CHAPTER FOUR

IMPORTS, GEOGRAPHICAL DETERMINISM AND INFLUENCES: THE USE OF EXOTIC AND LUXURY INGREDIENTS IN THE HIPPOCRATIC CATALOGUES OF RECIPES

Somehow the outer parts of the inhabited world were allotted the most beautiful features.

Herodotus 3.106

Introduction

In Chapter Three, I argued that the exotic, luxury and flamboyant ingredients included in the Hippocratic recipes transformed traditional medicine into *Haute Médecine*. In this chapter, I will attempt to determine with more precision which exotic and luxury products were used in the Hippocratic recipes and dietetic prescriptions. This, in turn, will help us understand the socio-economic context in which these prescriptions were created. Also, it will offer insights into how Hippocratic compilers valued different regions of the world.

Following a note on the naming of plants in ancient Greece, in the second part of this chapter, I systematically list the imported ingredients mentioned in the Hippocratic recipes, that is, the products that, for ecological reasons, could not grow in Greece or in Asia Minor.¹ I have also included ingredients, which, although they could be produced in Greece, are accompanied by an epithet of foreign geographical origin. I present these imported ingredients in four sub-categories according to their geographical origin.² In order to determine the origin of each exotic ingredient, and the routes they followed to reach Greece, I have drawn upon the studies of scholars working in a variety of disciplines: historians, linguists, botanists, and archaeologists.³

¹ Byl (1995) lists many of these exotic ingredients.
² This approach is similar to Dalby’s in his book *Empire of Pleasures* (2000), where he maps the ‘pleasures’ of the Roman Empire.
³ Archaeological evidence is unfortunately rather slim. Exotic organic goods, such as
I start with ingredients coming from the East, i.e. from the Levant (Syria, Lebanon, and Palestine), Arabia, and from ‘Further East’ (India, China, etc.). Then, I consider ingredients coming from the South, i.e. from Egypt, Ethiopia, and Libya. In most accounts of the contacts between Greece and overseas, Egypt and Ethiopia are presented together with the regions of the Near East, even though John Boardman pointed out that this can lead to confusion.\(^4\) In the case of our recipes, it is particularly important to dissociate imports from Egypt and Ethiopia from imports from the Near East. Indeed, these two sub-categories of *exotica* are presented in a very different way in the recipes. Moreover, scholars have generally considered that Greek medicine, and particularly Hippocratic gynaecology, was influenced more by Egyptian medicine than by Mesopotamian medicine or any other medicine from the Near East. My fourth sub-category includes *exotica* from the North, i.e. regions around the Black Sea. Finally, I consider ingredients imported from the western Mediterranean.

The exotic products listed in the Hippocratic treatises could have been divided into different sub-categories; for instance, these products could have been divided amongst the ancient continents. However, the number and boundaries of the continents were much disputed in fifth-century Greece. Some ancient authors, criticised by Herodotus, divided the world into three continents: Europe, Asia and Libya.\(^5\) Others, like the author of *Airs, Waters and Places* divided the world into two parts: Europe and Asia (which included Ionia, Egypt and Ethiopia). Herodotus himself, it seems, rejected the notion of continent altogether.\(^6\) In view of this confusion, I have chosen a more arbitrary repartition following the four cardinal points.

The Greeks could learn about, or discover, the medicinal qualities of exotic drugs in a variety of ways. In some cases, Greek physicians themselves may have learnt the medicinal properties of exotic drugs from foreigners. Indeed, physicians constituted, from at least Homeric

spices and gums, leave very few traces in archaeological contexts for the simple reason that they were consumed; we are left only with the containers. There is however one archaeological context in which luxury organic goods are preserved: shipwrecks. See Haldane (1993) 349.

\(^4\) Boardman (1999) 111. See also Guralnick (1997) who differentiates between ‘orientalizing’ art and ‘Egyptianizing’ art.

\(^5\) See Herodotus 2.16.

\(^6\) See the discussion by Thomas (2000b) chapter 3.