INTRODUCTION

I. Overview

A. Content

It is recognised that we cannot rely on the titles of Hippocratic works, commonly later impositions, to convey an accurate or even helpful reflection of their content. This may be especially true of anatomical texts, where basic factual information is inherently subject not only to constant repetition and recapitulation but also to a process of refinement or accretion: parallel accounts, differing versions or related material are all liable to be incorporated or appended. The treatise On Bones, largely on the subject of vascular anatomy, is just such an amalgam of material with a misleading title, doubtless derived from its inapposite opening. However, both the opening words and the resulting title of On Glands—more properly ‘On Glands as a Whole’, or ‘On Glands: A Survey’, or perhaps even ‘On the Lymphatic System’—are unusually apposite.

The term ἀδήν ‘gland’ is itself rare. This seems to be reflected in its differing gender already in the Hippocratic works On Glands (masculine or, more often, feminine) and Articulations (masculine) as well as later: feminine in Rufus, but masculine in Galen. (In LSJ it is erroneously stated that ἀδήν is feminine gender as ἡ ἀδήν in Articulations and masculine as ὁ ἀδήν ‘later’; in view of the generally fluctuating usage, it may be suggested that the rare word was always of common or varying gender.) Pollux regards ἀδήν as a term used by doctors and, by implication, not by others (Pollux 2. 4. 224): thus, our author’s medical credentials are implicit in the usage. There was evidently uncertainty, even among those who employed the word ἀδήν, as to its proper semantic range. The defining description of glandular tissue (1) is not appropriate for the large intestinal glands (5), or for the kidneys and the adrenals (8), and the place of the brain is indeterminate (10).

In popular usage, the anatomical term βουβών ‘groin’ is used by extension for the gland in the groin, and then for other glands, and then
by further extension as a term of pathology applied to a ‘swollen gland’, not only in the groin but in other locations also, such as neck and armpits or any region subject to visible and palpable swelling. This term too is used in medical texts (for Hippocratic usage, see on 4.2, 8; on Diokles, see on 2.2). The verb βούβιόνω (rather oddly rendered in LSJ ‘swell to a βοιβίων’) is the mot juste for glandular swelling; Aristophanes uses the cognate βουβιονάω as an obscene euphemism for a phallic erection (see on 8). The general looseness in terminology, allowing βουβιόν to refer to the groin or to a problem affecting it, can be further seen in the term βουβιονοφύλαξ ‘truss for an inguinal hernia’.1

From even a bald summary, the character of the work can be appreciated. The author’s view of the overall character of glands in nature and appearance is outlined (1); the nature and cause of maladies affecting them is described (2); their distribution and function is indicated (3); an association of glands, moisture and hair is postulated (4); it is allowed that hair is absent from some places where glands are present (5). Particular glandular areas are discussed: the kidneys (6); the neck (7); the armpits and groin (8); the intestines (9, also 5); the head, specifically the brain (10). It is stated that the head may send an excess of moisture in flux to the ears, the eyes, the nose, the throat, the oesophagus, the spine or the hip joint (11); and that the brain itself may be affected by the character and circumstances of this flux (12). The relatively minor hazards of fluxes to the eyes, nose and ears are outlined (13); flux via the oesophagus (to the belly) and via the trachea (to the lungs) and the extreme dangers of flux to the hips are described (14). The final sections have a tangential air: it is noted that the brain may suffer other dangerous maladies, and that these affect the rest of the body also (15); a glandular difference—breasts—between men and women is discussed (16) and the general physiology and pathology of the breasts is adumbrated (17).

The author aims to convey essential information, focusing on the most important glands, rather than to cover the subject of glands comprehensively (7). He makes a serious and wide-ranging attempt to observe the broad anatomy, to understand the underlying physiology, and to account for the general pathology of glands. He presents a lucid account of his main findings, integrating these into current medical theories. Awareness of the existence and function of glands appears sporadically in other ancient medical authors and works (see Introduction III A); but no com-

1 Lat. inguen by contrast seems to have only a local anatomical sense, ‘groin’.