

Encomium and Thesis in Galen's *De parvae pilae exercitio*

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GALEN'S TREATISE "On the exercise with the small ball" has been welcomed by scholars of ancient sports for its description of ball games and by scholars of ancient medicine for its discussion of the benefits of an exercise regimen.¹ Its rhetorical nature, however, has not been properly understood. The treatise is not non-rhetorical; it is also not an adoxographical encomium, an encomium of the ball itself, or even strictly an encomium at all; rather, it is a thesis exercise organized around encomiastic headings (*topoi*), in which Galen argues that everyone should engage in small ball playing. Rhetorical analysis of the treatise provides further evidence that, despite Galen's professions of distaste for rhetoric, he was able skillfully to deploy his training in it.

First, what the treatise is not. It is not non-rhetorical. The editor of the standard edition of the text, E. Wenkebach, all but denied the essay's rhetorical nature; he warned that it should not be "misunderstood as a rhetorical encomium by an Iatrosophist," because although it does contain praise of the game, it

¹ Ed. E. Wenkebach, "Galenos von Pergamon: Allgemeine Ertüchtigung durch Ballspiel. Eine sporthygienische Schrift aus dem zweiten Jahrhundert n. Chr.," *Sudhoffs Archiv* 31 (1938) 254–297, at 258–272 (cf. V 899–910 Kühn); Wenkebach's text is also available on the TLG. The following editions are used for the progymnasmata: M. Patillon and G. Bolognesi, *Aelius Théon: Progymnasmata* (Paris 1997); M. Patillon, *Corpus Rhetoricum I* (Paris 2008) [for Ps.-Hermogenes and Aphthonius]; J. Felten, *Nicolai Progymnasmata* (Leipzig 1913); R. Foerster, *Libanii Opera VIII* (Leipzig 1915) [for Libanius and Ps.-Nicolaus]. All translations are my own.

is “not tarted up at the expense of the facts by false means.”² From the vantage point of a time much more sympathetic to ancient rhetoric, Wenkebach’s hostile misrepresentation of the nature and function of encomium exposes his bias against rhetoric but tells us nothing about the nature of the treatise. In fact, the treatise makes explicit use of the rhetoric of praise and blame in the course of its argument: “perhaps you will think that I praise (ἐπαινεῖν) running” (3); “I blame (ψέγω) lack of proportion everywhere” (4); “therefore I do not even praise (ἐπαινω) running” (6); “And so I especially praise (ἐπαινω) an exercise that is capable of providing health of body and harmoniousness of parts and excellence of soul, all of which belong to the exercise with the small ball” (15–18). Moreover, Galen’s praise is not directed at a subject unworthy of it, such as baldness or bedbugs or dung; the treatise is not an adoxographical encomium.³ Nor is his praise ever directed at the small ball itself.⁴ In fact, although the treatise contains some elements of

² Wenkebach, *Sudhoffs Archiv* 31 (1938) 296: “Wer unser Schriftchen in dem hier erörterten Zusammenhange als einen Exkurs Galens zu seiner ‘Hygiene’ sieht, wird sich, glaube ich, nunmehr wundern, daß man es als ein rhetorisches Enkomion eines Iatrosophisten verkannt hat. Gewiß gibt es sich als ein Lob des Ballspieles, aber nicht auf Kosten der Tatsachen mit unechten Mitteln aufgeschminkt, sondern also hygienische Empfehlung eines Sportes.”

³ J. König, *Athletics and Literature in the Roman Empire* (Cambridge/New York 2005) 284–291, at 285, considered the possibility that the essay is an encomium, but only of the adoxographical type, and concluded that it is “not ... a straightforward example of the common rhetorical exercise of praising objects which would not usually attract praise.” For adoxographical encomia see A. S. Pease, “Things without Honor,” *CP* 21 (1926) 27–42.

⁴ König, *Athletics and Literature* 285–286, conflates the physical object with the exercise, and so sees humor, mockery, and paradox in the treatise where I do not: “The work opens with humorously extravagant praise of *the small ball*, which has the effect of undermining the pretensions of the more prestigious forms of exercise with which it is contrasted”; “There is an arresting—and I think very funny—sense of paradox here in the idea that *something so small and simple* can be the source of the very greatest of benefits

encomium, as W. Schaefer saw more than a century ago,⁵ it does not take the form of an encomium. Rather, it incorporates some of the headings of encomium into a thesis exercise arguing that everyone should engage in small ball playing.

In order to understand this claim, first we need to consider what the ancient handbooks on progymnasmata say about the exercise called ‘thesis’. The political or practical thesis as taught in the rhetorical schools was an inquiry into a question applying to human beings in general, such as whether one should marry. In considering the question, the student was taught to examine the topic through the lens of the *τελικὰ κεφάλαια*, usually glossed as “final headings” but helpfully explained by R. Penella as “the headings that are concerned with the ends of human actions.”⁶ This variable list of evaluative headings encouraged the writer to consider whether and how a given action was feasible, easy, just, appropriate, honorable, necessary, advantageous, legal, and so on.⁷ An anonymous reader has proposed an attractive outline for the treatise focused on the headings of feasibility, advantage, and consequence, as found in Hermogenes *Stas.* 76.3–79.16: “(1) the exercise is not difficult and (2) has beneficial consequences; (3) it is easy, and (4) has no harmful consequences.”

That analysis of the exercise from the perspective of the final

... [T]his paradox serves more than anything to mock the many other exercises which are said to fall short of the small ball’s usefulness. The humour lies in the fact that activities like athletics, despite the extravagant claims they make for their own benefits, are so easily defeated even by *the most tiny and unpretentious of objects*. That humorous effect is echoed several times in what follows” (emphasis mine). See further discussion below, n.12.

⁵ W. Schaefer, *De Galeni qui fertur de parvae pilae exercitio libello* (diss. Bonn 1908) 26–27. S. Mattern, *Galen and the Rhetoric of Healing* (Baltimore 2008) 128, characterized the essay as “a lighthearted encomium of the exercise for which it is titled” but did not pursue the point.

⁶ R. J. Penella, “The *Progymnasmata* in Imperial Greek Education,” *CW* 105 (2011) 77–90, at 84.

⁷ Penella, *CW* 105 (2011) 84 with n.31.

headings works well. Yet there is another way to understand how a thesis exercise is organized. The fifth-century handbook author Nicolaus of Myra says that, although he is well aware that other authorities use the final headings or other kinds of headings under novel names, the best authorities divide the thesis by encomiastic headings and the arguments derived from them, “so that the exercise may be deliberative in form but encomiastic in its content and division” (ἵνα ἢ μὲν τὸ προ-γύμνασμα εἶδους συμβουλευτικοῦ, ὕλης δὲ πανηγυρικῆς καὶ διαίρεσεως, 72.7–73.13). Nicolaus’ interpretation of thesis differs from those of other ancient theorists whose handbooks survive. However, as B. Schouler recognized, he is not describing a different kind of exercise, but simply looking at the same exercise in a different way; even the sample thesis exercise of Aphthonius, who recommends using the final headings and does not mention encomiastic headings, makes use of some encomiastic headings.⁸ Following Schouler, I suggest that Nicolaus’ interpretation of thesis is a valid way of analyzing the model thesis exercises in Aphthonius, Libanius, and Ps.-Nicolaus, as well as Galen’s treatise on the small ball.

Every rhetorical thesis exercise poses a political/practical question about a human cultural practice: whether one should marry, engage in politics, have children, teach rhetoric, sail, or build a fortification wall.⁹ In order to learn how to write an encomium of one of these human practices, the student first learned to praise a human being. The encomium of a person begins with an appropriate introduction, followed by praise of

⁸ B. Schouler, *La tradition hellénique chez Libanios I* (Lille/Paris 1984) 134: “Nikolaos approuve ceux qui, tout en admettant l’appartenance de la thèse au genre suasoire, adoptent les topiques du discours panégyrique. En réalité Aphthonios, dans son exemple sur le mariage, utilise successivement les deux registres: les topiques de l’éloge lui servent dans sa première partie, et ceux du genre délibératif dans la discussion qui suit, puisqu’il appuie la réfutation de chacune des trois objections qu’il avance sur le critère de l’intérêt.”

⁹ These examples are found in the handbooks of Theon (120.12–128.24), Ps.-Hermogenes (11), Aphthonius (13) and Nicolaus (71.6–76.23).

the subject's origin, his nurture and upbringing, and his deeds, divided into those attributable to his mind, to his body, and to external factors. The section on deeds should include a comparison showing the superiority of the subject. The exercise ends with a brief epilogue.¹⁰ These headings and instructions for encomia of persons could be adapted to praise animals, plants, and things.¹¹ In order to praise things (τὰ πράγματα), the writer would modify the headings of origin, nurture, and deeds. In place of origin, he would praise the inventors and first users of the thing. In place of nurture, he would praise the training involved in it. In place of deeds, he would praise the goods of the body and goods of the soul as found in its users. Ps.-Hermogenes explains (7.12):

τὰ δὲ πράγματα ἐγκωμιάσεις ἀπὸ τῶν εὐρόντων, οἷον τὴν θηρατικὴν Ἄρτεμις εὖρε καὶ Ἀπόλλων· ἀπὸ τῶν χρησαμένων, ὅτι ἥρωες αὐτῇ ἐχρῶντο· μέθοδος δὲ ἀρίστη ἐπὶ τῶν τοιούτων ἐγκωμίων, ὅσα περὶ πραγμάτων, τὸ τοὺς μετιόντας αὐτὰ σκοπεῖν, ὁποῖοί τινές εἰσι καὶ τὰς ψυχὰς καὶ τὰ σώματα, οἷον οἱ θηρῶντες ἀνδρεῖοι, εὐτολμοὶ, ὀξύτεροι τὰς φρένας, ἐρρωμένοι τὰ σώματα.

¹⁰ In the interest of avoiding unnecessary complexity, I have in this paragraph combined details from the handbooks of Theon (109.19–112.21), Ps.-Hermogenes (7), Aphthonius (8), and Nicolaus (47.4–58.18) to form one account.

¹¹ In his more advanced treatment of epideictic speech, Menander Rhetor acknowledges the existence of encomia of things but rejects the category: “And so these are all the divisions of the epideictic part as a whole, and I am not unaware that some have already written encomia of practices and arts (ἐπιτηδευμάτων καὶ τεχνῶν), but since our discussion is about man, it will [corrupt verb; editors suggest *embrace*] all these, so that the writers have unwittingly composed a part of a whole encomium as if it had been a complete encomium. Moreover, I am not unaware of the fact that some of the ancient sophists already wrote praises of salt and things such as that, but because our division has proceeded from the animate to the inanimate, it has already included this part, as well” (Treatise 1: 332.20–30 in D. A. Russell and N. G. Wilson, *Menander Rhetor* [Oxford 1981] 4–6).

You will praise things from those who invented them; for example, Artemis and Apollo invented hunting; from those who made use of them, [saying] that heroes used it. But the best method in the case of all such encomia that concern things is to examine those who pursue them, what sort of people they are in respect to both their souls and their bodies; for example, hunters are manly, courageous, rather keen in their wits, and strong in their bodies.

Nicolaus agrees with Ps.-Hermogenes that encomia of persons and things are similar in structure. After dividing things into material, inanimate things such as shields, spears, and rocks, and non-material things such as rhetoric and “practices in general” (ὅλως τὰ ἐν ἐπιτηδεύμασιν, 57.9–13),¹² he poses the question whether one can use the same headings for encomia of things as for encomia of persons, to which he gives the answer (57.15–58.1):

δεῖ τοίνυν εἰδέναι, ὅτι καὶ ἐπὶ τούτων τοῖς ἐνδεχομένοις τῶν ἐγκωμίων τόποις χρῆσόμεθα, οἷον τυχὸν ἐπὶ τῶν ἐπιτηδευμάτων ἀντὶ μὲν γένους παραλαμβάνοντες τοὺς εὐρόντας ἢ πρώτους χρησαμένους αὐτοῖς, ἀντὶ δὲ ἀγωγῆς τὴν ἐν αὐτοῖς ἄσκησιν, ἀντὶ δὲ πράξεων τὰς χρείας, ἅς πληροῖ τῶ τῶν ἀνθρώπων βίῳ, καὶ τὰς ὠφελείας, καὶ ἐφ’ ἐκάστου τῶν ἄλλων οὕτως.

It is therefore necessary to know that in the case of these encomia, too, we will use all possible headings; for example, perhaps in the case of practices, taking up in place of origin those who invented or first made use of them, and in place of nurture the training entailed in them, and in place of deeds the uses that they fulfill in the life of humans, and their benefits, and so on in the case of the rest.¹³

¹² This distinction is relevant because, contrary to König, *Athletics and Literature* 285–286, Galen never praises the ball itself (the material, inanimate *πρῶγμα*) but only the practice of exercising with the ball (the non-material *ἐπιτήδευμα*). See n.4 above.

¹³ “In the case of the rest”: it is unclear whether Nicolaus means the rest of the headings of an encomium of a practice (prologue, comparison, epilogue) or the rest of the subclasses of things (including the subclass of

Nicolaus' recommendation to turn encomium's heading of origin into a discussion of inventors and early users agrees with that of Ps.-Hermogenes. He also explains how to adapt the heading of nurture; this is not found in Ps.-Hermogenes. Nicolaus' modification of the heading of deeds focuses not on their effects on the human body and soul, as in Ps.-Hermogenes, but more generally on their benefits to humanity. The following chart summarizes the changes:

| <u>Praise of persons</u> | <u>Praise of activities</u> |
|--------------------------------|--|
| Prologue | |
| Origin | → inventors and first users (Ps.-Hermog., Nicol.) |
| Nurture and upbringing | → training involved in it (Nicol.) |
| Deeds: mind, body, external | → effects on bodies and souls of practitioners (Ps.-Hermog.); uses and benefits to humanity (Nicol.) |
| Comparison showing superiority | |
| Epilogue | |

If we follow Nicolaus' interpretation of thesis, the writer of a thesis about a practice uses adapted encomiastic headings as the basis of his argument, not only praising the practice but also arguing that one should pursue it (72.7–73.13). This argument should apply broadly and not only to specific individuals. Theon says that the aim of thesis is to persuade an audience of citizens in general in an assembly (120.23–25); similarly, Galen's thesis aims to convince his ideal readership of *pepai-deumenoï*, arguing that small ball playing is a good exercise for everyone and is superior to other exercises.

We turn now to consider two ways in which Galen's training in the composition of encomium and thesis exercises influenced the presentation of his argument in support of small ball playing.

First, Galen uses an argument from the praise of the inventors and first users of the practice. In Libanius' encomium

physical, inanimate objects).

of the practice of farming, after briefly defending his choice of subject by appealing to Hesiod's *Works and Days*, he praises the divine origins of the practice: Athena gave humans olive trees and the plow, Dionysus gave them the vine, and Demeter gave them wheat and barley (*Progym.* 8.7.2). The same feature is found in thesis exercises, but whereas Libanius' encomium mentions the divine origin of the practice mainly in order to defend and exalt his choice of topic, in thesis this heading is turned more to the service of argument. As Nicolaus explains in his interpretation of the thesis as an exercise based on encomiastic *topoi*, "if we should ask who were its inventors and first users, what will we say other than the arguments that we will use in place of [the heading of] origin?" (εἰ δὲ ζητοῖμεν, τίνες οἱ εὐρόντες καὶ πρῶτοι χρησάμενοι, τί ἕτερον ἢ ἐροῦμεν τὰ ἐνθυμήματα, ἅπερ ἀντὶ τοῦ γένους παραληψόμεθα; 73.3–6). In his thesis on whether one should marry, Aphthonius begins with praise of the divine origin of marriage, because it populated heaven and earth and provided humans with a kind of immortality through procreation (13.5). Libanius, after a brief prologue addressed to those reluctant to marry, argues that choosing to marry shows our obedience to the gods, whose lives and epithets indubitably support marriage and sanctify procreation, and helps us avoid the arrogance and impiety of treating the gods as ignorant or wicked beings (*Progym.* 13.1.3–8). Two thesis exercises mistakenly attributed to Libanius display the same feature. In the thesis on whether one should build a fortification wall, Ps.-Nicolaus argues that although the gods have no need of walls, since heaven provides their protection, they have shown their support for the art of wall-building by constructing the walls of Troy ([Lib.] *Progym.* 13.2.1–2). In the thesis on whether one should sail, he says that no one who is aware of sailing's divine origin would reject it, because the wise Athena invented it and made it easier for humans to cross the sea so that they might realize a profit from their agricultural produce. The author uses the divine invention of sailing to argue that sailing is good, beneficial, useful, profitable, and relatively easy ([Lib.] *Progym.* 13.3.1–2).

Unfortunately, small ball playing has no divine origin myth, and there was no famous first user of the practice. Yet Galen still uses this heading to serve his argument, meeting the rhetorically trained reader's expectation for this heading but cleverly turning it to a different end. After a short dedicatory preface, he begins as follows (1):

For I say that the best of all exercises are those that are able not only to give the body a workout, but also to delight the soul. And those who invented hunting with dogs and all the other kinds of hunting (ὅσοι κυνηγέσια καὶ τὴν ἄλλην θήραν ἐξεύρον), by combining the hard work in them with pleasure and delight and rivalry, were some wise men and accurately understood human nature.

Why does he mention inventors of hunting here? I suggest that he got the idea from his rhetorical training. Although Galen has no story of gods inventing small ball playing or early heroes playing with the ball, he nevertheless alludes to the encomiastic heading of origin and integrates it into his essay by making a brief reference to the invention of hunting, a more prestigious exercise, but one that is exclusive and available only to the rich. By contrast, says Galen (2), even the very poor can easily obtain the equipment needed for exercising with the small ball. Small ball playing provides enjoyable physical and mental exercise, like hunting, and the comparison to hunting serves to elevate its status, but it is also superior to hunting because of its accessibility. Anyone can, and should, engage in the practice of small ball playing; such universal propositions addressed to a general readership are the proper subject matter of a thesis. Discussion of hunting turns out to be important to Galen's argument, but his mention of the invention of hunting and its early users makes sense only in the context of his training in encomium and thesis.

This groundwork having been laid, Galen moves on to discuss the benefits of the exercise. Here he argues from praise of the effects of the practice on the bodies and minds of its users. Libanius' encomium praises farming for its physical benefits, as well as for its benefits to the soul and mind. Physically, farmers can endure heat and cold (6) and are healthy and free from

disease (8). As for their souls, seclusion from city life makes farmers morally good people whose petitions to the gods are more favorably received (4) and who show more self-control in regard to sex and drinking (5). Mentally, farmers gain practical astronomical knowledge (7). Discussion of the benefits of a practice to the user's body and soul is found in thesis exercises, as well. Aphthonius' thesis on whether one should marry argues that marriage makes men brave because they have to fight for their families, just because they fear for their children, wise because they must look out for their children, and self-controlled because marriage establishes legal limits for sexual pleasure (13.6–7). Libanius' thesis on the same theme argues that the wife's attendance on her husband helps him in times of illness (16) and that marriage increases a man's self-control, or at least the public perception of it (23–25). Ps.-Nicolaus' thesis on whether one should build a fortification wall argues that walls make men wiser, by giving them an opportunity to deliberate in assemblies ([Lib.] *Progym.* 13.2.3); safer, by elevating their armaments (3); just, by protecting their courts (4); and courageous (6–8; here responding to an antithesis that walls promote cowardice). Walls also safeguard women's chastity by protecting them from the enemy (4). In his thesis on whether one should sail, Ps.-Nicolaus argues that sailing makes men wiser, by letting them see the world ([Lib.] *Progym.* 13.3.3); brave, by exposing them to perils at sea (3); self-controlled, because there are no women at sea (3); just, because they need the gods to help keep them safe (3, 5) and because in their travels they study the just customs and laws of others (5–6); and pious, because they frequently call on the gods for help (5).

Similarly, in Galen's treatise, much discussion is devoted to the physical and mental benefits of small ball playing. Goods of the body naturally predominate, with a detailed discussion of different ways of exercising with the ball and how these benefit different persons and different parts of the body (2–3). As for its benefits to the soul (3), ball playing “sharpens one's thinking” (τὴν γνώμην θήγει), and when the process of thinking (φροντίζ) is combined with pleasurable, competitive exercise, it improves

the body's health and the mind's quick comprehension (τὴν ψυχὴν εἰς σύνεσιν). Galen sums up as follows: "And this, too, is no small thing, whenever the exercise can benefit both body and soul, each toward its peculiar excellence" (οὐ μικρὸν δὲ καὶ τοῦτ' ἀγαθόν, ὅταν ἄμφω τὸ γυμνάσιον ὠφελεῖν δύνηται, καὶ σῶμα καὶ ψυχὴν, εἰς τὴν ἰδίαν ἐκάτερον ἀρετὴν). To illustrate this claim further, he explains how ball playing's physical and mental benefits aid generals in their duties; by contrast, wrestling, running, and other weight-reducing exercises produce unwanted physical and mental results. This explicit focus on the physical and mental benefits of the exercise shows that Galen was influenced by his training in encomium and thesis to look for both.¹⁴

This analysis of rhetoric in Galen's "On the exercise with the small ball" should in no way detract from its value to modern studies of ancient sports and medicine. Galen was an elite practitioner of competitive, epideictic displays of dissection accompanied by lectures. He was a physician whose friends, enemies, patients, and audiences included sophists. He was furthermore a writer whose corpus not only shows knowledge of rhetorical handbooks and figures and canons of style, but also includes works on language.¹⁵ As L. T. Percy puts it,

¹⁴ The good of the body and soul can indeed be traced back to Plato (*Leg.* 697B2–5), and Galen certainly knew his Plato, but he did not make a special point of drawing on Plato for this idea, as König, *Athletics and Literature* 286, suggests: "This praise of the ball's capacity to bring physical and spiritual benefits together, which recurs a number of times in what follows, sets the argument within a Platonic frame of reference. The small ball, it seems, is not only the most useful of exercises for military and political life, but also one of the most Platonic." In following the instructions for an encomium, Galen would have praised any human practice by detailing its benefits to the bodies and souls of its users.

¹⁵ See Mattern, *Galen* 7–11; H. von Staden, "Galen and the 'Second Sophistic,'" in R. Sorabji (ed.), *Aristotle and After* (*BICS* Suppl. 68 [1997]) 33–54; A. Debru, "Les démonstrations médicales à Rome au temps de Galien," in P. J. van der Eijk et al. (eds.), *Ancient Medicine in its Socio-Cultural Context I* (Amsterdam/Atlanta 1995) 69–81; L. T. Percy, "Medicine and Rhetoric in

“Galen’s expressed contempt for rhetoric does not allow us to conclude that he was ignorant of it or reluctant to employ its methods.”¹⁶ It is therefore not surprising that Galen made use of compositional forms he learned in his rhetorical training as a way of instructing, persuading, and delighting his audience.¹⁷

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the Period of the Second Sophistic,” *ANRW* II.37.1 (1993) 445–456, esp. 448–449; J. A. Lopez Férez, “La rhétorique chez Galien,” in J.-M. Galy and A. Thivel (eds.), *La rhétorique grecque* (Nice/Paris 1994) 223–232; J. Kollersch, “Galen und die Zweite Sophistik,” in V. Nutton (ed.), *Galen: Problems and Prospects* (London 1981) 1–11; B. P. Reardon, *Courants littéraires grecs des II^e et III^e siècles* (Paris 1971) 46–63, esp. 62; G. W. Bowersock, *Greek Sophists in the Roman Empire* (Oxford 1969) 59–75, esp. 60–62, 69. For Galen’s rhetoric in a broader sense see T. S. Barton, *Power and Knowledge: Astrology, Physiognomics, and Medicine under the Roman Empire* (Ann Arbor 1994) 133–168. On the basis of the essay’s form and style, Schaefer, *De Galeni libello* 34, concluded that it was written not by Galen “but rather by some rhetor or sophist from around the same time” (“sed potius a rhetore quodam sive sophista eiusdem fere aetatis”; cf. comments at 26–31). I am not aware of any other discussion of the essay’s authenticity.

¹⁶ L. T. Percy, “Galen and Stoic Rhetoric,” *GRBS* 24 (1983) 259–272, at 260.

¹⁷ I wish to thank Jeffrey Beneker, Neil Bernstein, and Marquis Berrey for their comments and criticisms. I want especially to acknowledge the anonymous reader of an earlier version of this paper in which I argued that the treatise was an encomium; the reader’s detailed criticisms and suggestions helped me rethink my position and revise the argument.