances of

their conception, sometimes

soft
people [m] > are born as < soft
people soft
submissive

cultivation.

[11] Since his work is a Greek epigram, I will convey it here in verse as well (in Latin, of course), which I have composed as similarly [to the original] as I am able, lest the caccount sense of the languages be confused;



- [9] Denique etiam a Clodio historia curationis data ascaridarum esse perspicitur, quos de lumbricis scribentes uermiculos esse docuimus longaonis in partibus natos.
- [10] Parmenides libris, quos de natura scripsit, euentu inquit conceptionis molles aliquando seu subactos homines generari.
- [11] Cuius quia Graecum est epigramma, et hoc uersibus intimabo, Latinos enim, ut potui, simili modo composui, ne linguarum ratio misceretur:

11 a Greek epigram: the original fragment by Parmenides does not survive. Diels reconstructs it (1897 p. 44) but comments (p. 114) that Caelius' translation of Soranos' text must be fairly free, since he calls the original an epigram (which ought to have been in elegiac couplets, whereas Parmenides wrote in hexameters), and refers to 'the books that he wrote on nature' (Parmenides' poem does not seem to have been divided into multiple books). It is unclear to me why Diels assumes that these mistakes belong to Caelius and not Soranos, but either way, any attempt to reconstruct Parmenides' Greek is a purely hypothetical exercise.

And if the Furies do not make them into one

Then they will (disturb) the arising $\leq \frac{\text{sex}}{\text{gender}}$ with a twin seed.



[12] 'Femina uirque simul ueneris cum germina miscent, uenis informans diverso ex sanguine virtus temperiem servans bene condita corpora fingit. nam si uirtutes permixto semine pugnent nec faciant unam virtutem in corpore dirae, nascentem gemino uexabunt semine sexum.'

- 12.2 uenis informans: Bendz's reading, unius in formam, is a conjecture by Diels, and does not seem preferable to Sichart's reading.
- 12.2 power/virtue/capacity: the implication of a strongly gendered word like uirtus ('manliness', 'masculine excellence') may have been purposeful on Caelius' part, since its Greek equivalent, δύναμις, is not heavily gendered.
- 12.4 mixed-up/intermingled/disordered: the word permixto, from permiscere, carries more of a sense of confusion, disorder, and even promiscuity than miscere ('unite' / 'mix together' / 'comingle') on its own (in line 1).
- 12.5 Furies: the reading 'portents' / 'ill-omens' for dirae may be substituted for 'Furies', but is less likely.
- 12.5 uirtutem/permixto: Bendz believes that this permixto is a mistaken repetition because of the line above, but since it is the reading of all earlier editors (and is grammatical), I thought it best to include it. *Uirtutem* is Bendz's conjecture.
- 12.5-6 Another possible reading: 'And if the powers in the mixed-up seed fight against each other and do not make one power, then the Furies will trouble the arising sex with a twin seed.'
- 12 Diels (1897 pp. 115–16) argues that Parmenides was probably discussing hermaphroditism or androgyny rather than homosexuality in this passage.

intends has in mind that it is not merely the material of the has in mind virtues powers capacities, which, if they thus mix themselves together so that they make themselves one in the same body, will generate a harmonious congruent appropriate will with respect to sex gender. If, harmonious congruent appropriate will with respect to sex gender. If, however, when the bodily seed is intermingled disordered, the for both [types of] the for both [types of] will follow those born [in such a way].

[14] Moreover, many leaders of the [medical] < sects say that the (suffering disease passion) is (hereditary natural), and therefore it comes to sected and section offspring with the seed -



[13] Vult enim seminum praeter materias esse uirtutes, quae si se ita miscuerint, ut eiusdem corporis faciant unam, congruam sexui generent uoluntatem, si autem permixto semine corporeo uirtutes separatae permanserint, utriusque ueneris natos appetentia sequatur.

[14] Multi praeterea sectarum principes genuinam dicunt esse passionem et propterea in posteros uenire cum semine,

13 se ... miscuerint ... permixto; mix themselves together ... mixed up / intermingled / disordered: the right (miscuerint) and wrong (permixto) kinds of mixture are contrasted with each other here (see note 12.4 above).

not that they blame nature, of course, $\langle \substack{\text{which} \\ \text{who}} \rangle$ teaches [us] the (boundaries extent goalposts) of ther own purity through the other animals; for they are called $\langle her \rangle$ [nature's] mirrors by the wise – but [rather they blame] the human race, which holds onto vices once they are taken on received, so that it cannot be cleansed by any restoration, nor does it leave any place for (a new beginning). [15] And let the $\langle \frac{\text{blame}}{\text{fault}} \rangle$ of the mind be [considered] heavier more serious, since, while many hereditary inborn natural or happenstance extrinsic foreign grow old and are weakened broken exhausted subdued along with [our] bodies (such as gout, epilepsy, madness), and therefore with the

decline of age will become milder without a doubt – for all



non quidem naturam criminantes, quae suae puritatis metas aliis ex animalibus docet. nam sunt eius specula a sapientibus nuncupata; sed humanum genus, quod ita semel recepta tenuerit uitia, ut nulla possit instauratione purgari nec ullum nouitati liquerit locum; [15] sitque grauior mentis culpa, ut, cum plurimae genuinae seu aduenticiae passiones corporibus infractae consenescant, ut podagra, epilepsia, furor, et propterea aetate uergente mitiores procul dubio fiant — omnia etenim

14 nature ... teaches [us] the extent/boundaries/goalposts of its/her own purity through the other animals: although many of the views put forward by Caelius will seem foreign to most modern readers, this appeal to the purity of nature has been echoed often in modern anti-homosexual rhetoric. Apart from being factually false – many animals do engage in homosexual activity – the argument is notable as a rare instance in which beasts are held up as a moral example to humans, rather than as an inferior form of existence to be imitated only by the antisocial or insane.

troubles torments will have strong powerful effects when the vigor of the underlying material is opposing them, and since this is lacking in the elderly, the suffering disease passion diminishes along with their strength only the above-mentioned [suffering disease passion], which makes men passion bottoms pathics or soft becomes stronger more effeminate, increases in power with unspeakable (lust), not indeed without reason: [16] for in other [younger] $\langle \text{years} \rangle$, when the body is strong
powerful > and frequently <performs > the natural < functions > duties > of (intercourse love love sexuality), the (pleasure in textravagance wantonness desire for textravagance wantonness sensuality) of their ≺ souls > is divided in two



uexantia ualidos effectus dabunt firmitate opposita subiacentium materiarum, quae cum in senibus deficit, passio quoque minuitur, ut fortitudo – sola tamen supradicta, quae subactos seu molles efficit uiros, senescenti corpore grauius inualescat et infanda magis libidine moue<a>t, non quidem sine ratione.

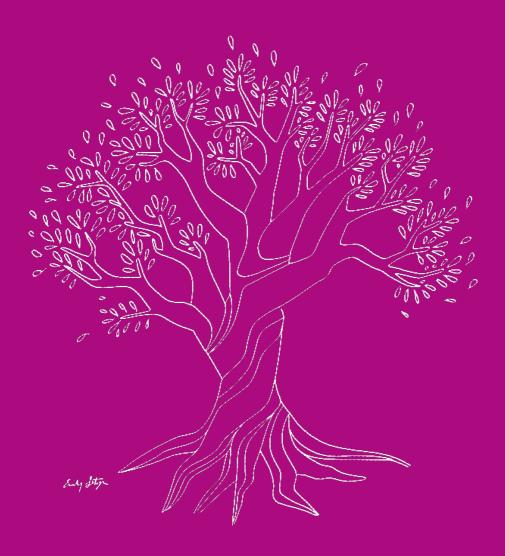
[16] In aliis enim aetatibus adhuc ualido corpore et naturalia ueneris officia celebrante gemina luxuriae libido dividitur animorum,

15 when the vigor/firmness/fortitude of the underlying material is opposing them: or, more naturally, 'when the underlying material is opposing them with vigor/firmness/fortitude'.

16 This final paragraph clarifies the remarkable claim made in §15 that the condition of the *malthakos* intensifies with age, rather than diminishing as other diseases do. It turns out that the 'worsening of the disease' is actually caused not by a direct increase in appetite, but by the loss of the 'natural virility' that opposes it. The pathic/bottom/submissive condition is present in the *malthakos* throughout his life, and is only obscured during adulthood by the additional presence of an appetite for (and ability to perform) the 'masculine' sexual role. Although it is impossible to say whether Caelius (or Soranos) based any of this on some observed phenomenon, the argument seems clearly designed to align with the common ancient belief – which has still not been excised from contemporary medical practice – that the state of male adulthood / middle age is the natural apex of human health, sanity, and virtue.

nunc faciendo, nunc patiendo iactata, in his uero, qui senectute defecti uirili ueneris officio caruerint, omnis animi libido in contrariam ducitur appetentiam, et propterea femininam ualidius uenerem poscit. hinc denique coniciunt plurimi etiam pueros hac passione iactari. similiter enim senibus uirili indigent officio; quod in ipsis nondum e<s>t, illos deseruit.





LEVERHULME TRUST _____ Sapphizdat PORTKNOCKIE