

Philip van der Eijk
University of Newcastle upon Tyne

The first and the second Hippocrates

This paper will consider the question to what extent the Hippocratic writings are bound together by any sort of intrinsic characteristic that distinguishes them *as a group* from other medical literature and thought of the same period. This is an important question, for if the answer is negative, the justification for treating the Hippocratic writings as a *corpus* or *collection* collapses. And if this is the case, the term ‘Hippocratic’, rather than being some kind of essentialist notion covering a specific body of medical literature with an identity of its own, just seems to stand for all fifth and fourth century medical literature written in Ionic dialect that happens to survive – indeed, which happens to have been preserved possibly for the very reason that it was associated, at some stage of its tradition, with Hippocrates and his school.

In order to answer this question, I will consider – as far as the fragmentary state of the material allows – whether the very substantial amount of ‘non-Hippocratic’ medical literature that was written in the fifth and fourth century BCE can lay at least equal claim to the virtues with which ‘Hippocratic medicine’ is usually credited (e.g. its alleged ‘rationality’). For if this is the case, there is no reason to associate the characteristics of this medicine any closer with the authors of the Hippocratic writings than with, say, the fragments of Diocles or Praxagoras or the works of Aristotle or Plato.

In this connection, I will also consider the question of the anonymity of the ‘Hippocratic’ writings, which stands in stark contrast to the confidence with which contemporaneous authors such as Herodotus and Alcmaeon put their names at the beginning of their works. Were the names of their real authors suppressed in the later tradition (as seems to have happened in the case of Polybus) or is there another reason for this mysterious phenomenon?

In this connection, I will also try to trace the concept of a ‘canon’ of Hippocratic works and consider some key episodes in its historical development, starting in antiquity and leading via the Aldine edition to Littré’s *Œuvres complètes d’Hippocrate*, and I will show how Littré’s concept of a ‘complete Hippocratic Corpus’ was challenged by his contemporary M.S. Houdart in his *Etudes historiques et critiques sur la vie et la doctrine d’Hippocrate et sur l’état de la médecine avant lui* (Paris, 1840) and his *Histoire de la médecine grecque depuis Esculape jusqu’à Hippocrate exclusivement* (Paris, 1856).