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The Authorship of the Hippocratic “de arte”

Though it may seem to be a troublesome task to decide one’s attitude on the well-known problem, the profession of the author of Hippocratic “de arte”, it is still important for a prospective commentator of the work. He should have made a decision on this issue before he begins writing the introduction and the commentary on some controversial sentences, such as II.1 and IX.1 (paragraph numeration by Jouanna). Is he to form his interpretation on a belief that the work is from the view point of a sophist-philosopher(Gomperz and his followers)?

Though Jouanna (Jouanna 179-183) offered a considerable amount of argument against the view, I think we have not yet reached a decisive point on this issue. On the other hand, no one has denied the rhetorical quality of the work. But where could we place the quality within the problem of the authorship? This is also an important issue for a prospective commentator. On this we have not reached an agreement, either. Here I would like to make the following points to assist a prospective commentator.

1: It is beyond dispute that “de arte” has the appearance of a well-built speech. However, rather astonishingly, it lacks any reference to the audience. It has no vocatives to the audience, no second-person communications. Even the imaginative speeches by Antiphon the rhetorician (Tetralogia 1-3) do not lack them entirely. The fact makes me doubt the meaning of the form as a speech. The form might have been a convenient device to realize the author’s purpose, whichever it might have been.

2: The famous sentence, which made Gomperz believe that the author is a sophist (IX-1), is in reality only a variation of transitional formulae (Bundy, *Lys.*3.44, *Isocr.*5.33). Main components of the sentence are usual ones of formulae to build up a transition within a literary work and a focalization towards the next topic within audience’s attention. Gomperz’s search into the philosophical affiliation of the author may lose some part of the ground.

3: The theory on existence and perception (II-1) has stirred up loud arguments on the author’s position within a history of philosophy. But in my view, this manifestation should be considered mostly in connection with the later part of “the speech” (IX-2~XII), where illness seen and unseen is described. The author’s principle expressed there is that, since there is certainly an illness, it must be seen (visible ones), or, if not seen, it should be seen by other means of perception (gnomes opsis). This is just the same as the theory in II-1, with a difference of viewpoint: We cannot perceive the non-existent (II-1)/The existent can be perceived in any wise(IX-2~XII). The principle is in complete harmony with the empiricism of medical scientists. We can find other variations within the Hippocratic Corpus (e.g. *Nat.Hom.*2).

4: Within a contrast between an incompetent patient and a competent medical doctor (VII-3), three important activities of Hippocratic writings, or activities of medical doctors – documentations of cases (Epid., Morb., etc.), prognosis (Progn. Etc.) and searches for better diet (VM etc.) – are compactly described. More than that, they are organized within a vivid daily situation for doctors. This is a typical case of the writing in question. We can say that in this work almost all the important activities of ancient medical doctors are well organized within one topic, to argue for medicine as a *techne*.

My provisional conclusion on the author's, or rather the writing's identity, is as follows: this is a work of a theoretically and rhetorically well-equipped medical practitioner. Its purpose is rather to give a theoretical support to the activities of practical doctors than to argue against real criticism of medicine.

Bibliography

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