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

**1 Origins**

There are words in a literary language which thrive for a certain period of time, then blur more and more, until they completely disappear. There are, conversely, some words which from very humble origins gradually establish themselves as to become prestigious even in the most refined literature.

The reasons why this happens may be manifold, and are sometimes difficult, if not impossible, to assess. That is particularly the case of many ancient languages, and due to an extensive shortage of evidence is unfortunately true also for the ancient Greek.

The history of the Greek language at early stages appears so closely linked to poetry that, given the almost complete lack of prose testimonies, we must often resist the temptation to consider as simply 'poetic' a relevant part of the Greek vocabulary. Distinguishing which words are poetically marked and which are not, and why it is so, may prove to be a very frustrating exercise. In this respect, the first text to face up to is naturally Homer, who was the fundamental poem of the Greek culture and, meanwhile, 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 lively nowadays through the several compounds formed upon it especially in the medical language.[[3]](#footnote-3) As with other Homeric terms, ἄλγος stirred the interest of Hesychius, who noted ἄλγος· ἡ λύπη (A 2803 Latte). The codex of the *Glossai kata* *poleis* (*GKP*), which is likely to depend on Hesychius himself, included ἄλγος amongst the Cypriot words, since it was not uncommon in the 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 it is meant at 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 represented 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 also attested in the Archaic Greek texts, each of them endowed with a more or less semantically different *nuance*: as opposed to ἄλγος, ὀδύνη refers to a shorter 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 dominate 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 that was already common in the many adjectival compounds in -παθής.[[7]](#footnote-7)

Starting from Pindar, it seems that ἄλγος begins to recede. Compared with the decidedly greater frequency of πόνος (35x) and πῆμα ‘misery’, ‘calamity’ (6x), as well as with the uniqueness of ὀδύνα in *Pyth*. 4.221 and the absence of λύπη and πάθος, to which Pindar prefers the even newer and pretentious πάθα (6x),[[8]](#footnote-8) 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). 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-9) A case in point is *Pyth.* 12.18, where the labours sustained by Perseus in his struggle with Medusa are recalled, 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-10)

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

The literary genre in which we observe instead a good permanence of ἄλγος is surely tragedy, although with some distinctions. Aeschylus, for instance, who uses it extensively (27x),[[11]](#footnote-11) 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, according to the well-known maxim πάθει μάθος (*Ag*. 177).[[12]](#footnote-12) This choice could be explained in consideration of the fact that ἄλγος was too epic and archaic compared to the newer πάθος, nevertheless it is very probable as well that the latter should better mean the passivity of man in the face of destiny.

The survey of Sophocles’ works by the Spanish philologist Marcos Mártinez Hernández in a 1977 study reveals that ἄλγος was liable to take on the signification of 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 when, at the end of the fifth century BC, the need for abstraction also makes itself strongly felt in the more traditional poetic lexicon.[[13]](#footnote-13) Thus, in order to indicate the same process of pain, with the consumption and fatigue that it entails, Philoctetes wishes that Odysseus will 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 a context of tragic parody by the poet Agathon in Aristophanes’ *Thesmophoriazusae* (vv. 146−147).[[14]](#footnote-14) The introduction of ἄλγησις is therefore also proof on the one hand of Sophocles’ preference for rare and elevated forms in –σιςin his later works and on the other of his desire to overcome 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, but it is significant that he wanted to try the new.[[15]](#footnote-15)

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 Sophocles used ἀλγηδών on only one occasion (*OC* 513−514), a secondary formation created on the root of the verb ἀλγέω with the application of the suffix –*don-*. The form that Chantraine 1933, 361defined as Ionic, poetic, and Platonic was probably too new and inelegant to the ears of Sophocles.

But what of ἄλγημα, which experienced a real boom in the *Hippocratic corpus*? In Sophocles’ usage, ἄλγημα surely refers to the physical pain experienced by Philoctetes 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).

Instead, Euripides witnesses on the one hand the decidedly high frequency of ἄλγος (with more than 40 attestations) and on the other the lesser fortune of the newly born ἄλγημα, which is attested in only one fragment, whereas according to Marzullo 1999, 124, the technical term ἀλγηδών “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-16) and, although less often, by ὀδύνη (12x).

In comparison with such a framework in poetry, in the *usus scribendi* of the prose writers of the 5th century BC, a drastic reduction of ἄλγος is observed. Herodotus only gives us a single occurrence (5.49.2), to which no particular attention has been paid in the commentaries. Heinrich Stein focuses more on χάλκεον πίνακα, which Aristagoras the tyrant of Miletus brought with him, but not on the epic emphasis of his words, which aimed at seeking the help of Cleomenes, the king of Sparta, on the occasion of the revolt of the Greek cities 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), who were concentrating more on the interpretation of Aristagoras’ map, noted no singularity 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 and together with ὄνειδος ‘blame, reproach’, which is also a word from Homer.

The question may not warrant excessive attention, since the prose of Herodotus tends toward the use of poetic forms;[[17]](#footnote-17) however, the passage proposed is not one of the most banal. Herodotus was artfully building a discourse that he imagined the Ionian Aristagoras to have pronounced in front of the Spartan Cleomenes; 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 motivated 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-18)

After Herodotus, Thucydides, who was also an acute investigator of the symptoms of the plague in Athens, never uses ἄλγος or ἄλγημα, preferring πόνος (Marzullo 1999, 126), or more abstract names indicating the symptoms specific to the disease. The only exceptions are the adjective ἀλγεινός (2x) and the verb ἀλγέω (2x). In this way, the verb of clear Ionian stamp is banished from Attic prose. After all, Thucydides censored much of the lexicon of pain and not only that.[[19]](#footnote-19) For example, amongst the rejects can be counted ἄχος ‘pain’, ‘anguish’ (Homeric, lyrical, and tragic, once in Herodotus), and the more banal ὀδύνη.

As is clear, however, it was the very brilliant Ionic culture that felt the need for a renewal of the lexicon. Between the fifth and fourth centuries BC, the *Hippocratic corpus* had already seen to the substitution of the old ἄλγος with the more precise and functional ἄλγημα, which Herodotus significantly continued to ignore. The balance sees a ratio of 14 attestations for the former compared to 194 for the latter. However, the nouns in -μα should really have been a fashion if we consider the relationship among 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*) in technical set 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 strikes us is the relative speed with which the Hippocratic lexicon introduced the more precise ἄλγημα to replace ἄλγος, evidently considered too old and tied to the Homeric world to serve the new medicine, which boasted its systematic methodology. Benedetto Marzullo saw in ἄλγημα “una rideterminazione di origine filosofica, implicante riflessiva soggettività” (Marzullo 1999, 124). Also in this will be seen a sign of the scientific tension in the medical school of Cos that rotated around the name of Hippocrates. It went better, however, for the equally old ὀδύνη, with 772 examples against the bare 5 of the neologism ὀδύνημα.

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

In concluding the review of Classical prose, the name of Xenophon must be mentioned. He fell in line with the general orientation, preserving only two attestations of ἄλγος in a medical context, discussed in a text regarding 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 evidently echoes an epic *iunctura* (πολλὰ δ᾽ ἄλγη ἀνέχεται).

The rarity of the term in prose, and similarly in the *Umgangssprache*, continues to preserve its permanence in the high registers, which in the 5th and 4th centuries BC are no longer only tragic.[[20]](#footnote-20) A significant example in this sense 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 yearning having lost the sexual favours of a young man who now, having become rich thanks to Plutus, 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 comments on the passage (Torchio 1999, 224) ignore this singular lexical choice, which could instead 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 are found in the doctoral thesis of Gretchen Cheney Southard, discussed in 1970 at Johns Hopkins University.[[21]](#footnote-21) To raise the style, a difference could be made, in an hilarious 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-22) It is interesting to note the very 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 doubles the dose by contrasting the previous κατατέτηκα with the much more realistic κατασέσηπα.

If, then, we can identify a precise tragic context in a verse that would, in effect, be fitting for a text by Sophocles or Euripides, it is a further proposal for interpretation and is heuristically captivating. Unfortunately, precise references, with the verb κατατήκω conjugated in the perfect tense, are lacking; nevertheless, 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, the same van Leeuwen adds a comic verse from Eubulus (fr. 102 K.-A., on κισσός ‘ivy’ which is ὀλολυγόνος ἔρωτι κατατετηκώς),[[23]](#footnote-23) while Philocleon in the *Wasps* gushes out φίλοι, τήκομαι (*Vesp.* 317). The Dutch scholar does not underline the uniqueness of the poetic ἄλγος, now rare even in prose, in the comic context. Nevertheless, in my opinion, the 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 a more uniform documentation, now largely testifying the poetic and archaic level of ἄλγος. Ast’s *Lexikon Platonicum* and the *TLG* mark the only occurrences of the term in the *Alcibiades secundus* (142e.1), but this is a quotation from Homer.[[24]](#footnote-24) Plato surely prefers ἀλγηδών, “souffrance”(Chantraine 1933, 361), which is documented 28 times. He certainly does not appreciate the Hippocratic ἄλγημα, which is entirely absent from his work.

Even the three cases of ἄλγος in Aristotle indicate the same evolution: now the quotations from Homer prevail.[[25]](#footnote-25) Similarly, Isocrates uses ἀλγηδών and never ἄλγος. At the level of 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 (*Gn.* 446 λιμὸς μέγιστον ἄλγος ἀνθρώποις ἔφυ). Now, in New Comedy, the sphere of pain is leased to λυπέω and λύπη (9x),[[26]](#footnote-26) which are more frequent than the words connected to the family of ὀδύνη, in accordance with a direction that is also evident in philosophy.[[27]](#footnote-27)

**3 Evolution in the Hellenistic age**

The Hellenistic philosophies insisted much more on the concept of pain and the method of limiting its impact on the life of man. Therefore, to investigate the different ways of labelling, conceiving and interpreting the human sufferings in this period is important even from a lexical point of view.

As is known, Epicurus aimed at liberation from pain, which he called significantly ἀπονία.[[28]](#footnote-28) It should be stressed, instead, that the first meaning of this abstract term was ‘lack of labour’, as documented in Aristotle (*De generatione animalium* 775a.37). To convey how the notion of ‘labour’ in πόνος was still active in the 4th century BC, it is sufficient to recall Xenophon in the *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-29)

But what can we say of the privatives formed on the theme of ἄλγος? The form ἀναλγησία ‘insensibility’ already existed with 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 comparison with the semantic area 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 in Thucydides (3.40.5), the sense is of ‘hard of heart’: effectively, insensibility and ruthlessness go hand in hand.[[30]](#footnote-30) Nevertheless, neither the abstract ἀναλγησία nor the adjectives ἀνάλγητος and ἀναλγής did meet with the same success of ἀπονία and ἀλυπία.[[31]](#footnote-31)

A good instance comes from the Epicurean philosophy, the school that more than others took to heart the problem of the search for pleasure and liberation from pain. A survey on Usener’s *Glossarium Epicureum* allows us to note the preservation of the verb ἀλγέω and the prevalence of λύπη and πόνος, which are now specialised in different meanings. Differently from πόνος, which is genetically tied to the experience of trial and labour, λύπη, the most ancient and thus appreciated by the tragedians, in fact 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 (p. 11 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-32)

Beyond the boundaries of philosophy, the remaining literary genres of the period deserve further remarks. While Hellenistic poetry continued to decline the Homeric concept of ἄλγος,[[33]](#footnote-33) due to the inertia of tradition, its single apparitions in prose are marked by a stylistic refinement, when it is not about poetic quotations. This 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 recording his behaviour when it involves paraphrasing Homer. For example, in a passage in the ninth book (21), the historian needs to quote the famous verse of the *Odyssey* on the reaction of Euryclea upon recognising Odysseus.[[34]](#footnote-34) Polybius then 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-35) 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 precious 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-36) marking a path that could lead to Modern Greek in which the use of πόνος was generalised to indicate pain or discomfort.

At approximately the same time, the 2nd century BC, a different discussion must be made in relation to Jewish-Hellenistic culture. A survey conducted on the concordance to the *Septuagint* by Hatch and Redpathdemonstrates the rather measured use ofἄλγος in the following passages:

(1) ἐπὶ τὸ ἄλγος τῶν τραυματίων σου

 (*Ps.* 68−69.26)

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 had been 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. In the case of the author of this book, who wanted to summarise the much wider work of a certain Jason of Cyrene, the level of refinement and erudition of Greek reached by Jewish culture of the time is particularly evident. Luciano Canfora (2013, 546) has already proposed the possibility of identifying an echo from Thucydides in the prologue (διακριβοῦν περὶ ἑκάστων), a rare quotation of a prosastic text in a book that often aims at a poetic style.[[37]](#footnote-37)

We would not be far from the mark in suggesting that the resumption of ἄλγος in Jewish-Hellenistic prose, as well as responding to the trend of Asian rhetoric of the time to recuperate poetisms, is a very Judaic stylistic trait that reshapes Greek and Homeric pain in 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-38)

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

Nevertheless, sporadic quotations are not sufficient to invert 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 good level of *koiné.*[[39]](#footnote-39)An exception is the doctor Aretaeus of Cappadocia,[[40]](#footnote-40) who recovers ἄλγος in a handful of cases. In *De causis et signis diuturnorum morborum*, in Greekπερὶ αἰτιῶν καὶ σημείων χρονίων παθῶν (IV 12.3.4−5), the author from Cappadocia who writes in the Ionic dialect of the Hippocratic tradition[[41]](#footnote-41) presents a differentiation amongst the various categories of pain according to criteria of density of the organs involved. When it strikes the ‘dense’ parts (τὸ πυκινόν) of the organism (ἄλγος γὰρ τρηχείᾳ ὲν αἰσθήσει), the pain is less acute and perceptible compared to the ‘thinner’ zones (τὸ ἀραιόν).[[42]](#footnote-42)

Subsequently, medicine would continue to prefer the more technical ἄλγημα, sustained now by centuries of linguistic usage, by Oribasius for example. Thus, Aetius of Amida, a physician of the 5th century AD, used ἄλγος just twice, while in the 7th century AD, in an era in which the name Hippocrates boasted an age of more than a thousand years, 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 the Homeric language, albeit with some distinctions (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 finds agreement in the single micro-stylistic aspect. In fact, next to the prevalent λύπη and πόνος, Greek now used mainly ἀλγηδών for moral value and ἄλγημα for the more technical physical field.[[43]](#footnote-43) In Plutarch, for example, in which ἄλγημα[[44]](#footnote-44) is used only once, the learned ἄλγος is limited to a handful of quotations.[[45]](#footnote-45) 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 that amazing work of Ionic prose that is *De Syria dea* (39.12).[[46]](#footnote-46) An Atticist writer such as Arrian of Nicomedia in the *Anabasis of Alexander* exhibits a mannered ἄλγος οὐ σμικρόν (7.6.2) regarding 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 contributes to the move towards a higher style: εἶναι γὰρ οὖν καὶ Μηδικὴν τὴν Ἀλεξάνδρου στολὴν ἄλγος οὐ σμικρὸν Μακεδόσιν ὀρωμένην.[[47]](#footnote-47)

In the long history of the literary recovery of ἄλγος, an important moment can be identified in the 4th century AD. The great Christian intellectuals of pagan education 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 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. In this sense, a survey in the *TLG* allows us to discover a neglected passage of Eusebius’ *Vita Constantini* regarding the death of the emperor.[[48]](#footnote-48) 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 mentioned above. In the fourth book of the *Vita Constantini*,the cultured author refers to the death of the emperor, his favourite, and the public displays of pain that followed with screams and cries. Here is 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 smothe himself, as if their life had been deprived of the common good of all” (transl. A. Cameron / S.G. Hall)

The excellent historical commentary by Averil Cameron and Stuart G. Hall, which often neglects formal notations, insists above all on the fact 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-49) 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 high and pathetic lexicon also contributes to the “extravagance of the scene” (Cameron / Hall 1999, 343).[[50]](#footnote-50)

In conclusion, the rich and articulated history of the term ἄλγος, which quickly and for unpredictable reasons became poetic, can be observed in the projection 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 the semantic shift that would also have consequences in modern languages (for example, the Hellenistic θλίψις, from ‘physical pressure’ to ‘oppression’ and ‘affliction’), but for its philological propensity it 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 for certain uses. Not with ἄλγος, but with the cognate ἀλγηδόνα, 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) by aiming to raise the style. For a mockery of linguistic history, 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 to 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.

1. A special thank goes to Ettore Cingano, Filippomaria Pontani, and Michele Napolitano for the suggestions they gave me on the occasion of presenting this paper at Ca’ Foscari on 28th April 2017. I owe to Albio Cesare Cassio more than words can express. Beyond the Classical philology, I am indebted to him for having learned a specific art for rationalising and overcoming the ἄλγεα with the discrete force of ἐπιστήμη and χάρις. [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
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. [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. Suffice it to think 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 the 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 it would not be far-fetched to state that it also began with pain, the ἄλγεα of the Achaeans and Odysseus. In reality, in the 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 the medical vocabulary, which then became common 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, which is charged intellectually and with a projection towards the future (‘worry’, ‘restlessness’; 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 out of an original beginning with a concrete one: “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* referred 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, in prose, and later in the 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-7)
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-8)
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 on 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 in this direction. 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 later on it comes to dealing with the alternating moments between joy and sadness, the poet reverts rather to πόνος. In vv. 33−34 can be read 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-9)
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-10)
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-11)
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-12)
13. “It is not surprising that the Philoctetes should contain a large number of words for pain and disease, as well as some professional medical terms. Thus νόσος meaning ‘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-13)
14. Long 1968, 132. [↑](#footnote-ref-14)
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-15)
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-16)
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-17)
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-18)
19. According to the French scholar Pierre Huart, a reason could be found in Thucydides’ interest for 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-19)
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-20)
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 in the poetic words. [↑](#footnote-ref-21)
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-22)
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-23)
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-24)
25. For example, in *Rhetoric* 1370b.5: μετὰ γὰρ τε καὶ ἄλγεσι τέρπεται ἀνὴρ μνήμενος ὅς τις πολλὰ πάθῃ καὶ πολλὰ ἐόργῃ (cf. *Il*. 18.108). [↑](#footnote-ref-25)
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-26)
27. Although with a significant exception, in the “fanciful” line ὀδύνης γὰρ ὑός in *Dysc*. 88 (Gomme / Sandbach 1973, 148−149). [↑](#footnote-ref-27)
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-28)
29. An interesting moment in this linguistic and philosophical matter is in the 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-29)
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-30)
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 to be stressed 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-31)
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 for pain. The problem set 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. Instead, 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-32)
33. To supply some information: in Apollonius of Rhodes 11x, Nicander 11x (*Ther.* and *Alex.*), Lycophron 2x. [↑](#footnote-ref-33)
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-34)
35. The passage was noted and opportunely commented on in stylistic terms by De Foucault (1972, 244). [↑](#footnote-ref-35)
36. Instead, the relationship is inverted if we consider the cognate verbs: λυπέω (16x) is set against πονέω (7x). [↑](#footnote-ref-36)
37. Some of these poetic terms, such as ἀπήμαντος, μόρος, σχέτλιος, στυγέω, or the preposition ἄτερ, a form such as the name 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-37)
38. In the first century AD Flavius Josephus refers 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 in a jewish author who aimed at μετασχεῖν τῶν ἑλληνικῶν γραμμάτων (*AJ* 20.263). [↑](#footnote-ref-38)
39. Faced with the very 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-39)
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-40)
41. Regarding the vitality of the Ionic dialect in post-classical prose, Cassio’s 1996 study is fundamental. [↑](#footnote-ref-41)
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 mean 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-42)
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-43)
44. *Life of* *Sulla* 26.3.1 (Σύλλᾳ δὲ διατρίβοντι περὶ τὰς Ἀθήνας ἄλγημα ναρκῶδες μετὰ βάρους εἰς τοὺς πόδας ἐνέπεσεν). [↑](#footnote-ref-44)
45. For instance in the *Consolatio ad Apollonium* (15) ἄλγος οὐδὲν ἃπτεται νεκροῦ, with a corresponding verse in Aesch., fr. 255 Radt. [↑](#footnote-ref-45)
46. The term ἄλγος is missing from the lexicon of the novelists (Achilles Tatius, Chariton, Heliodorus, Iamblichus, Longus, and Xenophon of Ephesus), while 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-46)
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-47)
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-48)
49. Cameron / Hall 1999, 343. [↑](#footnote-ref-49)
50. It must be added that the adjective ἐνδόμυχος is a poetic term as well, a *hapax* in Sophocles (*Ph.* 1457), and later then attested in Callimachus, Galen, and very often in Nonnus’ *Dionysiaca*. [↑](#footnote-ref-50)