

Laurence Totelin  
University of Cambridge

### 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?