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## What does 'Hippocrates' mean? The Historiographical Construction of the Greek physician as the 'Father of Medicine'

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Thomas Lilti's 2014 film *Hippocrate* presents the beginnings of the career of a young physician in a Parisian hospital. Despite this, Hippocrates himself is completely absent from the film: 'Hippocrate' is used as a synonym for 'Medicine'. Who hides behind this name? 'Hippocrates, a Greek physician of the fifth century before Jesus Christ, has long been considered the Father of Medicine' wrote Jacques Jouanna at the beginning of his important biography of Hippocrates.<sup>1</sup> Indeed, historians of ancient Greek medicine usually work on the *Hippocratic Collection*, a set of sixty medical treatises transmitted under his name. But debate has been raging since Antiquity to determine which of those treatises are really his and, today, we know that less than a third of the *Collection* was actually written by him or his close disciples.<sup>2</sup>

Paradoxically, hidden behind the authorship of this work and the huge symbol he represents, the actual life and actions of Hippocrates remain largely unknown. We have very little information about him in ancient sources, and the view we have of him is distorted by twenty-five centuries of commentaries and use of his paternal image as a reference in medicine. Since the 1990s scholars such as Jody Rubin Pinault, Jacques Jouanna, Eric D. Nelson have studied ancient sources evoking this character.<sup>3</sup> The aim of this article is to help historians of medicine who often have to deal with the *Hippocratic Collection* as the first treatises evoking their topic: for instance humours, diseases, mental illness, health, diet, drugs, etc. How did this quite unknown character manage to become the 'Father of Medicine', as he is often called in both modern popular discourse and by historians of medicine? <sup>4</sup> How has 'Hippocrates' become a synonym for 'Medicine'? Is he really representative of physicians of his time?

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<sup>1</sup> Jacques Jouanna, *Hippocrate* (Paris: Fayard, 1992), p. 7 and its English translation: Jacques Jouanna, *Hippocrates* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1999), p. xi. See also the title of this biography: Herbert Goldberg, *Hippocrates. Father of Medicine* (Authors Choice Press, 2006).

<sup>2</sup> Jouanna, *Hippocrates*, pp. 56-71.

<sup>3</sup> Jody Rubin Pinault, *Hippocratic Lives and Legends* (Leiden: Brill, 1992); Jouanna, *Hippocrate*; Eric D. Nelson, 'Coan Promotions and the Authorship of the Presbeutikos', in *Papers read at the XIth International Hippocrates Colloquium University of Newcastle upon Tyne, 27-31 August 2002*, ed. by Philip Van der Eijk (Leiden, Boston: Brill, 2005), pp. 209-235.

<sup>4</sup> For instance in the *Encyclopædia Britannica*:

[http://encyclopedia.jrank.org/HIG\\_HOR/HIPPOCRATES.html](http://encyclopedia.jrank.org/HIG_HOR/HIPPOCRATES.html), or in *Wikipedia*: <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Hippocrates>.

To answer this question I will try to determine what can be known about the actual existence of Hippocrates in sources. Then I will show how the symbolical figure of the 'Father of medicine' has been constructed over the past centuries until today. Finally, I will try to see if the Hippocratic figure is representative of ancient Greek physicians.

## I. The actual existence of a physician named Hippocrates

We know very little about the actual life of Hippocrates. But we can be quite sure that a relatively famous physician named Hippocrates lived and worked in the 5<sup>th</sup> century BC Greek world.

The name 'Hippocrates' comes from the word 'hippos', the horse, and the verb 'cratein', 'to have the power':<sup>5</sup> it translates as 'the one who is superior in horse'.<sup>6</sup> It was a common name in ancient Greece. Soranus of Ephesus, a physician of the first and second centuries AD, wrote in his *Life of Hippocrates* that the physician is thought to have been born in 460 BC.<sup>7</sup> Plato also evoked his image in the *Protagoras* (311). Chatting with his disciple Hippocrates, Socrates evoked his namesake as the very example of a physician he could deal with if he would like to learn medicine, in the same way he would deal with Phidias to learn sculpture. 'Suppose, for example, you had taken it into your head to call on your namesake Hippocrates of Cos, the Asclepiad, and pay him money as your personal fee, and suppose someone asked you – Tell me, Hippocrates, in purposing to pay a fee to Hippocrates, what do you consider him to be? How would you answer that? A doctor, I would say'.<sup>8</sup> This dialogue was written at the beginning of the 4<sup>th</sup> century BC but the scene occurs earlier, in the year 430. The character is also evoked as 'Hippocrates, the Asclepiad',<sup>9</sup> meaning the descendant of the god Asclepius, in a scene in *Phaedrus* (270) occurring in the years 410 BC.<sup>10</sup>

<sup>5</sup> Pierre Chantraine, *Dictionnaire étymologique de la langue grecque. Histoire des mots* (Paris: Klincksieck, 1999), pp. 467-468, 578-579.

<sup>6</sup> Henry George Liddel, Henry Stuart Jones, Robert Scott, *Greek-English Lexicon, Revised supplement*, (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1996) , p. 834.

<sup>7</sup> See the Greek text in Pinault, pp. 127-128.

<sup>8</sup> Plato, *Laches - Protagoras - Meno - Euthydemus*, ed. by W. R. M. Lamb (London, Cambridge: W. Heinemann, 1924), p. 99.

<sup>9</sup> 'PHAEDRUS. If Hippocrates the Asclepiad is to be trusted, one cannot know the nature of the body, either, except in that way'. Plato, *Euthyphro - Apology - Crito - Phaedo - Phaedrus*, ed. by Harold N. Fowler (London, Cambridge: W. Heinemann, 1960), p. 549.

<sup>10</sup> See the notice of Léon Robin, in Platon, *Phèdre*, ed. by Paul Vicaire, (Paris: Les Belles Lettres, 1985), pp. XVI-XVII.

These fragments are essential because they prove that at the end of the V<sup>th</sup> century BC a physician coming from the island of Cos was quite famous in the Greek world, known by Athenian elite, both because of his medical and teaching activity. We can deduce from these testimonies that Hippocrates has been practicing medicine from the years 430 to his death. Nevertheless only one author, Plato, evokes him contemporarily to his lifetime, and he needs to cite his geographical and familial origin: in the 5<sup>th</sup> century, Hippocrates seems to be a minor character, not present in any other source or representation.<sup>11</sup>

It was just after his death in the 4<sup>th</sup> century that Hippocrates becomes really famous,<sup>12</sup> conveyed by Aristotle and by the apocryphal biographic letters and discourses.<sup>13</sup> The *Letters* are fictional exchanges between Hippocrates and other characters. These texts are very interesting because a fictive Hippocrates talks in the first person singular, telling his life. There is also the *Athenian Decree* in which Athenians thank Hippocrates who helped the city victim of the plague, the *Speech from the Altar*, and the *Presbeutikos*, a discourse pronounced in Athens by Hippocrates' son Thessalus.<sup>14</sup> Here we find some precious information about the life of the physician, though this is unfortunately impossible to verify. According to Emile Littré, who edited the *Hippocratic Collection* in ten volumes with a complete French translation from 1840, these texts are false. Indeed, recent historiography showed that these works has been written later, in the Hellenistic period.<sup>15</sup> For instance, Eric D. Nelson suggests that the *Presbeutikos* could have been written by the historian Macareus during the 3<sup>rd</sup> century BC.<sup>16</sup> Another ancient source about Hippocrates is an anonymous

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<sup>11</sup> Pinault, p. 1.

<sup>12</sup> Hippocrates is thought to have died in either 375 or 351, according to biographies evoked in the *Life* written by Soranus. See Pinault, pp. 127-128.

<sup>13</sup> VII, 4: 'One would pronounce Hippocrates to be greater, not as human being but as a physician, than somebody who surpassed him in bodily size'. Aristotle, *Politics*, ed. by Harris Rackham (London, Cambridge: W. Heinemann, 1932), p. 555. Here, we can see that Hippocrates became really famous after his death at the IV<sup>th</sup> century BC. Indeed, *Politics* must have been written by Aristotle at the end of his lifetime, from 335 to 323 BC, at least twenty years after Hippocrates died. See Aristotle, *Politique, Livres I et II*, ed. by Jean Aubonnet (Paris, Les Belles Lettres, 1968), p. VII.

<sup>14</sup> In the *Athenian Decree* the Athenians honor Hippocrates with various privileges, such as a golden crown and the right of citizenship with food in the prytaneum throughout his whole life, because he looked after numerous Greeks in various places by sending his disciples almost everywhere. The *Speech from the Altar* is supposed to have been pronounced by one of the sons of Hippocrates, Thessalus, in front of Assembly of the Athenians during a conflict between Cos and Athens at the end of the V<sup>th</sup> century. Thessalus reminds four services provided by Asclepiads to the Athenians in past, and asks in exchange that Athens does not attack Cos. See Hippocrates, *Œuvres complètes d'Hippocrate. Tome IX* ed. by Emile Littré (Amsterdam: Hakkert, 1861); Hippocrates, *Pseudepigraphic Writings: Letters, Embassy, Speech from the Altar, Decree* ed. by Wesley D. Smith (Leiden: Holland, 1990).

<sup>15</sup> 'Hellenistic' is the period running from the death of Alexander the Great (323 BC) to the Roman conquest of Greece in 146 BC.

<sup>16</sup> Eric D. Nelson, 'Coan Promotions and the Authorship of the Presbeutikos', in *Papers read at the XI<sup>th</sup> International Hippocrates Colloquium University of Newcastle upon Tyne, 27-31 August 2002*, ed. by Philip Van der Eijk (Leiden, Boston: Brill, 2005) pp. 209-235.

manuscript called the *Brussels Life*, rediscovered only at the beginning of the century.<sup>17</sup> We have some information from the 10<sup>th</sup> century AD *Suda* encyclopedia, as well as from Byzantine authors such as Stephanus of Byzantium (6<sup>th</sup> century) and Johannes Tzetzes (12<sup>th</sup> century).<sup>18</sup>

Thanks to these sources, which may be helpful even if they are apocryphal, we can approach the life of the physician. He was born on the island of Cos to a family that claimed to descend from the god Asclepius himself on his father's side of the family, and from the hero Heracles on his mother's.<sup>19</sup> His family, the Asclepiads, seems to be a very rich and powerful *genos* of the Aegean world.<sup>20</sup> In the context of this aristocratic background, knowledge and practices of medicine were passed on to the male sons as well as other possessions. As the name of the Asclepiads was known in all Aegean Sea, Hippocrates was called to Abdera in order to cure the philosopher Democritus. He then went to Thessaly, looking for some new cases to study and cure. He is supposed to have refused to help the Persian King, who had asked him to preserve his army from the plague. On the contrary, he helped Athenians prevent the epidemic and thereby obtained important privileges. He then went back and died in Cos. The prevailing idea here is that very few information is known about this figure: only eight short sources evoke Hippocrates, all later to his lifetime. Yet, this quite unknown character is called the 'Father of medicine'.

## II. Becoming the 'Father of Medicine'

How, given how little we know about Hippocrates, did he become such an authority? The reason why he was during Antiquity and is today a figure better known than other important physicians – his ancestor Nebros, or Democedes of Crotona evoked by Herodotus about Hippocrates' son-in-law Polybes<sup>21</sup> – is that his name has been used to refer to the entire authorship of a group of medical treatises written in Greece at the classical period, 4<sup>th</sup> and 5<sup>th</sup> centuries BC: the *Hippocratic Collection*. It is the name of a set of sixty treatises, written in Ionian ancient Greek, that medieval tradition transmitted to us under the name of

<sup>17</sup> See the Latin text in Pinault, pp. 131-134.

<sup>18</sup> Pinault, p. 129; Stephanus of Byzantium (=Stephan von Byzan), *Ethnika* (Berlin: Graz, 1958) pp. 402-403; Joannes Tzetzes, *Historiarum variarum Chiliades* (Harvard: Harvard University, 1826), Hist. VII, 945 sq., p. 276 or Pinault, pp. 130-131.

<sup>19</sup> See Soranos, the *Suda* and the *Brussels Life* in Pinault, pp. 127-134.

<sup>20</sup> A *genos* is a clan, a group of families claiming to descend from the same divine or heroic ancestor.

<sup>21</sup> Herodotus, *Vol. 2, III*, 130-138, ed. by Alfred D. Godley (London, Cambridge: W. Heinemann, 1950-1956).

Hippocrates.<sup>22</sup> 'All these treatises cannot possibly have been written by one man', wrote Jacques Jouanna, one of the best contemporary specialists of the *Collection*.<sup>23</sup> Thus, those sixty medical treatises sometimes expose contradictory doctrines. There would be only less than twenty treatises written by Hippocrates himself and his close disciples, called the 'school of Cos'. Other treatises would have been added to this first group, coming from physicians of the same *genos*, the Asclepiads, from the island of Cnidus. They are called the 'Cnidus medical school'.<sup>24</sup> This category of treatises may be posterior and their origin is not known: they were added to the others during the medieval times.

At the same time, Hippocrates became the stereotypical figure of the wise physician after his death. Indeed in the *Letters*, written at the Hellenistic period, he is already called by the Persians 'pater ugieies', or the 'Father of Health'. This could be a reuse of the Cicero's words, who called Herodotus 'Father of History'.<sup>25</sup> In the case of Hippocrates, we can also see a parallelism with his legendary ancestor, the god Asclepius. Indeed, in his iconography, Asclepius is often depicted with his children: his sons Machaon and Podaleirus, or his daughters.<sup>26</sup> The most important of these ones is Hygieia, the goddess of Health, who often accompanies him when he is curing mortal people. Asclepius is literally the Father of Health, and his descendant Hippocrates is also the father of Health in a more symbolical way.

Later, in the first century AD, the figure of Hippocrates is presented as a pioneer in Roman books on the History of Medicine. The physician and writer Celsus, born in 25 BC and writing under the reign of the Emperor Tiberius, wrote in his preface of the *De Medicina*: 'But it was, as some believe, a pupil of the last, Hippocrates of Cos, a man first and foremost worthy to be remembered, notable both for professional skill and for eloquence, who separated this branch of learning from the study of philosophy'.<sup>27</sup> This teleological vision of medicine as a science in perpetual progress is also the one of Pliny the Elder, who wrote in his *Natural History* in the first century AD: 'The subsequent story of medicine, strange to say,

<sup>22</sup> Jean Irigoien, 'Tradition manuscrite et histoire du texte', *La Collection hippocratique et son rôle dans l'histoire de la médecine. Colloque de Strasbourg (23-27 octobre 1972), organisé par le Centre de Recherches sur la Grèce Antique, avec le concours des Facultés de Philosophie et des Langues Classiques* (Leiden, Brill, 1975), p. 6.

<sup>23</sup> Jouanna, *Hippocrates*, p. 56.

<sup>24</sup> These 'schools' are nothing like our current schools or college where we can learn medicine. They mean a local tradition of transmission of medicine between some physicians teaching their sons or close disciples. See Paul Roesch, 'Médecins publics dans les cités grecques', in *Histoire des sciences sociales*, XVIII, 3 (1984), p. 280.

<sup>25</sup> Cicero, *De Legibus*, I, I, 5, trans. by C. W. Kayes (London, Cambridge: W. Heinemann, 1961), pp. 300-301.

<sup>26</sup> Asclepius is represented with his sons on votive reliefs 1361, 1370, 1387 or 1426 of the *National Archaeological Museum of Athens*; and with his daughters on 1341, 1346, 1348, 1352, 1375, 1379 and 1426.

<sup>27</sup> Celsus, *De Medicina*, I, ed. by W. G. Spencer (London, Cambridge: W. Heinemann, 1960) p. 5.

lay hidden in darkest night down to the Peloponnesian War, when it was restored to the light by Hippocrates, who was born in the very famous and powerful island of Cos, sacred to Aesculapius.<sup>28</sup>

Galen, physician and writer of Pergamum in the second century AD, evokes Hippocrates in his books of Medicine and of History of medicine almost 2,500 times<sup>29</sup>. It is the case in his treatise *The Best Physician is also a Philosopher*. He presents Hippocrates as the founder of a 'rational medicine' opposed to magic and religion: 'Not knowing how to divide diseases by kinds and types leads physicians into error in the aims of therapy; Hippocrates says this when he invites us to follow the rational method'.<sup>30</sup> Hippocrates is presented as the first physician practicing nosology, the classification of diseases necessary to an adequate treatment according to Galen. Here, *progress* and *rationality* become synonyms: in this theory, Hippocrates occupies the first place.

From Greek classical times to the 19<sup>th</sup> century, the *Hippocratic Collection* was transmitted by the work of copyists and translators. It remains a reference for most European physicians. 'Schools' of medicine claim to belong to the Hippocratic or Galenic school of thought. Until the 20<sup>th</sup> century, the history of medicine was written by physicians themselves. Indeed, Emile Littré, the French editor and translator of the *Hippocratic Collection* from 1839 to 1861 studied medicine and was an '*officier de santé*'.<sup>31</sup> In their 'internalist' conception of the history of their own discipline, medicine through the centuries is understood as a linear process of progressive enrichment, going on towards always more truth and efficiency. In a teleological point of view authors believe in a perpetual progress, as if past medicine was less actual than that the contemporary one, itself less effective than that of tomorrow. In this context, the only doctors whom we highlight of this positivist history are 'pioneer' figures, people who were the 'first ones' to spread certain knowledge and certain practices we consider as 'true' or 'effective' today. Others are neglected and forgotten. The *Hippocratic Collection* was read and used by physicians from Antiquity and the middle Ages, but the very person of Hippocrates himself was born again, in a certain way, during the Modern period. Indeed, as Paul Hazard showed, the European 17<sup>th</sup> and 18<sup>th</sup> century brought the 'Rationalists' (Spinoza, Descartes, Malebranche): Hippocrates was then seen as the first 'rational' physician, using Reason, observation and experience to cure people, and who

<sup>28</sup> Pliny, *Natural History*, XXIX, ed. by W. H. S. Jones (London, Cambridge: W. Heinemann, 1963), pp. 182-185.

<sup>29</sup> Jouanna, *Hippocrates*, p. 353.

<sup>30</sup> Galen, *The Best Physician is also a Philosopher*, c. 1., cited in Jouanna, *Hippocrates*, p. 354.

<sup>31</sup> Didier Wagner, 'LITTRE EMILE – (1801-1881)', Universalis Education, <<http://www.universalis-edu.com/encyclopedie/emile-littre/>>.

fought against the darkness of magical or religious practices (in temples of Asclepius) which would have been exclusively used before him.<sup>32</sup> This vision is still predominant today. Jacques Jouanna himself writes, for instance: ‘The Hippocratic physicians allied themselves with the enlightened minds of the Periclean Age who promoted the new rationalism, and criticized— sometimes strenuously—those who believed that a disease could be caused by the intervention of a particular divinity, contrasting the notion of divine causality with one of rational causality [...].The rational attitude of these physicians is all the more remarkable since belief in the efficacy of magical practices and in gods as healing agents is well attested in the popular mentality of the age’.<sup>33</sup> This could seem accurate when we read some extracts of the treatise *On the Sacred Disease* (2): ‘ Being at a loss, and having no treatment which would help, they [the soothsayers] concealed and sheltered themselves behind superstition, and called this illness sacred, in order that their utter ignorance might not be manifest.’<sup>34</sup>

Nevertheless, the reality is far more complex: if some extracts of treatises indeed argue against soothsayers, it is more a strategy in order to legitimate their status of professional physicians who claim to be the only possessors of knowledge and skills in the medical art, than a conscious affirmation of ‘rationality’, which is an anachronistic concept.<sup>35</sup> Moreover, reading the *Hippocratic Collection*, it is difficult to find the rationality in long lists of curious ingredients used to make exchangeable potions. We also know that physicians were present in temples of Asclepius, as priests, contributors and dedicants.<sup>36</sup> For instance, an inscription of 270-269 BC, found in the Athenian Asclepieion on the south slopes of Acropolis, says: ‘[...] since it is a tradition for public physicians to make a sacrifice twice a year to Asclepius and Hygieia, for themselves and for the ones under their care’.<sup>37</sup>

In the 20<sup>th</sup> century, Hippocrates is still seen as a pioneer of rationality, the inventor of modern medicine. For doctors who wrote the history of their discipline he is the ‘Big

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<sup>32</sup> Paul Hazard, *The Crisis of the European Mind. 1680-1715*, trans. by Lewis J. May (New York: New York Review Books, 2013).

<sup>33</sup> Jouanna, *Hippocrates*, p. 181.

<sup>34</sup> Hippocrates, 2. *Prognostic – Regimen in acute diseases – The sacred disease – The Art – Breaths – Law- Decorum – Physician, chap. 1 – Dentition*, ed. By William H. S. Jones (London, Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1967), p. 141.

<sup>35</sup> Geoffrey E. R. Lloyd, *Magie, raison et expérience. Origines et développement de la science grecque*, trans. by Jeannie Carlier and Franz Regnot (Paris: Flammarion, 1990), pp. 51-61.

<sup>36</sup> Vivian Nutton, « The Medical Meeting Place », in *Ancient Medicine in its Socio-Cultural Context : papers read at the congress held at Leiden University, 13 - 15 April 1992*, ed. by Philip Van der Eijk (Amsterdam: Rodopi, 1995), pp. 3-26 ; Cécile Nissen, *Entre Asclépios et Hippocrate. Etude des cultes guérisseurs et des médecins en Carie* (Liège: Centre international d'étude de la religion grecque, 2009), pp. 225-247.

<sup>37</sup> Nissen, p. 235 and 243.



Ancestor', the 'medical and biological part of the Greek miracle' according to Marcel Martiny.<sup>38</sup> Statues and busts of Hippocrates decorate schools of medicine. For Georges Baissette, a young physician who wrote his thesis about the life of Hippocrates, the names of four pioneers of medicine appeared: Hippocrates, Galen, Descartes and Pasteur.<sup>39</sup>

### III. Is the Hippocratic figure representative of ancient Greek physicians?

The glorified figure of the 'Father of Medicine' should not eclipse the need to ask questions about real work conditions and real social status of physicians in Classical Greece. It shows us that far to be a representative figure of what a Greek physician was, Hippocrates exists mainly as a *construction*, built later than classical Greece.

First of all, the social status of Hippocrates is not representative of the actual status of classical physicians. His prestigious lineage was not usual for a doctor. His prestige was due before anything else to his membership in one of the biggest Greek aristocratic families. He had a doubly prestigious lineage and doubtless an important family fortune. In the *Letters*, Democritus, seeing him, evokes in the first place his kinship, the Asclepiads of Cos, and then his profession.<sup>40</sup> Moreover, according to the sources, the Asclepiads seemed to be a wealthy *genos*. In his *Letters*, Hippocrates mentions the 'comfortable' house he owned in Cos. He was rich enough to rent a Rhodian boat to go to Abdera. He could afford important and expensive trips to continental Greece with his disciples during several years, and sent his son Thessalus to accompany the Athenians during the shipping of Sicily in 415 BC, paying him himself. He is treated as an equal by an important character like the Persian King Artaxerxes, and the Asclepiads seemed to have had a family friendship with the sovereigns of Macedonia.<sup>41</sup> They were certainly not considered as domestics. Moreover, the Asclepiads had an important privilege as shown by a rule of 380-375 BC found in Delphi: they could consult the oracle and make sacrifices before the others, which was a clear mark of prestige.

<sup>38</sup> Marcel Martiny, *Hippocrate et la médecine* (Paris: Arthème Fayard, 1964), p.17.

<sup>39</sup> Raymond Baissette, *Aux sources de la médecine. Vie et doctrine d'Hippocrate* (Paris: 1931). pp. 94-95.

<sup>40</sup> Hippocrates, *Letters*, 17: 'My name, I said, is Hippocrates the physician. He [Democritus] answered: the nobility of Asclepiads and the glory of your skill in medicine came until me'. This ancestry is confirmed by the epigraphy. We found in Delphi a copy of the decree which granted privileges to the *koinon* of Asclepiads from Cos and Cnidus in the IV<sup>th</sup> century. It is indicated that they can consult the oracle as being a member of this *koinon* only if they swear to be an Asclepiad by the male lineage.

<sup>41</sup> Perdicas II for Hippocrates, then Archelaus for Thessalus, then Roxane (wife of Alexander) for his nephew Hippocrate IV.

<sup>42</sup> Thus Hippocrates was not only a famous physician, but was also a glorious representation of a very high-ranking *genos*. Their rank is comparable to the one of Athenian Eteoboutades, a family from within which were systematically recruited the powerful priests of Athena and Poseidon.

As shown by Henry W. Pleket or Evelyne Samama, archeological and epigraphic sources give us a different version of who Greek physicians were and how they worked.<sup>43</sup> In Classical Greece, doctors were in most cases free citizens, but some inscriptions show that emancipated slaves could be called 'iatroi'.<sup>44</sup> If Samama evokes some '*notables-médecins*' coming from high-ranked families and contributing to the fees of their City, Pleket, analyzing the size of the financial contributions of the doctors, explains that they generally belong to the middle or upper-middle class.<sup>45</sup> For instance, according to epigraphic sources, in Cos in 300 BC the wealth of the ten public physicians differed: if one of them belonged to the wealthy top-elite of society, all the others were 'decent citizen', living comfortably without being part of the elite. Epigraphic sources give us a different vision of Greek physicians than manuscript tradition.

Nevertheless, some elements of the life of Hippocrates reflected realities of the work of ancient Greek public physicians. Indeed, they were trained to medicine by their father or father-in-law: we know that it was the usual training by the 'Hippocratic Oath'<sup>46</sup> and by epigraphic sources.<sup>47</sup> Thus, cities could send an embassy to ask another city for one of its public physicians. For instance, like Abdera in the life of Hippocrates, it was the case of the Cretan city of Gortyn, which asked the city of Cos to send a physician.<sup>48</sup> Moreover, like

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<sup>42</sup> Jean Bousquet, *Bulletin de correspondance hellénique* 80 (1956) pp. 579-583 ; Jeanne et Louis Robert, *Bulletin épigraphique* (1958), p. 262 ; Georges Rougemont, *Corpus des inscriptions de Delphes, I.* (Paris: De Boccard, 1977) pp. 122-124. See also the *Speech of the Envoy* in Hippocrates, *Œuvres complètes d'Hippocrate. Tome IX* ed. by Emile Littré (Amsterdam: Hakkert, 1841), p. 414 ; Hippocrates, *Pseudepigraphic Writings : Letters, Embassy, Speech from the Altar, Decree*, p. 115.

<sup>43</sup> Henry W. Pleket, 'The social status of physicians in the Graeco-Roman world', *Ancient Medicine in its Socio-Cultural Context : papers read at the congress held at Leiden University, 13 - 15 April 1992*, ed. by Philip Van der Eijk (Amsterdam: Rodopi, 1995), pp. 27-34; Evelyne Samama, *Les médecins dans le monde grec. Sources épigraphiques sur la naissance d'un corps médical* (Genève: Droz, 2003).

<sup>44</sup> Samama, pp. 60 and 112-113.

<sup>45</sup> Samama, pp. 62-65.

<sup>46</sup> 'I swear by Apollo Physician, by Asclepius, by Health, by Panacaea, and by all the gods and goddesses, making them my witnesses, that I will carry out, according to my ability and judgment, this oath and this indenture. To hold my teacher in this art equal to my own parents; to make him partner in my livelihood; when he is in need of money to share mine with him; to consider his family as my own brothers, and to teach them this art, if they want to learn it, without fee or indenture; to impart precept, oral instruction, and all other instruction to my own sons, the sons of my teacher, and to indentured pupils who have taken the physician's oath, and to nobody else'. See Jouanna, *Hippocrates*, pp. 46-48.

<sup>47</sup> Roesch, pp. 279-281.

<sup>48</sup> Jean Pouilloux, *Choix d'inscriptions grecques. Textes, traductions et notes* (Paris: Les Belles Lettres, 1960), p. 68, n°16.

Artaxerxes begging Hippocrates, physicians could be involved in conflicts, as shown by an inscription of Idalion in Cyprus, thanking a physician paid by the king Stasikypros to cure the wounded soldiers between 478 and 470 BC.<sup>49</sup> Moreover, according to the *Letters*, Hippocrates refuses to be paid. This was a stereotypical posture of Ancient physicians, as shown by epigraphic sources.<sup>50</sup> The purpose was to get closer to philosophers, who appeared as disinterested.<sup>51</sup> Finally, we know by archaeological evidence that the island of Cos had an important Asclepieion, which shows that care was a local speciality.<sup>52</sup>

As a conclusion, we can say that the actual Hippocrates escapes the scrutiny of the historian. All we know about him is written years after his death. If elements can be true, we should however remain careful. The 'Father of Medicine' has been constructed by the transmission of different ancient Greek medical treatises under his name, and by the historiography of medicine which emphasizes pioneers. This figure should not prevent us to work on ancient medicine and physicians in a perspective of social history.

History of medicine, as well as history of sciences, glorifies pioneers and often deals with the idea of 'invention'. Hippocrates as the first 'rational' physician has been elaborated by historians of medicine on the basis on an actual – yet quite unknown – ancient character and on the name of a *Collection* of classical medical treatises.

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<sup>49</sup> Olivier Masson, 'Inscriptions Chypriotes Syllabiques', in *Salamis. 3. Excavations in the necropolis of Salamis*, ed. by Vassos Karageorghis (Nicosia: Department of Antiquities Cyprus, 1967) n° 217.

<sup>50</sup> Samama, pp. 217-219, 277-279, 284-288, 456-459.

<sup>51</sup> Hippocrate, *Bienséance*, 5, in *Œuvres complètes d'Hippocrate. Tome IX* ed. by Emile Littré (Amsterdam: Hakkert, 1861), p. 232-235 ; Galien, *Que l'excellent médecin est aussi philosophe*, II, 8, in *Introduction générale – Sur l'ordre de ses propres livres – Sur ses propres livres – Que l'excellent médecin est aussi philosophe* ed. by Véronique Boudon-Millot (Paris: Les Belles Lettres, 2007), p. 288.

<sup>52</sup> Jouanna, *Hippocrates*, pp. 3-5.

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