EVALUATING HIPPOCRATES THE YOUNGER

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Diocles of Carystus in Euboea, son of Archidamus, practiced medicine sometime during the fourth century BC. In common with most medical authors of antiquity, none of his works have survived and such as have remained are preserved in fragments and testimonia chiefly to be found in Pliny the Elder, Anonymus Parisinus (first century AD), Galen (quantitatively the most important source with 71 fragments), Athenaeus of Naucratis, Oribasius, and Caelius Aurelianus. The Anonymus and Caelius are the principal sources for the views of Diocles on disease and treatment. Diocles seems to have been considered an important medical figure whose influence was felt in his lifetime and who was still being cited (if only by name and reputation) at least 1600 years after his death. Celsus refers to him, together with Praxagoras, Chrysippus, Herophilus and Erasistratus, as among those who practiced medicine on the basis of “various methods of treatment” (in diversas curandi vias processerint). Pliny the Elder describes Diocles as “second in age and fame” (secundus aetate famaque) to Hippocrates.

In the Anonymous of Brussels, the eleventh or twelfth-century manuscript which preserves the account of an unknown medical writer of around the fifth century AD, Diocles is described not only as a “follower” (sectator) of Hippocrates, but also as one whom the Athenians called “Hippocrates the Younger” (iuniorem Hippocratesem). Michael of Italy, a twelfth century teacher of philosophy in
Constantinople, refers to the physician John Actuarius Pantechnes as one who “eclipsed” (ἀποκρύψας) Diogenes in the medical art. Diogenes is thus deemed sufficiently familiar to warrant citation in order to be ranked below the rather overweeningly-named Pantechnes. The above are four of the twelve fragments Philip van der Eijk has assembled which deal with Diocles’ life, chronology and reputation. The only unambiguous medical voice from these twelve fragments is Galen (frs. 5, 8 and 9). Galen brackets Diocles with Hippocrates, Empedocles and many of the other ancients, who practiced medicine because of their “love of mankind” (φιλανθρωπία), not for fame and riches (fr. 5). Diocles is thus an honourable physician in Galen’s eyes, and, together with such fellow practitioners as Pleistonicus, Praxagoras and Herophilus, is also a famous one (fr. 8). But it is clear that Dicoles and the others are mentioned simply because they form part of what a student should study if he is to master the doctrines of the ancients (fr. 9 says much the same thing). There is something rather anodyne about such testimonia.

Taken together, these twelve fragments do not reveal a great deal about Diocles. His status and reputation cannot be determined with any great confidence, and anything from the Anonymous of Brussels needs to be treated circumspectly. Medical writers and commentators from antiquity to the Byzantine period used Diocles for their own purposes, but this need not preclude an attempt to reconstruct the main tenets of Diocles of Carystus and to place him within his intellectual and cultural context.

There have been two previous attempts to do this in the twentieth century. In 1901 Max Wellmann published his edition of the fragments of Diocles, enrolling him as an important member of the so-called “Sicilian School” of medicine. Thirty-seven years though van der Eijk states that the expression “follower of Hippocrates” should be taken “with a grain of salt” (II: 7), he enjoins the reader to consider that if the mention of the Athenians is “historically correct,” then “it points to a significant impact of Diocles’ teaching in Athens.” This cannot be proven, of course, but if the Athenians regarded Diocles as a younger version of Hippocrates, then there is no reason to suppose they did not also regard him as a follower of, or otherwise associated with, the great Coan.

4 Fr. 11 vdE. The Commentary (II: 15) erroneously refers to him as “Michael Pantechnes.”

5 In the nineteenth century, Moritz Fraenkel published a collection in a thesis entitled Dioclis Carystii fragmenta quae supersunt: dissertatio inauguralis medico-historica (Berlin, 1840).