



Ann E. Hanson: *Kosmêtika, Kommôtika, Pharmaka*, and Courts of Kings

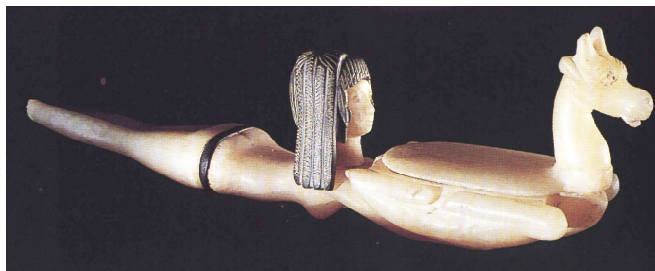
Galen (129-216 AD), the physician, tackled the question ‘In what ways do the cosmetic portions of medicine (*kosmêtika*) differ from the part that merely beautifies or embellishes (*kommôtika*)?’ (Gal. *Comp. sec. loc.* XII 434 ff. [Τίτι διαφέρει τοῦ κομμωτικοῦ τὸ κοσμητικὸν τῆς ἰατρικῆς μέρος.] Τῶ μὲν κομμωτικῶ σκοπὸς ἐστὶ κάλλος ἐπίκτητον ἐργάσασθαι, τῶ δὲ τῆς ἰατρικῆς μέρει τῶ κοσμητικῶ τὸ κατὰ φύσιν ἅπαν ἐν τῶ σώματι φυλάττειν, ὥ καὶ τὸ κατὰ φύσιν ἔπεται κάλλος).

“The aim of embellishment is to acquire additional beauty, but the aim of the cosmetic part of medicine is to preserve everything that naturally belongs to the body, for the natural beauty of the body also belongs to this construction. ... What is the point of going on to mention lichens or psoriasis or pustules, examples of dermatological maladies contrary to nature? The following, however, are part and parcel of the evilness associated with embellishments: making the color of one’s face whiter, or rosier from drugs (*pharmaka*); or making the curly locks of one’s head red or black, or increased to their longest extent, as women are wont to do. This is not the business of medicine”.

Galen’s answer is simple enough: medicine can and should be called upon to provide counsel and therapeutic recipes which maintain the human body and its manifold parts as a healthy and integrated whole. There was, in fact, a long history of considering embellishments to face, hair, and body, the *kommôtika*, as expressions of vanity. An early story was Homer’s depiction of the toilette and adornment the goddess Hera employed to beautify herself, and thereby seduce her husband Zeus in her efforts to redirect the course of the Trojan War (*Iliad* XIV 164-221).

Despite the disapproval that moralists, satirists and poets, medical writers, and other Greek and Roman authors heaped on costly feminine adornment — makeup, hair-dye, diaphanous clothing — there can be little question but that these improvements were viewed with approval by many women.

I feel I must stress how plentiful are the archaeological remains pointing to general popularity beauty aids enjoyed over the entire Mediterranean regions during all periods of Antiquity.



Cosmetic spoon. Carved from Egyptian alabaster
(New York, Metrop. Museum, ca. 1390-1350 BC)

I wish to conclude with a question from the real world of Greek and Roman Antiquity. I work with a mid-first-century archive of Nemesion, collector of money taxes for Julio-Claudian Emperors at the Fayum village of Philadelphia. The papyri belonging to his archive tell a lot about Nemesion, even though the majority involve the tax bureau he directed. Nemesion had a wife named Thermouthis and, like her husband, she was literate in Greek, a somewhat unusual accomplishment for a village woman. When a copy of the Emperor Claudius’ letter to the Alexandrians came his way, Nemesion copied the letter on the back of an old tax roll. Nemesion was also friendly with Servilius, certainly bearing one Roman name and perhaps a Roman citizen; Nemesion asked Servilius to send him five rolls of papyrus and 1¹/₄ cotyls (approximately 1/3 of a liter = 310 ml) of best quality Italian *rhodinon* (extract of roses, rose oil), for which latter, a luxury item, Servilius paid 8 drachmas. Servilius’ letter announced to Nemesion that he would receive the two items from Servilius’ son-in-law Julius. The *rhodinon* was probably still in concentrate form, since the 1¹/₄ cotyls were in transit. Medical uses for rose oil included medicating earaches and ophthalmias; as a

luxury item it was an elegant moisturizer for the skin, anointing with it after the bath, or cleansing it off with a strigil (scraper) after strenuous exercises.

My question: which family members in the Nemesion household were likely to use the luxurious Italian rose oil?

P.Graux II 11.10-12 “Lettre de Serouilios à Nemesiôn” (H. Cuvigny, ed., 1995)

1 Σερουίλιος Νεμεσίωνι τῶ ἀδελφῶ πλείστα χα(ίρειν) καὶ ὑγιαίνειν.
2 ἄ μοι ἔγραψας ἐπὶ τῇ ἐπιστολῇ πεποίηκα· δέξαι παρὰ
3 Ἰουλίου τοῦ γαμβροῦ μου χάρτας πέντε καὶ κοτύλην καὶ —
4 τέταρτον ῥοδίνου Ἰταλικοῦ πρώτου· τῆς κοτύλης —
5 ἔδωκα (δραχμὰς) ἡ μετὰ χάριτος καὶ δέξαι παρὰ Ἀντωνίου τοῦ
6 Λεωνίδου στρατιώτου ἐκ σπείρης δακτυλείδιον τεταρ-
7 τῶν δύο· λιθάριον σιλφίου οὐχ εὔρον πρὸς ὃ ἔγραψάς μοι, —
8 ἠγοράσθη δὲ (δραχμῶν) β (τριωβόλου) ἐν ᾧ ἐστὶν Ἄρποχράτης· ταῦτα —
9 δέξαι παρὰ Ἀντωνίου καὶ χανκάνθου ἡμιμναῖον· δέ-
10 ξαι αὐτὰ ἐσφραγισμένα ὡς μοι γράφεις καὶ ὧδε χάλκανθος
11 οὐχ εὔρισκεται καὶ σφυρίδιον τραγημάτων καὶ στροβίλους
12 δέκα τοῖς παιδίοις, ὃ ἐὰν χρήζης γράφε καὶ ποιήσω καὶ —
13 σὺ συγγενοῦ μετὰ Ἰουλίου τοῦ γαμβροῦ μου ἕως λάβητε ἢ τὸν
14 σῖτον ἢ τὸ ἀργύριον· ἂν λάβης τὸν σῖτον πώλησον αὐτό(ν)
15 τῆς οὔσης τιμῆς, ἐπισκοποῦ τὰ παιδιά καὶ Θερμοῦτις
16 καὶ τοὺς ἐν οἴκῳ πάντας καὶ γράφεις μοι περὶ ἀνθρώπων
17 ὧν οὐκ οἶδα· ἀπῆλθον εἰς τὴν Ἡρακλείδου καὶ οὐχ εὔρον τι

