
The 'Hippocratic' Corpus: Content and Context by Elizabeth M. Craik

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This is a very useful book. It contains an introduction followed by 51 chapters on individual medical treatises assigned to the 'Hippocratic' Corpus, a brief conclusion, bibliography, and indices. It is intended as both a 'general introduction' to the 'Hippocratic' Corpus (with Hippocratic in inverted commas since the connection with the historical Hippocrates is disputed) and a 'reference work' [ix]. The book not only analyzes the content of the 'Hippocratic' Corpus, it also presents information about material that, as Craik says, is 'more often taken for granted than discussed' [xxxv]. While the book does foreground basic assumptions about both the individual treatises and the Corpus as a whole, and provides essential information about each treatise, it also presents arguments about ancient medical ideas and the orientation of individual treatises methodically and judiciously.

The introduction is both truly that and more: in 21 pages, it sets out the cultural, intellectual, and historical contexts in which the Greek medical tradition represented by the Corpus developed; it discusses the evidence for the historical Hippocrates and the possible processes by which the 'Hippocratic' Corpus came into being; it provides an overview of the types of treatises and the medical ideas they represent, along with comparisons and links to other ancient medical traditions (Egyptian, Babylonian, Ayurvedic, Chinese); finally, it contains brief remarks on ideas widespread in the works of the Corpus and on common linguistic and stylistic features. The introduction is sophisticated: it does not simplify the interpretive challenges of any of these issues. However, it also provides in one masterly overview useful basic information that is not always easily found in other introductions to 'Hippocratic' medicine (e.g., the material on the development of the Corpus, including discussions of such later compilers and editors as Erotian, Ermerins, and Littré, or the brief but helpful mentions of other ancient medical authors such as Anonymus Londinensis). Scholars familiar with ancient medicine

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will find this material a fine summation of the ‘state of the field’ in the early 21st century, while beginners will find an expert introduction to the topic by a senior scholar.

The chapters on individual treatises are the core of the book. As Craik herself remarks [xxvii], she has used the appendix in Jouanna’s *Hippocrates* [1992], which provides summaries and dates of individual treatises, as a model for her work; however, whereas Jouanna’s book placed the summaries in an appendix within a book that synthesized information from the various treatises into an overall analysis of the Hippocratic medical tradition, Craik has flipped the emphasis such that each individual treatise receives extensive attention. The concept of ‘summary’, moreover, does not do justice to the richness of the material that Craik has provided. She sets out information on each treatise in a fairly strict pattern: first, she lists the editions of the treatise (beginning with Littré); then, after an occasional preliminary note, she outlines the content of the treatise; third, in a ‘comment’ section, she analyzes the ideas, organization, language, and style of the treatise; fourth, in a ‘context’ section, she compares the treatise with others in the *Corpus* and also, as appropriate, with other contemporary philosophical, medical, historical, or poetic works; lastly, she proposes a date. While Craik does suggest the affinities of each treatise to others in the *Corpus*, thus enabling possible ‘groupings’, the treatises are discussed in alphabetical order. Although some of this material can be found in editions of individual texts (especially in those with extensive introductions and commentaries such as the *Corpus Medicorum Graecorum* (CMG) and the *Budé* editions), it is nonetheless useful to have it available in one book. Moreover, the comments and contextualizations are full of the author’s thoughtful, sensible insights; and, although Craik is always appropriately cautious, she is not afraid to make judgments about the treatises and draw connections to other authors and genres. For example, in her discussion of *Glands*, she not only discusses connections with other treatises of the *Corpus*, but also with Diogenes of Apollonia, Democritus—whom she views as ‘the most pervasive underlying presence’ [122]—Dexippus of Cos, Menecrates, Aristotle, and the Aristotelian *Problemata*; and she finishes the chapter with the comment that

it may be said that there is no doubt that the writer is an important figure, responsible for a large part of the ‘Hippocratic’ *Corpus* and occupying an intermediate place between the thought of the Presocratics and study in the Academy and the Lyceum. [124]

Craik is also especially attuned to language and style in individual treatises, something less commonly found in academic work on the 'Hippocratic' Corpus from the English-speaking world. Thus, she remarks on the unusual language and the 'syntax frequently so abbreviated as to be impenetrable or hopelessly ambiguous' [132] in *Humors*. She also discusses, for example, the 'more idiosyncratic stylistic preferences' that appear in *Diseases 1*, such as 'a liking for compound, including double-compound, verbs' and 'a striking and repeated use of tmesis in compound verbs' that she notes is common in Herodotus and 'may have been regular Ionic but unfamiliar to some scribes and so frequently amended away' [172]. Every work in the 'Hippocratic' Corpus is treated to such careful observation.

In summary, this is a fine book by a senior scholar who has a long history of engaging with these texts, as both editor and interpreter. It contains material very useful to those who regularly work with ancient Greek medical texts but it also is written to provide sufficient background for those coming to these texts for the first time.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

Jouanna, J. 1992. *Hippocrates*. Baltimore, MD.