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Medical Fraternity: Initiations in the Hippocratic Corpus[1]

Yulia Ustinova

Abstract: By the end of the fifth century, Hippocratic physicians were organised in a family-like association, which acted according to formal statutes, recorded in the Oath, the Law, and other deontological texts. The Hippocratics were required to adhere to strict norms of ritual and moral purity, allowing the members of the association to regard themselves as holy men, pure and pious. Medical transmission included written texts, practical instruction, and oral tradition, presumably of esoteric knowledge prohibited to the uninitiated. A Hippocratic physician probably had to undergo rites of passage on two occasions. The first initiation was performed when he began his studies as a boy or adolescent; the second followed after years of apprenticeship and formally signified his becoming a physician. The combination of a two-stage initiation into esoteric wisdom, quasi-familial ties between the master and his disciples, and the emphasis on healing as a lofty vocation was characteristic of the associations of philosophers and healers in Magna Graecia. It is possible that the Hippocratics adopted some of their practices, particularly the elements of initiation rituals, and combined them with the norms and ceremonies of the Asclepiad clans of Cos and Cnidus.

Keywords: Ancient Greek medicine, Hippocratic Corpus, ancient physicians, Hippocratics, clan, initiations, knowledge transmission, association, Pythagoreans, Eleatics.

INTRODUCTION[2]

In ancient Greece, everyone who claimed to be able to heal, was called *iatros*, as Aristotle testifies: 'Physician (*iatros*) means both the ordinary practitioner and the master of the art, and thirdly, a man who has studied medicine as part of his education.'[3] Apparently, regular

1 This subject was first presented at the conference in honour of Rachel Zelnick-Abramovitz at Tel-Aviv University. I am grateful to the organisers and participants of the conference and the anonymous reviewers of this article for their valuable insights and comments, and to Carolyn Gross-Baruch for polishing my English style. The research was supported by the Israel Science Foundation (Grant No. 367/21).

2 The dates in this paper are BCE, unless indicated otherwise.

3 ἰατρὸς δ’ ὅ τε δημιουργὸς καὶ ὁ ἀρχιτεκτονικὸς καὶ τρίτος ὁ πεπαιδευμένος περὶ τὴν τέχνην, Arist. *Pol.* 1282a3, translation H. Rackham, slightly modified. Barker (1946), 125 offers a translation containing a detailed interpretation: 'The term 'doctor' is used in three different senses. It is applied to the ordinary practitioner; it is applied to the specialist who directs the course of treatment; and it is also applied to the man who has some general knowledge of the art of medicine.' Philips Simpson (1997), 97 translates ἀρχιτεκτονικός as 'consultant' and interprets the term as meaning 'someone with the quality of a ruling craftsman.' In his opinion, the one 'educated in art' indicates someone not practicing his art

practitioners were mere craftsmen, and educated doctors were intellectuals who could talk of medicine from the philosophical or scientific viewpoint, but who were Aristotle's master physicians and how were they distinguished?

The term *ēdelphismenos iētros*, literally 'physician who has been made a brother', is found in an obscure Hippocratic text, the *Precepts*.[4] This expression appears to be an established term denoting 'genuine' or 'respectable' doctor and seems to imply a formal act of joining a medical fraternity. The *Oath*'s description of the disciple-master relationship as akin to familial obligations is well-known. This text, dated to the late fifth–early fourth century,[5] and arguably the most famous in the Hippocratic Corpus,[6] depicts the community of physicians as closed and elitist. Other texts, most notably the *Law*, refer to the enormous efforts required in order to be admitted into the mysteries of medical science, and secret knowledge, reserved to the initiated, is mentioned in several Hippocratic treatises, discussed below. The *Oath* is usually regarded as obligating the Hippocratic community, at least during the Classical period.[7] The implications of the rules

at the present time. Cordes (1994), 174 understands this term as 'wissenschaftlich bzw. theoretisch gebildeten Mediziner.'

For the division of Greek medicine into science and craft, see Temkin (1977, originally published in 1953). For the status of physicians see Cohn-Haft (1956), 18–21; Pleket (1995); Edelstein (1967b); Nutton (1995a); Harris (2016). Intellectuals who read and wrote tracts on medicine, but did not practice medicine for a fee, could be viewed differently: Jones-Lewis (2016), 389.

4 *Praec.* 5, translation Jones (1924), 46. The date of the *Precepts* is uncertain: from mid-fourth century, with some later modifications (Sigerist (1961), 287; Gourevitch (1984), 266; Marasco (1999), 163–164; Jouanna (1999), 405; Craik (2015), 233) to the first or second centuries CE (Ecca (2016), 23–25; Leven (2018), 161; Potter (2022), 1, 301). In the opinion of Littré (1961), 9, 247, the text of the *Precepts* is the most complicated in the Hippocratic Corpus.

5 Jones (1924) 41; Deichgräber (1971), 118 (originally published in 1933); Lichtenthaeler (1984); Craik (2015), 149; Jouanna (2018), xxxvi, xlii; Nutton (2004), 337; Witt (2014), 105; Flashar (2016), 45; second half of the fourth century: Edelstein (1967a), 55; Sigerist (1961), 301; Gourevitch (1984), 258; the late fourth century: Lane Fox (2020), 82; an unspecified Hellenistic or a later date: Ducatillon (2001), 20–61; von Staden (2007), 465; Leven (2018), 177.

It is suggested that in the late fifth century the Athenians linked the *Oath* with the Hippocratic community, since Aristophanes alluded to its first lines on the Attic scene in the *Women at the Thesmophoria* 272–274, performed in 411: answering to a suggestion to swear 'by the community of Hippocrates' (τὴν Ἱπποκράτους ξυνοικίαν), a comic hero swears 'by all the gods together' (Jones (1924), 40; Craik (2015), 148). However, Hippocrates is a common name, therefore it cannot be ruled out that this Hippocrates was an unidentified wealthy Athenian, or the Athenian general mentioned in *Clouds* 1001 (von Staden (2007), 427; Sommerstein (2013), 174–175; Jouanna (1999), 7).

6 Flashar (2016), 36–49; Nutton (1996).

7 For detailed argumentation of this view, see Jouanna (2018) xxv–xxxvi, esp. xxxi; Leith (2007), 40 argues that the *Oath* was sworn 'in the original circumstances of its composition,' and later learnt by heart or regarded as an important set of ethical norms. The congruity of the *Oath* with the rest of the Corpus is noteworthy: Lichtenthaeler (1984); Craik (2015), 148.

Two commentators on the *Aphorisms*, Stephanus of Athens and Pseudo-Oribasius, recommend that beginning medical students start by studying the *Oath* (Leith (2007), 38). Most conspicuously, a second-century CE Athenian honorific inscription referring to activities

outlined in the *Oath*, the *Law*, and other deontological texts[8] are highly significant for the history of medicine in Classical Greece.

The main aim of this paper is to explore the procedure of entering the ranks of 'master physicians' or 'respectable doctors,' and to investigate the nature, function, and consequences of the rigid process of admission into the Hippocratic community during the Classical period. I begin with an examination of the evidence on the organisation of the Asclepiads into a clan-like association. In the following section, references to the physician's induction into his art are juxtaposed with evidence on mystery rites, suggesting that several Hippocratic texts allude to the physician's training as an initiation.[9] I will then argue that in the course of the fifth and fourth centuries, the traditional clan-like organisation of physicians modified its methods of admission of new members, and this transformation probably followed the model of philosophical schools of Magna Graecia. The final section discusses social and cognitive reasons determining the advantages of a secretive medical fraternity in Greek healthcare of the Classical age.

BETWEEN A CLAN-LIKE PROFESSIONAL ASSOCIATION AND AN UNCONVENTIONAL BROTHERHOOD

The important role of traditional practices and beliefs in the practices of Greek physicians has been studied extensively.[10] Hippocratic doctors obviously not only acted within the social norm prescribing piety, but also expressed in writing their belief in divine power over the environment and human life.[11] Hippocratic medicine preserved many traditional healing methods, particularly the emphasis on cleansing as the basis for its therapeutic approach.[12] Although different authors wrote the texts of the Hippocratic Corpus over a time span of several hundred years, these authors and the practitioners following their

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(*erga*) of a morally blameless physician, mentions the prohibition to look at or touch patients, contrary to the statute and oath (παρὲξ καὶ θεσμὰ καὶ ὅρκ[ον], *SEG* 28. 225; Samama (2003), 128–130, No. 22). This demonstrates that the *Oath* (perhaps along with the *Law,* here called *thesma*) was well-known and considered binding (Samama (2003), 74).

Presumably, not all the doctors regarded as Hippocratics followed the *Oath*, or even swore it (Lane Fox (2020), 83), but those who swore could hardly be a tiny minority, contrary to the opinion of Kudlien (1970a), 7 and Nutton (1995b), 29; (1996), 46. Nutton (1995b), 29 also assumed that given the contradiction between the norms required by the *Oath* and the attested practices of some physicians, the *Oath* 'may not have been generally sworn until the sixteenth century at the earliest.' However, later he accepted that the *Oath* 'was widely seen as a summation of ethical practice' (Nutton (2004), 68).

8 On this group of texts see Cordes (1994); von Staden (2007); Leven (2018).

9 The terms 'initiations' and 'mystery rites' are 'inadequate but convenient' (Vesperini (2021) 30). For a critical approach to the common use of this term see Dodd and Faraone (2003).

10 Joly (1966); von Staden (2003); van der Eijk (2004); Gorrini (2005); Laskaris (2002); Jouanna (2012), 97–118; Rodríguez Alfageme (2014).

11 Cf. Jouanna (2012), 97–118; van der Eijk, P. J. (2005, originally published in 1990) on the 'compatibility' of Hippocratic medicine and traditional religion.

12 Hoessly (2001); von Staden (1992); Ustinova (2023).

doctrines are loosely defined as Hippocratic physicians or the Hippocratics.[13] In antiquity, Hippocrates and the members of his 'choir of doctors' originating from Cos were considered descendants of Asclepius, and in the fourth century, Theopompus supported this view.[14] The term 'Asclepiad' first appeared in Theognis, perhaps as an honorific appellation, signifying the elated status of the Asclepiads.[15] Inside the fifth- and fourth-century Hippocratic circles, this term was probably synonymous with 'Hippocratic physician.'[16]

According to a fourth-century inscription, the Asclepiads of Cos and Cnidus traced their origin to Asclepius 'in the male line,' piously worshipped Apollo at Delphi, and enjoyed special privileges there from the sixth century at the latest.[17] In this respect, the Asclepiads adhered to the model of aristocratic clans in Ionia, particularly in Attica, who claimed to have descended from an alleged common mythical ancestor, but in actual fact, were united by a joint cult, assemblies, customs, and above all, mutual support.[18] The connection of the Asclepiads with the two major healing centres, underscored in the Delphic inscription, is also reminiscent of the traditional local attachments of most Attic *genē*.[19] Before and after Hippocrates, the Asclepiads had no recognised leader, and were supposedly loyal to the aristocratic principle of gentilic parity.[20]

However, the bonds between the Hippocratic physicians appear to have been much stronger than connections within clans. In the *Oath*, a Hippocratic physician swore that he would regard his teacher as equal to his parents, live in partnership with him, and consider

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13 On the connection between Hippocratic texts and Hippocratic physicians, particularly in the cultural context of the fifth and fourth centuries, when the bulk of the Corpus was assembled, see Jouanna (1999), 42–55; Nutton (2004), 53–71; Craik (2015), xx–xxiv.

14 Pl. *Phdr*. 270C; *Prt*. 311B; Theopomp. *FGrHist* 115 fr. 103: τῶν ἐν Κῶι καὶ Κνίδωι ἰατρῶν, ὡς ᾿Ασκληπιάδαι (the healers from Cos and Cnidus, and why they were Asclepiads); Galen adhered to this tradition: Nutton (2004), 69–70. Jouanna (1999), 51 distinguishes between born Asclepiads and the Hippocratic physicians who did not belong to the clan.

15 *Elegiae* 432–434; van Groningen (1966), 173, Cordes (1994), 24–25.

16 Plato's usage varies: in the *Republic* (405D) 'the ingenious Asclepiads' seems to mean just 'doctors' (Waterfield (1993), 397), but in the *Symposium* (186CE) the doctor Euryximachus says that Asclepius is his ancestor, 'as the poets tell us, and I believe them.' Is this an echo of a polemic uttered by a doctor, himself an Asclepiad, against his skeptical contemporaries? One of the factors influencing the diversity in the use of the term 'Asclepiad' may be the difference in 'degrees of credulity' in the accuracy of kinship myths among different individuals (Patterson (2010), 4, 22–27).

17 Κατά ἀνδρο[γέν]ειαν, Rougemont (1977), No. 12, see also 11; Bousquet (1956); *Oratio Thessali* 6; Langholf (1990), 233–235; Jouanna (1999), 33–35, 51; Samama (2003), 20–21; Lane Fox (2020), 67. Hippocrates' descent from Asclepius and Heracles: Pherec. Ath. *FGrHist* 3 fr. 59; Jouanna (1999), 12–16.

18 *EM*, Suid., Harp., s.v. *gennētai,* Parker (1996), 56–66.

19 Sherwin-White (1978), 259.

20 Sherwin-White (1978), 259; the aristocratic origin and worldview of the Asclepiads: Kudlien (1970a), 3–5; Sherwin-White (1978), 257–258; Witt (2014).

The anonymity of Hippocratic treatises, which looks quite odd in comparison to the common indication of authorship by Classical scientific writers, may have ensued from a similar reason. Or did it develop from the ancient tradition of joint authorship, which is attested to in the school of Cnidus (Hp. *Acut.* 1–3; Jouanna (1999), 49)?

the teacher's male family members as his own brothers.[21] While declaring his willingness 'to share his livelihood' with the teacher, the disciple was not required to renounce his property altogether and only promised to relieve the teacher's financial distress, if needed. In any case, the commitment of the Hippocratic disciple to his teacher, to be sworn to and secured in a written agreement (*sungraphē*),[22] is unprecedented. Presumably, those born as Asclepiads swore to practical obligations slightly different from those presented in the extant text of the *Oath*, referring to pupils from outside the clan, but to the same set of ethical norms.[23]

The filial attitude of a medical student to his mentor is probably rooted in an Archaic and even pre-Archaic tradition, best exemplified by the mythological image of the wise centaur Cheiron and his wards, Asclepius, Jason, and Achilles, all destined to excel in healing.[24] Cheiron, 'the one whose hand heals,' was the archetypal tutor and master of initiations, and a healer par excellence.[25] Asclepius' medical credentials are well-known; Jason, whose name is cognate to *iatros*, was also a healer;[26] and Achilles, although never described as *iatros,* is praised more than once for his medical skills.[27] The three resided with Cheiron for a long time, revered him as their second father, treated his family as their own, and learned from him the art of healing, along with a laudable code of conduct.[28] Cheiron and his charges seem to embody an ideal teacher-student relationship, as stipulated in the *Oath.*

To complete the picture, a dynasty of physicians, regarded as descendants of Cheiron, lived at the foot of Mt Pelion, where the centaur's sacred cave was located, and handed down their craft exclusively from father to son, but apparently did not serve as Cheiron's priests. They also abided by ethical norms regarded as sacred. Most notably, they considered it 'impious' (*ouch hosion*) to receive a fee for the treatment they provided.[29]

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21 *Jusj.* 1b: ἡγήσασθαι μὲν τὸν διδάξαντά με τὴν τέχνην ταύτην ἴσα γενέτῃσιν ἐμοῖσι, καὶ βίου κοινώσασθαι, καὶ χρεῶν χρηΐζοντι μετάδοσιν ποιήσασθαι, καὶ γένος τὸ ἐξ ωὐτέου ἀδελφοῖς ἴσον ἐπικρινέειν ἄῤῥεσι.

22 *Jusj.* 1a. The term: von Staden (2007), 437; the aboding legal force of this oath: Jouanna (2018), xxxi–xxxvi.

23 Jouanna (1999), 129; Jouanna (2018), xxx; Flashar (2016), 40, 186.

24 Nicholson and Selden (2019), 180–189.

25 Hom. *Il.* 4. 218–219; 9. 829–832; Pi. *P.* 3. 1–7; Roux (1949), 155–157; Cordes (1994), 25–31; Cheiron's name: Robbins (1975); Chantraine (1983–84), 2, 1252; Cheiron's cult: Plut. *Quest. conv.* 647A; Jeanmaire (1949); Dawson (1949); Picard (1951); Turcan (1966); Gisler-Huwiler (1986); Aston (2011), 91–94; Ustinova (2005).

26 Pi. *P.* 4. 102–119; Mackie (2001); Ustinova (2005); Andrieu (2014); his name was given to him by Cheiron: Pi. *P.* 4. 119; Mackie (2001), 2. Jason is depicted laying his hands on Phineus' blind eyes and returning his sight on a sixth-century Corynthian crater: Gantz (1993), 1, 355; Ustinova (2005), 509.

27 Hom. *Il.* 11. 830–832; Pi. *N.* 3. 53–57; he is depicted bandaging Patroclus' wounds on the cylix by Sosias (Beazley (1963), No. 21.1, 1620).

28 Nicholson and Selden (2019), 185.

29 Ταύτην δὲ τὴν δύναμιν ἓν τῶν πολιτῶν οἶδε γένος· ὃ δὴ λέγεται Χείρωνος ἀπόγονον εἶναι· παραδίδωσι δὲ καὶ δείκνυσι πατὴρ υἱῷ, καὶ οὕτως ἡ δύναμις φυλάσσεται, ὡς οὐδεὶς ἄλλος οἶδε τῶν πολιτῶν· οὐχ ὅσιον δὲ τοὺς ἐπισταμένους τὰ φάρμακα μισθοῦ τοῖς κάμνουσι βοηθεῖν, ἀλλὰ προῖκα, Pfister (1951), fr. 2. 12 (And one clan among the citizens has the following power: they are considered descendants of Cheiron. They transmit it and show forth

Thus, the Asclepiad model of a clan of physicians, who traced their origin to a healing deity, transmitted their craft through the family line, and were required to conform to strict rules, was not unique. Supposedly, this model operated on a far larger scale within the Hippocratic community, as compared to its application in Thessaly.

Returning to the Asclepiads and the remarkable phrase *ēdelphismenos iētros* mentioned in the *Precepts*, a search in the *TLG* demonstrates that the word *ēdelphismenos* was employed only in the Hippocratic Corpus and by Galen.[30] In all these texts, this term means 'similar' or 'related', the only exception found in the cited passage in the *Precepts*, where it is used to define a physician who skillfully and kindly treats even dubious patients,[31] – in a word, an exemplary doctor. Thus, the word *ēdelphismenos* could not be used in this passage in its standard sense, and must have had a different meaning. Given the clan-like organisation of the Asclepiads and their emphasis on moral integrity, it is probable that the expression 'physician who has been made a brother' implies loyalty to medical ethics. Other requirements to the *ēdelphismenoi iētroi* were likely to ensue from the professional standards set in the *Oath* and the *Law*, and will be discussed in the next section.

The use of fictive 'sibling language' as a metaphor to express a sense of fraternal solidarity began in pagan voluntary associations and professional guilds in the Greek East only later, in the first century CE.[32] This development coincided with its adoption by

from father to son, and in this way, this power is preserved [with them], and with no one else among the citizens. And it is impious for those who know the remedies to treat the sick for a fee, but [this is done] free of charge).

The text was formerly ascribed to Dicaearchus of Messene (*FGrHist* 2 F60), and was attributed to Heraclides Creticus, a geographer who lived in the third century, by Pfister (1951), 17–19; the date: 44–48.

30 The verb ἀδελφίζειν is also rare in Classical Greek; it appears in Isocrates (19.30) and means 'to call/regard someone one's brother,' as the lexicographers explain (Suid., Harpocr., EM, s.v. *adelphizein*).

31 *Praec.* 5, with the comments by Jones (1923), 318–319.

The reading of the passage under discussion is controversial. Littré (1961), 9, 258–259 and Jones (1923), 1, 318–319, read Τίς γὰρ… ἠδελφισμένος ἰητρὸς ἰητρεύειν πεισθείη ἀτεραμνίῃ ('quel médicin digne de son nom se laisserait aller à exercer son art avec dureté', 'who that is a brotherly physician practises with such hardness of heart…'). Ecca (2016), 116–117 and Potter (2022), 1, 309–309 read ἠδελφισμένως ἰητρεύοι πίσθει καὶ ἀτεραμνίῃ ('wer würde… auf brüderliche Weise mit Zuverlässigkeit…behandeln'; 'would be practising medicine in a brotherly manner with credit and integrity'). In her discussion of the manuscript versions of this passage and the problems of its interpretation, Ecca (2016), 197–199 indicates that ἠδελφισμένως of the earlier manuscript was corrected to ἠδελφισμένος, with a glossa by the copyist. She emphasises that it is difficult to exclude either reading. Erotianus defines ἠδελφισμένα as ὡμοιωμένα (Nachmanson (1918), fr. 43. 14). Thus, both interpretations of the words ἠδελφισμένος/ως, either in an ethical sense or as an indication of the connection to the Hippocratic fraternity, diverge from the common usage of the term in medicals texts, indicating similarity.

32 Whether those who were initiated together at Eleusis actually regarded themselves as brothers, as Burkert (1987), 45 suggests, is controversial: there is no evidence on collective activities or connections between Eleusinian initiates after their initiation, see Patera (2019), 676–677.

Christian communities and within Judaism.[33] Although the *Precepts* contain some Hellenistic and Roman interpolations, the bulk of the treatise is congruent with the *Oath* and the *Law*, and the treatise was considered Hippocratic by Erotianus.[34] It is tempting to regard *ēdelphismenos iētros* in the *Precepts* as the earliest example of 'sibling language' in a quasi-familial association. Even if this term was added at a later stage, it reflected the author's assessment of the Hippocratic community as a brotherhood.

The stipulations of the *Oath* protected the family-like structure of the Asclepiad community,[35] and the essential role of the family was preserved till the late fourth century when the political and social shifts and the emergence of new research centres introduced significant changes in the activities of the Hippocratic school.[36]

THE LAW OF THE PROFESSION

While the *Oath* insists on quasi-familial bonds between the master and his disciple, it does not explicitly address the physician's relationship with his colleagues. The *Law*, which was written down at approximately the same time as the *Oath*, in the late fifth–early fourth century, and belongs to the same group of deontological texts,[37] reveals intriguing aspects of the physician's professional life.

In this text, the author takes for granted that having learned his art (*technē*), the physician will constantly travel from city to city.[38] Wherever he goes, he will have to deal with the lack of respect for his trade, since Hippocratic doctors and charlatans were all treated in the same manner,[39] and in the eyes of a vast majority of the Greeks, physicians were no less weird and suspicious than magicians.[40]

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33 Harland (2005). On the mutual support of the members of voluntary associations, on a much more modest scale than among the Hippocratics, see Gabrielsen and Paganini (2023), 12, 15.

34 Nachmanson (1918), fr. 7 (*Praec.*); Craik (2015), 231–233; Ecca (2016), 27.

35 Deichgräber (1971), 103; Jouanna (1999), 47–48; Lane Fox (2020), 82.

36 Sherwin-White (1978), 262–263, in contrast to the views of Kudlien (1970a), 7; Smith (1990), 9–17; Jones-Lewis (2016), 389 and Nutton (2004), 70, who date the opening of the medical profession to the outsiders to the fifth century. In the opinion of Jouanna (1999), 46–48, the *Oath* was needed as a result of a 'revolution,' emphasised by Galen, who in *Anatomical Procedures* (2.1) points out that 'at a certain date' the Asclepiads began imparting their art to students who were not their kinsmen; however, Jouanna is indecisive about the date of this revolution.

37 von Staden (2007), 426; Craik (2015), 152, 155; Craik (2014), 25; Jouanna (2018), xiii, xix, 165.

38 *Lex* 4: ἀνὰ τὰς πόλιας φοιτεῦντας.

39 *Lex* 1. This resentment is shared by other Hippocratics, for instance, the roughly contemporary authors of the *On the Sacred Disease* (*Morb. sacr.* 2) and *On the Art (De arte* 1). See also note 3 above.

40 Graf (1995), 40. See Nutton (1985), 30–33; Hoessly (2001), 88 for the broad spectrum of the term *iatros* in Homer and elsewhere. In exceptional cases, a woman could claim to be *iatros*, as the mid-fourth-century grave stele of Phanostrate, midwife and doctor (μαῖα καὶ ἰατρὸς Φανοστράτη), demonstrates: *IG* II^2 6873; Totelin (2020).

According to the *Law*, the deplorable status of the physician is a result of the lack of legislation regulating the activities of different medical practitioners 'in the cities.'[41] This statement appears at the beginning of the work entitled *Nomos*, and thus indicates that the title refers not to polis laws but rather to a set of norms within the medical fraternity, which enacted them as a private organisation, following the well-known practice of recording the statutes of associations.[42] However, explicit ritual regulations appear only in the last paragraph of the text; its bulk dwells on the nature and method of medical learning. In this way, the author contrasts the negligence of legislative authorities in matters of healthcare throughout the Greek world with the responsible approach of the educated medical community. The main message of the *Law* is that the selection and education of future physicians guarantee high-quality medical treatment, ensured not by 'the cities,' but by the Hippocratic fraternity. Aristotle's statement that 'a physician should be inspected by physicians'[43] echoes perhaps his acquaintance with such real-life practice.

The interpretation of the *Law* as a normative document of the Hippocratic community is endorsed by the passage in the *Oath*, limiting the ranks of a physician's apprentices to his own sons, his teacher's sons, and 'pupils under contract and oath according to the law of the physicians (*nomos iētrikos*).'[44] These are formal terms, designating the signed

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41 This statement, echoed by Pliny (*Nat.* 29. 18), is inaccurate (Jouanna (1999), 78–80). Xenophon's Socrates alludes to the requirement that candidates for the position of public physician (*dēmosieuōn iatros*) prove their credentials (*Mem*. 4. 2. 5; Pl. *Grg*. 455B, 456B, 514DE; Cohn-Haft (1956), 57). The status of public physician could express an endorsement of the doctor's medical qualifications (Cohn-Haft (1956), 56–67), but public physicians were few, especially before the Hellenistic period (Cohn-Haft (1956), 76–85 lists 66 attested cases, mostly Hellenistic or later; cf. Samama (2003), 47–51). A fifth-century inscription from Teos ('Teian Curses') contains a law which forbids the use of *pharmaka dēlētēria*, 'harmful drugs', and stipulates execution of the practitioner and their entire family as a punishment (Ogden (2002), 275, No. 278; Motte (2000), 270–271; Collins (2008), 134). This law is not unique: Theophrastus says that possession of henbane, a lethal drug, was punished with death (Thphr. *HP* 9. 16. 47). Thus, physicians and traditional healers could be prosecuted, but there is no doubt that the Greek states failed to create a system of medical, and indeed any kind of professional licensing (Cohn-Haft (1956), 25; Dean-Jones (2003), 106–107).

42 For sacred regulations issued by private associations see Harris (2015); Gabrielsen and Paganini (2023), 9–17. The associations' regulations were often referred to as *nomoi*, as the list of terms in Gabrielsen and Paganini (2023), 24–38 demonstrates.

43 ὥσπερ οὖν ἰατρὸν δεῖ διδόναι τὰς εὐθύνας ἐν ἰατροῖς, Ar. *Pol.* 1282a1. In this passage, the body of physicians is contrasted to civic bodies that allow judgment by the (uneducated) majority (Lane (2013), 265). Citing the physicians as a positive example of proper procedure of inspection and judgement would be worthless unless Aristotle, the son of a doctor, was confident that such a practice existed among his father's colleagues. However, judgment by one's peers obviously did not have any legal standing in the state (above, note 41). Needless to add, mere practitioners would hardly count in Aristotle's eyes (cf. note 3 above, on the passage immediately following this one).

44 *Jusj.* 1c: μαθηταῖσι συγγεγραμμένοισί τε καὶ ὡρκισμένοις νόμῳ ἰητρικῷ. The language of 1b–c is rich in 'linguistic peculiarities,' which makes Jones wonder whether it is not 'liturgical' (Jones (1924), 43); cf. 'heavy religious tone' (Nutton (2004), 68).

The expression *nomos iatrikos* occurs in fourth-century texts (e.g. Ps.-Pl. *Min.* 316E), but is rare (von Staden (2007), 442).

agreement between the master and his disciple, and the equally official 'law' adopted by the associated physicians.[45]

The *Law* appears to contain a part of this *nomos* that could be shared with the general public. The other, probably greater, part could not be published, as stated at the end of the text: 'Things that are holy are revealed to holy men. They are prohibited to profane, until they have been initiated into the mysteries of knowledge.'[46] The language of mystery rites cannot be more obvious.[47] The verb *telesthēnai*, 'to be initiated', would suffice, but it is reinforced by the term *orgia*, 'mysteries,' or 'secret rites,'[48] and the sharp contrast between the initiated and the profane. The term *ou themis* belongs to the vocabulary of the sacred laws of sanctuaries and is used in statements that prohibit access to certain places or rites for people who are not ritually entitled to do so.[49] The word *bebēlos*, indicating a non-purified person or a place open to all, is a *hapax* in the Hippocratic Corpus.[50] The combination of these terms implies that real medical knowledge was only revealed to those who had formally undergone secret rites, and intended exclusively for future physicians.

The secrets of the brotherhood were perhaps behind the least intelligible of all Hippocratic works, the *Decorum*. It consists of broken sentences rendered in corrupted Greek, and is dated to the fourth or the third century, but could have been written several centuries later.[51] The text as a whole gives the impression that it was never intended for publication, and W.H.S. Jones suggested that it could be a list of points for a presentation to be given in a medical fraternity; the text is intentionally obscure, in order to prevent the possibility that an uninitiated would grasp its meaning.[52] The most incomprehensible sentence of the *Decorum*, 'In fact many, dominated by the two statements (or words – *logoi*), never used the two things (or acts – *prēgmata*) together in the demonstration,'[53]

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45 This term in the Oath is understood as referring to the Hippocratic Law: Jouanna (1999), 22–23; 166–168; Ducatillon (2001), 44–45.

46 *Lex* 5: Τὰ δὲ ἱερὰ ἐόντα πρήγματα ἱεροῖσιν ἀνθρώποισι δείκνυται· βεβήλοισι δὲ, οὐ θέμις, πρὶν ἢ τελεσθῶσιν ὀργίοισιν ἐπιστήμης.

47 Reflecting on this passage, W.H.S. Jones observes that it is 'very probable that some physicians at least joined together in secret societies, with a ritual and liturgy' (Jones (1923), 2, 258, 272–276; Jones 1924, 45); this opinion is accepted by Phillips (1973), 117; Lloyd (2003), 52; Craik (2015), 154; Craik (2014), 33, Flashar (2016), 186 ('Hinweis auf die Mysterien') and dismissed by Cohn-Haft (1956), 16. Witt (2014), 120 regards the Asclepiads as an aristocratic 'esoteric circle.' J. Jouanna interprets the concluding passage of the *Law* as an 'expression métaphorique du culte da la science' (Jouanna (2012), 157, 292).

48 For both terms, see Schuddeboom (2009). 'Mystery initiations' is a common rendering of τελετή (rite of fulfilment). In Archaic and Classical literature τελετή may mean mystery rites or a ritual act in general; in the Hellenistic literature the latter meaning prevails (Schuddeboom (2009), 37, 99, 224). The word ὄργια can denominate rites or objects associated with mystery rites (Jaccottet (2005), 223). Significantly, Erotianus understands Hippocratic ὄργια precisely in this sense, as μυστήρια (Nachmanson (1918), fr. 68. 13).

49 Harris (2015), 57.

50 On βέβηλος see Jouanna (2018), 291.

51 Craik (2015), 59; Jouanna (1999), 380 dates it to the first or the second century CE.

52 Jones (1923), 2, 269–273.

53 Καὶ γὰρ ἐν ἀμφοτέροισι τοῖσι λόγοισι πολλοὶ κρατηθέντες οὐδαμῇ συναμφοτέροισιν ἐχρήσαντο τοῖσι πρήγμασιν ἐς δεῖξιν, *Decent.* 4.

mentions unexplained *logoi* and *prēgmata*. This sentence probably alludes to ritual sayings and actions, familiar only to the initiated members of the society, especially since the following passage on medical *sophia* refers to secret *orgia*, similar to those mentioned in the *Law*.[54]

Direct and indirect allusions to mystery rites in Hippocratic treatises do not make only 'rhetorical use of mystery metaphor,'[55] as W. Burkert's described the allegorical interpretations of secrets of nature or enigmatic texts, employed by many ancient authors. The references to secrets that should not be disclosed to the uninitiated are consistent, appear in several treatises, are accompanied by other terms from the vocabulary of mystery rites, and suggest real-life behaviour rather than an intellectual endeavour.[56] A considerable part of the Hippocratic knowledge was a secret, to be discussed only with those formally admitted to the brotherhood – presumably the *ēdelphismenoi iētroi* of the *Precepts*.[57]

In the Hippocratic community, the distinction between the secret-sharers and the outsiders was articulated by the requirement for exceptional purity. In the *Law*, people who have been initiated into the mysteries of healing are called *hieroi anthrōpoi,* 'holy men.' This expression immediately evokes a phrase in the *Oath*: 'I will guard both my life and my art pure (*hagnōs*) and pious (*hosiōs*).'[58] It is noteworthy that *hosios* semantically approaches *dikaios*, 'just', and thus refers also to the highest moral qualities a physician swears to uphold.[59] Furthermore, in the *Oath*, the patients' personal information, that the physician swore not to disclose, is referred to as *arrheta,* 'unutterable' secrets, and this term is part of the vocabulary associated with mystery rites, indicating matters that should

54 Jones (1923), 2, 274; Craik (2015), 59.

55 Burkert (1987), 80.

56 In addition to explicit requirements of secrecy in the *Oath* and the *Law*, and the obscurity of the *Precepts* and the *Decorum*, noted by Jones (1924), 45, the reference to body parts 'known to those whom that concerns' (*De arte* 10: ἃς ἴσασιν, οἷσι τουτέων ἐμέλησεν) and 'those with sufficient knowledge of the art'(*De arte* 9: τοῖσι ταύτην τὴν τέχνην ἱκανῶς εἰδόσι), in the late-fifth-century *On the Art* may hint at arcane knowledge concealed from laymen (Craik (2015), 38; for the date of this tract see Cordes (1994), 101; Jouanna (1999), 378.

57 Jones (1924), 45–46 compares the Hippocratic fraternity to the Masons.

58 *Jusj.* 4: Ἁγνῶς δὲ καὶ ὁσίως διατηρήσω βίον τὸν ἐμὸν καὶ τέχνην τὴν ἐμήν. For a commentary see von Staden (1996b), 417–434. Bremmer (2002) argues that this reading is late, since the version of the *Oath* preserved in the earliest papyrus copies (dated to the third century CE, Schubert (2005), 16, 79; Leith (2007), 39; Flashar (2016), 45) contained the words ὁσίως καὶ εὐσεβῶς ('in a pious and reverent manner'). However, it is still unclear whether εὐσεβῶς appeared in all the earlier versions of the *Oath*, or only in a few of them. For the issue under consideration here, it is sufficient that both readings imply the same message, of a strongly emphasised adherence to a lifestyle defined as 'holy.'

On the terms *hieros, hagnos,* and *hosios* see Rudhardt (1992), 21–41; Parker (1983), 147–151, 328–331.

59 Rudhardt (1992), 32. Ritual connotations of the *Oath:* Jouanna (2018), xxv–xxxi; 10–13.

not be disclosed to the uninitiated.[60] Thus, the professional and personal behaviour of the Asclepiads was depicted in cultic terms.[61]

The extraordinary insistence on personal responsibility ('I will guard my life and my art') underscores the ethical dimension in this clause.[62] Given the nature of the physician's profession and lifestyle, it is difficult to imagine him able to entirely avoid being polluted by death, birth, and sexual intercourse. H. von Staden links this requirement with the lines inscribed over the entrance to the temple of Asclepius at Epidaurus: 'Pure (*hagnos*) must be the person who goes inside this fragrant temple, and purity (*hagneia*) is to think holy (*hosia*) thoughts.'[63] Thus, Hippocratic 'holiness' probably emphasised pious conduct and personal responsibility toward gods and humans.[64]

The terms *hieros, hagnos*, and *hosios*, describing purity and holiness, signify the dichotomy between the sacred and the profane. While in the *Oath* and the *Law*, moral and mental purity advance to the foreground,[65] ritual and formal requirements were also considered essential. The domain of medical art was sacred and forbidden to the profane, to whom only superficial trivialities were accessible. In order to approach 'things that are holy' and join the 'holy people,' one had to pass initiation into medical science. There can be little doubt that this ritual was modeled on Greek mystery rites. The secret was kept loyally, and the novices were taught the art of silence, as required by the *Oath* and the *Law*.[66]

The rest of the two-page *Law* is devoted to the study of medicine. The author underscores the importance of natural abilities (*phusis*), diligence, time, and beginning to study early (*paidomathia*). Medical studies are compared to the growth of plants, and this analogy provides perhaps the key to the problem of the timing of medical initiations.[67]

The *Law* does not spell out at what stage of his education a future physician undergoes his initiation. Most probably, he did that as an adolescent, in order to be exposed to the secrets of the art of medicine. Given the family-like concept of the Hippocratic

60 Burkert (1983), 252; Ustinova (2018), 116; Leven (2018), 176. Furthermore, the verb used in the same phrase and defining the action prohibited to a good physician, ἐκλαλεῖσθαι, 'to blabber,' is often used in references to cultic transgression (Ducatillon (2001), 565; von Staden (2007), 451).

61 Cf. Simmel (1906), 482–483 on the importance of rituals in secret societies.

62 von Staden (1996b), 419; von Staden (1996a), 172–195.

63 Clem. Al. *Strom*. 5.1.13.3; Porph. *Abst.* 2. 19. 5, translation H. von Staden: ἁγνὸν χρὴ νηοῖο θυώδεος ἐντὸς ἰόντα/ ἔμμεναι· ἁγνείη δ' ἐστὶ φρονεῖν ὅσια. This couplet is cited by Theophrastus in his lost treatise *On Piety*, and therefore was inscribed in the fourth century at the latest. See von Staden (1996b), 429; von Staden (1996a), 186; Chaniotis and Mylonopulos (2005), 436; Jouanna (2018), 31. Bremmer (2002) questions this consensus.
Cf. the sacred law from Mytilene, requiring the visitors to 'approach the temenos pure and thinking pious thoughts' (ἁγνὸν πρὸς τέμενος στείχειν/ ὅσια φρονέοντα; *IG* 12 *Suppl*. 23).

64 von Staden (1996b), 427–428; von Staden (1996a), 179–181; Nutton (2004), 68; Leven (2018), 174.

65 von Staden (1996b), 428–434; Jouanna (2018), 29–32. On 'purity of mind' see Moulinier (1952), 168–176.

66 Cf. Simmel (1906), 474–475 on the techniques of learning 'the duty of reticence' in secret societies.

67 For a different interpretation of this metaphor see Jouanna (2012), 162.

community, it is likely that the aspiring physician who was not born into the Asclepiad clan, was ritually admitted into his master's household. This first step was necessary to allow the novice access to secret knowledge. It was then followed by years of apprenticeship and presumably observance of strict purity rules, culminating in the acceptance of the new doctor as a colleague.

Thus, just as growing a plant begins with seeding, requires much work and diligence to allow the fruit to ripen, and ends in the harvest, the education of the future physician is to be marked by two defining events, at the beginning and at the end of his studies. It appears that there could have been two sets of initiation rites, one for new students and the other for new doctors. This arrangement resembles the practice of Greek mystery rites, which could vary in duration, might include children's initiations, and in some cases consisted of several stages.[68]

According to the *Oath*, medical instruction was regarded as the 'transmission' (*metadosis*) of knowledge divided into '[written] precepts, [oral] discourse (*akroasis*), and all other learning.'[69] 'Written precepts' supposedly designate texts, similar to the tracts later assembled into the Corpus.[70] The 'other learning' could comprise the numerous practical skills necessary in medical practice.[71] Given the insistence of the *Law* on the secret knowledge, forbidden to the profane, it is tempting to regard *akroasis* as oral instruction, including the tenets not to be disclosed to the uninitiated, but mainly necessary to teach the practical aspects of the physician's craft.[72] The division of medical education into written and oral components with the written part accessible to all and the oral part concealed from non-members, may reflect the duality of ancient medicine. It was both an intellectual pursuit engaging philosophers and educated laymen in general, and a craft to be perpetuated by practical training.[73]

The coexistence of extensive writing and reading with the requirement of personal apprenticeship, based on the oral transmission of knowledge between a master and a

68 Long preparation and multiple stages of initiations: Scarpi (2002), 1, 160–168; Ustinova (2018), 126–129; on two-stage initiations into the Eleusinian and Samothracian mysteries, see Lehmann (1969), 2, 14–15; Burkert (1983), 268, 275; Cole (1984), 26–36; Clinton (2003), 50; Dimitrova (2008), 78; Bremmer (2014), 11–16; children's initiations: Cole (1993), 288–290; Ustinova (2018), 195.

69 *Jusj.*1b: Παραγγελίης τε καὶ ἀκροήσιος καὶ τῆς λοιπῆς ἁπάσης μαθήσιος μετάδοσιν.

70 Galen alleged that Hippocrates started writing down some doctrines of his predecessors, because before him, these teachings were transmitted only orally (Nutton (2004), 61).

71 Aristotle (*EN* 1181b) was convinced that medical treatises were useful only to experienced physicians (Kudlien (1970a), 6). On the inadequacy of written texts as a basis for medical practices, see Dean-Jones (2003), 110–111.

72 The term is rare and occurs only in two deontological texts, the *Oath* and the *Precepts* (von Staden (2007), 440). In Hellenistic Histria and Perge, physicians gave public lectures called *akroaseis* (Samama (2003), 197–198; 439–442, Nos. 98, 341, both honorary decrees are second-century), and oratorial skills were indeed helpful to physicians (Edelstein (1967b), 100–104; Jouanna (2012), 39–53). However, a reference to the attendance of such lectures by the physician's pupils would sound odd, and thus in the *Oath* this term is probably used to denote oral instruction. It is noteworthy that in Aristotle's school, *akroasis* was intended for advanced students and not for the general public (Ducatillon (2001), 43).

73 Temkin (1977), 137–153; Cohn-Haft (1956), 15.

disciple, was not unique to the Hippocratics.[74] The diffusion of written texts was difficult to control, and therefore secret doctrines were best passed on orally. In any case, the division of medical *metadosis* into three categories was important enough to be explicitly stated in the *Oath*.

Every art could have its secrets, and they were often transmitted from father to his son or apprentice,[75] but none resembled the formal rules maintained by the Hippocratics. Furthermore, the emphasis on the special purity of the members, the requirement of formal initiations and the perception of adherence to a profession as a commitment equal to participation in mystery rites are unique to the Hippocratic community. Most significantly, these obligations of the Asclepiads are attested to explicitly or implicitly in several texts of the Corpus and in the later tradition, and therefore, cannot be dismissed as characteristic of a very small esoteric group.[76] However, the social circumstances reflected in the *Oath* and the *Law* did not last, and during the Hellenistic period, the education and activities of physicians were organised in a different manner. The practical stipulations of the *Oath* became obsolete, and only its ethical gist was considered binding.

In summary, in the fifth and fourth centuries, the Hippocratic community regarded itself as a fraternity, fostering familial bonds between physicians and their mentors. Certain aspects of medical knowledge were concealed from the public and probably transmitted orally; other parts were documented in writing. The physicians maintained that their lifestyle was pure and differed from the life of regular people, and admittance to the fraternity of professional physicians was probably marked as an initiation rite.

THE ITALIAN BACKGROUND

As we have already seen, clan-based organisations of physicians existed in the Greek world, and the Asclepiads were not unique in this respect. However, beginning in the fifth century, they had to cope with a new challenge, the growing need for trained physicians.[77] The number of their biological sons did not meet the demand, and the Asclepiads had to seek an alternative solution. The Italiote philosophical associations were exclusive enough to allow the perpetuation of secrecy, but their members were unrelated by blood. I propose

[74] Even if esoteric teachings, intended for the selected few, were not an all-around alternative philosophic system, the very existence of Plato's oral teachings, different from the ideas put forward in his written work (Arist. *Ph.* 209b15, cf. *Metaph.* 1. 6, 987a–988a), is difficult to doubt: Robin (1935), 17, 32, 330; Rosen (1968), xv– xxvi; Sayre (1988); Rowe (2003), 23–24, 196-200; Kahn (2001), 58–62; Ustinova (2018), 323–324. For a survey of this approach see Richard (1986), 29–35; Ferber (2007), 82–84.

[75] Jones (1924), 56; Kudlien (1970a), 5; Deichgräber (1971), 101–102; Sigerist (1961), 85; Harris (2020), 33, 55; Jouanna (1999), 43–46. In other crafts, sons often continued their fathers' trades, but there were no rigid regulations; for comparison with other *technitai* see Craik (2014), 33–34; Harris (2020). In the Babylonian medical tradition, families of scholars were an important channel of transmission of medical knowledge, and accepted outside students, and in Egypt, the Papyrus Ebers mentions a secret therapeutic method that could only be disclosed by a father to his son (Geller (2004), 14), but no obligating rules similar to those adopted by the Asclepiads are attested to.

[76] See note 7 above.

[77] Jouanna (1999), 47–48, see also note 36 above.

that some features of these associations were adopted by the Asclepiads who had to adjust their family-like community to the changing conditions.

The *Oath* and the *Law* contain allusions to the cultural context which gave rise to the ideas of a medical fraternity, keeping its knowledge in secret and regarding admittance as an initiation rite. Decades ago, L. Edelstein associated some elements of this cultural context, particularly as reflected in the *Oath,* with the Pythagoreans,[78] drawing attention to Magna Graecia and its impact on the Hippocratic school.

It should be noted that the Italiote medical tradition became famous before the Hippocratics. Galen praised physicians from Italy.[79] The famous Democedes of Croton, the son of a doctor, was active in the sixth century, and Herodotus regarded him the most skillful physician of his time.[80] Sombrotides, the son of Mandrocles, a sixth-century physician from Megara Hyblaea, was successful enough to be honoured with an expensive *kouros* as his funerary monument, and might also have belonged to a family of physicians.[81] It is quite possible that the Hippocratics were aware of the ideas and activities of their illustrious colleagues in Magna Graecia.

We will first review Edelstein's ideas, and then look at the evidence on the Pythagoreans and another South Italian philosophic school, the Eleatics, from the perspective of the *Law*. Finally, Empedocles' approach to healing will support the conclusions regarding the role of cultic ideas and practices in the transmission of medical knowledge in Magna Graecia.

The Pythagoreans

Pythagoras and his following practised healing, but technical aspects of therapy and surgery did not attract their attention.[82] The Pythagoreans put an emphasis on lifestyle and based their ideas on a complex set of ethical and religious ideas concerning the proper diet, regime of purifications, and rules of behaviour.[83] Pythagoras' gift of chasing away pestilences, and treating sick souls by using charms, magic and *mousikē* was well-known.[84] The medical doctrines advocated by the Pythagoreans were part of their broad vision of the cosmos and society, and consisted of concrete rules ensuing from their doctrines.[85]

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78 Edelstein (1967a, originally published in 1943).

79 Gal. *De methodo medendi* 1. 1 (X. 5 Kühn); Primavesi (2009), 29–30.

80 Hdt. 3. 131; Griffith (1987); Lane Fox (2020), 51–56.

81 *SEG* 14. 599; Pugliese Carratelli (1996), 676 No. 75; Samama (2003), 547, No. 511. The doctor's name, deriving from σῶς ('safe' or 'sound') indicates that his craft could be handed down within the family (Pugliese Carratelli (1996), 197), since such names were particularly common among doctors (Samama (2003), 17).

82 For Pythagoras as healer see Lévy (1927), 42; de Vogel (1966), 232–244; Burkert (1972), 293; Kingsley (1995), 327–331, 342; Thorn (1995), 213–214.

83 Porph. *VP* 21, 42–45; Iambl. *VP* 68–70, 85; D.L. 8. 18–19; Kouloumentas (2016).

84 Porph. *VP* 33; Iambl. *VP* 64, 163. For the use of music for magical purposes by Pythagoreans, see Boyancé (1937), 100–131; Dodds (1973), 154; Detienne (1963), 47–48; Hermann (2004), 105.

85 Kouloumentas (2016), 249. To what extent Pythagorean dietetics influenced Hippocratic views on the regimen, is debatable: Bartoš (2015).

The Pythagorean lifestyle was extremely peculiar, and its similarity to the stipulations of the *Oath* requires explanation. In the Greek world, the perception of the teacher as a father, and community members as brothers, as described in the *Oath*, is known only among the Pythagorean community.[86] Some other clauses of the *Oath* reveal additional connections with the Pythagorean circles, most notably forswearing the use of poison, and shunning surgery and abortions. All these actions were acceptable in ancient Greece, with the Pythagoreans being the only exception.[87] In particular, other Hippocratic texts refer to medical advice on abortion.[88] While the section concerning 'purity and holiness' of the physician's life and work[89] was much too strict for a mere professional, it is somewhat paralleled by the uncompromising Pythagorean ethical code.

Sharing one's income with their teacher is reminiscent of the attitude toward property within the Pythagorean association. The earliest report on the Pythagorean rule for common property dates back to the fourth century, and despite the obscure details, this practice probably originated in the time of the great master.[90] In addition, Pythagoras' own house was known as 'the house of mysteries,'[91] and similar to participants in mystery cults, the Pythagorean brotherhood shared common secrets not to be disclosed to the uninitiated, and required elaborate initiations.[92]

Edelstein's observations on the Pythagorean affinities to the *Oath* are accepted nowadays by several historians of ancient medicine.[93] It is to be emphasised that common features do not imply identity, and in my opinion, the *Oath* is not a 'Pythagorean document,' but shows some Pythagorean influence.[94] It is noteworthy that Croton, the seat

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86 D.S. 10. 11; Edelstein (1967a), 43–46.

87 Edelstein (1967a), 9–20; Nutton (2004), 68. On the attitude to abortion and assisted suicide in the Classical world see Carrick (2001), 84–85; Totelin (2020); Kapparis (2002), esp. 66–76, 170–194 in connection to the *Oath*. In some circumstances taking one's life was respected or even praised, hence the distinction between honorable and cowardly suicide (Garrison (1991); Yoshitake (1994), 145). The statistics of suicides in Greece are arbitrary (van Hooff (1990), 236–237), but taking one's life seems to have been rare.

88 Jouanna (1999), 27 observes that an abortifacient (ἐκβόλιον), mentioned twice in *On the Nature of Woman* and nine times in *On Diseases of Women,* was recommended in cases when the fetus was dead or abnormal. However, in *On the Nature of the Child* (13) the physician advises on abortion for a healthy girl (King (1998), 136).

89 *Jusj.* 4: Ἁγνῶς δὲ καὶ ὁσίως διατηρήσω βίον τὸν ἐμὸν καὶ τέχνην τὴν ἐμήν.

90 Timae. *FGrHist* 566 fr. 13; Iamb. *VP* 72; D.S. 10. 3. 5; Riedweg (2005), 101–102; Edelstein (1967a), 45.

91 Iamb. *VP* 143, cf. Timae. *FGrHist* 566 fr.131.

92 Burkert (1972), 179; Riedweg (2005), 98–104; Morrison (1956), 149–152; Bremmer (1995), 65-70; Casadesús (2016), 2. Simmel (1906), 474, discussing the difficulty of learning the techniques for keeping secrets, cites the example of the Pythagoreans.

93 Sigerist (1961), 94–99, esp. 99 ('since Edelstein's epoch-making study there cannot be any doubt that the so-called Hippocratic Oath was a Pythagorean document'); Phillips (1973), 116; Gourevitch (1984), 258; Carrick (2001), 84–100, esp. 88 ('conditioned by Pythagorean influences'); Ducatillon (2001), 60–61 (Pythagorean, or rather Neopythagorean, influence); Craik (2015), 149.

94 Lichtenthaeler 1984 opposes Edelstein's approach and underscores the common tradition shared by the *Oath* and other Hippocratic works; however, he consents that the *Oath* shows some Pythagorean impact; see also Kapparis (2002), 66. Those arguing that the *Oath* was not

of the Pythagorean covenant, was also home to some important physicians, most significantly Alcmaeon, a philosopher close to the Pythagoreans and a renowned medical thinker, famous for his empirical investigations in physiology.[95] His ideas on the role of the brain, for example, apparently influenced the Hippocratics, as did some other notions.[96] As mentioned above, Croton was the native city of the great Democedes, praised by Herodotus.

We can only guess how Pythagorean ideas reached the Hippocratic circles, and how the text of the *Oath* evolved before it was recorded. It is, however, significant that the Pythagoreans and the Asclepiads were the only two Greek societies showing a profound interest in medicine, that displayed similarities in their approach to community organisation, such as property-sharing, mystery-like admission into their ranks, secrecy, and purity norms.

The Eleatics

The author of the *Law* contrasts knowledge and opinion: ‘These are two things, knowledge (*epistēmē*) and opinion (*doxa*), the former causing knowing, and the latter ignorance.’[97] Immediately after this statement, he abruptly stops his discourse on medical practice and pronounces: ‘Things that are holy are revealed to holy men.’ Clearly, in his eyes, the judgment of charlatans and laymen was merely an opinion, and the knowledge of the Hippocratics was real and holy. This contrast brings to mind Parmenides’ worldview, namely the distinction between truthful divine knowledge, based on mystical reality (*alētheia,* ‘truth’) and revealed to the chosen few, and misleading human opinion, based on perception and appearance (*ta dokounta* or *doxa*, ‘things that seem’ or ‘opinion’).[98]

Parmenides founded a philosophical association that flourished from the sixth century BCE till the first century CE in the Greek colony Elea in South Italy, and was involved in medical activities. The association owned a large building with a subterranean chamber, cryptoporticus, which yielded herms with inscriptions referring to heads of the school as

influenced by the Pythagoreans since on certain issues it does not conform to the Pythagorean teaching (von Staden (1996b), 409; Miles (2005), 29–30; Kudlien (1970b); Leven (2018), 172–174; Lane Fox (2020), 81), overlook the possibility of impact rather than full-scale adoption of ideas.

95 D.L. 8. 83; Kudlien (1970a), 4–5; Longrigg (1993), 47–62 (hesitant regarding the extent of Alcmaeon’s Pythagorean connections); Lane Fox (2020), 57–62; Holton (2022), 74, 106–107.

96 Flashar (2016), 19; other notions: Kudlien (1970a), 4–5; Sigerist (1961), 103–104; Longrigg (1993), 48; Jouanna (1999), 262.

97 *Lex* 4: Δύο γὰρ, ἐπιστήμη τε καὶ δόξα, ὧν τὸ μὲν ἐπίστασθαι ποιέει, τὸ δὲ ἀγνοεῖν.

98 *DK* 28. B1 31-32, B8. 51, B19. 1; White (2005), 67–74; Mourelatos (2008), 194–197.

iatroi, healers or physicians, and *phōlarchoi,* 'lords of the den.'[99] The herm of Parmenides himself states that it portrays 'Parmenides son of Pyres *Ouliadēs phusikos.*'[100]

The title *phusikos* on the herm of Parmenides the Ouliad should not be taken to mean that he was merely an inquirer into nature, which was the neutral standard sense of the word.[101] In Italy in particular, the word *phusikos* implies healing and magical activities.[102] The word *phōleos* means 'den', 'lair', or 'hole,' usually underground;[103] *phōleuein* is 'to live or hide in a cave or a hole, to hibernate.'[104] Strabo uses the word *phōleos* to describe the *iatromanteion* at Acharaca, near Tralles in Asia Minor, where the priests and some chosen patients received instructions on their healing.[105] A notable Elean dedication to Apollo appears to have been offered by 'Ouliad the healer-prophet.'[106] The pholarchs in Elea probably used their cryptoporticus as a place of recurrent ritual withdrawal in order to attain revelatory visions on healing, among other matters.[107]

The name of all those who headed the association, Oulis, is meaningful. Apollo Oulios is an Ionian healing deity worshipped in Miletus, on Delos and elsewhere.[108] One of the statues discovered in the Elean complex has been identified as a representation of Apollo Oulios.[109] The cult of this god must have been imported to Elea from Italy by the first settlers. Oulis is a theophoric name recorded in several cities, and this name may have been adopted by every head of the Eleatics upon taking office.[110] *Ouliadēs* in respect to Apollo Oulios means a follower of vocation and worshipper, similar to *Asclepiadēs* in respect to Asclepius, and the Ouliads were probably regarded as a clan, like the

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99 Publication of the complex: Fabbri and Trotta (1989); inscriptions: Vecchio (2003), Nos. 22–24. The term *phōlarchos*, as well as the pholarch's functions, are discussed in a number of works: Pugliese Carratelli (1970); Pugliese Carratelli (1963); Pugliese Carratelli (1990); Nutton (1970); Musitelli (1980); Kingsley (1995), 225; Ustinova (2004); Ustinova (2009), 191–199.

100 Vecchio (2003), No. 21; cf. *SEG* 38. 1020; *SEG* 39. 1078; Masson (1988), 176, figs. 1–3; Fabbri and Trotta (1989), 69–75.

101 Nutton (1970), 218; Flint et al. (1999), 100; Pugliese Carratelli (1986), 109.

102 Ustinova (2009), 195–196. *Phusikoi* as physicians: Nutton (1970), 218; *phusikoi* and magic see Mauss (1972), 143, cf. Flint et al. (1999), 100.

103 Musitelli (1980). Pugliese Carratelli (1970), 245; Ustinova (2004), 29.

104 Ustinova (2004); Ustinova (2009), 191–199.

105 Strabo 14. 1. 44; Ustinova (2009), 86–87.

106 Οὖλις [—] ἰατρο·μ[αντ—] Ἀπολλω[—], Vecchio (2003), No. 20, cf. *SEG* 53. 114; Ebner (1970), 262; Pugliese Carratelli (1970), 247; Fabbri and Trotta (1989), 69.

107 Ustinova (2009), 197–199. For other interpretations of the function of *phōleos* in Elea: Pugliese Carratelli (1970), 245. Musitelli (1980), 253–254; McKay (2000), 11; Kingsley (1999).

108 Str. 14. 1. 6; Suid. s.v. *Oulios*; Macr. 1. 17. 21. Cf. Oppermann (1942); Benedum (1971); Masson (1988).

109 Schneider (1998).

110 Benedum and Michler (1971), 299 regard the Ouliads as a *genos*. In their opinion, the name Ouliades was hereditary in this *genos* of Eleatic philosophers, traditionally worshippers of Apollo Oulios, to which Parmenides belonged.

Asclepiads.[111] The founder of the Eleatic school Parmenides *Ouliadēs* adopted his disciple Zeno, perhaps emphasizing the gentilic nature of the association.[112]

It is noteworthy that like the Hippocratics, the Ouliads traveled throughout the Mediterranean, for instance, a fifth-century tombstone from Olbia on the Black Sea coast belongs to [O]ulios son of [Th]eodotos from Elea.[113] This Eleaen Oulios may have been one of the Ouliads and a practicing healer.

Initiation ceremonies were probably required for admission into the Eleatic association. In Parmenides' *proem,* the philosopher's journey is depicted as a drive of the initiate to the world of the beyond, where the goddess discloses to him the ultimate truth. This journey is undertaken by a youth, *kouros*, of an age that was, traditionally, the time for the most significant transition rites in the life of a Greek man.[114] The element of initiation into mystery rites is evident in the unveiling of the hidden ultimate truth to the *kouros*.

However, before meeting the goddess, the *kouros* had already been 'the man who knows' and had travelled the road which 'lies far from the paths of men,'[115] implying that he possessed secret knowledge concealed from ordinary mortals.[116] The *proem* appears to suggest two stages of initiations, the earlier stage endowing the select few with the ability to take the mystical road to the goddess, and the advanced stage comprising the ultimate revelation. Parmenides seems to refer to the *kouros'* apprenticeship preceding the life-changing mystical experience.[117] It is probable, therefore, that in the Eleatic association and the Hippocratic fraternity, the initiations consisted of two sets of transition rites, at the beginning and the end of the lengthy studies.

Although the head of the Eleatics was called *iatros*, and they performed the cult of Apollo Oulios, it was primarily a philosophical association.[118] The medical art of the healer-prophet, or revealer of healing remedies, practiced by the Ouliads, was different from that of most Asclepiads, but no less respectable.[119] Inscriptions of the Ouliads, discovered in the Elean complex, reveal some essential facets of this school, such as their devotion to the cult of the ancestor healing god, their activities as healers, and their understanding of scientific and philosophical knowledge as a way to attain mastery over

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111 Pugliese Carratelli (1970), 246; Masson (1988), 180; Burkert (2004), 55.

112 D.L. 9. 25.

113 Vinogradov (2000).

114 Verdenius (1948), 119; Burkert (1969), 14; Kingsley (1999), 71–74; Morgan (2000), 74; Palmer (2009), 57–58. See, however, Tarán (1965), 16; Cordero (2004), 24 for different interpretations of the word *kouros*.

115 *DK* 28 B1. 27; Verdenius (1948), 120; Burkert (1969), 5; Kingsley (1999), 62, 71–75.
According to Tarán (1965), 30, the wording of the *proem* suggests that the journey was undertaken by the author on multiple occasions; cf. Couloubaritsis (1986), 92; Coxon (1986), 161.

116 Coxon (1986), 15–16 suggests that this qualification assumes the *kouros*' adherence to an association resembling the Pythagorean community. On mystery cults and Parmenides, see Kingsley (1999), 71–74; Seaford (2004), 262–265; Palmer (2009), 58; Casadesús (2016), 3.

117 Ustinova (2009), 205–206.

118 Nutton (1970); Pugliese Carratelli (1970), 246; Benedum (1971), 929–935; Rawson (1985), 30–31; Morel (2000), 43–44.

119 Nutton (1970), 217–218; A. *Eu.* 62, *Supp.* 263.

natural forces. The Ouliads of Elea and the Asclepiads of Cos differed in their scientific and philosophic views, but shared an interest in natural philosophy and healing, an organisational pattern of a cultic association worshipping a healer god, and the age-old tradition of handing down professional knowledge, especially secret knowledge of magic and healing, within quasi-gentilic structures performing initiations of new members.

Empedocles

The title *iatros* could bestow much honour on its bearers: Empedocles listed healers and prophets among the noblest incarnations a human soul can reach.[120] He probably regarded himself as a healer, and his biography and poems persuaded Galen, who mentions Empedocles together with Hippocrates as an expert in medicine, and Pliny, who considered him an expert in both medicine and magic.[121] Diogenes Laertius and Suda attribute to him *iatrikoi logoi,* treatises on medicine.[122] In any case, Empedocles boasted of being able to offer a word of healing prophecy (*baxis*) for every kind of illness.[123] Empedocles' belief in his power was so great that in his verses, he proudly claimed to provide defence against old age, change the direction of the winds, and bring the dead back from Hades.[124] There were even some witnesses who reported having seen this healer-prophet practising sorcery (*goēteouōn*).[125] In addition, he wrote on cosmology and shared with the Hippocratics the idea that human health was governed by the same natural order as the cosmos.[126]

Empedocles claims that his poems were inspired by the Muse, who required strict self-censorship: some things were not suitable 'for creatures of the day to hear.' The poems were written as an instruction to a disciple, whom Empedocles urged to keep the esoteric teaching 'mute in his breast.'[127] Ch.H. Kahn assumes that 'the partial nature of the

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120 *DK* 31 B146–7; on the high status of Archaic *iatroi* see Dean-Jones (2003), 101.

121 Gal. *De placitis Hippocratis,* 7; Plin. *Nat.* 29. 1. 3; 30. 2. 9; Sigerist (1961), 104–106; Vegetti (1998); Nutton (2004), 46–47; Primavesi (2009), 30–32. It is against the conventional view, that Empedocles was a philosopher-physician, that the author of *Ancient Medicine* protests (Hp. *VM* 20).

122 *DK* 31 A2; Suda s.v. *Empedocles*; D.L. 8. 77; Vegetti (1998), 291–292.

123 *DK* 31 B112, D.L. 8. 62; Primavesi (2009), 31; *baxis* means 'oracular saying': Lloyd (2003), 26.

124 *DK* 31 B111, D.L. 8. 59. The fragment caused a vivid ongoing controversy (see Todoua (2005), with bibliography); van Groningen 1956 even considers it unauthentic. For the refutation of the attempts to consider Empedocles' claims not in a literal sense, but rather as allegories, see Burkert (1972), 153–154; Kingsley (1995), 217–232. On the importance of this passage as the core of Empedocles' creed, especially in the light of the Strasbourg papyrus, see Todoua (2005).

Cf. the attack of the Hippocratic author of *On the Sacred Disease* against impious rogues and their claims; Lloyd (1979), 37.

125 D.L. 8. 59; Philostr. *VA* 1. 2; Plin. *Nat.* 30. 1. 9; cf. Graf (1997), 33–34; Dickie (2001), 32; Todoua (2005), 58–59. Kingsley (1995), 220; Lloyd (2003), 24–27.

126 The Hippocratics as 'cosmological doctors:' Camden (2023); on the impact of Empedocles' ideas on the humoral theory: Sigerist (1961) 108; 322; Primavesi (2009), 34; Camden (2023), 70–71.

127 *DK* 31 B3, 111, Kingsley (2002), 347.

revelation makes one think of a preliminary initiation, which reserves the final disclosure for a later *epopteia.*'[128] Accordingly, Empedocles's poems reflect two stages of initiation, the last one reminiscent of *epopteia,* literally 'beholding,' which is the final stage of mystery rites, and a technical term referring to the second stage at Eleusis and on Samothrace.[129] The initiation entails strict adherence to Empedocles' ideas of purity, and endows the disciple with the superhuman abilities of the teacher.[130] Thus, Empedocles' teaching and Greek mystery cults share a number of basic characteristics: secrecy of the central tenets, gradual admission of the initiate to them, the importance of ritual purity, and most significantly, the mystical nature of the doctrine.[131] He also practised healing and was proud of his accomplishments.

After Empedocles, the Sicilian 'choir of doctors' flourished during the fifth century, and produced several brilliant doctors, among them Philistion, who influenced Plato and Diocles of Carystus.[132] Many tenets of this school, most notably the theory of four elements, were adopted and developed by the Hippocratics.[133]

THE HIPPOCRATICS, MAGNA GRAECIA, AND MYSTERY RITES

Although healer-philosophers of Magna Graecia put a great emphasis on *iatromanteia*, treatment by music and spells, and other traditional methods that were less popular with their colleagues in the Aegean,[134] the Hippocratics resembled them in many respects. The Asclepiads of Cos and the Ouliads of Elea seem to have been organised as *genē* focused on cults of divine progenitors, practiced various rituals, and restricted access to the core doctrines exclusively to the initiated. Pythagoras and his disciples insisted on special ritual purity, Empedocles echoed these ideas, and the Hippocratics underscored the purity and sacredness of those who were allowed access to medical wisdom. The Hippocratic community, the Ouliads, and Empedocles probably required two-stage initiation into their circle. Most substantially, in all these schools, including the Hippocratic school, real knowledge belonged to the initiated, and writings, even if abundant, were intended for the profane. Reading and free discourse with experts could serve as a shortcut to an opinion or an illusion of knowledge, but the path to the truth and excellence in the art had to be long and pass through initiations.

One reason for this organisational, ritual, and ideological similarity may have been the perception of the family as the basic unit of society, and the ensuing notion that all the other structures are somehow based on family ties, real or imagined. This resulted in the clan-like structure of the associations of healers and thinkers, modelled on the aristocratic *genē*.[135] Another factor to consider is the significant role of the family lineage in the transmission of professional knowledge, especially in healing, which requires long

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128 Kahn (1960), 8.
129 Ustinova (2018), 337; above, note 68.
130 Kingsley (1995), 360–363; Casadesús (2016), 3.
131 Kingsley (1995), 367–368; Parker (1995), 499; Ustinova (2009), 215. On philosophical doctrines as mystic revelations see Seaford (2004), 227–229; Ustinova (2018), 339–340.
132 Born in Locri, but often referred to as 'Sicilian' (D.L. 8. 8. 86, 89).
133 Sigerist (1961), 108–109; Primavesi (2009).
134 On the peculiarities of 'western Greek medical art' see Kudlien (1967), 36.
135 Cf. Nutton (1995a), 19 on 'medical education in terms of family units.'

apprenticeship and practical experience. As a result, medical associations of the fifth and fourth centuries preserved and codified archaic family- or clan-like notions and norms of behaviour. In this respect, the West of the Greek world did not differ much from the East.

In contrast, the perception of the transmission of knowledge and its division into truthful or real *versus* superficial or misleading indicates a different rapport. It was in Magna Graecia of the late sixth–fifth century that the notion of ultimate or divine knowledge as a great secret to be disclosed only to the select few, following extensive studies, was articulated in intellectual circles and institutionalised within societies of philosophers-healers, most notably the Pythagoreans and the Eleatics.[136] In other words, the combination of the mystery tradition with the intellectual quest, including a significant emphasis on healing, took place in South Italy. Some specifically Pythagorean ideas (opposing suicide and abortion) and customs (sharing resources and financially supporting the master), attested to in the *Oath*, hint at the same direction.

In addition, the Italian associations, founded in historical times, could not insist on adherence to gentilic principles, even if the Ouliads perpetuated the illusion of common origin. Thus, they had to invent a different way of fostering the common identity, which could serve as a model for the Asclepiads in their attempt to adapt to the changing social environment. It is, therefore, not surprising that some Hippocratics were fascinated by the practices and ideas of their Italian colleagues and appear to have combined them with the traditional concept of the Asclepiads as a *genos*.

The notion that healing, a practical art of vital importance, attained through long learning, was open only to the chosen few and after initiations, worked well because of several social and cognitive reasons. First, secrecy defines the boundary between those who possess the concealed knowledge and those who do not, and creates an aura of special power bestowed by this knowledge; as G. Simmel puts it, 'secrecy gives the person enshrouded by it an exceptional position.'[137] Secrecy is instrumental in creating reciprocal confidence, intimacy, and collective identity,[138] and could reinforce the perception of the Hippocratic community as a quasi-family unit. The belief in the formidable efficacy of the arcane knowledge of the Asclepiads probably had a considerable cognitive impact on the patients and their families, and could be helpful in the competition between doctors and traditional healers.[139] Secrets impress, and a healer using undisclosable knowledge

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136 In the fourth century, the opposition of revelation to experiential perception played a prominent role in Plato's ideas, and it is congenial to the Hellenic and Attic cultic tradition of mystery revelation: Riedweg (1987), passim, esp. 22–28; Rowe (1998), 193; Morgan (1990), 86–89; Bussanich (1999); Gómez Iglesias (2016).

137 Simmel (1906), 464. See Simmel (1906) on secrecy and secret societies as a universal sociological form; Manderson et al. (2015), 184; Tefft (1980), 37 on secret knowledge and power; Bowden (2015) on secret knowledge in Greek religion; Blakely (2012) on the application of the anthropological perspective regarding secrecy to an analysis of a Greek mystery rite.

138 Simmel (1906), 472–475; Manderson et al. (2015), 184.

139 Cognitive impact, similar to the placebo effect: Sliwinski and Elkins (2013); competition: Edelstein (1967b), 88–89; Laskaris (2002), 33. For the importance of social context in generating and enhancing positive results of Hippocratic treatment, which was often ineffective or even harmful in terms of modern biomedicine, see Demand (1999); McKeown (2002).

and claiming special purity had a better chance to cure the patient. Thus, possession of concealed knowledge empowered the initiated, both in their own eyes and in the eyes of society, especially the patients and their families.

Second, initiatory rites implied exclusiveness which was advantageous for the Hippocratics in their competition with other medical practitioners, whom they presented as charlatans. In addition, the existence of the medical fraternity provided a convenient network for itinerant physicians.

Third, in the cultural climate of the fifth century, when mystery cults were flourishing everywhere,[140] initiations fitted well into the social and cultural environment in every Greek city. Practices perceived as mystery rites merged easily with the quasi-familial organisation of the Asclepiads also because Greek mysteries were rooted in tribal and gentilic cults,[141] and the entailing congruency of the procedures resulted in a natural fusion.

Finally, physicians adhering to the Hippocratic tradition could differ not only in their views, as reflected in the written tradition, but also in their careers and education. It is important to recognise the diversity in the training of Hippocratic physicians and their compliance with the stipulations of the *Oath* and the *Law*.

CONCLUSIONS

This analysis suggests that by the end of the fifth century, practising Hippocratic physicians were organised in an association that acted according to formal statutes. In the fourth century, its members probably addressed their colleagues as brothers, *ēdelphismenoi iētroi*. The association was based on the assumed common origin from Asclepius, and a common cult, apparently of the deities mentioned in the opening lines of the *Oath*. The Hippocratics were required to adhere to strict norms of ritual and moral purity, allowing them to regard themselves as *hieroi anthrōpoi, hagnoi* and *hosioi.*

The apprenticeship was long, and ideally began in the childhood of the aspiring physician. Medical *metadosis* included the study of written texts, practical expertise, and oral tradition, presumably of esoteric knowledge prohibited to the uninitiated.

It appears that the physician had to undergo rites of passage on two occasions. The first initiation was performed when he started his studies as a boy or adolescent; the second one followed years of apprenticeship and signified his becoming a full-fledged physician. After the first initiation, the novice became a 'pupil under contract and oath according to the *nomos* of the physicians,' and could be exposed to secret medical doctrines. The second initiation was a prerequisite to admittance to the association and an official act, after which the member was acknowledged as an *ēdelphismenos iētros.* The second ritual likely included swearing the *Oath.*

The combination of a two-stage initiation into esoteric wisdom, quasi-familial ties between the master and his disciples and the emphasis on healing as a lofty vocation, is characteristic of the associations of philosophers and healers in Magna Graecia, in particular the Pythagoreans, the Eleatics, and the followers of Empedocles. It is possible

140 Burkert (1987); Scarpi (2002); Bowden (2010); Bremmer (2014).

141 Casadio and Johnston (2009), 6.

that the Hippocratics adopted these concepts from the Italiote associations and combined them with the norms of the Asclepiad clans of Cos and Cnidus.

The emphasis on ritual aspects, such as secrecy and purity, squares well with the long survival of therapeutic approaches common to Hippocratic medicine and traditional healing cults, first and foremost cleansing. The organisation into a brotherhood performing complex initiation rites is essential for understanding the social aspects of healthcare in Classical Greece. Though society at large had no criteria to distinguish competent doctors from frauds, the physicians themselves easily recognised properly initiated colleagues, and could even have had signs of their initiation.[142] This would be the ancient equivalent of the modern-day diploma hanging on the wall.

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[142] To preserve the memory of the rite, in many Greek mystery cults the initiated learned cryptic *sumbola* or *sunthēmata* of their distinction; in some cases, they kept material tokens of it: Burkert (1987), 45–47.

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