

WOMEN, WRITING AND MEDICINE IN THE CLASSICAL WORLD

It is now a well-established fact that women practised medicine in the ancient world. The *medica* or *iatrinē*—the specifically female version of the physician, the *medicus* or *iatros*—as well as the *obstetrix* or *maia*—the midwife—along with a number of linguistic variants on these terms, all appear regularly in a range of literary, epigraphical and papyrological sources, as scholars have repeatedly observed.¹ How these appearances should be interpreted, on the other hand, remains more contentious. In particular, two alternative understandings of the figure of the *medica* or *iatrinē* have emerged, and continue to be variously elaborated. For some she is the professional colleague of the male *medicus* or *iatros*, perhaps not his exact equal, but certainly operating on roughly the same terms, and illustrative, therefore, of a more inclusive, less sexually segregated, approach to the practice of medicine in antiquity than was to emerge in later times.² Others hold her to be synonymous, not with the *medicus* but the midwife, and so to illustrate a rather different historical principle: ‘that women’s health is women’s business’, and to demonstrate a clear sexual division of labour in the classical world rather than any blurring.³

This is a discussion, moreover, that extends beyond medical practice into the literary field, into the formation of classical medical culture more broadly. For, not only are various recipes and remedies attributed to women contained within the extant pharmacological compilations of several male writers of the Roman empire, with female authored works cited in a similar context, but a set of Latin medical texts survives attached to the name of Cleopatra, and a single Greek manuscript preserves what it describes as extracts ‘from the works of Metrodora’.⁴ Again scholarly opinion is divided on the authenticity and significance of this material. Holt Parker is the most optimistic, assuming that, as a general rule, these female names represent real women who at least practised medicine, and often wrote about it too.⁵ Others are more sceptical, particularly about the likelihood of female authorship. This scepticism is

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¹ The observation goes back to J. Marquardt, *Das Privatleben der Römer* (Leipzig, 1886), 1.779; and see also J. Oehler, ‘Epigraphische Beiträge zur Geschichte des Aerztestandes’, *Janus* 14 (1909), 4–20; and H. Gummerus, *Der Ärztestand im römischen Reiche nach dem Inschriften* (Helsinki, 1932).

² This was the implicit approach of both Oehler (n. 1) and Gummerus (n. 1); more recent and explicit advocates include L. Robert, ‘L’index commenté des épitaphes’, in N. Firatli, *Les stèles funéraires de Byzance gréco-romaine* (Paris, 1964), 175–8; H. Parker, ‘Women doctors in Greece, Rome, and the Byzantine empire’, in L. R. Furst (ed.), *Women Healers and Physicians: Climbing a Long Hill* (Lexington, KY, 1997), 131–50; R. Flemming, *Medicine and the Making of Roman Women: Gender, Nature, and Authority from Celsus to Galen* (Oxford, 2000), 35–7; and (a little more hesitantly) E. Samama, *Les médecins dans le monde Grec* (Geneva, 2003), 15–16.

³ Argued by e.g. J. Korpela, *Das Medizinpersonal im antiken Rom: Eine sozialgeschichtliche Untersuchung* (Helsinki, 1987), 18–20, following Marquardt (n. 1).

⁴ See e.g. Parker (n. 2), 145–6, for a listing of most of the relevant material.

⁵ Parker (n. 2), 137–40.

much encouraged by some of the names in question: Cleopatra, Aspasia (quoted extensively by the sixth-century A.D. medical encyclopaedist Aetius of Amida on gynaecological matters), and even Metrodora (not a historically notorious name, but possibly derived from a common Greek word for womb—*mētra*).⁶

The matter requires a further look, therefore, to see if the debate can be resolved, or at least advanced beyond its current impasse. A more measured and nuanced assessment of the different cases and types of cultural contribution at issue would be helpful, within the context of a wider understanding of, on the one hand, the overall dynamics and contours of ancient medical literature, and, on the other, of general female literacy, learning, and authority in the classical world. This would then establish a firmer empirical and analytical base from which to draw more far-reaching conclusions about the broader societal implications of the relations between women, medicine, and literary culture thus revealed.

This article aims to provide such an analysis, and some suggestions about the larger historical picture into which it fits. It begins with a brief examination of the kinds of relationship with medical literary culture—with book-learning, using, and writing—that are indicated, or suggested, by the mainly epigraphic evidence relating to female medical personnel. This then provides the background for a more detailed, in-depth, discussion of the literary material that refers to, cites, or indeed claims, female authorship. Since this literary material stretches back to around the second century B.C. but not really much further (or at least it becomes very hard to follow thereafter), a similar Hellenistic starting point will be adopted for the epigraphic and archaeological evidence.⁷ Most testimonies of either kind come, however, from the Roman empire.

LEARNING, LITERACY AND FEMALE MEDICAL PRACTITIONERS

Women appear in the epigraphic, literary, and papyrological records as medical practitioners in four main guises (or perhaps four and a half). They occur explicitly labelled as *iatrinai medicae* (or in one case as an *archiatrinē*), or as *maiai obstetrices*, or as a hybridization of the two—as *iatromaeae*—or they have their medical achievements described in a more general way.⁸ As has already been mentioned, opinion divides on whether all these named categories are to be seen as synonymous, or whether the different terms are intended to distinguish between groups of practitioners, with the *iatrinē medica* to be understood as the feminine version of the *iatros/ medicus*, the physician, or general medical practitioner of antiquity. There certainly seems to be a very strong *prima facie* argument, however, that women who lay claim to the title of *iatrinē medica*, or have it claimed on their behalf, are attempting to move themselves up the medical hierarchy; to stress the more encompassing quality of their art rather than its limitations.⁹ For, though *obstetrices* and *maiai* provided medical services to women that extended well beyond childbirth, and associated matters, they were still considered specialists in an age that valued generality. Their

⁶ For doubts see e.g. L. Dean-Jones, *Women's Bodies in Classical Greek Science* (Oxford, 1994), 33.

⁷ Not, it should be said, that much is excluded thereby: except Phanostrate, the fourth-century B.C. 'midwife and physician' *μαία καὶ ἰατρός*, *IG* 2² 6873 (Samama [n. 2], no. 002).

⁸ See e.g. Parker (n. 2), 140–4; Flemming (n. 2), 383–91; Samama (n. 2); for collections of relevant evidence, the *obstetrices* and *maiai* remain less well served than the others in terms of comprehensive study.

⁹ See Flemming (n. 2), 35–7.

expertise and activities, however well respected, were subject to certain restrictions, in contrast to those of their masters—the *medici* and *iatroi*—who had oversight of all medical domains.¹⁰

It was these boundaries that *iatrinai* and *medicae* challenged; and, though the extent to which they were successful in distinguishing themselves from midwives in terms of their actual practice (in particular in providing medical services to both men and women) is less clear, this challenge needs to be appreciated none the less. Indeed a claim to universality also characterizes many of the commemorative formulations used to describe medical women not explicitly referred to as *medicae* or *iatrinai*. So, for example, a North African woman, Gemina, is commemorated as ‘saviour of all, through her medical art’, on her third-century A.D. tomb in Avitta Bibba; while a roughly contemporary woman (perhaps named Domnina) from Asia Minor is described as having ‘protected her fatherland from disease’.¹¹ There are other ambitions and aspirations expressed in the representations of some of the non-midwife contingent of female practitioners which also bear examination in this context, serving not only to bring the discussion directly round to issues of literary culture, and to underline the gap between *obstetrix* and *medica*, but also to emphasize that this last category itself should not be taken to be homogeneous.

Differentiation both between, and within, groups of medical practitioners characterizes male professional patterns in antiquity, and the women show signs of following suit. Thus, while there are famous examples of male authorship that fall outside the circle of the *iatroi* and *medici*—the noted work on medical materials by Crateuas the Rootcutter, for example—it is physicians who head the list of medical writers, and who show the greatest engagement with literate activities more broadly.¹² That is not to say, however, that all, or most, *iatroi* or *medici* made any literary contribution to medical learning at all. The profession of the physician ranged, at least in the Roman world, from those who rank with cobblers and shop-keepers to those who earned enough from attending on the emperor to virtually rebuild their native city; from those with no literary ability or inclination, to those whose works can be counted in the hundreds.¹³

The much smaller body of evidence for female medical practitioners demonstrates a similar patterning; though not reaching the same heights.¹⁴ The majority of the inscriptions recording female medical personnel and practice are, like their male equivalents, funerary in character, and they often place more emphasis on the family relationships and virtues that led to their erection than on the professional life of the deceased. So, for example, a second-century A.D. inscription from a *columbarium* in Rome reads:

¹⁰ See e.g. H. King, ‘Agnodike and the profession of medicine’, *PCPhS* n.s. 32 (1986), 53–77, for discussion of the midwife’s purview; Soranus’ *Gynaecology* is clear about the hierarchical relationship between physician and midwife; and see also e.g. legal descriptions of *obstetrices* as practising ‘a kind of medicine’/utique *medicinam* (*Dig.* 50.13.1.2).

¹¹ *CIL* 8.806: *salus omnium medicin(a)e*; Samama (n. 2), no. 324: *πάτριν ῥυομένην νούσων*.

¹² On Crateuas see E. Kind, ‘Krateuas (2)’, *RE* 11.2 (Stuttgart, 1922), 1644–6; laymen such as Celsus also wrote medical works in antiquity.

¹³ On doctors and cobblers, see *Ov. Fast.* 3.809–21; for some of the most richly rewarded, see *Plin. HN* 29.7–9; this variability is a constant theme of Vivian Nutton’s work on ancient medical practitioners, both the essays in his collected volume *From Decedees to Harvey* (London, 1988), and his more recent book *Ancient Medicine* (London, 2004).

¹⁴ Women make up only about 5 per cent of the published inscriptions of ancient physicians.

To the sacred spirits of my Primilla, physician, daughter of L. Vibius Melito, she lived forty-four years, thirty of them with L. Cocceius Aphthorus, without complaint. Aphthorus made this for his best and chaste wife and himself.¹⁵

Similarly, a funerary inscription from Roman imperial Bithynia states that:

Gaius Iulius Vettianus, while alive, erected this for himself and Empeiria, physician, his wife, who lived for forty-nine years.¹⁶

Still terser are other *tituli* from Roman *columbaria* commemorating, for example, ‘Venuleia Sosis, freedwomen of a woman, physician’, or ‘Sallustia Athenais, midwife, freedwoman of Artemidorus’.¹⁷

While all of the epigraphic midwives are referred to in these terms, some epitaphs of other female practitioners, like *some* of those for men, also stress their learning, experience, and professional success. The funerary stele of ‘Mousa, physician, daughter of Agathocles’, from Hellenistic Byzantium, for example, shows her holding a book-roll (as do a handful of representations of male physicians); and, in early imperial Rome, the freedwoman Naevia Clara is labelled ‘physician and scholar’ (*medica philologa*) on the stele that commemorates both her and her husband L. Naevius, also a freedman, and ‘physician and surgeon’ (*medicus chirurgus*).¹⁸ In this medical partnership she seems the more theoretically minded, while he has a more practical focus. While a third-century A.D. statue base from Adada in Pisidia records a family group, set up by Aurelius Pontonianos(?) Asclepiades, of himself, his wife Aurelia Alexandra Zosime, ‘on account of her medical knowledge’, and their daughter.¹⁹

A further pair of inscriptions, one funerary, one honorific, celebrate women’s accomplishment in the art—the *technē*—of medicine in forms which clearly indicate, if not actually insist on, their education and social status. An impressive metrical epitaph from early imperial Pergamum praises the numerous virtues of Pantheia, bride of Glycon, in flowery language.²⁰ She combined the qualities of ideal wife and mother with those of the ideal medical partner: contributing equally to the couple’s shared ‘fame’ (*kleos*) in healing, for, ‘though a woman’ she matched her husband in the *technē*.²¹ While an earlier statue base, in the forum of Tlos (in Lycia), informs the viewer that:

¹⁵ CIL 6.7581, *Deae sanctae meae Primillae medicae L. Vibi Melitonis f(iliae) vixit annis xxxxiix ex eis cum L. Cocceio Aphthoro xxx sine querela fecit Aphthorus coniug(i) optima castae et sibi*.

¹⁶ CIG 2.3736: Γάιος Ἰούλιος Βεττιανὸς ζῶν ἑαυτῷ καὶ Ἐμπειρίᾳ εἰατρείνῃ ἑαυτοῦ γυναικὶ ζησάσῃ ἔτη μθ’ κατασκεύασεν (Samama [n. 2], no. 304).

¹⁷ CIL 6.9617: *Venuleia (mulieris) l(iberta) Sosis medica*, and 8192: *Sallustia Artemodori l(iberta) Athenais opstetrix*, respectively. A freedman is commemorated with Sallustia.

¹⁸ E. Pfuhl and H. Möbius, *Die ostgriechischen Grabreliefs* (Mainz am Rhein, 1977), 1.151 (no. 467): Μούσα Ἀγαθοκλέους ἰατρείνῃ (Samama [n. 2], no. 310); and for Naevia see Fleming (n. 2), 386 (no. 9); for visual depictions of physicians more broadly see A. Hillert, *Antike Arztedarstellungen* (Frankfurt am Main, 1990).

¹⁹ IGRR 3.376: Ἀὐρ. [Ἀ]λ[εξ]ανδρίαν Ζ[ωσ]ίμην ἀπὸ ἐπιστ[η]μῆς ἰατρ[ικ]ῆς. Ἀὐρ. [Πονπω]νι[α]νὸς Ἀ[σ]κ[λη]πιδ[ί]αδ[ος], ὁ ἀν[ήρ] ἀν[τ]ήρ, καὶ Ἀὐρ. [Μ]οντ[άνη]ν, τὴν γλυκυτάτην θυγατέρα, ὁ αὐτὸς Ἀσκληπιδίαδ[ος] (Samama [n. 2], no. 339); see also e.g. CIL 10.3980 (from Capua) for another epigraphic reference to female medical learning.

²⁰ IGRR 4.507; Samama (n. 2), no. 188; this inscription was accompanied by another (also metrical) dedicated to Glycon’s father, Philadelphus, also a physician (Samama no. 187).

²¹ καὶ κλέος ὕψωσας ξυὸν ἱητορίας, οὐδὲ γυνή περ εἰούσα ἐμῆς ἀπολείπειο τέχνης.

Antiochis, daughter of Diadotos, of Tlos, marked by the council and people of Tlos for her achievement in the medical art, erected this statue of herself.²²

Midwives are, however, connected with literacy in a different source. The *Gynaecology* of the noted Methodic physician Soranus, written in early second-century A.D. Rome, defines and organizes its subject matter in relation to the figure of the *maia*.²³ It covers both the midwife herself—how to recognize those persons who are fit to become midwives and to determine which are the best practitioners—and the medical matters—female health and disease, normal and abnormal childbirth, the care of infants—with which she is faced, thus clearly asserting the higher authority of the *iatros* over these domains. Basic literacy is, according to Soranus, a quality required by the potential *maia*, since her training should encompass both book-learning and more practical instruction.²⁴ Book-learning, a good grasp of theory, is also a key factor in judging the best midwife.²⁵ The question then arises, given Soranus' purposes in producing this work, and the manifestly idealizing prescriptions he offers, whether many, indeed any, actual, practising midwives in Rome fulfilled his testing criteria. As already mentioned, no claims for book-learning, or indeed literacy, are made by, or for, the *obstetrices* and *maiai* themselves in their surviving funerary epigraphy, despite the clear incentives Soranus' views provide. This should not, however, be taken as proving that no ancient midwife was literate, a point which would seem to be supported by the late antique latiniser of Soranus' *Gynaecology*, Muscio.²⁶ In the preface to his text he explains that, despite the importance of midwives' activities, and the benefits they would gain from being acquainted with Soranus' writings, they lack the necessary language skills, and so require his translation and abridgement. The resulting text is thus not only Latin, but also shorter and simpler than the original:

I used women's words so that even ill educated *obstetrices* would easily be able to understand the meaning, albeit when read to them by another women.²⁷

The implication would seem to be that, though educational levels varied, and many midwives could not read, sufficient numbers could do so for Muscio's literary project to make sense.

Muscio is writing perhaps as late as the sixth century A.D., and certainly outside Rome, in North Africa or possibly northern Italy, but it seems likely that his picture of minority literacy amongst female medical practitioners holds good for earlier times and other places too. Also, though his disparaging remarks about women's language should not be taken simply at face value, they do serve to emphasize an important general point, frequently made in studies of ancient literacy, that the line between the literate and illiterate is not a clear one, as there are numerous degrees of both.²⁸ It is

²² TAM 2.595: Ἀντιοχίς Διαδότο[υ] Τλωίς μαρτυρηθεῖσα ὑπὸ τῆς Τλωέων βουλῆς καὶ τοῦ δήμου ἐπὶ τῇ περὶ τὴν ἰατρικὴν τέχνην ἐνπειρίᾳ ἔστησεν τὸν ἀνδριάντα ἑαυτῆς (Samama [n. 2], 280).

²³ On Soranus see A. Ellis Hanson and M. H. Green, 'Soranus: methodicorum princeps', *ANRW* 2.37.2 (Berlin, 1994), 968–1075, and also Flemming (n. 2), 228–46.

²⁴ Sor. *Gyn.* 1.3.

²⁵ Sor. *Gyn.* 1.4.

²⁶ On Muscio see Hanson and Green (n. 23), 1046–7.

²⁷ Muscio, *Genecia* pr.: *muliebribus verbis usus sum, ut etiam imperitae obstetrices licet ab altera sibi lectam rationem facile intellegere possint* (Rose, 3).

²⁸ A. Ellis Hanson, 'Ancient illiteracy', in M. Beard et al. (edd.), *Literacy in the Ancient World* (Ann Arbor, MI, 1991), 159–98, elaborates on this point, also made in W. V. Harris, *Ancient Literacy* (Cambridge, MA, 1989).

possible to be able to read, but not to write, to be able to sign your name but little else, to be a 'slow writer' (*bradeōs grapheus*) as some papyri rather endearing put it, or more functionally literate, without having mastered any canons of style, and so on. The situation is further complicated by the extensive use of scribes in the classical world, by both the literate and illiterate, not to mention composition by dictation, and, of course, widespread multilingualism. Putting aside the medical material for a moment, other ancient evidence locates women right across this spectrum, from total illiteracy to authorship of poetry, carefully crafted epistles, and personal memoirs, and including various positions in between.²⁹ These women tend to follow, rather haltingly, their men-folk in terms of education and literary skills. In social circles where the men were expected to have completed the full rhetorical schooling, and acquired the various literary and oratorical skills thus taught, the women too would have acquired at least some letters, some cultural formation, and sometimes they would attain much more than that. In circumstances where the men of the family transacted their business in writing, the business of large-scale estate management, or small-scale bureaucracy, the woman might well follow suit, though perhaps with less assurance, and a less practised hand. Where the men can barely sign their names, the women will probably be entirely unlettered.³⁰

That female medical practitioners should follow, in a similarly uneven way, their male colleagues in respect to literacy is, therefore, hardly surprising. Especially since, as the epigraphy demonstrates, they were often the wives, daughters or freedwomen, of these men. Moreover, medicine was a field in which written texts played an important role—as vehicles of knowledge and authority, as items of practical utility and social prestige—and the levels of literacy within the associated professions are likely to have reflected this. As has often been remarked for societies in which reading and writing skills are restricted, the social groups in which they are commonly concentrated are the elite and the professionally literate: scribes on the one hand, and teachers, doctors, lawyers, architects, and various skilled craftspeople on the other.³¹ The Hellenistic and Roman worlds were no exception.

In conclusion, therefore, the general references to, and representations of, female medical practitioners in the Hellenistic and Roman imperial periods do indicate some engagement with literary culture. Soranus notwithstanding, it is amongst the *medicae* and *iatrinai* that claims to book-learning, to literary formation, are concentrated; underlining again issues of medical hierarchy. There is then enough here to support the possibility of female authorship in the medical field, so it is now time to turn to the evidence more specifically related to this question.

²⁹ On ancient female literacy see e.g. S. Cole, 'Could Greek women read and write?', in H. Foley (ed.), *Reflections of Women in Antiquity* (Philadelphia, PA, 1981), 219–45; E. Hemelrijk, *Matrona Docta: Educated Women in the Roman Elite* (London, 1999), as well as Harris (n. 28). On female scribes more particularly see also K. Haines-Eitzen, '“Girls trained in beautiful writing”: female scribes in Roman antiquity and early Christianity', *JECS* 6 (1998), 629–46.

³⁰ *POxy.* 12.1463 is the one counter example to this principle, illustrating the case of a literate wife with an illiterate husband.

³¹ This is discussed by Harris (n. 28), in his introduction (3–24). He cites, for example, scholarly estimates that, in seventeenth-century England, when overall literacy was running at about 20 per cent, even skilled craftsmen like goldsmiths and bakers were over 70 per cent signature-literate (22).

MEDICAL WRITING AND WOMEN

The evidence for female participation in classical medical writing can be divided into two separate types: surviving texts (or partial texts) that claim female authorship and references to, or citations of, women's works, and words, in extant male authored texts. This latter is a larger and more complex category than the former, and will be examined first. Importantly, this examination follows the previous discussion in its awareness of the spectrum of ancient literacy. Female authorship of entire medical treatises lies at one end of a whole range of possible female contributions to classical medical culture which will be worked along systematically.

These variables also interact with an additional set of complexities that characterize the field of ancient medical literature. For this domain is subject, not only to the general vagaries of creation, 'publication', transmission, and survival that attend on any body of classical writings, but also exhibits some more specific historical dynamics of its own. It is worth remembering, for example, that the earliest, and in some senses most authoritative, Greek medical texts—those that were collected into the Hippocratic Corpus—were all anonymous compositions; and their subsequent ascription to the legendary Hippocrates then served to establish a large category of pseudonymous works.³² Following these precedents, and in response to a range of other professional and compositional pressures, anonymity and pseudonymity continued to feature prominently in the literary landscape of ancient medicine. A situation that was further complicated by frequent borrowing, or sharing, of material; by the common practices of textual reuse, reorganization, and re-presentation; so that some scholars speak of 'collective' or 'successive', more than individual, authorship in classical medicine, or find the whole concept of authorship inadequate in the circumstances.³³

Recipes, remedies and women's writing

Many of these complexities are illustrated, and, indeed, underlined, by the main witness to female (and indeed male) participation in the literary culture of classical medicine: that is the great imperial physician Galen of Pergamum. Galen, it should be stressed, dominates the remains of this culture in all respects and it is no surprise that he features so prominently in this area also. The two key texts here are his monumental works on compound remedies—the ten books *On Compound Pharmaka according to Place* (that is compound medicaments organized according to the part of the body they treat) and seven books *On Compound Pharmaka according to Kind* (where the organization follows the generic classification of the medicaments themselves)—which were written relatively late on in his successful career, probably in the reign of Septimius Severus, when an aging Galen was well settled and established in Rome, continuing to attend on the imperial court and to add to his

³² There were lively ongoing debates in antiquity about which Hippocratic writings were by the great Hippocrates himself; which might be attributed to his sons and pupils—such as Polybus—or could at least be considered to be in line with Hippocratic teaching; and which were just plain frauds: see e.g. J. Jouanna, *Hippocrates*, trans. M. B. DeBevoise (Baltimore, 1997), esp. 56–65, for a summary of this situation. The debate has become even livelier in modern times.

³³ See e.g. V. Langholf, 'Structure and genesis of some Hippocratic treatises', in H. Horstmannshoff and M. Stol (edd.), *Magic and Rationality in Ancient Near Eastern and Graeco-Roman Medicine* (Leiden, 2004), 219–75, for discussion of these issues, mostly in a Hippocratic context.

already prodigious literary output.³⁴ Despite their organizational distinction, they share the same compositional technique: displaying a complex layering, or nesting, of sources, authorities and information, which must be understood as a whole in order to assess the significance of any single unit, or group of units, within it. Much rests, in this entire investigation, on a kind of literary archaeology, with due attention paid to both textual stratigraphy and assemblages.

These tracts both consist mainly of extracts from the writings of the more eminent amongst Galen's recent predecessors in the pharmacological field—such as Heras the Cappadocian, Asclepiades Pharmacion, Andromachus the Younger, and Crito (all of whom worked in the early imperial period, from Augustus to Trajan)—arranged according to his own particular organizational schemes, and interspersed with various passages of critique, commentary and explanation.³⁵ The more discursive sections appear most consistently and extensively at the beginning of a book or topic, but are also scattered throughout the texts. The extracts themselves, moreover, are basically collections of recipes, commonly anonymous, but also often given names, titles, or other attributions and descriptions; indeed, they may actually consist of a series of sub-extracts, each bringing together various individual remedies. This layering, or nesting, principle, complicated and ragged as it is in places, can be easily illustrated with an example in which a female name appears, and that also demonstrates some of the underlying issues of authority and literacy.

The final book of *Compound Pharmaka according to Kind* covers a range of externally applied softening, relaxing and pain-relieving medicaments, such as *malagmata* and *akopa* (emollient and refreshing *pharmaka* respectively). Chapter 12 consists of thirty-eight recipes for *akopa* and their closest relatives, taken, as the chapter heading explicitly states, from the fourth book of Asclepiades' work *On External Pharmaka*, written sometime in the late first century A.D.³⁶ The individual prescriptions themselves are then very variously introduced: an *akopon* 'called *lēxopyretōn*', for example, is followed by 'another, from the (books) of Aphrodisis', and 'another, foul-smelling *akopon*', with the most frequent opening being simply 'another'.³⁷ More fulsome descriptions include, 'another, a proven *pharmakon* of Bassus, which he himself first used to release paralysis'; and, 'another, of Pompeius Sabinus, entitled "very valuable", prepared by Aburnius Valerius, it helps those suffering from sciatica, joint problems, gout, trembling, and all nervous conditions'; and a *sunkrisma* 'compounded by Patroclus the freedman of Caesar', which provides general relief, being applied on a daily basis, as an ointment rubbed onto the feet, or around bruises.³⁸

³⁴ The basic work on the chronology of Galen's literary output is that of J. Ilberg, 'Ueber die Schriftstellerei des Klaudios Galenos I–IV', *RhM* 44 (1889), 207–39; 47 (1892), 489–514; 51 (1896), 165–96; 52 (1897), 561–623; see also V. Nutton, 'Galen *ad multos annos*', *Dynamis* 15 (1995), 25–39 for discussion of Galen's later years.

³⁵ This is clearly established and discussed in C. Fabricius, *Galens Excerpte aus älteren Pharmakologen* (Berlin, 1972); see also J.-M. Jacques, 'La méthode de Galien pharmacologue dans les traits sur les médicaments composés', in A. Debru (ed.), *Galen on Pharmacology* (Leiden, 1997), 103–28.

³⁶ Gal. *Comp. med. gen.* 7.12 (13.1009–1032 K); on Asclepiades see e.g. Fabricius (n. 35), 192–8.

³⁷ Gal. *Comp. med. gen.* 7.12 (13.1013 K): ἄλλο καλεῖται ληξοπύρετον ... ἄλλο ἐκ τῶν Ἀφροδισέως ... ἄλλο ἄκοπον δυσῶδες ... (*bibliōn* is understood to follow the *ek tōn* formula).

³⁸ Gal. *Comp. med. gen.* 7.12 (13.1017 K): ἄλλο Βάσσου φάρμακον ἐπιτετευγμένον τούτῳ αὐτῷ χρησάμενος πρότερον παραλυθεὶς διεσώθη ... (13.1027K): ἄλλο Πομπηίου Σαβίνου ἐπιγράφεται πολυτελές. ἐσκευάσθη Ἀβουρνίῳ Οὐάλεντι, ποιεὶ ἰσχυαδικοῖς, ἀρθρικοῖς, ποδαγρικοῖς, τρομῶδεσι καὶ πρὸς πᾶσαν νευρικὴν διάθεσιν ... (13.1019 K): συντεθέν Πατρόκλῳ Καίσαρος ἀπελευθέρῳ.

Other interesting attributions include an *akopon* ‘of Haleius, altered slightly by Valerius Paulinus’, and, finally, a *myrakopon* (a myrrh based refreshing unguent) ‘compounded by Aquilia Secundilla’.³⁹ This is a recipe as complex, and costly, as those which surround it:

Of spurge, balsam, oil of myrrh, two ounces of each; of foaming natron, three ounces; of wax, one ounce; of oil of the cinnamon-tree leaf, one pound; of *foliata*, saffron, spikenard oil, a fragrant perfume, and *amaracus*, half-a-pound; prepare in the customary manner.⁴⁰

The chapter concludes with some Galenic carpings about Asclepiades’ lack of systematization in various respects.

Galen’s citational practice is, therefore, clear and unequivocal about the written qualities of his lead source. Asclepiades’ work *On External Pharmaka* is a medical treatise much like his own, except not as good, of course. After that things become more complicated, filtered as they are through this first text. None the less, as the recipes are presented in their Galenic guise, named attributions seem to take two forms. One is literary, as in the reference to a remedy from *the books* of Aphrodisis; the other suggesting a more practical relationship between medicament and the name attached to it. These are variously (and variedly) ‘composed/*sunetethē*’, ‘prepared/*eskeuasthē*’, ‘used/*echrēstato*’, ‘proven/*epiteteugmenon*’ or ‘altered/*parapepoiēmenon*’ by the individuals concerned; and the implication is that those described simply as belonging to x (where the name appears in the genitive without further qualification) also fall within this latter category.

Certainly Aquilia, in the passage discussed, is credited with composition in the practical rather than literary sense. Her earlier appearance in the same book, within a chapter consisting of emollients from the works of Asclepiades, takes a similar form: there appears ‘another (*malagma*), of the Neapolitan (type), prepared by Aquilia Secundilla’.⁴¹ Most of the other female names associated with remedies in Galenic pharmacology are simply that—names to which a range of remedies belong, without further comment.⁴² One name is worthy of attention in this context, however, and that is ‘Antiochis’, whose *malagma* for conditions of the spleen and joints, dropsy, and sciatica, occurs twice in *Compound Pharmaka according to Place*, as prepared by Fabylla of Libya, who also composed another medicament along the same lines.⁴³ This Antiochis is generally considered to be the same Antiochis to whom a pharmacological treatise by the notable Empiric physician of the early first century B.C., Heracleides of Tarentum, was dedicated (a treatise excerpted by Galen on half a

³⁹ Gal. *Comp. med. gen.* 7.12 (13.1026): ἄλλο τὸ τοῦ Ἀλιέως παραπεποιημένον ὑπὸ Οὐλαερίου Παυλίνου (13.1031 K): συνετέθη Ἀκυλία Σεκουνδίλλῃ.

⁴⁰ εὐφορβίου, ὀσθραλάμου, σμύρνης στακτῆς ἀνὰ γο β’. νίτρον ἀφροῦ γο γ’. κηροῦ γο α’. μύρου μαλαβαθρίνου λι. α’. φυλλιάτου ἡμίλιτρον, κροκίνου ἡμίλιτρον, νάρδου μύρου ἡμίλιτρον, ἡδυχροῦ ἡμίλιτρον, ἀμαρακίνου ἡμίλιτρον, σκεύαζε κατὰ τρόπον.

⁴¹ Gal. *Comp. med. gen.* 7.6 (13.976 K): ἄλλο τὸ τοῦ Νεαπολίτου, ἐσκευάσθη Ἀκυλία Σεκουνδίλλῃ.

⁴² See Gal. *Comp. med. loc.* 7.2, 4 and 8.3 (13.58, 85 and 143 K): Origenia’s remedies for coughs, bringing up blood, and for the stomach; *Comp. med. loc.* 9.2 (13.244 K): Euerasia’s remedy for the spleen; *Comp. med. loc.* 9.6 (13.310 and 311 K): Samithra’s anal application and Xanthite’s very useful haemorrhoid remedy; *Comp. med. gen.* 5.13 (13.840): Maia’s excellent dry application for callused and cracked skin (I take Maia as a—rare but attested elsewhere—name not a profession here). Though this possession implies a more productive relationship with these remedies than if the women were referred to as simply ‘using’ them: as are e.g. various women of the Julio-Claudian family in Scrib. Larg. *Comp.* (e.g. 59, 60, 70, 271).

⁴³ Gal. *Comp. med. loc.* 9.2 and 10.2 (13.250–1 and 13.341 K).

dozen occasions), and she is also identified as Antiochis of Tlos.⁴⁴ There is, it should be said, nothing that explicitly links these three bearers of the same name.⁴⁵ Still, given the excellent fit between gaining public recognition and esteem for ‘achievement in the medical art’ and being the dedicatee of a therapeutic work by one of the leading medical authors of the day, the assertion that here is a woman whose textual existence and cultural achievements are confirmed by archaeological evidence (and vice versa) is a very attractive one.

While the level of Antiochis’ participation in medical culture is certainly heightened in some respects by Heracleides, there is still no direct evidence in Galen that she was anything other than the practical author of her *malagma*. Just as with all the women mentioned so far. This, of course, raises the question of Asclepiades’ own work of composition again. Indeed, it is not just Asclepiades’ approach to pharmacological writing that is at issue, but also that of his contemporary, Andromachus the Younger. For, between them, the pair account for all the female names attached to recipes in Galen, with the majority the responsibility of the former.⁴⁶ Andromachus, moreover, introduces the individual remedies somewhat differently from Asclepiades, at least in some cases. Thus, for example, amongst Andromachus’ collection of relatively simple treatments for aural ailments contained in the appropriate segment of *Compound Pharmaka according to Place* is a remedy for purulent ears, ‘from (*para*) Spendousa’:

Two parts bile of a young, castrated pig, one part Attic honey. Place together in a glass vessel on hot ashes and heat until reduced by half; then use.⁴⁷

This *para* with the genitive construction is common in Andromachean extracts—Spendousa’s recipe is immediately followed by one (also for the ears) ‘from Harpocras’ in the same manner, for example—but it is hard to find in the Asclepiadean passages.⁴⁸ On the other hand, Andromachus recognizes the more literary origins of a medicament exactly as Asclepiades does, with an excellent and proven (ear remedy) ‘from the (books) of Apollonius’ completing his aural assortment.⁴⁹

While it is notable that none of the female attributions in Galen advertise their literary parentage in this way, the story does not end there. For it seems highly probable that Asclepiades and Andromachus’ use of written sources extended beyond those flagged as such: on both the basis of the simple exigencies of producing such substantial and structured pharmacological treatises (as also demonstrated by Galen), and the sense of their recorded history that the various remedies bring with

⁴⁴ The Galenic citations of this treatise begin at: 12.691, 847, 957 and 983 K; 13.726–7 and 812 K. It is referred to simply as the work *πρὸς Ἀντιοχίδα*; see A. Guardasole (ed.), *Eraclide di Taranto: Frammenti* (Naples, 1997), 83–106 and 108–18.

⁴⁵ Though there is also nothing that stands in the way of such a link: for, while H. W. Pleket dated the Lycian inscription to the first century A.D., which would preclude the honorand from any kind of relationship with Heracleides (*Epigraphica II* [Leiden, 1969], 12), the more traditional first-century B.C. date has been reasserted by Guardasole (n. 44), 83, and is followed by Samama (n. 2), 389.

⁴⁶ This monopoly is, in part, simply a product of their overall dominance in the works, but might also relate to the fact that they are amongst the chronologically closest to Galen.

⁴⁷ Gal. *Comp. med. loc.* 3.1 (12.631 K): *παρὰ Σπενδούσης. χοίρου ἐκτομίου χολῆς μέρη β’. μέλιτος Ἀττικῆς μέρος α’. ὁμοῦ ἐν ὑελίνῳ ἀγγεῖῳ ἐπὶ θερμοσποδιᾶς θέρμαιναι ἄχρι τοῦ ἡμίσεως καὶ οὕτω χρῶ.*

⁴⁸ Gal. *Comp. med. loc.* 3.1 (12.631 K): *ὠτική παρὰ Ἀρποκράτους*; and on Andromachus see e.g. Fabricius (n. 35), 185–9.

⁴⁹ Gal. *Comp. med. loc.* 3.1 (12.633 K): *ἐκ τῶν Ἀπολλωνίου.*

them. Separation of composition, preparation, and use, not to mention the business of amendment, and the use of the word *epigraphēin* in relation to titlature, all suggest literary transmission. This need not be in the form of a polished or published treatise—that is one which circulated as a stable text attached to a specific author who had created it as such—but could be through a physician's more personal accumulation and organisation of recipes, or something less formal still. Galen, certainly, refers to a remedy (for baldness) he acquired from the parchment notebook of a recently deceased *iatros*; and the *Michigan Medical Codex* preserves an example of a doctor's working recipe collection, complete with extensive additions, emendations, and annotations.⁵⁰ So, presumably the sourcing of a remedy, 'from the books of Apollonius', or similar, is, very precisely, a reference to a published text; as distinct from the more messy, unstable, majority of medical writing, where remedies may have authors, but textual attributions make little sense.

This, of course, leaves the question of whether Spendousa, Aquilia, Antiochis, or any of the other women mentioned, actually wrote down their recipes for themselves, or rather allowed, or encouraged, others to do it for them, unresolved. How, exactly, their remedies first took textual form, and entered into the complex web of pharmacological writing that Asclepiades, Andromachus, and Galen, all variously drew on, is now no longer discernible. Though they were presumably more closely involved in this process than the handful of women who are reported, indirectly, as the discoverers of various drugs: and, of course, exactly the same uncertainty attends on the majority of their male colleagues.⁵¹ Indeed, it may well be that such precise questions are simply misplaced.

So, women participated in the less prestigious, more workaday, portion of medicine's literary culture on much the same terms as men; albeit in much smaller numbers. What exactly those terms were remains unclear, but there is nothing that particularly distinguishes the female minority from the male majority in this lack of clarity. One largely shared feature here is the absence of any professional designations. Or, to put it more precisely, while no female name is accompanied by anything other than an ethnic, a few male names are. Mostly these names distance their bearers from the medical mainstream—not only in the case of Patroclus the imperial freedman, encountered earlier, but also in those of Flavius the Boxer, for example, or Bassus the Stoic, Euschemus the Eunuch, and even Zoilus the Ophthalmikos.⁵² These, and others, are marked out from men such as Asclepiades, Andromachus, and Apollonius, who need no such qualification. Perhaps then the women too should be understood as members of this unmarked majority of practising physicians—as *iatrinai* alongside the *iatroi*. Perhaps, but unfortunately nothing is quite so simple, for the names of a few known *not* to belong to this category also appear entirely unremarked—such as Aelius Gallus—and there is Cornelius the Physician too, though he seems to have

⁵⁰ Gal. *Comp. med. loc.* 1.1 (12.422–6 K) for the whole story about the notebook and its coded contents; the *Michigan Medical Codex* (*P. Mich.* XVII), is edited by L. Youtie as *American Studies in Papyrology* 35 (Atlanta, GA, 1996). The majority of medical papyri, more broadly, are (often fragmentary) recipes or recipe collections, some of which are part of identifiable treatises, most not, with the likelihood being that many of these latter may represent this less formal literary layer. See the inventory of I. Andorlini, 'Papiri e scienza medica antica', *ANRW* 2.36.1 (Berlin, 1993), 458–562.

⁵¹ See e.g. Paul. *Aeg.* 3.5.4 and Plin. *HN* 25.17–18 for such stories.

⁵² Flavius (13.294 K); Bassus (13.1033 K); Euschemus (13.287 K); Zoilus (12.632 K), cf. Diogas the medical trainer (13.104 K), Pharnaces the rootcutter (13.204 K), and Thraseas the surgeon (13.741 K).

been alone.⁵³ These women's status as physicians thus remains plausible, but not assured; and the presumption of non-uniformity still applies.

Iatrinai or not, fluent writers or not, it is still worth emphasizing this fundamental female contribution to medical literature before moving on to the next level of possibility: that of female authored treatises. This is a possibility that is, after all, strengthened by women's participation in the more utilitarian and mundane layers of classical medical writing. Two points need to be stressed before pursuing it, however. One is that, in a sense, the most important stuff has already been covered: most of the literary activity associated with ancient medicine went on at this more practical and parochial level, and the recipe was the basic unit of therapeutic knowledge. The second is that all these women's names have been associated with remedies of general application: there has been nothing of a gynaecological, or more broadly womanly, nature. Even the treatise dedicated by Heracleides to Antiochis falls into this general category; indeed, if it did have a focus it would seem to be on the head.⁵⁴ This fact cannot be blamed on Galen, moreover, as specifically female complaints are treated extensively in *Compound Pharmaka according to Place*, and appear more fleetingly elsewhere in his pharmacological works too, as do a number of other issues which might be considered of most interest to women.

Women writing medical treatises?

One of these areas is *kosmētika*—the business of preserving and making the most of what nature has provided, not artificially adding beauty (that is, *kommōtika*)—which receives considerable, if ostensibly reluctant, coverage in the early books of Galen's *Compound Pharmaka according to Place*.⁵⁵ The opening book deals with the hair, and various associated problems of the scalp, and Galen includes within it extracts from the *Kosmētikon* of Cleopatra. It is pretty clear that Galen had no direct access to this work, but disembedded selected sequences from the multi-volume cosmetic work of Crito, a physician at Trajan's court.⁵⁶ None the less, Galen asserts that he is quoting Cleopatra's actual (written) words on remedies for *alopēkia* (mange), for stimulating and increasing hair growth, and for *achōras* (scurf or dandruff).⁵⁷ He gives no indication that either he, or anyone else, thought that a royal author was involved here—whether Cleopatra VII or any of her predecessors—but rather places Cleopatra alongside Heracleides of Tarentum, and other later *iatroi*, whose medicaments were collected by Crito.⁵⁸ Still, the courtly context for this kind of writing is very much emphasized. It is to satisfy the ladies of the imperial household that Galen dabbles in these somewhat dubious matters, and he is following long-established historical precedent in doing so.⁵⁹

⁵³ Gallus makes several appearances, including in Andromachus' ear sequence already cited (12.625 K); Cornelius (13.292 K).

⁵⁴ All the Galenic citations refer to the head, but that might just be the first book.

⁵⁵ The line between *kosmētika* and *kommōtika* is clearly drawn at *Comp. med. loc.* 1.2² (12.434–5 K).

⁵⁶ As also suggested by Fabricius (n. 35), 201–2. On Crito see e.g. J. Scarborough, 'Crito, physician to Trajan: historian and pharmacist', in J. Eadie and J. Ober (edd.), *The Craft of the Ancient Historian* (Lanham, MD, 1985), 387–405.

⁵⁷ *Gal. Comp. med. loc.* 1.2, 1.2², 1.7 (12.403–5, 432–4, 492–3 K).

⁵⁸ *Gal. Comp. med. loc.* 1.3 (12.445–6 K).

⁵⁹ *Gal. Comp. med. loc.* 1.2² (12.434–5 K). Though sometimes male monarchs, not just royal ladies, importune their doctors in this way.

How seriously, or strictly, Galen's chronological (and indeed conceptual) pairing of Heracleides and Cleopatra should be taken is unclear. Cleopatra is certainly being located earlier than the pharmacological writers who approach Crito's Trajanic date much more closely, but little more can be said than that. She was also cited by the Byzantine physicians Aetius of Amida and Paul of Aegina in their, respectively, sixth- and seventh-century A.D. medical encyclopaedias. Aetius includes a single, sweet-smelling unguent 'of Queen Cleopatra', in a chapter on facial applications.⁶⁰ Paul incorporates a set of recipes for curling and dyeing the hair taken from 'the books of Cleopatra' amongst others dealing with the head and hair at the beginning of his third book.⁶¹ It has also been asserted that the surviving metrological treatise ascribed to Cleopatra at least started life as a section of her *Kosmētikon*.⁶² Weights and measures, and in particular the translation between units belonging to different times and places, are of vital importance to all kinds of medical recipes. Still, none of this helps much in pinning down this Cleopatra. She remains active sometime in the first century B.C. or A.D., and, at least for Galen, stands, without comment, alongside various male medical writers; though for Aetius she possesses more monarchic qualities. Even in the former case, however, she is not in quite the same position as Asclepiades and his friends, whose works Galen utilized directly.

The obvious attractions of associating a cosmetic treatise with the last Ptolemaic queen also need to be taken into account here, even without Aetius' prompting. Cleopatra VII was, after all, a woman of notorious sexual allure: what better image to evoke in a work on beautifying techniques? There would be no need for active pretence, though that is an alternative tactic. It is not the actual identity of a historical monarch that is generally being laid claim to here, just a more general and diffuse piece of the action, some of her authority and aura. This, less direct, type of pseudonymity, as well as the more specifically imitative type, can certainly be found in a range of literary genres, including medical writing.⁶³ Indeed, as already noted, medicine was a field in which publishing under someone else's name (as well as no name) was particularly common, and this was not the only way in which the authority and interest of a text might be (somewhat artificially) enhanced.

These points can be illustrated, and strengthened, by reference to the various other literary texts and traditions of antiquity that bear the name of Cleopatra. As already mentioned, and to be returned to later, Cleopatra is associated with a set of late antique Latin medical texts; and also with Greek alchemical writing.⁶⁴ A page of

⁶⁰ Aet. 8.6 (CMG 8.2 408.18–21): *Κλεοπάτρας βασιλίσσης*.

⁶¹ Paul 3.2 (CMG 9.1 132.1–134.13): *ἐκ τῶν Κλεοπάτρας* (some manuscripts suggest that the books in question were on hairdressing). There are citations of Crito nearby, so Paul could also be accessing Cleopatra indirectly (though it seems not through Galen).

⁶² As printed in F. Hultsch, *Metrologicon Scriptorum Reliquiae I: Scriptores Graeci* (Leipzig, 1864), 233–6; following various earlier medical printings, but with what palaeographic authority is less clear.

⁶³ It is, in fact, not clear to me that the rich pseudepigraphical traditions of antiquity—Hippocratic, Platonic, Aristotelian, or whatever—were ever really intended to deceive; that was not their main purpose anyway. A more precise example of the invocation of authority without identity is [Thessalus] *On the Power of Herbs*, as argued by A. Scott, 'Ps.-Thessalus of Tralles and Galen's *De Methodo Medendi*', *Sudhoffs Archiv* 75 (1991), 106–10.

⁶⁴ The Jewish tradition also reports that the Queen herself was involved in embryological studies pursued through the dissection of pregnant slaves (Tosefta Niddah 4:17 and BT Niddah 30b). I find this story much less plausible than e.g. T. Meachem, 'Halakhic limitations on the use of slaves in physical examinations', in S. Kottek and M. Hortsmanshoff (edd.), *From Athens to Jerusalem: Medicine in Hellenized Jewish Lore and in Early Christian Literature* (Rotterdam, 2000), 42; but it shows the continuing power of Cleopatra's name and persona.

annotated figures and diagrams is all that survives of Cleopatra's treatise *Chrysopoia* (*Making Gold*), but she appears too in dialogue with the sage Comarius, and various other anonymous philosophers, in the rich and complex alchemical literature that traces its origins back to the early imperial period.⁶⁵ Some then connect the metrological treatise with alchemy not medicine.⁶⁶ Here, again, there is no attempt to identify the textual Cleopatra with any particular bearer of the name, but various characteristics of the last Ptolemaic queen are invoked or alluded to none the less. Cleopatra VII was learned as well as beautiful, allegedly the first of her line to master the Egyptian language (among others).⁶⁷ She was a powerful and effective figurehead for the passage of ancient and occult Egyptian wisdom into Greek that is enacted in these texts.

Pseudonymity, of course, opens up the possibility, indeed it might be argued, the statistical probability, that male authorship lurks behind the female name. Probability should not be mistaken for certainty, however, and it cannot be claimed that men were ashamed to publish on cosmetics under their own names, despite Galen's reticence. Crito clearly had no such problems, nor is he alone in that. Still, the attractions of using Cleopatra in this way are manifest, and there does seem to be a particular pattern to female pseudonymity that might suggest male disguise when venturing into what might be construed as women's territory.

The other famous female name to occur in a medical setting in this way is, as has been mentioned, Aspasia, who is quoted extensively in the final, gynaecological book of Aetius' medical encyclopaedia on subjects from pregnancy and abortives, to difficult births, uterine diseases and other female problems.⁶⁸ Unlike all of Aetius' other authorities, Aspasia appears nowhere else in the medical tradition, and though she is associated with Rufus in the chapter dealing with suppression of the menses, it is entirely unclear if this is meant to be Rufus of Ephesus, or how this association transpired.⁶⁹ In addition to which, some of the material in this chapter, and others, bears a striking resemblance to that in Soranus' *Gynaecology*; though, in the absence of a modern critical edition, it is difficult to pursue the matter any further.⁷⁰ Given these issues, the lack of any other confirmation of her existence, and the obvious appeal of Aspasia's name in a gynaecological context, it does then seem rash to assume that a real life female physician wrote what is preserved in Aetius' compilation.⁷¹ It is not impossible, but definitely doubtful, and the lack of any explicit claim of identity with the notorious consort of Pericles does not strengthen the case, nor does the fact that Aspasia was a reasonably common name. The other women whose works are cited in a medical context also fail to inspire confidence, and in a somewhat similar way.

⁶⁵ M. Berthelot (ed.), *Collection des anciens alchimistes grecs* (Paris, 1888), 1.132 and 2.289–99.

⁶⁶ F. Sherwood-Taylor, 'A survey of Greek alchemy', *JHS* 50 (1930), 117.

⁶⁷ Plut. *Ant.* 27.

⁶⁸ Aet. 16.12, 15, 18, 22, 25, 50, 72, 104, 109, 112, 114, 120 and 124.

⁶⁹ Aet. 16.25. The other authors cited by name in Book 16 are: Soranus, Galen, Philumenus, Leonidas, Archigenes, Philagrius, Asclepiades, and Rufus on his own; all are well known physicians and medical writers, mostly of the late first to third centuries A.D.

⁷⁰ So, compare Aet. 16.25 with Sor. *Gyn.* 3.1, and, even more strikingly, compare 16.22 with *Gyn.* 4.1. Though it has to be said that the situation is further complicated by the problematic Greek transmission of the *Gynaecology*; since it survives only in extracts, and in combination with Aetius Book 16 (and in Latin translations), from which the text has been carefully reconstituted. For Aetius 16, I have had to rely on the (problematic) edition of S. Zervos (Leipzig, 1901).

⁷¹ As does Parker (n. 2), 138 with notes.

The parade of authorities with which Pliny the Elder opens his *Natural History*, written around A.D. 78, includes several female names—Elephantis, Lais, Olympias of Thebes, Salpe and Sotira—which then appear in some of the medical books in his encyclopaedia more or less as advertised. That is, highly concentrated in Book 28, which deals with the difficult (if not disgusting) subject of the medicinal uses of items derived from the human body, with only Olympias making it (albeit briefly) into the earlier, more mainstream, sequence adumbrating the various effects of plants (and their derivatives) on human life and health, and Salpe into a subsequent book on the effects of aquatic creatures.⁷² Olympias is also the sole member of this group to be listed in the *medici* section of Pliny's authorial registers, all the others appear only as 'externi/foreigners'; though the epithet *obstetrix* accompanies Sotira's solitary manifestation in the main body of the text, as it does also just one of Salpe's more frequent outings.⁷³ *Obstetrices* also feature collectively on occasion, and share with these named authorities a particular interest in the (mostly) female body, its workings and products. The sense of sharing is further emphasized by the fact that these feminine figures are usually gathered together in the work. Their contribution to Pliny's treasury of useful knowledge about the world is, thus, quite focused and specific: they describe various means to intervene in female fertility, birth, miscarriage, and menstruation, and that includes by the application of menstrual fluid itself, though this substance can also be deployed against epilepsy, fever and the bite of a rabid dog.⁷⁴ Salpe also offers a few more general prescriptions, though of much the same flavour as the others. She provides aphrodisiac and depilatory recipes (the latter as used on slave-boys), as well as asserting the power of spitting to alleviate numbness, of human urine to improve the eyesight and relieve sunburn, and a (rather unpleasant, frog-based) way of stopping dogs barking.⁷⁵

Now, while their citation as *auctores* certainly guarantees that Pliny found Olympias, Lais, Salpe, Sotira and Elephantis, along with their medical knowledge, in a literary context, it does not, despite the assumptions of Parker (following G. E. R. Lloyd), imply that he used actual treatises which claimed to be authored by these women.⁷⁶ Pliny's compositional techniques included much unpicking and rearranging of previous compilations, thus multiplying his named sources, and exaggerating his learning.⁷⁷ He would generally strip away the identity of the compiler in the main text itself, leaving all the collected extracts thus exposed, together with their original attributions; but then include all the names, of compiler and compiled, in his authorial lists. Moreover, Max Wellmann, in the course of his wider Plinian *Quellenforschung*, actually claimed to have identified the (male) author responsible for

⁷² Olympias appears as an authority for Books 20–7, though she only appears in the text of Book 20; all appear as listed for Book 28; with Salpe also for Book 32. Pliny parades his ostensible disapproval of human medicaments at *HN* 28.1–3.

⁷³ Olympias is listed, with the rest, all together, among the *externi* for Book 28; Sotira *obstetrix* appears at 28.83 and Salpe at 32.135.

⁷⁴ Plin. *HN* 20.226, 28.246 and 253 (Olympias); *HN* 28.81, 82 and 83 (Lais, Elephantis, Salpe, and Sotira); *HN* 28.255 and 70 (*obstetrices*).

⁷⁵ Plin. *HN* 28.262 and 32.135, 28.38 and 66, 32.140. The 'top midwives' (*obstetricum nobilitas*) also recommend human urine for a range of skin complaints, sores, and ulcers: *HN* 28.67.

⁷⁶ Parker (n. 2), 137–8 with notes, following G. E. R. Lloyd, *Science, Folklore, and Ideology* (Cambridge, 1983), 60, n. 6 and 63, n. 11.

⁷⁷ See e.g. J. Scarborough, 'Pharmacy in Pliny's *Natural History*: some observations on substances and sources', in R. French and F. Greenaway (edd.), *Science in the Early Roman Empire* (London, 1986), 59–85.

all the ‘Hebammenliteratur’ (as he labelled it) which appears in the *Natural History*. Xenocrates of Aphrodisias, a first-century A.D. physician, composed a work *Περὶ τῆς ἀπὸ τῶν ζώων ὠφελείας* (*On Useful Things from Animals*) that made a major contribution to Pliny’s volumes covering animal medicaments (especially Book 28), and also created companion pieces on useful items derived from plants and aquatic creatures⁷⁸

Wellmann’s overall view of Pliny’s sources and methods is too simplistic in various respects, but he is on much firmer ground in relation to some of his more specific arguments, such as this one. He adduces textual parallels between various Plinian passages, and citations of Xenocrates by Greek medical writers (mainly Galen) to prove his point; and it is also worth noting Galen’s global verdict on the Aphrodisian’s animal treatise in this regard. He savages this text for its indiscriminate inclusion of, on the one hand, disgusting and shameful remedies involving the ingestion of human sweat, urine, faeces, seed, and (worst of all) menstrual fluid, and, on the other, such impossible and ridiculous items as love potions, hate charms, binding techniques, means of producing a miscarriage or permanently preventing conception, and so forth, all of which experience shows never work.⁷⁹ He could almost as well have been attacking Pliny, especially those parts of his encyclopaedia in which female names feature; though Pliny incorporates a critical element of his own along with much of the most pertinent material.

This would then make most of the women cited in the *Natural History* more equivalent to Origeneia, Aquilia, and the other female contributors of remedies to classical pharmacological literature, than to medical writers such as Asclepiades Pharmakion, Andromachus, or even ‘Cleopatra’; except, of course, that they purvey knowledge of a rather different kind. Though the fact that Olympias receives credit for books in which she does not then feature perhaps puts her in a different category than the others; and it should be said that the evidence for reliance on Xenocrates is less clear outside Pliny’s animal sequence, and most especially Book 28. There are always Xenocratean connections to be made when female figures appear, whether direct or indirect in character, but other authors and texts also come into play more in other places. The Aphrodisian is listed alongside Olympias among the medical authorities for Books 20–7, for example, and indeed he accompanies her on her sole textual outing within that span; though what relationship that implies is uncertain.⁸⁰ And, while he is not listed as an *auctor* for Book 32, in which Salpe features, sections of Pliny’s text bear a definite resemblance to a Greek extract labelled as coming from Xenocrates’ *Περὶ τῆς ἀπὸ τῶν ἐνύδρων τροφῆς* (*On Foods from Aquatic Creatures*), in Oribasius’ later medical compilation.⁸¹ So, perhaps this is an accidental omission, or perhaps Pliny drew on the same source as Xenocrates in this case: similar passages can also be found in Athenaeus’ *Deipnosophistae*, for example, where they are associated with the Hellenistic physician Diphilus of Siphnos.⁸²

⁷⁸ M. Wellmann, ‘Xenokrates aus Aphrodisias’, *Hermes* 42 (1907), 614–29, and see also id., ‘Beiträge zur Quellenanalyse des Älteren Plinius’, *Hermes* 59 (1924), 129–56.

⁷⁹ Gal. *SMT* 10.1 (12.248–53 K). Artemidorus, for example, is more generous in his assessment of the work: *Oneir.* 4.22.

⁸⁰ Xenocrates appears immediately after Olympias at Plin. *HN* 20.227. Interestingly, also, amongst the *auctores* in Book 1, he switches allegiance from the *medici* to the *externi* (with all the women) for Book 28.

⁸¹ Orib. *Coll. med.* 2.58 (*CMG* 6 1.1 47.1–57.14).

⁸² Ath. 3.91a–e, 120e, 121b. It is also worth remembering that Xenocrates and Pliny were rough contemporaries, though Xenocrates seems to have been the elder.

Wellmann was also convinced that the female names in Pliny were not just second-order sources in respect to the compositional structure of the encyclopaedia, but also in the sense that they were literary creations: fictitious appellations attached, like those of ‘Democritus’, ‘Orpheus’, ‘Osthanes’ and the other *magi* that surround them, to certain kinds of information to serve certain textual purposes. They would then share a certain existential (non-) status with ‘Cleopatra’, even if it is not exactly an authorial one, and even if the aura they bring with them is not of such a high, individual, quality. The Theban Olympias, while obviously not the mother of Alexander the Great, might carry some of her potency none the less, and ‘Lais’ was, after all, a very famous courtesan, and her name went on to enjoy a rich and diverse literary afterlife. Lais, however, takes this analysis in a rather different direction, for, some of the female names in Pliny do actually have an authorial existence outside of his encyclopaedia, but not in a medical, nor a very existentially secure, context; still, it does link up with the Corinthian *hetaira*.

Elephantis appears in a range of ancient sources as the author of an illustrated volume on sexual positions, or other such shameful writing (*anaischuntographos*), with a single reference in Galen suggesting that works circulating under her name might also have had some cosmetic content, as did other erotic texts also.⁸³ While Athenaeus’ diners, when discussing the fish *salpe* (the ‘saupe’, an elegant if otherwise less appealing fish), mention that a *Paignia* was produced under the same name.⁸⁴ This was either because ‘*salpe*’ was the epithet given to its creator, one Mnaseas, since his work was as variegated (*poikilos*) as the fish; or, as claimed by the Hellenistic paradoxographer Nymphodorus of Syracuse, because it was in fact a Lesbian woman called Salpe who composed this text. On its style and contents the assembled company have nothing to say, though Alcimus’ ascription of the origins of the *Paignia* to Botrys of Messene is cited, suggesting that the ‘games’ indicated by the title were not all good clean fun, since Botrys is (together with the most notorious author of ancient sex-manuals, Philaenis) labelled a ‘shameful writer’ by the Hellenistic historian Timaeus of Tauromenium, as reported by his critical successor Polybius.⁸⁵ Indeed the *salpe* was a fish with a range of suitably aphrodisiac qualities itself, as noted in the *Cyranides*.⁸⁶

It is worth repeating here that, despite implications to the contrary in some modern discussions, neither Elephantis nor Lais is ever referred to as *obstetrix* in Pliny (or elsewhere); and that Salpe is only so designated once, when she appears in close proximity to her fishy namesake in Book 32.⁸⁷ Moreover, Pliny remarks at the outset of the sequence on the medicinal powers of items derived from women’s bodies in which most of these names appear, that ‘not only midwives, but also prostitutes themselves’ promote the use of menstrual fluid for various purposes; suggesting

⁸³ On Elephantis’ sex manuals see Mart. 12.42; *Priap.* 4; Suet. *Tib.* 43; Tatianus, *Ad Gr.* 34.3; and the *Suda* (s.v. Ἀστυνάσσα—the maid of Helen of Troy, and alleged founder of the genre); and for a cosmetic remedy of hers see Gal. *Comp. med. gen.* 1.2 (12.416 K). For more general discussion of the classical sex manual see e.g. H. Parker, ‘Love’s body anatomized’, in A. Richlin (ed.), *Pornography and Representation in Greece and Rome* (Oxford, 1992), 90–111.

⁸⁴ Ath. 7.321f–322a. On the *salpe/saupe* see e.g. D. W. Thompson, *A Glossary of Greek Fishes* (London, 1947), 225.

⁸⁵ Polyb. 12.13.1; Philaenis is also linked with Elephantis by the *Suda* (s.v. Ἀστυνάσσα). The name Botrys also appears in the lists of Pliny’s medical *auctores*, e.g. for Books 12–13, 29–30, and 33–5 (with Nymphodorus).

⁸⁶ *Cyr.* 1.18.7, 1.18.50–9, and 4.58.

⁸⁷ The fish—*salpa*—appears at Plin. *HN* 32.151.

simultaneously that those cited might belong to either category, and that there is no real difference between the two.⁸⁸ The latter point is the most significant, and this conjunction in this particular context, also clearly indicates what brings these two groups together, the literary role they both perform here. In the discursive world of the *Natural History*, *obstetrices* and *meretrices* are identified and employed as experts in a type of innate female knowledge that is essentially about being a woman, rather than being based on any kind of training or theoretical understanding.⁸⁹ They speak direct from their bodies and experience, acquiring authority from having a particularly close, subsuming, and defining relationship with certain key aspects of that embodiment. This interchangeability, and the inherently female function of these figures and categories, thus renders both attempts to distinguish between, for example, Elephantis (or Salpe) the medical writer from Elephantis the pornographer, and to identify any actual women, either midwives or prostitutes, behind these denominations, pointless and misguided.⁹⁰

Instead it must be accepted that Pliny drew on resources which themselves utilized a whole range of materials in which knowledge about, and around, the human body was presented and purveyed. This will have included both sexual and medical writings, as well as combinations of the two, and more: that is, general compilations of the kind that Xenocrates' works 'on useful things' must have been, as well as Menander's treatise along the same lines, and Bion's *Περὶ δυνάμεων* (*On the Powers [of Things]*), which are both claimed as sources by Pliny.⁹¹ So, Elephantis can be left as a name attached to texts on sexual matters, matters which encompassed cosmetics and fertility control; and *Lais* stays a figure conjured up in a similar context. *Salpe* is somewhat more complicated, as a recent exchange between David Bain and James Davidson has shown.⁹² Despite Bain's objections it remains tempting to see a link between the *Paignia* of *Salpe* referred to in Athenaeus and the material in the *Natural History*, though a much more indirect one than Davidson suggested (or, indeed, Bain assumed). Pliny acquired *Salpe* at least second-, and more probably third- or fourth-, hand; indeed, quite likely several of these, since *Salpe* may well have come to him through multiple intermediaries. In any case, this would be well after a series of broadly body-based recipes had been extracted from, or formed out of, the original *Paignia*, and then variously incorporated in other works.

One of these subsequent texts gave *Salpe* the epithet *obstetrix* (*maia* in the original Greek), since the material associated with the name was now starting to fit into a certain pattern, which also incorporates *Sotira* and her collective companions. This pattern emerged out of the wider Hellenistic expansion in writing about the world, its contents and their various interrelationships. An expansion that involved the literary 'representation' of much Greek folklore dressed up in more exotic form: as the wisdom of the legendary Persian *magi*, or the great kings and priests of Egypt, which had been transmitted to Greek sages such as Pythagoras and Democritus, and was now

⁸⁸ Plin. *HN* 28.70: *non obstetrices modo verum etiam ipsae meretrices*.

⁸⁹ That is in clear contrast to Soranus' model *maia*, for whom education is explicitly rated as more important than experience, so she does not have to have borne a child herself (*Gyn.* 1.4).

⁹⁰ The drive to distinguish the medical from the pornographic is manifest, for example, in the two articles on *Salpe* in *RE* 1A (Stuttgart, 1920), 2006–7; and in Parker (n. 83), 106.

⁹¹ Menander's *Biochresata* is listed as a source for Books 19–27; and Bion's text just for Book 28.

⁹² J. Davidson, 'Don't try this at home: Pliny's *Salpe*, *Salpe's Paignia* and magic', *CQ* 45 (1995), 590–2; D. Bain, 'Salpe's ΠΑΙΓΝΙΑ: Athenaeus 322A and Pliny N.H. 28.38', *CQ* 48 (1998), 262–8.

being made more generally available.⁹³ A whole range of different factors contributed to the growth of this kind of literature, one of the most parochial of which was the way this manipulation of Oriental traditions of occult learning, the evocation of such potent figures as Zoroaster and Osthanes, Nechepso and Petosiris (as well as Pythagoras and Democritus), added excitement and authority to any text.⁹⁴ ‘Midwives’—named or otherwise—offer a similar service for a particular strand of Greek folk knowledge, concerned with the body, fertility and other ‘natural’ aspects of life: that is a way of legitimating and, to a degree, exoticizing it, since ‘women’s secrets’ are thus being revealed by the experts. So, the *Natural History* demonstrates the way the *obstetrix* has become the village wise-woman’s representative in literary culture, though that clearly does not exhaust either her representational or real possibilities.⁹⁵ Here she stands for the foreignness within, as opposed to that found in more distant realms: though both are illusory, they are basically recuperative projections of the self.

The final question that remains is whether Olympias of Thebes, either in person or, more likely, in borrowed nominal form, might have been the writer to perform some of these roles. Whether a text circulating under that name brought together a range of female-oriented material from midwives and *magi* alike: such as occurs, for example, in the final sequence, not only of Book 28 of the *Natural History*, but also Book 26.⁹⁶ Her appearance amongst the medical authorities for books in which she does not then feature, as well as her botanical intervention, certainly make her more of a contender for authorial and iatric status than any of Pliny’s other alleged female *auctores*. Olympias’ case may be the strongest, but it remains pretty weak, none the less. She could just as easily be a second-order creation, whether of Xenocrates or one of his Hellenistic predecessors. Either way, moreover, the suspicion must be that this is another adopted female name, behind which is a man. Indeed, none of the female monikers in Pliny really stands much scrutiny either as an author, or a woman. The rhetorical purposes these names serve, from those of Elephantis and Lais to Olympias and Sotira, are all too clear; and, Mnaseas seems a much better bet than a ‘Lesbian woman’ named after a fish as the original creator of the *Paignia*, especially when it is considered that there are no other attestations of Salpe as a personal name.⁹⁷

So, in contrast to the generalities of both application and learning demonstrated by the female participants in Galen’s pharmacology, and in contrast to the neutrality of their textual role, all the female figures which have been discussed in this section, from Cleopatra to Olympias, Aspasia to Lais, operate within a much narrower remit (despite their authorial pretensions) and perform a heavily gendered literary function. They are all made to speak directly from their bodies, their femininity; and, even if their speech is more varied in terms of tone and register, they are all there to legitimate

⁹³ On this ‘representation’ see e.g. Lloyd (n. 76), 202; R. Gordon, ‘*Quaedam veritatis umbrae*: Hellenistic magic and astrology’ in F. Bilde et al. (edd.), *Conventional Values of the Hellenistic Greeks* (Aarhus, 1997), 128–58; and R. Flemming, ‘Empires of knowledge’, in A. Erskine (ed.), *A Companion to the Hellenistic World* (Oxford, 2003), 449–63.

⁹⁴ See Gordon (n. 93), and Flemming (n. 93), for further discussion of these factors.

⁹⁵ So, Soranus illustrates the opposite, idealising, extreme, and the epigraphy is more moderate than either; for the persistence of the contrasting historical stereotypes of the ‘ignorant’ and ‘excellent’ midwife see e.g. H. King, ‘Imaginary midwives’ in her *Hippocrates’ Woman: Reading the Female Body in Ancient Greece* (London, 1998), 172–87.

⁹⁶ Plin. *HN* 26.151–64 and 28.246–62.

⁹⁷ The only appearance of Salpe in the *Lexicon of Greek Personal Names* is taken from Pauly; whereas Lais, Olympias, and Sotira (Σώτεια) are all common names. Elephantis is less so, but still attested outside the literary domain.

and sell certain types of information. As also, of course, are Pythagoras and Zoroaster, Orpheus and Nechepso, but it is a different kind of information they promote, albeit just as gendered. This is, as already alluded to, a world in which pseudonymity was rife, even *de rigueur* in some contexts; and this has to be accepted in studying it.

Within these extant male-authored medical texts, therefore, there is no woman who unquestionably makes the step up from general participant in pharmacological writing to full-blown authorship. This has ended up being a discussion about the circumstances in which men might adopt, might create, a female literary voice, more than about that voice itself. The classical practice of pseudonymity and the prevalence of apocryphal traditions in these discursive domains, do not, however, completely rule out the possibility of female authorship. A real woman might have written under the name of 'Cleopatra', or 'Aspasia', for example, for many of the same reasons that a man might. Indeed, she might have some of her own motives for doing so too. Nor should the very broad therapeutic remit of the assuredly female recipes in Galen be taken as implying that women medical practitioners would have avoided gynaecological matters, or eschewed the *kosmētikon* as a genre. None the less, a basic division between the literary activity of the female minority and male majority in the field of medicine does seem to be confirmed. There is no woman who follows the path of the more ambitious men, a path characterized by publication of medical treatises intended to promote the personal authority and reputation of the author himself, to increase his professional standing and circle of paying patients. The number of *medici* and *iatroi* who pursued this strategy should, of course, not be exaggerated, but it was an established route to real fame and fortune; and the absence of women is, therefore, significant. So it only remains to see if a final examination of the handful of surviving medical works attached to female names alters this picture.

Do any medical texts by women survive?

The names in question are only two—Cleopatra and Metrodora—but the works attached to them are a bit more numerous, and, interestingly, interconnected. Though it must be admitted that connections are easy to find in late antique medical writing, much more elusive are firm dates, clear geographical points of origin, and identifiable authors. Indeed, many of the texts are transmitted in such varied and tangled forms that this kind of investigative framework may be entirely inappropriate. To begin, however, with the familiar name of Cleopatra, around which three Latin texts cluster. The most substantial—the *Gynaecia Cleopatrae* (*Gynaecology of Cleopatra*)—consists of forty-three chapters covering a range of gynaecological topics and cures.⁹⁸ Its badly corrupt preface appears to cast the author, in fact, as one Theodote, *medica* to queens Cleopatra and Arsinoë, who addresses the treatise to her daughter; there is also reference to translation from Greek into Latin.⁹⁹ But, in chapter 19, which details a pessary for a swollen and damaged womb, Cleopatra herself seems to speak in the first person, having tested the remedy on her sister Arsinoë.¹⁰⁰ Nor is this the only point at which the somewhat mix and match nature of

⁹⁸ See, on all three treatises, their entries in Monica Green's 'Handlist of Medieval Gynaecological Texts', published in her collection, *Women's Healthcare in the Medieval World* (London, 2000), 8–10. I would also like to thank Professor Green, profusely, for making available to me her transcriptions of the texts in question.

⁹⁹ Echoes, then, of Astyanassa, maid to Helen of Troy and alleged founder of the sex manual genre.

¹⁰⁰ *Laur. Plut. Cod.* 73.1 fol. 152ra.

the material comes across clearly. More popular in the Middle Ages was an abbreviated version of this work, though still with roughly the same preface and the subsequent mention of ‘my sister Arsenoe’. A *Pessaria Cleopatrae* (*Cleopatra’s Collection of Pessaries*) also circulated which incorporates several pessaries from the *Gynaecia* but combined with various additional recipes.

Theodote, *medica* to queens Cleopatra and Arsinoë, also appears in the prefaces of the first and fifth books of a gynaecological work addressed to the midwife Soteris (the *Liber geneciae ad Soteris obstetrix*); a composite text that combines Cleopatran material (also found in the *Gynaecia*) with segments that derive from Soranus’ *Gynaecology*.¹⁰¹ This had first been translated into Latin by Caelius Aurelianus, and then by Muscio, in the version already mentioned. Muscio reworked the original more extensively than Caelius, cutting more and reorganizing the text into question and answer form. The *Liber* takes this process further, presenting its Soranian sections as a dialogue between Soranus and the midwife Soteris, who is presumably related to Pliny’s Sotira in some way, directly or indirectly.¹⁰² Soteris asks the questions, Soranus provides the answers.

Nor does the reach of Cleopatra’s *Gynaecia*, and the more general principle of textual entanglement, stop there. An anonymous treatise entitled *De passionibus mulierum* (*On the Diseases of Women*), which is preserved in two different medieval versions (with a fragment of the earlier original from which both derive also surviving), has clear Cleopatran connections too. Monica Green describes the original sections as ‘similar stylistically’ to the *Gynaecia*, a work that (along with Muscio) also contributes material to the subsequent Version B, and perhaps Version A as well.¹⁰³ To make matters more complicated still, all the Latin manifestations of *On the Diseases of Women* show a considerable degree of correspondence with a set of extracts, ‘from the books of Metrodora’, contained in a single Greek manuscript.¹⁰⁴ Or, at least, there is clear correlation between the Latin and the opening sequence of the Greek, described as ‘concerning the feminine diseases of the womb’.¹⁰⁵ In fact rather more than the womb, its ailments and treatments, are covered in this first substantial segment: the sixty-three chapters also deal with sex, reproduction and childbirth more generally, together with conditions of the breasts and cosmetics. They even include a recipe for a shining face reputedly used by Berenice, the queen of Egypt also called Cleopatra.¹⁰⁶ The *editio princeps* also printed the following sections in the manuscript, which consist of a series of antidotes, medical simples, and recipes, as extracts ‘from the books of Metrodora’. Parker has, however, challenged this presumption, though until his promised new edition is published his argument remains obscure.¹⁰⁷

This is really the key issue here. Without further scholarly work, without critical editions of Metrodora, the treatises associated with Cleopatra and the rest, it is very

¹⁰¹ The Soranian sections are printed in V. Rose (ed.), *Sorani Gynaeciorum vetus translatio Latina* (Leipzig, 1882), 131–9.

¹⁰² Pliny’s *Natural History* played an important role in the late antique Latin medical tradition in various ways, but Soteris could have been acquired from one of Pliny’s sources, or a later development of that tradition.

¹⁰³ Green (n. 98), 24.

¹⁰⁴ *Laur. Phut. cod.* 75.3 (ἐκ τῶν Μητροδώρας). The *editio princeps*, by Aristotle Kousis, is contained in the *ΠΡΑΚΤΙΚΑ ΤΗΣ ΑΚΑΔΗΜΙΑΣ ΑΘΗΝΩΝ* 20 (1945), 46–68.

¹⁰⁵ f. 4v: περὶ τῶν γυναικίων παθῶν τῆς μήτρας.

¹⁰⁶ f. 18r.

¹⁰⁷ Parker (n. 2), 151, n. 41.

hard to draw any conclusions about these texts. The explicit, if inconsistent, claims to linkage with the Ptolemaic dynasty made not only in the *Gynaecia* of Cleopatra itself, but also in portions of the *Liber ad Soteris* are hardly convincing, and contrast with earlier, more subtle approaches to the construction of authorial image and authority. But, beyond that, almost nothing can be said about authorship, indeed it is not even clear that it is a valid concept in the circumstances. On the other hand, Metrodora, on her own, appears a rather better prospect. The various objections raised to the claims of female authorship so far, operate more weakly in her case. Her name may share its first four letters with the Greek for womb, but it is very respectable none the less. It is the feminine of Metrodorus and well-attested in the epigraphical and historical record. The gynaecological content is certainly not an insurmountable barrier, nor is the lack of any other reference to Metrodora in the medical tradition. There are various indications that this is a late text (sixth century A.D. at the earliest), at least in its surviving form, which would certainly help explain its isolation in this respect.¹⁰⁸

Except, of course, that the contents are not isolated. They are partially shared with an anonymous strand of the late antique Latin gynaecological tradition. Probably both are then drawing on an earlier text, which itself may have been a messy and composite work. This would locate Metrodora more firmly in the late antique encyclopaedic field, as a female compiler of mainly male material (despite its queenly aspects). This is, however, all very speculative at this stage, and likely to stay speculative for some time.

CONCLUSION

Certainty and clarity have been rare commodities in this investigation. None the less, a solid core of female participation in the literary culture of classical medicine has been firmly established in two respects. At least a segment of the population of women medical practitioners—mostly *medicae* and *iatrinai* but unlabelled others also—associated themselves, were associated by others, with the realm of book-learning, and with achievements in a version of the medical art based on that learning, as both brought social status and prestige. And women did contribute to medical writing in the broadest, most prevalent sense: to the creation, transmission and manipulation of the medical recipe in literary form, in lasting literary form even. They did so, moreover, in the field of general, not gendered, therapeutics. Their written legacy, therefore, not only confirms, to a degree, these claims to involvement with medical literature, but also indicates a certain genericity of practice, and both points feed back into the initial debate about the range and scope of female medical practitioners in antiquity. Through both their general claims to literary credentials, and their more specific delivery, these women demonstrate a basic equivalence to, not division from, their male colleagues.

The figure of Antiochis of Tlos may well bring these two aspects together particularly explicitly and elegantly, as well as providing a further link with more elaborate types of medical discourse. But things have already become less secure. Probabilities will soon shade into mere possibilities, and the realm of the improbable but not

¹⁰⁸ If the *editio princeps* is correct in its inclusion of extracts from Alexander of Tralles in the Metrodoran package, then that establishes the late sixth century as a *terminus post quem*. Even if not, then its language and organization still look late to me, not unlike that of Alexander or Paul of Nicaea, though some of the material contained certainly has earlier origins (*pace* Parker's suggestion of the fourth century as a *terminus ante quem*: [n. 2], 151, n. 39).

actually unimaginable is rapidly reached. There are various circumstantial reasons for this, but it also has to be admitted that, in so far as the surviving evidence goes, the picture is one of limited female participation, of boundaries that were not crossed. These boundaries most likely lay a little outside the territory just outlined. Some kind of female involvement in the various pseudonymous and pseudepigraphic traditions discussed, in recipe collection as well as composition, and in wider compulsory activities such as may have been undertaken by Metrodora, remains likely. But the more formal, prestigious, original, and expansive literary path followed by Heracleides or Galen seems to have been an exclusively male one.

Such a conclusion is hardly surprising. It fits in with the general points about female literacy and professionalism made at the outset. The classical world may have been relaxed and pluralistic about its medical practitioners, not in the business of regulation, of explicitly legislating against (in any sense) female participation in the art of medicine; but it was hardly an egalitarian location.¹⁰⁹ Unevenness of expectation and opportunity, social and sexual hierarchies operated everywhere. The contrast between the more inclusive medical practices of antiquity and their more exclusive modern counterparts is produced less by the difference between the position of women in, say, the early Roman empire and nineteenth-century Europe, than by the divergence between their respective constructions—the institutional formation and socio-economic position—of the medical profession itself. Ancient medical culture was not gendered male in the way that the medical culture forged in the passage to modernity was. It lacked both the necessary regulative apparatus and drive. Sexual difference was not at stake to the same degree, nor in the same way, as it was later in the age of scientific medicine with its more epistemologically and sociologically lofty practitioners.¹¹⁰

Nor should such a conclusion be construed too negatively. Looked at from the perspective of the ancient societies themselves, rather than from a more historical angle—viewed sideways rather than backwards—the importance of the recipe as the basic unit of medical knowledge, exchange, and action, is hard to overstate, while that of the sophisticated surviving treatises of Galen and his colleagues is all too easy to overplay. Indeed, Galen's monumental attempt to encompass and order this vast expanse of useful information really proves the point, as does so much other evidence, however scattered and fragmentary. This was the arena for female participation, for creative and communicative contribution, as well as more practical application and manipulation. These women may have been outnumbered, but they were full participants none the less, not separated or differentiated from their male colleagues (to whom they were often married, or otherwise related). Their presence is well recorded, and should now be recognized, in these terms.

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¹⁰⁹ The only suggestion of such a prohibition comes in a story precisely about its breach and abolition, that is Hyginus' foundation myth for women's involvement with the medical art (*Fab.* 274.10–13).

¹¹⁰ On this point see e.g. D. Haraway, 'MODEST_WITNESS@SECOND_MILLENIUM' in her collection *Modest_Witness@Second_Millennium*. (New York, 1997), 23–45; and Flemming (n. 2).