

On the Origins of the Hippocratic *Oath*

Cristian Tolsa

THE ORIGINS of one of the most famous texts of Antiquity remain controversial. L. Edelstein's hypothesis that the Hippocratic *Oath* was originally written by a Pythagorean group¹ has been largely dismissed for lack of evidence, and a series of scholars have instead explored the affinities between the *Oath* and mainstream ethical concepts in classical Greek society.² If these studies tend to emphasize the 'normality' of the *Oath* in the fifth- and fourth-century context, the oddities of the text have been tackled by assuming that it was written (by Hippocrates) to ensure a proper use of medical knowledge outside the Asclepiad clan. This interpretation is somewhat supported by a commentary ascribed to Galen in an Arabic translation, whose preserved fragments deal only with the beginning of the *Oath* on medical teaching (first paragraph), declaring that before the time of Hippocrates, the Asclepiads were bound by oaths

¹ L. Edelstein, "The Hippocratic Oath: Text, Translation and Interpretation," in *Ancient Medicine: Selected Papers of Ludwig Edelstein* (Baltimore 1967) 3–64, at 17: "Pythagoreanism, then, remains the only philosophical dogma that can possibly account for the attitude advocated in the Hippocratic Oath."

² K. Deichgräber, "Die ethische Standesethik des hippokratischen Eides," in H. Flashar (ed.), *Antike Medizin* (Darmstadt 1971 [1933]) 94–120; F. Kudlien, "Medical and Popular Ethics in Greece and Rome," in *Clio Medica* 5 (1970) 91–121; C. Lichtenthaler, *Der Eid des Hippokrates. Ursprung und Bedeutung* (Cologne 1984); G. Harig and J. Kollesch, "Der hippokratische Eid. Zur Entstehung der antiken medizinischen Deontologie," *Philologus* 122 (1978) 157–176. Cf. more recently H. von Staden, "'In a Pure and Holy Way': Personal and Professional Conduct in the Hippocratic Oath?" *Journal of the History of Medicine and Allied Sciences* 51 (1996) 404–437, at 409; I. C. Torrance, "The Hippocratic Oath," in A. H. Sommerstein and I. C. Torrance (eds.), *Oaths and Swearing in Ancient Greece* (Berlin/Boston 2014) 372–380.

which prevented the teaching of medicine outside the family.³ The implication is that the Hippocratic *Oath* was a development of these oaths, devised by Hippocrates, through which new students from outside would swear allegiance to the Asclepiads, who would in turn thus ensure the quality of this transmission. Nothing similar to such a close association is attested in the surviving medical training contracts, of Hellenistic and Roman times,⁴ but from the very existence of these documents we can assume that the contract stipulated in the *Oath* was at least based on real practice. As for the remaining part, the ethical statements

³ Cf. F. Rosenthal, "An Ancient Commentary on the Hippocratic Oath," *Bulletin of the History of Medicine* 30 (1956) 52–87, at 80 (fragment f): "The family of Asclepius had in the past been bound by oaths and covenants preventing them from teaching medicine to outsiders. They had restricted instruction to their children in the medical schools in Rhodes and Cnidus and Cos. Eventually, however, Hippocrates feared that the craft may be lost, and he therefore fixed it permanently in writing." Cf. C. Magdelaine and J.-M. Mouton, "Le commentaire au Serment attribué à Galien retrouvé dans un manuscrit arabe du haut moyen âge," *CRAI* (2016) 217–232. On the question of authenticity see V. Nutton, "The Commentary on the Hippocratic Oath ascribed to Galen," in S. Fortuna et al. (eds.), *Sulla tradizione indiretta dei testi medici greci* (Pisa/Rome 2012) 15–24. Note Galen *Anat.admin.* 2.1 (II 280–281 Kuhn), where the writing of medicine from Hippocrates onwards is linked to the teaching of medicine outside of the Asclepiad clan (the *Oath* could be implied). For a defense of this scenario see J. Jouanna, *Hippocrates* (Baltimore 1999) 50: "The purpose of the medical oath, by contrast, was to protect the transmission of medical knowledge in each of the two branches from the moment when teaching was made available to students from outside the family." Cf. Jouanna, "Le Serment hippocratique: famille, religion et droit," in M.-H. Marganne et al. (eds.), *En marge du Serment hippocratique. Contrats et serments dans le monde gréco-romain* (Liège 2017) 11–37, at 27–28, and again, in his recent edition of the *Oath*, Jouanna, *Hippocrate I.2 Le Serment. Les serments chrétiens. La loi* (Paris 2018) xxxix.

⁴ See the scholarly efforts in this regard in B. Anagnostou-Canas, "Contrats et serments dans l'Égypte hellénistique et romain," in *En marge du Serment* 51–65; and, in the same volume, J. A. Straus, "Les contrats d'apprentissage et d'enseignement relatives à des esclaves dans la documentation papyrologique grecque d'Égypte," 119–134; A. Ricciardetto, "Un contrat d'enseignement de la médecine du III^e siècle avant notre ère: *P. Heid.* III 126," 135–156.

related to the prohibition of abortion (3), the ban on stone surgery (5), and more generally the identification of the individual life of the physician with medical practice (4), find no parallels, or even seem to be contradicted elsewhere in the Hippocratic corpus. These striking characteristics of the *Oath* have led to the alternative hypothesis that it might be a Hellenistic text.⁵ Intriguing evidence allowing this possibility comes from H. von Staden's comparative analysis of its language and style both with other ancient oaths and with the medical terminology in the Hippocratic corpus, revealing specific textual affinities with writings from the Hellenistic age.⁶

One might be tempted to argue that a late dating would be contradicted by the fact that the *Oath* appears in the earliest list of Hippocratic texts in the work of Erotian (1st cent. A.D.), but it should be recalled that Erotian also mentions the fictitious speeches *Embassy* (*Presbeutikos*) and *From the Altar* (*Epibomios*), likely composed after the death of Hippocrates. The two share a common plot, the *Embassy* featuring Hippocrates' son Thessalos speaking on behalf of his fellow citizens before the Athenian assembly to prevent an attack by the Athenian *polis* in the context of the Peloponnesian War during the last years of the fifth century, invoking the great services offered by the physician's family to all the Greeks. The speech *From the Altar* has Hippocrates himself appealing, much more briefly, to the Thessalians after the plea to the Athenians has failed. In contrast to the date of the

⁵ Cf. J. Ducatillon, "Le serment hippocratique, problèmes et interprétations," *BAssBudé* 1 (2001) 34–61.

⁶ H. von Staden, "'The Oath', the Oaths, and the Hippocratic Corpus," in V. Boudon-Millot et al. (eds.), *La science médicale antique: nouveaux regards* (Paris 2008) 425–466. Cf. the counterarguments of Jouanna, *Hippocrate* xl–xli, claiming that the differences with the other treatises in the Hippocratic corpus are due to the special nature of the text. For example, the presence of Ionian words attested only in late treatises like the *Precepts* or in the pseudepigraphical texts would reflect the fact that the teaching was in the Ionic dialect. Jouanna specifically refers to the verb *ἐπαυρίσκω* in a personal construction in the *Oath* (8), also used in this way in the *Embassy* (9) (more on the relation between these two texts below).

dramatic setting, the synoecism (political unification) of Cos in 366 B.C. is accepted as a *terminus post quem* for these texts, since the Coans appear there to regard themselves as a nation among the other Greek *poleis*.⁷ Even Jouanna (*Hippocrates* 414) concedes that the *Embassy* “may not be authentic,” though containing “reliable information.” The speech namely mentions the Delphic privilege of the Asclepiad family (4) and presents the Asclepiads claiming to be so “by male descent” (κατ’ ἀνδρογένειαν, 6), matching the fourth-century decree of the the Asclepiads of Cos and Cnidos, inscribed at Delphi, that any Asclepiad coming to the sanctuary was privileged to consult the oracle only after swearing to belong to the family by male descent, κατ’ ἀνδρο[γέν]ειαν (*CID* I 12).

Of course, this connection between swearing and the male family line recalls the first part of the Hippocratic *Oath*, in which the oath-taker swears to teach medicine only to his sons, his teacher’s sons, and indentured students (who have sworn this very oath).⁸ One could argue that this resemblance to the picture in the *Embassy* presenting the Asclepiads as a noble family of male physicians apparently monopolizing the practice of medicine in the Greek world and employing oaths to prove their descent seems to authenticate the *Oath* and its interpretation in the (ps.?)-Galenic commentary. Nevertheless, the very nature of the *Embassy* as a document makes it clear that fictitious texts were written portraying the special relationship of the Asclepiads with

⁷ J. Rubin Pinault, *Hippocratic Lives and Legends* (Leiden 1992) 41, places the *Embassy* (with no compelling arguments, in my opinion) at the end of the fourth century, whereas W. D. Smith, *Hippocrates. Pseudepigraphic Writings. Letters, Embassy, Speech from the Altar, Decree* (Leiden 1990) 7, extends the likely period of composition from 350 to 250 B.C. See below for E. D. Nelson’s dating to the second half of Smith’s period.

⁸ Hipp. *Oath* 1: γένος τὸ ἐξ αὐτοῦ ἀδελφοῖς ἴσον ἐπικρινεῖν ἄρρεσι, καὶ διδάξειν τὴν τέχνην ταύτην, ἣν χρηζῶσι μαθάνειν, ἄνευ μισθοῦ καὶ ξυγγραφῆς, παραγγελίης τε καὶ ἀκροήσιος καὶ τῆς λοιπῆς ἀπάσης μαθησιος μετάδοσιν ποιήσασθαι υἱοῖσι τε ἐμοῖσι, καὶ τοῖσι τοῦ με διδάξαντος, καὶ μαθηταῖσι συγγεγραμμένοις τε καὶ ὠρκισμένοις νόμῳ ἱητρικῷ, ἄλλω δὲ οὐδενί.

medicine. It has been pointed out⁹ that the witness of Plato's *Protagoras* (311B), contemporary with Hippocrates, could be relevant, since learning medicine from Hippocrates is apparently mentioned as a casual example of learning a profession (for a fee), similar to learning sculpture from Polyclitus or Phidias, without the mention of any kind of oath.

On the skeptical side, W. D. Smith in his edition of the pseudepigraphic writings points out the absence of any ancient epigraphical record attesting to the connection of the Asclepiad clan with medicine, and concludes that the classical literary references to physicians as Asclepiads are largely a figure of speech applicable to any doctor.¹⁰ If Smith were right, the commentary's interpretation of the *Oath* would automatically reveal itself as fully fictitious. However, Smith is probably oversimplifying. The impression from the early witnesses is not that 'Asclepiad' is interchangeable with 'physician'. In both Theognis (6th cent.) and Euripides (5th cent.) the Asclepiads appear, with remarkably similar phrasing, as physicians who have received the gift of medicine from a god (Theogn. 430, εἰ δ' Ἀσκληπιόδαις τοῦτό γ' ἔδωκε θεός / Eur. *Alc.* 969–970, ὅσα Φοῖβος Ἀσκληπιόδαις ἔδωκε). Plato has three references to the Asclepiads. In the *Phaedrus* and the *Protagoras*, Hippocrates is specifically distinguished from other people of the same name (including a friend of Plato in the *Protagoras*) as "that of the Asclepiads" (*Phdr.* 270c, *Prt.* 311B), and in *Republic* III (405D) Socrates compares unfavorably the new doctrines of his contemporary Asclepiads with the mythic sons of Asclepius in Homer, the physicians Macaon and Podalirius, noting that medical theories became fancier after the time of the sports physician Herodicus.¹¹ Since

⁹ E.g. Ducatillon, *BAssBudé* 1 (2001) 44.

¹⁰ Smith, *Hippocrates* 16–17, adducing as evidence that only as late as in the second century A.D. do we find references to specific Asclepiad physicians.

¹¹ As Smith notes, the alleged line of descent from Asclepius and his sons is found in the fourth-century historian Theopompus, who wrote, according to a summary by Photius, that "the physicians of Cos and Cnidus are Asclepiads, and the earliest of them came from Syrnos, descendants of Podalirius,"

Herodicus seems to be implied here to be in some sense an Asclepiad, and he is not from Cos or Cnidus, nor even said to belong to the family in the later sources,¹² we might surmise that the concept here designates physicians more in general. But this does not disprove a certain ancestral dedication to medicine in the Asclepiad clan which they would have claimed as a kind of monopoly already before the time of Hippocrates, naturally making use of their alleged descent from Asclepius. Some of the semi-mythical stories recounted by them and about them would have crystallized in the intricate narratives told by Thessalos in the *Embassy*, which do not give the impression of being just the inventive product of a sole author.

Earliest witness of the Oath: Cato the Censor

It is a matter of debate whether the famous passage of Cato warning his son against any serious study of Greek literature, quoted in Pliny's *Natural History* at the beginning of his book XXIX on natural remedies, contains the first extant reference to the *Oath*.¹³ A close reading of Cato's words, plausibly written in his old age (ca. 160 B.C.), sheds some light on the early context of our text (*HN* 19.14 = Cato *Libri ad M. filium*, fr. 1 J.):

dicam de istis Graecis suo loco, M. fili, quid Athenis exquisitum habeam et quod bonum sit illorum litteras inspicere, non perdiscere. vincam nequissimum et indocile genus illorum, et hoc puta vatem dixisse: quandoque ista gens suas litteras dabit, omnia conrumpet, tum etiam magis, si medicos suos hoc mittet. iurarunt inter se barbaros necare omnes medicina, sed hoc ipsum mercede faciunt, ut fides iis sit et facile disperdant. nos quoque dicitant barbaros et

περί τε τῶν ἐν Κῶ καὶ Κνίδῳ ἰατρῶν, ὡς Ἀσκληπιάδαι, καὶ ὡς ἐκ Σύρνου οἱ πρῶτοι ἀφίκοντο ἀπόγονοι Ποδαλείριου (*FGrHist* 115 F 103.14).

¹² Herodicus appears as the tutor of Hippocrates in the *Vita Hippocratis Secundum Soranum*: Rubin Pinault, *Hippocratic Lives* 10 n.21, with references.

¹³ In his list of ancient witnesses of the *Oath*, Jouanna, in *En marge du Serment* 30, classifies the passage under the heading “Élimination de faux témoignages,” adducing Plutarch's explanation (see below). In favor of the possibility that Cato knew, at least from hearsay, some version of the *Oath* see H. von Staden, “Liminal Perils: Early Roman Receptions of Greek Medicine,” in F. Jamil Ragep et al. (eds.), *Tradition, Transmission, Transformation* (Leiden 1996) 369–418, at 397.

spurcius nos quam alios Ὀπικῶν appellatione foedant. interdixi tibi de medicis.

In due course I will tell you, my son, what I found in Athens about these Greeks, and what good there is in their literature to examine, but not to study in depth. I will contend that they are a most vile and ignorant tribe, and you should take this as my prophecy: when this people end up transmitting to us their literature, they will corrupt everything, and still with more force, if they send us their doctors. They have *sworn between them* to kill all barbarians with their medicine, but they do this for pay, to give credit to themselves and thus be able to ruin us easily. They also assert that we are barbarians, and disgrace us with more obscenity than others by calling us Opici. I prohibit you to have contact with physicians.

The fact that the phrase *iurarunt inter se* matches so closely the alleged procedure in the Hippocratic *Oath*, in which every would-be doctor swears not to impart teaching outside his or his teacher's family or other indentured students, thus confining the knowledge of medicine to the first teaching family and those of the subsequent sworn students, cannot be a coincidence. A reference to a common oath is also understood by Plutarch, who, referring to this passage in his *Life of Cato* (23.4),¹⁴ informs that the censor "said all [Greek] physicians had taken an oath in common" (ἔλεγε κοινὸν ὄρκον εἶναι τοῦτον ἰατρῶν ἀπάντων). Plutarch does not mention the Hippocratic *Oath* probably because knowledge of it was not widespread outside the medical community. In this regard, Cato might have been an exception: even an encyclopedic author like Pliny seems to ignore the *Oath* when dealing with topics obviously connected with the *Oath*, in his invective against Greek physicians that follows the quotation from Cato. In particular, he refers to the lack of any law that punishes ignorant physicians (19.18, *nulla praeterea lex quae puniat*

¹⁴ It is remarkable that Plutarch and Pliny give nearly the same information about this passage of Cato, his indication that he wrote a book with his own remedies, and the effects of his medicine on him and his family's health, which points to a common ultimate source, perhaps Cassius Hemina, who is mentioned by Pliny just before as his source for the story about Archagathus, the first Greek doctor in Rome (19.12–13).

inscitiam), who “learn through our perils and perform experiments by putting us to death” (*discunt periculis nostris et experimenta per mortes agunt*), and to physicians knowingly participating in poisonings, frauds in testaments, and adultery in imperial homes (19.20, *quid enim venenorum fertilius aut unde plures testamentorum insidiae? iam vero et adulteria etiam in principum domibus*). Wrongdoing of this kind is, of course, part of what the Hippocratic oath-taker swears to banish from his life and profession. General harm (2), poisoning (3), misuse of secrets (7), and sexual intercourse by taking advantage of admission into the patient’s house (6) are explicitly addressed. Of course, these must have been well-known clichés—we find the ‘physician-poisoner’ as one of the typical characters listed and described in Libanius’ *Progymnasmata*¹⁵—and it would be possible to argue that Pliny consciously avoided any mention of the *Oath* in order not to undermine his Catonian attack on Greek medicine, but it remains true that the few ancient mentions of the *Oath* appear exclusively in medical authors (Scribonius Largus, Soranus of Ephesus) and texts.¹⁶

But how should we interpret the insidious content that Cato attributes to the *Oath* (*barbaros necare omnes medicina*)? For Plutarch this presents no difficulty, which probably has to do with his ignorance of the *Oath* and its strict ethical statements. Plutarch suggests that the Roman censor knew about the famous story according to which Hippocrates refused to help the Persian king Artaxerxes for patriotic reasons. This story is developed in the Hippocratic *Letters* 1–9. Cato’s grounds were of course connected to Hippocrates’ nationalism, but I think the *Embassy* is a better candidate, for reasons that will be detailed below.¹⁷

¹⁵ Lib. *Progymn.* Common Topics 3 (VIII 182–194 F.); see the references to the topic in Greek and Roman declamation given in C. A. Gibson, *Libanius’ Progymnasmata. Model Exercises in Greek Prose Composition and Rhetoric* (Atlanta 2008) 167 n.4. Cf. the plot of Lucian’s *Disowned*, also based on medical practice and probably influenced by the rhetorical tradition.

¹⁶ See the list of ancient witnesses of the *Oath* in Jouanna, in *En marge du Serment* 30–34 nos. xii–xxii, and Jouanna, *Hippocrate* xii–xiii.

¹⁷ Furthermore, Rubin Pinault (*Hippocratic Lives* 43) dates the Persian letters

In any case, I think it is likely that Cato is alluding to a concrete text, since the warning to his son against Greek literature and Greek physicians is prompted by what he had read in Athens (*dicam de istis Graecis suo loco, M. fili, quid Athenis exquisitum habeam*). His mention of what he takes as an insult from the Greeks, Ὀπικοί, is especially illuminating. Festus writes that the meaning “obscene” that Cato attributes to the word derives from the usually obscene nature of the ancient fables in the Oscan dialect, the Atellan farces: Ὀπικοί is Greek for Obsci or Osci, and Festus says this form was used in Latin, too.¹⁸ As we can expect, this association is never attested in the Greek sources; it must have been a wholly Roman phenomenon.¹⁹ In fact, the Oscans do not appear frequently in the Greek corpus. The only mention from before the time of Cato in the genitive plural, as Cato has it, is in the 8th Platonic *Letter* (353E), addressed to Dion, in which he urges him to strengthen the Hellenic element in Sicily, lest

σχεδὸν εἰς ἐρημίαν τῆς Ἑλληνικῆς φωνῆς Σικελία πᾶσα, Φοινίκων ἢ Ὀπικῶν μεταβαλοῦσα εἷς τινα δυναστείαν καὶ κράτος.

hardly a trace of the Greek tongue will remain in all Sicily, since it will have been transformed into a province or dependency of Phoenicians or Opicians.

While the Phoenicians obviously represent the Carthaginians, a Roman of Cato’s time would probably have lacked the historical context to understand that the Oscans were in fact Italian mercenaries of Dionysius II and Hipparinus.²⁰ For Cato, the eternal enemies fighting for power over Sicily could be no others than Carthaginians and Romans, and, since in Latin the Greek form

slightly later than Cato, between the mid second and mid first century B.C. Smith, *Hippocrates* 5, favors instead a dating before *From the Altar*, which he situates in the third century B.C. or later.

¹⁸ *De verb. signif.* 204 L.: *et in omnibus fere antiquis commentariis scribitur Opicum pro Obsco, ut in Titi[n]ni fabula Quinto ... a quo etiam verba impudentia elata appellantur obscena, quia frequentissimus fuit usus Oscis libidinum spurcarum.*

¹⁹ Pace A. E. Astin, *Cato the Censor* (Oxford 1978) 173, who assumes it was a real name for the Italians used by the Greeks, similar to how the Romans called the Greeks (*Graeci*).

²⁰ L. J. Sanders, *The Legend of Dion* (Toronto 2008) 131.

for Oscans was taken as an insult, he would naturally have interpreted that Plato was insulting the Romans. Plato also calls the two groups βάρβαροι (357A), matching what Cato says. More generally, the scenario of Cato reading this Platonic letter is entirely plausible, given his interest in Sicily, where he was quaestor to Scipio, in the war against Carthage, and in criticizing Greek philosophers. In fact, philosophers are the other Greek target discussed by Plutarch in his *Life of Cato* just before his analysis of the reference to the medical oath (23, ὁ δ' οὐ μόνον ἀπηχθάνετο τοῖς φιλοσοφοῦσιν Ἑλλήνων, ἀλλὰ καὶ τοὺς ἰατρούοντας), which may imply that, as Plutarch understood it, in the first part of the fragment Cato was thinking of Greek philosophers (Plutarch seems to know the fragment as well as Pliny, see n.14 above). Furthermore, it seems fitting to his disdain for Greek philosophy to choose precisely a Platonic work with little philosophy such as one of the epistles.

With medicine it could have been similar. Cato could have read, in addition to the *Oath*, the *Embassy*. As in the Platonic letter, there is a reference to the barbarians in the *Embassy* which Cato would have easily understood as referring to the Romans. In one of the stories recounted by Thessalos about the medical aid supplied by his family to the Hellenes in the course of history, a plague comes “through the barbarian land which lies beyond Illyria and Paeonia” (7, διὰ τῆς βαρβάρου, ἢ ὑπέρκειται Ἰλλυριῶν καὶ Παιόνων). What lies beyond Illyria in the direction contrary to Greece (that is, west), the “barbarian land” where the plague travelling to Greece in part originated, could well have been Italy. In Thessalos’ account, the kings of the Illyrians and the Paeonians (οἱ τούτων τῶν ἔθνέων βασιλῆες) asked Hippocrates to come to their countries to help, offering whatever he would like to take, but he treacherously refused and hurried to help the Greeks, traveling to many significant *poleis* as well as sending other family members: “when he had gotten all this information [about the plague] he told them to go back, pretending that he was unable to go to their country,” ὁκοτε δὴ πάντων μαθήσιας ἀνείλετο, τοὺς μὲν χωρεῖν ἐκέλευσεν ὀπίσω, ἀποφηνάμενος μὴ οἶός τε εἶναι ἐς χώραν τὴν ἐκείνων ἰέναι (transl. Smith). The treacherous element sets this story apart

from the one of Artaxerxes, matching much better what Cato says. Furthermore, the combination with the first paragraph of the *Oath*, in which it appears that all the physician families have taken an oath of allegiance to Hippocrates and his family, inevitably leads to the conclusion that Greek (Hippocratic) doctors are committed to help the Greeks and let the barbarians die. Take, for example, an oath of allegiance to M. Livius Drusus, in Diodorus (37.11):

ὄμνουμι τὸν Δία τὸν Καπετώλιον καὶ τὴν Ἑστίαν τῆς Ῥώμης καὶ τὸν πατρῶον αὐτῆς Ἄρην καὶ τὸν γενάρχην Ἥλιον καὶ τὴν εὐεργέτιν ζῳῶν τε καὶ φυτῶν Γῆν, ἔτι δὲ τοὺς κτίστας γεγενημένους τῆς Ῥώμης ἡμιθέους καὶ τοὺς συναυξήσαντας τὴν ἡγεμονίαν αὐτῆς ἥρωας, τὸν αὐτὸν φίλον καὶ πολέμιον ἠγγήσεσθαι Δρούσω, καὶ μήτε βίου μήτε τέκνων καὶ γονέων μηδεμιᾶς φείσεσθαι ψυχῆς, ἐὰν μὴ συμφέρη Δρούσω τε καὶ τοῖς τὸν αὐτὸν ὄρκον ὁμόσασιν.

By Capitoline Jupiter, Vesta of Rome, Mars the patron of the city, Sol the origin of all the people, Terra the benefactress of animals and plants, by the demigods who founded Rome, and the heroes who have contributed to the increase of its power, I swear that the friend or the enemy of Drusus will also be mine; I will not spare my life or my children or my parents, if the interests of Drusus and those who are bound by the same oath require it. (transl. Attalus.org)

The enemies of your benefactor become your enemies, and his friends become your friends. The family is involved, too. In a similar way, if Hippocrates was hostile to all non-Greeks as pictured in the *Embassy*, so will all Greek doctors be, Cato assumed. If, then, they were practicing in Rome, it could only be with their worst intentions.

Again, the text of the *Embassy* is of a kind that would naturally have appealed to Cato, who, according to Plutarch, drew inspiration from the rhetorical pieces of Thucydides and from Demosthenes (*Cat.Mai.* 2). Like the Platonic letter with its philosophy, the *Embassy* has little or no medicine, and there is a reference to Sicily, too, just after the plague story, where Thessalos recounts that, in the context of the Athenian Sicily campaign, his father Hippocrates dispatched him as a military

physician along with the army commanded by Alcibiades (8).

In sum, it seems likely that Cato's anti-Greek attack did not come out of the blue, but was founded on the reading of these particular passages of Plato and Hippocrates, undoubtedly the most natural selection for one intent to criticize Greek philosophers and physicians.

Ethical standards in medical practice (paragraphs 2–7)

A further question is whether the ethical statements of the *Oath* that follow the first paragraph should have prevented Cato's criticisms. A possible line of argument would be that Cato interpreted these apparently universal high standards for medical practice sworn by physicians to apply only to Hippocrates' friends, the Greeks. But another possibility is that they were not introduced until later in the textual history of the *Oath*. What is certain is that Scribonius Largus in the 40s A.D. and Soranus in the late first/early second century were reading the statement (3) on the prohibition of administering abortives.

Favoring the possibility of a later dating for this second part are two observations that could link the contents to a second- or first-century B.C. context. C. Singer briefly noted a series of parallels between the *Oath* and the exceptionally strict purity conditions (by Greek standards) for participation in a cult in Philadelphia (Lydia) instituted by a certain Dionysios in a house on his property, as recorded in a second- or first-century B.C. inscription (*TAM* V 1539).²¹ Participants apparently swore to fulfill these conditions in an oath (16–17, τοὺς θεοὺς [πάντας ὀρκούσ]θῶσαν). Singer did not analyze the coincidences in any depth, regarding them as self-evident, and concluded that the sacred rules revealed the influence of the Hippocratic *Oath*. However, I claim that the influence, understood in broad terms, should probably be posited as running in the opposite sense. Indeed, there is no sign of a connection with medicine in the Philadelphia cult, since among the thirteen divine entities mentioned in the inscription, all of whom apparently had altars in

²¹ C. Singer, "An Early Parallel to the Hippocratic Oath," *Gesnerus* 8 (1951) 177–180.

Dionysios' house, the only one possibly related to medicine is Hygieia, but not even this is certain, since the name is completely restored (line 9). The coincidences, occurring in parallel and in the same order in the *Oath* and in the inscription, are worth setting out in a chart:

<i>Hippocratic Oath</i>	<i>Philadelphia inscription</i>
The physician declares that he will use his art only to help (2, ἐφ' ὠφελείῃ), excluding any sort of injury or wrong-doing (ἐπι δηλήσει δὲ καὶ ἀδικίῃ εἶρξαι).	The worshippers entering the house must swear not to know or use any deceit (17, δόλον) against anybody.
The physician then states that he will not use any deadly poison when asked to do so (3, οὐδὲ φάρμακον οὐδενὶ αἰτηθεὶς θανάσιμον), or suggest this (ὕφηγήσομαι).	The rules continue by prohibiting knowledge or use of any harmful poison, spell, or love-charm (18–20, μὴ φάρμακον πονηρὸν πρὸς ἀνθ[ράπους, μὴ ἐπι]δάς πονηράς μήτε γινώσκειν μή[τε ἐπιτελεῖν, μὴ] φίλτρον).
The physician immediately declares that he will not give any woman a “deadly pessary” (3, πεσσὸν φθόριον).	The rules similarly transition to abortion by prohibiting the use or recommendation of any abortifacient or contraceptive, or in general anything deadly to children (20–21, μὴ φθορεῖον, μὴ [ἀτ]οκείον, μὴ ἄλλο τι παιδο]φόνον).
The physician swears that he will abstain from any wrong-doing in the houses where he enters, “especially regarding sexual contact with the bodies of men and women, free or slaves” (6, τῆς τε ἄλλης καὶ ἀφροδισίων ἔργων ἐπὶ τε γυναικείων σωμάτων καὶ ἀνδρείων, ἐλευθέρων τε καὶ δούλων).	After the section on abortion, a long passage (25–41) is devoted to the interdiction of intimate contact outside of marriage (presumably between members of the cult) between free or slave men and women ([ἄνδρα παρὰ τὴν] ἑαυτοῦ γυναῖκα ἀλλοτρίαν ἢ [ἐλευτέραν ἢ] δούλην ἄνδρα ἔχουσαν μὴ φθερε[ῖν]).

Purity conditions for the participation in cults were often posted in inscriptions. This case, however, stands out for its relatively demanding standards: whereas the ban on homicide is sometimes a requirement in Greek cults, women who have had

an abortion are elsewhere declared to be impure for just a number of days. In the case of the Philadelphia cult, however, the ban on abortion seems to be absolute (20–21: μή φθορεῖτον, μὲ [ἀτ]οκείον μ[ὴ ἄλλο τι παιδο]φόνον).²² This may be related to the fact that Agdistis, a form of the Phrygian goddess Cybele, is identified as the “holy guardian and mistress of the house” (51, φύλακα καὶ οἰκοδέσποιναν τοῦδε τοῦ οἴκου), possibly indicating that the shrine was originally dedicated to her. Cybele’s role as mother-goddess protector of the family was related in myth and ritual practice with chastity, evolving in the extreme case of the Galli into self-emasculation.²³ This might also explain the long and detailed ban on sexual relationships outside of marriage. Again, illicit sexual contact was often an impurity-inducing condition in Greek cults, entailing the prohibition to participate for a number of days, but the ban is here more explicit and absolute, including the necessity of denouncing any such practices within the group (29–31, τὸν τοιοῦτον φα[νερὸν ποιήσειν] καὶ τὸν ἄνδρα καὶ τὴν γυναῖκα καὶ [μὴ ἀποκρύψειν μη]δὲ παρασιωπήσειν).

A close relationship between the *Oath* and purity conditions of a Cybele cult could also clarify the much-discussed paragraph on lithotomy, the operation of bladder stones, favoring Nittis’ interpretation that the *Oath* bans the practice of emasculation as a remedy for the easy extraction of stones in men.²⁴ Castration

²² Cf. R. Parker, *Miasma: Pollution and Purification in Early Greek Religion* (Oxford/New York 1983) 325: “only the remarkable prescription of a basically un-Greek private cult centre at Philadelphia declared that those who transgressed the fundamental moral laws were permanently unfit to worship the mighty gods of the shrine.”

²³ In the story of the introduction of her cult in Rome, the goddess intervened to confirm the questioned chastity of a Roman matron. On the Galli see Lucian *Syr.D.* 51. This ritual practice can be explained from the myth of Cybele, in which she seduces her son Attis, who ends up castrating himself and dying. Cf. J. Alvar, *Romanizing Oriental Gods: Myth, Salvation and Ethics in the Cults of Cybele, Isis and Mithras* (Leiden/Boston 2008) 174–175.

²⁴ S. Nittis, “The Hippocratic Oath in Reference to Lithotomy: A New Interpretation with Historical Notes on Castration,” *Bulletin of the History of*

was also practiced for ‘immoral’ purposes in the Near East and later in Rome, and the author of the *Oath* might be referring to both kinds: “I will not cut, not even the sufferers from stones, leaving this to practitioners of this technique” (5, οὐ τεμέω δὲ οὐδὲ μὴν λιθιῶντας, ἐκχωρήσω δὲ ἐργάτησιν ἀνδράσι πρήξιος τῆσδε).

The cult of Cybele had generally been introduced in the Greek-speaking world in private houses like that of Dionysios (Philadelphia was a Hellenistic foundation),²⁵ and the Hippocratic *Oath* seems to build an analogy between these private shrines and the house of the patient, when it has the oath-taker swear that, inside the house (6, οἶκος), he will abstain from any wrong-doing, specifically sexual intercourse with any persons in the household (ἀφροδισίων ἔργων ἐπὶ τε γυναικείων σωμάτων καὶ ἀνδρείων, ἐλευθέρων τε καὶ δούλων). Interestingly, in both the *Oath* and the inscription it is specified that this holds both with free and with slave individuals.

The exceptional nature of the inscription precludes certainty over how representative of its time these purity conditions are, but maybe we can give some weight to the idea that its rather late dating in the declining period of the Hellenistic monarchies accords well with its basically un-Hellenistic moral strictness.²⁶

But there is still another important element of the *Oath* which can be tentatively related to this approximate period. Both H.

Medicine 7 (1939) 719–728.

²⁵ Another example is the little shrine of Cybele in Priene, outside of the city walls: M. Murray, “Down the Road from Sardis: Religious Structures and Religious Interaction in the Ancient City of Priene,” in D. Ascough (ed.), *Religious Rivalries and the Struggle for Success in Sardis and Smyrna* (Waterloo 2005) 197–210, at 200–201.

²⁶ Still later are the somewhat comparable Lydo-Phrygian confession inscriptions, from the second and third centuries, in which worshippers cured of an affliction sent by a god inscribe their transgression and its punishment, always in relation to ritual procedures and sometimes specifically to the fulfillment of conditions of purity: G. Petzl, “Die Beichtinschriften Westkleinasiens,” *EpigrAnat* 22 (1994) 1–175; cf. Parker, *Miasma* 254–255.

von Staden and N. J. Bremmer²⁷ have argued that the close association of ἄγνός (“pure”) and ὅσιος (“holy”) that is proclaimed in the *Oath* (4, ἀγνῶς δὲ καὶ ὀσίως διατηρήσω βίον τὸν ἐμὸν καὶ τέχνην τὴν ἐμήν), and which by its central position represents a pivotal point, is not encountered in texts of the archaic and classical ages, and they relate it to the elegiac couplet reportedly inscribed above the portal of the Epidaurian Asclepeion: ἀγνὸν χρῆ ναοῖο θυώδεος ἐντὸς ἰόντα / ἔμμεναι· ἀγνεία δ’ ἐστὶ φρονεῖν ὅσια (“pure must be the person who enters the sweet-smelling temple; purity is to think holy thoughts,” transl. Bremmer). Bremmer specifically counters the traditional dating of the inscription to the classical age, adducing the apt editorial observation of Bouffartigue that the transmitter Porphyry is, contrary to his normal practice, not signaling here his borrowing from Theophrastus,²⁸ and that comparison with similar inscriptions suggests a date circa the first century B.C. At the end of his paper, Bremmer attempts to save a classical dating for the *Oath*, suggesting that the reading]ως κα[ὶ εὐ]σεβῶς instead of ἀγνῶς καὶ ὀσίως in *P.Oxy XXXI* 2547.14 (late 3rd/early 4th cent.), the only surviving papyrus featuring text from the *Oath*, could possibly represent an earlier version of the text which did not make it into the medieval tradition. However, examination of the other obvious variants, namely ὀλέθρῳ (line 8) instead of δηλήσει and κατὰ γνώ[μην] (9–10) instead κατὰ κρίσιν (par. 2) seems to indicate that the readings in the papyrus are just more common expressions, and thus probably adaptations.

Hypothesis

A natural solution to the puzzle would be that the *Oath* which Cato read comprised only something similar to the first paragraph, in which the students of Hippocrates swear allegiance to

²⁷ H. von Staden, “Character and Competence: Personal and Professional Conduct in Greek Medicine,” in H. Flashar et al. (eds.), *Médecine et morale dans l’Antiquité* (Vandouvres/Geneva 1997) 172–195, at 179–186; N. J. Bremmer, “How Old is the Idea of Holiness (of Mind) in the Epidaurian Temple Inscription and the Hippocratic Oath?” *ZPE* 141 (2002) 106–108.

²⁸ Bremmer, *ZPE* 141 (2002) 108; J. Bouffartigue and M. Patillon, *Porphyre: De l’abstinence* II (Paris 1979) 29.

his family. Such an oath, in combination with the *Embassy*, where Hippocrates' family refuses to help the barbarians with an element of treachery, would have triggered Cato's criticisms against the Greek physicians, especially if he had not read the ethical commitments of the rest of the *Oath*, in which the physician apparently includes everyone.

An earlier version of the Hippocratic *Oath* of this form, without medical content, would perhaps share a common origin with the *Embassy*. E. D. Nelson defends the thesis that the long and complex historical narrative of the *Embassy*, including the non-straightforward nature of the Asclepiad promotion, suggests an original context of the speech within a historical work; specifically, he argues that (1) an anonymous Calydonian hero appearing in the story related to the Sacred Wars recounted by Thessalos could be indicative of a third-century date, given the regained control over Delphi by the Aetolian League from ca. 280 B.C. onwards;²⁹ (2) similarly, the expression "Kings of the Heraclids" (7, βασιλευῖσι Ἡρακλειδέων), used by Thessalos to designate the rulers of Macedon and probably alluding to older, ancestral ties between the Asclepiads and the old Macedonian rulers, would hardly be appropriate to the dramatic fifth-century audience, more likely fitting the time of the powerful third-century dynasty of the Antigonids in Macedon, who claimed Heraclid descent and who also ruled over Thessaly, Hippocrates' domicile at the dramatic time.³⁰ Indeed, such complex speeches of historical scope are typical of accounts like Thucydides', whereas (probably) free-standing pseudepigraphical pieces like the Hippocratean *Letters* were generally shorter and simpler.³¹

²⁹ E. D. Nelson, "Coan Promotions and the Authorship of the *Presbeutikos*," in P. van der Eijk (ed.), *Hippocrates in Context* (Leiden/Boston 2005) 209–238, at 212–216.

³⁰ E. D. Nelson, "Hippocrates, Heraclids, and the 'Kings of the Heraclidai': Adaptations of Asclepiad History by the Author of the *Presbeutikos*," *Phoenix* 61 (2007) 234–246, at 242–245.

³¹ To compare another case of an ancient historian's struggle to make sense

An intriguing possibility is that an oath of allegiance to Hippocrates constituting the earliest version of the *Oath* would originally have been contained in this historical work. Such simple oaths were frequently employed in ancient histories to attach some sense of reality and vividness to the narratives, and it is perfectly imaginable that any history of Cos explaining the period of Hippocrates would have included some account of how medical knowledge was transferred, or at least more so than in previous periods, to students outside of the Asclepiad family. The extended medical family thereby proclaimed would in a way have countered the impression that the Asclepiad clan was no longer dedicated to medicine, as we do not hear of Asclepiads practicing medicine after the fourth century: Praxagoras (Galen *De meth. med.* X 28 K.) and Critobolus (Arr. *Anab.* 6.11.1) are the last known; in the fifth century we have Ctesias and of course Hippocrates and his ascendants and sons and sons-in-law. Thus in the third century it may have been pertinent to explain what

of semi-mythical familiar stories intermingled with historical narratives like those of the Asclepiads, consider Ephorus' narration of the history of the Heraclids in the fourth century B.C.: N. Luraghi, "Ephorus in Context: The Return of the Heraclidae and Fourth-century Peloponnesian Politics," in G. Parmeggiani (ed.), *Between Thucydides and Polybius: The Golden Age of Greek Historiography* (Cambridge [Mass.] 2014) 133–151. Concerning the implied third-century B.C. work recounting the history of Cos in which the *Embassy* would have been born, Nelson, in *Hippocrates in Context* 230–231, proposes to identify it with Macareus' *Coaca*. He argues that similar narrative techniques in the *Embassy* and the *Asylurkunden* for the Coan Asclepeion suggest that the author of the *Embassy* was one of the participating *theoroi*, one of the recorded names being Μακαρεύς. As he himself recognizes, the name was quite popular on Cos, and we therefore cannot be certain. The alleged similarities could be due to common cultural and historical knowledge and well-known narrative techniques shared by historians and political actors. However, what are the probabilities that another detailed history of Cos and the Asclepiads besides the *Coaca* existed? Also, the date of the *Coaca* is not known, but the early third century seems probable. P. M. Fraser, *Ptolemaic Alexandria* (Oxford 1972) II 791 n.8, suggests that Macareus and Philetas were contemporaries. The deduction that he was one of the *theoroi* in the sacred embassies of the Coans seems more arbitrary given the frequency of the name.

happened with the Asclepiad physicians.

Possibly the author had in mind the phenomenon of family aggregation as attested in family cult foundations in Cos and the neighboring Doric area at the beginning of the Hellenistic age. The most recent analysis of the evidence concludes that, by that time, aristocratic families in Cos saw their political influence waning, owing to the expanding socio-political arena (e.g. interference from the Ptolemaic monarchs), migration, or the natural extinction of the masculine family line, and attempted to cope with these phenomena through a broader and more regulated cult of their heroized ancestors.³²

This oath, together with the *Embassy*, could have been excerpted in Alexandria as a biographical piece on Hippocrates, and perhaps figured right after the *Embassy* on the same papyrus, forming the end of the collection, as in *Urb. gr.* 64 (f. 116). The pseudepigraphic letters, decrees, and speeches appear regularly at the end of the Hippocratean manuscripts, probably reflecting ancient practice, in the same way as the Platonic letters also close the tetralogies. If Cato followed the same reading pattern, he could have directly browsed the end of the Hippocratic collection to skip the technical content and read the historical and biographical information. Furthermore, such an oath placed at the end of the Hippocratic collection could have nicely echoed the literary practice of closing a work with the warning not to share the content too lightly.³³

³² S. Campanelli, “Family Cult Foundations in the Hellenistic Age: Family and Sacred Space in a Private Religious Context,” in M. Hilgert (ed.), *Understanding Material Text Cultures: A Multidisciplinary View* (Berlin/Boston 2016) 131–202. Cf. also J.-M. Carbon and V. Pirenne-Delforge, “Priests and Cult Personnel in Three Hellenistic Families,” in M. Horster et al. (eds.), *Cities and Priests. Cult Personnel in Asia Minor and the Aegean Islands from the Hellenistic to the Imperial Period* (Berlin 2013) 65–120.

³³ As e.g. in the magico-medical *De virtutibus herbarum*, attributed to one Thessalus: K. Ni-Mheallaigh, “Reading the Fraudulent Text: Thessalus of Tralles and the Book of Nechepso,” in J. Martínez (ed.), *Fakes and Forgers of Classical Literature* (Leiden 2014) 179–186. Cf. Book 7 of Vettius Valens’ *Anthologies*, which opens (7.1.1) and closes (7.6.230–234) with an oath of secrecy.

Later on, in the first century A.D., the *Oath* already included the ethical statements regarding medical practice, and in the second century it was regarded by some doctors as the beginning of medical instruction precisely because of these high medical standards.³⁴ The editions of Hippocrates made by the time of Hadrian, those of Artemidorus Capito and Dioscurides of Alexandria on which Galen comments (*On Hippocrates' Nature of Man* XV 21–22 K.), probably already had the *Oath* at the beginning, perhaps preceded by a biography like the so-called *Vita Hippocratis Secundum Soranum*. This is the structure of the tenth-century *Venet.Marc.* 269, which presents at the very beginning, after the biography, the same tetrad described by Erotian in the first century A.D. as “writings dealing with the art: *Oath, Law, On the Art, On Ancient Medicine*” (*Voc.Hip.* 36, τῶν δ’ εἰς τὸν περὶ τέχνης τεινόντων λόγον· Ὀρκος, Νόμος, Περὶ τέχνης, Περὶ ἀρχαίας ἰατρικῆς). As V. Nutton writes, “it is likely, although far from certain, that their [Artemidorus and Dioscurides’] work lies at the base of the manuscript tradition of the Hippocratic corpus as we have it today.”³⁵

However, the textual transmission of the Hippocratic writings before the first century A.D. remains a black box. It is in that time that we have witnessed Roman fears about Greek physicians in Cato’s words, amplified later by Pliny—fears which the statements of the *Oath* duly address. After all, if putting your body in the hands of doctors entailed (much more in antiquity than now) a great amount of courage and confidence, it must have been worse with linguistic and cultural barriers.³⁶ It seems then a

³⁴ *P.Oxy* LXXIV 4970; cf. D. Leith, “The Hippocratic *Oath* in Roman Oxyrhynchus,” in *En marge du Serment* 39–50, at 41–42.

³⁵ *Ancient Medicine* (London 2004) 213.

³⁶ On the Greekness of the medical profession in Rome and Pliny’s invective see V. Nutton, “The Perils of Patriotism: Pliny and Roman Medicine,” in *From Democedes to Harvey: Studies in the History of Medicine* (London 1988) 30–58. Cf. von Staden, in *Tradition, Transmission, Transformation* 369–418, focusing on Cato’s criticisms and Celsus’ medical encyclopedia, which strikingly displays a strong anti-Greek sentiment, even though it incorporated a significant amount of Greek medicine.

plausible hypothesis that the ethical conditions for medical practice in the *Oath* were introduced in the period between Cato and Pliny, that is, between the mid-second century B.C. and the mid-first A.D., after the first important wave of Greek physicians in Rome.

If such accretions had been inspired by cultic laws of Cybele, knowledge of the official Roman adoption of this goddess via Pergamum ca. 200 B.C. may have played a role. In relation to this and the issue of lithotomy, one should recall that Roman citizens were initially banned from becoming priests of Cybele apparently because it entailed castration, since Claudius lifted the ban only on condition that they did not castrate themselves.³⁷ Thereafter, the ban on castration in the Cybele cult of Rome can be interpreted as part of its sacred rules.

Another sign that the ethical statements could have been introduced in the context of the transmission to Rome is that Cato apparently read the medical oath in Athens, probably before the Hippocratic collection was available in Rome. Remember that the future transmission of Greek literature to Rome with its pernicious effects is the topic of the passage. It might then be no coincidence that the earliest likely references to the full version of the *Oath* are by authors active in the imperial city: Erotian dedicated his work to Nero's *archiatros*, and Scribonius Largus was physician to Claudius.

There is evidence that this kind of process took place in the textual transmission of a Greek astrological text, in a similar period and likewise in the Roman milieu. The astrological treatise of Dorotheus as we have it (an Arabic translation of a seventh-century Middle Persian translation) contains several horoscopes from the first half of the first century A.D. which have been used to date the author to the second half of the same century, but the fact that they all appear as illustration of a single technique mostly in a single chapter (one in 1.21 and seven in 1.24) suggests that they were instead inserted in the text in the

³⁷ A. T. Fear, "Cybele and Christ," in E. N. Lane (ed.), *Cybele, Attis, and Related Cults* (Leiden 1996) 47.

course of the textual transmission, likely in the late first century A.D. (astrological authors normally used horoscopes from their own lifetime in their treatises). This probably happened at the same time with the (signaled) insertion of an excerpt from a certain Qītrīnūs al-sadwālī, appearing towards the end of the text (5.41). As Pingree suggests, this astrologer should probably be identified with a Cedrus from Athens named in a list of ancient astrological authorities by ibn Nawbakht quoted by ibn al-Nadīm.³⁸ “Cedrus” was certainly a name used in the first century,³⁹ identical with the name of the tree and therefore not surprisingly mostly attested as the name of slaves and freedmen, probably from the Lebanon area. We could then suppose that he was a slave in a Roman household in Athens. But maybe the pompous style of the reference (“Greek from the city of Athens, flourishing in science”) leaves the suspicion of creative guesswork, like what appear to be additions to his name in the title of the chapter.⁴⁰ From his excerpt, we can deduce that he took a strong interest in medical matters from the point of view of astrological theory. One passage is of special concern here, where he lists a series of astrological conditions implying different results in the course of an illness: thus, one astrological configuration means that the patient “will not benefit from any of the doctor’s drugs and his exertion and treatment”; another, that “he will benefit from the doctor and that he [the doctor] will be pleasant in his treatment”; another, that “as for the doctor who begins to treat the illness, even if he is kind and learned, he will not benefit from his kindness and his treatment, but the reputation will fall

³⁸ D. Pingree, *Dorothei Sidonii Carmen astrologicum* (Leipzig 1976) xv.

³⁹ E.g. *CIL* IV 3376 (Pompeii), VI 6420 (Rome, first half 1st cent.), 10661 (2nd cent.), 14329, 14627, 22837, *I.Samothrace* 36 (A.D. 19), *IAquileia* I 587 (first half 1st cent.). Cedrenus is not attested, either in the *PHI* corpus (Greek) or in the Clauss-Slaby (Latin).

⁴⁰ The lengthening of the name to “Cedrenus” (attested in Late Antiquity, cf. the Byzantine scholar George Cedrenus) could have been aimed at dignifying a slave-sounding name. Similarly, sadwālī is probably a corrupt derivation from Persian *sarwar*, meaning “master” (*d* and *l* are easily mistaken for *r* in the Arabic alphabet).

to another than his doctor” (5.41, p.425 Pingree).

Therefore, not only a change of cultural context brought along practical insertions like the sample horoscopes, illustrating techniques that were previously explained without examples, but also the need was felt to introduce a chapter on medical reputation and ethics. It is true that the paraliterary status of astrological texts probably allowed of itself much more flexibility in the transmission of texts than was the case in other genres such as medicine, but perhaps the early version of the *Oath* was precisely *the* medical text that could be changed. Maybe its shortness (if it comprised just the first paragraph) called in some way for an enlargement, and the fact that our hypothesized earlier version was basically an oath of allegiance and silence partly situated the text in the orbit of Orphic, astrological, and magical literature.

To conclude, I believe this hypothesis about the *Entstehung* of the Hippocratic *Oath* addresses the most obvious problems posed by this very special text. I have proposed dividing its emergence in two phases, the first comprising what is edited as the first paragraph, dealing with the strong bond between student and teacher and the commitment to teach only students within the two families or indentured students; and the second adding the rest of the current paragraphs, on medical conduct and the consequent reputation of the physician. Certain textual circumstances are at least compatible with this scenario. Even though they are not compelling by themselves and the argument does not repose on them, they probably should be mentioned. One is that it seems reasonable that the *Oath* as we have it now would place the oldest part at the beginning, an enlargement being more probable at the end of the text. Second, there is another obvious difference between the two parts, other than their topic: whereas the first long paragraph is developed out of the single idea of the strong bond between student and teacher, the second part is a sequence of short norms (hence its division into several paragraphs): thus, not only do they show a clear stylistic difference, but also the more sequenced text of the second part befits better a later accretion. Finally, it is perhaps significant that the

current version of the *Oath* has a length remarkably similar to that of the *Law*, its thematic sibling in the corpus as already perceived by the ancient authors.⁴¹

Summing up the argument: Cato the Elder adduces a “common oath” sworn among Greek physicians to kill all barbarians. It appears that he is attacking Greek authors he had read in Athens. His accusation that the Greeks called the Romans *Opici* must come from a misunderstanding, probably from reading Plato’s *Letters* in which Opicians (actually Oscan mercenaries) and Carthaginians are placed together (and called barbarians) as contenders for control of Sicily. Similarly Cato would have encountered the common Greek medical oath in the non-technical works of Hippocrates, such as some version of the Hippocratic *Oath*, as well as the *Embassy*, where Hippocrates’ family appears as benefactor of all the Greeks but treacherously denying aid to barbarians asking for help to dispel a plague originated in “barbarian land” beyond Illyria (perhaps understood by Cato as Italy). However, the second part of the *Oath* with its apparently universal ethical statements is at odds with Cato’s affirmations, which seem nevertheless not to be just the product of Cato’s mistrust but to have arisen from his readings. These ethical statements present a close resemblance to purity conditions specified in cultic laws, especially those in a second/first century inscription of a private Cybele shrine in Lydia. In particular, the clause on lithotomy could be related to ritual emasculation in this cult and its ban in Rome. Also, it is argued that the association of purity and holiness in the *Oath*, which has a parallel in a famous

⁴¹ The *Law* mentions the absence of a law punishing medical malpractice, discusses the necessity of early training for physicians, and ends up proposing that medical training should be imparted only to the apt ones, just like the content of the mysteries. As for the ancient awareness of a link between the *Law* and the *Oath*, it is telling that the title refers to something (a law) whose absence is easy to see, the text itself not constituting anything like a law (unlike the *Oath*). Also, we have seen that Erotian puts them together in his list (cf. 616 above), and one of the ancient witnesses of the Hippocratic *Oath*, *P.Oxy.* LXXIV 4970.5, refers to it as νόμου δικαιοσύνης, which Leith, in *En marge du Serment* 42, interprets as a possible reference to the *Law*.

couplet on the entrance of the Epidauran Asclepieion, probably cannot be dated to before the first century B.C. On this evidence, and given the serious reservations and fears of Greek doctors deeply imbricated in Roman society, largely coinciding with those addressed in the *Oath*, I have put forward the hypothesis that the second part of the *Oath* was added after the first paragraph in the context of the transmission of the Hippocratic texts to Rome (Cato read them in Athens) between the second century B.C. and the first A.D.

In turn, if the earlier version contained only something like the first paragraph, such a text would be easy to conceptualize as a witness to how Hippocrates transferred medical knowledge outside of the clan, as the (ps.?)-Galenic commentary seems to imply. However, taking into account that Hippocrates' contemporary Plato seems not to know anything of such an oath, and that such oaths were frequently inserted by historians in their narratives, it seems reasonable to think that this early version of the *Oath* was in fact a historian's retrospective explanation of that process, as part of his account of the history of the Asclepiads. It could then have been excerpted from the third-century B.C. history of Cos from which the *Embassy* was extracted (as it has been claimed), both pieces providing valuable 'biographical' information about Hippocrates for the Alexandrian collection.⁴²

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Universität Osnabrück /
 Universitat de Barcelona
 ctolsa@gmail.com

⁴² This paper arose from, and quickly grew beyond, a comparison between the astrological oaths in Vettius Valens and the Hippocratic Oath, which was part of a Humboldt Foundation Postdoctoral Fellowship based at Osnabrück Universität, and was finalized at Universitat de Barcelona where the author is currently based as a Juan de la Cierva Researcher.