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Hippocrates

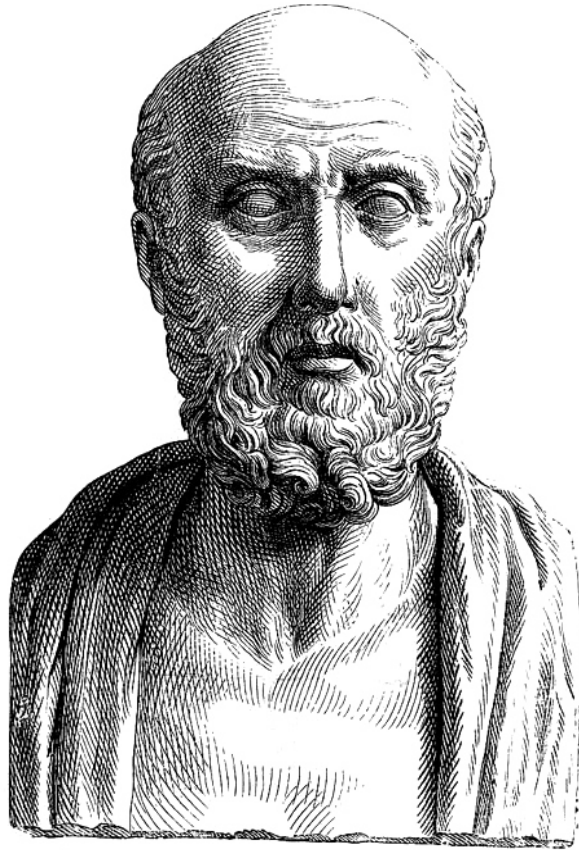


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From a Roman 'portrait' bust (19th century engraving)



Hippocrates

Born c. 460 BC in Kos, Ancient Greece

Died c. 370 BC in Larissa, Ancient Greece

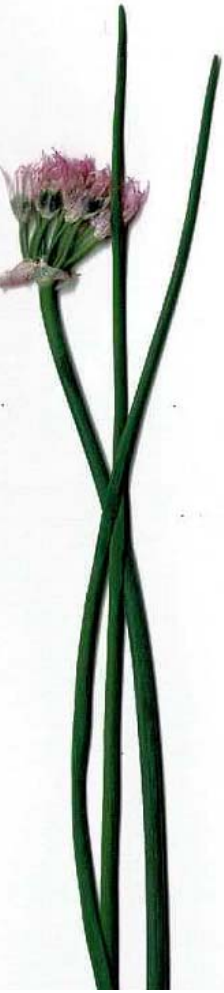


Hippocrates was said to have sought to separate the art and science of medicine from the practice of religion and magic.



He observed that clusters of symptoms, which he identified as diseases, often followed a certain trajectory. He felt that the origin of disease was connected with geographical and atmospheric environment; for recovery, the patient needed to adapt their way of life.

Hippocrates, Vol. 1, translated by W.H.S. Jones 1923 [1957]



Jones described that in 'no treatise (of Hippocrates) is there any superstition, in many there is much philosophy with some sophistic rhetoric . . . some are merely technical handbooks, while others show signs of a great mind, dignified and reserved . .' Diseases were natural and not a punishment of the gods.

Hippocrates, Vol. 1, translated by W.H.S. Jones, 1923 [1957]



Treatment methods:

As well as metal compounds and animal parts, plants and herbs were used in the treatment of conditions.

For Hippocrates, there were critical moments where the advancement of the toxins of a disease or the efficacy of nature's herbs and other treatments hung in the balance.

Astrological medicine

Hippocratic students were likely to have knowledge of astrology and may have made use of this knowledge in their practice.

Each part of the human body was represented by one of the astrological signs.

There were optimal astrological moments to harvest herbs and to apply certain treatments.

Each medicinal plant was understood to be ruled by a certain planet.



Example from Culpeper



Self-heal:

'Government and virtues. Here is another herb of Venus, self-heal, whereby when you are hurt, you may heal yourself: it is a special herb for inward and outward wounds'.

Nicholas Culpeper, *Culpeper's Complete Herbal & English Physician*, (Bath: Pitman Press Ltd, 1826 [1981])



The author of the Hippocratic oath is unknown, it begins:

‘I swear by Apollo Physician and Asclepius and Hygieia and Panaceaia and all the gods and goddesses, making them my witnesses, that I will fulfil according to my ability and judgment this oath and this covenant . . .’

—Translation from the Greek by Ludwig Edelstein. From *The Hippocratic Oath: Text, Translation, and Interpretation*, by Ludwig Edelstein. Baltimore: Johns Hopkins Press, 1943



‘Life is short, but the art is great, the
opportune moment fleeting,
experimentation perilous, discernment
difficult’.

(Translated by D. G Greenbaum)

The art of medicine



‘It is to do away with the sufferings of the sick, to lessen the violence of their diseases, and to refuse to treat those who are overmastered by their diseases, realizing that in such cases medicine is powerless’.

Hippocrates, Vol II, translated by W.H.S Jones , 1923 [1959]

The art is great:



It requires a significant level of knowledge, training, experience and skill, including physical, astrological, philosophical and herbal knowledge.

Medicine is a worthy and powerful craft with ethical responsibilities.

The physician places themselves as accountable to the gods by means of the Hippocratic Oath.

The opportune moment fleeting:



Acute diseases are a matter of urgency and the opportune time was limited by critical days and maximised by beneficial planetary alignments.

Experimentation perilous:



The art had to be as precise as possible; using tried and tested techniques and remedies, because life depended on it being so.

The physician was in danger of undermining not just their own reputation, but that of the craft, as a result of experiment-failures resulting in death.

Discernment difficult:



A wide range of factors needed to be considered in order to diagnose and treat, requiring thorough and methodical assessment and evaluation. It is not an easy task and not for the untrained.



Despite the scientific methods espoused and taught by Hippocrates, which gave rise to increasing numbers of secular doctors, the role of spirituality in sickness and recovery persisted - in the healing temples and the use of magical gems, for example.

Veronique Dasen, *Magic and Medicine: Gems and the Power off Seals*
<http://doc.rero.ch/record/232952/files/8.Dasen.Gemsofheaven.sphragis.pdf>

Is there a spiritual aspect to medicine?



Research shows that there is a link between spiritual belief and recovery.

Those prayed-for make a stronger recovery.

<http://www.nes.scot.nhs.uk/media/3720/march07finalversions.pdf.pdf>

<http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/health/485268.stm> &

Healing Words: The Power of Prayer and the Practice of Medicine

BMJ 1995; 311 doi: <https://doi.org/10.1136/bmj.311.7013.1174> (Published 28 October 1995) Cite this as: BMJ 1995;311:1174