

# THE DIVINE DISEASE

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*One approach is called 'rational' medicine, spearheaded under the aegis of Hippocrates of Cos, which presented a scientific approach to disease and cure, attempting to disassociate itself from magical and supernatural beliefs. The other was 'religious' medicine aligned with the cult of Asclepius, which attended to the belief in the divine origin of disease and cure.*



*by Brian Clark*

# INTRODUCTION

## THE DIVINE DISEASE

*'Hippocratic writers, with their use of terms and concepts such as katharsis (cleansing), apostasis (separation and/or expulsion) and pharmakon (drug), draw inspiration from traditional religious ideas. Thus, despite their insistence on non-divine, natural causality and natural principles of remedy, the fifth century medical writers cannot escape certain ways of thinking about disease deeply embedded in Greek culture.'*<sup>1</sup>

- Jennifer Clarke Kosak

At the end of the 5<sup>th</sup> Century Hippocratic concepts and principles had developed out of time-honoured traditional ideas about disease. Embedded in the Greek concept of illness was a religious dimension, shaped through its continuous connection to the divine and accompanying rituals of purification.<sup>2</sup> Towards the close of the 5<sup>th</sup> Century the threads of this motif had become tightly woven into the myth of Asclepius whose emergent cult practice of temple healing coexisted alongside Hippocratic medicine. However, it was not only Hippocratic writers on sickness, but also mythmakers, historians, poets and playwrights who were influenced by long-held attitudes and beliefs in the role of the divine in illness and healing.<sup>3</sup> From the earliest literary sources it is apparent that Greek culture had always associated the divine with disease, investing illness with a moral causation.

Prior to the spread of Hippocratic theories during the fifth century BCE the very idea of illness had clear moral connotations. Illness, and in particular epidemic disease, was a *miasma*, a pollution derived from offending the gods.<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Jennifer Clarke Kosak, *Heroic Measures: Hippocratic Medicine in the Making of Euripidean Tragedy*, Brill (Boston, MA: 2004), 3. Throughout the thesis I will utilise Ms. Kosak's phrase 'ways of thinking about disease'. For other scholars who acknowledge the debt Hippocratic writers owe to religious tradition, see Chapter 1, footnote 3.

<sup>2</sup> The word 'embedded' is used by Simon Price in his introduction to *Religions of the Ancient Greeks*, Cambridge University Press (Cambridge: 1999), 3 and also by Jan Bremmer in the introduction to *Greek Religion*, Oxford University Press (Oxford: 1994), 2-4. The word summarises how ingrained religious experiences were for the ancient Greeks.

<sup>3</sup> For 5<sup>th</sup> Century examples of the divine as grounds for illness, see Herodotus, *Histories*, IV 205, VI 61, 75, 84; Euripides, *Hippolytus*, 141-2, 478-9; Euripides, *Orestes*, 34-8; Sophocles, *Philoctetes*, 192-200; Aeschylus, *The Libation Bearers*, 279-90; Aristophanes, *The Wasps*, 1037-9.

<sup>4</sup> Maria Elena Gorrini, "The Hippocratic Impact on Healing Cults: The Archaeological Evidence in Attica", from *Hippocrates in Context*, edited by Philip J. Van Der Eijk, Brill (Leiden: 2005), 135.

This thesis evolved out of my own interest and passion in non-traditional and sacred forms of healing. Originally my intent was to explore the ‘enlightened’ union of rational and religious medicine in the classical period as a contrast to the estrangement in present-day medicine between methodological and alternative forms of healing. However it became clear in the context of the Greek mind that the coexistence of rational and religious healing was neither enlightened nor unusual, since a meaningful and multi-faceted relationship between the divine and disease had existed in the Greek world from at least the Mycenaean period.<sup>5</sup> Therefore the core of my thesis shifted to the development of the divine’s connection to disease and how it emerged organisationally under the auspices of Asclepius.

Throughout the course of the 5<sup>th</sup> Century BCE evidence points to the parallel development of two broad streams of medical practice, each poised to spread throughout the Greek world. One approach is called ‘rational’ medicine, spearheaded under the aegis of Hippocrates of Cos, which presented a scientific approach to disease and cure, attempting to disassociate itself from magical and supernatural beliefs.<sup>6</sup> Its doctrines were disseminated throughout parts of Greece in the latter 5<sup>th</sup> Century through treatises and public lectures.<sup>7</sup> The other was ‘religious’ medicine aligned with the cult of Asclepius, which attended to the belief in the divine origin of disease and cure. The medical emergency of the Athenian plague that devastated the city in 430/29 BCE highlighted the usage of both rational and religious medicine and subtly contributed to the convergence of both Hippocratic and religious medicine in Athens in the last quarter of the 5<sup>th</sup> Century. Rational medicine had been disseminated to

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<sup>5</sup> Robert Arnott, “Healing and medicine in the Aegean Bronze Age”, *Journal of the Royal Society of Medicine*, London, Volume 89, May 1996.

<sup>6</sup> Throughout the text the terms rational and religious medicine will be utilised to differentiate Hippocratic and scientific medical practices from healing rituals, particularly those used in the cult of Asclepius. The word rational suggests that diagnosis and treatment are brought about through logical deduction, including therapeutic means like diet or medical intervention using drugs and surgery, free of supernatural elements. The concept of Greek ‘rational’ medicine has been criticised and debated frequently in the current literature. It is now recognised that early Greek medicine could not completely isolate itself from the supernatural nor could ‘rational’ medicine remain objective. I have elected to use the terms rational and religious medicine as categories. For a detailed analysis of the complex changes in the study of ancient Greek medicine see Philip J. Van der Eijk, *Medicine and Philosophy in Classical Antiquity*, Cambridge University Press (Cambridge: 2005), 1-42. For the problems in differentiating rational from irrational medicine see H.F. Horstmanshoff and M. Stol (eds.), *Magic and Rationality in Ancient Near Eastern and Graeco-Roman Medicine*, Brill (Leiden: 2004), 1-9 and Plinio Pioreschi, *A History of Medicine*, Volume 2, Edwin Mellen Press (Lewiston, NY: 1994), 251-266.

<sup>7</sup> The medical texts loosely grouped under the aegis of Hippocrates have been dated between approximately 430-350. The corpus includes about sixty works which were mainly collected together in Alexandria in the last quarter of the 3<sup>rd</sup> Century. Vivian Nutton, “Medicine in the Greek World, 800-50 BC”, in L. I. Conrad et al, *The Western Medical Tradition*, Cambridge University Press (Cambridge: 1995), 21-2.

medical practitioners before the plague<sup>8</sup>, while the sacred snakes of Asclepius, the symbol of the cult's relocation, heralded the god's arrival in Athens in 420 BCE. The *polis* embraced the new healing cult, establishing the sanctuary of Asclepius on the western side of the Acropolis, locating it at the heart of Greek religious practice and at the doorstep of the Hippocratic doctors:

indeed the healing cult of the god Asclepius provided a significant alternative to the care offered by the rationalist doctors<sup>9</sup>

From a modern perspective it would be logical to conclude that temple medicine was the prelude to a more logical medical framework and that religious beliefs about the cure of disease would become less significant as science took hold. But this is not the case. Even though protestations were voiced and boundaries clearly set, rational medicine did not diminish the magico-religious approaches to healing.<sup>10</sup> Both approaches to medicine coexisted throughout the later classical and Hellenistic periods without the religious attitude towards healing becoming eclipsed by a scientific viewpoint. Early Greek medical tradition included numerous types of healers like exorcists, root-cutters, bone-setters, herbalists, gymnasts<sup>11</sup> some of whom reached back into the mythic past to legitimise themselves. Boundaries between rational and religious medicine were never as clear as later secular medical practitioners would have liked them to be. Indeed still today this boundary is tenuous, especially with a difficult or terminal diagnosis.<sup>12</sup>

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<sup>8</sup> Thucydides in *The History of the Peloponnesian War* (VII.47) records the futility of the physician in the face of the overwhelming disaster.

<sup>9</sup> Jennifer Clarke Kosak, *Heroic Measures*, 3.

<sup>10</sup> The Hippocratic text *On the Sacred Disease* written in the last quarter of the 5<sup>th</sup> Century attacks the notion of the 'sacred disease' and those who profess to believe in sacred illnesses and accompanying 'unnatural' treatments. The author challenges the superstition that epilepsy is sacred and tries to reconstruct a 'natural' scientific explanation for the disease based on nature, not a divine act. This explanation covers the majority of the text which also includes Hippocratic principles and claims. Those who suggest disease is divine are deemed ignorant and simplistic, as are their proposed cures. The author vehemently tries to de-construct 'magical' medicine and replace it with logical, scientific Hippocratic practice which suggests that the ritualistic, cathartic healers he attacks were not only widespread, but popular and in direct competition in the marketplace. *On the Sacred Disease* is a record that demonstrates against 'magical' practices clearly delineating the boundary between legitimate (Hippocratic/science) and illegitimate (magic/ritual) medical practice. Traditional scholarship has generally used this text to demonstrate the dominance of rational medicine over supernatural methods of healing proclaiming the 'emancipation of medicine from superstition' (James Longrigg, *Greek Rational Medicine*, Routledge, London: 1993, 1). However scholarship in the past two decades has begun to refute that such a clear-cut boundary existed and that the plurality of healing traditions overlapped. See Julie Laskaris, *The Art is Long*, Brill (Leiden: 2002); Vivian Nutton, "Ancient Medicine: Asclepius Transformed", from C.J. Tupin and T.E. Rihll (eds.), *Science and Mathematics in Ancient Greek Culture*, Oxford University Press (Oxford: 2002), 242-255.

<sup>11</sup> Vivian Nutton, "Medicine in the Greek World, 800-50 BC", 16.

<sup>12</sup> See Appendix 1: *Disease, Virtue and the Morality of Illness*.

The boundaries between rational and religious healing have been blurred by later ideologies and ways of thinking. Firstly, the belief in the post-Hellenistic world was that the temple of Asclepius at Cos had predated Hippocrates and here he learned his trade from priest-physicians who transmitted medical knowledge to their students.<sup>13</sup> Secondly, the legacy of Hippocrates that was widely circulated and accepted was grossly misshapen.<sup>14</sup> Finally medicine's supernatural heritage was dismissed by later scholars and medical writers whose commitment to the superiority of rationality excluded considering magical and religious influences upon its development.<sup>15</sup> Armed with the advanced paradigm of science, both ancient and modern writers wrote triumphantly, albeit erroneously, of rational medicine's defeat of the 'supernatural causation of disease'.<sup>16</sup>

We should not assume therefore that empiricism entirely displaced magico-religious approaches any more than the biomedical model superseded 'natural' remedies in the contemporary era. In the current social context alternative healing modalities and medical science no longer exist as equals as religious and rational attitudes to disease and cure have become shadows of one other. The dominant medical paradigm in Western medicine is the biomedical model, which rests uneasily with alternative healing systems. Projecting this estranged relationship of the 'superior' biomedical model and its 'inferior' healing alternatives backward to understand the affiliation of Hippocratic medicine and religious healing in the classical period is flawed.<sup>17</sup> In the Greek world both orientations to healing had developed together from within the culture and acquired their own niche. Therefore to understand their coexistence in the latter 5<sup>th</sup> Century this thesis focuses on myths and literature that corroborate the enduring relationship of disease with the divine and supernatural.

While Asclepius emerged as the god of healing whose cult of temple medicine became aligned with miraculous cures, there already had been a long tradition connecting deity and disease. The mythic

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<sup>13</sup> The myth of Asclepius and the biography of Hippocrates along with their diverse approaches to medicine became entangled in legend. The historical distortions continued throughout later antiquity. Refer to Appendix 5: *Asclepius and Hippocrates: Medical Mythmaking*.

<sup>14</sup> Two references, which clarify the fictional accounts of Hippocrates, are Wesley Smith, *Hippocrates Pseudepigraphics Writings*, translated by W.D. Smith, Brill (Leiden: 1990) and Jody Rubin Pinault, *Hippocratic Lives and Legends*, Brill (Leiden: 1992).

<sup>15</sup> For an examination of the supernatural heritage of rational medicine, see Plinio Plioreschi, *A History of Medicine*, Volume 2, 251-266 and Julie Laskaris, *The Art is Long*, 32-53.

<sup>16</sup> J. Longrigg, *Greek Rational Medicine*, 45. Plinio Plioreschi, *A History of Medicine*, Volume 2, 266 suggests that the urge to suppose that the 5<sup>th</sup> Century populace believed in rational medicine is our need 'to invest the ancient Greeks, the object of our admiration and even veneration, with ideas that are characteristic of our time, in this case, the naturalistic explanation of diseases.'

<sup>17</sup> Helen King, *Hippocrates' Women*, Routledge (London: 1998), 101.

motif of petitioning a god for cure was a template evident from the earliest literary sources. In fact this may have contributed to later antiquity's assumption that Asclepian temple healing predated Hippocratic medicine. Underpinning my enquiry is how the medical metamorphosis is displayed through the diachronic changes in the myths of healers. I will be concerned primarily with myth as the reflection of prevailing attitudes that contributed to science and religion coexisting in the parallel practices of traditional and temple medicine. To address this question I will focus on medical personalities in myth who embody the spirit of early Greek medicine: Paiëon, Apollo, Chiron, Asclepius, Machaon, and Podilarius.<sup>18</sup>



*Asclepius with his staff is accompanied by his daughter Hygeia, who pays homage to him by offering wine as a libation from a bowl. Marble, Italy, 1st century AD*

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<sup>18</sup> Other deities connected with healing emerged later. Hygeia, the popular goddess personifying Health, did not appear until the last quarter of the 5th Century. While the concept of health had been applied to Athena in her epithet as Hygeia, the goddess did not become known in her own right until the cult of Asclepius brought her to Athens in 420 BCE. See Emma Stafford, *Worshipping Virtues Personification and the Divine in Ancient Greece*, Duckworth and the Classical Press of Wales (London: 2000), 147 – 172.

I will argue that temple medicine evolved in tandem with rational medicine and both medical paradigms flourished simultaneously as a result of the deeply entrenched notions the Greeks held towards disease. Even though some practitioners of rational medicine were highly critical of alternative healing modalities and dismissive of the belief in the divine being the cause or cure of disease, these same doctors offered sacrifices to the gods and held festivities in honour of the healing god.<sup>19</sup> However divergent these two opposing orientations towards disease and healing may seem, they coexisted and thrived together in the latter days of the classical and throughout the Hellenistic period. From a modern perspective the open acceptance of both scientific and spiritual healing operating freely in the marketplace is remarkable, but to the classical Greek it was commonplace.<sup>20</sup>

The divine disease was ingrained in the Greek way of thinking. Even the advent of Hippocratic medicine with its rational tenets and invectives against this point of view could not sway the notion of the divine's association with disease.<sup>21</sup> My pivotal argument in this thesis will be that the alignment of disease with the divine was crucial to the Greeks and consequently this fundamental alliance responded to the changing paradigm of medicine through the emergence of Asclepius as the god of healing. This thesis surveys the relationship between the divine and disease in the earliest literary sources from the time when disease was god-sent to the end of the 5<sup>th</sup> Century when Asclepius' ritual of temple healing became institutionalised as religious medicine. Homer's epics (c. 700 BCE) contain the first references to the notion of disease as a divine phenomenon, while the introduction of the worship of Asclepius into Athenian religion (c. 420 BCE) epitomises the acknowledgement of religious healing.<sup>22</sup> Therefore this thesis encompasses three centuries, from the first references to religious healing in epic literature to its public recognition, focusing on mythological personalities in

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<sup>19</sup> Luis Cohn-Haft, *The Public Physicians of Ancient Greece*, Smith College Studies in History (Northampton, MA: 1956), 92 and Emma J. & Ludwig Edelstein, *Asclepius A Collection and Interpretation of the Testimonies*, Volume 2, John Hopkins Press (Baltimore, MD: 1945), 140. The Hippocratic *Oath* (c. 400), the ethical oath of entry into the profession, appealed to Apollo and Asclepius.

<sup>20</sup> For a discussion on the variety of medical options available see Helen King, *Hippocrates' Women*, 100-113; Jennifer Clarke Kosak, *Heroic Measures*, 30-31; V. Nutton, "Healers in the Medical Marketplace: towards a social history of Graeco-Roman medicine", from *Medicine in Society*, edited by A. Weir (Cambridge: 1992), 15-58.

<sup>21</sup> *On the Sacred Disease* voices the strongest invective against the divine causation of disease. Julie Laskaris, *The Art is Long*, 31 argues convincingly that the attack is a competitive argument by the Hippocratic author to try and 'offer the public credible alternatives to traditional, often deeply-rooted, explanations of disease' and does not reflect the superiority of rational medicine.

<sup>22</sup> The arrival of Asclepius is known from the Telemachos Monument on the southern slope of the Acropolis, named for the citizen instrumental in bringing the cult to Athens. For a thorough discussion of the arrival of Asclepius into Attica see Robert Garland, *Introducing New Gods*, Duckworth (London: 1992), 116-135. For a discussion on the dating of the cult see Emma and Ludwig Edelstein, *Asclepius* Volume 2, 120, n 4.

early Greek literature who either personify the tradition of divine disease or demonstrate early healing viewpoints. The essential line of reasoning will demonstrate that the embroidery of the divine with the experience of sickness was so strongly woven into Greek life that it adjusted to the changing ways of thinking about disease.

It was commonplace for both diseases and cures to be ‘attributed to the wrath of the Gods’.<sup>23</sup> Even throughout the course of the archaic and classical periods when rational explanations for natural phenomena began to emerge, the divine’s relationship to disease remained intact. As the perception of nature and the understanding of physical occurrences became more highly developed in the classical period, the Greek imagination still continued to project divinities onto natural phenomena including disease. The task of this thesis is to ask the question ‘does early Greek myth and literature reveal an extant medical tradition in a religious and rational context that contributes to the 5<sup>th</sup> Century’s ‘ways of thinking about disease’?’

Sources for the early period are almost entirely poetic whereas for the later period they are much more wide-ranging. In accordance with the poetic interest in healing gods, particular emphasis is placed on the works of Homer in Chapters 1 and 2, and Pindar in Chapter 3. The *Iliad*, as an epic of war, contains many references to wounding and illustrates both practical and religious ‘healing’<sup>24</sup> while Pindar’s odes are fundamental sources for a more developed construction of the myths of Chiron and Asclepius. Homer and Pindar, together with fragments from the Epic Cycle, Hesiod and the Homeric Hymns, have also been the subject of much research in addition to the prolific literature of the 5<sup>th</sup> Century including the medical texts of the Hippocratic corpus. I have concentrated on the secondary sources that are dedicated to Greek religion and the history of early medicine, serendipitously drawn to my subject matter when previous perspectives regarding the supernatural influence on early Greek medicine are being challenged by contemporary scholars.

Classical scholarship on the history of Greek medicine has flourished in the past three decades, especially in considering the cross-cultural influences and similarities of other near eastern ancient

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<sup>23</sup> James Longrigg, *Greek Medicine from the Heroic to the Hellenistic Age A Source Book*, Duckworth (London: 1998), 15.

<sup>24</sup> Healing is a vast concept. For the purposes of the thesis I will define healing as applied to the treatment of wounds and physical disease. If healing applies in another context, for instance emotional or spiritual, I shall specifically state this.



medical traditions.<sup>25</sup> Previously, Greek medicine was predominantly considered to be the systematic product of ‘rationalism’, emerging from the new intellectualism of 5<sup>th</sup> Century philosophy and science.<sup>26</sup> Having overcome the belief in the supernatural causation of disease, the quiet assumption was that Greek medicine was superior ‘to the medical beliefs and practices of other Mediterranean civilisations, such as Mesopotamia and Egypt’.<sup>27</sup> This way of thinking elevated Greek medicine to an exclusively ‘rational’ discipline, uncomplicated by magic or religious overtones. The supernatural approaches to healing became consigned to foreign, mainly Near Eastern and Egyptian influences. However, more recently scholars are researching the similarities and interrelationship between ancient Greek and Near Eastern medicine.<sup>28</sup> Gradually over the past thirty years the long-held assumption that Greek medicine is the paragon of scientific excellence in its defeat of supernatural approaches to healing has been deconstructed, allowing a more pluralistic point of view.<sup>29</sup>

The rapidly growing interest in ancient medicine in other specialised fields such as the history of philosophy and science has also challenged previous notions of early Greek medicine.<sup>30</sup> In the past two decades scholarship and debate on the Hippocratic tradition and its medical procedures has also burgeoned.<sup>31</sup> Numerous scholars have analysed the Hippocratic medical texts not only from an anatomical or physiological angle but also from cultural and social perspectives.<sup>32</sup> In terms of the divine, scholars are more recently inclined to suggest that Hippocratic secular medicine evolved from

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<sup>25</sup> The growing scholarship is visible in the texts devoted to early Greek medicine in the series *Studies in Ancient Medicine*, published by Brill in Leiden, The Netherlands. Among many classicists who pioneered work on the history of Greek medicine are G.E.R. Lloyd, James Longrigg and E.D. Phillips. Innovative research continues through the work of Philip van der Eijk, Ann Hanson, Manfred Horstmanshoff, Helen King and many other scholars.

<sup>26</sup> For many the 5<sup>th</sup> Century has been seen as a period of enlightenment. For a discussion on the scholarship on the evolution from *mythos* to *logos*, refer to R. Buxton (ed.), *From Myth to Reason*, Oxford University Press (Oxford: 1998), 1-13.

<sup>27</sup> Philip J. Van der Eijk, “Introduction”, *Magic and Rationality in Ancient Near Eastern and Graeco- Roman Medicine*, 5.

<sup>28</sup> For instance, see M.J. Geller, “West Meets East: Early Greek and Babylonian Diagnosis”, *Magic and Rationality in Ancient Near Eastern and Greco- Roman Medicine*.

<sup>29</sup> Philip J. Van der Eijk, *Medicine and Philosophy in Classical Antiquity*, 1- 42; Vivian Nutton, “Ancient Medicine: Asclepius Transformed”, 242-255.

<sup>30</sup> Philip J. Van der Eijk, *Medicine and Philosophy in Classical Antiquity*, 1.

<sup>31</sup> See Wesley Smith, *Hippocrates Pseudigraphic Writings*; Jody Rubin Pinault, *Hippocratic Lives and Legends*; Mark J. Schiefsky, *Hippocrates on Ancient Medicine*, Brill (Leiden: 2005) and Philip J. van Der Eijk (ed.), *Hippocrates in Context*.

<sup>32</sup> See Helen King, *Hippocrates’ Women*; Philip J. Van Der Eijk (ed.), *Hippocrates in Context*.

long-standing traditional knowledge and is not as easily separated from its supernatural legacy as earlier scholars speculated.<sup>33</sup>

Scholars in Greek religion have also explored the attitudes towards pollution, the rituals of purification and the usage of herbs and drugs in ancient Greek healing.<sup>34</sup> Discussions of religious and non-secular healing traditions are often included in the history of ancient Greek medicine; however, it is rarely recognised in its own right or appreciated in an evolutionary context. Therefore this thesis addresses an area not developed in the literature and that is the enmeshment of the divine with disease and its dynamic impact on the developmental ways of thinking about illness in the Hippocratic atmosphere of the later 5<sup>th</sup> Century. While the history of ancient Greek medicine is not my area of specialty, nor the focus of my thesis, it structures the temporal backdrop for the continuity of the divine's relationship to disease.

In the first chapter, Divine Healers, I concentrate on references to divine healers in Homer's *Iliad* to demonstrate that a continuing relationship between the divine and disease had existed since the Mycenaeans. In the *Iliad* Apollo is connected to the sphere of wounding and healing in three ways which will be amplified. Homer contrasts battle injuries, attended to by army physicians, with the god-sent disease, which can only be alleviated through sacrifice and propitiation. Homer introduces Paiëon, the divine physician, who heals the wounds of the immortals, differentiating Paiëon's divine process of healing from the natural healing skills of the physicians.<sup>35</sup> Whilst Paiëon's presence is only fleeting in the *Iliad*, there appears to be a clear link to the same figure referred to in the Linear B tablets. Through unearthing the foundation stones of the mythic medical tradition evident in the *Iliad* I will argue that the divine was deeply embedded in the Greek concept of disease, demonstrating that the interlinking of Apollo and Paiëon as medical deities foreshadowed the institutionalisation of temple medicine.

In chapter two, Heroic Healers, I will examine 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

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<sup>33</sup> For this point of view, see: R. Arnott, "Minoan and Mycenaean Medicine and its Near Eastern Contacts", *Magic and Rationality in Ancient Near Eastern and Graeco-Roman Medicine*; Vivian Nutton, "Ancient Medicine: Asclepius Transformed"; Julie Laskaris, *The Art is Long*.

<sup>34</sup> Lewis Richard Farnell and Walter Burkert investigated the rituals of early Greek medicine. More recently Robert Parker has thoroughly researched the ancient religious attitudes towards miasma and purification in *Miasma Pollution and Purification in Early Greek Religion*, Clarendon Press (Oxford: 1996).

<sup>35</sup> I have chosen the spelling of the divine healer in the *Iliad* as Paiëon to differentiate the god from the healing hymn, Paean.

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 the thesis will draw 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.

According to Homer Thessaly was the mythic homeland of Asclepius, ‘the blameless physician’. Whereas Homer never suggests that Asclepius is other than an aristocratic medical practitioner, by the 5<sup>th</sup> Century Asclepius has become deified and associated with a cult of healing at Epidaurus, where temple medicine flourished. Archaeologically, Epidaurus supplies a record of miraculous medical cures that serve as a patent contrast to the parallel practice of rational medicine during this time. In Chapter 3, *The Healing God*, I will outline the literary and archaeological evidence that supports Asclepius’ ascension to his role as the healing deity. In contrasting the transformation of Asclepius with the rising practice of rational medicine I will argue that his mythic metamorphosis is the religious response to the changing paradigm of disease and cure in the later 5<sup>th</sup> Century.

My primary argument underlying the thesis is 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. In support of this line of reasoning I will now turn to the exploration of the divine healers introduced by Homer in his epic poem, the *Iliad*, to argue the case for the long-standing tradition of the divine disease.

# CHAPTER I

## DIVINE HEALERS

### The Legacy of Apollo and Paiëon to Religious Medicine

*'Early medicine passes for a divine revelation and disease a mark of divine displeasure'*<sup>36</sup>

- Lewis Richard Farnell

The relationship between early medical rituals and the role of the divine has already been topical for many classical scholars.<sup>37</sup> Whereas most recognise the strong connection between illness and the divine, few have acknowledged that the long-standing belief in the supernatural causation of disease underpinned the course of medicine. One exception to this way of thinking is put forward by Julie Laskaris, who maintains that supernatural ideas of magic and religion 'shaped medical theories and practices in the last third of the 5<sup>th</sup> Century'.<sup>38</sup> The key argument of this chapter will be that early Greek myth and literature reveal that the relationship of the divine with disease is deeply entrenched in rituals and customs. Since religious healing was such a deep-seated convention it influenced later thinking about the origins of disease. Naturally the established therapeutic alliance between healing and religion exerted its influence on 5<sup>th</sup> Century attitudes. This chapter will consider the mythic fragments of Apollo and Paiëon, the divine healers introduced in the *Iliad*, as evidence for the prevailing belief that disease and cure was the province of the gods. As divinities who heal, and in Apollo's case also wound, healing was logically positioned in a religious context. I will argue that the

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<sup>36</sup> Lewis Richard Farnell, *The Cult of the Greek States*, Volume 4, Clarendon Press (Oxford: 1909), 233.

<sup>37</sup> See, among others, Walter Burkert, *The Orientalizing Revolution: Near Eastern Influence on Greek Culture in the Early Archaic Age*, translated by Walter Burkert and Margaret E. Pinder, Harvard University Press (Cambridge, MA: 1992); Emma and Ludwig Edelstein, *Asclepius A Collection and Interpretation of the Testimonies*, 2 volumes; G.E.R. Lloyd, *In the Grip of Disease*, Oxford University Press (Oxford: 2003); Robert Parker, *Miasma Pollution and Purification in Early Greek Religion*.

<sup>38</sup> Julie Laskaris, *The Art is Long*, 31. Plinio Prioreschi in *A History of Medicine*, Volume 2, 251-266 also reports on the supernatural legacy to medicine. In the medical procedures of the Hippocratic corpus *katharsis* or artificially induced cleansing was widely used. Robert Parker, *Miasma*, 213-6 notes that this central tenet of the Hippocratic physicians along with other treatments such as fumigation, 'wiping off', localised drenching and baths were forms of purification similar to the purifiers of the archaic age. Whether the *katharsis* was spontaneous or medical there was a strong similarity to purification in the religious sense, which led Parker to conclude that it 'has come to be recognised that Hippocratic medicine is in many respects a continuation of traditional practices and beliefs'.

intimate relationship of the divine with disease and healing was firmly established before the Homeric period and therefore an established way of thinking about their relationship had developed.

It is the *Iliad* that offers the most comprehensive evidence of the divine's early affiliation with healing through Apollo. In the opening lines Homer introduces Apollo in his role as sender of the plague immediately establishing the moral connection between the god's anger and the scourge that is afflicting the Greek army (1.9-10). While Homer never specifically identifies Apollo as a healing god *per se*, he is involved in both wounding and curing and by implication represents the divine characterisation of healing. From the outset Apollo is allied with healing in three distinct ways. First, Apollo is the god who sends the destructive plague which ravages the Greek army. Second, he is the god petitioned for healing in a collective and personal way. Finally, as the god of oracles, Apollo is implicated in the diagnosis and prognosis of disease.<sup>39</sup> Through amplifying these three points, as well as Apollo's affiliation to Paiëon, I will establish the intimate connection between the divine and the sphere of disease and healing.

## 1. APOLLO: Wounding and Healing

*It is from Phoibos  
physicians have learned deferment of death*<sup>40</sup>

The first chapter of western literature opens with the motif of wounding and healing. In the opening scene of the *Iliad* (1.16-17) Homer introduces Apollo as the god who brings the plague and later as the god who is able to relieve it, prefacing the epic with the motif of an epidemic and its cure. 'Hear me, lord of the silver bow' petitions Chryses in summoning Apollo. Raging at Agamemnon's arrogant refusal to accept his humbly offered ransom in exchange for his captive daughter, the priest prays to his god for revenge:

if ever it pleased your heart that I built your temple,  
if ever it pleased you that I burned all the rich thigh pieces  
of bulls, of goats, then bring to pass this wish I pray for:  
let your arrows make the Danaans pay for my tears shed (1. 39-42)

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<sup>39</sup> Timothy Gantz, *Early Greek Myth*, Volume 1, The Johns Hopkins University Press (Baltimore, MD: 1996), 95-6 comments on Apollo's unclear connection to healing: 'In one sense, of course, Apollo is always a healing god, for as one who sends plagues he is also the one who can halt them'.

Apollo hears the priest's curse, disguised as a prayer.<sup>41</sup> Inflamed, 'angry in his heart' the god unleashes his fury through a shower of arrows<sup>42</sup> that first strike the mules, then the dogs and finally the men; the god-sent plague ravages the Greeks (1.46-53). Apollo's plague is devastating and foreshadows death and destruction for the Greek army and remains as the first account of disease in western literature. The seminal scene opens with the humble reminder that a god brings about the onset of disease and that its cure lies within the god's jurisdiction. Anger and vengeance are the destructive emotions that ignite the outbreak of the disease. In mythical accounts of divinities it is common to see 'divine mood swings' as gods embrace a spectrum of opposites, being both destructive and benevolent.<sup>43</sup> This polarity is reflected in Apollo's power to both send and halt the plague. As part of his religious identity, Apollo embraces the spectrum from divine wounding to the god's healing.

Gods in the *Iliad* are also able to cure individual illnesses and ailments, and Apollo is also petitioned for personal healing.<sup>44</sup> Like Chryses, Glaucus appeals to Apollo to help ease the pain of his wound that will not stop bleeding. However, this time the pain is physical, not an affront to character. An arrow has struck Glaucus; the pain is sharp and the blood uncontrollably pours out of the wound (16.510f). Hearing his prayer Apollo attends to Glaucus and the god stops the blood flow, eases the pain in the wound, and reawakens his spirit, allowing him to continue fighting (16.527-9). Apollo is not

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<sup>40</sup> Callimachus, *Hymn to Apollo*, from *Callimachus, Hymns, Epigrams, Select Fragments*, translated by Stanley Lombardo and Diane Rayor, The Johns Hopkins University Press (Baltimore, MD: 1988).

<sup>41</sup> Walter Burkert, *Greek Religion Archaic and Classical*, translated by John Raffan, Basil Blackwell (Oxford: 1985), 73 articulates the religious link between prayer and ritual: 'There is rarely a ritual without prayer, and no important prayer without ritual.' The prayer or *Ara* can also be a curse, since once it is uttered it can never be retracted. Burkert also suggests that in a poetic way the prayer is a 'well-formulated entreaty to the personal god Apollo, who heeds his priest', 74.

<sup>42</sup> Apollo is associated with the bow and arrow, although he is not known as the god of hunters. Walter Burkert, *Greek Religion Archaic and Classical*, 145 links Apollo's archery with a Syro-Hittite component of the god citing the similarity to the Semitic god Resup, a plague god who shoots firebrands. Apollo's arrows symbolise pestilence and carry the disease. Like arrows, disease can be quick and pierce the body. His sister Artemis also appears with bow and arrows and is known for bringing about the swift death of women (21. 483-4) and punishing *hubris* (24. 605-7) with her shower of arrows. The onset of disease was rapid, like an arrow shot from a god's bow, fired at their victims who have violated the god's sanctity, often through *hubris*. Arrogance is punished by the gods with a decisive death (24. 605-7) or the evil of disease and pestilence. The arrow remains an important symbol in healing myths and the mysterious convergence of the arrow with wounding and healing is a motif throughout Greek mythology, first introduced through Apollo and his toxic arrows. In book 5, both Hera and Hades are wounded by Heracles' arrows, the preferred weapon of Apollo and a consistent metaphor for the process of wounding.

<sup>43</sup> Christopher A. Faroane, *Talismans and Trojan Horses*, Oxford University Press (Oxford: 1992) discusses Apollo's mood swings in reference to his sending then halting the plague, 54-73.

<sup>44</sup> There are four instances in the *Iliad* when gods heal mortals who have been injured (5.121-32; 5.445 -50; 15.235-70; 16.527-31). However there are also many other instances when gods focus their attention on the wounded. See Appendix 2.

specifically petitioned as a healer by Glaucus; however, in prayer Glaucus does suggest Apollo is a god who ‘can listen to a man in pain’ (16.515). The hero is also wounded emotionally, as his comrade Sarpedon, the son of Zeus, had been killed in the fighting. Glaucus appeals to Apollo to treat the wound and restore his will so that he can avenge his friend’s death. Apollo is petitioned above other gods:

No but you at least, my lord, make well this strong wound;  
and put the pains to sleep, give me strength so that I may call out  
to my companions, the Lykians, and stir them to fight on,  
and I myself do battle over the fallen body. (16. 523-6)

Glaucus identifies Apollo’s ability to heal the wound and restore vitality. As a god invoked for cure, Apollo is also involved in healing episodes with Aeneas and Hector, two other Trojan warriors.<sup>45</sup>

Whilst Apollo is not the only god in the *Iliad* who is capable of healing he has a much greater involvement in it than any other god. Two other recuperative cases highlight Apollo’s presence in the sphere of healing. Specifically, Apollo protects Aeneas from the wrath of Diomedes and escorts him to the shelter of his temple where his injuries are attended. His female companions, Leto and Artemis, heal Aeneas’ wound and nurse him back to health in Apollo’s temple (5.447-8). However, this scene also places Apollo at the central point of another healing episode, which distinctly characterises the motif of wounded gods that is featured in Book 5. Aphrodite is injured by Diomedes, as she attempts to rescue her son Aeneas from the battlefield (5.336-340), a scene which not only serves to contrast divine and mortal wounds, but to introduce Paiëon, the exclusive healer of the gods (5.401). While Aeneas is recuperating in the god’s shrine, Apollo makes an image of Aeneas (5.449-50).<sup>46</sup> Through the phantom Apollo addresses ‘violent Ares’ in order to provoke him and the Trojans into avenging the wounding of Aphrodite and her son (5.455-9). Re-awakening the battle spirit of Ares eventually leads to Ares’ own wounding (5.850ff). Apollo’s actions not only assist in Aeneas’s healing but also link the wounding of Aphrodite and Ares to the appearance of Paiëon as the divine physician for Hades (5.401) and Ares (5.899), highlighting Apollo’s transitional involvement with healing.

The second episode is when Hector, struck by a boulder in the chest, is re-invigorated by Apollo, who ‘breathed huge strength into the shepherd of the people’ (15.262). In this instance Zeus, not Hector,

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<sup>45</sup> As a god who supports the Trojans, it makes sense that Apollo heals these warriors. Interestingly this is as a contrast to the Greek healers who are mortal and Thessalian. See Chapter 2.

<sup>46</sup> For an amplification of this untypical incident, refer to G.S. Kirk, *The Iliad, A Commentary Volume 2: Books 5-8*, Cambridge University Press (Cambridge, MA: 1990), 109.

has summoned the god. It is Zeus himself who instructs Apollo to attend to Hector and ‘waken the huge strength in him’ (15.232). Underscoring this brief command is Zeus’ identification and acknowledgement of Apollo’s healing ability. Previously in Book 5 Zeus scolded Aphrodite’s participation in the battle, defining the appropriate boundaries between marriage and warfare, the province of Athene and Ares (5.428-30). Immediately following the scene Apollo reappears in a protective and healing capacity. While never expressly stated, the scenes in Book 5 and 15 suggest Apollo’s jurisdiction includes battle and healing, an echo of the mysterious combination of wounding and healing which is threaded throughout Greek myth. In attending to Hector Apollo is also consulted for spiritual healing, restoring the hero’s will, confidence and courage. With renewed heart Hector returns to battle to fight heroically. As the healer of the plague, instrumental in the recovery of Aeneas and Hector, and the healer of Glaucus, Apollo cures both collective and personal ills.

Wounds that are healed by the gods do not appear to be fatal, as the boundaries of death and illness are well defined. The role of the gods is not to rescue the injured from death, but only to facilitate or quicken the healing process. Divine healing is miraculous as it eliminates the pain, dissolves the haemorrhage and revitalises the spirit. Attendance by a god insures the return to battle and the reclamation of the possibility of a heroic death. Divine intervention in attending to the wounds is idealised and serves as a contrast to the procedures by mortal physicians in the *Iliad*:

Glaucos’ case shows most clearly what divine healing stands for: it is the ideal of wound treatment, unobtainable in the human world. The pain and the haemorrhage – the main problems with wounds in real life and often mentioned in connection with wounds in the *Iliad* – are dealt with immediately and for good.<sup>47</sup>

When medical treatment was undeveloped or unsatisfactory the curative urge was projected onto the gods. Divine healing was the ideal alternative to insufficient medical knowledge.<sup>48</sup>

Religious medicine also forged an intimate connection between healing and divination. A seer, one capable of reading divine intent, performed the diagnostic procedures to ascertain the origin of the disease. In the earliest references Apollo is the god who bridges both specialities of healing and

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<sup>47</sup> Christine Salazar, *The Treatment of War Wounds in Graeco-Roman Antiquity*, Brill (Leiden: 2000), 136.

<sup>48</sup> This viewpoint contributed to the coexistence of rational and religious medicine in the later classical and Hellenistic periods. By the classical period the divine was already well established as an antidote when secular medicine was ineffective. Patients would seek out the modality that offered the best cure, whether that was the Hippocratic doctor or visiting the temple of Asclepius.



divination. Walter Burkert acknowledges the archaic necessity of unifying purification rituals and oracular knowledge under the jurisdiction of one god:

With disease and bane, *nosos* in the widest sense, being interpreted as pollution, the bane is not personified but objectified; knowledge and personal responsibility come into play; the person must discover the action which has brought about the pollution and must eliminate the *miasma* through renewed action. This, of course requires super-human knowledge: the god of purifications must also be an oracle god.<sup>49</sup>

While it is specifically Agamemnon who has offended Apollo's priest by rejecting his offer, it is the whole of the Greek army who are plagued by the angry god. And it is Apollo who must be propitiated in order to relieve the plague.<sup>50</sup> To diagnose the cause of such a virulent epidemic a 'holy man', or 'prophet' or 'even an interpreter of dreams' (1.62-3) must be summoned in order to divine the source of the god's displeasure. A seer is necessary since the basis of the disease was divine, therefore the cure could only be prescribed through understanding the will of the gods. Calchas, the 'blameless seer' (1.92), interprets the source of Apollo's wrath and offers his prognosis. This opening scene of the *Iliad* demonstrates that disease is a manifestation of the divine and that religious rituals of purification need to be carried out to appease the god. Homer illustrates the archaic ritual of purification as a means of alleviating disease. Rites of cleansing and thanksgiving to ease anguish and grief constitute a religious act. James Longrigg suggests this scene is a 'fairly typical example of religious medicine'; the angered god sends a disease, which is then divined through augury and appeased through sacrifice and propitiation.<sup>51</sup>

Apollo is the tutelary god of Calchas. As the *iatromantis* consulted, Calchas diagnoses the epidemic as divine discontent. Evidenced in the first book of the *Iliad* Apollo is the god who personifies the

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<sup>49</sup> Walter Burkert, *Greek Religion*, 147.

<sup>50</sup> In the Homeric period descriptions of healing were generally focused on purifying a moral or physical pollution. While guilt could be ascribed to one man often the entire community was engulfed with disease. Maria Gorrini in her article "The Hippocratic Impact on Healing Cults", 135-6 articulates this pattern: 'Even if a single person, or a single group of persons, were responsible for the offence, the guilt assailed the entire community and consequently the only possible cure was a collective purification.' See also Yves Bonnefoy, *Greek and Egyptian Mythologies*, translated under the direction of Wendy Doniger, The University of Chicago Press (Chicago, IL: 1992), 140. It was mainly to the god Apollo that the community turned to seek help. In the Homeric tradition Apollo was the god who sent and expunged pestilence, a mythic tradition that probably existed long before Homer. This tradition lasted through the archaic to the classical period and was probably one of the major factors in ascribing healing as a central trait of Apollo's worship (see Walter Burkert, *Greek Religion*, 147). Pausanias reports the god Apollo was known at Bassai as 'Helper' for turning away the plague in 430 (8. 41. 9). However, by the classical period, purification was no longer solely the god's prerogative, as it had become part of the magical trade, performed by itinerant healers and purifiers.

<sup>51</sup> James Longrigg, *Greek Rational Medicine*, 12.

ancient alignment of divination and purification, a combination that ties religious ritual to a curative outcome.<sup>52</sup> Apollo is the foremost divinity who is the connection between these two elements of religious practice. As an oracular god it is possible Apollo may have also become recognised as the therapeutic god through the close proximity between healing and the prognostic divination of the disease.

The presence of Apollo as the divine diagnostician of pollution is also evident in Sophocles' play *Oedipus the King*. At the beginning of the play Oedipus invokes Apollo as healer (line 5). However, it is through Creon that Oedipus learns the prescription that the oracle of Apollo has suggested to purge the curse and heal the devastation that Thebes is experiencing:

Relief from the plague can only come one way.  
Uncover the murderers of Laius,  
Put them to death or drive them into exile. (350-2)

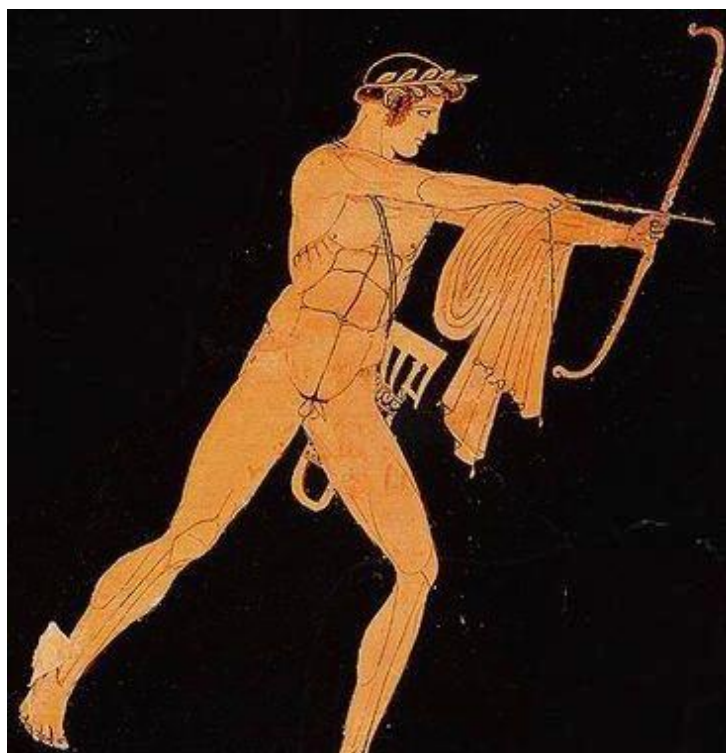
It is clear that to relieve the pollution the death of Laius must be avenged and the seer Tiresias is consulted to unravel the mystery. The motif of Apollo as diviner and healer in the 5<sup>th</sup> Century play repeats the schema introduced by Homer in the *Iliad*.

Even though Apollo is nearby the periphery of disease and cure, Homer gives no indication that the god is specifically known for healing. It is never apparent in other early literature whether healing was an aspect of the early cult of Apollo.<sup>53</sup> Either the audience is familiar with this aspect of Apollo and therefore it needs no amplification, or his incorporation with the healing sphere is still incomplete

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<sup>52</sup> Healers known as *kathartai* were itinerant healers who would travel performing private purification rituals for a fee. Walter Burkert in *The Orientalizing Revolution* suggests that during the Homeric period the culture was less self-conscious and therefore more open to foreign influences, including healing and purification. However in the unsettling atmosphere after the Persian invasions, attitudes towards itinerant healers and their purification practices became denigrated (see Plato, *Republic*, 2.364b). Itinerant practitioners of purifications in the 5<sup>th</sup> and 4<sup>th</sup> Centuries are often assimilated with the archaic purifiers due to the commonality of petitioning the divine. However, archaic purifiers were different from their later counterparts, as they were part of a communal and sacred ritual. Purification was performed in a religious context. Earliest purifications were done by an *iatromantis*, an amalgam of both a healer and a seer. Later purifiers treated the symptoms with magical techniques, whereas the archaic seer would diagnose the cause and prescribe the necessary steps to relieve the disease (Robert Parker, *Miasma*, 209). The archaic ritual of purification is visible in Homer. Calchas is the *iatromantis* of the *Iliad* (1. 68-100) who has received his 'seer craft' from Apollo. Augury is used to diagnose the cause while purification rituals are prescribed combining the arts of divination and healing. The opening scene details the religious rituals of washing and sacrifices (1.312-16) necessary to expunge the pollution. The rituals are communal and 'magical' elements of the ceremony are incorporated unconsciously. By the 5<sup>th</sup> Century itinerant healers were magicians who worked independently for a fee.

waiting to be sculpted by later mythmakers. However, as highlighted, the *Iliad* sketches his healing portfolio in various ways: through stopping the devastating progress of the plague, attending to individual injuries of heroes like Glaucus and Hector, and being associated with the diagnosis of diseases through divination. Homer depicts Apollo in Book 5 as the Trojan god who links the healing sequence of the gods that starts with Aphrodite and ends with Ares' curative treatment by the divine physician Paiëon. However, it is through Paiëon that Apollo's status of divine healer can be better understood in context of the continuous association between the divine and disease.



*Apollo the god of afar*

## 2. PAIËON: The Divine Healer of Olympus

*'Unless Phoebus Apollo should save him from death, or Paeon himself who knows the remedies for all things'<sup>54</sup>*

As already suggested Homer does not specifically establish Apollo as the god of healing even though he is closely connected with its sphere in the classical and Hellenistic literature.<sup>55</sup> Instead Homer

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<sup>53</sup> Walter Addison Jayne, *The Healing Gods of Ancient Civilizations*, University Books, Inc. (New Hyde Park, NY: 1962), 306-310; Timothy Gantz, *Early Greek Myth*, Volume 1, 95-6; Yves Bonnefoy, *Greek and Egyptian Mythologies*, 140.

distinctly characterises Paiëon as the divine healer whose role is entirely focused on healing. Paiëon's name appears in the *Iliad* twice as a healer of gods who have been wounded (5.401, 899), obviously differentiating his exclusive role as healer to the gods. Together with the Homeric personality of Paiëon there was another ancient tradition of healing through song and dance performance also connected to the god. These performances or paeans, which petitioned the deity for various reasons including purification, apotropaic prayers, or success in battle, eventually became identified with Apollo.<sup>56</sup> Paiëon, the Olympian healer, also becomes aligned with Apollo. Yet it is through Paiëon that the alliance of the divine with disease and healing can be traced back to the Mycenaean period.

While no evidence for a cult of Paiëon exists, the god's name appears in the Linear B script from Knossos as *Pajawone*.<sup>57</sup> This name agrees 'exactly with the latter Greek usage' as Paiëon, the divine healer who first appears in Homer.<sup>58</sup> The inscription of the god's name is dated to the 14<sup>th</sup> Century, probably about six centuries before Paiëon's inclusion in the *Iliad*. No trace of Apollo has been found on Linear B, yet this god is linked to Paiëon, who is the mythic derivative of Paiawon. Through Homer's usage of Paiëon, as the divine physician, the presence of an ancient tradition of religious healing has been highlighted. A Mycenaean medical deity has been linked to a Hittite divination text dating to the 14<sup>th</sup> Century.<sup>59</sup> It has also been proposed that the healing god of the Mycenaeans whose fame may have spread as far as Anatolia may have been Paiawon, the divine healer that Homer describes in the *Iliad*.<sup>60</sup> Homer's Paiëon seems to be firmly positioned on Olympus, the central seat of

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<sup>54</sup> Schol., *Odyssey* 4.232, Hesiod, *The Homeric Hymns and Homerica*, 275.

<sup>55</sup> By the Hellenistic period Apollo's mythic biography included the role of healer and medical mentor. In Callimachus's *Hymn to Apollo* the god is portrayed as an educator of physicians who eases the burden of fate by turning deadly disease away. In the classical period Apollo was also identified as a healer. Sophocles in *Oedipus Rex*, line 173 directly refers to Apollo as 'healer of Delos' while Euripides in *Alcestis* lines 968-971 refers to the 'salves and simples' that Apollo gave the priests of Asclepius 'to heal the many hurts of mankind'. Euripides also refers to Apollo as healer in *Andromache*, line 900. Earlier Pindar speaks of Apollo's ability to heal men and women 'from grievous sickness'. While Apollo seems to be associated with healing it is never really apparent how Apollo becomes aligned with healing and whether this is an ancient legacy or a later alteration to the myth. Timothy Gantz, *Early Greek Myth*, Volume 1, 95-6, writes of this ambiguity when he suggests that whether Apollo's role of healer 'is the result of his connection with Asclepius, or the cause of it, or neither, remains open'.

<sup>56</sup> See Ian Rutherford, *Pindar's Paeans*, Oxford University Press (New York, NY: 2001), 3-57; Bruno Currie, *Pindar and the Cult of Heroes*, Oxford University Press (New York, NY: 2005), 99-100; and Walter Burkert, *Greek Religion*, 43-4.

<sup>57</sup> Walter Burkert, *Greek Religion*, 43. In the text the god's name is spelt Paiawon.

<sup>58</sup> Walter Burkert, *Greek Religion*, 43; Ian Rutherford, *Pindar's Paeans*, 11.

<sup>59</sup> Robert Arnott, "Healing and medicine in the Aegean Bronze Age". He connects this to the reign of King Muršili (1350-20 BCE), as it was the Mycenaean god who cured him.

<sup>60</sup> Robert Arnott in "Healing and medicine in the Aegean Bronze Age" suggests that the Mycenaeans 'worshipped a god whose fame and potency spread as far as central Anatolia'. He then suggests this god 'may

power in the new order of Olympian deities, ensuring the continuity of the cult of the divine healer from this earlier period.

Homer's choice of Paiëon as the divine healer of his battle epic is consistent with representations of an earlier cult, which petitioned the god for healing during or before battle. Similar to Apollo, Paiawon's healing capacity was invoked during battle:

When Paiawon /Paeon was called on to heal, the indications are that it was primarily in the context of battle and military training. I would suggest that the healing powers of the deity and the song were originally confined to military, or quasi-military, contexts, and that they were generalized only later.<sup>61</sup>

Rutherford suggests Paiëon may have been a healing god specifically called upon in battle, hence an appropriate deity to represent the divine healer. Within the *Iliad* Paiëon seems distinctly separate from Apollo, yet in some ways a synthesis of the two gods is implied. By the late archaic period the two become fused together as one composite healing god, Paiëon becoming an epithet for Apollo in his aspect of healer.<sup>62</sup>

While hardly a central character in the *Iliad* the presence of Paiëon is significant. Being the first divine physician on Mount Olympus<sup>63</sup>, the seat of divine power, his only role is to attend to the wounds of the gods. Carl Kerényi poses the following question about the presence of Paiëon in the *Iliad*:

Who is this divine physician on Olympus who guarantees the immortality of the gods by healing their wounds? Is he simply the medical function, personified and raised up to the heavens? In any case he is not the function of earthly physicians. This function in Homer goes back to Chiron the centaur, who is involved in the un-Olympian world of life and death and remains on earth. Homer

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have been Paeon, the healing god in Homer', 267. C. Kerényi, *Asklepios, Archetypal Image of the Physician's Existence*, Thames and Hudson (London: 1960), xvii, also suggests that the cult is mentioned as early as the 15<sup>th</sup> Century: 'Paiawon was among the first names of Greek gods to be read in the Mycenaean inscriptions, and this is the form that "Paicon" would regularly take in the Mycenaean dialect. He had his place in the myths of the fifteenth to the thirteenth century and possessed his cult in Knossos, where he is mentioned as early as the fifteenth century.'

<sup>61</sup> Ian Rutherford, *Pindar's Paeans*, 16. As discussed later *paeon* also refers to a healing song.

<sup>62</sup> For the distinction made in Homer and the later merging of Paeon and Apollo see Timothy Gantz, *Early Greek Myth*, 96; Walter Addison Jayne, *The Healing Gods of Ancient Civilizations* and Walter Burkert, *Greek Religion*, 120. Walter Burkert draws the two together in his explanation of the same god having differing names: 'Different names may refer to the same being, as, for example with Apollo and Paeon'.

<sup>63</sup> Mount Olympus marks the northern boundary of Thessaly, the locale known for magic and healing and the home of the healing mentor Chiron. Wounded deities Ares and Hades make their way to Olympus to be healed centralising the aspect of divine healing on the northern boundary of Thessaly, a contrast to the more southern mountain, Pelion, where the semi-divine healer Chiron taught and made medicinal remedies to soothe mortal wounds.

draws an inviolable dividing line between the spheres of mortality and immortality. For him even the best of physicians, even an Asclepius or the more godlike Chiron, remains in every respect confined to the realm of mortality. Paiëon stands over the physicians. He is a higher source of cure than Chiron or Asclepius.<sup>64</sup>

While for Kerényi Paiëon is ‘the dividing line’ between human and divine, I maintain that Paiëon is the deification of divine healing, a replica of the Mycenaean healing god. Paiëon embodies a divine concept of healing. Being the attendant physician solely to the gods, those who are ‘not made to be one of the mortals’,<sup>65</sup> he exists as a contrast to the other mythic healers like Chiron, noble physicians like Asclepius and warrior healers like Machaon. Paiëon’s realm is divine healing. Unlike Apollo, Paiëon does not involve himself in the affairs of mortals or the politics of war. He stands outside the human drama, removed, attendant only to the divine, by implication uninterested in the human chaos of battle. Yet, like the human doctors, Paiëon uses healing medicines to soothe the wound and ‘still pain’ serving as a divine double of the mortal healer. Paiëon’s presence acts as an idealised copy of the mortal physician while the wounded gods, who are his patients, serve to reinforce the boundary between the divine and mortal, life and death. Robert Parker notes that the distinct division between god and mortal is one of the attitudes that ‘determine the Greeks’ religious explanations of disease’.<sup>66</sup> Paiëon like Apollo is immortal and distinctly set apart from suffering, unlike healers Chiron and Asclepius who are wounded in later versions of their myth. As the personification of the divine doctor, Paiëon personifies an archaic construct that underpins the image of the physician and remains the first specific reference to the role of healer in the *Iliad*.

Homer utilises the motif of Aphrodite’s wounding to establish Paiëon’s position as the healing god, and to reaffirm the boundary between mortality and immortality, human and divine.<sup>67</sup> Having received a painful wound to the hand, inflicted by Diomedes as she tried to rescue her son Aeneas from the

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<sup>64</sup> C. Kerényi, *Asklepios, Archetypal Image of the Physician’s Existence*, 80-1.

<sup>65</sup> In Book 5, lines 402 and 901, Homer uses the same description when referring to the wounded gods, Hades and Ares. Certainly the concept of gods being wounded is novel. Homer stresses the point that while they may be wounded their fate is not to die, drawing the inevitable line that separates mortality from immortality. Fatal wounding and serious disease constellate the fearful potentiality of death for humans, not gods.

<sup>66</sup> Robert Parker, *Miasma*, 256 suggests that there are four attitudes determining the Greek religious explanation of disease: 1. the natural order should conform to the moral order, 2. division of gods and mortals, 3. fate, and 4. cosmic justice.

<sup>67</sup> Tamara Neal, in her Ph.D. thesis (2003) *The Wounded Hero, Non Fatal Injury and Bloodspill in Homer’s Iliad*, University of Melbourne Centre of Classics and Archaeology, suggests that ‘the key function of these episodes of divine suffering is to show how easily immortal pains can be cured, and conversely, the vulnerability of mortal life. Nearly all mortals who are injured in the poem are unable to return to fighting unless attended by a god’. See Chapter Four, Wounded Gods, 122-51.

battlefield, Aphrodite flees to Mount Olympus seeking solace and comfort from her mother (5.346-80). Dione is able to cure the pain through simply stroking her hand illustrating the healing power of a mother's care (5.416-7). But Dione also instructs Aphrodite to 'endure' the slight helping to relieve her humiliation by recounting the other gods who have also been wounded. Ares was chained for months in a cauldron until Hermes rescued him from bondage (5.385-91); Hera had to bear the incurable pain of one of Heracles' arrows, which struck her in the breast (5.392-94). Finally Dione tells of Hades' plight when struck by one of Heracles' arrows at the Gate of Hell. To be healed of the excruciating pain Hades left his underworld domain and ventured to Olympus where Paiëon healed him through the use of medicinal ointments (5.395-402). Lying behind Dione's account is the implication that Paiëon is an older god who has been functioning as a healer since at least the epoch of Heracles' labours and his antagonistic relationship with Hera.<sup>68</sup> To Homer Paiëon is as ancient as the other Olympians, perhaps older.

Paiëon is also alluded to in the other Homeric poem. In the *Odyssey* Homer refers to the race of Paiëon (4.232) when referring to the anti-depressants, the 'subtle medicines' (4.227) that Helen had in her possession to alleviate sorrow and grief. Polydama of Egypt had given these drugs to her. Homer then describes the body of medical knowledge associated with the tradition of Paiëon, naming Egypt as:

where the fertile earth produces the greatest number of medicines, many good in mixture, many malignant, and every man is a doctor there and more understanding than men elsewhere. These people are the race of Paiëon. (4.229-32)

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<sup>68</sup> Hera's painful wounding at the hands of Heracles' puts her following actions in perspective. Two references recall how Hera raised a storm that blew Heracles along the coast of Asia Minor, from Troy to Cos (14.254-5; 15.26-28). No reason is given for Hera's action (except the implied hatred the goddess had for Heracles), nor is the narrative embellished in any way. Yet this fragment is important in establishing the link between Heracles and Cos and aligning the two medical centers of Cos and Thessaly (See Appendix 8). Hesiod and Pindar (*Ehoiai*, Hesiod fr. 43a MW; Pindar *Nem* 4:25-26 and *Is* 6: 31-2) also allude to the incident, but it is Plutarch (*Mor* 304 c-d) who offers a more comprehensive version of the mythic events. Heracles was washed ashore on Cos and after he defeated the Meropes, the indigenous Coans, he married Chalcioppe, daughter of the king Eurypylus. She gave birth to Heracles' son, Thessalos. Hippocrates, Cos' famous physician, also had a son named Thessalos. Hippocrates, the Coan founder of rational medicine, not only claimed descent from Asclepius but also from Heracles, being both an Asclepiad and a Heraclid. Ancient biographies legitimise the descent from Heracles in two ways. Podalirius, the son of Asclepius, was the grandson of Heracles and the legend of Hippocrates was that he was directly descended from Podalirius. The other version suggests Hippocrates' mother was descended from Heracles. Existing biographies of Hippocrates are not only late but compiled from fanciful legends that circulated in the ancient world. Yet what is significant to note is the alignment between the paragon of rational medicine and his mythic counterparts Asclepius and Heracles. Hippocrates' legend was consciously intertwined with the mythological past expressing the Greek urge to thread the present with the past and their myths with reality. Hippocrates, the seminal figurehead of rational medicine, was aligned with the god of healing to provide continuity between medicine's mythic past and the emergent new medical paradigm.

Again Paiëon is linked with a former era through Helen. Homer links the divine physician to an earlier body of knowledge that is not only well developed but originates in the tradition of the priest physician.<sup>69</sup> While the role of Egyptian practices in early Greek medicine is debatable, nonetheless, Homer aligns Paiëon with an ancient guild of priest-physicians. For the Mycenaeans, as well as the Minoans, the role of priest-healer was ‘to appease the deity or exorcise the spirit from the body of the sick person’.<sup>70</sup> In the archaic period physicians were also categorised with seers, troubadours and carpenters, who travelled for their livelihood and were specialists in their *techne*.<sup>71</sup> Technicians of sacred arts such as divination and medicine or vocations of craft were often traditionally ‘passed down’ through families from father to son. Even though the relationship may not have been familial, the apprentice was ‘fathered’ in the techniques of the particular craft, including healing.<sup>72</sup> Edelstein suggests that in Homer’s time doctors were known as ‘Paeonii’ or the sons of Paiëon. Having obtained their skill from the gods ‘it was natural that the human doctors were considered members of the family of Paiëon’.<sup>73</sup> While healing was still the jurisdiction of the gods, there could be no better patron than the divine physician himself. Physicians were never named after the god Apollo, but from ‘the sixth century on they were called Asclepiads, sons of Asclepius.’<sup>74</sup> Asclepiads were trained physicians whose art of healing came through human advancement and accomplishments, while Paeonii referred to the guild of healers invested with a divine sense of cure who practised religious medicine. While the change of patrons reflected the changing paradigm in the nature of healing from the archaic to the classical period,<sup>75</sup> nonetheless the tradition of the divine’s relationship to healing remained intact.

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<sup>69</sup> For the tradition of Egyptian priest-physicians see Walter Addison Jayne, *The Healing Gods of Ancient Civilizations*, 51-2. Herodotus in *Histories 2*: 84 also speaks of the skill of Egyptian physicians: ‘each physician treats a single disorder, and no more: thus the country swarms with medical practitioners’. Egyptian physicians were known for their treatment of disease and Cyrus and Darius both recruit medical practitioners from Egypt (Herodotus, Book III: 1 and 132). G.E.R. Lloyd (ed.), *Hippocratic Writings*, translated by J. Chadwick and W.N. Mann, Penguin Books (Harmondsworth: 1978), 13 suggests that Egyptian medicine was ‘impressive’ but it could not compare to the systematic debate and inquiry into the nature and cause of disease of the Hippocratic Corpus: ‘The question of the debts of Greek medicine to the medicine of their Near Eastern neighbours, particularly the Egyptians, is obscure and controversial.’ For Egyptian medicine during the Ptolemaic Period see R. David, “Rationality versus Irrationality in Egyptian Medicine in the Pharonic and Graeco-Roman Periods”, *Magic and Rationality in Ancient Near Eastern and Graeco-Roman Medicine*.

<sup>70</sup> Robert Arnott, “Healing and medicine in the Aegean Bronze Age”, 267.

<sup>71</sup> Walter Burkert, *The Orientalizing Revolution*, 41ff. and Horstmanshoff, H.F.J. ‘The Ancient Physician: Craftsman or Scientist?’ *Journal of the History of Medicine and Allied Science*, Volume 45, April 1990, 188-9.

<sup>72</sup> See Walter Burkert, *The Orientalizing Revolution*, 42-6; Vivian Nutton, “Healers in the medical market place: towards a social history of Graeco-Roman medicine”, 15-22.

<sup>73</sup> Emma and Ludwig Edelstein, *Asclepius*, Volume 2, 56.

<sup>74</sup> Emma and Ludwig Edelstein, *Asclepius*, Volume 2, 56.

<sup>75</sup> The shift of patron from Paiëon to Asclepius also supports the theory that Asclepius became deified in the 6<sup>th</sup> Century – see Chapter 3.



The apparent shift of medical practitioners' allegiances from Paiëon to Asclepius occurs in the 6<sup>th</sup> Century as new ways of cosmological thinking began to emerge. During the last half of that century, pre-Socratic philosophers influenced the redefining of the origins of disease.<sup>76</sup> During the similar time period literature begins to reveal the emergence of Asclepius as the son of Apollo, creating a chain of healers linked together through Apollo.<sup>77</sup> No relationship exists between Asclepius and Paiëon in the *Iliad* yet both have status as divine healers in differing epochs. Paiëon seems to be an archaic form of divine healing whilst Asclepius represents the contemporary healing god of the later classical period. Apollo is the link between the classical god of healing embodied by Asclepius and the image of divine healer personified by Paiëon, a mythic figure who can be traced back to the Mycenaean period.

The primary application of the name Paeon was to Apollo, but this link was not exclusive. For one thing, vestiges of the obsolete deity survived, for example in traditions of performance on the battlefield. And secondly, in so far as it was interpreted as 'healer', the name was also associated with Asclepius, and other deities perceived as capable of healing.<sup>78</sup>

### 3. APOLLO and PAIËON: The Continuity of Divine Healing

*'both custom and religious doctrine decreed that in all Apollonian sanctuaries the ritual hymn known as the paeon after Paiëon should be sung in praise of Apollo.'*<sup>79</sup>

At the end of Book 5 of the *Iliad* Diomedes injures the god of war (5.855-6) and it is Paiëon who heals the wound applying the medicinal potions to relieve Ares' pain. While gods may be wounded, unlike

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<sup>76</sup> Miletus, a vibrant Ionian city, spearheaded an intellectual revolution that espoused the natural origins of the cosmos segregating their ideological worldview from the widely held belief in the gods. Ionian philosophy postulated that there were rational explanations for natural phenomena that had previously been attributed to the gods. On the cusp of the 6<sup>th</sup> Century Thales of Miletus was the first recorded philosopher to influence the way the Greek mind would conceptualise their cosmos. Along with his student Anaximander and his pupil Anaximenes, the triumvirate of Milesian scientists dubbed the pre-Socratic philosophers, were the first wave of revolutionary thinkers to confront traditional cosmogony and supernatural beliefs. Gods who were once responsible for floods, earth tremors and natural disasters became redundant when the early Milesian philosophers rejected the supernatural cause of natural phenomena. The trend away from the chaotic and supernatural explanation of the universe to a more ordered and logical one also paved the way for the transition to a more 'rational explanation in medicine' (James Longrigg, *Greek Rational Medicine*, 26). Freedom from superstition and magical beliefs allowed medicine to develop as a science. Yet while the Greeks are credited as the first to evolve rational systems of medicine free from magical overtones, medicine's emancipation from the religious was not as easy to shake off.

<sup>77</sup> The diachronic emergence of Asclepius as son of Apollo is detailed in Chapter 3.

<sup>78</sup> Ian Rutherford, *Pindar's Paeans*, 17.

mortals their fate is not to die. Divine injury confronts the mortality of the human body; hence Paiëon is introduced specifically as healer of the gods, and is the only god in the epic whose specific function is healing. As the earliest reference for a god whose sole function is healing he represents a divine embodiment for health, a concept still located in the realm of the divine. Subsequently his name would be annexed to other gods to represent their healing capacity, as the attitudes towards health and healing in rational medicine became de-identified with the divine.<sup>80</sup> *Paeon* also had another function and that was to denote a song or even battle cry.<sup>81</sup> Both god and hymn originated in Knossos and were eventually enmeshed with Apollo; Paeon, meaning healer, became his epithet while the paeon was his cult hymn:

Apollo's cult hymn is the paeon. In Greek-ruled Knossos, Paiawon is an independent god, and in the *Iliad*, Paeon can still be distinguished from Apollo, although at the same time *paieon* is the healing hymn, which appeases Apollo's wrath.<sup>82</sup>

By the 5<sup>th</sup> Century *paeon* would become synonymous with healer in two ways: either as an epithet or through the genre of devotional healing songs. Embedded in both the epithet and healing hymn was the ancient legacy of the divine healer.

In the *Iliad* (1.472-4) a paeon is sung to Apollo after the ritual sacrifice to the god as thanks offerings for the ending of the plague:

All day long they propitiated the god with singing,  
chanting a splendid hymn to Apollo, these young Achaians,  
singing to the one who works from afar, who listened in gladness.

It is the prayer to Apollo that initiates the plague and it is the healing song dedicated to Apollo that celebrates its ending; intimately the *ara* and *paeon* are linked through Apollo, the god who sends and banishes the disease. In the Homeric description the art of healing consisted of sacred ceremonies, purifications and incantations and what was known later as charms or petitioning the god for good health were 'in earlier days certainly called 'paeans''.<sup>83</sup>

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<sup>79</sup> C. Kerényi, *Asklepios, Archetypal Image of the Physician's Existence*, 81.

<sup>80</sup> James Longrigg, *Greek Medicine From the Heroic to the Hellenistic Age*, 16 states that Paeon's name subsequently became attached to gods when denoting their healing function 'for example, of Zeus at Dodona and Rhodes, of Apollo, of Dionysus, of Asclepius, and of Helios.' By the 5<sup>th</sup> Century *paeon* would become synonymous with healing.

<sup>81</sup> Ian Rutherford, *Pindar's Paeans*, 10 draws the comparison to other cultures that used songs before battle to draw favours from the gods as well as healing songs to the gods.

<sup>82</sup> Walter Burkert, *Greek Religion*, 145.

<sup>83</sup> Martin P. Nilsson, *A History of Greek Religion*, translated by F.J. Fielden, Oxford University Press (Oxford: 1925), 131. The link to the Cretan healing god Paiawon was preserved through the paeon composed to various deities from the 5<sup>th</sup> Century on.

Prayer was one way of summoning the god but another form of invocation was a chant, accompanied by specific movements, or shouted during processions that were associated with particular gods. The paeon became associated with Apollo and was known as his chant:

Paeon signifies a dance and hymn with a specific rhythm, which is endowed with an absolving and healing power, as well as a god present in the hymn who is equated with Apollo; the epiphany of the god in dance and song agrees well with what may be surmised from the Minoan iconography.<sup>84</sup>

Paiëon becomes associated with the cult of Apollo through the healing hymn that is dedicated to him. The shout *ie paeon* has a special rhythm of three short and one long chant and it is this shout that ‘gives its name to the hymn which drives out pestilence and celebrates victory, and also to the god who so manifests himself’.<sup>85</sup> This chant is performed in line 514 of the *Homeric Hymn to Pythian Apollo* but is first alluded to in the *Iliad*.

Whilst Homer never specifically mentions the connection between Apollo and healing, the battle cry and the healing hymn are two aspects associated with his cult. These two aspects are directly linked to the Cretan Paiawon, then Paiëon and finally Apollo. Homer deals with the legacy of the Minoan deity Paiawon in two distinct ways: one is his aspect of divine healing as the Olympian physician Paiëon, and the other is the ritual healing song to Apollo. These two aspects eventually converge in the one god Apollo who represents the god foremost associated with healing throughout the archaic period. Lacking evidential support it is impossible clearly to define the period when the syncretism of the Cretan Paiawon and Apollo occurred. However, when analysing Homer’s inclusion of the healing god and hymn in the *Iliad*, it seems evident that the conflation of the two gods is already taking place in the Homeric period of the late 8<sup>th</sup> Century and accelerates in the 7<sup>th</sup> Century.

In the *Iliad* Paiëon, as the Olympian healer of the gods, is still a separate deity from Apollo. This is also the case in Hesiod, as a scholiast referring to Fragment 144 clearly differentiates Paiëon from Apollo.<sup>86</sup> In the 6<sup>th</sup> Century Solon (xii, 53-62; fragment. 13, 45) still speaks of Paiëon and Apollo as separate personalities. At this time the two gods are still not fused together as healers as they are in the

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<sup>84</sup> Walter Burkert, *Greek Religion*, 44. On pages 102-3 Burkert mentions that the ‘names Paeon and Dithyrambos refer equally to the god, his hymn, and his dance, perhaps from Minoan tradition’.

<sup>85</sup> Walter Burkert, *Greek Religion*, 74.

<sup>86</sup> See Walter Addison Jayne, *The Healing Gods of Ancient Civilizations*, 96. Hugh G. Evelyn-White, *Hesiod The Homeric Hymns and Homericica*, 275 translates the fragment as: ‘Unless Phoebus Apollo should save him from death, or Paeon himself who knows the remedies of all things’. Clearly Apollo and Paeon are differentiated.

classical period when Paeon 'is understood to mean "healer"'.<sup>87</sup> To earlier classicists like Farnell, the Homeric separation of the two deities, Apollo and Paiëon, was not proof that each had independent cults. He argued that 'the personality of Paeon the healer arose in direct or indirect association with Apollo',<sup>88</sup> as evident in post Homeric literature. This argument, similar to others<sup>89</sup>, was prior to Linear B unearthing a direct link between the Homeric Paiëon and the Cretan Paiawone. Therefore the question still remains as to when the syncretism of Apollo and Paiawon may have taken place. Rutherford suggests the obvious interpretation points to the two fusing their identities in the 'early centuries of the first millennium BC, late enough for a trace of the distinction to survive in early poetry'.<sup>90</sup> But the author also points out that the amalgam of the two deities may have taken place before the Linear B text, and if this were the case, then the two distinct personalities may even have a more ancient history. Paiëon seems to have survived through Homer as the divine concept of healing which had its genesis in or before the Mycenaean period. His survival reflects the long-standing tradition of the divine healer.

Apollo's incorporation of Paiëon is evident by the late 7<sup>th</sup> century (moving into the 6<sup>th</sup>). Sappho is one of the earlier poets who clearly align Paiëon with Apollo when suggesting the Trojan men called on Paiëon 'the far shooting god of the lyre'.<sup>91</sup> Paiëon as an epithet for Apollo is also used in an Orphic Hymn (xxxiv, 1) from the later 6<sup>th</sup> Century while Pindar (*Pythian IV*, 270) also addresses Apollo with this title.<sup>92</sup> Certainly by the 5<sup>th</sup> century the amalgam is complete and Apollo is Paiëon. And in the *Homeric Hymn to Pythian Apollo* (line 514) *paeon* is distinctly the song to Apollo:<sup>93</sup>

So the Cretans followed him to Pytho, marching in time as they chanted the Ie Paeon  
after the manner of the Cretan paeon-singers.

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<sup>87</sup> Ian Rutherford, *Pindar's Paeans*, 15.

<sup>88</sup> Lewis Richard Farnell, *The Cults of the Greek States*, Volume 4, 235.

<sup>89</sup> See A. Fairbanks, *A Study of the Greek Paeon* (Cornell: 1900).

<sup>90</sup> Ian Rutherford, *Pindar's Paeans*, 16.

<sup>91</sup> See Fragment 44. Anne Carson, *If Not Winter, Fragments of Sappho*, Alfred Knopf (New York, NY: 2002), 91.

<sup>92</sup> Walter Addison Jayne, *The Healing Gods of Ancient Civilizations*, 225 suggests that the title of paeon and *iatromantis* (Aeschylus, 62) given to Apollo to represent his healing function 'were given to Apollo after the time when the alliance with Asclepius is believed to have been affected'.

<sup>93</sup> The Pythian part of the Hymn to Apollo dates to the early 6<sup>th</sup> Century. Hugh Evelyn-White in the Introduction to *Hesiod, Homeric Hymns, Epic Cycle, Homeric*, Harvard University Press (London: 2002), xxxvi suggests this part of the hymn can be no later than 600 BCE. Michael Crudden, *Homeric Hymns*, Oxford University Press (Oxford: 2001), 104 suggests a date of c.585.

While the intimate connection between god and hymn<sup>94</sup> seems to derive from Minoan tradition ‘literary sources tell that the Cretan paeon was taken from Crete to Sparta as healing hymn and dance at the beginning of the seventh century’.<sup>95</sup> In the *Iliad* god and song are differentiated, but in the century following Homer it becomes more evident that both are distinctly separate. Apollo has become the substitute for Paiëon while the healing chant has become the paeon to Apollo.<sup>96</sup> The *Homeric Hymn to Pythian Apollo* silently preserves the link to Paiawon through the Cretan sailors from Knossos who are fated by Apollo to be his priests in Delphi. While Apollo’s name does not appear on Linear B he is linked to Mycenaean Crete in subtle ways: his priests, his healing hymn, but most of all through his ancestral alter ego, Paiëon.

Homer’s usage of Paiëon establishes a bridge to an older Minoan god most likely concerned with healing in battle. As the divine healer of the *Iliad*, Paiëon immortalises the notion of healing and establishes the divinity of the healer. His inclusion preserves a link to an ancient concept of healing which is subtly projected onto Apollo in the following century ensuring that the primal relationship between disease, healing and the divine is carried by one of the Greeks’ favourite gods. As the divine healer who can be traced back to the 14<sup>th</sup> Century there is enough evidence to suggest that the alliance of the divine with the disease had become deeply rooted in the rituals and ideas of the Greeks. Homer’s inclusion of Paiëon in the epic is the first portrait, albeit fleeting, of a divine healer in Greek literature and the earliest literary inspiration for the classical god of healing, Asclepius.

In this chapter I have demonstrated the role that Apollo plays in transmitting the ancient belief in the god-sent disease into the archaic age. Involved in sending and relieving plagues, personal healing as well as oracular diagnosis of disease, Apollo was the appropriate personality to promote as the god of healing. The notion of a divine healer is preserved through the Homeric character of Paiëon whose roots extend back to the Mycenaean period. Through his eventual amalgamation with Apollo a lineage of divine healers is established in Greek myth preparing the stage for the organisation of religious medicine that is fronted by Asclepius in the 5<sup>th</sup> Century. By this time, the intermeshing of the disease and the deity has existed for at least a millennium.

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<sup>94</sup> Ian Rutherford, *Pindar’s Paeans*, 12-13 considers whether the name of the god or the name of the song would have appeared first. By looking at other examples of homonym between deity and song he concludes that in the case of Paiëon/Paeon ‘movement from the name of song to name of deity seems the less likely alternative’.

<sup>95</sup> Walter Burkert, *Greek Religion*, 145.

<sup>96</sup> Ian Rutherford, *Pindar’s Paeans*, 11 suggests that the title Paeon is ‘usually a substitute for his name rather than a true epithet’.

## CHAPTER II

### 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.'*<sup>97</sup>

- 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.<sup>98</sup> 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

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<sup>97</sup> 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).

<sup>98</sup> 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, *Documents in Mycenaean Greek* (Cambridge: 1973), 547 and L.R. Palmer, *The Interpretation of Mycenaean Greek Texts* (Oxford: 1963), 422.

his systematic study of ancient attitudes towards wounding, suggests that ‘the oldest witness of Greek medicine is Homer’<sup>99</sup>; 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 *techne* 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.<sup>100</sup> 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.<sup>101</sup> 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.

## 1. The Healers from Thessaly

*‘A healer is a man worth many men in his knowledge*

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<sup>99</sup> Guido Majno, *The Healing Hand Man and Wound in the Ancient World*, Harvard University Press (Cambridge, MA: 1973), 142.

<sup>100</sup> Chris Mackie, “Achilles’ Teachers: Chiron and Phoenix in the *Iliad*”, *Greece and Rome* 44 (1997).

<sup>101</sup> 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 5<sup>th</sup> 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*.

*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 6<sup>th</sup> 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.<sup>102</sup> Two 'good healers' (2.732) Podalirius and Machaon, who are sons of Asclepius, are listed as representing Tricca in the Thessalian delegation.<sup>103</sup> Achilles (2.685) and Philoctetes (2.718), both associated with the motif of wounding and healing are also part of the Thessalian contingent.<sup>104</sup> 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 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

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<sup>102</sup> 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.

<sup>103</sup> Tricca was promoted as the birthplace of Asclepius, the god of healing, in the 6<sup>th</sup> Century. See Chapter 3.



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.<sup>105</sup> 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.<sup>106</sup>

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.<sup>107</sup> 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 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,

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<sup>104</sup> 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.

<sup>105</sup> 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.

<sup>106</sup> Robert Arnott, "Healing and medicine in the Aegean Bronze Age", 266.

<sup>107</sup> For a persuasive argument linking three Thessalian heroes and healers together in a critical way see Chris Mackie, "The Earliest Philoctetes", forthcoming *Scholia* 2008.

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.<sup>108</sup> 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.<sup>109</sup> 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'.<sup>110</sup> 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 psychiatrist who treated and 'healed "invisible" ills, including those of the soul'.<sup>111</sup> 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.<sup>112</sup>

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<sup>108</sup> 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*).

<sup>109</sup> The most recognised image of Achilles as a healer is on the Sosias Cup in the Berlin Antikensmuseum. The scene also involves Patroclus who is wounded; however, this time Achilles is the one who tends the wound.

<sup>110</sup> Bryan Hainsworth, *The Iliad A Commentary*, Volume 3: Books 9-12, Cambridge University Press (Cambridge: 1993), 279.

<sup>111</sup> C. Kerényi, *Asklepios Archetypal Image of the Physician's Existence*, 76 citing Scholiast BT Eustathius.

<sup>112</sup> *Greek Epic Fragments*, Sack of Ilion, 2, translated by Martin L. West, Harvard University Press Cambridge, MA: 2003), 149.

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.<sup>113</sup> In the *Little Iliad* Machaon heals the wound of Philoctetes,<sup>114</sup> whereas in a later version Apollodorus suggests Podalirius is the healer.<sup>115</sup> 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 Eurypylus, a nephew of Priam who bears the same name as the Thessalian leader.<sup>116</sup> Pausanias also mentions the legend that Podalirius settled in Caria.<sup>117</sup> His individual biography becomes more detailed in post Homeric literature, migrating to Caria and

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<sup>113</sup> 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.'

<sup>114</sup> *Greek Epic Fragments*, Argument 2, 121.

<sup>115</sup> For a discussion on the different versions of the myth see Timothy Gantz, *Early Greek Myth*, Volume 2, 535-9.

<sup>116</sup> In the *Iliad* there are two warriors by the name of Eurypylus. 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 Eurypylus who is healed by Patroclus with healing medicines passed on from Achilles. Homer refers to Cos as '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, Göttingen: 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.

<sup>117</sup> 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'.

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 6<sup>th</sup> Century known as Asclepiads.<sup>118</sup> 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.<sup>119</sup> In *Medicine throughout Antiquity* the author summarises the medical skill of the doctors in the *Iliad*:

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.<sup>120</sup>

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

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<sup>118</sup> Emma and Ludwig Edelstein, *Asclepius*, Volume 2, 56.

<sup>119</sup> 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.

<sup>120</sup> Benjamin Lee Gordon, *Medicine Throughout Antiquity*, 448-9.

contrast between heroic life and heroic death'.<sup>121</sup> 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 death <sup>122</sup>

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',<sup>123</sup> especially when practical assistance was of no use and a cure was unknown.<sup>124</sup> 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 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',<sup>125</sup> 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.<sup>126</sup> 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.

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<sup>121</sup> Jasper Griffin, "Homeric Pathos and Objectivity", CQ 26, 48.

<sup>122</sup> Christine Salazar, *The Treatment of War Wounds in Graeco-Roman Antiquity*, Brill (Leiden: 2000), 128

<sup>123</sup> James Longrigg, *Greek Medicine from the Heroic to the Hellenistic Age*, 15.

<sup>124</sup> 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.

<sup>125</sup> Guido Majno, *The Healing Hand, Man and Wound in the Ancient World*, 142

<sup>126</sup> Richard Janko, *The Iliad: A Commentary*, Volume 4: Books 13-16, 119.

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’.<sup>127</sup> In *A History of Medicine*, the author summarises the training of Greek physicians that is implied in the *Iliad*:

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.<sup>128</sup>

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.<sup>129</sup> 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.

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<sup>127</sup> C. Kerényi, *Asklepios Archetypal Image of the Physician’s Existence*, 78.

<sup>128</sup> 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’

<sup>129</sup> L.R. Farnell, *Hero Cults: Greek Hero Cults and Ideas of Immortality*, 237.

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.<sup>130</sup>

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 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.<sup>131</sup> 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 drugs<sup>132</sup>, 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,<sup>133</sup> 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.<sup>134</sup> In the palatial culture of the Bronze Age, palace physicians were 'attached to elite households, practicing surgery and functional medicine'.<sup>135</sup> 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.

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<sup>130</sup> Emma and Ludwig Edelstein, *Asclepius*, Volume 2, 16.

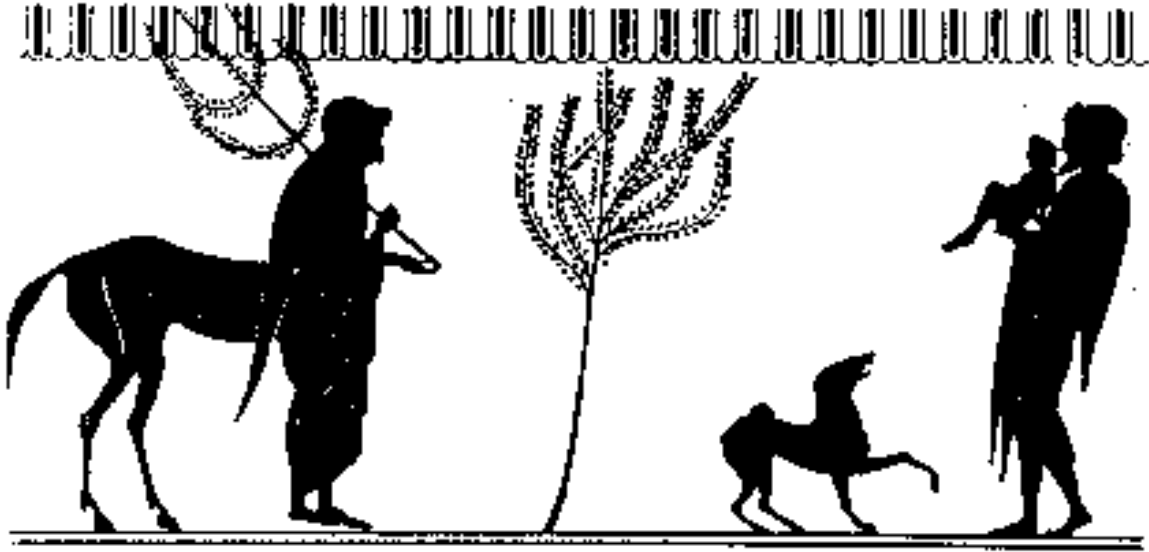
<sup>131</sup> A tradition of doctor hero, 'the hero-doctor in the city' or *heros iatros* has been identified at Eleusis, Athens, Marathon and Rhamnus. At Rhamnus the cult is dated to the 6<sup>th</sup> Century. See Robert Parker, *Athenian Religion*, 176.

<sup>132</sup> 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.

<sup>133</sup> For a compilation of the Thessalian ships in the Greek fleet see Appendix 4.

<sup>134</sup> Hooker, *Mycenaean Greece*, Routledge and Kegan Paul (London: 1978), 107.

<sup>135</sup> Robert Arnott, "Healing and medicine in the Aegean Bronze Age", 266.



*Peleus brings his son Achilles to Chiron for fostering*

## 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'* <sup>136</sup>

In only four brief references Homer introduces Chiron (4.218-9; 11.830-1; 16.143-4; 19.389-91).<sup>137</sup> 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 healing<sup>138</sup> as well as befriending Asclepius and Peleus (4.219; 16.143). Homer

<sup>136</sup> 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.

<sup>137</sup> 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.

<sup>138</sup> 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.*



gives us the first clue that Chiron and Thessaly were the mythic touchstones of Greek medicine through the contingent of heroes from Thessaly.<sup>139</sup> 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 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.<sup>140</sup> 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.<sup>141</sup> 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'.<sup>142</sup> 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.

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40.2. Other heroes either reared or schooled by Chiron according to the ancient sources were Aristaeus, Actaeon and Heracles.

<sup>139</sup> 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.

<sup>140</sup> Martin L. West in *Greek Epic Fragments*, 26 dates Eumelus to mid-8<sup>th</sup> C.

<sup>141</sup> 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.

As a relic of the past Chiron was a difficult figure for the earlier poets to fully embrace.<sup>143</sup> 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 ancestry can be traced back to the Lapith king, Ixion.<sup>144</sup> 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.<sup>145</sup> 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’.<sup>146</sup> 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.<sup>147</sup>

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<sup>142</sup> Eumelus, 13.

<sup>143</sup> 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.’

<sup>144</sup> Pindar, *Pythian II*, 21-48.

<sup>145</sup> 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.

<sup>146</sup> The term dark age is being used in the context of Westlake’s opinion that Thessaly remained in the Dark Ages until the 4<sup>th</sup> 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’.

<sup>147</sup> Page duBois, *Centaurs and Amazons, Women and the Pre-History of the Great Chain of Being*, University of Michigan (Ann Arbor, MI: 1991), 30.

By the 5<sup>th</sup> Century Centaurs were loathsome. They became the artist's ally in portraying the barbarian at the gate of Greek democracy.<sup>148</sup> Therefore, as Dubois suggests, Chiron is 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,<sup>149</sup> 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.<sup>150</sup> As scholars have suggested Chiron is unacceptable in the Homeric age as the tutor to the greatest of all heroes.<sup>151</sup>

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<sup>148</sup> 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 5<sup>th</sup> Century the centaur symbolised the barbarian, while Chiron personified the ancient healing tradition. During the mid 5<sup>th</sup> 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*).

<sup>149</sup> 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'.

<sup>150</sup> 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

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 disenfranchised boys destined to be heroes.<sup>152</sup> Chiron's implied role as a guide through 'rites of passage in the wild'<sup>153</sup> 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,<sup>154</sup> 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'.<sup>155</sup> 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.<sup>156</sup> Consistent with

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son Telemachus. Phoenix and Mentor are a new age of mentors who are human, unlike Chiron who represents the archaic uncivilised past.

<sup>151</sup> 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.

<sup>152</sup> 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'.

<sup>153</sup> Chris Mackie, "The Earliest Jason. What's in a Name?"

<sup>154</sup> Chiron's tutelage of Asclepius is noted by Pindar in *Nemean III* and *Pythian III*.

<sup>155</sup> 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.

<sup>156</sup> 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

tradition early 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.<sup>157</sup> 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'.<sup>158</sup> 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 brought to his father from high on

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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 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.

<sup>157</sup> 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.

Pelion to be death for fighters'. This spear has supernatural powers (20.99-100)<sup>159</sup> 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.<sup>160</sup> 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.<sup>161</sup> 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-6<sup>th</sup> Century develop the mythic theme of Chiron's special spear.<sup>162</sup>

During a landing at what they thought was Troy the Greeks engage in battle with the Mysians and Achilles wounds the local king, Telephus.<sup>163</sup> 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.<sup>164</sup> The method of cure was to scrape the verdigris<sup>165</sup> off the spear and into the wound, a homeopathic procedure of injecting poison into the wound for cure, an unusual technique and

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<sup>158</sup> 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.

<sup>159</sup> 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.

<sup>160</sup> *Cypria*, Fragments 3-4.

<sup>161</sup> 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".

<sup>162</sup> *Greek Epic Fragments*, *Cypria* Argument 7, 13 suggest the *Cypria* 'can hardly be earlier than the second half of the sixth century'.

<sup>163</sup> 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.

<sup>164</sup> *Greek Epic Fragments*, 73-4 includes Apollodorus' narrative accompanying the original.

<sup>165</sup> Verdigris is the green or greenish blue poisonous pigment formed on copper, brass or bronze surfaces. The head of the spear was bronze.

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 5<sup>th</sup> 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 Achilles<sup>166</sup>, 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'<sup>167</sup> 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*)

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

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<sup>166</sup> Pindar references to Chiron as mentor to Achilles *Nemean III.43-63* and *Pythian VI.21-23*; Euripides, *Iphigeneia at Aulis*, 1265-75.

<sup>167</sup> Hesiod, *The Homeric Hymns and Homeric*.

cornerstone in the early practice of rational medicine which honoured the alignment of medicine and morality.

By the 5<sup>th</sup> 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’.<sup>168</sup> 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.<sup>169</sup>

Euripides assigns the 5<sup>th</sup> 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 5<sup>th</sup> Century the rational reconstruction of medicine had distanced itself from the mythic past permitting Euripides to project new attitudes onto Chiron’s philosophical mentorship. 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,

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<sup>168</sup> Euripides, *Iphigeneia at Aulis*, 958-61.

<sup>169</sup> Euripides, *Iphigeneia at Aulis*, 1265-75.



That he ruled in the glades of Pelion, the wild Centaur,  
With a heart friendly to man.<sup>170</sup>

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'<sup>171</sup>, 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.<sup>172</sup> By the 5<sup>th</sup> Century the legacy of the Thessalians as healers had become part of the mythic tradition.

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.

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<sup>170</sup> Pindar, *Pythian III*.1-5.

<sup>171</sup> 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.

<sup>172</sup> See Chris Mackie, "The Earliest Philoctetes".

# CHAPTER III

## THE HEALING GOD

### Asclepius, Heroic Physician and Divine Doctor

*'The truest explanation for the rise of Asclepius may be that he was, as it were, in partnership with Hippocrates' <sup>173</sup>*

- Robert Parker

As established in Chapters 1 and 2, Homer's *Iliad* reveals two medical conventions. One is divine, personified by Apollo and Paiëon, while the other is the pragmatic medical skill of the Thessalian physicians like Machaon whose tutelage reaches back through his father to Chiron. In this chapter I trace the convergence of these traditions in the 6<sup>th</sup> and 5<sup>th</sup> Centuries through the literary alterations and additions to the myth of Asclepius. My core argument will be that Asclepius' evolution into the venerated god of healing not only demonstrates the changing attitudes towards disease and cure, but allows the unique co-existence between the secular and sacred aspects of Greek medicine to persist. As the divine voice of religious medicine Asclepius facilitates the traditional alliance of the divine with disease throughout the classical and Hellenistic periods.

Homer's *Iliad* supplied the first reference in Greek literature to Asclepius as the 'blameless physician' (4.194). By the 5<sup>th</sup> Century, archaeological and textual evidence corroborate Asclepius' appearance as a god at Epidaurus where his worship became localised. To Homer, Asclepius' homeland was Thessaly where his mentor-friend Chiron was renowned for his medical training<sup>174</sup>, but no link between Asclepius and Apollo is evident. By the classical period Asclepius has inherited the sphere of healing once associated with Apollo, leaving no doubt that by the 5<sup>th</sup> Century he was part of a divine dynasty of healers. By the mid-5<sup>th</sup> Century the mythic biography of Asclepius had been considerably reshaped, having evolved from the 'blameless physician' of the *Iliad* into the god of healing in the course of three centuries. Edelstein, one of the foremost researchers into Asclepius' cult of temple medicine,

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<sup>173</sup> Robert Parker, *Athenian Religion: A History*, Clarendon Press (Oxford: 1996), 184.

<sup>174</sup> As discussed in Chapter 2, Homer implies that Chiron is a friend of Asclepius (4:219) or at least acts in a friendly manner to him. Pindar refers to this relationship as mentor-student (*Nemean III. 54-56* and *Pythian III. 45-46*), the interpretation that becomes more revealing in assessing the link between Chiron and Asclepius.

suggested that the reshaping of the myth had been consciously orchestrated. Asclepius' emergence as the healing god on the cusp of the classical period was 'not fortuitous, nor merely an eccentric play of poetic or mythical imagination; it was made on purpose, meant to have symbolic significance.'<sup>175</sup>

What fuelled the reconstruction of the medical myth of Asclepius cannot be certain. However, what is apparent is that Asclepius' metamorphosis developed in conjunction with the widening acceptance of a rational approach in the treatment of disease. In the changing paradigm of disease and cure in the 5th Century, the worship of Asclepius, as the god of healing, began to flourish alongside rational medicine. While many new cults were promoted in response to the rapidly changing socio-political climate<sup>176</sup>, the worship of Asclepius exemplified a prime example of how religious attitudes paralleled the changes in the cultural ethos. In this chapter I argue that the deification of the 'blameless physician' was the natural evolution of the relationship between the divine and healing. The advent of rational medicine and its practitioners brought new attitudes and expectations towards disease and cure, which were embraced by Greek religion.

Welcomed by both the guild of physicians and the common people, Asclepius is the penultimate mythical and religious medical figure to represent the amalgam of the natural and supernatural strands of healing. Through modifications to his myth, Asclepius becomes the transitional figure between the mystical medicine of the heroic age and temple medicine that took hold in the latter 5<sup>th</sup> Century. By the classical period Asclepius was the heir to both Chiron and Apollo's healing legacy and the deity who continues the ancient legacy of the divine's intimate association with healing. Through Asclepius, healing was united with religion, maintaining the alignment with its sacred and mysterious roots which rational medicine was unable to sever. Diachronically, Asclepius mirrors the evolving attitudes towards healing. Paradoxically, as the understanding of the nature of disease began to shift from supernatural and divine causation to natural origins, Asclepius' worship gained momentum. As god of healing, Asclepius is the outcome of both the long-standing relationship between divine and disease as well as the prominent position of religion in the everyday life of the ancient Greek. Ingrained in Greek tradition was a concept of divine healing, which could not be solely replaced by scientific doctrines of disease, and Asclepius became the embodiment of this institution.

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<sup>175</sup> Emma and Ludwig Edelstein, *Asclepius*, Volume 2, 37.

<sup>176</sup> For amplification on the introduction of new cults into Greek society, in particular Athens, in the 5<sup>th</sup> Century refer to Robert Garland, *Introducing New Gods*, Duckworth (London: 1992) and Robert Parker, *Athenian Religion A History*. For a discussion on the reaction to rationalism and the introduction of new cults see E. R. Dodds, *The Greeks and the Irrational*, University of California (Berkeley, CA: 1951).

## 1. Asclepius, the Blameless Physician

*'Homeric Asclepius is a rather shadowy figure'* <sup>177</sup>

Greek literature first introduces Asclepius through his sons, Machaon and Podalirius, in the *Iliad*. Asclepius is a physician who has passed on 'healing medicines' (4.218) to his sons. While Homer implies Asclepius is king or at least regent of Tricca the only true characterisation of Asclepius in the *Iliad* refers to his medical prowess as a physician. In the Homeric epic Asclepius is never referred to as a god, and therefore we are left to assume that he is a noble physician who passes on his skill and knowledge to his sons. A natural inference from these passages would be that Asclepius 'was a human healer like his sons'.<sup>178</sup> Even though Homer is silent on the heroic aspect of Asclepius he is linked 'in friendship' (4.219) to Chiron, the mentor of healing heroes,<sup>179</sup> aligning Asclepius with the timeless medical and magical tradition associated with Thessaly.<sup>180</sup> Although mythic tradition not always considers Machaon and Podalirius his sons<sup>181</sup> Homer associated Asclepius with them, suggesting he was probably already well known before the Homeric epic. If Asclepius was already known as a great physician any one claiming descent from him, like Machaon and Podalirius, would also be glorified.<sup>182</sup> Differing theories suggest he may originally have been a folk deity, a god or a chthonic deity like Trophonius.<sup>183</sup> While the status of Asclepius remains uncertain prior to Homer, he enters epic as a noble physician from Thessaly initiated into healing knowledge that he passes onto his sons.

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<sup>177</sup> Emma and Ludwig Edelstein, *Asclepius*, Volume 2, 2. For a detailed analysis of Asclepius status as hero and god see Emma and Ludwig Edelstein, *Asclepius*, Volumes 1 and 2.

<sup>178</sup> W.K.C. Guthrie, *The Greeks and Their Gods*, Beacon Press (Boston, MA: 1955), 242.

<sup>179</sup> Inclusions of Asclepius in the pre-Trojan heroic pursuits, like the Voyage of the Argo or the Calydonian Boar Hunt, are later additions. Even though he is the father of Greek heroes at Troy and therefore a contemporary of Peleus, the father of Achilles, Asclepius is not a heroic crewmember of the Argo in the ancient sources. Any heroic biography of Asclepius was probably reconstructed after his rise to popularity in the 5<sup>th</sup> Century.

<sup>180</sup> Emma and Ludwig Edelstein, *Asclepius*, Volume 2, 63 continue their thesis that the myth of Asclepius was consciously shaped, even in the *Iliad*: 'Asclepius' localisation in Thessaly, therefore, like other features of the saga, seems to be a purposeful invention, well in accord with Homer's intentions.' Another interpretation here could suggest that Homer was referring to the tradition that medical skill and knowledge was passed from father to son and that Chiron passed the knowledge to Asclepius who then passed it to his sons. As suggested in Chapter 2, myths of Thessaly suggested a tradition of medical training before the Homeric epics were conceived.

<sup>181</sup> Scholiast on the *Iliad* reports that Arctinus, *The Sack of Ilium*, suggests that Poseidon is their father. See *Greek Epic Fragments*, 149.

<sup>182</sup> Emma and Ludwig Edelstein, *Asclepius*, Volume 2. 16 – 17, as discussed in Chapter 2.

<sup>183</sup> For this discussion see W.K.C. Guthrie, *The Greeks and Their Gods*, 244; E. Rohde, *Psyche*, translated by W.B. Hillis, Kegan Paul (London: 1925) and Farnell, *Hero Cults: Greek Hero Cults and Ideas of Immortality*. No conclusive evidence to suggest the status of Asclepius exists prior to his inclusion in Homer. Therefore

As the father of two heroic healers and a physician himself Asclepius is the first and oldest doctor of medicine in Greek literature. But as Edelstein suggests: ‘Homeric Asclepius is a rather shadowy figure’.<sup>184</sup> Since Homeric tradition fashioned Asclepius as the first healer in Greek myth he represents the seminal figurehead for the vocation of healing. Even though his inclusion in the *Iliad* is cursory it insured that the image of Asclepius as earliest physician would remain embedded in the Greek imagination. Since Homer gives no indication of Asclepius being either divine or connected to Apollo it appears that his elevation to immortality may be later. Homer has identified a legendary doctor who, as father of physicians and friend to Chiron, is the perfect representative for medicine in a mythic-religious context. When Greek religion is in need of a divine surrogate Asclepius is the natural choice as the flawless double of the medical doctor.

Hesiod’s *Theogony* sheds no light at all on Asclepius. However, in the pseudo-Hesiodic *Catalogue of Women*, written around 600 BCE<sup>185</sup>, two fragments (88 & 89)<sup>186</sup> are the first known references to reveal the emergence of the myth as it became known to later generations. In the first fragment Coronis is introduced as ‘unwed’, residing on the Dotian plain in Thessaly near Lake Boibeis. The motif of the crow that informs Apollo of her marriage to Ischys is also presented in the second fragment (89). Although none of the surviving lines expressly states that Coronis was the mother of Asclepius, this was probably intended or even originally stated. The following fragment (90) refers to Apollo’s anger when Asclepius was slain by Zeus. The theme of the crow and Apollo’s anger are central to the myth as it developed in the 5<sup>th</sup> Century. In reconstructing the fragments, scholars have pieced the mythic narrative together, which is thematically similar to the motifs that Pindar describes.<sup>187</sup> In *Pythian III*, written ‘about 474’,<sup>188</sup> Pindar names Apollo as the father of Asclepius and locates Coronis in the Thessalian region, exactly where the *Catalogue* had, and in the same prefecture as Homer had alluded to. As the 6<sup>th</sup> Century dawns the first surviving reference to the divine lineage of Asclepius emerges in the *Catalogue of Women*. It was also at this same time that the Milesian

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scholars have interpreted the slight references to Asclepius in the manner that supports their thesis. What seems clear is that it was not until the 5<sup>th</sup> Century that Greek religion fully embraced his divinity.

<sup>184</sup> Emma and Ludwig Edelstein, *Asclepius*, Volume 2, 2. Robert Garland in *Introducing New Gods*, 116 also uses this term ‘shadowy’ in describing Asclepius: ‘In myth he [Asclepius] is a somewhat shadowy figure, which lends testimony to his “lateness”’.

<sup>185</sup> Emma and Ludwig Edelstein, *Asclepius*, Volume 2, 24 list differing references which place the date of the catalogue anywhere between 620 and 580 BCE.

<sup>186</sup> *The Homeric Hymns and Homerica*, 211-2.

<sup>187</sup> W.K.C. Guthrie, *The Greeks and Their Gods*, 243, describes the process of scholarship on these fragments.

<sup>188</sup> C. M. Bowra, *The Odes of Pindar*, 99.

philosophers emerged with their revolutionary ideas that overthrew the centrality of the gods as the causation of natural phenomena. Synchronistically Greek religion had moved to reflect the new philosophical paradigm in linking Asclepius, the physician, with Apollo, the god of healing, bequeathing the divine disease to a mythic figure entirely devoted to healing.<sup>189</sup>

An earlier fragment in the *Catalogue of Women* (63) suggests that Asclepius is the son of Apollo and Arsinoë, a Messenian.<sup>190</sup> The interest in Asclepius, as a divine surrogate of the medical tradition, is no longer fixed to one locale, which indicates the growing interest in his worship and his function. The commentary in the *Catalogue* definitely dismisses this version of Asclepius' maternal line: 'This oracle most clearly proves that Asclepius was not the son of Arsinoë but that Hesiod or one of Hesiod's interpolators composed the verses to please the Messenians'.<sup>191</sup> Pausanias reports that it is the Delphic oracle who refutes the Messenian claim that Arsinoë is Asclepius' mother. Perhaps, as Edelstein suggests, the purpose is not to trace the genealogy of Asclepius correctly, but to establish 'the descent of his son Machaon who was worshipped as a national hero in Messina'.<sup>192</sup> What is of interest is that by the beginning of the 6<sup>th</sup> Century Asclepius is not solely confined to Thessaly, the geographical home proposed by Homer. The alternate version suggests that Asclepius is becoming both valued and known in other regions of the Greek world. In the 6<sup>th</sup> Century Asclepius' reputation is not only spreading, but now is dynastically linked to Apollo, the god associated with healing. To Edelstein, this 6<sup>th</sup> Century reconstruction of the myth to make Asclepius a son of a god forms 'the first link in the chain, which was to bind Asclepius to the immortals'.<sup>193</sup>

Elevating Asclepius to kinship with Apollo certainly seems post-Homeric as no trace of this connection is mentioned earlier. To Homer the divine healer is Paiëon. By the 6<sup>th</sup> Century the syncretism of Apollo and Paiëon had probably already taken place creating a vacancy in Greek religion for a divinity exclusively dedicated to healing. In the *Homeric Hymn to Asclepius*, probably written in the 6<sup>th</sup>

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<sup>189</sup> See Appendix for comparative dates between the mythic development of Asclepius and the development of Hippocratic medicine.

<sup>190</sup> Confusion arose from Homer's listing Tricca, Ithome and Oechalia together as the troops under the command of the brothers Machaon and Podalirius (2.729-33). In the ancient period Tricca was a well-known town in Thessaly and the favoured birthplace of Asclepius for the ancient authors (Strabo, *Geographica* XIV, 1, 39 & Hyginus, *Fabulae*, XIV, 21). However Ithome and Oechalia were towns in Messenia which also promoted itself as the birthplace of Asclepius.

<sup>191</sup> *The Homeric Hymns and Homerica*, 189. The reference to the oracle is the one given by the Pythian oracle of Delphi, which suggests that Asclepius was born in Epidaurus.

<sup>192</sup> Emma and Ludwig Edelstein, *Asclepius*, Volume 2, 32.

<sup>193</sup> Emma and Ludwig Edelstein, *Asclepius*, Volume 2, 34.

Century,<sup>194</sup> Asclepius is clearly the son of Apollo, born to Coronis on the Thessalian plain of Dotian. Asclepius is characterised as one ‘who charms ill pangs away’ and is now acknowledged as the divine son of the ‘plague-healing’ god.<sup>195</sup> However, as previously suggested, it is Pindar’s early 5<sup>th</sup> Century ode, *Pythian III*, which is the first remaining reference to fully document the details of Asclepius’ conception, his birth, parentage as well as his fate. Using fragmentary evidence we can see the myth being exposed through the 6<sup>th</sup> Century; however, it is Pindar who is our first complete mythic biographer of Asclepius.

Pindar introduces Asclepius as ‘the gentle worker of sound-limbed painlessness’ and the ‘hero, healer of every sickness’ (6-7). The poet tells the widely accepted version of the myth of Asclepius, snatched from the womb of his dead mother, and taken to Chiron where he ‘should learn to heal the divers pains of sickness of men’ (43). His mother Coronis is located near Lake Boibias, which is at the top of the Magnesian Peninsula, the land associated with Chiron and the Centaurs. As the daughter of Phlegyas, Coronis is a sister to Ixion, the cursed father of Centaurus, anchoring Asclepius’ ancestry in the rich healing legacy deep-rooted in Thessalian soil. The mythic essentials consistent with heroic biographies are present in the story of Asclepius: his divine conception and extraordinary birth, orphaned then fostered are all motifs of the heroic journey.<sup>196</sup> Asclepius, the son of the god Apollo, is miraculously born ‘out of the dead body’ (*Pythian III.42*) of his mother on the funeral pyre. As an orphan he is then fostered and educated by Chiron, who teaches him medicinal magic:

The flaming pyre blazed either side of him.  
He bore him away and gave him  
To the Magnesian Centaur: there he should learn  
To heal the divers pains of the sickness of men. (*Pythian III.43-6*)

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<sup>194</sup> Apostolos N. Athanassakis, translator of *The Homeric Hymns*, John Hopkins University Press (Baltimore, MD: 2004), 88 states that ‘the sixth century is a good guess’ for dating the composition of the Homeric Hymn to Asclepius.

<sup>195</sup> *The Homeric Hymns*, translated by Michael Crudden, Oxford University Press (Oxford: 2001).

<sup>196</sup> See Joseph Campbell, *The Hero with a Thousand Faces*, Princeton University Press (Princeton, NJ: 1968). This book is a comparative study of heroic myths which contain these themes. Campbell proposed the theory of the ‘monomyth’: many heroes, one storyline. The mythic biography of the hero was studied earlier by F.R. Raglan, who included these common heroic motifs amongst 22 common points in hero myths (F.R. Raglan, *The Hero A Study in Tradition, Myth and Drama*, Vintage Books, New York, NY: 1956). Amongst early psychoanalysts interested in the life cycle of the hero was Otto Rank whose tripartite heroic cycle was birth, initiation, death (see Otto Rank, *The Birth of the Hero*, translated by F. Robbins and S.E. Jellife, Robert Brunner, New York, NY: 1952).

Pindar also amplifies the fragmentary motif of Asclepius' demise at the hands of Zeus found in the *Catalogue of Women*. Seduced by gold, Asclepius crosses the boundary between man and god by magically raising a man from the dead. For this transgression he is killed by Zeus' blazing thunderbolts. Pindar's intent may be to moralise by illustrating the consequences of inflation; however, Asclepius is also characterised as a miracle worker having divine powers and offering the possibility of resurrection. As a personification of the miraculous, Asclepius was petitioned for a divine cure, which was one of the main reasons why his worship spread quickly throughout the Mediterranean world at the close of the 5<sup>th</sup> Century.

Asclepius' birth myth echoes the timeless motif of the divine conception and miraculous birth.<sup>197</sup> Like other orphaned sons destined to be heroes he was relinquished to the care of Chiron. Pindar aligns Asclepius with the heroic age and the legacy of the hero initiated into the healing mysteries. However, unlike other heroes Asclepius had the power to retrieve souls from the underworld through his ability to raise the dead.<sup>198</sup> Edelstein suggests this ability makes him a sorcerer as well as a physician:

He became an especially good surgeon; he healed the sick and revived the dead. But besides being a physician, he was a sorcerer as well.<sup>199</sup>

Poets, playwrights and mythmakers often judged Asclepius' act of 'soul retrieval' as a sin, punishable by death.<sup>200</sup> The motif became a boon for later playwrights to moralise on the inevitability of death.<sup>201</sup> Edelstein reminds us that the amalgam of healing and sorcery, an association denigrated throughout the 5<sup>th</sup> Century, was still evident in the archaic period.

Asclepius is a healer struck down for transgressing the boundary between immortals and humans. This mythic motif suited Pindar's design. The ode, dedicated to an ill man, utilises the motif of overreaching to counsel him in not indulging in strong hopes of recovery.<sup>202</sup> Ironically, it was

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<sup>197</sup> As suggested in previous footnote Asclepius' birth follows the paradigm of the hero. However, it also echoes the pattern of Olympian gods who are born miraculously like Dionysus and Athena.

<sup>198</sup> Asclepius' birth from the dead body of his mother and his ability to retrieve a soul from the underworld is similar to Dionysus. His birth from the clutches of death, as well as his ability to cross over boundaries between this world and the other, parallels the experiences of shamans. For a discussion on Greek myth and shamanism refer to Mircea Eliade, *Shamanism*, 387-93; E.R. Dodds, *The Greeks and The Irrational*, 135-178; Walter Burkert, *Structure and History in Greek Mythology*, University of California Press (Berkeley, CA: 1979), 88-98.

<sup>199</sup> Emma and Ludwig Edelstein, *Asclepius*, 23.

<sup>200</sup> Pindar in *Pythian III* is condemning of Asclepius. See also Sextus Empiricus, *Against the Grammarians*, 260-2.

<sup>201</sup> See Aeschylus *Agamemnon*, 1021f and Euripides, *Alcestis*, 1f, as quoted later in this chapter.

<sup>202</sup> See C.M. Bowra, *The Odes of Pindar*, 99. In his notes on *Pythian III* he suggests that Hieron who was ill invited Pindar to visit but he refused and uses the myth to illustrate 'the dangers of trying to pass beyond the proper limits for men'.



Asclepius who became the embodiment of a hopeful recovery for generations of pilgrims who petitioned the god for a miraculous cure at one of his numerous sanctuaries. In his *techné* as a healer Asclepius had demonstrated the miraculous cure offering hope after disease, even life after death. Unlike other mythic heroes Asclepius was not worshipped at a localised hero shrine. Instead the cult of Asclepius became pan Hellenic, as healing was of concern to every citizen of every province. As a hero he ‘must have been emancipated from the attachment to a local grave’<sup>203</sup> which encouraged the cult to spread.

Pindar elaborates on Asclepian healing:

All who came  
Bound fast to sores which their own selves grew,  
Or with limbs wounded, by grey bronze,  
Or a far-flung stone, or wasting in body with summer fire, or with winter  
He, loosening all from their several sorrows,  
Delivered them. Some he tended with soft incantations,  
Some had juleps to drink,  
Or round about their limbs he laid his simples,  
And for some the knife: so he set all up straight. (*Pythian III.47-53*)

Pindar’s praise of the god implies that healing rituals using incantations, spirited drinks, medicinal plants and surgical intervention were associated with Asclepius at the time of this ode. The two strands of healing evident in the *Iliad* and *Odyssey* are becoming entwined; both religious healing using incantations and pragmatic surgical skills are part of Asclepius’ repertoire. The poem also displays his charisma and is prophetic in describing the healing magnetism of Asclepius that first became obvious in the latter quarter of the 5<sup>th</sup> Century. Pindar etches a poetic template, an anthem to the fascination of Asclepius, similar to the 4<sup>th</sup> Century marble stelae recovered from Epidaurus that described the miraculous cures of this special god.<sup>204</sup> His cures were a blend of ancient magical traditions like incantations and the laying on of hands with herbal remedies and surgery. Psychologically the power of faith and devotion in the healing cult of Asclepius was already becoming evident. Pindar

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<sup>203</sup> Fritz Graf, “Asclepius” from Simon Hornblower and Antony Spawforth (eds.), *The Oxford Companion to Classical Civilisation*, Oxford University Press (Oxford: 1998), 86.

<sup>204</sup> Pausanias visited the sanctuary of Epidaurus in the 2<sup>nd</sup> Century CE and recorded that six of the marble slabs bearing the inscription of cures were still standing. Four of these dated from the 4<sup>th</sup> Century BCE have been retrieved by archaeologists, two being virtually intact. The recorded cures are miraculous by nature.

characterises Asclepius as a miracle-worker ensuring his popularity in the Greek imagination and linking his healing prowess to both Chiron and a magical tradition.

Pindar's ode was written in 474 BCE.<sup>205</sup> At the beginning of the second quarter of the 5<sup>th</sup> Century the ode illustrates the intermingling of the secular and sacred strands of medicine, the legacy revealed in Homer that extends back into the Mycenaean era. Robert Garland interprets the lines 47-53 of *Pythian III* in the following way:

As these lines reveal, in principle at least there was no conflict between conventional and mystical healing in the Greek world – spells and surgery were complimentary not adversarial aspects of the same *techne* or discipline.<sup>206</sup>

The figure of Asclepius embraced both the 'conventional and mystical' strands of medicine. Pindar's poem confirms the divine parentage of Asclepius at the dawn of the 5<sup>th</sup> Century and praises his healing abilities. Pindar's Asclepius inhabits the threshold between the ancient healing legacy of Thessaly and the modernistic views of the rational constructs of medicine.

It is important to note that Pindar locates Asclepius in Thessaly, not Epidaurus. While a son of a god he is still mortal and referred to as 'the hero' (*Pythian III*: 6). Even though the poem writes a more detailed mythic biography there is still no clarity regarding the status of Asclepius as a god of healing, nor references to any specific cults, although his healing expertise is praised. From the available literary evidence Pindar's account seems to imply that Asclepius was an apprentice for the position of healing god. Pindar still longs for the time when Chiron 'ruled the glades of Pelion' (4) and 'if only Chiron was still living in his cave' (64). The poet straddles the magical legacies of Chiron and the new medical model beginning to develop under the influence of the pre-Socratic philosophers. To Pindar it seems as if Asclepius is not yet the fully-fledged god of healing we know at the end of the century.

Pindar's description is interpreted by Edelstein as follows:

In the beginning of the fifth century B.C., then, the god Asclepius can hardly have been acknowledged or even have been known everywhere. It is therefore assumed that the chthonian Asclepius at first was venerated only in an isolated part of Greece, in Thessaly, where Tricca most probably was the oldest place of his cult. From there he

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<sup>205</sup> C. Bowra in notes to *The Odes of Pindar*, 99. Although Hippocrates was not yet born, theories of medicine were being influenced by the pre-Socratic philosophers. Pythagorean influence had already left its strong impression on the medical school at Croton where physicians 'taught medicine to their sons'. See Plinio Prioreschi, *A History of Medicine*, Volume 2, 185. While a medical profession was not yet established the practice of healing was widespread. See Vivian Nutton, "Medicine in the Greek World, 800-50 BC", 11-23.

gradually extended his influence over the neighbouring countries, even down to Epidaurus, until in the fifth century the god suddenly emerged from the darkness of his provincial existence into the full light of Panhellenic fame.<sup>207</sup>

Edelstein suggests a logical evolution of the god with his cult spreading from its epicentre at Tricca. As pointed out earlier his deduction is based on the theory that the myth of Asclepius was consciously orchestrated for ‘symbolic significance’. However, I would argue that it is also possible that the mutations in the myth are due to the developmental changes in attitudes towards disease and cure taking place concurrently. At the dawn of the 5<sup>th</sup> Century a complex of events contributes to reshape the ways of thinking about disease. From a mythological viewpoint Asclepius personifies this reshaping.

Pindar is the most detailed literary reference for the myth of Asclepius before the advent of his popularity as the healing god. In 458 Aeschylus’ production of *Agamemnon* was performed which contained a reference to the motif of Asclepius’ chastisement:

Who then by incantations  
Can bid blood live again?  
Zeus in pure wisdom ended  
That sage’s skill who summoned  
Dead flesh to rise from darkness  
And live a second time<sup>208</sup>

Unlike Pindar, Aeschylus questions the healing potential of incantations. By the middle of the 5<sup>th</sup> Century mysticism, especially in the Athenian atmosphere, was beginning to be denigrated. Attitudes towards magic and the supernatural were shifting.<sup>209</sup> During Aeschylus’ lifetime Greek rationalistic medicine was under development and he may well have been influenced by its new doctrines and scorn

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<sup>206</sup> Robert Garland, *Introducing New Gods*, 117.

<sup>207</sup> Emma and Ludwig Edelstein, *Asclepius*, Volume 2, 66.

<sup>208</sup> Aeschylus, *The Oresteian Trilogy*, *Agamemnon*, 1021 ff.

<sup>209</sup> During the 5<sup>th</sup> Century the concept of magic became aligned with the ways of the barbarian and was viewed by the elite as an archaic remnant from the period before culture. The negative attitude towards magical practices continued on into the following centuries. Plato refers to the sorcerer as *thériodés*, meaning beast-like, reminiscent of the Homeric description of the Thessalian Centaurs (beast men, *Iliad* 2:741). See Fritz Graf, “Excluding the charming: the development of the Greek concept of magic” from M. Meyer and P. Mirecki (eds.) *Ancient Magic and Ritual Power*, E.J. Brill (Leiden: 1995) and Richard Gordon, “Aelian’s peony: the location of magic in Graeco-Roman tradition”, from *Comparative Criticism* 9, Cambridge University Press (Cambridge: 1987).

of magic.<sup>210</sup> In 438 Apollo, in the prologue to Euripides *Alcestis*, tells why he served as a common labourer in the House of Admetus:

This was caused by Zeus: he had killed Asclepius, my son, flinging a fiery thunderbolt at his chest, and in my anger at this I killed the Cyclopes.<sup>211</sup>

Later the chorus reiterates the storyline when lamenting over the loss of Alcestis: ‘if only Phoebus’s son yet lived’.<sup>212</sup> The chorus seems unaware of any contemporary devotion to Asclepius; he seems quite dead, not yet resurrected. The Asclepian motif was a boon to the playwrights grappling with the issues of life, death and resurrection as well as magic and medicine. By the middle of the 5<sup>th</sup> Century playwrights had begun to weave the motif of healing into their plays<sup>213</sup> and the Asclepian theme of magic and resurrection had become a moral example reiterating the natural boundaries of life. Yet still no obvious reference to temple medicine or the worship of Asclepius exists, only the fascination with Asclepius’ healing power. Homer and Pindar had constructed the template for a religious image of the physician and with the advent of rational medicine Greek religion was poised to embrace Asclepius as their divine embodiment of the healer.



*Asclepius*

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<sup>210</sup> Jennifer Clarke Kosak, *Heroic Measures*.

<sup>211</sup> Euripides, *Alcestis*, 1 ff.

<sup>212</sup> Euripides, *Alcestis*, 122.

<sup>213</sup> For a thorough examination of the theme of healing in tragedy see Jennifer Clarke Kosak, *Heroic Measures*.

## 2. Asclepius, the Divine Physician

*'no where was the association of Apollo with his son, the divine physician, so intimate as at Epidaurus'*<sup>214</sup>

As previously discussed, the era when Asclepius becomes known as the god of healing is uncertain.<sup>215</sup> Reconstructing the myth and cult practices of Asclepius seems to have been no easier in antiquity. Probably using Homer's Catalogue of Ships, Strabo concluded that the oldest and most famous temple to Asclepius was in Tricca.<sup>216</sup> While Strabo supported the belief that the worship of Asclepius originated in Thessaly, no archaeological evidence supports this. In fact the earliest remains of a sanctuary to Asclepius in the region of Tricca date to the late Hellenistic period.<sup>217</sup> Pausanias tackles the problem of Asclepius' origins and states that Epidaurus is the rightful birthplace quoting the Pythian priestess who, when asked if Asclepius was the child of Arsinoe, said that Asclepius was born in Epidaurus.<sup>218</sup> By Pausanias' period the Thessalian Asclepius had been integrated into the god of Epidaurus and it was commonly accepted that Epidaurus was his place of origin. Apollo was already worshipped here; therefore, through the continuity of cult his son Asclepius became associated with Epidaurus. Even though the cult of Asclepius arose at Epidaurus his Thessalian origins could not be erased. Later mythmakers attempted to relocate his birthplace to Epidaurus but his lineage to Thessaly and connection to Chiron's ancient healing legacy would underscore every later alteration to his myth. Unlike other gods Asclepius' deification seems to happen not through myth but through religious worship.<sup>219</sup>

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<sup>214</sup> Lewis Farnell, *The Cult of the Greek States* (5 volumes), Clarendon Press (Oxford: 1908), Volume 5, 239.

<sup>215</sup> Emma and Ludwig Edelstein, *Asclepius*, Volume 2, 98 are fairly convinced of the time of Asclepius' deification: 'it is safe to say that Asclepius did not become a god until the end of sixth century'. The premise may be influenced by Kavvadias' dating of the votive offering to Asclepius to the 6<sup>th</sup> Century, a conclusion that has now been refuted (see footnote 50). R.A. Tomlinson, in *Epidaurus*, University of Texas Press (Austin, TX: 1983), 15 suggests 'there is little reason to doubt that Asclepius had divine status by the end of the sixth century', albeit 'in a purely local context'. Again this is based on the one archaeological remain dated to the early 5<sup>th</sup> Century.

<sup>216</sup> Strabo, *Geographica*, IX, 5, 17.

<sup>217</sup> An Asclepieion at Tricca has been excavated sporadically since 1902. The ruins discovered include part of a late Hellenistic stoa and building as well as a Roman bath and mosaic floor. Very little literature is available on the archaeological site and its excavations - see Museums and Archaeological Sites on the Hellenic Ministry of Culture website [www.culture.gr](http://www.culture.gr).

<sup>218</sup> Pausanias, 2:26.7.

<sup>219</sup> Even if Asclepius had been a god in the pre-Homeric period the reinstatement of his divinity during the period under examination is largely in response to the new paradigm of rational medicine.

The first coin to depict Asclepius was minted in Larissa, geographically close to Tricca, his Homeric birthplace, an environs linked with Hippocrates.<sup>220</sup> It has been dated to between 450-400 BCE<sup>221</sup>, the time frame when the worship of Asclepius began to be apparent. While the later date seems more likely, the existence of a coin bearing the image of Asclepius reflects both the growing popularity of his cult and the importance of healthcare in the lives of everyday citizens. However, the earliest archaeological evidence for the worship of Asclepius emerges at Epidaurus. A votive of a bronze offering bowl dedicated to the god Asclepius has been dated to the beginning of the 5<sup>th</sup> Century.<sup>222</sup> Therefore, given the archaeological and literary evidence, it is probable that the worship of Asclepius began to take root in the fertile soil of Epidaurus during the first half of the 5<sup>th</sup> Century, but remained localised until the last quarter of the century. Another hero, known as Maleatas, had been previously worshiped at the site as early as the Bronze Age. After the Dorians occupied the area, their god Apollo assimilated the heroic cult under the epithet of Apollo Maleatas,<sup>223</sup> which effectively eradicated his individual religious identity. The cult of Asclepius continued that tradition from the 5<sup>th</sup> Century on.

During the cult's early period it is likely that the Epidaurians accepted the well-known version of the myth that Asclepius' homeland was Thessaly. However, as the cult gained momentum and prestige, the myth was altered to reflect Asclepius being born at Epidaurus. The first surviving record for this is about 300 BCE, inscribed as a *paeon* to the god, recovered near the temple of Asclepius. While this variation of the myth may have developed earlier, the first record of this mythic version is composed much later by Isyllos.<sup>224</sup> The hymn tells the story that Phlegyas, who dwelt in Epidaurus, had a daughter Aigle who was known as Coronis because of her beauty. Apollo seduced the beautiful young

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<sup>220</sup> Tradition suggests that Hippocrates died in Larissa and his tomb was between Larissa and Gyrtion. See Jacques Jouanna, *Hippocrates*, translated by M.B. DeBevoise, John Hopkins (Baltimore, MD: 1999), 36-7.

<sup>221</sup> Gerald D Hart, *Asclepius the God of Medicine*, Royal Society of Medicine Press Ltd. (London: 2000), 14.

<sup>222</sup> Robert Garland, *Introducing New Gods*, 117 and R.A. Tomlinson, *Epidaurus*, 23. The original excavator of the sanctuary at Epidaurus, Panayotis Kavvadias, discovered the dedicatory offering to Asclepius. Originally he believed the inscription dated to the sixth century. However, in a more recent study of early local Greek Lillian Jeffrey has dated the inscription 'hardly earlier than c. 500'. On the basis of the earlier archaeological evidence the establishment of the cult of Asclepius was usually dated to the sixth century. However the new dating suggests this is unlikely. While a cult may have existed before the early 5<sup>th</sup> Century there is no supporting evidence.

<sup>223</sup> R.A. Tomlinson, *Epidaurus*, 12.

<sup>224</sup> One of the most famous *paeans* to Asclepius sung in the procession to the sanctuary of Epidaurus was composed by Sophocles who was also active in introducing the cult to Athens. While not all scholars accept the tradition that Sophocles housed the sacred snakes of Asclepius on his arrival in Athens the association of the dramatist with the new cult illustrates the importance and the promotion of communal acceptance of the new cult. See Robert Garland, *Introducing New Gods*, 125.

woman who became pregnant with his child. When she gave birth to his son, Apollo called the child Asclepius derived from his mother's name Aigle.<sup>225</sup> The myth no longer includes the archaic vestiges of betrayal and rage, nor the miraculous birth of Asclepius on the funeral pyre, or his relinquishment to the Centaur Chiron for medical training. The vestiges of the archaic myth and links to the supernatural are gone, as the new version clearly locates Asclepius' family of origin at Epidaurus. The Hellenistic version of the myth had emerged to portray Epidaurus as the home of Asclepius and to validate it as the centre of temple medicine. Asclepius' connection to Thessaly ensured the continuity of his myth from the heroic age. However Asclepius' divinity was not apparent until he emerged, in his own right, out the umbra of his father at Epidaurus. While Thessaly had been the legendary birthplace it was Epidaurus that proved to have the oldest remains of his cult worship. The bronze offering bowl dedicated to Asclepius is the first archaeological evidence to support the honouring of the god at the beginning of the 5<sup>th</sup> Century, but it was not until the last quarter of the century when evidence exists to fully support the functioning of the cult of Asclepius.

In 420 the worship of Asclepius was introduced into Athens from Epidaurus.<sup>226</sup> The acceptance of the divine doctor into the heart of Athenian religion was the first step in the rapid dissemination of the cult of Asclepius throughout the Greek world. As the cult of Asclepius became accepted by the mainstream the archaic notion of the divine's intervention in healing was protected. Temple medicine gave refuge to the belief in miraculous cures and coexisted with the rationalistic doctrines espoused by the Hippocratic doctors. By the end of the 5<sup>th</sup> Century the two strands of rational and religious medical practice were intertwined like the snakes on the caduceus, which would later become emblematic of the medical profession.<sup>227</sup> By the time that the cult of Asclepius was introduced into Athens the desacralisation of medicine was under way.<sup>228</sup> Hippocratic doctors were using a rationally based medical model to diagnose and treat illness without reference to divine causation. However, the apotheosis of Asclepius and the rituals of temple medicine allowed the ancient tradition that disease and cure were the jurisdiction of the gods to continue on in Greek religion.

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<sup>225</sup> R.A. Tomlinson, *Epidaurus*, 14-17.

<sup>226</sup> Robert Garland, *Introducing New Gods*, 118.

<sup>227</sup> For a thorough history on the symbol of the caduceus and how medicine came to adopt this emblem see Walter Friedlander, *The Golden Wand of Medicine, A History of the Caduceus Symbol in Medicine*, Greenwood Press (Westport, CT: 1992).

<sup>228</sup> The Hippocratic text *On the Sacred Disease* was probably written around this time. Julie Laskaris in *The Art is Long*, 2 argues that this was probably given as an oration and 'is best understood as a sophist protreptic speech that was meant to demonstrate its author's superior understanding and treatment of that disease for the purpose of attracting students and a clientele'. Nonetheless, the case for rational medicine often excluded or denigrated the notion of the divine disease.

The year before the cult's arrival in Athens, the rituals of temple healing were introduced into Piraeus and perhaps even the island of Aegina.<sup>229</sup> Until this time the cult practices associated with Asclepius had not been documented, nor seemingly were of any interest to the Athenians who were caught up in the turmoil of war. However, with the grim experience of the plague, which devastated their city, the Athenians became more receptive to the new god of healing. Aristophanes refers to a sanctuary of Asclepius and the cult ritual of dream incubation on Aegina in his comedy *Wasps*, produced at the Lenaea in 422. From the tone of the farce the slight reference to the sanctuary seems to confirm that a cult site to Asclepius may have existed on Aegina, a Saronic island with historical links to Epidaurus. As the old man had to travel to Aegina, no sanctuary of Asclepius may have existed in Attica. The one in Epidaurus may have been 'in a direct line of fire between Athens and Sparta at a period of protracted hostilities'.<sup>230</sup> True to form, Aristophanes parodies magical and religious healing techniques. However, it is also an important reference to the variety of healing options that were available in this period, including the rituals of incubation practiced in the sanctuaries of Asclepius:

then he tried ritual bathing and purification on him; no good at all. After that he tried Corybantic rites; but the old man rushed off, drum and all, burst into the New Court and joined the jury. So then as he was doing no good to him by these rituals, he sailed across to Aegina, took the old man with him, and bedded him down for the night in the sanctuary of Asclepius<sup>231</sup>

Aristophanes' few lines locate the first known Asclepeion outside Epidaurus. Shortly after the play was first produced the cult was introduced into Athens. Robert Parker describes the god's arrival in Athens as 'an important step in Asclepius' career'.<sup>232</sup> The introduction of the cult into Athens is a defining moment as from this time forward the popularity of Asclepius increases and his worship quickly spreads throughout the rest of the Greek world.

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<sup>229</sup> Aristophanes in the *Wasps* (122-23) mentions the temple of Asclepius and a muted reference to incubation. While Pausanias references suggest other cult activity in the middle to late 5<sup>th</sup> Century there is no other evidence to support this. Evidence for cult activity before the introduction of the cult into Piraeus and Athens is sketchy and unreliable.

<sup>230</sup> Robert Garland, *Introducing New Gods*, 118 is referring to the Peloponnesian War and the hostilities between Athens and Sparta.

<sup>231</sup> Aristophanes, *Wasps*, 118-125. Ironically Aristophanes' comic touch gives one of the best literary descriptions, albeit farcical, of the Asclepian temple ritual of dream incubation in his play *Plutus*, 659-738. In the play, which was performed in 388 BCE, Aristophanes burlesques the incubation ritual of the cult of Asclepius. A slave tells how he witnessed a greedy priest steal cakes and figs off the altar and parodies the lying in the temple and the cures that had been reported of the serpents curing sores and disease.

<sup>232</sup> Robert Parker, *Athenian Religion*, 177.



The description of the cult's arrival in Athens is recorded on a monument in the sanctuary dedicated to Asclepius on the south side of the Acropolis.<sup>233</sup> While there is no definitive evidence why the cult spread to the vicinity of Athens it is assumed that the plague of 430/29 was one of the main reasons. In 421 the Peace of Nicias ended the hostility between Athens and Epidaurus opening the way for the cult of Asclepius to be imported into Athens.<sup>234</sup> The worship of Asclepius was unique because it was not only a public cult celebrating social festivals, but also a private one as well. Individuals underwent their own personal encounter with the god through incubation undertaking religious rituals and activities in the hope of being cured. The cult's popularity probably grew through the promotion of individuals who described their own miraculous cures or passed on legendary tales of healing to their neighbours. The 4<sup>th</sup> Century inscriptions unearthed at Epidaurus detail cures of a miraculous nature in elaborate detail.<sup>235</sup> There is no reason to doubt that a few generations earlier the accounts of Asclepius, as the god of miraculous cures, were also shared in an enthusiastic and infectious fashion, passed on through families and communities.

Early in the Peloponnesian War Athens was ravaged by a plague that threatened the whole of Greece. Unlike Homer's account of the plague at Troy, an angry god was no longer solely the cause or cure for the epidemic. Thucydides' account of the Athenian plague no longer suggests that it is the revenge of an angry god; the pestilence arrives from foreign lands on ships that harbour at the port of Athens.<sup>236</sup> At the dawn of scientific enlightenment few measures were in place to combat an epidemic. Eradicating sources of religious pollution and propitiating the gods were still the prime measures for combating an epidemic of this proportion.<sup>237</sup> Therefore in context of the times, the devastating plague that broke out in Athens in 430 invited a new god and new rituals. Public physicians were available to treat disease, but were unable to offer an effective cure to stop the spread of the plague. Thucydides'

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<sup>233</sup> Robert Garland, *Introducing New Gods*, 118.

<sup>234</sup> See Robert Parker, *Athenian Religion*, 180 and R.A. Tomlinson, *Epidaurus*, 24.

<sup>235</sup> Pausanias describes seeing six votive columns that had engravings of men and women who were healed by Asclepius. Their disease, symptoms and cure are listed. Three columns and fragments of a fourth containing seventy case histories have been recovered at Epidaurus. Dated to the 4<sup>th</sup> Century they include valuable details about the types of patients who sought healing, the miraculous intervention of the god and the cure. The descriptions of the cures are imaginative and miraculous and served as propaganda for the cult of Asclepius. See G.E.R. Lloyd, *In the Grip of the Disease*, 53 and Emma and Ludwig Edelstein, *Asclepius*, Volume 2. The Edelsteins have painstakingly recorded the description of the cures.

<sup>236</sup> Thucydides, *The History of the Peloponnesian War*, 2. 48-9.

<sup>237</sup> James Longrigg "Death and Epidemic Disease in Athens" from Valerie M. Hope and Eireann Marshall (eds.), *Death and Disease in the Ancient City*, Routledge (London: 2000). Longrigg states: 'Although we might have expected totally different attitudes in the fifth century in the light of the development of rational medicine, little or no practical innovations were introduced to counter epidemic disease.'

account of the epidemic ‘clearly stated that physicians were helpless against the disease and were often themselves the first victim’.<sup>238</sup> According to Soranus, Hippocrates flourished during the period of the Peloponnesian Wars<sup>239</sup> and the rise of Hippocratic medicine was also evidenced by its first treatise being published during the same period that the Athenian plague broke out. Hippocratic and Asclepian approaches to medical cure arrived in Athens during the same period and became emotionally fused together in the Athenian mind due to the dramatic need for medical expertise. The conjunction of Hippocrates and Asclepius during this time is evidenced by a Hellenistic legend that Hippocrates helped the Athenians combat the plague. This legend persisted throughout antiquity.<sup>240</sup>

It was during the second year of the Peloponnesian War in 430/29 that the epidemic engulfed Athens. The plague may have originated in Ethiopia but entered the port of Piraeus before it appeared in the ‘upper city’ of Athens.<sup>241</sup> Thucydides reports that the ravages of the plague caused the Athenians to no longer fear the gods or civic law as death seemed inevitable.<sup>242</sup> The Athenian spirit was weakened both with the war and the plague. Medical intervention failed, even the gods seemed impotent in the wake of the plague. During this time the Athenians attacked Epidaurus. While the plague had touched the other centres of the Athenian offensive, Epidaurus was left relatively unscathed. By this time the sanctuary at Epidaurus had already been established and probably had been active for at least a generation. With Epidaurus unpolluted by the plague ‘her people would have had every reason to be grateful to the healing god’.<sup>243</sup> The people of Epidaurus, thankful not to have been infected by the plague after contact with the Athenians at the start of the Peloponnesian War, used this opportunity to promote their sanctuary.<sup>244</sup> Prominent Athenians began to take interest in the healing cult at Epidaurus and it began to thrive. A private citizen Telemachus sponsored by notable citizens such as Sophocles

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<sup>238</sup> Judy Rubin Pinault, *Hippocratic Lives and Legends*, 35. For Thucydides’ detailed account of the plague see *The Peloponnesian War*, 2. 47-54.

<sup>239</sup> Soranus is one of the three authors on the life of Hippocrates that has survived from antiquity. *The Life of Hippocrates according to Soranus* is dated between the 2nd and 6th Centuries CE. See Judy Rubin Pinault, *Hippocratic Lives and Legends*.

<sup>240</sup> For a thorough examination of how this legend developed in the ancient world and how it was perpetuated see Judy Rubin Pinault, *Hippocratic Lives and Legends*, 35-60.

<sup>241</sup> Thucydides, *The History of the Peloponnesian War*, 2.48-9.

<sup>242</sup> Thucydides, *The History of the Peloponnesian War*, 2.52.

<sup>243</sup> R.A. Tomlinson, *Epidaurus*, 24.

<sup>244</sup> R.A. Tomlinson, *Epidaurus*, 24 states: ‘The impetus for the development of the cult is almost certainly the plague which devastated Athens’. This was a plague which ‘frightened the whole of Greece’.

received the new god into the city shrine of the Acropolis in 420.<sup>245</sup> Seventy years later the cult was publicly prominent in the religious community of Athens ‘equipped with a priest, an income, and at least two festivals on the grand scale’.<sup>246</sup>

Epidauros became an international sanctuary of Asclepius, ‘fostered by the plague in Athens’.<sup>247</sup> When the Athenian Asclepeion was finally established on the sheltered southern side of the Acropolis it introduced the healing god into the heart of Athenian religion. Ironically at an apex of sophistication and acceptance of rational medicine, the cult of religious healing, with its supernatural cures and divine miracles, became centered at the heart of Greek culture. The worship of Asclepius at Epidauros offered hope for a divine cure beyond the rational constructs of Hippocratic medicine. Now the centre for divine healing, ‘people seem to have made the journey to Epidauros not as an alternative to medical treatment, but once such treatment had failed’,<sup>248</sup> consistent with the attitudes already witnessed in the early literature. Temple medicine redirected the concerns for health and wellbeing into the religious sphere and the everyday experience of the ancient Greek.

In comparison to other religious cults, which had flourished throughout the archaic period, the cult of Asclepius did not emerge until the last quarter of the 5<sup>th</sup> Century and continued growing in popularity through Hellenistic times. The growth of the cult of Asclepius was not ‘a new aspect of Greek religion, but rather a concentration of a particular aspect – healing – on the particular personality of Asclepius’.<sup>249</sup> The cult was a natural outreach of Hippocratic medicine; when rational medicine was not effective, a religious attitude was now available. When the human physician was unable to cure the disease the divine physician could be evoked:

when physicians of the kind that we may with some reservations call secular refused to treat the incurably sick, they were in effect entrusting them to the unexplained powers of Asclepius as revealed by his priests.<sup>250</sup>

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<sup>245</sup> Sophocles’ gesture of housing the new god was honoured by giving him the name Dexion, meaning receiver ‘in gratitude for the role which he played in promoting the new cult’. Robert Garland, *Introducing New Gods*, 125.

<sup>246</sup> Robert Parker, *Athenian Religion*, 181.

<sup>247</sup> Christopher Mee and Antony Spawforth, *Greece an Oxford Archaeological Guide*, Oxford University Press (Oxford: 2001), 81.

<sup>248</sup> Robert Parker, *Miasma*, 249-50.

<sup>249</sup> R.A. Tomlinson, *Epidauros*, 24.

<sup>250</sup> E.D. Phillips, *Greek Medicine*, 197. Phillips suggests that the ‘unexplained powers of Asclepius’ is ‘faith healing’.

The difference between the faith healing promoted by the cult of Asclepius and the rational diagnosis of Hippocratic and other rationalistic doctors was often very subtle. The distinction between religious and naturalistic doctrines of healing was still not clearly defined in the classical period and debate over the distinctions would continue for centuries. There was often ‘more of an overlap between these two divergent medical traditions than the rivalry between them might lead us to expect’.<sup>251</sup> Temple rituals included dream incubation yet dreams were also used as diagnostic tools in Hippocratic tradition.<sup>252</sup> Terminology and methodology often overlapped, blurring the boundaries between the two practices in the mind of the layman.

Religion was a prominent aspect of Greek life. In an atmosphere of increasing focus on the natural cause and course of disease, temple medicine and its rituals responded to the rise of secular medicine. During the same period that Asclepius was received into the heart of Athenian religion a number of other cults began to thrive, many who appealed to life’s more mystical and mysterious aspects. Scholars have often commented and speculated on the growing irrationalism of this epoch.<sup>253</sup> Perhaps as Robert Parker suggests the rise of temple medicine or ‘irrationalism’ may be a dynamic inherent in the growth of rational medicine:

[It is] only partially correct to see the triumphant rise of the Asclepius cult as a symptom of growing irrationalism. The genuine achievements and programmatic aspirations of Hippocratic medicine had aroused large expectations as to the possibility of curing all forms of disease, expectations that, naturally, it was in no position to fulfil. To satisfy them, popular imagination created, in the human doctor’s image, a divine doctor whose magic powers allowed him to make real the exaggerated claims of rational medicine. Those who underwent incubation dreamed not of angry gods but of skilful surgery and subtly balanced regimen.<sup>254</sup>

Asclepius emerged as a divine colleague to the Hippocratic doctor, reinstating the religious experience to healthcare as it had always existed.

Temple healing was never overtly competitive with or a replacement for rational medicine. Both traditions of medicine seem to continue side-by-side throughout the late classical and Hellenistic periods with comparatively minimal rivalry and controversy ‘as there has been in more recent times

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<sup>251</sup> G.E.R. Lloyd, *In the Grip of Disease*, 56.

<sup>252</sup> See *On Regimen*

<sup>253</sup> E.R. Dodds, *Greeks and the Irrational* and R. Garland, *Introducing New Gods*.

<sup>254</sup> Robert Parker, *Miasma*, 249-50.

between science and religion'.<sup>255</sup> To the Greeks religion was embedded in their everyday experience and touched all aspects of their lives. Religion was their foundation stone, the coherent part of their identity that defined and secured their existence. It contributed to and enhanced their communal experience and permeated the social and political spheres of their lives. Temple medicine and its rituals allowed the Greeks to bring the mystery of disease and healing into their religious experience in a similar fashion as their ancestors had. Through Asclepius and temple medicine disease was a religious aspect of everyday life, as it had always been. With the growth of rational medicine the need for the supernatural element of healing became more imperative, evidenced in the reconstituted form of Asclepius. At the close of the 5<sup>th</sup> Century Asclepius had materialised as the divine phantasm to the mortal physician. Ironically at a nodal point in the development of medicine, the spheres of magic, science and religion were enmeshed in the Greek way of thinking:

Even those who were attended by *iatroi* working in the rationalist tradition (as represented in the Hippocratic Corpus) were probably much less prone than twentieth century scholars to make distinctions between religion, magic and secular medicine. Indeed, the same patient might sleep in the sanctuary of Asclepius at Epidaurus, make use of herbs gathered in the dark of the moon while chanting spells and invoking Hecate, and go to a healer in pursuit of some rationalist dietary or pharmacological cure. To the average Greek of this period, all of these approaches were merely different routes to the same end: the restoration of their health. Health was their primary concern.<sup>256</sup>

Asclepius permitted the belief in a power greater than the rational healing constructs of the Hippocratic doctor. If 'Health was their primary concern' then it is no wonder that Hygieia, the embodiment of health, became the god's attendant and feminine counterpart.<sup>257</sup> Greek religion responded to the medical needs of the people, not just through Asclepius, but through his mythic family. In this chapter I have traced the diachronic changes in the myth of Asclepius that culminated in his acceptance as the god of healing. As demonstrated, the worship of the new god emerges in the complex climate of the later 5<sup>th</sup> Century as rational medicine also begins to find its place.

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<sup>255</sup> E.D. Phillips, *Greek Medicine*, 197.

<sup>256</sup> Jennifer Clarke Kosak, *Heroic Measures*, 30.

<sup>257</sup> Hygieia's entrance into Greek myth is concurrent with Asclepius' acceptance by the Athenians. For further amplification see Emma Stafford, *Worshipping Virtues*.

## CONCLUSION

### DEITY and DISEASE

#### The Legacy of the Divine to 5<sup>th</sup> Century Ideas about Disease

*'It therefore becomes necessary to know the nature of such affections, how far they are above the powers of the constitution; and, moreover, if there be anything divine in the diseases, and to learn a foreknowledge of this also'*<sup>258</sup>  
- Hippocratic Corpus

Plutarch gives an account of a remarkable healing that occurred during the Periclean building program on the Acropolis. The healing was so miraculous that Plutarch mused that 'the goddess Athena herself, so far from standing aloof, was taking a hand and helping complete the work'.<sup>259</sup> While constructing the Propylaea one of the more vigorous workmen lost his balance, tripped and fell from the scaffolding. Falling from a great height, the man crashed to the rocky ground severely injuring himself. Due to the extent of his injuries, the attending doctors held no hope of his recovery. Pericles was distressed at this prognosis; however, Athena appeared to him in a dream and diagnosed a course of treatment for the injured builder. Following the goddess' prescription, the workman recovered and was quickly healed of his trauma. To commemorate the goddess' healing intervention, a bronze statue of Athena the Healer was dedicated to the deity. A base, inscribed to Athena Hygieia found inside the Propylaea, substantiates Plutarch's story.<sup>260</sup> In the atmosphere of the 5<sup>th</sup> Century secular medicine and religious healing were contemporaries. Four centuries after the construction of the Parthenon, Plutarch replicates the motif of divine intervention in healing, a vital element of Greek thinking about disease.<sup>261</sup>

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<sup>258</sup> Prognostic, I translated by F. Adams, *The Genuine Works of Hippocrates*, Williams and Wilkins (Baltimore, MD: 1939). W.H.S. Jones in his translation of Prognostic in *Hippocrates*, Volume 2 omits the phrase 'and, moreover, if there be anything divine in the diseases' as he states in footnote 1, page 9 that this is 'contrary to Hippocratic doctrine'.

<sup>259</sup> Plutarch, *The Rise and Fall of Athens*, translated by Ian Scott-Kilvert, Penguin (Harmondsworth: 1960), *Pericles* 13, 180

<sup>260</sup> A. E. Raubitschek, *Dedications from the Athenian Acropolis*, Cambridge: 1949, 185-8.

<sup>261</sup> Emma Stafford, *Worshipping Virtues*, 151 suggests that Plutarch was influenced by the knowledge of cult practices of Asclepius which appeared after the building of the Parthenon: 'The details of the story, with its combination of divine intervention and practical treatment, probably owe much to the author's knowledge of later healing procedures at Epidaurus and other sanctuaries of Asclepius'. Nonetheless, Plutarch's story encapsulates the confluence of both secular and supernatural approaches to healing in the 5<sup>th</sup> Century.

As I have argued, at the close of the 5th Century, divine intervention and practical treatment in medical procedures were able to coexist due to the continuity of a well-established medical tradition that is traceable back to the Bronze Age. There has been a tendency to maintain that Hippocratic medicine separated itself from the supernatural, even though the enmeshment of magico-religious practices with healing naturally exerted its influence on the course of secular medicine.<sup>262</sup> Robert Parker notes the strong similarity between the Hippocratic tenet of *katharsis* and purification in a religious sense, leading him to conclude that ‘Hippocratic medicine is in many respects a continuation of traditional practices and beliefs’.<sup>263</sup> However, supported by some of the texts of the Hippocratic Corpus, there has been a tendency to see Greek medicine in the last quarter of the 5th Century as triumphing over irrational ideas and magical intervention in healing.<sup>264</sup> Certainly *On the Sacred Disease* is an invective against the notion of disease being divine or sacred in any way. Walter Burkert suggests that this treatise indicates the shift from the practice of the itinerant, cathartic healer/seer to the medical practitioner who embraced Hippocratic doctrines, whereas Julie Laskaris argues that it is a testament to the multi-faceted approaches to medicine and reveals the influence of magico-religious healing on secular medical practitioners.<sup>265</sup> I have argued that the tradition of the divine in association to disease and healing was so deep-rooted in the Greek way of thinking that it found a renewed expression through Asclepius in the 5th Century.

Deeply established in the Greek way of life was the devotion to the divine which had an enduring alliance with disease and healing. It was this long-term association between disease and the deity that summoned the god Asclepius to continue the religious tradition of divine healing into the progressive age of the 5th Century. Rational medicine endeavours to disassociate itself from the morality and uncertainty of illness through objectifying and depersonalising disease. Consigning meaning and morality to disease was relinquished to the pilgrim at the sanctuary of Asclepius and the playwright, who used mythic motifs and characters to introduce the archaic themes of disease as fate and punishment by the gods.<sup>266</sup> To the sick, once secular medicine was ineffective, hope for healing was projected onto Asclepius. The notion of divine healing and the symbiosis of the deity with disease

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<sup>262</sup> See Julie Laskaris, *The Art is Long*, 156-7.

<sup>263</sup> Robert Parker, *Miasma*, 213

<sup>264</sup> Hippocratic texts which support the rational progression of medicine are *On Ancient Medicine*, *The Art* and *On the Sacred Disease*.

<sup>265</sup> See Walter Burkert, *The Orientalizing Revolution*, 41; Julie Laskaris, *The Art is Long*, 4.

<sup>266</sup> Jennifer Clarke Kosak, *Heroic Measures* is a thorough examination of 5th Century characters, motifs and scripts in tragedy that amplifies the attitudes of disease and healing.

were so established in the Greek way of thinking that it found a voice through the divine persona of Asclepius.

Rational medicine challenged the long-held assumption that gods were responsible for the cause and cure of disease. Having extricated itself from the archaic notion that supernatural forces created ill health, the naturalistic doctrines of rational medicine unintentionally formed a spiritual void by separating the divine from the disease when distinguishing that natural, not supernatural, cause underlay the manifestation of disease. This vacuum became filled with the divine presence of Asclepius, personified as a doctor, who more faithfully represented the religious experience of healing by offering hope when rational medicine proved impotent or when the extent of the disease was beyond the grasp of the secular doctor. While the new medicine may have been able to offer modernistic models of cure, it was not infallible. When rational medicine failed the divine physician Asclepius was petitioned in the image of a medical doctor. The shifting perspective on the nature of disease and cure had called forth a new god, a divine alter ego in the form of the human physician.



*Apollo, Chiron and Asclepius*



In the Greek way of thinking, it was not that easy to replace a religious ideology with a scientific worldview. This was particularly evident in the sphere of medicine. At the same time as rational medicine emerged from out of the influential new ideas of the pre-Socratic philosophers the acceptance of Asclepius as the divine counterpart to the mortal physician developed. In Chapter III, the diachronic examination of Asclepius from Homer to Pindar reveals the subtle change that allowed Asclepius to be reshaped as the god of healing. As demonstrated, the cult of the new god emerges in the complex climate of the later 5<sup>th</sup> Century as rational medicine begins to find its place. Synchronously as an enlightened Athens becomes aware of Hippocratic medicine it also welcomes Asclepius into its city shrine. As I have argued the acceptance of Asclepius allows the divine, the imaginative and the miraculous to co-exist with the rational, secular and practical orientations to healthcare, an ancient amalgam that could not be destroyed. Asclepius is the figure in Greek myth that clearly reflects the interweaving of religious and supernatural attitudes towards disease and cure in the early development of Greek medicine, an uneasy alliance that still exists in the contemporary psyche.

Temple healing was never overtly competitive with or a replacement for rational medicine. Both traditions of medicine continued side-by-side throughout the late classical and Hellenistic periods with comparatively minimal rivalry and controversy. Temple medicine and its rituals allowed the Greek to bring the mystery of disease and recovery into their religious experience in a similar manner that other mystery cults provided. Through Asclepius and temple medicine, disease was not purely abstract and rational but a religious and meaningful aspect of the everyday life. With the growth of rational medicine the need for the supernatural aspect of healing became more imperative, evidenced in the reconstituted form of Asclepius. Greek religion was a crucial aspect in the everyday life of the ancient Greek and since disease is an inevitable part of the everyday life healing found a place in classical religion through the worship of Asclepius.

The study of ancient medicine in classical scholarship is beginning to challenge conventional opinions about the growth of Greek rational medicine by acknowledging the impact that medical and magical practices of other cultures have had on its development.<sup>267</sup> A new horizon is visible when we begin to understand Greek medicine in the context of continuity. In this context it is evident that rational medicine did not emerge as a separate discipline. My thesis demonstrates that morality and reverence

are systemic to the Greek way of thinking about disease and seek expression through contact with the divine. As argued, this has an impact on the course of healing and subsequently, organised medicine. Rational medicine did not exist independently of magical and religious healing but developed out of and alongside it. Therefore medical history needs to be studied from the perspective of continuity. And in this context the legacy of the divine to 5<sup>th</sup> Century ways of thinking about disease becomes apparent. While there is certainly room in the field for more research on the impact of magic and religion on the development of medical ideas and practices, this thesis has established that myth and literature reveal the longevity of the association between secular and religious medicine. It was this long-standing association between the divine and the disease that influenced the course of both Hippocratic and temple medicine in the 5<sup>th</sup> Century.



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<sup>267</sup> See H.F. J. Horstmanshoff and M. Stol (eds.), *Magic and Rationality in Ancient Near Eastern and Graeco-Roman Medicine*; Julie Laskaris, *The Art is Long*,

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# APPENDIX

## 1. Hippocrates and Asclepius: Medical Mythmaking

Hippocrates' elevation to the father of rational medicine is analogous to Asclepius' apotheosis to the god of healing in that both are shrouded in mythmaking. Continuity of medical practice from the heroic age to the Classical period was attained by anointing Asclepius as both the beneficiary of religious medicine and the forefather of Hippocrates. As rational medicine flourished it was Hippocrates' name that was familiar enough to personify this strand of medical practice. However, although his name is well known, the man is not. Biographical details of Hippocrates are sketchy, clouded by pseudepigraphic writings and fanciful accounts that champion his ethical and virtuous nature. While Homer had immortalised Asclepius it was Plato who eulogised Hippocrates. In the classical period only two references to Hippocrates by Plato and one by Aristotle affirm that Hippocrates was an eminent and well-respected physician of the period. From these slight references, epistolary literature and other dubious documents, the biographical details of Hippocrates were embellished by Varro, Strabo, Pliny, Celsus, Plutarch and finally Galen into a fascinating history of medicine that became accepted throughout antiquity.

The belief in the post-Hellenic ancient world was that the Asclepeion at Cos had predated Hippocrates and it was here that he learned his trade from priest-physicians who transmitted medical knowledge to their students. Priests of Asclepius were thought to have been physicians who practiced their craft at the temple on Cos, an ancient medical research centre. By the Roman period the legacy of Hippocrates had become widely accepted, yet was grossly misshapen. Throughout the Hellenistic period an imaginative biography began to be shaped through the influence of fictional letters and speeches accredited to Hippocrates and his family.<sup>268</sup> In the 1<sup>st</sup> Century CE Celsus, in his preface to *De Medicina*, describes the development of medicine beginning with Asclepius as the 'most ancient authority'. His refinement of the art, albeit 'rude and vulgar', allowed him to be deified. No distinguishable advances in medicine took place until the emergence of philosophy. But it was 'Hippocrates of Cos, a man first and foremost worthy to be remembered, notable for both professional

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<sup>268</sup> For two references which clarify the fictional accounts of Hippocrates see Wesley Smith, *Hippocrates Pseudepigraphic Writings* and Jody Rubin Pinault, *Hippocratic Lives and Legends*. *Letters* was a collection of letters supposedly written by or addressed to Hippocrates. However it is believed most of these date to the 1<sup>st</sup> Centuries, BCE and CE. Therefore scholars regard this epistolary literature as highly suspect. *Speech of the*

skill and for eloquence, who separated this branch of learning from the study of philosophy'. Celsus recognises Asclepius and Hippocrates as the true founders of medicine.<sup>269</sup> The myth of Asclepius and the biography of Hippocrates along with their approaches to medicine had become entangled and rearranged in medical history. Temple medicine had erroneously become accepted as being the inspiration for rational medicine.

In the Roman period it was believed that Hippocrates had been educated in medicine by studying the textual evidence and research on display at the Asclepeion.<sup>270</sup> Strabo boldly states that Hippocrates learned his trade from these inscriptions:

Hippocrates was trained in the knowledge of dietetics by the cures dedicated there.<sup>271</sup>

The Romans believed that through this study Hippocrates was able to dissect medicine from magic and philosophy instigating the rational medicine that he became associated with. To Pliny, Hippocrates had used the *iamata* to learn and from this rational medicine was born:

The subsequent story of medicine, strange to say, lay hidden in darkest night down to the Peloponnesian War, when it was restored to the light by Hippocrates, who was born in the very famous and powerful island of Cos, sacred to Asclepius. It had been the custom for patients recovered from illness to inscribe in the temple of that god an account of the help that they had received, so that afterwards similar treatment might be enjoyed. Accordingly, Hippocrates, it is said wrote out these inscriptions and, as our countryman Varro believes, after the temple had been burned, founded that branch of medicine called "clinical". Afterwards there was no limit to the profit from medical practice.<sup>272</sup>

Archaeological evidence does not support Strabo or Pliny's notion that Hippocrates forged his medical expertise from educating himself on the *iamata* in the Asclepeion. Herzog, the archaeologist who excavated the Asclepeion on Cos dated the earliest building to the later part of the 4<sup>th</sup> Century nearly one century after trained Hippocratic doctors had disseminated their practice throughout Greece. An earlier cult may have been active on the sanctuary but no evidence that a temple or another building existed to treat patients has been found. Although the practice of temple medicine in Cos may have been unique, in that medical treatments may have been performed on site and that Coan physicians may

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*Envoy* is supposedly delivered by Hippocrates' son Thessalus dated to the end of the 5<sup>th</sup> Century, which is also filled with fictional details although recent epigraphic discoveries have confirmed some of the specifics.

<sup>269</sup> Celsus, *De Medicina*, translated by W.G. Spencer, Loeb (Cambridge, MA: 1960).

<sup>270</sup> For a discussion on the confusion between Hippocratic medicine and Asclepius see James Longrigg, *Greek Rational Medicine*, 21-24.

<sup>271</sup> Strabo, *Geographia*, XIV, 2, 19.

<sup>272</sup> Pliny, NH XXIX, 2.

have actually come to the temple to practice rational medicine, no evidence supports Hippocrates himself participating in religious medicine. The tradition that intellectual inquiry and practices had mingled with cult activities had their parallels in Lyceum and Museum at Alexandria influenced Herzog to deduce that rational medical practice may have been practiced at the site.<sup>273</sup> Yet, from the Hellenistic period, legends persisted about Hippocratic medicine having emerged from temple records. Horstmanshoff suggests that this legend and the presence of the gods as witnesses to the ‘Hippocratic Oath’ all suggest the ‘symbiotic relationship’ between the gods and medicine.<sup>274</sup>

No archaeological discoveries have uncovered any medical inscriptions on Cos. The only medical steles discovered have been those at Epidauros, which describe the miracle cures of Asclepius. In fact the medical history of Cos, the biography of Hippocrates and the beginning of the Coan Asclepeion are shrouded in uncertainty. Even the medical treatises first disseminated in the classical period and later collected under the name of Hippocrates lack biographical or historical details. The lack of any early medical writing or references as well as the absence of reliable medical history in the extant manuscripts of the Hippocratic Corpus left a void for ancient writers to fictionalise the development of Hippocratic medicine and its connection to temple medicine at Cos. Wesley Smith describes the works of the Hippocratic Corpus as ‘simply pre-Alexandrian medical works’ suggesting that ‘we can draw no direct references from them about Cos’.<sup>275</sup>

The only reliable references to Hippocrates from the classical period are found in Plato and Aristotle. Plato’s reference to Hippocrates is in *Protagoras*, often cited as evidence of Hippocratic doctors charging fees. But the context for the discussion is due to a famous Sophist being in Athens to teach. An enthusiastic potential student named Hippocrates is questioned to reflect on what he might gain from this education through other examples of well-known educators in their field. Hippocrates, the physician-educator, is one of these:

Suppose you had been thinking of going to your namesake Hippocrates of Cos, of the medical guild, and giving him money in payment for services to yourself.<sup>276</sup>

From the reference it is clear that Hippocrates is as well known in his field of expertise as Phideas of Athens or Polyclitus of Argos, the other names cited. While the dialogue was written at the beginning

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<sup>273</sup> James Longrigg, *Greek Rational Medicine*, 22

<sup>274</sup> H. F. Horstmanshoff, “Asclepius and Temple Medicine in Aelius Aristides’ Sacred Tales”, 337-8.

<sup>275</sup> Wesley Smith, *Hippocrates Pseudepigraphics Writings*, 9.

<sup>276</sup> Plato, *Protagoras*, translated by C.C.W. Taylor, 311 b-c

of the 4<sup>th</sup> Century it is set in an earlier period, ‘sometime around 430’.<sup>277</sup> The first textual reference to Hippocrates by Plato affirms that Hippocrates had become the contemporary personification for medical practice. Commonly Plato’s reference is seen as the proof of Hippocrates’ fame:

The reference to the physician Hippocrates therefore attests that by the end of the fifth century he was known for his teaching and that he was already regarded by his contemporaries as the paradigmatic representative of the art of medicine.....Hippocrates was therefore the most celebrated physician of the Periclean Age.<sup>278</sup>

Plato’s other reference refers to Hippocrates as an Asclepiad.<sup>279</sup> In the context of the passage Phaedrus is being questioned about the philosophical nature and science of the soul. He utilises Hippocrates argument that we cannot understand the body without an examination of nature, using a medical analogy to support his philosophical one reaffirming that Hippocratic thought must have been known and respected at the time.

Both Plato’s references to Hippocrates used his classical epithets ‘of Cos’ (*Protagoras*) and ‘Asclepiad’ (*Phaedrus*). However Aristotle’s reference to Hippocrates only mentions him by name citing Hippocrates as an example of a man who is great, not because of his physical stature, but for his skill as a physician.<sup>280</sup> By the time Aristotle wrote *The Politics* Hippocrates’ name was recognisable without any further amplification.

As Greek medicine developed it was not only of interest to the sick, or the physician and his patient, but also represented a cultural phenomenon that reiterated the cosmological motif of order triumphing over chaos. Medical progress was another metaphor for the characteristic Greek doctrine of chaos ceding to order. This underlying need for a coherent pattern first aligned Asclepius to Apollo and the gods. After rational medicine emerged there was a conscious attempt to invest Hippocrates with founding medicine as well as linking him in a chain of descendants to Asclepius creating a cohesive pattern in the transmission of medical knowledge. A recurrent aspect of Hippocratic legend linked him in an ancestral chain that reached back nineteen generations to claim descent from Asclepius, the

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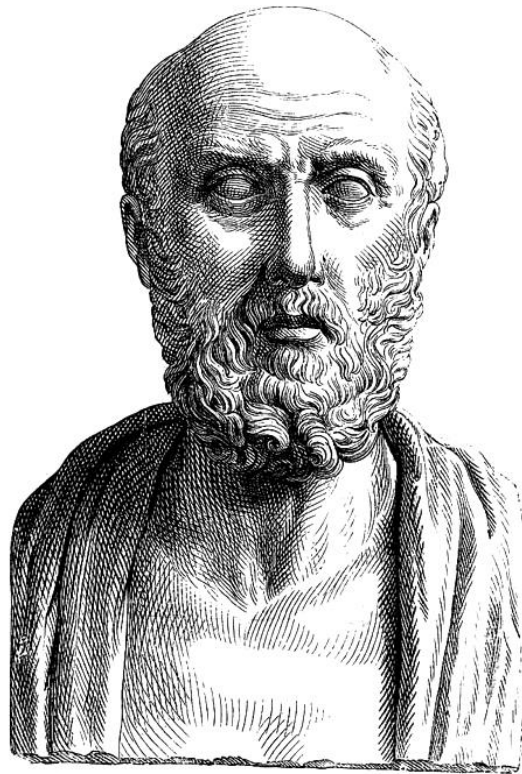
<sup>277</sup> Jacques Jouanne, *Hippocrates*, 6.

<sup>278</sup> Jacques Jouanne, *Hippocrates*, p.6.

<sup>279</sup> Plato, *Phaedrus*, 270c.

<sup>280</sup> Aristotle, *The Politics*, VII, IV.

mythic healer of Epidaurus who was schooled in the arts by the wise centaur from Thessaly.<sup>281</sup> Hippocrates' lineage which links him to Asclepius is reflected in the epithet Asclepiades, the traditional name for the guild of doctors that passed their knowledge through the system from father to son.<sup>282</sup> Perhaps, as Jody Rubin Pinault suggests, there was a great need to connect the collection of ancient medical writings which first emerged in the 5<sup>th</sup> Century with a 5<sup>th</sup> Century physician, one already immortalised through the pen of Plato.<sup>283</sup>



*Hippocrates*

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<sup>281</sup> Jody Rubin Pinault, *Hippocratic Lives and Legends*, E.J. Brill, Leiden: 1992, 7. Ancient sources including Eratosthenes, Apollodorus and Pherecydes also mention this lineage.

<sup>282</sup> Members of the Coan guild of *iatroi* as well as practitioners throughout Greece used the epithet Asclepiades to denote membership in the medical fraternity. This epithet dates to the archaic period. See Susan M. Sherwin-White, *Ancient Cos*, 257. Sherwin-White suggests that the Asclepiads, bound by blood ties, were an exclusive guild of doctors who comprised the Coan medical school. However Wesley Smith, *Hippocrates Pseudepigraphics Writings*, 9 disagrees with this premise suggesting that this is the 'outdated traditional description'. His analysis of the Coan epigraphic documents 'indicate a broad and open medical profession, while control of the profession by the Asclepiads is no where evidenced'. Much of the medical history of Cos since the Hellenistic period is unreliable due to the fictional embellishment of Hippocrates and the Coan school, as well as the tendency to put forth a reasonable solution as the truth in the absence of evidence.

<sup>283</sup> Jody Rubin Pinault, *Hippocratic Lives and Legends*, 2. This fate seems similar to Asclepius who was immortalised through the epic of Homer, as previously suggested.



## 2. The Dual Development of Religious and Rational Medicine

Important Dates in the Asclepius Tradition	Important Dates in the Hippocratic Tradition	Comments
C. 750 Iliad First recorded reference to Asclepius	6 <sup>th</sup> C Pre Socratic philosophers begin to develop the theory of natural causes for mundane phenomena which impacts on the causation of illness and the administration of medical cures.	Asclepius is the oldest physician in Greek literature and the mythic prototype for the healer. Suggested as the ‘father of physicians’ through his link to Machaon and Podalirius
C. 600 Catalogue of Women First record of Asclepius as son of Apollo	The Milesian Philosophers 625 - 547 Thales 610 - 540 Anaximander 585 - 525 Anaximenes	Asclepius becomes linked to Apollo in the surviving literature in the same epoch as the pre-Socratic philosophers from Miletus reject supernatural causation of natural phenomena
C. 480 First archaeological evidence for the cult worship of Asclepius	C. 460 Birth of Hippocrates on the island of Cos	The worship of Asclepius is first evidenced before the birth of Hippocrates but grows rapidly in the last quarter of the 5 <sup>th</sup> C as rational medicine develops popularity
C. 474 Pythian III Complete details of Asclepius myth including parentage, healing prowess and demise at the hands of Zeus’ thunderbolts	430- 350 Hippocratic Corpus Treatises	Pindar’s ode alludes to cult practice
last ½ 5 <sup>th</sup> C First coin depicting Asclepius		The seminal Hippocratic Treatises c. 430 appear at the same time as the Athenian plague and the Epidaurian cult beginning to be noticed by Athenians
421/420 Sanctuary at Piraeus and Athens brought from Epidaurus	430 Athenian plague	Spread of cult to Athens and the beginning of the cult’s dissemination throughout the Greek world. Hippocratic rational medicine and Asclepian temple healing coexist and are accepted in the ambience of the late Classical and Hellenistic period.

### 3. The Placement of the Sanctuaries of Asclepius

Because the cult of Asclepius was a later arrival into Greek religion its sanctuaries were defined by previous cult existence: ‘in his early sanctuaries, those of the 5<sup>th</sup> and 4<sup>th</sup> centuries BC, Asclepius normally takes over the sanctuary of an established deity.’<sup>284</sup> Sanctuaries were founded near the shrines of other gods, especially Apollo, as in Epidaurus. Since the late Bronze Age a shrine to a local hero Maleatas had existed nearby. His cult was assimilated by Apollo in the archaic age and finally yielded to Asclepius during the Classical period. Similarly at Cos the cult of Asclepius continued on from Apollo Cyparissius. And at Corinth the sanctuary to Asclepius was previously a 6<sup>th</sup> Century open-air shrine to Apollo. From the Classical period Asclepeions were placed in well-established sanctuaries, ‘annexed’ to already existing sites such as at Athens and Corinth:

as a latecomer Asclepius did not possess sanctuaries traditionally dedicated to him and he was therefore accommodated in or near sanctuaries of other gods, particularly if they had some other healing significance.<sup>285</sup>

Continuity of cult was guaranteed as Asclepius amalgamated the older shrines into new sanctuaries. Through this merger Asclepius was a bridging divinity embodying the development of religious medicine, its practices and rituals.

As a later developed cult its placement was influenced by established sanctuaries and shrines, which the new cult either co-existed with or assimilated. The Asclepeions were most likely to assimilate the Apollonian shrines as Asclepius’ myth had claimed Apollo, the archaic healer-god, as his father. Social needs and concerns also influenced the location of these sanctuaries. Water, especially springs and wells, was a common attribute of these sanctuaries, as was the landscape. The geography of the setting was varied and ranged from valleys to mountaintops. Sanctuaries dedicated to Asclepius were often located in a beautiful rural setting, ‘sometimes on the seashore or in a lone valley’.<sup>286</sup> Since the specific geography of the site contributed to the ambiance of the sanctuary and reverence for the deity, Asclepius’ sanctuaries needed to support and encourage the process of healing, the experience pilgrims sought at these shrines. Pilgrimage was an essential, albeit underestimated, aspect of the healing process. The journey to the Asclepeion suspended routine and encouraged withdrawal from everyday life. Vitruvius (*DeArchitectura* 1,2,7) suggested that the combination of pilgrimage and the tranquilly

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<sup>284</sup> Fritz Graf, “Discussion”, *Le Sanctuaire Grec*, Fondation Hardt (Geneva: 1992), 201.

<sup>285</sup> R. Tomlinson, *Greek Sanctuaries*, 97.

<sup>286</sup> Fritz Graf, “Asclepius” from Simon Hornblower and Antony Spawforth (eds.), *The Oxford Companion to Classical Civilisation*, 86.

of the site promoted healing: 'when sick persons are moved from a pestilent to healthy place and the water supply is from wholesome fountains, they will more quickly recover'. Many of the Asclepeions either have a stunning vista or are sheltered by mountains, surrounded by natural beauty. One outstanding feature of the sanctuaries of Asclepius was their natural beauty. The specific outlook may have contributed to the selection of the site. The sanctuary at Cos is built on terraces connected by a monumental stairway. The temple to Asclepius was placed on the top terrace. From the upper terraces there is a panoramic view across the Aegean to Asia Minor and the city of Halicarnassus. At Piraeus the sanctuary looked out across the Saronic Gulf to Mount Oros. At Titane the Asclepeion looked out towards the Gulf of Corinth. While the location of these sanctuaries encouraged a feeling of being elevated (perhaps close to the divine), the clean crisp sea air along with the view promoted wellbeing. At Epidaurus the landscape differs. However the majesty, beauty and fertility of its valley setting, sheltered by low lying mountains, inspires a feeling of calm and wellbeing. Many of the Asclepeions were placed to reflect both the chthonic and divine aspects of the cult.

Influencing the placement of a sanctuary was a variety of factors, including the nature of the deity and the function of the cult. Whether the landscape provided a vista or a shelter, the common pattern was the natural beauty of the setting generally located away from the cities, although not always. The beautiful setting, its clean air and unpolluted land promoted a feeling of wellbeing. Landscape reflected the deity and promoted contact with the divine. The naturalistic settings and peace were in accord with the Hippocratic health regimen that promoted clean air and a balanced life. A consistent theme in the works of the Hippocratic Corpus stressed the maxim that balance is a sign of health while imbalance promoted disease.