The term ‘Hippocrates’ can have two meanings: in a narrow sense, it refers to the classical Greek doctor, a contemporary of Socrates, who originally came from the island of Cos and belonged to a family of Asclepiads. His fame in his own lifetime is attested by two references in Plato’s Protagoras and Phaedrus. In a wider sense, ‘Hippocrates’ refers to the collection of some sixty medical writings transmitted under his name in medieval manuscripts. Although we might reasonably attribute some of these writings to Hippocrates’ hand (without having absolute criteria with which to identify them), it is clear that not all of them could have been written by the same person. Some are works by his students. For example, one of the most famous treatises of the Hippocratic Corpus, the Nature of Man, known above all for its theory of the four humours which constitute human beings (blood, phlegm, yellow bile and black bile), was written by Polybus, Hippocrates’ student and son-in-law. However, alongside the group of writings originating from the Hippocratic School, or the School of Cos, there is a group of nosological treatises that originate from another medical centre, the Asclepiads of Cnidus. Finally, there are other treatises, philosophical in nature, which form a third group and are of unknown origin. Thus, the Corpus is composed of writings of various kinds. Moreover, the treatises that comprise it were not written at the same time. The majority belong to the second half of the fifth century or the start of the fourth century; thus, they are contemporary with Hippocrates. However, other treatises date from the period of Aristotle or later. Nevertheless, despite these differences in origin or date, the Hippocratic Corpus presents an undeniable unity.

This unity stems primarily from the fact that all the authors practice a rational medicine. At first sight, the attitude of these doctors towards the sacred, when they talk about it, is fairly homogeneous. In adherence with the rationalism of the century of Pericles, they criticise (sometimes vigorously, as we will see below) those doctors who believe that a disease may be

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caused by the intervention of a particular deity, and they contrast a divine cause with a rational one. They even criticise those seers or interpreters of dreams who cross into the domain of medicine. However, we should not infer, as is often done, that the rationalism of the Hippocratic doctors is opposed to the notion of the divine, or is incompatible with traditional religion. Indeed, we will see below that the situation is more blurred: one doctor’s position on the problem of the sacred is not necessarily the same as another’s, and in the treatise in which attacks against magico-religious medicine are most impassioned, traditional sanctuary religion is not called into question. In order to obtain a better understanding of this two-sided attitude of the writers of the Hippocratic Corpus, we will in the third part of this paper examine not only the written works, as philologists do, but attempt to place these ideas on the sacred and the divine in the historical context of the life of Hippocrates of Cos, a member of the Asclepiad family, and examine, using literary and epigraphic evidence, the relationship of the Asclepiads with the important healing sanctuaries of Asclepius or Apollo at Delphi.

The Hippocratic doctors’ rationalist attitude towards the sacred is particularly apparent regarding what the ancients called the ‘sacred disease’, and what we call epilepsy. Contrary to what we might believe, the term ‘sacred disease’ is not a fifth-century lay equivalent of a technical term for a disease. We find the term in the medical texts of the Hippocratic Corpus. For example, the author of the gynaecological treatise Diseases of Women, when describing the symptoms of an affliction of women who suddenly lose their ability to speak, says that they exhibit “the same symptoms as someone afflicted by the sacred disease.” Since the ‘sacred disease’ is used here as a reference, in a technical treatise, to describe another disease, it clearly described an affliction that was well known by doctors, and the term ‘sacred disease’, whose symptoms were codified, was clearly accepted by specialists. We could draw the same conclusion from the first attestation of the ‘sacred disease’ outside the technical writings of the Hippocratic Corpus, in Herodotus: Cambyses, having sacrilegiously struck the ox Apis, becomes mad and murders his brother and his wife (who was also his sister). Thus,


2 Hippocr. mulier. morb. 2.151 = 8.326,17 L. καὶ τὰ ἄλλα ἄτα καὶ ἵππης νούσου ἑπιλήπτοι πάσχουσι.
his acts of madness against his relatives appear to be the result of a direct infraction against the sacred. However, Herodotus, without taking a position on the cause of this madness, reports another possible explanation:

It is said that Cambyses was afflicted from birth by a grave disease, which some call the sacred disease. It is likely that since his body suffered from a grave disease, he did not have a healthy mind either.\(^3\)

From this passage, it is clear that the expression ‘sacred disease’ was already known in Herodotus’ time to describe a specific and particularly grave disease that could afflict the individual from birth. However, the expression does not seem to have been in popular usage, since Herodotus clarifies that it concerns a disease “that some call sacred.”\(^4\) Thus, only a category of people would have called it by this name. The indefinite pronoun τίνες does not allow us to be more precise about whom it refers. However, since this second hypothesis on Cambyses’ madness aims to substitute a medical explanation for a purely religious one, and since the term ‘sacred disease’ serves, in this context, to describe the nature of the grave disease that Cambyses had since birth, this method of designating the disease was probably a technical expression, as it is in the Hippocratic treatise Diseases of Women mentioned above. Moreover, it is paradoxical to claim that the ‘sacred disease’ in Herodotus presents a rational explanation of hereditary madness, in contrast with a religious explanation based on the direct intervention of a divinity. Even after the Hippocratic Corpus, the ‘sacred disease’ remained the technical name of the affliction, at least in certain authors. Indeed, Aristotle’s student, Theophrastus, in his History of Plants, speaks of the plant called Heraclean, whose root, mixed with seal’s milk, is effective against the ‘sacred disease’;\(^5\) Theophrastus does not add anything to specify the disease further, which indicates that the term was still current in the fourth century.

However, most of the passages of the Hippocratic Corpus that discuss the ‘sacred disease’,\(^6\) such as Breaths\(^7\) or The Sacred Disease,\(^8\) include the participle καλεομένη, so we would better translate it as the ‘disease called

\(^3\) Herodotus, 3.33.
\(^4\) Ibid. νούσον μεγάλην ... τὴν ιρήν ὀνομάζουσι τίνες.
\(^5\) Theophr. Hist. plant. 9.11.3 τῆς ἱερᾶς νόσου.
\(^6\) The expression is found in six different treatises of different origin: some are thought to come from the School of Cos, such as Airs, Waters, Places and The Sacred Disease; others come from the School of Cnidus, such as Diseases of Women 2 or Diseases of Girls; others are of debated origin, such as the treatise Breaths or Proorrhetic 2.
\(^7\) Hipp. Flat. 14 = 6.110,14 L. = p. 121,6 Jouanna τὴν ιρήν καλεομένην νούσον.
\(^8\) Id. Morb. sacr. 1 = 6.352,1 L. = p. 60,1 Grensemann τῆς ἱερῆς νούσου καλεομένης.
sacred’. This phrase is basically a way of underlining that this expression—if I may say so—is established in the technical use of medical prose; the term epilepsy (ἐπιληψία) was still not used in the fifth century to describe this illness. However, most doctors of the Hippocratic Corpus also feel the need to clarify the disease ‘called’ sacred to distance it from a traditional meaning that did not correspond to their understanding of this disease. In fact, none of the Hippocratic authors attribute a sacred character to it. The explanations that they propose can be very different: according to some, it is a perturbation of the movement of the blood, according to others a perturbation of the movement of the air; according to some, the affected part of the body is the brain, according to others the heart or the diaphragm. However, despite these differences, the rationalist spirit that overarches these explanations is fundamentally the same: disturbances stemming from natural causes.

Some of the Hippocratic doctors limit themselves to expounding their rational theories about this disease, as they would do for every other affliction, and do not pay attention to its name and the religious substrate of the presumably divine origin behind it. For example, the author of Breaths, who proposes to show in his epidictic discourse that all diseases have a single origin, the air, takes the case of the ‘disease called sacred’ as a single example amongst others (ch. 14), and explains it by a perturbation of the movements of the blood, the source of intelligence, caused by an excessive quantity of air in the body. However, other Hippocratic doctors criticise those who believe in the divine origin of the ‘sacred disease’. There is a very significant, but little known, example. Discussing the ‘disease called sacred’ that affects girls of marrying age when they remain unmarried, the author of the work Diseases of Girls describes their delirium during the crisis and gives it a rational explanation, blaming a flow of blood that is carried to the heart and diaphragm, instead of being evacuated through the uterus. He adds:

When the girl becomes calm again, the women dedicate many general offerings to Artemis, and in particular the most beautiful female clothes, following recommendations from the seers (τῶν μάντεων); but they are completely misled. Liberation from this disease occurs when the flow of blood is not blocked. I recommend to girls who are afflicted by such a complaint that they get married as soon as possible because, once pregnant, they are cured.

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9 On the perturbation of the blood’s movements, cf. Flat. 14; on the perturbation of the air’s movements, cfr. Morb. sacr. 7; for a discussion on the affected part of the body, cfr. Morb. sacr. 17.

There is radical contrast between the doctor and the seers. The seers believe in the divine origin of the disease in these women and attribute it to the virgin Artemis. Thus, after the crisis they recommend making offerings to the goddess to thank and placate her, in this way preventing the return of another crisis. The Hippocratic author counters the recommendations of the seers with his own recommendation: not to be concerned about moral or religious taboo and to encourage the woman to get married as soon as possible, so that the obstacle that impedes the flow of blood will disappear. The doctor’s short, yet vigorous, attack against the seers, whom he accuses of deceiving the patient and those nearby, suggests in reality a harsh rivalry between doctors and seers at the patient’s bedside.

Such a forceful attack against seers is rare in the Hippocratic Corpus, but it is not unique. The author of *Regimen in Acute Diseases* warns his colleagues against inconsistencies in the treatment of acute diseases, contradictions that, like those of the seers, risk discrediting the entire medical art:

> Since if, in the most acute diseases, practitioners differ so much among themselves that those prescriptions judged best by one are held to be bad by another, laymen might say that the art (of medicine) resembles augury, since augurs (οἱ μάντες) hold that the same bird, if seen on the left hand, is good but, if on the right, bad; whilst some think the opposite.\(^{11}\)

He adds that such contradictions are also observed in haruspicy. This passage is exceptional for its content, since there is no other Greek text which indicates that the left side was judged favourable by some Greek seers; conversely, in its spirit it adheres to the rationalism of the century of Pericles and is a forerunner of Cicero’s criticism who, in his *De divinatione*, compares Greek divination, in which the right side is favourable, to Roman divination, where the left side is favourable.\(^{12}\) These are the only two passages of the Hippocratic Corpus in which seers are attacked.

Returning to the ‘sacred disease’, seers are not the only people who, according to the Hippocratic Corpus, believe in the divine origin of this disease and deceive patients. There was also a certain category of healers criticised with unusual vigour and breadth by the author of *The Sacred Disease*, who does not believe in a particularly sacred character of this disease.

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\(^{11}\) Id. *morb. acut*. 3 = 2.240,10–244,1 L. = p. 39,12–20 Joly.

The Hippocratic author refrains from giving his adversaries the title of ‘doctor’; he speaks instead of “those who first attributed a sacred character to this disease.”

We find here again the theme of ‘first inventor’ (πρώτος εὑρέτης), so dear to fifth-century enlightenment; we can compare this passage in particular to the tragedy of the Sophist Critias, Sisyphus, about a man who “invented the belief in the gods.” Whilst the mention of the first inventor is usually accompanied by a eulogy of his discovery (Critias in particular praises the salutary fear inspired in men by belief in the gods), in the Hippocratic treatise it leads to an unusually forceful condemnation.

To reconstruct the state of mind of those past men who sacralised the disease, the Hippocratic author compares these first inventors of the disease to those who are, in his time, “magicians, seers and charlatans.”

To understand the forcefulness of this attack, we might compare it to a scene in Sophocles’ Oedipus Rex when Oedipus, angered by his argument with Tiresias, who has just revealed a truth which he does not want to believe, accuses the soothsayer of being a ‘deceiver’ (line 387 μάχον) and ‘mountebank’ (388 ἀγυρτην). Not only are these two terms analogous, but the accusations are also similar. Before Oedipus accused Tiresias of being a deceiver and mountebank, he firstly accused him of being blind to his art (388 f.). These two accusations are found in The Sacred Disease. It is “due to their lack of means” that some healers attributed the cause of each variety of the ‘disease called sacred’ to a god. However, in the Hippocratic treatise this accusation is secondary, whilst the second, incompetence in the art, is fundamental; according to the Hippocratic author, this is the origin of the belief in the sacred nature of the disease. This is how he unravels the behaviour of those who sacralised the disease and denounces their position: “These people,” he declares, “using the divine as a veil and defence to hide their own inability to give any useful prescription, suggested that this disease was sacred in order to avoid that their total ignorance be obvious.”

The criticism is very outspoken, no less than that of Oedipus against Tiresias.
Just like, according to Oedipus, the seer is blind to the art of divination, so, according to Hippocratic medicine, healers that sacralised the disease are totally ignorant of the art of medicine. Just as Oedipus wishes to uncover the deception of the seer that acts with hidden cunning to deceive him, the Hippocratic author denounces the imposture of healers that use the divine to deceive patients.

The connection between a speech delivered by a character in a theatrical play, who speaks in a fit of anger (as the chorus lets us know (line 405)), and the speech of a scientist who defends a rational conception of medicine, casts new light on the passionate polemic that the rationalist doctors mounted against supporters of magico-religious medicine. The author of *The Sacred Disease* is so forceful in his criticism because his adversaries were more significant than we might think. In a period in which the medical profession was not guaranteed by titles, and the community of citizens, concerned about traditional religion and accustomed to hearing about the healing gods in the theatre, recruited public doctors in a democratic city such as Athens in the people’s assembly, the competition between enlightened doctors, sensitive to the interests of the patient and those of the charlatans, who profited from peoples’ superstition and ignorance, could be as lively as the rivalry between seers and doctors.

Moreover, while denouncing his adversaries’ total ignorance of the art, the author of *The Sacred Disease* recognises that they have a certain ability both to hide their ignorance and to appear knowledgeable. To hide their ignorance, they blame the gods when a patient dies, but take full credit when the patient is cured. In order to appear to possess a superior knowledge, they draw on numerous and different skills. The author uses a specific vocabulary to qualify this cunning behaviour of his adversaries: ‘contriving’ (μηχανάω), ‘trickery’ (τεχνάω, τέχνημα), ‘embellishment’ (ποικιλλῶ) and ‘forgery’ (προσποιέομαι). Such skills are used both in the diagnosis and in the treatment, although the best known concern the treatment: these treatments simultaneously combine magico-religious practice (such as purifications and incantations), which rational medicine condemns, with dietary prohibitions, recognised as fundamental by rational medicine. Less known, but perhaps more revealing of their ability, are the subtle distinctions that they make in the diagnosis, as testified by a further very interesting passage from *The Sacred Disease*:

If the patient imitates a goat, grinds his teeth, or has convulsions on his right side, they say that the Mother of the gods is responsible; if he speaks in a sharper and more intense tone, they compare this state to a horse and say that Poseidon is responsible; if any faeces are involuntarily passed, which is often
the case owing to the violence of the disease, the name of the goddess Enodia is blamed; if the faeces are thin, like a bird's, and passed more frequently, it is said to be from Apollo Nomius; and if the patient foams from the mouth and kicks with his feet, Ares is responsible; for those who panic during the night, have terrors and delirium, jump out of bed and escape from the house, they say that they are assaulted by Hecate or the heroes.19

We should be thankful for the Hippocratic author for having preserved such a clear testimonium about the manner in which his adversaries, advocates of divine medicine, make refined use of differences between the symptoms of crises in order to distinguish the considerable variety displayed by the ‘sacred disease’, and to attribute its cause to different divinities. The belief that the patient may be possessed by different divinities is probably very old; in particular, we note that Poseidon appears here mounted on a horse, which corresponds to the most archaic aspect of the god.20 This belief certainly corresponded to popular credence, even in the age of Pericles, as a comparison with the parodos of Euripides’ Hippolytus suggests, where the chorus of women from Troezen, having just learned of Phaedra’s disease, asks about the different divinities who might be its cause:

Oh young girl, has some god, Pan or Hecate, possessed you? Do your wits wander under the spell of the august Corybantes or the Mother who rules over the mountains? Are you being consumed for some fault against Dictynna the great huntress, having failed to offer her victims in sacrifice?21

The two lists of divinities are comparable. We find Hecate and also a divinity called Mother (the mother of the gods in Hippocrates, the Mother ruling over the mountains in Euripides). However, neither this evidence for popular belief, nor the oversimplified criticism of the Hippocratic author should hide the fact that religious medicine was able to rival rational medicine. The diagnostic principle of the practitioners of magico-religious medicine consists in making subtle distinctions between symptoms and then to make them correspond to the varieties of diseases. This is the same principle that we find in the Cnidian nosologic treatises of the Hippocratic Corpus, where the subtle variation of some symptoms allowed doctors to distinguish varieties of diseases. Of course there were fundamental differences, since the former attribute these variations of a disease to divine powers, the latter to natural phenomena. However, the magico-religious medicine as it

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appears from the Hippocratic author’s perspective, however distorted, does not show the miraculous and incredible character of the tales of healers that are preserved on the stelae at Epidaurus. It is possible that magico-religious medicine was able to reach a certain level of sophistication at the same time in which rational medicine developed. This explains a certain paradoxical aspect of the Hippocratic author’s criticism, which on the one hand relegates his adversaries to common charlatans, yet on the other hand also recognises their sophisticated ability and some positive knowledge of the diet that can harm the patient.

The ‘disease called sacred’ is not the only affliction in the Hippocratic Corpus that provokes criticism of the belief in its divine origin. Chapter 22 of *Airs, Waters, Places*, an ethnographic section in which Europe and Asia are compared, is dedicated to refuting the belief that the impotence of some Scythians is caused by a divinity. The author tells us about the fate of these Scythians, called Anarieis, who become similar to eunuchs:

When they approach a woman but cannot have intercourse, at first they take no notice and think no more about it. But when two, three or even more attempts are made with no better success, they think that they have sinned against a god (τῶν θεῶν), to whom they attribute the cause, and they put on women’s clothes, holding that they have lost their manhood, speak like a woman and do the same work as women do.22

The author adds that other people bowed down before them, because they believed that these men were sacred, and they were afraid of being struck by the same disease. The author contrasts his rational explanation with this religious one. Far from attributing it to the guilt committed by a man in the eyes of a particular divinity, the affliction is explained by the Scythians’ way of life, since they are always riding horses, which alters the seminal vessels, and by a treatment that does more harm than good: at the onset of the disease, they cut the vessels behind the ear; according to the author, this operation subsequently alters the vessels of the seminal liquid.

This rejection of religious belief has a less-marked controversial tone than in *The Sacred Disease*. The reason is that the author is not dealing with potential competitors. Indeed, this is not an opinion sustained by doctors or pretend doctors, but a belief shared by a populace outside the territory where Hippocratic doctors practised medicine, i.e. the Greek islands of Cos and Thasos, and also northern Greece, Thessaly, Macedonia and the Greek cities of the Thracian coast.

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However, the Hippocratic author’s position stands out better if we contrast it with that of Herodotus. The historian twice discusses the Scyths mentioned above in his *Histories* (1.105 and 4.67); he calls them Enareis, not Anarieis. His testimony clarifies that of the Hippocratic author about the identity of the divinity who causes the disease. It is the goddess Aphrodite, who inflicts this female disease on the descendants of some Scythians responsible for having sacked her temple in Ascalon. However, whilst the Hippocratic author persists largely in refuting such a religious explanation to substitute it with a rational one, Herodotus presents only the religious explanation, and it does not occur to him to doubt it. Thus, the permanent character of this disease that affects part of the Scythian population finds in the historian and the doctor two decisively different explanations. In the historian, the perennial nature of the religious offence is transmitted from generation to generation in the families whose ancestors committed it; in the doctor, it is the persistence of a way of life, horse riding, in the well-off classes of Scythian society. The historian adheres to the kind of causality that runs through the myth of cursed families, which is so widespread in Athenian tragic theatre, whilst the doctor proposes a natural explanation for this disease, as for others: “Every disease,” proclaims ch. 22, “is produced by a natural cause.”

However, even when Hippocratic doctors use rational arguments to criticise the personal intervention of a divinity in the pathological sphere, they are careful not to contrast science with religion.

Significantly, both in *Airs, Waters, Places* and in *The Sacred Disease* a divine conception of disease is criticised, but the notion of the divine, far from being rejected, is preserved in the Hippocratic author, and given a new explanation instead. Thus, the author of *Airs, Waters, Places* does not oppose head on the explanation that the Scythian disease is divine. Indeed, having noted that the Scythians attribute the Anarieis’ impotence to a divinity, the author continues: “I too (ἐμοί δὲ καὶ ἀντίκα) think that these diseases are divine.” Translators do not generally translate καὶ ἀντίκα because they are subconsciously embarrassed by the rationalist doctor’s concession to a religious explanation. However, in the immediate sequel to this statement,

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23 Herodot., 1.105 δήλωσεν νοῦσον.
24 Hippocr., *Aer.* 22 = 2.78,1 L. = p. 72,16 f. Diller.
25 Ibid. = 2.76,16 f. L = p. 72,14 f. Diller.
26 Cfr. for example, Littré ad loc., “Pour moi, je pense que cette maladie vient de la divinité”; Diller ad loc. “Mir für meine Person scheinen diese Leiden ... göttlich zu sein.” On
apparently agreeing with popular belief, the author actually distances himself from it by giving a different explanation for the notion of divine: “these diseases are divine (θεία), and so are all others, none of them being more divine or more human than any other; all are alike and all are divine” (θεία). Thus, instead of a more or less obscure divine justice, which punishes the guilty with a disease, the Hippocratic doctor proclaims a universal order that is both divine and natural, which accounts for all diseases and frees the patient from all guilt. We find the same concept of the divine in The Sacred Disease, in terms that are so similar that we can conclude that the two treatises are by the same author. In particular, it is said in ch. 18 of The Sacred Disease: “There is no need to believe that this disease (called sacred) is more divine than any other, since all are divine (θεία) and all are human, and each disease has its natural cause (φύσιν) and its particular character.” This phrase is very similar to that found in Airs, Waters, Places. Here, too, the concept of the divine is defined in natural terms and deprived of all traditional anthropomorphic representation. Thanks to The Sacred Disease, we can give concrete examples of what the Hippocratic author considered as divine. In ch. 18 he says: “The ‘disease called sacred’ comes from the same causes as the other diseases, from what enters and exits the body, from the cold, from the sun and from the continuous and ever changing winds, which are all divine things.” Thus, what is considered divine (θεία) are the elements of the universe that have an effect on health or disease: the air that man inhales or exhales, the winds whose changes determine changes in the body, the sun and the cold. Thus, cosmological phenomena can cause or favour pathological processes in a man’s body. This is a far cry from the attribution of a disease to a particular divinity. Although of little formal importance, the use of the adjective θείος, ‘divine’, instead of the noun θεός, ‘god’, allows the change from a traditional concept of the gods to a rational concept of the divine.

Thus, should we conclude that if everything is divine, nothing is divine, and that the Hippocratic doctor pushes traditional religion to one side with

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the other hand, M. Vegetti ad loc. correctly translates: “Quanto a me, anch’io penso che questo male sia divino.”

such affirmations? The issue is more complex, since both treatises, which affirm this rational concept of the divine in identical terms, also discuss traditional religion. In *Airs, Waters, Places* (ch. 22), traditional religion, with its gods who are placated by receiving offers and sacrifices from men and who give them benefits in return, is used as a basis for arguing that the disease that afflicts the Scythians could not be attributed to a god because the impotence tends to afflict the rich, precisely those who have the means to honour the gods with offers and sacrifices. Thus, the traditional belief in the gods, far from being criticised, serves to denounce the falseness of the belief in the divine origin of a particular disease. In *The Sacred Disease*, the position of the doctor regarding traditional religion is even clearer. He defends traditional religion, accusing his adversaries of impiety and atheism: “It seems to me that their discourse is not pious, as they suppose, but rather impious and atheist; what for them is pious and divine, in reality is impious and unholy.” In particular, he highlights the impure and impious character of their treatment through purifications and incantations. Here is what he says:

> When they use purifications and incantations, they commit the most impure and impious acts, it seems to me, because they purify those who are possessed by a disease with blood and other similar things, as though they were polluted by some crime … whilst they should do the opposite, sacrifice, pray, and take the patients to the sanctuary to supplicate the gods; but in reality they do nothing of the sort, but they purify; and the objects that are used in the purification are sometimes buried, sometimes thrown into the sea, sometimes carried far into the mountains, where no one will touch them or tread on them, whilst they should take them to the sanctuaries to offer them to the gods, if indeed a god is the cause. 

The criticism of ritual practices of purification with blood recalls that of the philosopher Heraclitus, who said: “they try in vain to purify themselves with blood when they are not stained.” As in Heraclitus, this criticism of ritual is made with an elevated concept of divinity in mind: “They do not truly understand what the gods are,” says Heraclitus in the same passage. The Hippocratic doctor likewise contrasts his own purified concept of divinity with that of his adversaries, but he does so with a eulogy of the divine that is of exceptional depth, profundity and fervour:

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32 Ibid. = 6.362,6–16 L. = p. 66,6–15 Grens.
33 Heraclit., fr. 5 DK.
I do not believe that a man’s body can be polluted by a god, something which is more perishable by something which is purer; by contrast, if the body is polluted or affected by something else, the god can purify it and sanctify it, rather than polluting it. In any case, it belongs to the god to purify, sanctify and purge us from the greatest and most impious offences; we mark out the boundaries of the sanctuaries of the gods and their holy enclosures, so that no one may cross them unless he is pure and, when we enter them we are sprinkled with water, and we do this not because we think we are polluted, but to cancel any previously held impurity.\footnote{Hippocr., *morb. sacr.* 1 = 6.362,16–364, 8 = p. 66,15–22.}

The Hippocratic author does not draw radical conclusions from this purified conception of divinity, as Heraclitus does: whilst Heraclitus seems to question religious rites in general in the name of reason, both purifications and offerings to statues,\footnote{On Heraclitus’ position on the divine, cfr. D. Babut, *La religion des philosophes grecs*, Paris 1974, p. 28.} the Hippocratic doctor establishes a clear distinction between some cathartic practices and the rites of the religion of the sanctuaries. In the name of a purified conception of divinity, the author criticises some cathartic rites practiced by some individuals, but he justifies the rites of the religion of the sanctuaries, ablutions, sacrifices and offerings. Thus, two seemingly very different conceptions of the divine co-exist in the same doctor, but they do not appear contradictory to him: as a doctor, he believes in one single order of causality for all diseases, whatever they are, an order that is both divine and natural; as a citizen, he participates in the traditional cult of the sanctuaries, even though he questions some ritual practices that do not correspond to the pure idea he has of divinity.

Although θεον can describe for a Hippocratic doctor both divinity in the context of traditional polytheism and atmospheric phenomena that cause diseases, the meaning of the word θεον can sometimes be ambiguous. Thus, at the start of *Prognostic*, the Hippocratic author, having indicated that a doctor should know how to recognise, so as not to be biased, diseases whose strength is superior to that of the patient, declares: “He must know to what extent the nature of such afflictions exceeds the power of the body, and at the same time, if there is anything divine about the disease, the doctor should know how to prognosticate this, too.”\footnote{Hippocr., *Progn.* 1 = 2.112,3–6 L. = p. 194,3–5 Alexanderson.} From antiquity to the present day, translators have been divided on the use of θεον in this passage.\footnote{For debates on the meaning of θεον in the *Prognosis*, cfr. W. Nestle, “Hippocratica I. Der Begriff des θεον und δαιµονον,” in *Hermes* 73 (1938), pp. 1–8, and A. Thivel, “Le ‘divin’ dans la...
treatment from the doctor because they are caused by the gods? Or should we rather understand that θείον refers to the atmospheric factors that cause disease? The diversity of answers is explained in part by the fact that in the rest of the treatise, θείον is not used again. As a result, scholars are often led to justify an answer chosen with reference to other Hippocratic works.

In support of the first answer, that there can exist (albeit exceptionally) diseases caused by the gods and, consequently, not curable by medicine,\(^{38}\) we may quote the similar attitude of the Hippocratic author of Regimen regarding dreams. In ch. 87,\(^{39}\) the doctor distinguishes between ‘divine’ (θεῖα) dreams, sent from the gods to cities or individuals to announce to them a propitious or unpropitious event, pertinent to the art of interpreting dreams, and dreams arising from the soul and announcing the various states of the body, pertinent to medicine. According to the author of Prognostic, we could also infer that there is a category of diseases sent by the gods that are not pertinent to medicine.\(^{40}\) Nevertheless, it is difficult to rely on Regimen to explain Prognostic, since Regimen occupies a relatively exceptional place in the Hippocratic Corpus for its position regarding the sacred. Indeed, this treatise is the only one to recommend a combination of rational treatment and prayers to the gods; it goes so far as to indicate the names of the gods whom one should offer prayers to in cases where it is appropriate. Thus, the author says in ch. 89: “It is necessary to follow a regimen and pray to the gods, in the case of favourable signs to the Sun, Zeus of the Heavens, Zeus, protector of the hearth, Athena, protectress of the hearth, Hermes, Apollo; in the case of unfavourable signs, to the gods that protect against harm, the Earth and the heroes.”\(^{41}\)

Therefore, in order to explain the meaning of θείον in Prognostic, another group of translators work with the most representative treatises of the school of Hippocrates, above all the two treatises The Sacred Disease and Airs, Waters, Places, in which we find a ‘scientific’ conception of θείον. On

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\(^{38}\) For example, this was the position of E. Littré, Œuvres complètes d’Hippocrate, II, Paris 1840, pp. 99 f.; cfr. also Thivel, “Le ‘divin’ dans la Collection hippocratique,” cit., p. 60.


\(^{40}\) The distinction between two types of disease, one caused by the gods, the other spontaneous, is also made in a fragment of Euripides (fr. 292 Nauck).

this view, far from referring to divine intervention against which the doctor
would find himself helpless, θείον in Prognostic would mean all the external
factors, in particular climatic ones, that influence the disease. Galen, a
fervent supporter of such an interpretation, rightly noted that at the end
of the treatise (ch. 25), the author of Prognostic also urged the reader to
take into account the constitution of the season when making a prognosis
(ἔνθυμεσθαι τὴν τὲ τῆς ὁρῆς κατάστασιν). It is possible that the author of
Prognostic, in an attempt at ring composition, connected the θείον at the
start with the constitution of the seasons quoted at the end.

Whatever solution we might adopt to account for the divine in Prognostic,
two conclusions arise from examining the collection of texts that
discuss the sacred and the divine in the Hippocratic Corpus. The first is
that, despite a common element of rationalism that unites the treatises, it
would be futile to suggest that all the Hippocratic doctors held a uni-
fied position on the sacred. The second is that their rationalism, even in those
cases where they oppose superstition and magic, is not atheistic. The fifth-
century doctors’ rationalism is softer and more complex and malleable than
the rationalism of the nineteenth and twentieth century translators, who
sometimes had a tendency to force the opposition between the rational and
the divine, between reason and religion, whether it be in the text’s inter-
pretation, constitution or translation. With regard to the interpretation, the
case of Regimen appeared embarrassing, for this treatise, as well as founding
medicine on a rational cosmology whose principal bases are fire and water,
at the same time recommends prayers to the gods. Thus, a translator tried
to belittle what he thought to be a disagreement by attributing the men-
tion of prayers to a source that the author thought agreeable. Regarding
the constitution of the text, the most obvious example is that of the editor
of Hippocrates in the Teubner series, H. Kühlewein, who was unable to bear
the idea that the author of Prognostic allowed for divine interference in the
causation of disease, and suppressed in his edition the phrase containing the
word θείον. Other less visible alterations in the translation are just as reveal-
ing. We saw how in ch. 22 of Airs, Waters, Places, καὶ αὐτῷ was often left out
of the translation in order to contrast the doctor’s rationalism with Scythian

42 Galen, *In Hippocr. Progn.* 1.4 = pp. 205–209 Heeg. This interpretation of θείον in Prognostic has been taken by modern scholars from Nestle, “Hippocrativa I,” cit., p. 5.
43 In any case, it can only refer, in the mind of the author of Prognostic, to a secondary
element, which is not present in Airs, waters, places or The Sacred Disease.
superstition. Here is another example: a famous phrase from *Regimen*,\(^{47}\) καὶ τὸ μὲν εὔχεσθαι ὄγαθον: δεὶ δὲ καὶ αὐτὸν συλλαμβάνοντα τοὺς θεοὺς ἐπικαλεῖσθαι, appeared agreeable to two minds as different as A.-J. Festugière and Robert Joly, because they translate, along with Littré: “It is undoubtedly a good thing to pray; but, whilst invoking the gods, they must help themselves.”\(^{48}\) Unfortunately, this translation does not correspond exactly to the Greek; to arrive at the idea of “to help oneself,” it would be necessary to use not αὐτὸν but the dative reflexive ἐωντῷ. The meaning is more like: “It is undoubtedly a good thing to pray; but, whilst invoking the gods, they must also play their own part.” The difference is not insignificant. What one should do is not help oneself, but help the gods who are being invoked. The doctor recommends collaboration between men and gods, and knows well that man cannot be successful without the gods. He concludes his treatise by saying: “I have discovered a regimen, to the extent that this can be discovered by someone being only a man, with the help of the gods.”\(^{49}\) Conversely, man should make his own contributions, no matter how small, to facilitate the success of the divine action. The author of *Regimen* certainly occupies an exceptional place in the Hippocratic Corpus for his religious spirit, which is evident in his practice of the art; but for the author of *The Sacred Disease*, too, a ‘scientific’ concept of θείον does not exclude a ‘religious’ concept of θείον.

In short, the rationalism of Hippocratic doctors can conflict with some seers or charlatans, who practiced their art alongside the doctors; but it is never in conflict with the religion of the great sanctuaries.

In order to understand the Hippocratic doctors’ attitude better, we should compare their works with what we know about Hippocrates of Cos’ relationship with the traditional religion of the great sanctuaries.

Philologists who study the divine in the Hippocratic Corpus neglect this topic for two reasons. The first concerns the Hippocratic question: since it is impossible to identify with any certainty the works written by Hippocrates himself, they prefer to study the medical works without reference to their author. The second concerns the suspicions of philologists regarding information on Hippocrates’ life that is found in the biographical writings of the Hippocratic Corpus or in the different *Lives* of Hippocrates.

\(^{46}\) Cfr. *supra*, note 27.


It is true that certain paths of research are similar to dead ends, in particular the relationship of Hippocrates the Asclepiad with the sanctuaries of Asclepius. In my opinion, it is certain that Hippocrates was of male descent from an important aristocratic family of Asclepiads, who claimed to descend from Asclepius through his son Podalirius, whose branch became established on the island of Cos, in the classical city of Astypalea in the west of the island, whilst another branch of the family established itself at Cnidus. However, it is very difficult to determine what kind of connections might have existed between the Asclepiad doctors and the priests of the healing sanctuaries of Asclepius. A later tradition saw Hippocrates inspired to write his works by votive tablets in Asclepius’ sanctuary. Indeed, Strabo says: “It is said that Hippocrates derived his dietetic prescriptions mostly from the cures recorded on the votive tablets there.”\(^{50}\) We know nothing of votive texts from Hippocrates’ time in Cos, but the stelae preserved in the sanctuary of Asclepius at Epidaurus, where miraculous medicine occurred, do not encourage us to make any connection between the rational medicine of the Asclepiads of Cos and the religious medicine of the priests of Asclepius. It is no longer believed that the aphoristic literature of the Hippocratic Corpus, and in particular Prorrhetic 1, derived from the religious medicine of the Asclepieia. The rational medicine of the Asclepiads did not originate from the temples of Asclepius.

However, we should not interpret this as a sign of impiety or irreligiosity. The Asclepiads’ rational medicine and the cult of their prestigious ancestor are not incompatible: in the famous medical Oath preserved in the Hippocratic Corpus,\(^{51}\) Asclepius appears in second place, after Apollo, in the list of divinities invoked as guarantors of the oath. It is reasonable to think that doctors who came from the family of the Asclepiads, tied to Asclepius not only through their art, but also through their blood, would observe, as other members of the family, a cult in honour of their prestigious ancestor. This is all the more likely if we take into account the example of the doctor Nicias of Miletus, a friend of Theocritus who, being connected to Asclepius only through his art and not through blood, venerated Asclepius.\(^{52}\) It is also reasonable to think that members of the genos of the Asclepiads of Cos, descended from Asclepius through Podalirius, worshipped their heroised ancestor. In any case, evidence for a cult of Podalirius of Cos in the Hellenistic period comes from the existence of an altar with the unpublished

\(^{50}\) Strab., 14.2.19.
\(^{51}\) Hippocr., Jusjur. = 4.628,1 L.
\(^{52}\) Anthologia Palatina 6.337 [Theocr.].
inscription Ποδα[λ]ειρίου. We could also ask whether the Asclepiad genos possessed, due to their heritage with the god, a respected position in the cult of Asclepius that was present in the city. The eleventh Hippocratic letter, although apocryphal, contains a noteworthy observation on the rite of the celebration of Asclepius in Cos: "It happened that this day was the ceremony of the renewal of the rod, an annual festival, as you know, in which all are united in a sumptuous procession towards the cypress grove, which is by custom led by those who belong to the god." Now, "those who belong to the god" are the Asclepiads. Thus, this testimonium suggests that the Asclepiads held a traditionally respected position in the annual procession towards the sacred cypress groves that united the entire city at the feast of Asclepius. Although this witness refers to events in the Hellenistic or Roman period, it is possible, given the traditional character of this privilege, that it could date back to an older period.

Hippocrates’ relationship with the sanctuaries of Asclepius remains a grey area. However, the situation is clearer concerning Hippocrates’ relationship, and that of the family of Asclepiads, with the sanctuary at Delphi. Some philologists have shown some interest in the topic, and have spent some time on the problem. They read in a work called Presbeutikos (or the Ambassadorial Oration of Thessalus, the son of Hippocrates), which already formed part of the Hippocratic Corpus in Nero’s time, that the Asclepiads of Cos had obtained religious privileges for services they had rendered in Delphi at the time of the First Sacred War and that, when Hippocrates travelled to Delphi with his son Thessalus, the Amphictyonic League renewed the religious privileges that they had inherited and displayed them on a stele placed in the sanctuary. However, following Littré, philologists considered that “these texts are not to be trusted, they are apocryphal and the work of fraudsters.” By contrast, archaeologists and epigraphers of Delphi paid more attention to this text than philologists, because they followed the opposite path: they used the inscriptions and testimonia on the statues to

54 Hippocr., Letter 11 = 9.324.24–326.3 L.
55 On the significance of the rite of analepsis, cfr. Susan M. Sherwin-White, Ancient Cos (“Hypomnemata,” 51), Göttingen 1978, p. 356. Despite her suspicion towards the biographical writings of the Hippocratic Corpus, Sherwin-White gives credit to the witness of Letter 11 and thinks that the Asclepiads were able to benefit from a traditional role in the cult of Asclepius already by the time of Hippocrates (pp. 339 ff.).
56 Hippocr., Presb. = 9.414.3–9 L.
57 Littré, Œuvres complètes d’Hippocrate cit., 9.308.
confirm the *Presbeutikos*. They knew, thanks to Pausanias, that the statue of a patient affected by consumption, said by the Delphians to have been offered by Hippocrates, was still there in the year 350 in the enclosure of the sanctuary of Delphi. They knew of an inscription that bore the name of Hippocrates (Inv. n. 2255 of Delphi), published in 1918 by H. Pomtow in his study on Hippocrates and the Asclepiads at Delphi, which despite its fragmentary state can be said to have been dedicated by a doctor, as shown by τὰ νοσοῦντα in line 3, “the diseases.” This doctor can only be the great Hippocrates, as suggested by the term Θεσσαλός, that precedes the name of Hippocrates in the inscription, even if there are two possible interpretations. It could mean “Thessalus Hippocrates,” as in Hippocrates’ funerary epigram that we find in the *Anthologia Palatina*, or “Thessalus, son of Hippocrates,” or even “Thessalus and Hippocrates.” If it were Hippocrates and his son, it would be better adapted to the plural τοίς μόνοις of the fourth line, which could indicate two dedicants. Thus, in this fragment, we probably have the remains of a dedicatory inscription of Hippocrates and his son Thessalus at the time of their journey to Delphi, discussed in the *Presbeutikos*. In any case, this inscription at least attests to connections between Hippocrates and the sanctuary of Delphi. The religious privileges which, according to the *Presbeutikos*, the members of the family of Hippocrates (i.e. the Asclepiads of Cos) enjoyed at Delphi, are confirmed by an inscription, perhaps contemporary to the final period of the life of Hippocrates, that Jean Bousquet found in the *Via sacra* in 1939. He published it along with an erudite and sensitive commentary in 1956, and it can also be found, alongside a new fragment 8131, identified by the same scholar, in the *Corpus* of sacred inscriptions of Delphi published by G. Rougemont in 1977. Here is the text of this inscription:

Decree of the *koinon* of the Asclepiads of Cos and Cnidus: if the Asclepiad, having arrived at Delphi, wishes to consult the oracle or sacrifice, he must first swear that he is an Asclepiad by male descent (κατὰ ἀνδρογένειαν) ... He who

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58 Pausan., 10.2.6.
breaks these rules will not have access to the oracle as an Asclepiad and all further privileges awarded to the Asclepiads by the Delphians will be stripped from him, if he does not behave in a way following the previous prescriptions.

Thus, we know from this inscription that the Asclepiads of Cos and Cnidus, having arrived in Delphi, had to swear to be Asclepiads by male descent, in order to benefit from some religious privileges, although the nature of these privileges is debatable. The inscription supports the testimonium of the Presbeutikos to the extent that it presents, as Jean Bousquet has already noted, the same very rare expression κατ’ ἀνδρόγενειαν, “through male descent,” to describe the authenticity of belonging to the Asclepiad genos.\(^\text{62}\) However, it also offers new information compared to the Presbeutikos: whilst the Presbeutikos speaks only of the privileges accorded to the Asclepiads of Cos at Delphi, the inscription reveals that these privileges also belonged to the Asclepiads of Cnidus and that there existed, at least in the fourth century, a koinon of the Asclepiads of Cos and Cnidus.

Here, then, is an epigraphic testimonium, which confirms that the rationalism of the Hippocratic doctors was not incompatible with acknowledgement of the traditional gods and participation in the cult of the great sanctuaries. In fact, the religious privileges from which those doctors could benefit who, like Hippocrates, belonged to the aristocratic family of Asclepiads through male descent, could only reinforce their social prestige and be useful to them in their medical career, since scientific titles did not yet exist.

The oath that the Asclepiads swore at Delphi undeniably evokes the famous Oath preserved in the Hippocratic Corpus in which, as we have seen, all the gods were called to witness, but in particular the gods of health: first Apollo the doctor, who was also the great god of Delphi, and then his son Asclepius, and finally the goddesses Hygeia and Panacea. However, we should not confuse these two oaths, despite these comparisons. They clearly do not have the same function. The oath at Delphi is designed to preserve the religious privileges within a great family descended from Asclepius, whether it be the branch at Cos or Cnidus, whilst the medical Oath aims to preserve the transmission of medical knowledge within a medical school, from the moment in which it was opened to students from outside the family of Asclepiads. Thus, it was not the same people who took the two oaths. The one sworn at Delphi was reserved for authentic members of the genos of the Asclepiads of Cos and Cnidus, i.e. a group of people both

\(^\text{62}\) Hippocr., Presb. = 9.416,17 L.
larger and more restricted than that of the medical schools; larger in the sense that not all authentic Asclepiads were doctors, and more restricted in the sense that the doctors belonging to the schools of Cos or Cnidus were not all authentic Asclepiads. On the other hand, the medical Oath, which accompanied a kind of contract of adoption, was meant to be sworn by those who, although not belonging to the family of the Asclepiads, wished to become students of the medical school directed by an authentic member of the family of Asclepiads. We can take two concrete examples: Thessalus, the son of Hippocrates, was an Asclepiad through male descent. To benefit from his father’s teaching he did not need to take the medical oath; however, in his journey to Delphi, he had to take the Delphic oath to benefit from the religious privileges reserved for his family. On the other hand, Polybus, student and son-in-law of Hippocrates, author of Nature of Man, was obliged to take the medical oath in order to be admitted into the school of Cos, since he was not an Asclepiad through male descent. However, he was unable, without being a perjurer, to benefit at Delphi from the religious privileges of the authentic Asclepiads, of whom he was not a part. Thanks to the growth of the number of students associated with the genos, some doctors from Cos and Cnidus were able to give themselves the title of Asclepiad and looked to profit from the associated religious privileges. Such abuses probably obligated the koinon of the Asclepiads of Cos and Cnidus to establish the preserved decree.\footnote{For a comparison between these two ‘oaths’, cfr. J. Jouanna, “Le problème des écoles médicales en Grèce classique: réinterprétation de témoignages épigraphiques et littéraires,” in Actes du Xᵉ Congrès de l’Association Guillaume Budé (Toulouse 1978), Paris 1980, pp. 312–314.}

In any case, we should not define the koinon, of which we possess no other testimonium, as an association of doctors. Yet it is this very definition that Susan M. Sherwin-White gives it in the most recent monograph on Cos, when she says: “The Coan iatroi were members of a koinon, or guild.”\footnote{Sherwin-White, Ancient Cos cit., p. 257.} Modern scholarship confuses what the decree of the koinon rightly wanted to distinguish: the authentic Asclepiads through male descent, who were not all doctors, and those that were proud owners of the title of Asclepiad, i.e. doctors from the medical schools of Cos and Cnidus, who, although not authentic Asclepiads, proudly held the title, either because they supported authentic Asclepiads in the school, or because they were servants of an art of which Asclepius was a god. The koinon was certainly not a
professional association that united doctors of various origins; it was probably a noble organisation concerned with preserving the religious privileges of the family.

Thus, by placing Hippocrates in his time, we can undoubtedly better understand the position of Hippocratic doctors concerning the sacred, even though not all of the works of the Hippocratic Corpus could be by Hippocrates, and the doctors whose writings are collected in this Corpus do not necessarily share the same position. Although openly attacking the seers and charlatans, alongside whom they practiced an unregulated art, these doctors never oppose the traditional religion of the great sanctuaries. Their rationalism was not atheistic, and they could reconcile concepts of the divine, such that one founded medical science and the other a purified religion. The development of rational medicine in the fifth century was in part probably the work of members of an aristocratic family that claimed to descend from the god Asclepius, through his son Podalirius. Thus, it is not at all paradoxical that its most brilliant representative, Hippocrates, was heroised after his death and then deified in his native island at the end of the Hellenistic period. Hippocrates did nothing more than become part of the brilliant progeny of his ancestors.