**Prose and poetry of pain: A history of the term ἄλγος[[1]](#footnote-1)**

**1 Origins**

Some words thrive in literary language for a certain period of time, then progressively fade until they completely disappear. Others gradually establish themselves from very humble origins to become prestigious even in the most refined literature.

The reasons for this are manifold, and are sometimes difficult, if not impossible, to assess. This is particularly the case for many ancient languages, including ancient Greek, due to an extensive shortage of evidence.

The Greek language appears so closely linked to poetry in its early stages that we must often resist the temptation to consider a significant part of the Greek vocabulary 'poetic' simply because we have precious few prose testimonies. Differentiating the words that are poetically marked from those that are not may prove to be a very frustrating exercise. The natural first step in such an endeavor is confronting Homer, the fundamental poetry of the Greek culture, which included a large variety of words, some of which have survived until modern times.

One of these words is ἄλγος ‘pain’,[[2]](#footnote-2) which is still prevalent today in several compound forms, especially in medical terminology.[[3]](#footnote-3) As with other Homeric terms, ἄλγος piqued the interest of Hesychius, who noted ἄλγος· ἡ λύπη (A 2803 Latte). The codex of the *Glossai kata* *poleis* (*GKP*), which likely depends on Hesychius himself, included ἄλγος amongst the Cypriot words, since it was not uncommon in antiquity to ascribe poetic words, especially those of Classical drama, to the Cypriot dialect.[[4]](#footnote-4)

The lexeme, which in Homer mainly occurs in the plural, indicates above all a pain suffered over time, as in the very beginning of the *Iliad*, where Achilles’ rage is tied to the innumerable and lasting sufferings incurred by the Achaeans (*Il.* 1.2 μυρί’ Ἀχαιοῖς ἄλγε’ ἔθηκε). A long-lasting pain is also evoked in the first verses of the *Odyssey*, which consecrate Odysseus as a hero who suffered much pain in his heart on the sea (*Od.* 1.1-2 πολλὰ δ᾽ ὅ γ᾽ ἐν πόντῳ πάθεν ἄλγεα ὃν κατὰ θυμόν).[[5]](#footnote-5) Obviously, other words for ‘pain’ are attested in Archaic Greek texts, each of them endowed with a semantically different *nuance*: as opposed to ἄλγος, ὀδύνη refers to briefer suffering (as is clear e.g. from Solon fr. 12, 59 West ἐξ ὀλίγης ὀδύνης μέγα γίνεται ἄλγος), whereas πῆμα ‘calamity’ is connected to the domain of suffering on account of its causative value (a calamity brings about pain).[[6]](#footnote-6)

Within lyric poetry, too, ἄλγος continues to be quite frequent and dominates statistically over its synonyms. In Fatouros’ *Index verborum zur frühgriechischen Lyrik*, approximately fifteen attestations are observed, more than those of λύπη (once in Corinna, fr. 654 Page), ὀδύνη (6x), πένθος (8x), or πάθος (6x), the latter formed by the zero grade already common in the many adjectival compounds ending in -παθής.[[7]](#footnote-8)

Starting with Pindar, it seems that ἄλγος begins to recede. Slater’s lexicon attests ἄλγος only once in Pindaric poetry (fr. 210 Snell- Maehler ἱστᾶσιν ἄλγος ἐμφανές [sc. οἱ ἄγαν ἐν πόλεσι φιλοτιμώμενοι]; *v.l.* ἢ στάσιν, ἄλγος). Instead, we find a decidedly greater frequency of πόνος (35x) and πῆμα (6x), as well as the distinctive presence of ὀδύνα in *Pyth*. 4.221 and an absence of λύπη and πάθος, to which Pindar prefers the even newer and pretentious πάθα (6x).[[8]](#footnote-9) Apart from occasional metrical choices, it is plausible that the reason for the prevalence of πόνος in an epic lyric lexicon that is instead impregnated with ἄλγος and ἄλγεα rests on Pindar’s heroic ethics, which associate pain with the struggle that one undertakes to obtain a prize.[[9]](#footnote-10) A case in point is *Pyth.* 12.18, which recalls the labours of Perseus in his struggle with Medusa, labours that in the logic of things incur their own pain. In short, for Pindar it is probably a matter of *parole* rather than *langue*.[[10]](#footnote-11)

**2 The 5th and 4th centuries BC**

The literary genre in which the use of ἄλγος remains constant is tragedy, although with some discrepancies. Aeschylus, for instance, who uses it extensively (27x),[[11]](#footnote-12) relies on the more modern πάθος (which conveys a sense of unexpected and enduring suffering) to signify the speculative tension that allows man’s conscience to advance, as evidenced by the well-known maxim πάθει μάθος (*Ag*. 177).[[12]](#footnote-13) This choice could be explained by the fact that ἄλγος was too epic and archaic compared to the newer πάθος, or that the latter stresses the passivity of man in the face of destiny.

Spanish philologist Marcos Mártinez Hernández’s 1977 survey of Sophocles’ works reveals that ἄλγος tended to signify physical pain, moral pain, and pain in general. The most interesting tragedy from this point of view is *Philoctetes*, not only because it addresses the topic of suffering, but also because it represents a precise moment in linguistic history at the end of the fifth century BC when the more traditional poetic lexicon strongly reflects the need for abstraction.[[13]](#footnote-14) Thus, to fully convey his pain, with all the consumption and fatigue it entails, Philoctetes wishes Odysseus could experience it in the same way that he felt it:

ὦ ξένε Κεφαλλήν, εἴθε σοῦ διαμπερὲς

στέρνων ἵκοιτ’ ἄλγησις ἥδε. φεῦ, πάπαι.

(Soph. *Phil.* 791−792)

O my friend from Cephallenia, if only this pain went through your breast and held you in its grip (transl. R.G. Ussher)

As Anthony Arthur Long wrote, Philoctetes’ pain is physical, and after Sophocles the word ἄλγησις was used only in the context of tragic parody by the poet Agathon in Aristophanes’ *Thesmophoriazusae* (vv. 146−147).[[14]](#footnote-15) The introduction of ἄλγησις is therefore also proof of Sophocles’ preference for rare and elevated forms ending in –σιςin his later works and of his desire to circumvent the traditional lexicon in view of what Long defined as an *affected style*. Line 792 could have had equal scansion had Sophocles used ἄλγημα τοῦτο rather than ἄλγος, so it is significant that he wanted to use the newer form.[[15]](#footnote-16)

In fact, the contemporary cognate forms at the end of the 5th century BC were essentially ἀλγηδών and ἄλγημα. It is no accident that the tragic poet Sophocles used ἀλγηδών on only one occasion (*OC* 513−514). Chantraine (1933, 361)described this word, a secondary formation created on the root of the verb ἀλγέω with the application of the suffix –*don-*, as Ionic, poetic, and Platonic, so it was probably too new and inelegant to Sophocles’ ears.

But what of ἄλγημα, which was increasingly prevalent in the *Hippocratic corpus*? In Sophocles’ usage, ἄλγημα must refer to the physical pain Philoctetes experienced because of his wound in *Phil*. 1170−1172. Similarly, in 339−340, Neoptolemus makes reference to Philoctetes and his ἀλγήματα: “Thou hast enough of thine own pains, poor soul, without lamenting for another’s woe” (transl. F. Storr).

Conversely, Euripides’ works contain a decidedly high frequency of ἄλγος (with more than 40 attestations) and almost no trace of the newly born ἄλγημα, attested in only one fragment. The technical term ἀλγηδών, according to Marzullo (1999, 124), “invades” *Medea* (24, 56, 1031). In the theatre of Euripides, the semantic field of pain is also represented by λύπη (with about 40 examples), on occasion by πόνος[[16]](#footnote-17) and, although less often, by ὀδύνη (12x).

In comparison with the framework in poetry, there is a drastic decline of ἄλγος in the *usus scribendi* of the prose writers of the 5th century BC. Herodotus provides us only a single occurrence (5.49.2), to which no particular attention has been paid in the commentaries. Heinrich Stein focuses on the χάλκεον πίνακα Aristagoras the tyrant of Miletus brought with him, but not on the epic emphasis of his words, aimed at seeking the help of Cleomenes, the king of Sparta, on the occasion of the Greek cities’ revolt in Asia Minor.

Κλεόμενες, σπουδὴν μὲν τὴν ἐμὴν μὴ θωμάσῃς τῆς ἐνθαῦτα ἀπίξιος· τὰ γὰρ κατήκοντα ἐστὶ τοιαῦτα· Ἰώνων παῖδας δούλους εἶναι ἀντ᾽ ἐλευθέρων ὄνειδος καὶ ἄλγος μέγιστον μὲν αὐτοῖσι ἡμῖν, ἔτι δὲ τῶν λοιπῶν ὑμῖν, ὅσῳ προέστατε τῆς Ἑλλάδος. [3] νῦν ὦν πρὸς θεῶν τῶν Ἑλληνίων ῥύσασθε Ἴωνας ἐκ δουλοσύνης ἄνδρας ὁμαίμονας. εὐπετέως δὲ ὑμῖν ταῦτα οἷά τε χωρέειν ἐστί· οὔτε γὰρ οἱ βάρβαροι ἄλκιμοι εἰσί, ὑμεῖς τε τὰ ἐς τὸν πόλεμον ἐς τὰ μέγιστα ἀνήκετε ἀρετῆς πέρι.

 (Hdt. 5.49.2)

Wonder not, Cleomenes, that I have been so zealous to come hither; for such is our present state: that the sons of the Ionians should be slaves and not free men is a shame and grief to ourselves in especial, and of all others to you, inasmuch as you are the leaders of Hellas” (transl. A.D. Godley).

The commentators (Macan, How and Wells, Nenci, and more recently Hornblower), more concerned with the interpretation of Aristagoras’ map, noted no peculiarity in this lexical choice. Herodotus from Halicarnassus, who a short time later in the same passage used the form δουλοσύνη, “che aveva avuto particolare fortuna in area ionica, dove la schiavitù sotto lo straniero era stata vissuta da generazioni intere e poteva ben essere evocata con la sua drammaticità epica” (Nenci 1994, 224), uses the Homeric term ἄλγος only once together with another Homeric word, ὄνειδος ‘blame, reproach’.

The question may not warrant excessive attention because Herodotus tends to use poetic forms in his prose;[[17]](#footnote-18) however, the passage proposed is not one of the most banal. Herodotus was artfully building the dialogue he imagined the Ionian Aristagoras delivering to the Spartan Cleomenes: this was a tyrant from Ionia confronting a Spartan of the first order in a situation that required a particular *pathos*. To his eyes and to those of the Greeks from Asia, it was disgraceful and painful that the sons of Ionia were slaves instead of free men.

The stylistic intensification is more than intentional**,** and the epic patina does not derive solely from ἄλγος, but also from δουλοσύνη and from the expression with which Aristagoras decrees the superiority of the Spartans (ἐς τὰ μέγιστα ἀνήκετε ἀρετῆς πέρι), which Nenci (1994, 225) indicates in the comment on the passage.[[18]](#footnote-19)

After Herodotus, Thucydides, an acute investigator of the symptoms of the plague in Athens, never uses ἄλγος or ἄλγημα, preferring πόνος (Marzullo 1999, 126), or more abstract terms describing the symptoms specific to the disease. The only exceptions are the adjective ἀλγεινός (2x) and the verb ἀλγέω (2x). In this way, he banishes a word with a clear Ionian stamp from Attic prose. After all, Thucydides censored much of the lexicon of pain.[[19]](#footnote-20) He also rejected words such as ἄχος ‘pain’, ‘anguish’ (Homeric, lyrical, and tragic, found once in Herodotus), and the more banal ὀδύνη.

It is clear, however, that the brilliant Ionic culture renewed the lexicon. Between the fifth and fourth centuries BC, the *Hippocratic corpus* already reflected the substitution of the old ἄλγος with the more precise and functional ἄλγημα, with 14 attestations of the former compared to 194 of the latter. However, we can see that nouns ending in -μα were generally preferred by comparing the instances of νοῦσος (126x), νόσημα (487x) and the very new νόσευμα (12x). The preserved forms of ἄλγος only appear in *Epidemics* and *Internal affections* (a text considered amongst the oldest in the *corpus*) as part of set technical phrases such as καρδίας ἄλγος ‘heart ache’ (*Epid*. 7.20 Littré), περὶ τὴν κύστιν ἄλγος ‘bladder pain’ (*Epid*. 5.43), ἄλγος κοιλίης δεινόν ‘terrible stomach pain’ (*Epid*. 5.98, 7.29), ἄλγος ἐς γούνατα καὶ μηρόν ‘pain in the knees and the side’ (*Epid*. 7.54), and καὶ πρός καρδίην ἄλγος δεινόν ‘terrible heart pain’ (*Epid*. 7.62).

What is striking is the relative speed with which the Hippocratic lexicon introduced the more precise ἄλγημα as a replacement for ἄλγος, evidently considered too old and tied to the Homeric world to serve the new medicine’s systematic methodology. Benedetto Marzullo saw in ἄλγημα “una rideterminazione di origine filosofica, implicante riflessiva soggettività” (1999, 124). This is also a sign of the scientific tension in the medical school of Cos, which revolved around the name of Hippocrates. The equally old term ὀδύνη, instead, fared better, with 772 examples compared to a mere 5 of the neologism ὀδύνημα.

The epigraphic documentation also bears witness to the sporadic preservation of the now crystallised forms, an illuminating example of which comes from *IG* IV2,1122, chronicling Asclepius’ *Iamata*. One of the clinical cases concerns acertain Agestratus, an athlete who suffered from κεφαλᾶ[ς ἄ]λγος and πόνος, which forced him into periods of insomnia διὰ τὸμ πόνον τᾶς κεφαλᾶ[ς]. The competition here is between ἄλγος and πόνος to determine which would become the winning lexeme in philosophy and in the Greek language of the Hellenistic period.

The review of Classical prose would be incomplete without Xenophon. He followed the general tendency, preserving only two attestations of ἄλγος in medical contexts, discussed in a passage about dogs with weak paws in *Cynegeticus* 3 (οὐδ’ ἂν ὦσιν εὔψυχοι τοὺς πόνους δύνανται ἀνέχεσθαι ἀλλ’ ἀπαγορεύουσι διὰ τὸ ἄλγος τῶν ποδῶν, “Even if they are plucky, can’t stand the hard work, and tire because they are foot-sore”, transl. E.C. Marchant) and in *Symposium* 8.37, where he clearly echoes an epic *iunctura* (πολλὰ δ᾽ ἄλγη ἀνέχεται).

The infrequency of the term in prose continues to persevere in the high registers, which in the 5th and 4th centuries BC are no longer only tragic.[[20]](#footnote-21) A significant example comes from Aristophanes’ *Plutus*, a comedy from 388 BC in which ἄλγος is attested as a *hapax legomenon*. The passage deserves a deeper analysis. An old woman entertains herself with Chremylus to whom she relates her distress at having lost the sexual favours of a young man who has become rich thanks to Plutus and so no longer needs to be paid by a very old woman.

Γρ. ὑπὸ τοῦ γὰρ ἄλγους κατατέτηκ’, ὦ φίλτατε.

Κρ. Οὔκ, ἀλλὰ κατασέσηπας, ὥς γ’ ἐμοὶ δοκεῖς.

(Ar. *Plut.* 1034−1035)

Old Woman: In fact I’m pining away with grief, my dear man.

Chremylus: No, you’re rotting away, if you ask me. (transl. J. Henderson)

The commentary on the passage (Torchio 1999, 224) ignores this remarkable lexical choice, which could probably be interpreted as a hint at a tragic style, considering that otherwise ἄλγος had no right to belong to comedy. Some useful indications to give worth to this formal choice can be found in the doctoral thesis of Gretchen Cheney Southard, discussed in 1970 at Johns Hopkins University.[[21]](#footnote-22) To raise the style, a difference could be made in a comedic situation in Italian by using a word such as *duolo*, a piece of poetic language concurrent with a more neutral term such as *dolore*.[[22]](#footnote-23) It is interesting to note the polarity achieved by the verse of the old woman and that of Chremylus. The former complains of being consumed by the pain, as though she were a tragic heroine (but in a much lighter situation), while the latter adds to the absurdity by contrasting the previous κατατέτηκα with the much more realistic κατασέσηπα.

If we could identify a precise tragic context in a verse that parallels a text by Sophocles or Euripides, it would warrant interpretation and be heuristically captivating. Unfortunately, precise references with the verb κατατήκω conjugated in the perfect tense are lacking; still, useful indications can be found in the commentary by van Leeuwen (1968, 153), who quotes Electra’s lament in Sophocles (*El.* 187 ἄνευ τοκέων κατατάκομαι) and Orestes’ words in Euripides’ play (*El*. 239, λύπαις γε συντετεκώς). In addition, van Leeuwen adds a comic verse from Eubulus (fr. 102 K.-A., on κισσός ‘ivy’ which is ὀλολυγόνος ἔρωτι κατατετηκώς),[[23]](#footnote-24) while Philocleon in the *Wasps* gushes out φίλοι, τήκομαι (*Vesp.* 317). The Dutch scholar does not highlight the uniqueness of the poetic ἄλγος, now rare even in prose, in the comic context. Nevertheless, van Leeuwen’s rich annotation on κατατέτηκα and κατασέσηπας (“*parum sane urbane dictum,* *non tamen omnino abhorrens a lingua quotidiana*”) only serves to strengthen the paratragic flow of the verse.

The 4th century BC offers us more uniform documentation, now largely testifying the poetic and archaic status of ἄλγος. Ast’s *Lexikon Platonicum* and the *TLG* mark the only occurrences of the term in *Alcibiades secundus* (142e.1), but it appears in a quotation from Homer.[[24]](#footnote-25) Plato prefers ἀλγηδών, “souffrance”(Chantraine 1933, 361), which is documented 28 times. He certainly does not appreciate the Hippocratic ἄλγημα, as it is entirely absent from his work.

Even the three cases of ἄλγος in Aristotle registered by Radice’s lexikon reveal the same evolution: two of them are poetic quotations.[[25]](#footnote-26) Similarly, Isocrates uses ἀλγηδών and never ἄλγος. In Menander, the verb ἀλγέω and the nouns ἄλγος and ἄλγημα survive with one or two attestations and, unsurprisingly, only ἄλγος is attested in the *γνῶμαι μονόστιχοι* (*Gn.* 446 λιμὸς μέγιστον ἄλγος ἀνθρώποις ἔφυ). In New Comedy, the sphere of pain belongs to λυπέω and λύπη (9x),[[26]](#footnote-27) which are more frequent than the words connected to the family of ὀδύνη, a development that is also evident in philosophy.[[27]](#footnote-28)

**3 Evolution in the Hellenistic age**

The Hellenistic philosophies were quite occupied with the concept of pain and the method of limiting its impact on the life of man. Therefore, investigating the different ways of labelling, conceiving of and interpreting human suffering from a lexical perspective is important in this period.

Epicurus’ aim was liberation from pain, which he significantly termed ἀπονία.[[28]](#footnote-29) It should be stressed that the first meaning of this abstract term was ‘lack of labour’, as documented in Aristotle (*De generatione animalium* 775a.37). That the notion of ‘labour’ was still implicit in πόνος in the 4th century BC is evident in Xenophon’s *Cyropaedia* (2.2.25), where ἀπονία is used to indicate indolence, the absence of energy. The term resurfaces in the Cynics and Stoics, who charge it with a strong ethical meaning, as often happened in the Hellenistic philosophies.[[29]](#footnote-30)

But what can we say of the privatives formed from the stem ἄλγος? The form ἀναλγησία ‘insensibility’ already existed in Democritus (B 193 D.-K.) and the verbal adjective ἀνάλγητος ‘insensible to pain’ or even ‘not painful’, if referred to things, is already attested in the 5th century BC (Soph. *Trach*. 126), whereas ἀναλγής ‘painless’ (for example referring to death) is apparently documented in the *Hippocratic corpus* for the first time. In contrast to the semantic range of ἀπονία, the privative compounds ἀναλγησία and ἀνάλγητος focus more on the aspect of insensibility to physical or metaphorical pain. In both Sophocles’ *Ajax* (946) and Thucydides (3.40.5), the sense is ‘hard of heart’: effectively, insensibility and ruthlessness go hand in hand.[[30]](#footnote-31) Nevertheless, neither the abstract ἀναλγησία nor the adjectives ἀνάλγητος and ἀναλγής met with the same success as ἀπονία and ἀλυπία.[[31]](#footnote-32)

Epicurean philosophy is worth studying because it was especially concerned with the search for pleasure and liberation from pain. A survey on Usener’s *Glossarium Epicureum* reveals the preservation of the verb ἀλγέω and the prevalence of λύπη and πόνος, which have developed specialized meanings. In contrast to πόνος, which is tied to the experience of trial and labour, λύπη, the most ancient and thus most appreciated by the tragedians, retained a shade of psychological negativity, approaching that of the French *chagrin*, and it is no accident that Hellenistic philosophy tended to afford it a negative meaning. The Stoic Cleanthes defined it as a relaxation of the soul (*SVF* 1.575 ἔλεγε τὴν λύπην ψυχῆς παράλυσιν). Andronicus of Rhodes in the *περὶ παθῶν* (1.1.10 Kreuttner), a work that in reality is attributed to an eclectic author of the Imperial Age, presented pain (λύπη) as an irrational depression (ἄλογος συστολή).[[32]](#footnote-33)

Beyond the boundaries of philosophy, the remaining literary genres of the period deserve further remarks. While Hellenistic poetry continued to reject the Homeric concept of ἄλγος,[[33]](#footnote-34) due to the inertia of tradition, its single apparitions in prose are marked by a stylistic refinement when it is not part of a poetic quotation. Such is the case with Polybius, at least limited to the section preserved in his work: ἄλγος is attested only once, precisely in a quotation (the famous *incipit* of the *Odyssey*, in 12.27.11). It is rather more interesting to analyse his behaviour when paraphrasing Homer. For example, in a passage in the ninth book (21), the historian quotes the famous verse of the *Odyssey* on Euryclea’s reaction upon recognising Odysseus.[[34]](#footnote-35) Polybius prefers to substitute the Homeric ἄλγος with the more prosaic λύπη (κατὰ τὸν ποιητὴν ἅμα λύπην καὶ χαρὰν ὑποτρέχειν εἰκὸς ἦν τὰς ἑκάστων ψυχάς).[[35]](#footnote-36) According to John Thornton (2014), the reference to the passage from the *Odyssey* is inaccurate, as Polybius’s quotations often are. In any case, the inaccuracy of the quotation is valuable because it demonstrates how much a noun such as ἄλγος clashes with the historiographic prose of an author such as Polybius, which is dry and free of floweriness.

ὅτι τοιαύτης διαθέσεως ὑπαρχούσης περί τε τοὺς Ῥωμαίους καὶ Καρχηδονίους, καὶ παλιντρόπων ἑκατέροις ἐκ τῶν ὑπὸ τῆς τύχης ἀπαντωμένων ἐναλλὰξ προσπιπτόντων, κατὰ τὸν ποιητὴν ἅμα λύπην καὶ χαρὰν ὑποτρέχειν εἰκὸς ἦν τὰς ἑκάστων ψυχάς.

(Polyb. 9.21)

Such being the respective positions of the Romans and Carthaginians, experiencing in turn the opposite extremes of fortune, it was natural that, as Homer says, pain and joy at once should possess the minds of each. (transl. W. R. Paton)

Through a survey of Mauersberger’s valuable lexicon of Polybius (*PL*), we have confirmation that even in his lucid and dispassionate prose, it is the ‘vulgar’ and neutral πόνος (12x) that dominates, rather than λύπη (2x) and ὀδύνη (totally absent),[[36]](#footnote-37) marking a path that may lead to Modern Greek in which the use of πόνος was generalised to indicate pain or discomfort.

At approximately the same time, in the 2nd century BC, Jewish-Hellenistic literature offers its own trends. A survey conducted on the concordance to the *Septuagint* by Hatch and Redpathdemonstrates the rather measured use ofἄλγος in the following passages:

(1) γενηθήτω ἡ ἔπαυλις αὐτῶν ἠρημωμένη,

καὶ ἐν τοῖς σκηνώμασιν αὐτῶν μὴ ἔστω ὁ κατοικῶν·

ὅτι ὃν σὺ ἐπάταξας, αὐτοὶ κατεδίωξαν,

καὶ ἐπὶ τὸ ἄλγος τῶν τραυματίων σου προσέθηκαν.

 (*Ps.* 68/69.26-27)

Let their steading become desolated because, and let there be no one who lives in their coverts, because they persecuted him whom you struck and to the pain of your wounded they added” (*NETS*, transl. A. Pietersma)

(2) ἄλγος καρδίας καὶ πένθος γυνὴ ἀντίζηλος ἐπὶ γυναικὶ καὶ μάστιξ γλώσσης πᾶσιν

 ἐπικοινωνοῦσα.

 (*Si.* 26.6)

 Pain of heart and sorrow is a woman who is a rival to a wife / and a lash of a tongue is she who shares with everyone” (*NETS*, transl. B.G. Wright)

(3) οἱ πρὸς ὑμᾶς πάντες παραπορευόμενοι ὁδὸν, ἐπιστρέψατε καὶ ἴδετε εἰ ἔστιν ἄλγος κατὰ τὸ ἄλγος μου, ὃ ὲγενήθη.

 (*La.* 1.12)

It is nothing to you, all you who pass along the road! Turn, and see if there is a sorrow like my sorrow which has happened” (*NETS*, transl. P.J. Gentry)

(4) ἀκούσατε δή, πάντες οἱ λαοί, καὶ ἴδετε τὸ ἄλγος μου

 (*La.* 1.18)

Hear then, all you peoples, and behold my sorrow” (*NETS*, transl. P.J. Gentry)

(5) περιεκέχυτο γὰρ περὶ τον ἄνδρα δέος τι καὶ φρικασμὸς σώματος, δι’ ὧν πρόδηλον ἐγίνετο τοῖς θεωροῦσιν τὸ κατὰ καρδίαν ἐνεστὸς ἄλγος.

 (*2 Ma.* 3.17)

For a frightening bodily shudder was spread over the man by which the pain lodged in his heart became clear to all who beheld it” (transl. R. Doran)

The context of the final passage is the violation of the Temple of Jerusalem by the functionary Heliodorus, who was sent by King Seleucus IV Philopator (187−175 BC) to confront the high priest Onias III. The author refers to the turmoil felt by Onias at the sight of the unprecedented impiety committed by the pagan. This book, which summarises the much wider work of a certain Jason of Cyrene, shows the level of refinement and erudition of Greek reached by Jewish culture of the time. Luciano Canfora (2013, 546) has already proposed the possible Thucydidean echo in the prologue (διακριβοῦν περὶ ἑκάστων), a rare quotation of a prosastic text in a book that often strives for a poetic style.[[37]](#footnote-38)

We would do well to consider that the resumption of ἄλγος in Jewish-Hellenistic prose, in addition to responding to the contemporary trend of Asian rhetoric to recuperate poetisms, is a very Judaic stylistic trait that reshapes Greek and Homeric pain in a way that reflects a Jewish Hebrew perspective. Within the *Septuagint*, an alternative to ἄλγος is ἀλγηδών, a term that is common in *2 Maccabees* (with more than four attestations: 7.12, 9.5, 9.9, 9.11) and is significantly represented with a discrete repetition only in *IV Macc*., the most philosophical of these texts (3.18, 6.7, 6.34, 6.35, 8.28, 9.28, 13.5, 14.1, 14.11, 16.17), and in *Psalm* 37/38 (v. 17).[[38]](#footnote-39)

**4 Lexical matters in Greek of the Imperial Age**

Nevertheless, sporadic quotations cannot undermine a rather clear evolution. In the languageof medicine, the most common term for indicating bodily pain became ἄλγημα, as demonstrated by the high number of attestations documented in Galen, an author who writes with a significant amount of *koiné.*[[39]](#footnote-40)An exception is the doctor Aretaeus of Cappadocia,[[40]](#footnote-41) who recovers ἄλγος in a handful of cases. In *De causis et signis diuturnorum morborum* (IV 12.3.4−5), the Cappadocian author writing in the Ionic dialect of the Hippocratic tradition[[41]](#footnote-42) presents a spectrum of various categories of pain corresponding to the density of the organs involved. When it strikes the ‘dense’ parts (τὸ πυκινόν) of the organism, the pain is less acute and perceptible (ἄλγος γὰρ τρηχείᾳ ὲν αἰσθήσει) compared to the ‘thinner’ zones (τὸ ἀραιόν).[[42]](#footnote-43)

Subsequently, medicine would continue to prefer the more technical ἄλγημα, sustained now by centuries of linguistic usage by Oribasius, among others. Thus, Aetius of Amida, a physician of the 5th century AD, used ἄλγος just twice, while in the 7th century AD, in an era where the name Hippocrates was more than a thousand years old, even Paul of Aegina (625−690 AD), who specialised in gynaecology, used only ἄλγημα.

Outside the confines of medicine and poetry, which remained substantially faithful to Homeric language, albeit with some discrepancies (ἄλγος 74x in the *Posthomerica* by Quintus Smyrnaeus, 16x in the *Dionysiaca* by Nonnus of Panopolis), the Greek prose of the Imperial Age, marked by a division between Asianism and Atticism, at least agrees in a single micro-stylistic aspect. Next to the prevalent λύπη and πόνος, Greek used mainly ἀλγηδών for moral value and ἄλγημα for the more technical physical realm.[[43]](#footnote-44) In Plutarch, for example, in which ἄλγημα[[44]](#footnote-45) is used only once, the learned ἄλγος is limited to a handful of quotations.[[45]](#footnote-46) A similar argument can be made for Lucian, who quotes the epic ἄλγεα (see for instance ἄλγεα πάσχειν, *Dialogues of the Dead* 77.5.2 Macleod) and revives ἄλγος in the amazing work of Ionic prose that is *De Syria dea* (39.12).[[46]](#footnote-47) An Atticist writer such as Arrian of Nicomedia in the *Anabasis of Alexander* exhibits a mannered ἄλγος οὐ σμικρόν (7.6.2) referring to the displeasure felt by the Macedonians when they see Alexander wearing Median clothes, in a passage where even the epic form σμικρόν instead of μικρόν points to the move towards a higher style: εἶναι γὰρ οὖν καὶ Μηδικὴν τὴν Ἀλεξάνδρου στολὴν ἄλγος οὐ σμικρὸν Μακεδόσιν ὀρωμένην.[[47]](#footnote-48)

In the long history of the literary recovery of ἄλγος, there is an important moment in the 4th century AD. The great Christian intellectuals with pagan educations begin to comment on the sacred texts of the new religion, and the above-mentioned passages of the Old Testament required a commentary, which was also, even if created with different tools from ours, of a lexical nature. Gregory of Nazianzus, for example, made the concept of ἄλγος his own in poetry, but more significant and important for the purposes of our investigation are the occurrences in prose. A survey in the *TLG* uncovers a neglected passage of Eusebius’ *Vita Constantini*,on the death of the emperor.[[48]](#footnote-49) Eusebius — whose rhetoric and sustained prose Photius did not like (*Bibl.*, cod. 13.4a) due to a presumed lack of elegance — regularly uses the common term ἀλγηδών, except when he quotes Homer (*PE* 6.3.1, 6.8.2, 13.12.5) or when he mentions and comments on the few Old Testament passages cited above. In the fourth book of the *Vita Constantini*,the cultured author refers to the death of his favourite emperor and the public displays of pain in the form of screams and cries that followed. We find here the rare *iunctura* ἐνδόμυχον ἄλγος:

Δῆμοί θ’ὡσαύτως τὴν σύμπασαν περιενόστουν πόλιν, τὸ τῆς ψυχῆς ἐνδόμυχον ἄλγος κραυγαῖς καὶ βοαῖς ἔκδηλον ποιούμενοι, ἄλλοι δὲ κατηφεὶς ἐπτοημένοις ἐῴκεισαν, ἑκάστου τε πένθος ἴδιον ποιουμένου ἑαυτόν τε κόπτοντος, ὡσανεὶ τοῦ κοινοῦ ἁπάντων ἀγαθοῦ τῆς αυτῶν ἀφῃρημένου ζωῆς.

(Eus. *Vita Constantini* 4.65.3).

The populace similarly wandered all round the city, expressing their inward anguish of soul with groans and cries while others were thrown into a sort of daze, as each one mourned personally and smote himself, as if their life had been deprived of the common good of all” (transl. A. Cameron / S.G. Hall)

Averil Cameron and Stuart G. Hall’s excellent historical commentary insists above all that the whole scene of public mourning was constructed “as the antithesis of rejoicing and *adventus*”, where “all orders and all ages weep and lament for the Emperor, invoking him in traditional terminology as saviour and benefactor, while in addition the soldiers mourn him as their good shepherd”.[[49]](#footnote-50) Not even the more recent biographical work on Constantine by Bleckmann / Schneider (2007) makes notations on the lexical aspect of this text.

On the other hand, it does not seem out of place to emphasise that we are faced with a clear attempt to raise the style required by an epochal event such as the death of Constantine, the emperor who was the model for Christians in the fourth century. Therefore, the intentionally refined and moving lexicon also contributes to the “extravagance of the scene” (Cameron / Hall 1999, 343).[[50]](#footnote-51)

In conclusion, the rich and articulated history of the term ἄλγος, which became quickly and unforeseeably poetic, can be followed from the *Iliad* and the *Odyssey* up to Greek Christian literature. Greek is prodigious in its very subtle emotive terminology, which in many cases anticipates a semantic shift that also has consequences for modern languages (for example, the Hellenistic θλίψις, from ‘physical pressure’ to ‘oppression’ and ‘affliction’) and could not obliterate the aristocratic and Homeric ἄλγος, snubbed by the innovator Hippocrates, but recorded in the lexicon of Babiniotis and still vital in Modern Greek in certain contexts. A poet of the last century, Odisseas Elitis, in the first hymn of the *Genesis* of the *Άξιον Εστί,* celebrated God the creator as both pain and joy (ἀλγηδόνα καὶ εὐφροσύνη) not with ἄλγος, but with the cognate ἀλγηδόνα, aiming to raise the style of the piece. In fact, the younger αλγηδόνα, a term that was a novelty for Euripides, is no longer in use today, and Elitis elegantly recovered it as an archaism. Meanwhile, as happened with many words in classical Greek, άλγος, so quickly adopted already in the 5th century BC in the firmament of poetry, has been recovered and continues to be used in Modern Greek.

**Abbreviations**

*DELG*= Chantraine, P., *Dictionnaire étymologique de la langue grecque: histoire des mots*, Paris, 1968-1980.

*FGrHist* = Jacoby, F., *Die Fragmente der griechischen Historiker*, Berlin-Leiden, 1926–

*H&R* = Hatch, E. & Redpath, H., *A Concordance to the Septuagint and the other Greek versions of the Old Testament (including the apocryphal books), Oxford, Clarendon Press, 1897* (Graz, Akademische Druck- und Verlaganstalt 1975).

*IG* = *Inscriptiones Graecae*, Berlin, 1873–

*NETS* **=** Pietersma, A. / Wright, B.G. (eds.), *A New English Translation of the Septuagint*, Oxford-New York, 2007.

*PL* = Mauersberger, A. et al., *Polybios-Lexikon im Auftrage der Deutschen Akademie der Wissenschaften zu Berlin*, Berlin, 1956−2004.

*SH* = Lloyd-Jones, H. & Parsons, P., *Supplementum Hellenisticum*, Berlin, 1983.

*Syll*. = Dittenberger, W., *Sylloge inscriptionum graecarum*, third edition, Leipzig, 1915− 1924.

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2. One of the proposed etymologies refers to the verb ἀλέγω ‘worry’, ‘take care’: this link would explain the vocalism of the adjective ἀλεγεινός as an alternative to the more common ἀλγεινός ‘painful’. In any case, according to Chantraine (*DELG s.v.*) and Seiler (1950, 85), the relationship between ἀλέγω and ἄλγος creates semantic problems, unless an unforeseen development occurs, which can be explained as a kind of euphemism according to the succession: ‘take into account’ > ‘take care’ > ‘suffer’. In fact, Seiler prefers the comparison with Latin (*algus* ‘bitter cold’, ‘nip’). [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. Suffice it to refer to *otalgia* ‘earache’ *odontalgia* ‘toothache’, *cephalalgia* ‘head-ache’, *cardialgia* ‘pain in or near the heart’. [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
4. Because of his peripheric position, Cyprus tended to preserve a lot of archaic cultural features, even from a linguistic point of view, and the Cypriot dialect has been one of the most conservative Greek dialects since Antiquity. Several epic and lyric terms were still in use in Cyprus in the 5th century BC and later on, not only in poetry. “L’ensemble des gloses chypriotes ne présente donc pas des emprunts à la langue épique, mais un héritage commun” (Egetmeyer 2010, 28). [↑](#footnote-ref-4)
5. In his lectures, Domenico Musti often emphatically repeated that Greek literature began with rage, Achilles’ μῆνις, and that it would not be far-fetched to state that it also began with pain, the ἄλγεα of the Achaeans and Odysseus. In reality, in Homeric poetry there was not yet a clear distinction between physical and psychological pain. As stated by Roseline Rey in her interesting book *Histoire de la douleur* “les modes de représentation de la douleur s’articulent non autour de l’opposition du physique et du moral, non autour du degré de la douleur, mais suivant deux axes: le degré d’implication du sujet dans la douleur et les modalités de perception de celle-ci en fonction de la temporalité et en fonction de la source de la douleur — durable ou rapide, aigu ou tranchant — c’est-à-dire en faisant référence directement à l’instrument qui en est la cause, et qui définit du même coup les qualités de la sensation” (Rey 2011, 18−19). [↑](#footnote-ref-5)
6. The French scholar sees in πῆμα “la designation d’une chose désagréable ou nuisible, en tant qu’*origine*, *agent ou porteur du procès*, et non comme produit d’un procès, comme phénomèn extérieur au sujet. Cette valeur (‘fléau, malheur, cause ou sujet de douleur’) s’accorde d’ailleurs avec la signification des différents dérivés de πῆμα: exemple: ἀπήμων ‘qui ne fait pas de mal’, πημαίνω ‘faire du tort à, léser, endommager’” (Mawet 1979, 387). As for ὀδύνη, it is instead a term originally belonging to medical vocabulary, which then became a common word for indicating an acute, violent pain. “En tant que désignation d’une douleur lancinante et localisée, ὀδύνη s’oppose à ἄλγος, espression d’une douleur plus durable, plus généralisée et qui affecte la totalité du corps” (Mawet 1979, 390). The Homeric lexicon of pain also includes ἄχος ‘emotive shock’, πένθος ‘mourning’, and κῆδος ‘worry’, ‘restlessness’, which is intellectually charged and projects towards the future (according to Mawet, this concept is similar to the French *souci*). [↑](#footnote-ref-6)
7. The term λύπη is not attested in Homer and seems to prevail especially in the 5th century BC with a moral meaning (‘pain’, ‘suffering’) developed from one that was originally concrete: “Les emplois à propos de maladies ou de mauvaises terres supposent à l’origine un sens concret” (*DELG* *s.v.*). In reality, the adjective λυπρός is already a Homeric *hapax* referring to the island of Ithaca (*Od*. 13.243), just like its cognate λυπέω is found in Hesiod (*Op*. 401). Therefore, it is only in tragedy, prose, and later in subsequent poetry that the more modern λύπη, after some attestations in lyric poetry, acquired a vivacity that made it “le terme central de la douleur en grec post-homérique” (Mawet 1979, 399−400). The neuter πάθος, formed in the zero grade from the aorist παθεῖν and destined to a long history on the strength of its generality, is also recent since it is not attested before the 5th century BC. [↑](#footnote-ref-8)
8. The latter represents an ‘extraordinary term’ of the Hippocratic lexicon. This feminine form also occurs in Herodotus (5x), Sophocles (3x) and Plato (7x). [↑](#footnote-ref-9)
9. Even with the necessary distinctions, the semantic shift that led πόνος ‘labour’ to acquire the meaning of ‘pain’ in post-Homeric literature is the opposite of that of Latin *laboro* (‘I suffer’, ‘I labour’), which evolved into the Italian *lavorare*. “L’acception “souffrance” résultant d’un développement postérieur des emplois du terme, n’apparait que de façon tout à fait occasionelle dans les poèmes homériques, à côté de la signification propre: “travail accompli avec effort”” (Mawet 1979, 393). An interesting moment in this history can be identified in the poetry of Pindar. In fact, reading some sections of the odes gives us useful indications of the semantic value to be assigned to πόνος, not simply ‘labour’, but also ‘pain’. For example, *Ol.* 2, dedicated to the tyrant Theron of Acragas, winner of the chariot race in 476 BC, which deals with the inescapable ups and downs of human existence, offers precious evidence for this progression. Already in the first narrative section (vv. 19−20), the poet states “for the malignancy of woe is quelled and perisheth beneath the joy of goodly triumphs, / when the destiny of God sendeth a man soaring happiness from on high” (transl. L.R. Farnell); the word used for ‘pain’ is πῆμα (πῆμα θνᾴσκει παλίγκοτον δαμασθέν) and when he later writes about the alternating moments between joy and sadness, the poet reverts rather to πόνος. This can be seen in vv. 33−34: ῥοαὶ δ’ ἄλλοτ’ ἄλλαι / εὐθυμιᾶν τε μέτα καὶ / πόνων ἐς ἄνδρας ἔβαν. “At various times varying tides of fortune come upon men bearing both joy of heart and sorrows” (transl. L.R. Farnell). [↑](#footnote-ref-10)
10. “Πόνος und μάθησις ̶ ja, πόνος und ἀρετή sind untrennbar; […] der Vorausschauende nimmt freiwillig πόνος auf sich; der Dumme hat seine Versäumnis durch πάθος abzugelten” (Dörrie 1956, 319). [↑](#footnote-ref-11)
11. In reality, with Aeschylus, another cognate also comes to the fore, the verb ἀλγύνω ‘cause pain’ (3x: *Sept.* 358, *Ch.* 746, *PV* 245), which is quite common in Sophocles and Euripides (see for instance *Hipp.* 798). [↑](#footnote-ref-12)
12. It is worth pointing out that even the term μάθος was a rarity. ‘Freilich soll schon Alkaios das Wort μάθος gebraucht haben; das bezeugt Herodian *περὶ μονηρᾶς λέξεως* II 941, 28 L. […] Im Attischen ist Aischylos’ Prägung jedenfall singulär’ (Dörrie 1956, 310). The risk of a monotheistic interpretation of Aeschylus’ statement πάθει μάθος, which had gained a certain consensus in the past, has been highlighted by Lloyd-Jones (1956). On the concept of πάθος in Greek see also Lanza (1997). [↑](#footnote-ref-13)
13. “It is not surprising that the *Philoctetes* contains a large number of words for pain and disease, as well as some professional medical terms. Thus νόσος ‘physical sickness’ occurs 18 times, ἄλγησις and ἄλγημα (340, 1169) do not occur in the other plays, and we find such technical terms as νοσηλεία (18), θερμότατον αἱμάδα (696), κουφίζειν (735), αἱμορραγὴς φλέψ (825)” (Long 1968, 132). [↑](#footnote-ref-14)
14. Long 1968, 132. [↑](#footnote-ref-15)
15. “The difference is a fine one, but important; ἄλγησις gives us a subjective statement of feeling. Philoctetes wants Odysseus to experience the full force of his own suffering” (Long 1968, 133). [↑](#footnote-ref-16)
16. Since πόνος means both ‘toil’ and ‘physical suffering’, it is difficult to state with certainty its precise value in every Euripidean passage (113x). As explained by J.P. Vernant, “πόνος s’applique à toutes les activités qui exigent un éffort pénible”. Heracles’ life is the very example of this heroic concept: ‘dans le mythe d’Héraclès, le héros doît choisir entre une vie de plaisir et de mollesse et une vie vouée au *ponos*. Héraclès n’est pas un travailleur (Vernant 1971, 17). On the meaning of πόνος and the concept of labour in ancient Greece, see also Loraux 1982 and Musti 1997, 41-42. [↑](#footnote-ref-17)
17. The use of poetisms by Herodotus, not by chance defined as ὁμηρικώτατος by the ancients, has been widely studied, including in connection with the various contexts. For example, Carla Schick had revealed a greater frequency of poetic terms in the parts with dialogue than those with narrative. The recourse to the model of poetry by logographers is greater “quando lo stesso interesse per il fatto narrato induce gli autori, consapevoli o no, a ricercare forme più intensamente espressive” (Schick 1956, 390). [↑](#footnote-ref-18)
18. After all, the language of pain used by Herodotus also tends to stylistic rarity elsewhere, as pointed out by Marzullo (1999, 126). The sole case of the synonym ὀδύνη (9.16.5) is in the gnomic words of a certain Tersander: ἐχθίστη δὲ ὀδύνη ἐστὶ τῶν ἐν ἀνθρώποισι αὕτη, πολλὰ φρονέοντα μηδενὸς κρατέειν. “And it is the hatefulest of all human sorrows to have much knowledge and no power” (transl. A.D. Godley). [↑](#footnote-ref-19)
19. According to the French scholar Pierre Huart, this could be due to Thucydides’ interest in events and processes that could have a general interest, beyond the individual sentiments. «Voilà donc le but de l’étude psychologique pour Thucydide: passer sous silence tout ce qui est particulier, pour s’attacher à ce qui, dans les personnages qu’il met en scène, est susceptible de présenter un intérêt général pour la connaissance de l’homme et des sentiments fondamentaux qui mènent l’humanité» (Huart 1968, 5). [↑](#footnote-ref-20)
20. According to Marzullo (1999, 126), “l’aristocratica supremazia di ἄλγος è destinata a crollare: l’imbarazzante poetismo sopravvive, quale pretenzioso flosculo letterario”. [↑](#footnote-ref-21)
21. “In this case the pain is obviously mental, but the use of κατατήκω may suggest a play on physical pain since τήκω and its compounds, though primarily non-medical words, are often used by medical writers to describe the dissolving of flesh or by non-medical writers of someone being consumed by disease or love” (Southard 1970, 23). Nevertheless, Southard fails to point out that we are dealing with a *hapax* of the author and inserts ἄλγος within a chapter on the *medical vocabulary in Aristophanes*, constructed through the search for punctual correspondences with the use of Hippocrates. In light of the considerations I am making, it would probably be more correct to insert them among poetic vocabulary. [↑](#footnote-ref-22)
22. Maria Cristina Torchio translates with *dolore* (pain) (“Ve. Mi consumo per il dolore, carissimo. / Cr. No, ma sei già in putrefazione, per quanto mi sembra”). [↑](#footnote-ref-23)
23. This fragment has been interpreted in different ways. “Meineke suggested that these lines refer ‘ad incognitam nobis fabulam… de Cisso (Nonnus, *Dion*. 12.97, Pausan. 1.31.6) Ololygonis nymphae amore tabescente’ and this idea was picked up in an influential note by Rhode” (Hunter 1983, 196). White 1979, 9-16 has suggested that the nightingale was meant by the word ὸλολυγών (also in Theocr. 7.139). [↑](#footnote-ref-24)
24. The quotation is not at all banal, since it comes from a moralising section of the *Odyssey,* in which Zeus laments the ingratitude of men (ὑπὲρ μόρον ἄλγε’ ἔχουσι) and seems to pave the way to a kind of archaic theodicy. [↑](#footnote-ref-25)
25. As regards *Rhetoric* 1370b 5, μετὰ γὰρ τε καὶ ἄλγεσι τέρπεται ἀνὴρ μνήμενος ὅς τις πολλὰ πάθῃ καὶ πολλὰ ἐόργῃ, cf. *Il*. 18.108. In the *Athenian Constitution* 5.2, instead, Aristotle quotes Solon, fr. 4a W. It is interesting to observe still in Aristotle (*Hist. an*. 635a 28) a medical expression such as ἄνευ ἄλγους καὶ μετὰ ἀναισθησίας, which should sound quite antiquated. [↑](#footnote-ref-26)
26. As is declared in a fragment of the *Kitharistes*, ἆρ’ ἐστὶ συγγενές τι λύπη καὶ βίος; (fr. 1, 8 Körte), “Can pain and life be brothers?” (transl. W.G. Arnott). [↑](#footnote-ref-27)
27. Although with a significant exception, in the “fanciful” line ὀδύνης γὰρ ὑός in *Dys*. 88 (Gomme / Sandbach 1973, 148−149). [↑](#footnote-ref-28)
28. In the fragment of the treatise περὶ αἱρέσεων καὶ φυγῶν, reported by Diogenes Laertius in the *Life of Epicurus* (10.136), we read: ἡ μὲν γὰρ ἀταραξία καὶ ἡ ἀπονία καταστηματικαὶ εἰσιν ἡδοναί· ἡ δὲ χαρὰ καὶ εὐφροσύνη κατὰ κίνησιν ἐνεργείᾳ βλέπονται (fr. 2, 91.9 Usener). Epicurean philosophy preached liberation from the torment of the soul (ἀταραξία) and the pain of the body (ἀπονία). [↑](#footnote-ref-29)
29. An interesting moment in this linguistic and philosophical matter is in its use by Onesicritus of Astypalea, a cynical thinker who took part in Alexander the Great’s expedition. In a passage handed down by Strabo (15.1.65 = *FGrHist* 134 F 17), the stimulating character of πόνος is highlighted compared to the passive and negative λύπη. “La douleur en général apparaît donc comme un ennemi de l’homme, mais le même douleur, exploitée dans le cadre volontaire et réfléchi de l’ascèse, se voit doter d’une valeur positive: en ce sens, Antisthéne pouvait dire que «la douleur est un bien». Cette ambivalence de la douleur, qui anticipe le principe de l’«indifférent» stoicienne, est également soulignée par Onésicrite, lorsqu’il oppose le caractère stimulant du πόνος à celui totalement négatif du chagrin (λύπη), qualifiant le premier de φίλιος, le second de πολέμιον” (Prost 2004, 40). [↑](#footnote-ref-30)
30. In the Thucydidean passage, for instance, Cleon invites the Athenians not to seem ἀναλγητότεροι (less sensitive) than the inhabitants of Mytilene, who had revolted against the Athenian empire, and to punish them. “Here, on Kleon’s lips, it means ‘insensible to our town’” (Gomme 1956, 312). [↑](#footnote-ref-31)
31. The semantic field of ἄλυπος and ἀλυπία is rather the lack of pain (see *OT* 593, *OC* 1519): γήρως ἄλυπα are the things that are protected from the ravages of time. The notion of ἀλυπία is probably older than ἀπονία. The famous inventor of the mysterious τέχνη ἀλυπίας, a sort of pioneering psychology, was Antiphon (F A 6 D.-K.), whom Mario Untersteiner also considers the creator of the same word (Prost 2004, 76). As to the stem of ἄλγος, it is important to note that before philosophy, Greek medicine itself had snubbed ἀναλγησία and ἀνάλγητος (3x) and that their recovery only occurred at the beginning of the 19th century. “La nostra “analgesia” è dotto recupero, risale agli inizi del secolo scorso, molti lessici ancora chiosano con ‘mancanza di sensibilità’” (Marzullo 1999, 124−125). [↑](#footnote-ref-32)
32. Thus, when we arrive at the famous passage of Cicero’s *Tusculanae disputationes* (2.35), to a Roman, even one as cultured and partisan as Cicero, it seemed that Greek was strangely lacking in vocabulary, seeing as it uses the same term, πόνος, for labour and pain. The problem laid out by Cicero, who splits hairs on the meaning of the Greek term πόνος indicating both physical labour and the painful sensation it brings about, is well analysed by Prost (2016, 14−15). In reality, the Greek lexicon for pain is richer than what the Latin writer would have wanted and is historically and stylistically differentiated. In the case of the Greek φιλόπονος, taken as ‘lover of pain’ (*studiosos vel potius amantis doloris*) instead of ‘lover of labour’, it is a false problem if considered diachronically. [↑](#footnote-ref-33)
33. Found in Apollonius of Rhodes 11x, Nicander 11x (*Ther.* and *Alex.*), Lycophron 2x. [↑](#footnote-ref-34)
34. *Od*. 19.471−472 τὴν δ’ ἅμα χάρμα καὶ ἄλγος ἕλε φρένα τὼ δέ οἱ ὄσσε / δακρυόφι πλῆσθεν, θαλερὴ δέ οἱ ἔσχετο φωνή “Then upon her soul came joy and grief in one moment, and both her eyes were filled with tears and the flow of her voice was checked” (transl. A.T. Murray). [↑](#footnote-ref-35)
35. The passage was noted and opportunely commented on in stylistic terms by De Foucault (1972, 244). [↑](#footnote-ref-36)
36. Instead, the relationship is inverted if we compare the cognate verbs λυπέω (16x) and πονέω (7x). [↑](#footnote-ref-37)
37. Some of these poetic terms, such as ἀπήμαντος, μόρος, σχέτλιος, στυγέω, or the preposition ἄτερ, a form such as ἄλγος or a whole elocution such as ἃ μὴ θέμις, seem to indicate a reading of Homer and of tragedy. Faced with the epochal importance of the Maccabean revolt and the heroism of Judah and his men, the author of *2 Ma.* aimed above all to reproducethe tone of an epic, for example through the use of adverbial forms such as λεοντηδόν, ἀγεληδόν, or the neologism κρουνηδόν. On the literary character of the book to which I dedicated my doctoral thesis (Rome 2015) under the guidance of Albio Cesare Cassio, see the commentary by Doran (2012) and the very recent dissertation by Domazakis (2018). [↑](#footnote-ref-38)
38. In the first century AD Flavius Josephus remarks that τὸ βουβῶνος ἄλγος ‘inflammation of the groin’ was also known as σαββάτωσις (*Contra Apionem* 2.22.1, 2.27.4; for a commentary, see Barclay 2007, 179). These two sporadic attestations of ἄλγος are not surprising for a Jewish author who aimed at μετασχεῖν τῶν ἑλληνικῶν γραμμάτων (*AJ* 20.263). [↑](#footnote-ref-39)
39. Although attesting a high frequency of ἄλγημα, the prestigious *Dictionary of Medical Terms in Galen* (Durling 1993,29−31) registers only one case of ἄλγος, significantly in a quotation from a poetic passage of medical content from Philo of Tarsus (*De compositione medicamentorum*, 13.268.1 Kühn = *SH* 690.9 πάντα δ’ ὅσα σπλάγχνοισιν ἐνίσταται ἄλγεα παύω). As regards Galen, the *TLG* registers very few other attestations of ἄλγος, often in poetic quotations (*De antidotis* 14.35.13, 14.37.8 Kühn and in a controverse passage of *Quod animi mores corporis temperamenta sequantur* 4.819.1 Kühn). [↑](#footnote-ref-40)
40. Its dating remains controversial, although today the period proposed includes the second half of the 1st century and the first half of the 2nd century AD. A detailed discussion of the problem is given by Amneris Roselli (2004, 164), who also analyses the organisation of Aretaeus’s work in eight books. [↑](#footnote-ref-41)
41. Regarding the vitality of the Ionic dialect in post-classical prose, Cassio’s 1996 study is fundamental. [↑](#footnote-ref-42)
42. “Aretaios’ terminology for pain suggests that he is not determined to differentiate between pain terms: the treatises repeatedly slide between the use of *ponos*, *odunē* and *algos*. While there are occasions when specific terminology is used for different types of pain, it is clear that Aretaios extracts little intellectual or classificatory mileage out of shifts in terminology: pain = pain = pain” (King 2017, 68−69). According to Aretaios, who prefers the current term πόνος, except when he needs to refer to specific ailments such as κεφαλαλγίη (e.g., in *SD* III 2.1.2), the pains (τὰ ἄλγεα) are bound to increase when a δυσκρασίη alters the innate heat of the human body (*SD* IV 12.3.7−4.4). Unlike Roselli (2005, 415), who argues that Aretaeus actively read and commented on Hippocrates, according to Oberhalm (1994, 966) “What is Hippocratic in Aretaios, in the final analysis, is not the medical theories and praxis, but only the style”. As regards ἄλγος, it seems that he was even more conservative than Hippocrates himself. [↑](#footnote-ref-43)
43. Even the most famous sick writer in the second century AD, Aelius Aristides, refers to his disease in terms of ὀδύναι… δειναί (47−62 K.) or of ἀλγήματα ἰσχυρά καὶ δεινά (49−16 K.). A rich analysis on the perception of pain on the part of the author of the *Sacred Tales* can be found in King (2017, 129−153). [↑](#footnote-ref-44)
44. *Life of* *Sulla* 26.3.1 (Σύλλᾳ δὲ διατρίβοντι περὶ τὰς Ἀθήνας ἄλγημα ναρκῶδες μετὰ βάρους εἰς τοὺς πόδας ἐνέπεσεν). [↑](#footnote-ref-45)
45. For instance, in the *Consolatio ad Apollonium* (15) ἄλγος οὐδὲν ἃπτεται νεκροῦ, with a corresponding verse in Aesch., fr. 255 Radt. [↑](#footnote-ref-46)
46. The term ἄλγος is missing from the lexicon of the novelists (Achilles Tatius, Chariton, Heliodorus, Iamblichus, Longus, and Xenophon of Ephesus), although we find ἀλγηδών (Achilles Tatius, 1.6.2, 2.7.2, Heliodorus 2.30.1, 9.18.2) and ἄλγημα (3.7.1, 4.7.6). On the other hand, the verb ἀλγέω is more frequent (Conca / De Carli / Zanetto 1983, *s.v.*). [↑](#footnote-ref-47)
47. “In fact they had long been pained to see Alexander wearing the Median robes, and his Persian marriage ceremonies had not given satisfaction to most of them” (transl. I. Robson). [↑](#footnote-ref-48)
48. I will not enter into the merit of the discussion on the paternity of the work, for which I refer to the recent study by Francesco Corsaro, which defined it “piuttosto discutibile sotto il profilo letterario per il suo carattere farraginoso, non esente talora da una certa sciatteria” (Corsaro 2012, 284). [↑](#footnote-ref-49)
49. Cameron / Hall 1999, 343. [↑](#footnote-ref-50)
50. It should be added that the adjective ἐνδόμυχος is a poetic term as well, a *hapax* in Sophocles (*Ph.* 1457), later attested in Callimachus, Galen, and very often in Nonnus’ *Dionysiaca*. [↑](#footnote-ref-51)