

Competitive Medicine and the Style of the *Epidemics*

Ionian intellectual and literary culture produced a variety of writers during the 5th century B.C., including physicians working within the Hippocratic tradition. These writers adapted many of the cultural advancements appropriate to their medical practice for their texts, not least those associated with the development of Greek prose. In this paper, I situate the Hippocratic *Epidemics* in their cultural context, focusing on the medically competitive climate that physicians faced and the stakes of such competition. In light of this competitive environment, a Hippocratic doctor would need to advertise his skills, and if he were itinerant – as many were – word-of-mouth offers localized help only. Different types of advertising would be required, including the presentation of past cases in which patients were successfully treated (and, on occasion, less successful cases). The ability to narrate the successful resolution of different types of cases lends the physician more credence, and a collection of notes could help a doctor craft his narration. I argue that an internal analysis of the style of the *Epidemics* illuminates one of the primary functions of the text for doctors in the 5th century: it is a repository of medical notes, easily referenced and short enough to grab somebody's attention but rich in details that allow for elaboration of the Hippocratic methodology, its underlying medical assumptions, and how these might apply to new, potential customers.

This paper will be divided into two parts. In the first, I will examine what evidence we have that suggests that the *Epidemics* are reference works being utilized by doctors. The style and the structure of the works allows for effective use in the field, especially in consideration of phrases such as “In this constitution” (*En tē katastasei tautē*) (1.13) that start discrete sections. Doctors who use the texts as medical case studies or as lectures notes benefit from the ability to access different sections quickly. The frequent use of proper names also facilitates quick

reference use. Proper names will also play a role in the second part of my paper in which I argue for the utility of the *Epidemics* for advertisement. Often the *Epidemics* lists proper names, domestic or social details of a patient, and other familiarizing details alongside symptoms and potential diagnoses. It is surprising how strongly emotional the tone of lists in the *Epidemics* can be. The second part of my paper will perform a close reading of instances in which the writer provides extra-medical information, as for example in *Epidemics* 5.1, in which a woman's husband and his profession are mentioned as a way of adding emotional drama to the narrative of her case but little medically relevant information. Narrative elements of case studies are an understudied aspect of the *Epidemics*, and they contribute much to my argument that the *Epidemics* could be excerpted for the sake of advertising.

The *Epidemics* remain one of the least studied works in the Hippocratic corpus. Nevertheless, my paper will build off of and combine work from two separate strands of scholarship. The first, best represented by Percy 1992, highlights the importance of narrative in understanding the Hippocratic corpus. The second examines the cultural climate in which the Hippocratic physicians operated. Langholf 1990, Smith 1994, and Alessi 2010 provide the most relevant evidence. Thomas 2000 and Jouanna 1999 (1992) are less directly relevant but nonetheless helpful. By combining the work of these scholars, I further our understanding of the *Epidemics* and place in the Ionian medical culture.

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