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From Corpus to Canon(s): Debating the Hippocratic in the Roman Empire

In many ways the formation of the Hippocratic Corpus did not itself draw a decisive boundary around the 'Hippocratic': both in the sense that the Corpus remained open to at least a few later additions, and in the sense that disputes rapidly arose about the authenticity, significance and utility of the texts within in. Indeed, extant ancient discussions about criteria for counting a treatise, or doctrine, as 'Hippocratic', are very much focused on these internal affairs.

Erotian, and most especially Galen, offer the fullest insight into these questions in the Roman imperial period, and an educational Hippocratic canon was to be established, in a reasonably settled form, in the schools of late antique Alexandria. Galen has, of course, his own agenda, wants to make a particular version of Hippocratism, a particular set of Hippocratic texts, canonical; but it is also possible to see him, in his Hippocratic commentaries and other works, responding to existing patterns of engagement, and prioritisation. Moreover, some of these patterns become clearer when considered alongside Erotian, and the surviving Hippocratic papyri from the Empire, as well the evidence of the later commentary traditions.

This paper will, therefore, investigate the formation of a Hippocratic canon, or competing canons, the debates about the Hippocratic, in the medical culture of the Roman Empire, before Galen. Is it possible to discern an established set of textual priorities within those encompassed by the Hippocratic Corpus which Galen inherits, and reacts to, and, indeed, a pre-existing set of disputes and discussions, around such texts, their doctrines and contents, and on what grounds? On what kind of critical terms did the learned physicians of the Empire approach the Hippocratic writings?