MEDICINE AND THE BODY IN ANTIQUITY

HIPPOCRATIC ORATORY

The Poetics of Early Greek
Medical Prose

James R. Cross

ROUTLEDGE

Hippocratic Oratory

On Ancient Medicine, On the Art, On Breaths, On the Nature of Human Beings and *On the Sacred Disease* are among the most well-known and sophisticated works of the Hippocratic Collection. The authors of these treatises were seeking means to express their arguments that built on authoritative models of their predecessors. By examining the range of expressive resources used in their expository prose, James R. Cross demonstrates how oral tradition and written techniques, such as sound patterning, signposting and antithetical formulae, were deployed to help the writers develop a case. The book demonstrates that there were various layers of meaning and manners of communicating ideas which can be found in Hippocratic expository prose, and offers fresh insights into the oral debating culture and experiments in persuasion which characterise the ancient Greek world of the late fifth century BCE.

James R. Cross is a Tutor in Classical Civilisation at University College London. He completed his PhD in Classics at King's College London. His research focuses on connections between ancient medicine and literature.

Medicine and the Body in Antiquity

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The Poetics of Early Greek Medical Prose

James R. Cross

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Abbreviations and editions

I refer to the Greek text of the five Hippocratic treatises focused on in this study as printed in the following editions. Note that other editions of these treatises show different line and section numbering and minor differences in the Greek.

Jouanna, J. (ed. and trans.) (2003), *Hippocrate. Tome II, 3e partie. La maladie sacrée* Paris: Les Belles Lettres.

Jouanna, J. (ed. and trans.) (2002 [1975]), *Corpus Medicorum Graecorum I, 1, 3. Hippocrate. La nature de l'homme*. Berlin: Akademie-Verlag.

Jouanna, J. (ed. and trans.) (1988), *Hippocrate. Tome V, 1re partie. Des vents; De l'art*. Paris: Les Belles Lettres.

Mann, J. E. (2012), *Hippocrates, On the Art of Medicine*. Leiden; Boston: Brill.

Schiefky, M. (2005), *Hippocrates: On Ancient Medicine*. Leiden; Boston: Brill.

I rely on the English and French translations of the Greek in the editions listed above and below to produce English translations of extracts from the Hippocratic treatises referred to in this book.

Jones, W. H. S. (ed. and trans.) (1923-1931 [reprinted 1998-2005]), *Hippocrates I-IV*. Cambridge, Mass.; London, England: Harvard University Press.

Jouanna, J. (ed. and trans.) (1990), *Hippocrate. Tome II, 1re partie. De l'ancienne médecine*. Paris: Les Belles Lettres.

I make use of the following abbreviations in referring to texts of the Pre-Socratics and Sophists, where applicable, and cite the Greek text as printed in TEGP, except where indicated. I have generally also cited D. W. Graham's English translations of Pre-Socratic and Sophistic texts, except where indicated.

DK Diels, H. and Kranz, W. (ed. and trans.) (1964), *Die Fragmente der Vorsokratiker: griechisch und deutsch*. Zurich; Berlin, Weidmann.

TEGP Graham, D. W. (2010), *The Texts of Early Greek Philosophy: the Complete Fragments and Selected Testimonies of the Major Pre-Socratics*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

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1 Hippocratic expository prose

Introduction

This study is concerned with the poetics and persuasive function of a group of treatises in the Hippocratic Collection which shows signs of being composed for or in relation to oral dissemination and which, as such, should be considered as evidence for Hippocratic oratory.¹ The focus in this study is principally on five of these ‘oral’ Hippocratic treatises: *On Ancient Medicine* (*De vetere medicina*), *On the Art* (*De arte*), *On Breaths* (*De flatibus*), *On the Sacred Disease* (*De morbo sacro*) and *On the Nature of Human Beings* (*De natura hominum*), which are all believed to have been written towards the end of the fifth century in Greece during a period of seismic cultural, intellectual and social change in the ancient Greek world. These treatises were deeply implicated in these changes and should be valued for the insights they can offer into fifth-century debating culture and their affinity with the developing body of prose writing broadly understood, as much as for their medical content and relationship with other Hippocratic treatises.

My argument is essentially that these Hippocratic works represent significant examples not only of developments in medical understanding and philosophical debate about the nature of the human body and its ailments, but also valuable evidence for the early development of prose writing in ancient Greece: reading the ‘oral’ Hippocratic treatises as evidence for experiments in authoritative persuasion and creative exercises in explanation in the relatively new form of expository prose yields fresh insights into the volatile and exciting world of late fifth-century oratory that have yet to be explored fully in existing scholarship. My main interest lies in how, in the selected Hippocratic treatises, language is used to make sense of the world, and how language use to an extent *interacts* with – that is, shapes and reflects – these authors’ understanding of the workings of the human body, of disease development and so on.

I focus on the persuasive function of recurring patterns in language use: for example, antitheses and balancing effects in phrasing, repetitions and accumulations of words or phrases, tags and sonic effects such as rhyme or resonance in sound, as well as key items of vocabulary. Many of these are features more commonly associated with poetry than prose; one aim of this book is to elicit

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and analyse the main poetic features of Hippocratic treatises intended for oral dissemination and consider their persuasive role in pseudo-scientific prose tracts as part of the gradual development from oral poetic models of authoritative account to written prosaic models, which is a strong trend throughout the fifth century BCE and has its roots in developments in previous centuries.

Another, related aim is analysis of the extent to which suggested, accumulated, resonant meanings that emerge through various patterns in the prose overlap with or are entangled with the fast-developing hard logic of philosophical authority that could be said to culminate in Aristotle's *Organon*, written in the fourth century BCE, which can be viewed as an extreme example of the expression of authority through the form of prose. In other words, this study explores the presence of different layers of meaning and modes of 'reasoning' in certain Hippocratic treatises, that are beyond the 'logical' surface content of any given treatise.

I have selected these five treatises from the Hippocratic Collection to focus on because they are among the most similar in style and tone to other philosophical and sophistic writing of the period. As Iain Lonie notes, writing on literacy and the Hippocratic Collection, regarding these essayistic treatises, 'They are rationalistic, bold in hypothesis, ingenious in argument, sceptical of received opinion, and they share the general commitment to intellectual analysis' (Lonie 1983: 149). Others could easily be included in this study; however, this selection ensures a manageable focus for the close reading of persuasive techniques and allows for discussion of the more prominent persuasive features, as well as hopefully providing an opening for further research on this topic in the future.

I give a brief synopsis of these five treatises in the [Appendix](#) to this volume. I turn now to an overview of the Hippocratic Collection and scholars' reaction to expository prose in the Collection, and then introduce the many important influences that lie in the background to composition of such texts and their place within the story of the development of early Greek prose writing.

Medical oratory in the Hippocratic Collection

The Hippocratic Collection contains around seventy treatises. The majority are believed to have been composed in the late fifth and early fourth centuries BCE, though some are likely to have been written as early as 450 BCE and others as late as 250 BCE in different locations around the Mediterranean world.²

The Collection in the form in which it exists today can be traced back to the publication of an edition printed in Italy in 1526. Vivian Nutton notes that

the Aldine press in Venice printed the first edition of the complete works of Hippocrates in Greek, for no single ancient manuscript surviving

today contains every tract from the collection, and many have only a small selection. But it is also clear from the manuscripts themselves and from the work of ancient commentators and compilers of Hippocratic dictionaries that the great majority of the texts printed in 1526 were already circulating together under the name of Hippocrates by the first century AD, if not 300 years earlier.

(2013 [2004]: 60)

The most recent modern editor and translator of the entire Collection, Maximilien Paul Emile Littré (1801–1881) believed the compilation of the treatises into a single Collection took place in Alexandria, noting that ‘The Hippocratic Collection did not exist in an authentic manner until after the time of Herophilus [of Alexandria, 335–380 BCE] and his pupils’ and believed that most of the treatises of the Collection came to Alexandria from family or medical libraries (Littré 1973 [1839]: vol. 1, 262–291).³ Nutton also notes that

it [is] likely that the collection was first assembled in broadly the form we have it at Alexandria in Egypt in the famous library of the Ptolemies, at a time when Cos was part of their empire . . . The somewhat haphazard way in which materials were brought together and stored at the Alexandrian library would . . . explain, at least in part, the varied nature of the collection.

(2013 [2004]: 61)

There is only limited and often fanciful evidence available to take us any further than Littré’s sense of a body of work formed somewhat haphazardly in the library at Alexandria. Between them, Jody Pinault’s edition and translation of fascinating hagiographic-style stories that gathered around the name Hippocrates in *Hippocratic Lives and Legends* and Wesley Smith’s edition and translation of letters associated with Hippocrates collect all the relevant sources and attest to the murkiness of our historical knowledge regarding the original composition and dissemination of the treatises of the Collection, as well as the rich body of legends that built up around the name of Hippocrates.⁴ If there is no way to be sure precisely when and where the Collection was formed, the internal evidence nevertheless suggests that there were sub-collections of treatises such as the case studies of *Epidemics* or the series of medical maxims entitled *Aphorisms* which are likely to have been grouped prior to being included in the full Collection (see Nutton 2013 [2004]: 61–62). Furthermore, from analysis of the style and content of individual treatises, in relation to what is known about their intellectual or cultural context, scholars can establish probable dates of composition, though in certain cases only an imprecise range of decades or even centuries can be provided; occasional

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references to other datable historical events or characters – such as the Pre-Socratic philosopher Melissos, in the case of *On the Nature of Human Beings* – also help with dating (Jouanna 2002 [1975]: 59–61).

All the treatises are connected, by manuscripts, with the historical figure Hippocrates. Beyond the name, only the slightest secure information about the identity of Hippocrates exists, though long-standing threads of discussions now referred to as the ‘The Hippocratic Question’ have been pursued regarding which, if any, of the treatises in the Collection were composed by Hippocrates, and indeed who he was.⁵ The Collection was clearly composed by many different hands.

The treatises of the Collection are medical in the loose sense that they all discuss the functions and malfunctions of the human body, yet the Collection also contains much that could be considered ethnographic, historical and above all philosophical rather than solely medical. To take some representative examples, there are treatises that focus on the fundamental causes of diseases; there are those that discuss in detail the therapy that must be applied to cure individual diseases; others explore dietetics, that is the treatment and prevention of diseases by the regulation of daily routines such as eating and drinking habits and frequency, type and level of physical exercise; some treatises contain case histories of patients; others discuss the principles of surgery; another area considered is pregnancy and diseases of women; the Hippocratic oath is one treatise in the Collection that famously discusses medical ethics.

There is an impressive and fascinating treasury of material here that has from antiquity up to the present day been of interest to those studying medicine and to historians of medicine.

In the last forty years or so the Hippocratic Collection has also begun to receive serious critical attention from Classicists from a variety of intellectual backgrounds and so the context of the collection has been explored in greater detail and from a diverse set of perspectives.

Many of the medical writers discuss ideas that reveal an intimate connection with Pre-Socratic and Platonic thought, for example. Connections with discussion of natural philosophy in Herodotus’ *Histories* have also provided a rich source for recent research.⁶ Ideas central to Hippocratic medicine, such as the notion of humoralism, enshrined as canonical through Galen’s high regard for the theory as described in *On the Nature of Human Beings*, shows close links with Alcmaeon of Croton’s notion of *isonomia*, of balance of powers, as well as with Empedocles’ notions of competing forces in the world at large which need to be balanced. Indeed, many Hippocratic treatises display interests and discuss issues which go beyond understanding of the human body to understanding nature and culture. *Airs, Waters, Places* is an important example of this, which contains analysis of climate and its effects on the body as well as theories of climate and racial difference.⁷

Until recently, however, the Collection has been largely overlooked as evidence for the development of prose. The Hippocratic Collection is widely acknowledged to represent a transformation in the understanding of the body and its place in the natural world as gleaned from early extant Greek writing, such as the Homeric poems in which gods rather than bodily constituents such as phlegm or bile are described as bringing about disease.⁸ Yet, it is much less commonly acknowledged in Hippocratic scholarship that along with this deep change in understanding, the language being used to communicate new ideas was relatively untried and itself in the process of rapid development; use of prose represented a fundamental departure from Homeric hexameter and the authority of inspired, poetic voice, and went hand-in-hand with the conceptual changes that were taking place in the period.

One reason for this is perhaps that the treatises of the Collection all too often do not fit easily into the notion of 'classical' in the sense of 'first-class' literary compositions in the way that Plato's dialogues or Thucydides' historiography do and so have attracted only limited attention from scholars interested in issues of form and style. Another explanation may be that their medical content has until recently meant that Hippocratic treatises have been treated as specialised and therefore not of mainstream interest, though this situation is changing.

Of most importance for this study are the areas of cross-fertilisation between the Hippocratic Collection and sophistic authors, which are relevant to the study of the development of prose expression. Until recently, many scholars dismissed sophistic traits of the Hippocratic writings as unimportant, even somewhat dangerous, rather in the same way that we find negative reactions to writers considered Sophists among ancient commentators. This is almost certainly the reason why discussion of the interrelation between Hippocratic and Sophistic oratory has been limited until the last few decades.⁹

Jones, working in the first half of the twentieth century, wrote of the Hippocratic treatise *On Breaths*: 'The author shows no genuine interest in medicine, nor do his contentions manifest any serious study of physiology or pathology' (1923: 222), though he adds that 'We may laugh at the crudities of *περί φυσῶν* . . . but we must respect its inquiring spirit and its restless curiosity' (1923: 223). He calls *On Breaths* a 'sophistic essay, probably written to be delivered to an audience' (1923: 221).

Of *On the Art*, a defence of the art of medicine included within the Hippocratic Collection, which is commonly thought to show intense sophistic influence, Jones writes:

It is quite plain from even a cursory reading of the treatise that its author was not a physician. His interest lies in subtle reasonings and in literary style, not in science. Besides this, in the last chapter he speaks of 'those

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who are skilled in the art' as giving a proof of the existence of medicine based on works, and not, like the proofs given in the present book, on words. He evidently distinguishes himself from medical men.

(1923: 187)

He continues:

The two most striking characteristics of *The Art* are an attenuated logic and a fondness for sophistic rhetoric. The rhetorical character of the whole book is so striking that without doubt it must be attributed to a sophist. The elaborate parallels, verbal antitheses, and balancing of phrase with phrase, can have no other explanation.

(1923: 187)

The label 'sophist', is, for Jones, an indication of want of medical expertise.

By contrast, a more recent editor of these texts acknowledges them as written by doctors in the Hippocratic spirit as well as showing strong sophistic influence. Jouanna writes of *On the Art*:

Neither the sophistic form of the speech, nor the associations with the theories of Diogenes of Apollonia or Empedocles should mask a more profound reality: the treatise has its roots in Hippocratic medicine in the broad sense of the term. It is wrong to view this treatise as the speech of a Sophist mislaid in the Hippocratic Collection. By the tone, the general themes regarding the art of medicine and the detail of its physiological explanations, the work is in accordance with common foundations of Hippocratic medicine.

(1988: 30)¹⁰

For Jouanna, this treatise is Hippocratic and medical in the deepest sense and should not be considered a sophistic speech extraneous to the main Collection; here, too, though, we can detect a sense that the word 'sophistic' carries negative connotations of superficial or specious.

On *On the Art*, Jouanna writes:

The treatise *On the Art* presents analogies in form with *On Breaths*. It is also an epideictic speech composed with sophistic technique by a physician who is arguing a case. However, the argument is very different: while the author of *On Breaths* claims that air is the cause of all diseases, the author of *On the Art* claims that medicine exists in so far as it is a τέχνη – an 'art'.

(1988: 167)¹¹

This treatise is considered as an epideictic speech composed with sophistic techniques by a doctor; there is, here too, a certain distancing from the dangers of the label of sophistry.

There are many treatises in the Collection that are intensely engaged with the spirit of the age in which they were written and, as prose writings, emerge in an unstable interface between poetic and prosaic, oral and literate. In places, some treatises go so far as to begin to develop new modes of expression; this is a phenomenon which echoes contemporary exploration of the possibilities of the expression of meaning in language. This book aims to contribute to the movement in current scholarship examining Hippocratic writings in context and consider the value of these treatises as examples of early Greek prose writing and in terms of their poetics and persuasive function. Unlike some previous scholarship, however, the aim here is to examine behind the negative and dismissive reactions and listen in to the voices of the authors of the most outlandish and performative treatises of the Hippocratic Collection; it seeks to ask what effects they intended to achieve on their audiences and how they went about this, reserving judgement about the effectiveness of their techniques.

Models of Hippocratic medical oratory

In classical Athens, in the fifth century BCE, and across the Greek world culturally and intellectually in touch with Athens' influence, experience and skill in the art of communicating to a live audience was a central and vital feature of everyday life which would have involved all (male, Athenian) citizens, if not all people in Athens, at some level. The democratic assemblies which drew crowds of several thousands were sustained by public eloquence. The establishment of dramatic festivals at Athens, attended by large audiences from across the Greek world, and the development of tragic and comic drama celebrated mastery of the voice, and drew self-conscious attention to dialogue and declamation, spoken and sung. The law courts at Athens, from which most of our evidence for ancient Greek law derives, were driven by the speeches of prosecutors, defendants and witnesses.¹² Public oratorical contests and performances were not only a feature of democratic processes, legal systems and the theatre; the influence of the performance culture of the spoken word extended well into the world of early Greek philosophy and the sciences, including medicine.

No area of cultural or intellectual life was untouched by the pressing need to find ways to communicate ideas in a public forum, before a crowd, in one form or another, in this century of cultural and intellectual revolutions. The evidence of essays designed for public dissemination from the Hippocratic Collection shows that many doctors were certainly part of this impulse

towards oratory. In order to gain a sense of the nature of Hippocratic oratory, it is useful to consider its possible genealogy; for, as with other forms of oratory indicated above – in the law courts, in democratic assemblies, in the theatre – it emerges from a tradition of public debate, and specifically public debate on medical topics, for which we have some evidence. The work of several Pre-Socratic thinkers offers some of the earliest evidence for medical oratory extant from Greece, and is likely to have served as a model from which Hippocratic oratory develops.

Empedocles, for example, at the peak of his activities in the mid-fifth century BCE wrote in dactylic hexameter, the metre of Homeric and Hesiodic epic; his work was modelled on epic poetry designed for performance, recited by itinerant professional bards. In terms of form, his work looks back to the epic tradition. The content of his work, however, which focuses on questions of natural philosophy – such as the fundamental structure of the cosmos – rather than mythic narratives, shows a radical departure from the Homeric and Hesiodic tradition.

As a natural philosopher engaged in opening new intellectual territory in verse, there is a general sense in which Empedocles is a direct predecessor of Hippocratic public discussion about the nature of medicine, since his philosophical interests included medical topics.¹³ The *Suda* and Diogenes Laertius (8.77) indicate that Empedocles wrote on the topics of physiology such as respiration and embryology (see e.g. TEGP 386–387 (127 [F78])); TEGP 388–389 (130 [F80]), (132 [F82]), (134 [F84]) = DK31B65, B67, B68) and more broadly on nature and on purification, and Galen (*Method of Healing* 1.1, 10-5-6 K) includes Empedocles in a list of early physicians.

Indeed, evidence for Empedocles' work shows an intellectual engaged in two strands of thinking, the interconnection and interplay between which will be the focus of this study on Hippocratic oratory in the late fifth century BCE, as follows: (i) experimentation with different ways of communicating ideas; (ii) concurrent engagement with and development of medical theories.

In the following extract, Empedocles describes himself travelling from city to city where he is revered by people seeking to hear his healing words; he specifically entwines themes of language and healing:

τοῖσιν ἅμ' εὖτ' ἂν ἴκωμαι ἄστυα τηλεθάοντα,
 ἀνδράσιν ἠδὲ γυναιξί, σεβίζομαι· οἱ δ' ἅμ' ἔπονται
 μυρίοι ἐξερέοντες, ὅππῃ πρὸς κέρδος ἀταρπός,
 οἱ μὲν μαντοσυνέων κεχρημένοι, οἱ δ' ἐπὶ νούσων
 παντοίων ἐπύθοντο κλυεῖν εὐηκέα βάζιν,
 δηρὸν δὴ χαλεπῇσι πεπαρμένοι <ἄμφ' ὀδύνησιν>.

When I come to other flourishing cities
 I am revered by them, men and women alike; they follow together

by thousands inquiring the path to success,
 some seeking oracles, some seeking
 to hear the healing word for all sorts of diseases,
 having been long pierced by severe <pains>.

(TEGP 406–407 ([F120]) = DK31B112)

Empedocles portrays himself as a religious healer with powers to cure many kinds of diseases through his insights. This is a model of an author's self-representation as saviour, using language that is drawn from the epic past to introduce and discuss topics that relate to everyday health problems; as a saviour-figure, Empedocles also implies that he is able to dispense 'healing words'. While the level of self-fashioning and the tendency to draw on religious and epic themes in this extract does not correlate directly with what is found in Hippocratic expository prose, as will be seen in the following chapters of this study, there is a clear sense of a model here for Hippocratic treatises such as *On Breaths* which communicate the heroism of doctors and which include poetic effects in language to convey both medical theories and the healing power of such theories.

Added to this conjunction of healing and the use of persuasive powers, it is important to note that Empedocles was thought to have reflected on the topic of persuasion and be involved with the development theories of eloquence too. Quintilian, the first-century CE Roman author on rhetoric, notes that

Empedocles is said to be the first one after those poets referred to, to promote anything about rhetoric. The earliest writers of textbooks [on rhetoric], Corax and Tisias were from Sicily, followed by Gorgias of Leontini, a man of the same island, who was, as it is reported, a student of Empedocles.

(TEGP 338–339 (12) = DK31A19)¹⁴

This development of rhetorical handbooks goes beyond anything we find evidence for in the writers of Hippocratic oratory; nevertheless, they too were involved the development and promotion of new techniques of persuasion, as well as in discussions of medical theory.

Other Pre-Socratic philosophers, such as Xenophanes and Heraclitus, have no demonstrable connection with specifically medical topics but as natural philosophers engaged in the development and use of new modes of expression, they almost certainly played a part in sparking and influencing the emergence of public debates on medical topics. Their work seeks to develop new philosophical ideas partly *alongside* and *through* experimentation with language use; this manner of thinking and expressing at the same time on topics relating to natural philosophy was of significant and demonstrable influence

on several key Hippocratic writers. Detailed discussion of links between Heraclitus and *On Breaths* follows in [Chapter 4](#) of this book.

Xenophanes, a forebear of Parmenides and Empedocles, was known in antiquity as a wandering performer and poet, and had interests in cosmogony and astronomy, nature and divinity. The religious tone of Xenophanes' style of communication and references to pious behaviour show one way in which the author both indicates and embodies his interests in the divine as part of his enquiries into the nature of divine, as, for example, in the following: 'χρὴ δὲ πρῶτον μὲν θεὸν ὑμνεῖν εὖφρονας ἄνδρας / εὐγήμεοις μῦθοις καὶ καθαροῖσι λόγοις' 'It is right for men of good will to hymn the god first of all, / with auspicious tales and pure words' (TEGP 102–103 (9 [F1]) = DK21B1). Here, Xenophanes recommends expressing reverence for the divine in hymns. At the same time, elsewhere in his poem, he is offering his audience a new kind of religious poetry in which he proceeds to express his own version of understanding of the divine, which includes questioning the behaviour of the gods: he notes that the gods are considered by some to be the source of all that is blameworthy and disgraceful among mortals (TEGP 108–109 (29 [F17]) = DK21B11).

In a similar vein, Heraclitus makes use of style of expression in part to engage in philosophical questions about the nature of nature. Throughout antiquity and beyond, Heraclitus' enigmatic style and love of paradox and ambiguity have drawn a range of strong reactions. From Lucretius in the Roman philosophical poem *On the Nature of Things*, composed over four centuries after Heraclitus' death, we have a dismissive reaction to Heraclitus' philosophical contribution:

quapropter qui materiam rerum esse putarunt
ignem atque ex igni summam consistere solo,
magno opere a vera lapsi ratione videntur.
Heraclitus init quorum dux proelia primus,
clarus ob obscurum linguam magis inter inanis
quamde gravis inter Graios qui vera requirunt.
omnia enim stolidi magis admirantur amantque
inversis quae sub verbis latitantia cernunt,
veraue constituunt quae belle tangere possunt
auris et lepido quae sunt fucata sonore.

Wherefore, those who have thought fire is the matter of things and the totality is composed of fire only have clearly fallen far from the true account. Heraclitus first joined battle as their general, thought brilliant for his dark utterance more among the empty-headed than among serious Greeks who seek the truth. For dimwits admire and love all things

which they can discern hidden under twisted words, and they regard as true words that prettily tickle their ears, and are coloured with graceful sound.

(Lucretius *De Rerum Natura*, I. 635–644 = TEGP 182–183 (169))

Heraclitus' 'twisted words' sought to convey complex ideas in natural philosophy. While Lucretius clearly does not take Heraclitus' work seriously, these lines suggest that the Pre-Socratic philosopher did succeed in provoking some manner of public engagement with philosophical ideas; this in turn is a clue to his influence on some of the Hippocratic oratorical texts. Lucretius is, of course, writing over 400 years after Heraclitus' lifetime, but this passage emerges from a tradition of responses to Heraclitus' work which include close contemporaries who found his work befuddling: Aristotle comments, for instance, that Heraclitus' writing does not make logical sense, with all statements being both true and false (TEGP 182–183 (167) = Aristotle *Metaphysics* 1012a24–26, a29–31, a33–b2).¹⁵

In the work of Xenophanes, Heraclitus, Parmenides and Empedocles, in different ways and to different degrees, we find, then, fragmentary evidence for writing that is likely to have served as models for the kinds of composition designed for public performance found in the Hippocratic Collection. To be clear, the period in which Xenophanes, Heraclitus, Parmenides and Empedocles were working is characterised by two major and interrelated shifts. Firstly, poetry was ceding to prose as the dominant form of authoritative expression on all questions of major intellectual importance. Secondly, a society that relied predominantly on oral expression was evolving into one that placed ever-increasing emphasis on the value of the written word in its records, its forms of self-expression and its enquiries. In order to begin to consider the nature of Hippocratic oratory, these shifts must be acknowledged and considered. I turn now to a brief introduction to and outline of each of them to establish some further background context for the study of Hippocratic oratory.

Poetry and prose in late fifth-century intellectual debates in the Hellenic world

In this section, I offer a brief sketch of some of the main ideas and sources relating to the rise in dominance of written prose and its development. For the purposes of this study, it is important to emphasise the main differences between verse and prose; the point that a contest between authoritative media is underway in fifth century BCE in Greece; and some of the intellectual ramifications of the development of prose as the main form of authoritative communication. I am also interested in pointing out the way in which development of prose style and theories of knowledge and reasoning become entangled in

certain ways in this period; this converging relationship between thought and expression is pertinent to the discussion in the following chapters and is a significant feature of Hippocratic oratorical treatises.

Written prose most closely reflects the everyday conversational exchanges that we can presume are a feature of life for all people in all periods of history; it is a form of expression that presents itself as at one with the commonplace comings and goings of everyday life, as the adjective 'prosaic' may imply. Poetry, by contrast, seeks to distinguish itself from the mundane and quotidian, and express something which is not normally expressed, cannot normally be expressed, or is only permitted to be expressed by certain people. The category 'prose' exists only insofar as it is a point of contrast with the category 'poetry' or 'verse'. In the ancient world, as will be explored further in the following chapters, examples of prose on scientific or technical subjects in the ancient Greek world show many 'poetic' elements; in its most fundamental conception, however, poetry must be considered as words written to fit a certain metre which are frequently sung or recited to music. Whatever the degree of 'poetic' elements it embraces, prose in ancient Greek had no regular metre and was not sung or recited to music.¹⁶

Records exist of statements in list form from the earliest times in the ancient Greek world. The Linear B tablets written in Mycenaean Greek, for instance, contain many lists of records of exchanges of goods. The first records of grammatically connected prose in ancient Greece derive from the late sixth or early fifth century BCE.¹⁷ While written prose was clearly always in use in the ancient world, more intellectually demanding or abstract issues and topics thought more divine were explored and expressed in the Archaic period in ancient Greece in poetic form. To compose an explanation in words of the nature of the universe in the eighth century BCE meant to give an account in poetic form by means of divine inspiration, as we find, for example, with Hesiod's *Theogony*. This is the tradition from which Xenophanes, Parmenides and Empedocles, and to a lesser extent Heraclitus, emerge in the late sixth and early fifth centuries BCE.

Many of the Pre-Socratic philosophers chose not to compose in verse form and here we find one thread of evidence for the movement towards the challenging and dismantling of the authoritative status of poetic metre with its associations of divine inspiration and the development of explanations without metre intended to be accepted as authoritative enquiries into natural philosophy. Indeed, even the poetry of Xenophanes, Parmenides and Empedocles was thought by some to fall short of the standard set by their predecessors and other literary contemporaries:

non ita tamen Xenophanes aut Parmenides aut Empedocles sive alii quicumque theologi a poesi capti sunt divini viri, sed potius theoriam naturae gaudio amplexi et vitam omnem ad pietatem laudemque deorum

dedicantes optimi quidem viri comperti sunt, poetae tamen non felices: quos oportebat divinitus spiritum sortiri gratiamque de caelo metrum carmen rhythmumque caelestem ac divinum, ut poemata vera relinquerent velut prototypum libri perfectum et pulcrum cunctis exemplar.

Nevertheless neither Xenophanes, Parmenides, Empedocles nor any other theologians, divine men inspired by poetry, [made the gods liars,] but rather joyously embracing the contemplation of nature and dedicating their whole lives to piety and the praise of the gods they revealed themselves to be the best men, though they were not gifted poets. They should have received a divine spirit and metre, melody, and a heavenly, divine rhythm as a gift from heaven so that they might leave true poems as the perfect model of a book and a beautiful example to all.

(TEGP 100–101 (8) = DK21A26)

In this passage from Philo's *On Providence*, handed down to us in Latin translation, the author associates, however implicitly, the decline in poetic skill with lack of divine inspiration. Philo is writing in the Jewish tradition, attempting to combine Jewish and Hellenistic philosophy into a single theological system, and so might be expected to find these Pre-Socratic authors lacking in divine inspiration; nevertheless, the observation tallies with the point that the use of 'less perfect' poetic models, and later prose, emerges most strikingly among the earliest intellectuals who question the divine and enquire into the nature of nature itself, putting faith in their own powers of thought. As Glenn Most argues in his work on the poetics of the Pre-Socratics, the overall context of the decision about how to compose a piece of writing in the fifth century BCE was a contest for authority between verse and prose (Most 1999: 332–362).

Evidence of the emergent use of sophisticated explanatory prose is also famously found in the first historical accounts in Herodotus' *Histories*, Thucydides' *On the Peloponnesian War* and their mythographer predecessors who sought to upset and overturn the mythic histories which had previously dominated in the form of epic poetry. The competition for authority between the new historiographers writing in prose and their poetic predecessors is clear in one of the most famous examples of oratory from the fifth century BCE, recorded – and part-invented – by Thucydides in *On the Peloponnesian War*. First citizen Pericles' exclamation of the power of prose oratory over the epic poetry of the past in his speech commemorating the dead at the end of the first year of the Peloponnesian War is as follows:

μετὰ μεγάλων δὲ σημείων καὶ οὐ δὴ τοὶ ἀμάρτυρόν γε τὴν δύναμιν
παρασχόμενοι τοῖς τε νῦν καὶ τοῖς ἔπειτα θαυμασθησόμεθα, καὶ οὐδὲν
προσδεόμενοι οὔτε Ὀμήρου ἐπαινέτου οὔτε ὅστις ἔπεισι μὲν τὸ αὐτίκα

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