

In 2006 I completed my Masters in Classics and Archaeology. My final thesis was titled Disease and the Deity; *medicine and the divine in early Greek literature and myth*.

My primary argument underlying the thesis was that the amalgam of the divine with disease was fixed in the Greek mindset. Because the religious and moral focus on disease was so well cultivated the consequence was that temple medicine was able to flourish amidst a culture developing a high degree of rational and intellectual complexity. As part of my argument I examined the locality of Thessaly and the personage of Chiron, as the seminal mythic figure in Greek medicine, to establish the existence and transmission of a developed body of medical knowledge. Thessaly claims a leading role in Greek myth as the first location of medical training and for its celebrated healers including Chiron, Jason, Medea, Asclepius, Machaon, Podalirius, Philoctetes and Achilles. Thessaly locates the prehistoric attitudes and beliefs in healing and represents a primal and archaic layer that underpins the development of Greek medicine. Focusing mainly on the *Iliad*, the second chapter of my thesis drew on the myths of Thessaly and Chiron in order to make a case that practical medical skills were co-extant with the supernatural belief in disease since the Bronze Age.

I was honored when Melanie Reinhart (www.melaniereinhart.com), a colleague and witness to the profound importance of the archetype of Chiron in the human experience, asked me to make the second chapter available on her website. Therefore I have followed suit and made this available on ours.

Brian Clark

HEROIC HEALERS

Chiron and the Thessalian Doctors

*'In Magnesia Chiron was worshipped by all the inhabitants of that country as the one who had first practiced the medical art.'*¹

- Emma and Ludwig Edelstein

As demonstrated in the previous chapter Greek healing was allied with the gods from at least the Mycenaean period, hence medicine and religion were intimately intertwined by the time the Homeric epics were sung. While evidence is slim, there is some anatomical and physiological confirmation that surgery, herbs and nutrition were used in healing during the Bronze Age and that a medical tradition prevailed during this period.² In this chapter I will present supporting evidence for a physical and secular healing tradition gleaned from literature and myth. My central argument will be that early literature points to the existence of an ancient medical practice, set in Thessaly, under the patronage of Chiron. This mythic motif becomes a template for early Greek medicine, which influences and reveals ways of thinking about disease. As part of this line of reasoning I will demonstrate that myth supports the existence of medical training and the custom of passing down therapeutic knowledge through generations from father to son. Both this practical medical skill and religious rituals to promote healing co-existed. This is visibly demonstrated in the *Iliad* through the descriptions of ritual purification, as previously discussed, and the pragmatic treatment of war wounds by army healers. Guido Majno, in his systematic study of ancient attitudes towards wounding, suggests that 'the oldest witness of Greek medicine is

¹ Emma and Ludwig Edelstein, *Asclepius*, Volume 2, 96. Chiron's emblematic position as the seminal benefactor of the healing arts is legendary. The Newsletter of the Melbourne University Medical Society is named Chiron. In the first edition the editor, Peter Jones writes, 'Chiron has been chosen as the title of the newsletter of the University of Melbourne Medical Society. The choice was naturally determined by the recognition of Chiron in classical Greece as the master, and teacher, of all the healing arts.' (The 1983 Newsletter of the Melbourne University Medical Society).

² Bronze surgical instruments, probably belonging to a palace physician, dated to 1450 have been discovered in a Mycenaean chamber tomb at Nauplion. Skeletons dated to a hundred years earlier, which support medical intervention in the case of fractures, have been unearthed at Mycenae. For evidence of palace physicians during the Mycenaean period, see Robert Arnott, "Healing and Medicine in the Aegean Bronze Age", 265-9. The earliest textual evidence for medical expertise in Greece is described in Linear B (*PY Eq 146*) from the Mycenaean period; the word *iatros* or doctor has also been found on Bronze Age documents. See J. Chadwick, *The Decipherment of Linear B* (Cambridge: 1958), 116-7; M. Ventris and J. Chadwick,

Homer³; therefore I make use of the *Iliad* to extract and amplify references to medical conventions. Behind these fragments is the first mention of a ‘rational’ medical model lying alongside the enduring custom of petitioning the god for a cure.

From the fragmentary evidence in the *Iliad*, two main focal points become apparent. First, Thessaly emerges as the earliest setting for a medical tradition through the references to Thessalian warriors trained in the *technē* of healing. Second, Chiron is the seminal medical mentor, a foster father to heroic healers like Achilles, Asclepius and Jason. References are limited yet revealing. Notably, in the scenes when the Greeks employ medical practices and surgery, it is the fraternity of warriors attached to the Thessalian contingent who are the ones most skilled at the art of removing arrows and soothing wounds. When Machaon treats Menelaus’ injury (4. 216-7) or Patroclus tends Eurypylus’ wound (11. 821-834), the medicines applied and the method of application can be traced back to Chiron, the Thessalian centaur (4.218-9; 11.830-1). While later writers would amplify the role Chiron played in medical pre-history, it was Homer who first intimated that the Greek medical lineage reached back to him, locating medical training on the Magnesian peninsula in Thessaly.⁴ The early myths of semi-divine Chiron and his heroic apprentices demonstrate that medical education and the transmission of therapeutic knowledge were consciously centred on Thessaly. Before the medical schools on Cos or Cnidus, or the healing temple of Epidaurus, Thessaly was the mythic setting for medical instruction.⁵ To make a case for an extant medical tradition I will examine literary fragments which refer to the healers of Thessaly and then turn to those which mention Chiron.

Documents in Mycenaean Greek (Cambridge: 1973), 547 and L.R. Palmer, *The Interpretation of Mycenaean Greek Texts* (Oxford: 1963), 422.

³ Guido Majno, *The Healing Hand Man and Wound in the Ancient World*, Harvard University Press (Cambridge, MA: 1973), 142.

⁴ Chris Mackie, “Achilles’ Teachers: Chiron and Phoenix in the *Iliad*”, *Greece and Rome* 44 (1997).

⁵ Interestingly actual medical training centers thrived in areas far removed from the classical heartland of Greece. Greek cities in Southern Italy had two important schools, one in Croton, the other in Sicily. Hippocratic medicine was mainly focused on the schools at Cos and Cnidus, although an earlier one had existed on Rhodes. When these schools were established is not known. However they were known in the early 5th Century. For medical centers in ancient Greece see Plinio Prioreschi, *A History of Medicine*, Volume 2, 183-399. For an examination of Thessaly’s legacy of magic and witchcraft due to it being marginal from the cultural centres, see my honours thesis *The Magical Legacy of Thessaly*.

1. The Healers from Thessaly

*'A healer is a man worth many men in his knowledge
of cutting out arrows and putting kindly medicines on wounds'
(Il. 11.514-5)*

While Thessaly is well known as a region of ancient Greece it did not become a unified territory until the 6th Century BCE. The region's name is derived from the Thessali, a race that migrated from the northwest and is reputed to have conquered the country two generations after the Trojan War. In the *Iliad* Homer lists 280 ships in the Catalogue of Ships (2.685-759) that are from this region, but never mentions the name Thessaly, presumably because it had not yet coalesced into a specific region.⁶ Two 'good healers' (2.732) Podalirius and Machaon, who are sons of Asclepius, are listed as representing Tricca in the Thessalian delegation.⁷ Achilles (2.685) and Philoctetes (2.718), both associated with the motif of wounding and healing are also part of the Thessalian contingent.⁸ What becomes apparent in the poem is that the Thessalians have drugs for soothing wounds and that their medical skill can be traced back to Chiron. Besides being valued for their medical expertise, what is also obvious is that some Thessalian warriors share a bond, apparent in the scenes that involve them in healing.

When the Thessalian warrior-surgeon Machaon is struck with a 'three-barbed arrow' in his shoulder, Achilles, who is withdrawn from the battle, becomes anxious. As both a Thessalian and a healer, Achilles' apprehension is aroused when he witnesses Nestor's chariot drive past with his wounded compatriot. Being fairly certain that it is Machaon, Achilles sends his companion Patroclus to verify, if indeed, it is Machaon who has been injured. It is Idomeneus who has instructed Nestor to take Machaon, 'the son of the great healer Asclepius' (11.518) to the safety of the ships immediately. According to Idomeneus

⁶ For the early history of Thessaly see H. D. Westlake, *Thessaly in the Fourth Century BC*, Bouma's Boekhuis N.V. Publishers (Groningen: 1969), Chapter 2. Homer ignores the political realignments that took place after the invasion of the Thessali. See G.S. Kirk, *The Iliad: A Commentary*, Volume 1, books 1-4, Cambridge University Press (Cambridge: 1987), 187.

⁷ Tricca was promoted as the birthplace of Asclepius, the god of healing, in the 6th Century. See Chapter 3.

⁸ Homer does not refer to Philoctetes as a healer, although it is probably known to the audience at this time. This aspect is developed by Sophocles in his eponymous play.

a surgeon's skill is worth 'many men' therefore the Greeks cannot afford to lose Machaon, their eminent physician:

Nestor, son of Neleus, great glory of the Achaians,
quick, get up on your chariot, let Machaon beside you
mount, and steer your single-foot horses to the ships in all speed.
A healer is a man worth many men in his knowledge
of cutting out arrows and putting kindly medicines on wounds

(11.511-515)

It is obvious that army healers are valued, especially Machaon, who exemplifies the importance of the physician trained in healing wounds. Elite physicians were highly valued in the Mycenaean tradition and Homer continues to respect this custom.⁹ The following description of a Bronze Age doctor's experience of wound treatment parallels Homers', suggesting the description of healers in the *Iliad* is consistent with Mycenaean tradition, as Robert Arnott reports:

The Late Bronze Age mainland palaces would have supported their own physicians, attached to elite households, practicing surgery and functional medicine. Their experience would have been based upon observable physical causes, much of it trauma, and they probably knew much about wounds caused by weapons, tools or accidents, and their treatment.¹⁰

Nestor's rescue of Machaon precipitates a turning point in the war for the Greeks since it renews Achilles' interest in the battle events and initiates his return to combat.¹¹ It also demonstrates the attachment Achilles has to his fellow Thessalian and healer, Machaon.

Returning from his assignment for Achilles, Patroclus encounters Eurypylus, another member of the Thessalian contingent. Limping off the battlefield, due to a thigh injury inflicted by an arrow, Eurypylus appeals to Patroclus to help tend his wound. In his plea he

⁹ For a discussion on the great value of physicians in the Mycenaean period, see Julie Laskaris, *The Art is Long*, 33-4. Drawing on the research of Protonotariou-Deilaki the author suggests that the eleven medical tools from a Bronze Age burial between 1450-1400 confirm the status and value of Bronze Age healers. The high quality tools unearthed were similar to instruments found in the Asclepieia of the classical period. Robert Arnott, "Healing and medicine in the Aegean Bronze Age", also verifies the importance of doctors and surgeons during the Bronze Age.

¹⁰ Robert Arnott, "Healing and medicine in the Aegean Bronze Age", 266.

¹¹ For a persuasive argument linking three Thessalian heroes and healers together in a critical way see Chris Mackie, "The Earliest Philoctetes", forthcoming *Scholia* 2008.

recounts the many who have been wounded by the Trojans, articulating the healing bond which exists amongst the Thessalian contingent:

But help save me now at least, leading me away to my black ship,
And cut the arrow out of my thigh, wash the dark blood running
Out of it with warm water, and put kind medicines on it,
Good ones which they say you have been told of by Achilles,
Since Chiron, most righteous of the Centaurs, told him about them.
As for Machaon and Podalirius, who are healers,
I think Machaon has got a wound, and is in the shelters,
Lying there, and himself is in need of a blameless healer (11.821-834)

Apparently Chiron had taught his student well, as Achilles has been able to instruct Patroclus on the surgical procedures necessary to remove an arrow. Successfully Patroclus cuts the arrow out of Eurypylus' thigh, cleanses the infected area and then applies a 'bitter root to make the pain disappear'. The wound dries, the pain subsides and the flow of blood stops (11.841-7). The healing procedure reveals both a rudimentary surgery and knowledge of drugs and attention to wounds, concepts that were later expressed by Hippocratic doctors.¹² Chiron's medicinal herbs were able to heal Eurypylus' wound, suggesting that not only did procedures for the treatment of injuries exist but that they may have originated in the region of Thessaly. While Patroclus is the one who tends the wound, it is Achilles who has passed on the technique taught him by Chiron.¹³ In the poem the reference to the healing brothers, Machaon and Podalirius follows on, aligning the various Thessalian healers together.

To Homer Machaon is a 'general practitioner' while later poets describe him as the surgeon. His brother Podalirius is 'the pharmacist'.¹⁴ Both sons of Asclepius are specialists in different aspects of healing and heirs to their father's medical expertise. While Machaon is revered as the skilful surgeon his brother was an ancient prototype of the

¹² Guido Majno, in *The Healing Hand*, 143 points out that the medicines used to cool and dry the wound of Eurypylus were concepts utilised in the Hippocratic writings (*On Wounds*).

¹³ The most recognised image of Achilles as a healer is on the Sosias Cup in the Berlin Antikenmuseum. The scene also involves Patroclus who is wounded; however, this time Achilles is the one who tends the wound.

¹⁴ Bryan Hainsworth, *The Iliad A Commentary*, Volume 3: Books 9-12, Cambridge University Press (Cambridge: 1993), 279.

psychiatrist who treated and ‘healed “invisible” ills, including those of the soul’.¹⁵ Podalirius is mentioned only twice in the *Iliad* as Machaon’s brother with no detail of his healing skills. It is in the *Iliou Persis*, one of the epics of the Trojan cycle, that Podalirius’ speciality as a healer of invisible or internal disease is first described:

To the one [Machaon] he gave defter hands, to remove missiles from flesh and cut and heal all wounds, but in the other’s heart [Podalirius] he placed exact knowledge, to diagnose what is hidden and to cure what does not get better. He it was who first recognised the raging Ajax’s flashing eyes and burdened spirit.¹⁶

Podalirius is barely heroic in Homer’s eyes. Yet lying behind his inclusion in the *Iliad* is a fragment of another healing motif linking together the Thessalian healers. Both brothers are connected with the healing of another Thessalian, Philoctetes. Subtle themes of wounding and healing are intertwined in the myth of Philoctetes, but it is only the sons of Asclepius who are able to heal his wound.¹⁷ In the *Little Iliad* Machaon heals the wound of Philoctetes,¹⁸ whereas in a later version Apollodorus suggests Podalirius is the healer.¹⁹ Again the chain of collegiality amongst the Thessalian doctors has been preserved in the fraternal links between the healers.

Homer’s last account of Machaon in the *Iliad* describes him recuperating on Nestor’s ship (14.1-8); it is the *Little Iliad* which reveals the physician’s fate. According to Pausanias it is the *Little Iliad*, which describes the murder of Machaon by Eurypylos, a nephew of Priam who bears the same name as the Thessalian leader.²⁰ Pausanias also mentions the

¹⁵ C. Kerényi, *Asklepios Archetypal Image of the Physician’s Existence*, 76 citing Scholiast BT Eustathius.

¹⁶ *Greek Epic Fragments*, Sack of Ilium, 2, translated by Martin L. West, Harvard University Press Cambridge, MA: 2003), 149.

¹⁷ Philoctetes is only mentioned once in the *Iliad* (2.716f) in the Catalogue of Ships. Homer mentions him twice in the *Odyssey* (3.190; 8.215f) but his profile is sketchy. It is Proclus in the Epic Cycle, Pindar (*Pythian* 1), and Sophocles in his play, *Philoctetes* which add the details of his abandonment on the island of Lemnos and his pivotal role in the Trojan War. Chris Mackie in “The Earliest Philoctetes” suggests: ‘the notion of the hero as healer seems to link these three Thessalians together – Achilles, Machaon and Philoctetes – in the various sources. Healing is obviously very important in the story of Philoctetes because a physical ailment is compounded by terrible suffering at the emotional level.’

¹⁸ *Greek Epic Fragments*, Argument 2, 121.

¹⁹ For a discussion on the different versions of the myth see Timothy Gantz, *Early Greek Myth*, Volume 2, 535-9.

²⁰ In the *Iliad* there are two warriors by the name of Eurypylos. The Trojan warrior is the son of Telephus, who is healed by Achilles but later killed by Achilles’ son. The Greek warrior is the Thessalian Eurypylos who is healed by Patroclus with healing medicines passed on from Achilles. Homer refers to Cos as

legend that Podalirius settled in Caria.²¹ His individual biography becomes more detailed in post Homeric literature, migrating to Caria and continuing the tradition of passing medical knowledge onto his sons. In various traditions Machaon and Podalirius were considered the forefathers of many medical families; therefore Homer's genealogy promotes Asclepius to the father of physicians, a prelude to the association of doctors in the 6th Century known as Asclepiads.²² However, the tradition of medical transmission is much older than the *Iliad* and therefore the alignment of Machaon and Podalirius with Asclepius probably predates the epic.

As an epic of war the *Iliad* vividly illustrates heroes inflicting wounds and being wounded and includes some early impressions of the archaic practices of medical treatment and surgery used to treat these wounds. A reference to 'the healers' at 13.214 suggests that there may have been many unnamed physicians and surgeons amongst the troops or at the very least there may have been a number of warriors who were skilled in first aid and removing arrows.²³ In *Medicine throughout Antiquity* the author summarises the medical skill of the doctors in the *Iliad*:

'Eurypylus' city' and lists the Coans, Pheidippos and Antiphos, as the leaders of their fleet (2.677-8). These were sons of Thessalos and grandsons of Heracles, who were likely kings of Cos and descendants of Eurypylus (G.S. Kirk, *The Iliad A Commentary*, Volume 1, Books 1-4, 228). Homer's naming Cos as 'Eurypylus' city' is a muted reference to Thessaly, as a Thessalian hero of the same name is in charge of 40 ships (2.734-7). Heracles' son, Thessalos, becomes the eponym for the northern region but also becomes a popular Coan name. The Coan doctor Hippocrates, named as the 'father of medicine' also had a son named Thessalos. White suggests that in the case of Cos: 'Thessalian colonisation may well be supported by the existence in Cos of Thessalian place-names, which can be plausibly explained as an inheritance from early Thessalian settlers' (Susan M. Sherwin-White, *Ancient Cos*, Vandenhoeck and Ruprecht, Gottingen: 1978, 18). Kirk also stresses this legend: 'Cos maintained the tradition that it was founded in some way by Thessalos and from Thessaly'. The transmission of medical traditions and lore (like place-names) may well have been part of the ethos of the migration between Thessaly and Cos. Embedded in Coan history is an implied connection to Thessaly, the land of medicinal myths.

²¹ Pausanias, *Guide to Greece*, translated by Peter Levi, Penguin (London: 1979) Book 3, 26:8-9. Timothy Gantz, *Early Greek Myth*, Volume 2, 840, footnote 71 suggests that these fragments could come from a different *Little Iliad*: 'The *Iliad* scholia cite verses about the different medical skills of Machaon and his brother Podalirius which they attribute to the *Iliou Persis* of Arktinos; these might mean that the death of Machaon was also related in this poem'.

²² Emma and Ludwig Edelstein, *Asclepius*, Volume 2, 56.

²³ In commenting on the different types of wounds in the *Iliad* Benjamin Lee Gordon, *Medicine Throughout Antiquity*, Davis (Philadelphia: 1949), 449 reports these statistics: '149 different wounds' are described in the epic, the 'average mortality, as figured by Frohlich, was 77.6 per cent' and that the 'highest mortality was among those whose wounds were inflicted by the sword and the spear', while the lowest were those injured by arrows. For the detailed compilation of wounds in the *Iliad* by weapon and to parts of the body refer to Bryan Hainsworth, *The Iliad: A Commentary*, Volume 3, 253 which clearly points out that the spear was the favoured weapon and wounds to the torso and head were most common. The majority of wounds (85%) are fatal except those to the arms and legs.

There was considerable knowledge of first aid at that period, at least among the warriors who were of great aid to themselves and to their comrades when wounded; their field work was systematic and based upon recognised principles of surgery which came only as a result of considerable thought and practice. There were no cases of inflammatory or traumatic fever, and no one died from secondary haemorrhage.²⁴

While this author is confident that a high level of medical skill existed amongst the army doctors the evidence lies behind the epic in only a few scenes. The *Iliad* is dedicated more to the heroic grandeur of the Trojan campaign and the glory of death in battle rather than healing. The battlefield is the theatre where the hero can attain glory, both in fighting and in dying. Death in battle achieves *kleos*. Glorious death in battle can bring immortal renown; heroic achievement transcends life and an honourable death is a laurel for future generations to admire. Therefore heroic death in most cases must be swift since ‘there are to be no mutilated and hideously suffering warriors to blur the overriding contrast between heroic life and heroic death’.²⁵ From the epic viewpoint death in battle must be swift and non-fatal wounds must be tended to quickly:

wounds in the *Iliad* are always either immediately fatal or are cured in a relatively short time and the poet never describes protracted agony before death²⁶

While Homer’s heroic agenda may idealise the actual experience of dying and wounding, nonetheless the motif of wounding and healing are central, illustrating medical knowledge in the treatment of wounds without magical assistance. During both the Mycenaean period and the one contemporaneous with Homer, healing was generally imbued with paranormal overtones and ‘permeated with belief in magic and the supernatural’,²⁷ especially when practical assistance was of no use and a cure was unknown.²⁸ An example of supernatural healing occurs in the *Odyssey* when a boar wounds Odysseus. His companions use incantations over the wound to stop the flow of blood (*Od.* 19.455-8), illustrating a magical

²⁴ Benjamin Lee Gordon, *Medicine Throughout Antiquity*, 448-9.

²⁵ Jasper Griffin, “Homeric Pathos and Objectivity”, CQ 26, 48.

²⁶ Christine Salazar, *The Treatment of War Wounds in Graeco-Roman Antiquity*, Brill (Leiden: 2000), 128

²⁷ James Longrigg, *Greek Medicine from the Heroic to the Hellenistic Age*, 15.

component of healing. In early Greek healing rituals it was commonplace for healers to employ incantations and other magical practices. However in the *Iliad* it is the technique and skill of the doctor that is evident, typifying a separate body of medical knowledge that is more pragmatic and immediate.

In commenting on wound care in the *Iliad*, Guido Majno states: ‘that for the first time in history one hears of the wounded being carried off the battlefield and tended in barracks, or in the nearby ships’,²⁹ suggesting a developed system of healthcare existed during the time of the Trojan campaign. The healer’s skill is developed and systematised. For instance the art of fashioning bandages by twisting wool to create a sling was already well known.³⁰

Homer describes the curative procedure:

great-hearted Agenor drew from his hand the spear
and bound up his hand with a careful twist of wool fleece
in a sling the henchman held for the shepherd of the people (13.598-600)

As already discussed, Homer describes the physician’s dexterity in the surgical removal of arrows (11.828) and using drugs and medicines (11.829). Skill at drawing out poisons and applying medicinal remedies are also described through the medical procedure Machaon uses when healing Menelaus.

Machaon is summoned to attend to the wounds of Menelaus, a high-ranking and important general, suggesting that Machaon has a prominent position as healer in the Greek army. Machaon ‘sucked the blood and in skill laid healing medicines on it that Chiron in friendship long ago had given his father’ (4.216-7). Machaon’s father is Asclepius ‘the blameless physician’ who along with his son belongs to a family of healers. Homer alludes to the ancient tradition of passing medical knowledge from father to son, as Machaon has received the medicinal remedies and tinctures from his father Asclepius. The source of these healing medicines was Chiron, the elder and ‘divine originator of the healer’s art’.³¹ In *A History of Medicine*, the author summarises the training of Greek physicians that is implied in the *Iliad*:

²⁸ The custom of petitioning the divine for healing when practical methods failed continued into the classical period. Patients were content to consult Asclepius when Hippocratic medicine failed.

²⁹ Guido Majno, *The Healing Hand, Man and Wound in the Ancient World*, 142

³⁰ Richard Janko, *The Iliad: A Commentary*, Volume 4: Books 13-16, 119.

In Homeric times, undoubtedly, apprenticeship with a more experienced healer was the only way a young man could learn the healing art. Later, the knowledge of medicine tended to be in the hands of families of physicians and was transmitted from father to son.³²

The first reference to Asclepius is in the Catalogue of Ships (2.731). Homer suggests that Asclepius' sons are 'good healers' like their father, implying the existence of a tradition of medical nepotism. In the *Iliad* the diffusion of medical knowledge from Chiron to Asclepius and then his son Machaon is consistent with this line of transmission, as described above. Farnell's assumption that Machaon and Podalirius were affiliated with Asclepius merely 'because of their medical character' also supports the system of medical diffusion through families.³³ While Homer is the first remaining source to sketch the prototype of a healing dynasty and suggests that its epicentre is Thessaly, the tradition appears to have existed beforehand.

What remains uncertain is why Thessaly is the earliest literary location for a medical tradition? Edelstein, in referring to Asclepius' association with Chiron, suggests that their relationship is much older than the *Iliad*, implying that a medical tradition already existed.

Homer certainly did not invent Asclepius' relation to Chiron, a feature not even quite in line with the role ascribed to Asclepius in the *Iliad*. There must have been a legend of Asclepius, the physician, before the time of the Homeric Epic.³⁴

This pre-existing 'legend' seems to be centred on Thessaly, the locale of healing embodied in the figure of Chiron who passed on the knowledge of *pharmaka* to his pupils. Homer links Asclepius with Chiron through the 'healing medicines' (4.218) that Machaon uses to treat Menelaus. Chiron had given these potions to Asclepius 'in friendship' (4.219), who in turn distributes these medical remedies to his son. Homer also alludes to Chiron's role as

³¹ C. Kerényi, *Asklepios Archetypal Image of the Physician's Existence*, 78.

³² Plinio Prioreschi, *A History of Medicine*, Volume 2, 640. In writing of the tradition that knowledge in the ancient world was passed from father to son Walter Burkert, *The Orientalizing Revolution*, 44-45 says: 'The requirement that secret knowledge be passed on only to an actual son appears in alchemical writings and in the magical papyri. However, this mandate already applied to the organizations of the early Greek physicians'

³³ L.R. Farnell, *Hero Cults: Greek Hero Cults and Ideas of Immortality*, 237.

³⁴ Emma and Ludwig Edelstein, *Asclepius*, Volume 2, 16.

mentor to Achilles (11.830-1) as well as Achilles' concern when Machaon is wounded, linking the two Thessalian healers together in a fraternal bond to their homeland and to Chiron. The inclusion of the fragmentary healing motif suggests that a pre-Homeric legend of Asclepius, an a priori pattern of a healing hero, was probably already familiar to the audience and no further amplification was necessary.³⁵ Therefore it seems appropriate for Homer to locate a medical training school for heroes in a location that was known in antiquity for its herbs and drugs³⁶, its folktales of Centaurs, the 'hairy beast men' (2.743) on Pelion, especially Chiron, and its reputation for the supernatural. Thessaly had also supplied one quarter of the Greek fleet,³⁷ therefore in all probability the region was important during the Mycenaean period; in fact there are suggestions that the region was more 'Mycenaean' than commonly credited.³⁸ In the palatial culture of the Bronze Age, palace physicians were 'attached to elite households, practicing surgery and functional medicine'.³⁹ Possibly Asclepius represented a prototypical or a legendary doctor. Thessaly was the mythic homeland of not only heroes like Achilles and Asclepius, but also the gods. Mount Olympus, the residence of the gods and home to the divine healer Paiëon, is the Northern boundary of Thessaly. By locating the first medical training centre in Thessaly, healing was positioned alongside the divine and the supernatural and symbolically placed at the feet of the gods.

³⁵ A tradition of doctor hero, 'the hero-doctor in the city' or *heros iatros* has been identified at Eleusis, Athens, Marathon and Rhamnus. At Rhamnus the cult is dated to the 6th Century. See Robert Parker, *Athenian Religion*, 176.

³⁶ Theophrastus, a student of Plato and contemporary of Aristotle is credited with the first record of botany: *Enquiry into Plants*, translated by Arthur Hort, William Heinemann (London: 1916). In Volume 1, 324f he credits Pelion and Ossa, Thessalian mountain ranges, with a 'great abundance' of medicinal plants and herbs.

³⁷ For a compilation of the Thessalian ships in the Greek fleet see Appendix 4.

³⁸ Hooker, *Mycenaean Greece*, Routledge and Kegan Paul (London: 1978), 107.

³⁹ Robert Arnott, "Healing and medicine in the Aegean Bronze Age", 266.

2. Chiron and Medical Mentorship

*'I was brought up in the house of Chiron,
The most righteous of men,
And he taught me to act from a simple heart'*⁴⁰

In only four brief references Homer introduces Chiron (4.218-9; 11.830-1; 16.143-4; 19.389-91).⁴¹ Although fleeting, the textual references locate the seeds of Greek medicine in the wilds of Magnesia, where Chiron's cave symbolises the first record of a training centre for healers. This early motif of the wise Centaur instructing many of the Greek heroes in the skills of healing and the virtues of heroism not only endured but also was enhanced by later mythmakers. By the late classical period it became customary to assume that most heroes with a good reputation had been fostered by Chiron in his Thessalian cave. Chiron had mentored Jason and Achilles and many other Greek heroes whom he trained in the *techne* of healing⁴² as well as befriending Asclepius and Peleus (4.219; 16.143). Homer gives us the first clue that Chiron and Thessaly were the mythic touchstones of Greek medicine through the contingent of heroes from Thessaly.⁴³ This Thessalian legacy ensured that the medical tradition would be forever enmeshed with the supernatural and the divine. In reaching back to the Homeric period later myth makers would be inspired to reconstruct a medical legacy that would begin with Chiron, the fabulous Centaur who not only originated the tradition of medical intervention but also mentored heroes in the healer's art. Through Homer's epic we not only have been able to observe the army

⁴⁰ Achilles speaks about his mentor Chiron in Euripides, *Iphigeneia at Aulis*, translated by W.S. Merwin and George E. Dimock, Jr., Oxford University Press (New York, NY: 1978), 961.

⁴¹ These four references refer to two important bequests handed down from Chiron: the first is *pharmaka*, the 'healing medicines' Chiron has disseminated to Asclepius and Achilles. The other is the 'Pelian ash spear' passed down from Peleus to Achilles. As a recipient of two special gifts from Chiron, Achilles personifies both healer and warrior.

⁴² For Achilles as the student of Chiron, see Hesiod *Cat. Fr.* 204.87ff. Merkelbach et West, *Fragmenta Hesiodica* (Oxford, 1967) and Pindar, *Pythian* 6.21-23; for Jason as the student of Chiron refer to Hesiod, *Cat.* 40.2. Other heroes either reared or schooled by Chiron according to the ancient sources were Aristaeus, Actaeon and Heracles.

⁴³ Pliny suggests that the Thessalian people were content 'in the Trojan period with the medicines of Chiron' (Pliny, *Natural History*, translated by W.H.S. Jones, William Heinemann Ltd., London: 1963, XXX.II.6). Later Galen acknowledges Chiron and the heroes he taught as the traditional figures in the history of medicine. See Paul Veyne, *Did the Greeks Believe Their Myths?*, translated by Paula Wissing, University of Chicago (Chicago, IL: 1988), 55. Chiron is struck and wounded by an arrow. Chiron's wound is incurable; an ironic twist for the healing mentor who has supplied the *pharmaka* that has cured so many other warriors. Ultimately even the great medical practitioner and tutor must cede to the divine.

physicians' skill at surgery, application of drugs and wound treatment, but also can trace its origins to Chiron.

Evidence from Eumelus, in the fragments of Greek epics dating to the mid-eighth Century suggests that Chiron's genealogy as the son of Cronus most probably would have been known to Homer.⁴⁴ The fragment describes Cronus shape shifting into a horse to ravage Philyra, who then fell pregnant and gave birth to Chiron, the horse-centaur (Eumelus 12). Obviously Chiron's myth as the hybrid horse-man was ancient, a relic relating to the pre-Olympian epoch.⁴⁵ Fathered by a Titan, Chiron was an intermediary between the rational order of the Olympian gods and the chaos of the Titan's dark past. As a hybrid Chiron symbolised an amalgam of the divine and the beast, a son of a Titan carried by the body of a horse. Yet the primary motif preserved by Homer and his contemporaries was the Centaur's role as companion and educator to the heroes. Chiron was a mentor who promoted the virtues of respect, ethics and morality to his students and taught them the rules of right living. According to Eumelus it was Chiron who 'led the human race to righteousness by instructing them in oath-taking and cheerful sacrifices and the patterns of Olympus'.⁴⁶ As both the Homeric and Hesiodic fragments suggest, Chiron is the conduit through which the heroic honour of the past is transmitted to the new age of heroes.

As a relic of the past Chiron was a difficult figure for the earlier poets to fully embrace.⁴⁷ Being a Centaur Chiron is half human, half beast, but also as the son of Cronus he is partially divine. Being a half-brother to Zeus he is a step removed from being an Olympian, yet as a Centaur he is clearly never going to be acceptable in the elite atmosphere of the Olympian gods, like Paiëon was. While Chiron is physically similar to other centaurs he is not from the same familial line as the other 'hairy beast men', whose

⁴⁴ Martin L. West in *Greek Epic Fragments*, 26 dates Eumelus to mid-8th C.

⁴⁵ Mircea Eliade, *Shamanism, Archaic Techniques of Ecstasy*, Penguin (London: 1964), 387-8, suggests that the 'centaurs and the first divine healers and doctors' show 'faint traces of a certain primordial shamanism.' Chiron belongs to a primordial age.

⁴⁶ Eumelus, 13.

⁴⁷ Chris Mackie, "The Earliest Jason, What's in a Name?" states: 'There seems to be a certain unease about Chiron in the ancient sources, partly because he has an astonishing capacity to perform great feats with his drugs, and pass them on to his pupils. Whilst Chiron's virtue in his use of drugs is never really in question, he is not able to direct the activities of his pupils after they have left his care.'

ancestry can be traced back to the Lapith king, Ixion.⁴⁸ While both Chiron and the other centaurs are marginal to Greek culture, Chiron does not display the barbaric nature as others of the tribe. In contrast, the other Centaurs are wild, unpredictable and barbaric, brandishing tree trunks, boulders and firebrands as their weapons. They are hybrids, intolerant of culture and disrespectful of its laws and customs, especially marriage.⁴⁹ Like Chiron they inhabit the threshold between the primitive past and the civilising present. The Centaurs' habitat was Thessaly, a region on the threshold of the 'Dark Age'.⁵⁰ Page duBois captures how Chiron and the other Centaurs represent a world before culture, who inhabit an archaic pre-rational layer of the Greek psyche:

Cheiron was the only Centaur to be immortal, to be married; he shared his vast knowledge of hunting with the heroes entrusted to his care. He also possessed the knowledge about *pharmaka*, drugs and taught his craft to his pupils. Cheiron's benevolence shows how the Centaurs inhabited a threshold, were liminal in another sense, that is, they lived in nature both as violent, uncivilised beasts, and as characters from a lost past, before the necessity for separation between gods and men, before work, cooking, death, all the evils that culture brings. They demonstrate the Greek's fundamental ambivalence about nature and the prehistory of mankind. The world before culture was viewed with nostalgia as well as loathing.⁵¹

By the 5th Century Centaurs were loathsome. They became the artist's ally in portraying the barbarian at the gate of Greek democracy.⁵² Therefore, as Dubois suggests, Chiron is

⁴⁸ Pindar, *Pythian II*, 21-48.

⁴⁹ For an exploration of the Centaur, see G.S. Kirk, *Myth, Its Meanings and Functions in Ancient and Other Cultures*, Cambridge University Press (Cambridge: 1986), 152-161.

⁵⁰ The term dark age is being used in the context of Westlake's opinion that Thessaly remained in the Dark Ages until the 4th Century. When referring to Thessaly, H.D. Westlake, *Thessaly in the Fourth Century BC*, 4 states: 'the Dark Ages may scarcely be considered at an end until the close of the fifth century'.

⁵¹ Page duBois, *Centaurs and Amazons, Women and the Pre-History of the Great Chain of Being*, University of Michigan (Ann Arbor, MI: 1991), 30.

⁵² The 'world before culture' was epitomised by the Centaur as well as the region they inhabited, Thessaly. The centaur symbolised anti-culture. On the other hand Chiron represented the wisdom of the ancient traditions, an exception that proved the rule. But by the middle of the 5th Century the centaur symbolised the barbarian, while Chiron personified the ancient healing tradition. During the mid 5th Century Athenians used the motif of the Thessalian Centauro-machy (the battle between the Lapiths and the Centaurs) on the metopes of the Parthenon and the temple of Hephaestus in the Agora. Robin Osborne in "Framing the Centaur" from *Art and Text in Ancient Greek Culture*, Cambridge University Press (Cambridge: 1994), 52 suggests that: 'the most important surviving sculptural sequences from fifth century BCE Greek temples all prominently feature centaurs'. This reminded Athenians of their struggles with barbarians and the continual conflict of opposites: nature/culture, divine/beast and moderation and self-restraint (*sophrosyne*) versus impiety (*hybris*).

left an ambivalent figure at the dawn of Greek civilisation, a misshapen remnant from the prehistoric past. Ironically it was his marginality that identified him with the heroes who, like their mentor, also suffered from being dislocated and disenfranchised. Heroes become attached to Chiron through their shared experience of marginality. Semi-divine, yet embodied as an animal, Chiron personified heroic valour and morality yet was trapped in a mortal body. The image of Chiron portrays the instinctual reality of the ambivalent relationship between spirit and death, an archaic truth remembered through disease. In myth Chiron survives as wise and just, the virtuous mentor of the heroes, who reminds them of the values of the past. Located in a cave on Mt. Pelion, a region known in antiquity for its herbs and drugs, Chiron is portrayed as a healer who uses the prolific herbs of Pelion,⁵³ a teacher of hunting and healing, a philosopher and a foster father. While Homer refers to Chiron as the ‘most righteous of the Centaurs’ (11.831) the poet invents a more appropriate mentor, in the character of Phoenix, for his leading hero Achilles.⁵⁴ As scholars have suggested Chiron is unacceptable in the Homeric age as the tutor to the greatest of all heroes.⁵⁵

Chiron is a complex figure to represent the tentative beginnings of Greek medicine. Yet from the earliest sources he was depicted as the seminal medical mentor to young and

⁵³ While Thessaly in the prehistoric period was profusely wooded, Mount Olympus and the Mount Pelion regions were especially known for their prolific plant life: wildflowers, herbs and roots. Root digging, herb collecting and drug handling for healing purposes was an aspect of pastoral life. The use of herbs for medicinal and surgical purposes was an important aspect of Chiron’s tradition. This mythic tradition is continued through botany by the plants that are named for the Centaur Chiron. *Centaurea* has 70 species throughout Greece and Dioscorides suggests this was the plant with which Chiron tried to heal himself after being accidentally wounded by Heracles, commonly naming the plant ‘blood of Heracles’. See *The Greek Herbal of Dioscorides*, translated by Robert T. Gunther, Oxford University Press (Oxford: 1934). Book III: 8 & 9 describe the plants bearing the Centaur’s name: *Kentaurion Makron* and *Kantaurion Mikron*. Theophrastus in *Enquiry into Plants* (9.9.2) named *Inula helenium* the ‘all heal of Chiron’ as it grew throughout the valleys of Thessaly. The root, which contains inulin and helein, still remains an important medicinal herb today. The seminal botanical treatise of Theophrastus suggested that on Pelion plants, which had ‘medicinal properties in their roots and juices’ were gathered for healing purposes. Pelion is also listed as one of the best places for the location of drugs: ‘of places in Hellas those most productive of drugs are Pelion in Thessaly’.

⁵⁴ See Chris Mackie, ‘Achilles’ teachers: Chiron and Phoenix in the *Iliad*’. The mentor was obviously an important role that continued into the Homeric period. In fact Homer is the source of the word. In the *Odyssey* Mentor is the faithful Ithacan advisor to whom Odysseys entrusts the care of his house and the education of his son Telemachus. Phoenix and Mentor are a new age of mentors who are human, unlike Chiron who represents the archaic uncivilised past.

⁵⁵ Bryan Hainsworth, *The Iliad: A Commentary*, 121 comments on Chiron as being an unacceptable tutor to Homer’s protagonist, as for all his justice, he still was a mountain dwelling centaur. Hainsworth suggests that Chiron is consciously banished ‘to the sidelines of the *Iliad*’. Even though Chiron sits out the epic his spirit still lingers as the link to the prehistoric past.

disenfranchised boys destined to be heroes.⁵⁶ Chiron's implied role as a guide through 'rites of passage in the wild'⁵⁷ identified him not only as an educator but as a mentor as well. Fragmentary textual evidence suggests that Chiron passed on medical knowledge and moral concepts to his students. Homer is the earliest reference referring to Chiron as a teacher of the healing tradition (11.831-2) who gave special medicines to his friend Asclepius (4.218-9). While Homer does not credit Chiron the medical mentor of Asclepius, as Pindar specifically does,⁵⁸ it is evident that Chiron passes on the tradition of the medicines and therefore is the origin of medical knowledge.

While it is never clear if Chiron developed a cult, his role in mythic history was continuous. His presence as a medical authority and revered teacher spanned the generations of Trojan heroes and their parents. Mythic fragments associate Chiron with two generations of Greek heroes. Jason was a Thessalian hero from the previous generation who was fostered and mentored by Chiron. It was Chiron who gave him his name Iason, meaning 'healer'.⁵⁹ While the ancient sources do not provide us with any references to his healing abilities, a fragment from a Corinthian column-crater (575 BC) suggests Jason may too have been skilled at the art of healing. The scene on the fragment has been interpreted as Jason healing Phineus' blindness through the laying on of hands.⁶⁰ Consistent with tradition early

⁵⁶ The theme of healing and marginality is similar to many contemporary healers working with addictions, trauma and dissociative disorders who are drawn to their vocation through personal suffering. John Sanford, *Healing and Wholeness*, Paulist Press (New York, NY: 1977), 81 refers to the motif of the Wounded Healer suggesting: 'A certain faith in the healing process is generated by having found healing oneself, not to mention a capacity for empathy with those who are ill, which can only come through having suffered'.

⁵⁷ Chris Mackie, "The Earliest Jason. What's in a Name?"

⁵⁸ Chiron's tutelage of Asclepius is noted by Pindar in *Nemean III* and *Pythian III*.

⁵⁹ See Chris Mackie, "The Earliest Jason. What's in a Name?" 4-5 and B.K. Braswell, *A Commentary on the Fourth Pythian Ode of Pindar* (New York, NY: 1988), 340.

⁶⁰ For a more detailed account of the fragmentary evidence as well as the interpretation see C.J. Mackie, "The Earliest Jason. What's in a Name?" 7-9 and T. Gantz, *Early Greek Myth*, Volume 1, 354-5. This evidence could suggest that earlier versions of the myth might have credited Jason with the healing magic that was later projected onto Medea, the Eastern sorceress with the knowledge of herbs and poisons. As a priestess of the cult of Hecate, she was also associated with magic. See Apollonius of Rhodes, *The Voyage of the Argo*, translated by E.V. Rieu, Penguin (London: 1971), 3.844-65. Her first magical act on Thessalian soil was to rejuvenate Jason's aged father. The tradition of her ability to rejuvenate the aged with *pharmaka* was a long-standing one, recorded as early as the *Nostoi*, 2. In 530 BCE 'a series of Attic vases with the ram and the cauldron' retell the magical acts of Medea (Timothy Gantz, *Early Greek Myth*, Volume 1, 366-8). In order to perform this ritual Medea must gather the appropriate herbs and magical plants which grew profusely in Thessaly as described vividly in Ovid, *Metamorphoses*, VII.222-8. Sophocles' lost play *Rhizotomoi* (*Rootcutters*) also depicts Medea gathering herbs. The description of Medea's ritualistic collection of herbs, her sorcery and magical use of plants is strongly connected to Thessaly. Horace also referred to the 'poisonous herbs from Iolcus'. See Horace, *Odes and Epodes*, translated by David Mulroy, The University of

myth reports Jason's son Medeus was also reared by Chiron (*Theogony* 1001). Similarly Peleus and Asclepius, who were both intimate friends with the Centaur, and their sons Achilles and Machaon, are connected to Chiron. Chiron's tutelage and companionship of the Greek heroes was trans-generational encompassing the new breed of Trojan heroes as well as the lineage of older heroes like Peleus, who accompanied Jason on his quest to Colchis in the epoch before the Trojan War. Mythic motifs of Jason's quest for the Golden Fleece suggest that this narrative may reach back into the Bronze Age, supporting the longevity of Chiron's tradition.⁶¹ Both Homer and Hesiod referred to Chiron as the foster father and mentor of heroes, which suggests that his myth predates the Homeric epics and that his story was probably already familiar to his audience. Preserved in the earliest references was the motif of Chiron's medical mentorship, which had become an essential aspect of the hero's education as well as a consistent facet of the heroic biography. Behind the terse reference to Asclepius and Chiron in the *Iliad* are clues that the tradition of the physician was well established.

Chiron's uncivilised past may be the reason why he is only mentioned briefly in the *Iliad*. Yet behind the insubstantial references lies the hint of an ancient tradition. Of the four times his name is specified, two references allude to healing (4.218-9; 11.831-2) and two to wounding (16.141-4; 19.388-91), the paradoxical pattern associated with Chiron and the homeopathic tradition which calls for treating 'like with like'.⁶² These references preserve two of Chiron's bequests, which are passed down through the generations. The first is the medicines that Chiron gave to Asclepius that now are part of Machaon's belongings as well as the drugs Achilles passed on to Patroclus. The second is the spear given to Peleus, now in his son Achilles' possession. Both valuables are the legacy of Chiron, surviving as images of early healing attitudes and traditions. Homer's later two references to the weapon Chiron gave Peleus are described as the 'Pelian ash spear which Chiron had

Michigan Press (Ann Arbor, MI: 1994), Epode 5: 22, 86, initiating the Roman notion that Thessaly cultivated these herbs for the purpose of magical ritual.

⁶¹ G. Kirk, *The Nature of Greek Myths*, Penguin Books (London: 1990), 160 states that Iolcus, the departure point for Jason's quest, was an important port in Mycenaean times, but not later, linking the hero to this period. By association Chiron, whose cave was located on Mt. Pelion above the port, also was legendary in this period.

⁶² Homeopathy is derived from the Greek words *homoios* (similar) and *pathos* (suffering) and is a system of medicine based on the law of similars, prescribing remedies that produce a similar set of symptoms in healthy subjects. This remedy is mixed in extremely low concentrations.

brought to his father from high on Pelion to be death for fighters'. This spear has supernatural powers (20.99-100)⁶³ not only in wounding but also in healing which becomes evident in the post Homeric literature. The narrative that develops in the later texts clearly demonstrates Achilles' ability as a healer and that Chiron's spear is iconographical of the mysterious homeopathic fusion of wounding and healing.

The *Cypria* contains some epic fragments from the Trojan cycle that reveal the mythic story line of Peleus' courtship and marriage to Thetis, including the wedding gift of the spear that Chiron gave to Peleus.⁶⁴ The union of Achilles' parents and gift of the spear were probably already a well-known tradition in Homer's time given the *Iliad's* brief reference. Later writers and vase painters enhanced the narrative of Chiron's friend Peleus capturing his bride, the powerful goddess Thetis, their great wedding feast on Mt. Pelion, and Chiron's wedding gift of the spear.⁶⁵ According to Homer Peleus had passed the wedding gift of Chiron's spear onto his son, which he used as a fierce weapon in the battle against the Trojans. Other fragments from the Trojan cycle which probably first appeared in the mid-6th Century develop the mythic theme of Chiron's special spear.⁶⁶

During a landing at what they thought was Troy the Greeks engage in battle with the Mysians and Achilles wounds the local king, Telephus.⁶⁷ Later, on the advice of an oracle, Telephus comes to Argos to seek out Achilles who has the ability to heal his wound. Apollodorus' commentary details that it was prophetic Apollo who told Telephus that he would only be cured when the one who inflicted the wound also tended it.⁶⁸ The method of cure was to scrape the verdigris⁶⁹ off the spear and into the wound, a homeopathic

⁶³ Supernatural, as the spear seemed to be guided by a god and never missed its mark. Similarly in Celtic myth Lug's spear also never failed to hit its target. The motif of the spear that wounds and heals is an aspect of Christian mythology, as the spear that wounds Christ was also seen to be an instrument of healing.

⁶⁴ *Cypria*, Fragments 3-4.

⁶⁵ Hesiod *Theogony* (1003-7); *Cypria*, argument 1, fragment 4; *Returns*, argument 4; Pindar *Isthmian VIII*, 30-66; The Francois Vase depicts the wedding procession of Peleus and Thetis; Catullus Poem 64 "The Marriage of Peleus and Thetis".

⁶⁶ *Greek Epic Fragments*, *Cypria* Argument 7, 13 suggest the *Cypria* 'can hardly be earlier than the second half of the sixth century'.

⁶⁷ Telephus was the son of Heracles and the subject of many classical plays now lost. Interestingly the Pelion ash spear that heals him is thematically similar to his father's bow that is necessary to heal Philoctetes and win the war for the Greeks.

⁶⁸ *Greek Epic Fragments*, 73-4 includes Apollodorus' narrative accompanying the original.

⁶⁹ Verdigris is the green or greenish blue poisonous pigment formed on copper, brass or bronze surfaces. The head of the spear was bronze.

procedure of injecting poison into the wound for cure, an unusual technique and seemingly a vestige of a more primitive healing ritual. Whether this account underlay Homer's brief reference to the spear or whether it was shaped throughout the successive centuries is uncertain. What is certain is that the spear was emblematic of Achilles' dual legacy of healer and warrior, his inheritance from Chiron.

As mentioned previously Chiron's other legacy was the 'healing medicines' that Asclepius had given his son Machaon (4.218-9). Chiron also passed his medical knowledge on to Achilles who has shared it with Patroclus (11.829-831). Later poets and playwrights amplified the passing reference to Chiron's association with Achilles. By the early 5th Century the myth of Chiron was more developed than the skeletal remains of the narrative preserved in the *Iliad* and other earlier sources. For instance both Pindar and later Euripides clearly acknowledge Chiron's fostering and mentoring of Achilles⁷⁰, an aspect faintly alluded to by Homer (11.831-2).

The initial reference to Chiron as an educator of ethics and morals is an early composition belonging to the Hesiodic corpus called *The Precepts of Chiron*. This didactic poem 'addressed by the Centaur Chiron to his pupil Achilles'⁷¹ included moral and practical precepts. In *Pythian VI* Pindar gives us a sense of what morals Chiron may have taught Achilles by fashioning apophthegms composed in a similar fashion to the original. Chiron counsels Achilles in the virtues of respecting the elders, first worship Zeus and then honour the parents:

Among the mountains, they say, Philyra's son
Gave to the mighty child of Peleus far away from his home
This counsel: 'Zeus Knoniadas,
The deep-voiced Lord of Lightning and Thunderbolts,
Him thou shalt worship first of Gods:
And a like honour
Give to thy parents for the length of their days.

(*Pythian VI.19-26*)

⁷⁰ Pindar references to Chiron as mentor to Achilles *Nemean III.43-63* and *Pythian VI.21-23*; Euripides, *Iphigeneia at Aulis*, 1265-75.

⁷¹ Hesiod, *The Homeric Hymns and Homeric*.

From this ode Chiron's role as a mentor of philosophy and morality is apparent. As the preceptor of moral and ethical behaviour, Chiron also personified the medical amalgam of morality and healing. The mythic legacy of ethical medicine passed on to his heroic charges became an important cornerstone in the early practice of rational medicine which honoured the alignment of medicine and morality.

By the 5th Century Chiron was far enough in the mythic past to be romanticised as the wise teacher. Unlike Homer, poets and playwrights felt safely distant from the chaos of the Dark Age to idealise the legacy of the Centaur. In *Iphigenia at Aulis* Euripides passionately describes the ethics and morals that Chiron taught Achilles in the secluded and protective wilds of Pelion. It is Agamemnon who suggests that Achilles was reared by Chiron to avoid 'learning the evil ways of men'. And Clytemnestra agrees that Achilles has had a fine education: 'Wise teacher! And Peleus was wiser still, sending the boy to him'.⁷² But it is Achilles himself who describes the virtuous education he received from Chiron:

Pride rises up in me
and draws me on. But I have learned
to curb my grief in adversity, and my joy
in triumph.
Mortals who have learned this
Can hope to live by reason. There are moments
When it is good not to be too wise,
But there are times too when taking thought is useful.
I was brought up in the house of Chiron,
The most righteous of men,
And he taught me to act from a simple heart.⁷³

Euripides assigns the 5th Century values of rational thought and moderation to Chiron's teaching. Achilles is now taught to 'curb' his feelings, 'live by reason' and to reflect. By the 5th Century the rational reconstruction of medicine had distanced itself from the mythic past permitting Euripides to project new attitudes onto Chiron's philosophical mentorship.

⁷² Euripides, *Iphigeneia at Aulis*, 958-61.

⁷³ Euripides, *Iphigeneia at Aulis*, 1265-75.

Pindar laments the loss of the past, wishing that Chiron were still alive. Sentimentally looking back to the past Pindar laments:

I could wish
That Chiron, Philyra's son,
(If with my lips I should utter all men's prayer)
Were alive, who is departed,
The lord of wide lands, the seed of Kronos Ouranidas,
That he ruled in the glades of Pelion, the wild Centaur,
With a heart friendly to man.⁷⁴

While the reference is fleeting, it is Homer who has preserved Chiron's position as the medical tutor to Achilles. Eurypylos, one of the Thessalian heroes, instructs Patroclus to attend to his wound and apply the medicinal ointments that Achilles gave him. Homer clearly alludes to the healing tradition that Chiron passed to Achilles: 'The notion of healing is germane to the Iliadic Achilles'⁷⁵, a notion clearly embedded in Chiron's medical mentorship of Achilles. Another mythic Thessalian hero who also knows the mysterious alignment of wounding and healing is Philoctetes who is introduced in the *Iliad* as the leader of seven ships (2.718). Although never stated, the audience is reminded of his abandonment by the Greeks on Lemnos due to a painful snakebite. He suffers both physically from the wound and emotionally from the pain of being abandoned by his colleagues. In the eponymous play, Sophocles (649ff) describes the healing drug Philoctetes uses to relieve the pain of his wound. It took two centuries to make clear what the Homeric audiences were probably already aware of: being Thessalian Philoctetes knew the antidote to snake bite. Given the strong alignment between Thessaly, Chiron and the healing tradition it seems reasonable to assume that a Thessalian of the same generation as Achilles and Machaon would be aware of the healing power of local herbs.⁷⁶ By the 5th Century the legacy of the Thessalians as healers had become part of the mythic tradition.

⁷⁴ Pindar, *Pythian III*.1-5.

⁷⁵ Chris Mackie, "In the Centaur's Cave" from an unpublished manuscript, 3. G.S. Kirk, *The Nature of Greek Myths* also refers to this theme.

⁷⁶ See Chris Mackie, "The Earliest Philoctetes".

This chapter has demonstrated two ideas. First, an extant medical tradition free of magical or supernatural connotations existed, revealed in the few examples of treatment of war wounds in the *Iliad*. This tradition coexisted with religious rituals and petitions to the gods for healing. Second, transmission of medical knowledge existed centred on Thessaly. Chiron is the mythic figure that embodies this tradition through his mentorship of the Greek heroes and his teachings on both moral and medical matters. The literary focus identifies Chiron and Thessaly as mythic threads to medical prehistory, ensuring the supernatural remains an aspect of medicine's heritage. Both the natural and supernatural strands of medicine continued to coexist and influence one another, bound together not just in myth but also in the imagination of the Greeks.