

Imperial Ecphrasis in Galen's *Protrepticus*

This paper examines rhetorical features in Galen's *Protrepticus*, also commonly known as *Exhortation to the Study of Medicine*. I argue that Galen employs the rhetorical techniques of ecphrasis commonly found in authors of the Second Sophistic as he describes images of Lady Fortune and Hermes. This analysis attempts to complement a number of recent studies which situate Galen within the intellectual context of the Imperial Period, thus identifying him as an author typical of the era (Percy 1993, von Staden 1997, Hankinson 2008, and Gill, Whitmarsh, and Wilkins 2009).

Scholarship has long acknowledged that the treatise exhibits many of the characteristics of philosophical protreptic (see introductions in Barigazzi 1991, Boudon-Millot 2000). What has been less well appreciated, however, is Galen's participation in the sophistical show-pieces common to the rhetoricians of his time.

My point of departure is the ecphrasis in chapters 2-5 of the *Protrepticus*, in which Galen describes Fortune (*Tychē*) and Hermes along with their respective bands of adherents. Fortune, he writes, is a blind woman standing on a sphere and who constantly leads her followers into calamity. In her train are the tyrants and criminals of the past, demonstrating the folly of a life lived apart from the arts. Conversely, Hermes is a young man in the flower of youth who directs ordered ranks of artisans to lead lives dedicated to their crafts and to imitate the gods in their work.

At the beginning of this ecphrasis, Galen mentions ancient painters and sculptures (*oi palaioi graphontes kai plattontes*, 2.2) who depicted Fortune and he later notes the portrayal of Hermes by the same two kinds of artists (3.1). Although speculative, it is possible that Galen had specific images in mind, such as *Hermes Logios*. Regardless of the presence of specific

works of art, I suggest that he intentionally communicated to the audience that he was engaged in eiconic discourse similar to the work of Philostratus in the *Imagines*. Indeed, Galen repeatedly employs the grammar of ecphrasis, which includes engagement of the senses, describing the actions depicted in art in the present tense, and the author's own interpretation of mythological elements. If we can analyze the rhetorical techniques of Galen in this treatise through the lens of other authors who engaged in ecphrasis, we can clarify his position as a "sophistic" author and elucidate his participation in the literary and oral culture of his time.

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