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Some Organizational Principles and Pharmaceutical Therapies
in the Hippocratic *Diseases of Women I*

Among the works on gynecology and obstetrics in the Hippocratic corpus, *Diseases of Women I* and *II* incorporate the majority of specifics describing female anatomy, and what we would term ‘physiology,’ ‘pathology,’ and therapeutics, especially listings of suggested drugstuffs. Although there is some overlapping in contents with the *On Generation* and *On the Nature of the Child* (and likely *Diseases IV*) and later parts of *Diseases of Women I* and *II* indicate the author’s presumptions of a four-humor theory (similar to the *Nature of Man*), the lengthy and detailed recipes of pharmacological remedies in *Diseases I* and *II* probably incorporate details drawn from far older traditions, so that some of these sections likely are dated to about 400 B.C. My purpose, however, is not to delve into the heated controversies of which of the works in the Collection is earliest, but to suggest that in some of these pharmacological sections, one can discern fairly precise organizational principles that can be broken down into (1) Description, (2) Etiology, (3) Therapy, (4) Contraindications, (5) Discussion of Other Therapies and Refutation, and (6) Continued Therapies, concluded with multi-ingredient and technical instructions for the preparation of pharmaceuticals.

A primary illustration will be *Diseases of Women I*, 63 (Littre, 8, pp. 126-130) that begins, “If the wombs should develop sores, and there is a concurrent clearing-out of purulence and blood...,” followed by a clear etiology (“The ailment seizes a woman after miscarriage...”), therapy, contraindications, discussion, and further drug therapy; other sections in the work display similar structures, but the paper will provide a detailed analysis of *I*, 63, and some comparisons with other comparable instructions in Egyptian and Mesopotamian texts, as well as some careful identification of the phytochemical principles indicated in the suggested ingredients, especially in the “[Continued Drug Therapy: an Eleven-Ingredient Ointment]” = Littre, 8, p. 130.

Preliminary Bibliography

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What's Hippocratic about the Hippocratics?
The Contribution of Materia Medica and Therapeutics

The physicians whose practice has been recorded in the treatises ascribed to Hippocrates have been credited with the use of a wide range of natural substances in therapeutics and a great therapeutic ability. The systematic inventory, computerization, and data-basing of all the prescriptions in the treatises considered to be part of the *Corpus Hippocraticum* (5,500+ items) make it possible to approach the topic on a new basis. Not only the range of plants used (almost half of the total number of prescription is made of only 40+ plants), but also the ways natural substances were prepared (excipients - with their variety - and other possible substances) and administered to the patients will be re-examined. Analysis will inscribe data in the context of traditional practice (considering that knowledge in the field resulted from the accumulation of data gained by trial and error over the centuries), verify if variations/evolutions over time and space can be identified, and contrast data (possibly in differentiated chronological and geographical ways) with those of other origins and periods (for example the chapters on the action of medicinal plants in the *Problemata* of the Aristotelian school, some fragment by Diokles of Karystos and, among others, the 9th book of the *Historia Plantarum* by Theophrastus). It will not deal with the pharmaco-chemical validation of ancient uses of plants in a positivist way, but will describe the therapeutical practices of the physicians whose activity has been recorded in the treatises further collected in the *Corpus Hippocraticum*, aiming at verifying if it can be characterized as resulting from a typical method (or, perhaps, from a reduced set of methods). In so doing, the presentation might offer a further contribution to the understanding of the genesis, provenance and dynamics behind the Hippocratic collection.

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Hippocratic and Aristophanic recipes: same difference

There are only two recipes preserved in the comedies of Aristophanes that have come down to us, whilst there are some 1500 recipes preserved in the Hippocratic *Corpus*. Yet comparing the Aristophanic and Hippocratic recipes can help us to understand better the context in which both sets of recipes were composed and transmitted.

Most Hippocratic recipes are found in the gynaecological texts of the *Corpus*. They are generally short, being composed of four or five ingredients on average. The presence of exotic, expensive, flamboyant ingredients is particularly conspicuous in the Hippocratic collections of recipes. In particular, ingredients qualified by a geographical epithet are numerous: Egyptian perfume, Egyptian alum, Indian pepper, Ethiopian cumin, Pontic nut, Attic honey, Chian wine, Milesian wool, Thasian nut, etc. These geographical epithets refer to places both within the Greek world and beyond its boundaries. In many cases, it seems, these epithets are used as a means to distinguish a commodity from its luxurious equivalent. This way of qualifying products with geographical epithets is also documented in numerous non-medical Greek texts, for instance in Pindar and in comedies.

Our two Aristophanic recipes do contain ingredients qualified by geographical epithets. In addition, similarly to the Hippocratic recipes, they are short. Both of Aristophanes' recipes are destined to the politician Neokleides. The first, preserved in the *Assembly Women*, is imagined by Blepyrus (Praxagora's husband):

Crush garlic with verjuice, add Laconian spurge; cover your eyelids with this ointment in the evening. This is what I would have said if I <sc. Blepyrus> had been there <sc. at the assembly>. [*Assembly women* 403ff].

The second, preserved in the *Plutus*, is prepared by the god Asclepius himself:

First of all, for Neokleides, he <sc. Asclepius> set himself to knead a plaster, throwing in three cloves of Tenian garlic. Then, he crushed them in the mortar, mixing them together with verjuice and squill. Then, he soaked <the mixture> with Sphettian vinegar. And turning out the eyelids of the man, he plastered them to make him suffer more. [*Plutus* 716ff]

By inventing Tenian garlic, vinegar from Sphettos and Laconian spurge, Aristophanes mocked those who thought that when mundane goods such as garlic or vinegar came from a particular locality, they were more powerful.

In this paper, I will argue that, although Aristophanes' recipes are meant to make audiences laugh, they may be based on some medical knowledge. At *Regimen* 2.54, one learns that garlic (ingested obviously, not applied) is bad for the eyes, whilst onion is good for sight. On the other hand, at *Organ of sight* 7, eating garlic is recommended in the treatment of night blindness. I will suggest that Aristophanes had access to ancient medical recipes that are now lost. I will stress the fact that, although there are few recipes for the eyes in the Hippocratic *Corpus*, ophthalmologic preparations constitute a non-negligible proportion of later recipes, especially of recipes on papyri.

This will lead me to face some difficult questions: if the Aristophanic recipes are parodying recipes for the eyes written in the classical period, why are such recipes almost absent in the Hippocratic *Corpus*? In fact, why are 'non-gynaecological' recipes so rare in the Hippocratic *Corpus*? Can the large number of recipes in the gynaecological treatises be explained by a gender argument? Or is it simply linked to the vicissitudes of text transmission?