CHAPTER 19

Author, Argument and Exegesis: A Rhetorical Analysis of Galen’s *In Hippocratis de natura hominis commentaria tria*

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1 Introduction

In a culture where philosophical and medical commentators turned to the corpora of their progenitors to uncover and demonstrate the principles of their professions, Galen thought it was extremely important that *De natura hominis* (*Nat. Hom.*) be perceived as having been written by Hippocrates.¹ He argued that *Nat. Hom.* was the only text in which Hippocrates methodically investigated the primary substances of the human body, its φύσις, and therefore, it contained the ‘foundation’ (χρηστής) of the whole art of Hippocrates.² As will be seen in this chapter, Galen’s understanding of *Nat. Hom.* was derived from his perception that the venerable Hippocrates held similar theoretical views on the four elements and humors as Galen did.³

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¹ This chapter is derived from a chapter in my doctoral thesis. I am grateful to the Wellcome Trust for funding my research. I would also like to thank Prof. Dean-Jones and Prof. van der Eijk whose critical and insightful remarks contributed to the formulation of this chapter. I have also greatly benefited from Jouanna’s discussion of *HNH* as well as from his edition of *Nat. Hom.*, Jouanna 1975; also Jouanna 2000, 273–92. The Greek text used is from I. Mewaldt, *In Hippocratis de natura hominis commentaria tria*, 1914, 3–113 = 15.1–223 K, which comprises *In Hippocratis de natura hominis commentarii (HNH)* and *In Hippocratis de salubri victus ratione commentarius (Hipp. Vict.).* Mewaldt’s text will appear as M. from here onward. Galen’s commitment to *Nat. Hom.*’s Hippocratic authorship is obvious from the title of one of his lost works, *In ‘The Nature of Man’ Hippocrates is observed holding the same opinion in respect to his other works* (ὁ Ἰπποκράτης ἔχων φαίνεται τῇ κατὰ τὸ περὶ φύσεως ἀνθρώπου, *HNH*, M. 7.19–20 = 15.9.14–15 K), and from his detailed discussion of *Nat. Hom.*’s authenticity in *On the Legitimate and Spurious Writings of Hippocrates* (Περὶ τῶν γνήσιων τε καὶ νόθων Ἰπποκράτους συγγραμμάτων, *HNH*, M. 56.4–6 = 15.107.3–5 K). A fragment of latter work which discusses *Nat. Hom.* is preserved in *HNH*, 15.9–11 K.

² *HNH*, M. 1914, 8.20 = 15.11.14 K; Jouanna 2000, 290.

The received text presented a number of exegetical problems for Galen. First, there was a strong contingent of contemporary scholars who maintained that Hippocrates’ pupil and son-in-law, Polybus, was the author of *Nat. Hom.*, and these men could point to a long tradition extending to the 4th century BC which declared *Nat. Hom.* was written by Polybus. Secondly, although the author of *Nat. Hom.* presented a systematic physiological model of the four humors, he does not argue for the four elements being the φύσις of man, as Galen had previously claimed in *De elementis ex Hippocrate* (*Hipp.Elem.*). Thirdly, not all of the theories presented in the received text agreed with Galen’s understanding of medical science, most especially, the antiquated model of human anatomy in Chapter 11 of *Nat. Hom.* Therefore, Galen was faced with the task of extricating parts of the text he deemed to be Hippocratic from those which he perceived were neither written by Hippocrates nor true to the τέχνη of Hippocrates. Galen attempted to accomplish this by writing three books of commentary to the received text: *In Hippocratis de natura hominis commentarii* (*HNH*) and *In Hippocratis de salubri victus ratione commentarius* (*Hipp. Vict.*).

In his prefatory remarks to *HNH* Galen puts forward the overall argument of his commentary. He claims that the received text for *Nat. Hom.* is an

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4 Galen claims Sabinus, as well as the majority of exegetes (οἱ πλεῖστοι ἐξηγηταί), believed that *Nat. Hom.* was written by Polybus. *HNH*, M. 87–88 = 15.171–173 K. He also notes how Dioscorides attributed at least part of the work to Hippocrates, the son of Thessalos, i.e. the grandson of the legendary Hippocrates. *HNH*, M. 57–59 = 15.110–112 K. Other possible commentators of *Nat. Hom.* see Ihm 2002, 160–164; *HNH*, M. 8–9, 87–88, 89 = 15.11–12.171–173, 174–175 K; Flemming 2008, 342.


6 According to Jouanna, ancient manuscripts of *On the Nature of Man* (*Περὶ φύσεως ἀνθρώπου*) included the fifteen chapters of *Nat. Hom.* (6.32–19L) as well as the nine chapters (6.72–87 L) which today are commonly referred to as a separate treatise entitled *De salubri victus* (*Salubr.*). Jouanna 1999, 399. Mewaldt’s title *In Hippocratis de natura hominis commentaria tria* reflects the fact that Galen used three books of commentary—2 *HNH* and 1 *Hipp. Vict.*—to address the material covered in the received text of *Περὶ φύσεως ἀνθρώπου*. At the end of Book 2 of *HNH* Galen uses a transitional statement to declare that the exegesis of the received text will continue with his commentary on *Salubr. HNH*, M. 88.12–13 = 15.173 K. Therefore, Galen intended all three books of commentary to be read straight through.

7 As von Staden points out, ancient commentaries were sometimes shaped by ‘something resembling a plot’, and some prefaces reveal the larger commitment of a commentary. von Staden, 2002, 118. cf. Baltussen 2007, 249.