Online Humanities Scholarship: A Digital Medical Library based on Ancient Texts

The project to digitise a large corpus of ancient medical papyri and related artifacts from Egypt aims at providing comprehensive digital editions of medical sources, including texts, translations, commentary, metadata and images of the papyri. The research questions are: A) the dramatic impact on the capabilities of the digital environment to handle the complexity of the literary texts preserved by papyri; B) the quality of the digital editions assured by the collaboration of an international community of experts and the publication of the primary data kept up-to-date; C) a major impact on a wider range of text-editing disciplines beyond the papyrological field (epigraphy, archaeology, classics).

The goal is to make both texts and metadata accessible through a single interface and to publish online combining philological rigour with technological flexibility. The editions will include line-by-line commentary as well as expandable bibliography, evolving critical apparatus for all Greek texts, and an interactive glossary. In order to optimise financial and scientific resources, the Digital Medical Library will gradually extend the existing Duke Data Bank by bringing documentary and literary papyri together into a common technological framework for the first time.

A documentary specimen: letter requesting medical tools (early 7th cent. AD) – GMP II 10
[picture, Leiden+ transcription and final rendering in SoSOL]

A literary specimen: Hippocrates, De fracturis 37 (2nd cent. AD) – GMP I 1

("i) ... in relation to its size than is that of the arm-bone, and it alone has a regular conformation, a rounded one, whereas the articular end of the humerus is extensive, having several cavities. Besides this the leg-bones are about the same size, the outer one overtops the other to some little extent not worth mention, and opposes no hindrance to ..., the external tendon of the ham arises ...; but the bones of the forearm are unequal, and the shorter (radius) much the thicker, while and the more slender one (ulna) ...

(ii) ... on the projecting part, and with the other makes counter-pressure ..."