SAPIENZA
UNIVERSITÀ DI ROMA

E-ISSN 2531-7288
ISSN 0394/9001

MEDICINA NEI SECOLI
Journal of History of Medicine and Medical Humanities
35/3 (2023) 99-110

Received: 28.06.2023
Accepted: 12.08.2023
DOI: 1013133/2531-72882822

Corresponding author:
Carlo Delle Donne
carlodelledonne2@gmail.com

αἰδέονται φράζειν
Female Patients' Figurative Language in the *Corpus Hippocraticum*

Carlo Delle Donne
PhD Sapienza-Università di Roma, Roma, Italy

ABSTRACT

My paper focuses on an often neglected

Issue regarding ancient medicine: the role played by female patient's figurative language within the medical relationship. In particular, I set out to elaborate on the prognostic, diagnostic and therapeutic potential inherent in the patients' metaphorical way of thinking about and expressing their own experiences of disease. Metaphors, images, and similes are frequently employed by laymen when they talk to physicians; upon closer scrutiny, this fact testifies to the intrinsically metaphorical structure of our everyday thinking. More precisely, this phenomenon emerges especially when female patients are confronted with the conceptualisation of what is less immediately accessible in experience, such as the nature and causation of their own suffering. In other words, metaphors help them understand and talk about their health, be it psychic or physical. But physicians can turn our images into medical signs, as if they were real symptoms, if they are able to "decode" them appropriately.

Keywords: *Corpus Hippocraticum* - Figurative language - Female patients - Medical relationship.

The role played by female patients within the *Corpus Hippocraticum* (= *CH*) has often been a controversial matter[1]. Who is the source of the physician's knowledge? Is it the female patient herself, or is it the physician? Scholars have defended both options[2]. Although I won't delve into the details of this issue, it is reasonable to assume that the truth lies somewhere in the middle. In certain Hippocratic passages, the physician casts doubt on his patient's reliability[3], while in others, it is the female patient who provides valuable information about her illness[4]. Regardless, physicians likely used to pay attention to their patients' words, even when the latter expressed themselves figuratively.[5] Considering this premise, the present paper will focus on some figurative expressions which can be reasonably imputed to female patients, specifically examining relevant testimonies from the *Epidemics*, the *De natura muliebri*, and the *De mulierum affectibus*. However, this is not sufficient, of course. That is why, in the near future, I intend to expand the scope of this research to include other treatises of the *CH*, potentially as part of an outstanding project led by Professor Mónica Durán, if it receives funding.

The first text which is worth discussing comes from book the *Epidemics*, V 25:

> *Ἐν Λαρίσσῃ, ἀμφίπολος Δυσήριδος, νέη ἐοῦσα, ὁκότε λαγνεύοιτο, περιωδύνεεν ἰσχυρῶς, ἄλλως δὲ ἀνώδυνος ἦν. Ἐκύησε δὲ οὐδέποτε. Ἐξηκονταέτης δὲ γενομένη, ὠδυνᾶτο ἀπὸ μέσου ἡμέρης, ὡς ὠδίνουσα ἰσχυρῶς· πρὸ δὲ μέσου ἡμέρης αὕτη πράσα τρώγουσα πουλλὰ, ἐπειδὴ ὀδύνη αὐτὴν ἔλαβεν ἰσχυροτάτη τῶν πρόσθεν, ἀναστᾶσα ἐπέψαυσέ τινος τρηχέος ἐν τῷ στόματι τῆς μήτρης. Ἔπειτα, ἤδη λειποψυχούσης αὐτῆς, ἑτέρη γυνὴ, καθεῖσα τὴν χεῖρα, ἐξεπίεσε λίθον ὅσον σπόνδυλον ἀτράκτου, τρηχύν· καὶ ὑγιὴς τότε αὐτίκα καὶ ἔπειτα ἦν.*
>
> *In Larissa, the servant of Dyseris, when she was young, whenever she had sexual intercourse, suffered much pain, but otherwise was without distress. And she never conceived. When she was sixty, she had pain from midday, like strong labor. Before midday, she had eaten many leeks. When pain sized her, the strongest ever, she stood up and felt something rough at the mouth of her womb. Then, when she had already fainted, another woman, inserting her hand, pressed out a stone like a spindle top in size, rough. She was immediately and thenceforth healthy. (trans. by Smith, modified)*

Dyseris's servant is afflicted with a gynecological disorder that causes her to experience symptoms similar to pregnancy, although she is not actually pregnant. When she reached the age of sixty, she perceived a rough object (τινος τρηχέος) near the opening of her womb, which she herself confirmed through direct palpation (ἐπέψαυσε). Thankfully, another woman was able to extract a stone from her, roughly the size of a spinning top (ὅσον σπόνδυλον ἀτράκτου), and the servant experienced a full recovery. This case is intriguing for several reasons. Firstly, the physician does not directly interact with the patient's body. The palpation is carried out by the patient herself, and the removal of the rough formation is performed by another woman whose identity remains unknown (presumably, a trained midwife). In this context, the physician assumes the role of a mere observer, recording only the data indirectly provided to him.

One could even hypothesize that the physician was only informed of the complete clinical story after the servant had recovered, implying that he likely was not personally present during the events described.

So far, so good. However, if this interpretation holds true, how should we interpret the two similes, "as if in severe labor pains" (ὡς ὠδίνουσα ἰσχυρῶς) and "about the size of a spindle top" (ὅσον σπόνδυλον ἀτράκτου)? The first simile aids in expressing the patient's pain—a challenging task for both patients and physicians, as evident in both the *CH* and Galen's writings[6]. The second simile serves to describe the size and, perhaps, the shape of the rough object within Dyseris's servant's womb. Do these similes originate from the patient's own imagination, thereby providing evidence of figurative language employed by patients? Or should we attribute them to the physician's narrative? Considering the physician's relative absence from the narrative and taking into account the nature of the pain described by the first simile, as well as the semantic field associated with the second simile (everyday life, specifically female activities), it is likely that one of the two young women used these figurative expressions, which have been passed down to us through the physician's account. Arguably, the suffering girl could be the author of the first simile, while the second simile likely originated from the other girl.

Another relevant example can be found in *Epidemics* VII 11. This passage is noteworthy, as it demonstrates what Chiara Thumiger refers to as the "character language" of the patients. In this instance, the physician employs the verb φημί to give voice to the patient, reporting an expression (in this case, a metaphorical one) that should be attributed to the patient herself, rather than the physician:

> *Τῇ Ἑρμοπτολέμου χειμῶνος πυρετὸς καὶ κεφαλῆς ἀλγήματα· καὶ ὁπότε πίοι, ὡς χαλεπῶς καταπιοῦσα ἐξανέστη, καὶ τὴν καρδίην οἱ γυιοῦσθαι ἔφη· γλῶσσα πελιδνὴ ἀπ' ἀρχῆς. (ed. Jouanna)*

> *The wife of Hermoptolemus, in the winter, had fever and headache. Whenever she drank she sat upright because of difficulty swallowing. She said that her heart had been weakened. Tongue livid from the outset. (trans. by Smith, modified)*

Hermoptolemus' wife was suffering from a fever and headache – in all likelihood, salmonellosis[7] – and the physician took careful note of all the clinical evidence, including her use of γυιοῦσθαι ("to be weakened"). It is worth noting that the reading γυιοῦσθαι was proposed by Coray as an emendation for the *traditus* ὑγιᾶσθαι, which is supported by ms. M (*Marcianus Graecus* 269, 10th century). However, as the *textus traditus* makes little sense, and an emendation is certainly necessary, Coray's one has the merit of making sense of the patient's metaphorical use of a verb that is never used analogously in the *CH*[8]. By employing the image of someone "limping" (hence, "being weak"), which is the basic meaning of γυιόω[9], Hermoptolemus' wife drew on her everyday world in order to convey to the physician how she felt about her heart's

condition. The fact that the physician recorded this expression along with the other symptoms suggests that he found it not only effective and appropriate, but also diagnostically revealing. Therefore, it does not come as a surprise that, a few lines below, the physician mentions another answer given by his patient (μετὰ τὰς πρώτας ἡμέρας ἐρωτωμένη οὐκ ἔτι κεφαλὴν, ἀλλ' ὅλον τὸ σῶμα πονεῖν ἔφη).

Another intriguing example occurs twice in the *Epidemics*, once in Book V (63) and again in Book VII (28). The recurrence of the same clinical story is certainly noteworthy, as it exemplifies the pervasive process of textual modification and implementation that was characteristic of many treatises in the *CH*[10], such as *Epidemics* V and VII[11]. In Book V, 63, Polemarchus's wife appears to metaphorically describe the movements of her heart[12]:

> *Τῇ Πολεμάρχου χειμῶνος κυναγχικῇ οἴδημα ὑπὸ τὸν βρόγχον· πολὺς πυρετός. 'Εφλεβοτομήθη· ἔληξεν ὁ πνιγμὸς ἐκ τῆς φάρυγγος· ὁ πυρετὸς παρείπετο. Περὶ πέμπτην γούνατος ἄλγημα, οἴδημα, ἀριστεροῦ· καὶ κατὰ τὴν καρδίην ἔφη τι ξυλλέγεσθαι αὐτῇ· καὶ ἀνέπνει ὡς ἐκ τοῦ βεβαπτίσθαι ἀναπνέουσι· καὶ ἐκ τοῦ στήθεος ὑπεψόφει ὥσπερ αἱ ἐγγαστρίμυθοι λεγόμεναι· τοιοῦτό τι ξυνέβαινεν. Περὶ δὲ τὰς ἑπτὰ ἢ ἐννέα ἐς νύκτα κοιλίη κατερράγη ὑγρὰ πολλὰ κακὸν ὀζόμενα· ἀφωνίη· ἐτελεύτησεν. (ed. Jouanna)*
>
> *Polemarchus' wife had quinsy in the winter. Swelling by the windpipe, much fever. She was phlebotomised. The choking in her pharynx was relieved; the fever persisted. About the fifth day, pain and swelling in the left knee. She was under the impression of having something of a gathering around the heart, and she breathed like a diver who has surfaced. She made a noise from her chest, like that which the so-called ventriloquists make; something like that happened. On the seventh or ninth day her intestines broke loose towards night, emitting much moist excrement, smelly. Voicelessness. She died. (trans. by Smith, modified)*

At VII 28 another girl, who is also described as Polemarchus' wife[13], is said to suffer from the same disease as the homonymous character in book V:

> *Τῇ Πολεμάρχου χειμῶνος κυναγχικῇ οἴδημα ὑπὸ τὸν βρόγχον· πολὺς πυρετός. Φλέβα ἐτμήθη· ἔληξεν ὁ πνιγμὸς ἐκ τῆς φάρυγγος· ὁ πυρετὸς παρείπετο. Περὶ πέμπτην γούνατος ἄλγημα καὶ οἴδημα ἀριστεροῦ· καὶ κατὰ τὴν καρδίην ἔφη δοκεῖν τι ξυνάγεσθαι ἑωυτῇ· καὶ ἀνέπνει οἷον ἐκ τοῦ βεβαπτίσθαι ἀναπνεούσῃ· καὶ ἐκ τοῦ στήθεος ὑπεψόφει ὡς αἱ ἐγγαστρίμυθοι λεγόμεναι· τοιοῦτό τι ξυνέβαινεν. Περὶ δὲ τὴν ὀγδόην ἢ ἐνάτην ἐς νύκτα κοιλίη κατερράγη ὑγρὰ πολλὰ καὶ ἀλέα καὶ κάκοδμα· ἀφωνίη· ἐτελεύτησεν. (ed. Jouanna)*
>
> *Polemarchus' wife had quinsy in the winter, swelling by the windpipe, much fever. A vein was opened. The choking in her pharynx was relieved, the fever persisted. About the fifth day, pain and swelling in the left knee. She said she felt as though there was a gathering around her heart; she breathed as though she was catching her breath after being submerged. She made a noise from her chest, like that which the so-called ventriloquists make. Something like that happened. On the seventh or ninth day her intestines broke loose towards night, massively emitting much moist excrement, that was smelly. Voicelessness. She died. (trans. by Smith, modified)*

In the case in question, the physicians record a metaphorical expression used by their patients. The latter describe feeling as though "something was gathered around the heart" (κατὰ τὴν καρδίην […] τι ξυλλέγεσθαι/ξυνάγεσθαι)[14]. The use of the complex *formula* ἔφη δοκεῖν ἑωυτῇ in VII 28 makes it clear that the patient herself came up with this expression (it is hence another sample of "character language"); and also ἔφη in V 63 supports this hypothesis. Interestingly, the verb συλλέγω, which is employed by Polemarchus' wife in V 63, can be found elsewhere in the *CH*, sometimes associated with the movement of blood (e.g. *Epid*. II 6, 32; *Nat.Hom*. 11, 37; *Genit.* 51, 63; *Oss*. 9, 35). It is hence possible that Polemarchus' wife was attempting to express her feelings in quasi-technical language; or perhaps she was using the verb more broadly, as its occurrences in the *CH* (aside from those mentioned above) are often non-technical, and generically refer to any form of "gathering". The same can be said of συνάγω, employed by (the other) Polemarchus' wife at VII 28: the verb is often employed elsewhere by the physicians (e.g. *Epid*. VII 25, with reference to the eyes; VII 1, with reference to the whole body). So, both of the verbs are taken at face value by the physicians, despite their degree of technicality. Unfortunately, the authorship of the two rare and effective similes "like a diver who has just surfaced" (ὡς ἐκ τοῦ βεβαπτίσθαι ἀναπνέουσι /οἷον ἐκ τοῦ βεβαπτίσθαι ἀναπνεούσῃ) and "like the so-called ventriloquists" (ὥσπερ αἱ ἐγγαστρίμυθοι λεγόμεναι)[15] remains unclear. They are nowhere else attested in the *CH* and may have been used by the physicians to describe the patient's breathing and the noises she made from her chest. However, given that both images come from everyday experiences that the patient could have feasibly had, it is possible that Polemarchus' wife herself made reference to them.

Considering all these aspects, it is reasonable to question whether female patients tend to employ similar figurative expressions as male patients. The *CH* does not provide ample evidence regarding this matter. However, there is one noteworthy passage from the *De mulierum affectionibus* (I 36) that sheds light on the subject:

> *Γίνεται δὲ καὶ ἕλκεα ἐν τῇσι μήτρῃσιν οἷα τῶν λοχείων σαπέντων· καὶ ἢν γένηται, πλέονος μελεδώνης δεήσεται, ὅκως μή οἱ τὰ ἕλκεα μεγάλα καὶ σηπεδονώδεα ἔσται· κίνδυνος δὲ ἢ θανεῖν ἢ ἄφορον γενέσθαι. Σημήϊα δὲ ταῦτα γίνεται ἢν ἕλκεα ἐνῇ· ἐπὴν χωρέῃ ἡ κάθαρσις, δοκέει ὡς ἀκάνθια διὰ τῶν μητρέων ἰέναι, καὶ πῦρ λάζεται τὴν κοιλίην.*
>
> *Ulcers may also form in the uterus as a result of lochia putrefying, and if this happens more attention will be required to prevent them from becoming large and putrid, for they threaten death and barrenness. The following signs appear if ulcers are present (sc. in the uterus): when the cleaning is being discharged, something like a thorn seems to be piercing the uterus, and heat occupies the cavity. (trans. Potter)*

The ailment in question pertains to ulcers of the womb. A symptom indicative of their presence is a sensation experienced by the patient, which the physician describes figuratively. The phrase "she perceives a sensation akin to small prickles traversing her

womb" (δοκέει ὡς ἀκάνθια διὰ τῶν μητρέων ἰέναι) is employed to portray a particular type of pain, whose existence the physician equates with a genuine symptom. This observation is highly revealing. Firstly, it demonstrates that physicians were indeed receptive to incorporating their patients' imagery into their accounts, presumably due to the recurrence of certain images under clinically comparable circumstances[16]. In other words, figurative expressions could be regarded as quasi-symptoms due to their frequent reoccurrence. As Vincenzo Di Benedetto convincingly argued many years ago, regularity and frequency, based on consistent occurrence, contribute to the notion of probability, which lies at the core of ancient medicine concerning diagnosis, prognosis, and treatment[17]. Moreover, the image cited by the physician is noteworthy because it can be attributed to the imagery employed by male patients as well. For instance, consider *Morb*. II 72:

> *Φροντίς· δοκεῖ ἐν τοῖσι σπλάγχνοισιν εἶναι οἷον ἄκανθα καὶ κεντεῖν, καὶ ἄση αὐτὸν λάζυται, καὶ τὸ φῶς φεύγει καὶ τοὺς ἀνθρώπους, καὶ τὸ σκότος φιλεῖ, καὶ φόβος λάζεται, καὶ αἱ φρένες οἰδέουσιν ἐκτὸς, καὶ ἀλγεῖ ψαυόμενος, καὶ φοβεῖται, καὶ δείματα ὁρᾷ καὶ ὀνείρατα φοβερὰ καὶ τοὺς τεθνηκότας ἐνίοτε· καὶ ἡ νοῦσος [ἐνίοτε] λαμβάνει τοὺς πλείστους τοῦ ἦρος. (ed. Jouanna)*
>
> *Phrontis: somthing like a thorn seems to be in the inward parts and to prick them; loathing attacks the patient, he flees light and people, he loves the dark, and he is seized by fear. His diaphragm swells outwards, and is painful when touched. The patient is afraid, and he sees terrible things, frightful dreams, and sometimes the dead. This disease attacks most people in spring. (trans. Potter)*

The disease under consideration, the highly debated φροντίς[18], gives rise to a pain in the bowels akin to the pricking of a thorn. Considering numerous other instances where the "pricking" metaphor appears[19], it is reasonable to attribute the authorship of this figurative expression to male patients. Consequently, irrespective of gender, patients commonly utilised the semantic field of pricking to vividly depict an intense and penetrating type of pain. This hypothesis is further strenghtened by the image of "fire" (πῦρ), that is said to "attack" (λάζεται)[20] the κοιλίη. In a passage from the *De morbis* (III 7), fire is mentioned along with needles to describe the sensations of a male patient:

> *Οταν δ' ὁ πλεύμων πρησθῇ ὑπὸ φλεγμασίης καὶ οἰδήσῃ, βὴξ ἴσχει σκληρὴ καὶ ὀρθόπνοια καὶ ἀναπνεῖ ἀθρόον καὶ πυκινὸν καὶ ἀσθμαίνει καὶ ἰδίει καὶ τοὺς μυκτῆρας ἀναπετάννυσιν ὡς ἵππος δραμὼν καὶ τὴν γλῶσσαν θαμινὰ ἐκβάλλει καὶ τὰ στήθεα αὐτῷ ἀείδειν δοκεῖ καὶ βάρος ἐνεῖναι, διὸ χωρεῖν οὐ δύνασθαι τὰ στήθεα, ἀλλὰ διαρρήσσεσθαι, καὶ ἀδυνατεῖ· ἡ τε ὀδύνη ὀξέα ἴσχει τό τε νῶτον καὶ τὰ στήθεα, καὶ τὰς πλευρὰς ὡς βελόναι κεντέουσι καὶ καίεται ταῦτα ὡς πρὸς πῦρ καθήμενος καὶ ἐρυθήματα ἐκφλύει ἐς τὸ στῆθος καὶ τὸ νῶτον ὡς φλογοειδέα [φλογοειδέα M, φολιδοειδέα Jouanna, φολιδοειδές **θ**].[21] Καὶ δηγμὸς ἰσχυρὸς ἐμπίπτει [καὶ ἀπορίη] ὥστε οὔτε κατακεῖσθαι οὔθ' ἑστάναι οὔτε καθῆσθαι οἷός τ' ἐστίν, ἀλλ' ἀπορεῖ ἀλύων βληστρίζει τε ἑωυτόν καὶ δοκεῖ ἤδη ἀποθανεῖσθαι· ἀποθνήσκει δὲ μάλιστα τεταρταῖος ἢ ἑβδομαῖος· ἢν δὲ ταύτας ἐκφύγῃ, οὐ μάλα ἀποθνήσκει. (ed. Jouanna)*[22]

When the lung is distended due to phlegmasia and swells up, a harsh cough and orthopnea set in. The patient respires rapidly and frequently, gasps for breath, sweats, dilates his nostrils like a running horse, and continually protrudes his tongue. His chest seems to him to sing and to contain a heaviness that prevents it from dilating, but it seems to him to be about to be torn, and he is powerless. Sharp pain is present in the patient's back and chest, needles, as it were, prick his sides, and he burns in these areas as though he were sitting next to a fire, and red patches like flames erupt on his chest and back. A violent gnawing pain attacks the patient, and he can neither lie down, nor stand up, nor sit; he is at a loss, being distraught, and tosses himself about, and seems already on the point of death. He usually dies on the fourth or seventh day; if he survives that many, death is rare. (trans. by Potter, modified)

Another remarkable example can also be cited. In the *De natura muliebri* (10), concerning the swelling of the womb caused by phlegm, the author suggests a specific query to be posed to the afflicted patient:

Ην αἱ μῆτραι φλεγμήνασαι πρησθῶσι, φῦσα ἐγγίνεται, καὶ τὰ ἐπιμήνια λευκὰ ἐπέρχεται φλεγματώδεα· ἔστι δ' ὅτε καὶ αἷμα λεπτόν, ὑμένων ἔμπλεον· καὶ τῷ ἀνδρὶ ὑπὸ τῆς ὑγρότητος οὐκ ἐθέλει μίσγεσθαι, καὶ ὠχρὴ καὶ λεπτὴ γίνεται. Ἐρέσθαι οὖν χρὴ αὐτὴν τὸ ῥέον μὴ δάκνει[23] *τε καὶ ἐξελκοῖ· καὶ ἢν μὴ δάκνῃ, ἀπὸ τοῦ ἐγκεφάλου φάναι εἶναι τὸ ῥεῦμα, ἢν δὲ δάκνῃ, ἀπὸ τῆς κοιλίης. (ed. Bourbon)*

If the uterus becomes inflated with an inflammation, wind collects in it and menses happen to be white and phlegmatic, and sometimes blood is thin, filled with membranous. The woman has no desire to have intercourse with her husband, on account of her moistness, and she becomes pallid and thin. Therefore, you must ask this patient whether the flux bits her and causes an ulceration. If it is not biting, indicate that the flux is coming from the brain, but if it is, then from the cavity. (trans. Potter, modified)

It is not explicitly stated whether the metaphorical use of δάκνω originates from the patient herself. However, it appears likely, as the physician assumes that his question is easily comprehensible to the patient. Nevertheless, further analysis is required to examine the usage and pattern of this question, as this passage seems to be noteworthy for several reasons. Firstly, it demonstrates the active involvement of the female patient in the diagnostic process[24]. Secondly, her response is considered a symptom, possibly due to its recurrent nature. Thirdly, as mentioned earlier, both the answer and the question contain a metaphor, the "biting" pain, which is commonly found in the *CH*[25]. Fourthly, the fact that this metaphor is also used in reference to male patients indicates a shared figurative expression employed by both genders[26]. Lastly, the presence of this metaphor in both the question and the answer supports the notion that figurative language is part of the shared imagery and communication system between physicians and patients[27].
The "biting" metaphor is also found in the *De mulierum affectibus* (II 176 L. = II 67 P.), where the case of "dropsy" of the womb is discussed. However, this chapter is noteworthy not only for the use of the metaphor but also for another linguistic element, namely the simile of the brine (ἅλμη), which describes a specific type of pain:

Ὑδέρου μητρέων· ὕφαιμόν τι ῥέει ἰχωροειδὲς, καὶ καθαίρεται, καὶ δάκνει σφόδρα καὶ ἑλκοῖ ὥσπερ ἅλμη τὰ αἰδοῖα καὶ τὰ πέριξ, καὶ ὅκου ἂν ἐπιστάξῃ ἑλκοῖ, καὶ ἡ χροιὴ ἰκτερώδης· τὰ δὲ ἄλλα καθαίρεται πλῆθος, ὥσπερ ἐν τοῖσιν ἄλλοισι ῥόοισιν.

Dropsy of the uterus: the menstrual flux is between bloody and serous, and it is discharged, and it bits intensely, and it ulcerates the genitalia and the area around them as brine would: wherever it drips it causes ulceration, and the skin looks yellowish. Otherwise, the volume of cleaning is as with fluxes in general. (trans. Potter, modified)

The identical phrasing (with the addition of the verb ἐσθίω, emphasizing the "eating" metaphor)[28] can also be observed in chapter II 122 (L. = II 13 P.). This further attests to the consistent manipulation of certain foundational texts or models, which were continuously expanded upon and revised with minor modifications:

Ῥόου ἰχωροειδέος θεραπείη· ῥέει ὕφαιμον, οἷόν περ ἀπὸ κρεῶν ὀπτῶν χυμὸς, καὶ δάκνει ὡς ἅλμη, καὶ ἐσθίει καὶ ἐξελκοῖ τὰ αἰδοῖα, καὶ ἡ ὑστέρη ἀνελκοῦται, καὶ τὰ πέριξ καὶ τοὺς μηροὺς καὶ τὰ ἄλλα· ἐπειδὰν ἐπιστάξῃ ἐπὶ τὰ ἱμάτια, βάπτεται, καὶ δύσπλυτα ἐμμένει.

Therapy for a serous flux that appears somewhat bloody like the juice from roasting meat, bits like brine, and eats and ulcerates the genitalia; the uterus becomes ulcerated, as do the area around it, the thighs, and other regions. Wherever drops fall on the bedding, they produce stains which are difficult to wash out. (trans. Potter, modified)

The pain metaphorically "bites" and even "eats" the patient's pudendum. This repeated utilization of the same semantic field serves as a means for both the patient and physician to better understand each other. However, within this overarching metaphor, a second image emerges: the simile of the brine (ἅλμη). This latter image is less commonly used, appearing only twice in the *CH*, specifically in the aforementioned passages. While we cannot be certain, it is likely that this simile originates from the female patient herself. Such pain was undoubtedly a deeply personal and internal experience, as she alone had access to the suffering in her pudendum. Therefore, it is reasonable to believe that she was the one to initially employ the image of the brine to describe the nature of her sensation. Physicians, in turn, had to accept it at face value, carefully recording it, which allowed it to endure over centuries until the present day.

Bibliography and notes

Andò V(ed.), Ippocrate, Natura della donna. Milano: Rizzoli; 2000.
Bourbon F(ed.), Hippocrate, Nature de la femme. Paris: Les Belles Lettres; 2008.
Dean-Jones LA, Women's bodies in Classical Greek science. Oxford: Oxford University Press; 1994.
Delle Donne C, Searching for a Dialogue. The Need to Share a Common Language in Greek Medical Writings. AION 2020;42:1-18.
Delle Donne C, Con gli occhi di chi soffre. Metafore dei pazienti da Ippocrate a Galeno. Technai 2021;12:9-24.

Delle Donne C, Metaphors they lived by. Patients' figurative language in ancient Greek medical works. In: Damiani V(ed.), Greco-Roman Medicine in Literature and Language, Heidelberg: Heidelberg University Press; 2023 (forthcoming).
Di Benedetto V, Il medico e la malattia. La scienza di Ippocrate. Torino: Einaudi; 1986.
Garofalo I, La terminologia e la fisiologia del dolore tra Ippocrate e Galeno. I Quaderni del Ramo d'Oro 1998;2:159-174.
Jouanna J, Médecine et protection. Essai sur une archéologie philologique des formes de pensée. In: Lassere F, Mudry P(eds), Formes de pensée dans la Collection hippocratique. Genève: Droz; 1983. pp. 31-39.
Jouanna J, La maladie dévorante: existe-t-il un présent moyen de ἐσθίω?. In: Actas del VII Congreso Español de Estudios Clásicos. Vol. I. Madrid: Universidad Complutense de Madrid; 1989. pp. 199-208.
Jouanna J, Réflexions sur l'imaginaire de la thérapeutique dans la Grèce classique. In: Garofalo I, Lami A, Manetti D, Roselli A (eds), Aspetti della terapia nel Corpus Hippocraticum. Atti del IX Colloque International Hippocratique, Pisa 25-29 settembre 1996. Firenze: Olschki; 1999. pp. 13-42.
Jouanna J, Hippocrate. Pour une Archéologie de l'École de Cnide. Paris: Les Belles Lettres; 2009².
Jouanna J, Disease As Aggression in the Hippocratic Corpus and Greek Tragedy: Wild and Devouring Disease. In: Jouanna J (ed.), Greek Medicine from Hippocrates to Galen: Selected Papers. Leiden-Boston: Brill; 2012. pp. 81-96.
Jouanna J, Grmek DM(eds), Hippocrate. Epidemies V et VII. Paris: Les Belles Lettres; 2003.
King H, Hippocrates' Woman, London-New York: Routledge; 1998.
Lloyd GE, Scienza, folclore, ideologia. Le scienze della vita nella Grecia antica. Torino: Einaudi; 1987.
Manuli PE, Donne mascoline, femmine sterili, vergini perpetue: la ginecologia greca tra Ippocrate e Sorano. In: Campese S, Manuli PE, Sissa G(eds), Madre materia: sociologia e biologia della donna greca. Torino: Boringhieri; 1983. pp. 149-204.
Mirto MS, La penetrazione del dolore: l'etimologia di ὀδύνη tra Omero e Platone. Hermes 2011;139(2):147-162.
Roselli A, Manetti D (eds), Ippocrate, Epidemie. Libro sesto. Firenze: La Nuova Italia; 1982.
Roselli A, Come dire il dolore. Galeno e il linguaggio dei medici e dei malati. Antiquorum Philosophia 2015;9:55-68.
Smith WD (ed.), Hippocrates. Volume VII. Cambridge (MA)/London: Loeb; 1994.
Vegetti M, Tra Edipo e Euclide. Milano: Saggiatore; 1981.
Thumiger C, Patient function and physician function in the Epidemics cases. In: Petridou G, Thumiger C (eds), Homo Patiens – Approaches to the Patient in the Ancient World. Leiden-Boston: Brill; 2015. pp. 107-137.
Thumiger C, Phrenitis and the Pathology of the Mind in Western Medical Thought. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press; 2023 (forthcoming).

1. See Andò V(ed.), Ippocrate, Natura della donna. Milano: Rizzoli; 2000. pp. 42-46; Dean-Jones LA, Women's bodies in Classical Greek science. Oxford: Oxford University Press; 1994. pp. 26-40; King H, Hippocrates' Woman. London-New York: Routledge; 1998. pp. 157-171; Lloyd GE, Scienza, folclore, ideologia. Le scienze della vita nella Grecia antica. Torino: Einaudi; 1987. pp. 60-65; Manuli PE, Donne mascoline, femmine sterili, vergini perpetue: la ginecologia greca tra Ippocrate e Sorano. In: Campese S, Manuli PE, Sissa G

(eds), Madre materia: sociologia e biologia della donna greca. Torino: Boringhieri; 1983. pp. 149-204.

2. A plausible hypothesis suggests that Hippocratic authors relied on oral traditions regarding female diseases, which likely originated from female patients themselves. Physicians may have had a direct acquaintance with the female body, but they could also have relied on bodily inspections performed by the patients themselves. Moreover, trained midwives too could have served as intermediaries in this process: Manuli PE, Ref. 1. In terms of the medical relationship, the *CH* occasionally presents female contribution to diagnosis as necessary and beneficial; however, there are also passages where such contributions are severely judged and, consequently, undermined: see Dean-Jones LA, Ref. 1; Andò V, Ref. 1, pp. 42-46 stresses the role played by female patients in the medical relationship. This ambiguity also extends to the involvement of male patients: Delle Donne C, Searching for a Dialogue. The Need to Share a Common Language in Greek Medical Writings. AION 2020;42:1-18 (where complete bibliography is mentioned and discussed).
3. *Ep*. VI 8, 10: Τὰκ τῆς γνώμης, ξύννοια, αὐτὴ καθ' ἑωυτὴν, χωρὶς τῶν ὀργάνων καὶ τῶν πρηγμάτων, ἄχθεται, καὶ ἥδεται, καὶ φοβεῖται, καὶ θαρσέει, καὶ ἐλπίζει, καὶ ἀδοξέει, οἷον ἡ Ἱπποθόου οἰκουρὸς, τῆς γνώμης αὐτῆς καθ' ἑωυτὴν ἐπίστημος ἐοῦσα τῶν ἐν τῇ νούσῳ ἐπιγενομένων. See also *Septim*. 4: Χρὴ δὲ οὐκ ἀπιστέειν τῇσι γυναιξὶ περὶ τῶν τόκων· λέγουσι γὰρ πάντα καὶ αἰεὶ λέγουσι καὶ αἰεὶ ἐρέουσιν· οὐ γὰρ ἂν πεισθείησαν οὔτ' ἔργῳ οὔτε λόγῳ, ἀλλ' ὅτι γνῶναι τὸ ἐν τοῖσι σώμασιν αὐτέων γινόμενον. See the commentary by Roselli A, Manetti D (eds), Ippocrate, Epidemie. Libro sesto. Firenze: La Nuova Italia; 1982.
4. *Ep*. IV 6: Μεθ' ἡλίου τοῦ θερινοῦ ἡ Ἀχελώου ἑκταίη ἀπέφθειρεν, ἐμετώδης ἐοῦσα καὶ φρικώδης· καὶ ἱδρῶτες· κρίσις, τεσσαρεσκαιδεκάτῃ· ὁποσάμηνον οὐκ οἶδα· ἄρσεν δὲ καὶ ἄλλο πρὸς τὰς εἴκοσιν ἔφη, εἰ ἀληθέα, οὐκ οἶδα.
5. Delle Donne C, Con gli occhi di chi soffre. Metafore dei pazienti da Ippocrate a Galeno. Technai 2021;12:9-24; Delle Donne C, Metaphors they lived by. Patients' figurative language in ancient Greek medical works. In: Damiani V(ed.), Greco-Roman Medicine in Literature and Language. Trier: Jarbuch Literatur und Medizin; 2023, forthcoming (also for supplementary bibliography).
6. On this issue, see the splendid paper by Roselli A, Come dire il dolore. Galeno e il linguaggio dei medici e dei malati. Antiquorum Philosophia 2015;9:55-68; see also Garofalo I, La terminologia e la fisiologia del dolore tra Ippocrate e Galeno. I Quaderni del Ramo d'Oro 1998;2:159-174 and Mirto MS, La penetrazione del dolore: l'etimologia di ὀδύνη tra Omero e Platone. Hermes 2011;139(2):147-162.
7. Jouanna J, Grmek DM (eds), Hippocrate. Epidemies V et VII. Paris: Les Belles Lettres; 2003. p. 196, n. 8.
8. In epic literature, the verb occurs in Hom. *Il*. 8,402 and 416, and in Hes. *Th*. 858, whence Hermoptolemus' wife might have derived it (in this case, she was likely to be well-educated).
9. See also Thumiger C, Patient function and physician function in the Epidemics cases. In: Petridou G, Thumiger C (eds), Homo Patiens – Approaches to the Patient in the Ancient World. Leiden-Boston: Brill; 2015. p. 120.
10. See Jouanna J, Hippocrate. Pour une Archéologie de l'École de Cnide. Paris: Les Belles Lettres; 2009.
11. See Jouanna J, Grmek DM, Ref. 8.
12. The disease is lilely to be angina, as Jouanna J, Grmek DM, Ref. 8. p. 29 n. 5 observe.

13. Jouanna J, Grmek DM, Ref. 8. p. 161, n. 8 correctly observe that the first girl dies in winter, whereas the second in summer. This makes even more remarkable the reuse of the same clinical record.
14. On this passage see also Thumiger C, Ref. 10. p. 121.
15. See Jouanna J, Grmek DM, Ref. 8. p. 29 n. 2 on the so-called ἐγγαστρίμυθοι.
16. See Delle Donne C, Ref. 6 (the paper forthcoming in 2023).
17. Di Benedetto V, Il medico e la malattia. La scienza di Ippocrate. Torino: Einaudi; 1986. pp. 126-142.
18. See Thumiger C, Phrenitis and the Pathology of the Mind in Western Medical Thought. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press; 2023 (forthcoming).
19. See the evidence discussed by Delle Donne C, Ref. 6 (the paper forthcoming in 2023).
20. On fighting/attacking/assaulting images in medical literature, see Vegetti M, Tra Edipo e Euclide. Milano: Saggiatore; 1981. pp. 41-58.
21. Jouanna prints φολιδοειδέα, "scaly", which is an emendation of φολιδοειδές, the *textus traditus* by **θ** (*Vindobonensis med. gr*. 4, XI saec.). Jouanna's reading is equally sound and appropriate (and it is a *lectio difficilior*, as φολιδοειδής never occurs again in the *CH*).
22. See also *Aff. Int*. 7 and *Morb*. II 58 (all of them derive from the same model).
23. The same association occurs at *Mul*. 57 (which is a double of *Nat. mul*. 10: καὶ εἰ δάκνοι τὸ ῥέον καὶ ἕλκοῖ τὰ ἀμφίδεα, χρόνιον φάναι τὸ ῥεῦμα), 90 (Ὅταν δὲ ὕδωρ ἐκ τῶν ὑστερέων ῥέῃ καὶ ἕλκεα ᾖ καὶ δάκνηται).
24. This assumption is defended by Andò V, Ref. 1. p. 43.
25. Jouanna J, La maladie dévorante: existe-t-il un présent moyen de ἐσθίω?. In: Actas del VII Congreso Español de Estudios Clásicos. Vol. I. Madrid: Universidad Complutense de Madrid; 1989. pp. 199-208. Jouanna J, Disease As Aggression in the Hippocratic Corpus and Greek Tragedy: Wild and Devouring Disease. In: Jouanna J (ed.), Greek Medicine from Hippocrates to Galen: Selected Papers. Leiden-Boston: Brill; 2012. pp. 81-96.
26. See, e.g., the (aforementioned) *De morbis* III 7.
27. As Roselli A, Ref. 7 effectively shows.
28. Jouanna J, Ref. 26 (the paper published in 1989).