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ANESTHESIOLOGY REFLECTIONS FROM THE WOOD LIBRARY-MUSEUM

Galen's Four Temperaments in 1893 at Chicago's Post-Graduate School of Anaesthesia



Born over 500 years after the death of Hippocrates, Galen of Pergamon (129 CE to c.216 CE), a Greek physician to several Roman emperors, reoriented medicine from the Hippocratic humoral system toward a Galenic temperamental one. From animal sacrifices to the gods, pre-Classical Greeks had observed that the topmost layer (serum) of freshly settled sacrificial blood was actually yellow. This **leading** layer likely sparked concepts of elemental fire, Hippocratic “yellow bile,” and the Galenic “choleric” temperament of **leading**, goal-oriented motivators. The second buff layer (leukocytes) reflected elemental **water**, Hippocratic “phlegm,” and the Galenic “phlegmatic” temperament of **water**-like, calming mediators. The third **air**-reddened layer (erythrocytes) inspired concepts of elemental **air**, Hippocratic “blood,” and the Galenic “sanguine” temperament of garrulous, “**air**-filling” talkers. The final, reddish-black **bottom** layer (clot) congealed elemental earth, Hippocratic “black bile,” and the Galenic “melancholic” temperament of depressed, **bottom**-line, analytical perfectionists. In 1893 at Chicago's Post-Graduate School of Anaesthesia, professors taught that “Physiognomy, Phrenology and Temperament” provided clues to each patient's unique mixture of Galen's choleric, phlegmatic, sanguine, and melancholic temperaments. (Copyright © the American Society of Anesthesiologists, Inc.)

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