

Hippocrates and the ‘Hippocratic’ Corpus*

ELIZABETH CRAIK

IT HAS long been recognised that the association of the contents of the ‘Hippocratic’ Corpus¹ – a large and disparate body of texts, some seventy in number – with the historical Hippocrates, celebrated doctor and medical writer of the fifth century BC, is tenuous. The works of the Corpus are all anonymous; there are no dedicatees and very little reference to named contemporaries. However, it is surely probable that some can be attributed to Hippocrates himself. In addition, from other sources we know the names of many early Greek doctors, to add to this most famous name. Important information on medical ideas which were current in the fifth and fourth centuries BC is to be found in a papyrus dating from the second century AD, conventionally known as *Anonymus Londinensis*; despite

* Since November 2010, when I gave a talk with the above title at the University of Crete in Rethymno, I have been at work on a book: *The Hippocratic Corpus: Content, Comment and Context*. My aim is to cover the corpus in its entirety, giving each work individual attention and placing each in its context both within and beyond the confines of the corpus. This short paper follows the general structure of the talk, while adapting its emphasis and extending its scope.

1 Important editions of the Hippocratic Corpus are: (Standard) E. Littré (10 volumes, Paris, 1839-61) and F. Z. Ermerins (3 volumes, Utrecht, 1859-64); (First) F. M. Calvus, Latin tr. (Rome, 1525) and F. Asulanus, Greek *editio princeps* (Venice, 1526); (Early) J. Cornarius (Basle, 1538), A. Foesius (Frankfurt, 1595) and J. A. van der Linden (Leiden, 1665). Individual works by various editors have appeared in *CMG* (Corpus Medicorum Graecorum) and *CUF* (Budé) as well as in the Loeb series. The *Index Hippocraticus* (Kuhn & Fleischer 1986) is also useful.

Other essential primary sources are: *Die Fragmente der Vorsokratiker*, ed. Diels and Kranz; *The Medical Writings of Anonymus Londinensis*, ed. Jones; the works of Plato, esp. *Timaeus*, and of Aristotle, esp. *Problemata*. Useful general works are: F. Adams, *The Genuine Works of Hippocrates* (London, 1849); J. Jouanna, *Hippocrate* (Paris, 1992; English translation London, 1999); Vivian Nutton, *Ancient Medicine* (London, 2004); W. D. Smith, *The Hippocratic Tradition* (Ithaca and London, 1979).

this late date, the ideas seem to be derived, at least to some extent, from a history of medicine compiled by Aristotle's pupil Menon. (The clumsy name arises from the location of the papyrus, which was discovered at the end of the nineteenth century, from its location in London and its anonymous character.) In this compilation, devoted in large part to a summary of different views of the aetiology of disease, twenty-four doctors are named. Those named include many figures previously unknown and several – including Plato – known to us not as medical but as philosophical writers. Among the latter are many Pythagorean thinkers, such as Philolaos. This brings us to another important collection of primary source material, the fragments of the so-called Presocratic philosophers, whose investigations of *physis* ('nature') embraced the nature of the body as well as the nature of the universe.

The word 'fragments' is sadly recurrent in accounts of early Greek medicine. By contrast, we can see that Plato and Aristotle both had extensive medical interests. As noted above, Plato is described as a doctor in the *Anonymus Londinensis*. There the dialogue *Timaios* is summarised: that work does indeed contain – embedded in much mystical content – an account of human bodily development and of human physiology in health and sickness. Similarly, Plato's depiction of the doctor Eryximachos in *Symposium* is realistic and knowledgeable, though not entirely sympathetic. Relations between doctors, sophists and the philosophical schools were evidently complex, and these categories overlapped. The brother of the celebrated rhetorician Gorgias was a doctor. Aristotle was the son of a distinguished doctor and much in his biological writing meshes with contemporary medical research on embryology, respiration and other topics; even his writing on rhetoric and literature is imbued with medical imagery and allegory. More specifically, medical questions are addressed in question and answer format in the Aristotelian *Problemata*.

As remarked above, the Hippocratic Corpus comprises some seventy treatises, heterogeneous in character. A first broad distinction can be made between formal 'treatises' and collections of 'notes'.

The length of the works varies greatly. Some are very short, for example *The Oath* (a deontological statement), *On Anatomy* (an anatomical survey) and *On Dentition* (notes on infant health); others are very long, for example *On Regimen* (a personal argument that health depends on balance between food and exercise), *Aphorisms* (general rules and observations on a wide range of medical topics). Some works are primarily physiological, for example *On the Nature of Man* (a discourse on the fundamental components of the body, including the doctrine of the four 'humours') and *On Flesh* (an outline description of the origin and composition of bodily components). Some works are surgical: *On Articulations* and *On Fractures* (on common types of dislocation and fracture – probably intended for doctors of gymnasium and palaestra) and *On Head Wounds* (on serious blows to the skull – probably intended for army surgeons). Some works are theoretical or ideological: *On Ancient Medicine* and *On The Art* (essays on the evolution of the art, or profession, of medicine). Many works are gynaecological: *Diseases of Women*, *The Nature of Women* (mainly on procedures to predict or promote a woman's ability to conceive; not on obstetrics, the business of the midwife). Some are case histories: *Epidemics* (clinical case-notes, some describing the day by day progress of particular patients). Some works are nosological, describing diseases rather than patients: *Internal Affections*, *On Acute Diseases* (typologies, with much on the symptoms, course and interrelation of different diseases). Other works are wide-ranging in content: *On the Sacred Disease* (on epilepsy, no more 'sacred' than any other disease and on causes of disease more generally); *Airs, Waters and Places* (on environmental health, but also on ethnography).

How are we to classify this vast and multifarious body of material? The first to attempt classification was the lexicographer Erotian, who lived in the age of Nero – or, rather, the classification of Erotian is the first we can see clearly: the extent of his debt to certain predecessors (such as Bacchius, whom he cites frequently) is debatable. The Hippocratic Corpus as recognised and addressed by Erotian is

almost, though not entirely, coincident with that recognised today. Erotian's classification is subject to the same constraints as all later attempts at classification: since many of the works are very mixed in character and resist neat pigeonholing, their multifarious content militates against their being placed squarely in a single division. Yet Erotian's organisation is intelligent. It prefigures both the modern physician's classification of subjects in medical textbooks and the modern philologist's classification of works on a generic basis.

Erotian begins with works on signs, that is prognostic signs, a subject of fundamental importance in ancient theories of pathology (*Prognostic*; *Prorrhetic* 1 and 2; *On Humours*); then continues with works on aetiology and nature, equally fundamental to ancient views of physiology and anatomy (*On Winds*; *On the Nature of Man*; *On the Sacred Disease*; *On the Nature of the Child*; *Airs, Waters and Places*). These first two categories comprise an overarching approach to the basic theories of medical practice, and correspond broadly to the modern doctor's divisions of knowledge under the heads of anatomy, physiology and pathology. At the same time, the content of these categories corresponds broadly to the content of 'handbooks' in modern generic terms. But these works are not merely handbooks; simply, among other things, they fulfil a purpose similar to that of the modern handbook. Thus, no work is devoted exclusively to anatomy, but anatomy is introduced where appropriate to topics addressed.

Thirdly, Erotian goes on from the theory which underpins medical practice to the practice itself; that is, to the therapy which is based on the theory. This he subdivides as on the one hand 'surgical' (*On Fractures*; *On Articulations*; *On Sores*; *On Head Wounds*; *On the Surgery*; *Mochlicon*; *On Haemorrhoids*; *On Fistulae*) and on the other hand 'dietary' (*On Diseases* 1, 2; *On Regimen in Acute Diseases*; *On Places in Man*; *On Diseases of Women* 1, 2; *On Nutriment*; *On Infertile Women*; *On Use of Liquids*). Once again, his classification corresponds to modern generic designations. These works are, in modern terms, 'instruction manuals'. In many cases a set of instructions is

clearly given, steps in a procedure being prefaced by words signifying 'then', 'next'. Fourthly, Erotian allows for a small group of works mixed in character (*Aphorisms; Epidemics*). Erotian's fifth and final category comprises works on the *techne* ('craft') of medicine (*The Oath, The Law, On the Art, On Ancient Medicine*). The works of this final category might be viewed in generic terms as 'manifestos'.

This early attempt at classification might be refined and revamped in various ways. But such major topics as anatomy, physiology, pathology, therapy and ideology are recurrent in modern attempts to isolate and categorise the main types of material addressed. An important topic not separately recognised by Erotian is gynaecology, although a large fraction of the Hippocratic Corpus is devoted to gynaecological topics – primarily to pregnancy and fertility treatment. Erotian subsumes those gynaecological works that he does include in his lexicon under the heading of dietary treatment, doubtless because recipe cures feature so prominently in the gynaecological texts. But it may be reiterated that many works might be placed in more than one category. In particular, Erotian's 'mixed' category might be considerably extended.

In his major edition produced in the nineteenth century, Littré classified the treatises according to his own, at times subjective, view of Hippocratic authenticity and relative dating. Littré's important categorisation was justly influential but unfortunately resulted in protracted neglect, complete or comparative, of several of the many works that he had regarded as unimportant and accordingly had relegated. In the long Hippocratic tradition, particular works – and indeed particular passages or even phrases of particular works – have tended to be privileged. *On Ancient Medicine* has come to be regarded, without particular reason, as quintessentially Hippocratic. Similarly, the statement in *On the Sacred Disease* that epilepsy is no more 'sacred' than any other disease has been unjustifiably regarded as a radical blanket rejection of all irrational medical method; on the contrary, rational and irrational methods continued to exist even in the time, and in the writings, of Galen.

All the works of the Corpus are written in the Ionic dialect. However, the expression and style vary greatly: different syntax and different vocabulary as well as different choices of presentation in simple and unadorned or in flowery and rhetorical prose are marked. Matters are complicated by the nature of the transmission. Few works are ‘literary’ in texture and it is evident that many are derivative in character. The terms ‘redactor’ rather than ‘author’ and ‘compile’ rather than ‘compose’ are appropriate. Thus, some works transmitted separately cohere (*On Articulations* and *On Fractures*; *On Fistulae* and *On Haemorrhoids*); some fall into two parts (*Airs, Waters and Places*); some have a duplicate start (*Diseases 2*) or an extraneous ending (*On Nature of Man*); some are evident amalgamations (*On Bones*) or summaries (*Mochlicon*) or re-workings (*On Anatomy*). There are affinities, more or less clear, between certain treatises, including some which are stylistically sophisticated (*On Ancient Medicine* and *On the Art*); there are works with blocks of material in common (notably the gynaecological treatises and *Epidemics*, especially 5 and 7).

In looking for unity of authorship we chase a will o’ the wisp. It may be more realistic to look for cognate groups of writers, working in the same region at the same time. Progress can be made only by separate detailed examination. On the basis of such examination, it appears that *Places in Man* is an early work, associated with the intellectual milieu of the Pythagoreans, originating perhaps in the west Greek world of Sicily or south Italy; that *On Anatomy* is a late compilation based on the Democritean as well as the Hippocratic tradition, originating perhaps in north Greece; that *On Sight* is a rough surgical manual, originating perhaps in Cyrene; that the author of *On Glands* has a close connection with the author of the group of works *On Generation* and *On the Nature of the Child*.²

It has become unfashionable to single out works for attribution to Hippocrates. But, if pressed to do so, my first nomination would be

2 Craik 1998, 2006, 2009.

the surgical texts *On Articulations* and *On Fractures*. As to reasons:
λαβὲ τὸ βιβλίον.

Elizabeth Craik
Honorary Professor
School of Classics
University of St. Andrews
ec@st-andrews.ac.uk



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Ο Ιπποκράτης και το *Corpus Hippocraticum*

ELIZABETH CRAIK

Περίληψη

ΤΟ *Corpus Hippocraticum*, η μεγάλη συλλογή που παραδίδεται με το όνομα του Ιπποκράτη από την Κω, περιλαμβάνει περίπου εβδομήντα ιατρικά έργα, που παρουσιάζουν σημαντική ετερογένεια στον χαρακτήρα. Η θεματολογία είναι ευρεία και καλύπτει τομείς όπως η ανατομία, η φυσιολογία, η παθολογία, η θεραπεία αλλά και η ιδεολογία. Εξίσου μεγάλη είναι και η εκφραστική και υφολογική ποικιλία: διαφορές στη σύνταξη, στο λεξιλόγιο, αλλά και στις επιλογές του τρόπου έκθεσης της επιχειρηματολογίας εντοπίζονται σε όλη την έκταση της συλλογής. Σύνθετος φαίνεται πως είναι και ο τρόπος παραγωγής και διάδοσης των κειμένων αυτών: είναι προφανές ότι αρκετές πραγματείες έχουν δευτερογενή χαρακτήρα. Αν και είναι δύσκολο να ταυτιστούν οι συγγραφείς των κειμένων, δεν φαίνεται αδύνατο να προσδιοριστεί μία ατμόσφαιρα και μία χρονική περίοδος κοινή για κάποια από αυτά τα έργα. Στον ίδιο τον Ιπποκράτη μπορούν ενδεχομένως να αποδοθούν κάποιες από τις χειρουργικές πραγματείες.

