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Galen's Practice of Textual Criticism

The recently discovered Galen's short treatise *On avoiding grief (Peri alupias)*, written in 193, when he was an old man over his sixties, offers new information on his previous work on some literary and philosophic texts (Homer, Aristotle, Theophrastus) he found in the libraries of Rome. He writes that during the last thirty years in Rome he copied many texts and added diacritics in view of a private *ekdosis*, examined the *pinakes* of the libraries, wrote on the authenticity of some texts he discovered. Galen presents himself as a kind of grammarian who works for his personal library and for himself. However, our information on Galen's philological activity rests mainly on his running commentaries on Hippocrates, which offer a completely different point of view. Here Galen does not work for himself but for friends and medical students and aims to explain the medical content and value of the 'most genuine' writings of Hippocrates. In order to give his own exegesis Galen not only refers to ancient and recent or contemporary commentaries and to all the treatises relevant to the subject he was able to find in private and public libraries but he also takes position against the current editions of Hippocrates published by two scholars of Hadrianean age, Dioscorides and Artemidoros Capiton, often referring also to other Hippocratic manuscripts; he is able to evaluate the quality and authority of the manuscripts (*akribe antigrapha, palaia antigrapha*). Galen's interest in textual criticism is a means of defending the Hippocratic text from the insolent attacks of sectarian interpreters, plagiarists and interpolators; he acts as a conservative philologist, particularly interested in preserving the Hippocratic language and thought (*lexis kai dianoia*), reluctant to innovations. On the other hand, Galen admits that some errors in the Hippocratic texts may be very old and probably made by the copyist who first copied the text (*protos bibliographos*), others have their origin in the form of the letters or are caused by the intrusion of notes from the margins, and so on; in such cases he feels absolutely allowed to modify the text. In the course of the years Galen devoted more and more space in his commentaries to the textual problems of the Hippocratic texts (in particular in the case of *Epidemics VI*), but at the same time, he became intolerant of the efforts to emend or to explain passages totally obscure and incomprehensible. Through a choice of cases, I'll illustrate how Galen worked, the criteria he used to evaluate the quality of the Hippocratic texts and to explain their form and content, as well as the aims and the place of his philological work in the context of his teaching activity and in the construction of his Hippocratism.