WHO WAS GALEN?

Galen was a physician and the most famous doctor and scientist in the Roman Empire. Born around 130 AD in the ancient Greek city of Pergamum (located in modern day Turkey) he was doctor to four Roman emperors. Galen practised Hippocratic medicine, but become an innovator in his own right.

“look at the human skeleton with your own eyes”
Galen of Pergamum

HOW GALEN BECAME GREAT

Galen believed that the study of anatomy was crucial to improving medical knowledge. Unfortunately, for Galen, Roman law banned dissection of humans and therefore Galen had to limit his dissection to animals such as monkeys and pigs, famously dissected a squealing pig to demonstrating the effect of severing the laryngeal nerve.

Galen also learned a great deal working with the gladiators in the arena, whose wounds often allowed Galen an opportunity to see the inner workings of the human body. Access to living specimens no doubt empowered Galen to be able to perform many advanced surgical procedures including eye and brain surgery.

GALEN’S LEGACY

Galen was a prolific author, writing 300 books and articles ensuring his theories dominated throughout the Middle Ages until his ideas began to be challenged during the Renaissance. This was primarily achieved by the demonstration through dissection of flaws in Galen’s work, which incorrectly identified anatomical features in humans which are actually found in monkeys.

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