Introduction

Writings by Hippocrates are evidence of ancient knowledge of diseases of the female genitalia transmitted orally at the time.(Andò 2000, 44ss. Vd. Eurip., Ph., 293 ss.,)(Flashar 1997, 16ss). Medical practices and remedies using plants to promote fertility, contraception, abortion, and neonatal care were common and recognized fields of knowledge since prehistoric times. Older women functioned as obstetricians assisting childbirth in some rituals using spells or incantations, sometimes with the help of the presence of the goddess Hannahanna(3). (Haas 2003, I, 4s.).

The moment of birth is documented in a few mummies from ancient Egypt, which show clear signs of maternal-fetal dystocia with the fetus trapped in the pelvic cavity and vesicle-perianal lacerations(4). (Cosmacini 1997, 46-7). Other evidence of the importance of the moment of birth is confirmed by small coroplast art in the Corinthian sanctuary of Lapithos, illustrating a mother giving birth assisted by two women, now in the Cyprus museum(5). (Vegetti 1965, 161-62).

Typical images of the mother in the popular imagination of the time are seen in the figure from Megara Iblea of a woman breastfeeding two babies in swaddling clothes(6) (Arias 1967, N. 326, 230). In Sicily there is evidence that the “kourotrophos” in the ancient world(7) (Hadzisteliou Price 1978, Iss., 5-9) accompanied every phase of a child’s existence even before birth from the embryonic stage to birth.

ABSTRACT

Introduction: Medical art in Greece was not exclusively male. The involvement of women in the field of medicine has been documented in several early cultures.

Material and methods: Archaeological findings, artistic representations and written sources reveal the feminine presence in medical care in Greece.

Results: The history of the childbirth assistance demonstrate the presence of women as obstetricians assisting childbirth in some rituals, sometimes with the help of the presence of the goddess Hannahanna. It is clearly explain the role of women in the myth sphere. In the actions of the gods, the ceremonies highlighted the introduction of a newborn in the family. In mythology we find traces to learn about the ancient sites of care and among the names of those who has it exercised the art of healing also includes several female figures.

Conclusion: In this paper, we examine the magical-therapeutic rituals that involved feminine role in Greek mythology.

Keywords: Medical Care, Women in Ancient Greece

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with the relative absence of the mother. The figure is very ancient (Hadjizadeh - Price 1978 10ss., 17 ss.), and to the Greeks the first mother was Gê (Earth) but also Rea and Demeter, Persephone’s mother and daughter of Zeus who was kidnapped by Aidoneus / Ade with Zeus’ consent. In Homer’s hymn “Demeter” the competence of the suckler and knowledge of herbs protected the newborn from poisonous substances (Seminara, 2016, p.160-161). Knowledge of magical formulas possessed by older sucklers was part of the existence of pediatric medicine in the ancient Greek world.

There are various references to Demeter as to “Kourotrrophos.” Perato’s son in Plemneo, whose children died at their first sound. Demeter took pity on him and disguised herself as a foreigner to suckle his son Ortopoli, who survived and grew up healthy. Demeter also appeared to Celeos’ daughters who went to a fountain to draw water, and with her authoritiveness struck the young girls, who then convinced their mother Metanira to give up her son born late. To make the boy immortal and protect him from poisonous herbs, Demeter raises him, anoints him with ambrosia, and at night hides him in the flames of a fire as if he were an ember.

But Metanira finds him and frustrates Demeter’s rite and her anger makes the year accursed and provokes a famine.

The myth clearly explains the role of Kourotrrophos and the atmosphere of child care, knowledge of helpful herbs, the ability to identify poisonous herbs, and the magic rituals to keep evil spirits away from newborns while attracting positive forces.

Isis and Astarte experienced the same rituals at Demeter’s hands. Isis raised Astarte, offering her fingers to the younger child to suckle instead of milk. At night Isis burned the mortal parts of the body, but the queen mother arrived suddenly and interrupted the rite so that the child would not achieve immortality. The essential elements of the rite may be traced back to the procedures used by Teti, who personally placed each of Peleo’s children to a trial of fire and immersed them in a caldron of boiling water to find out if any were immortal or kill the mortal parts of the body. By day Teti anointed the newborn with ambrosia, repeating the rite used by Demeter with Demophonte. Medea attempted the same thing by taking the children born to Jason to make them immortal, but the rite was frustrated by the father’s arrival.

Such myths verify the existence of magic curing rites, which some women had, especially priests like Medea (Caruso 2005, 341 ss.), who was related to Diodorus at the temple of Helios, and associated with the medicines of Artemis (Diod. 4. 46; 51. Magnelli 2012, 153 ss., 164 ss, 180 ss, 212-14 ). Other figures such as Metanira exemplify the aged suckler, of whom the divine Kourotrrophos was the paradigm. The magical initiation involved the use of fire, the home, and the rite was performed by an older woman. It was a magical therapeutic rite for the purpose of warding off the negative influence of evil spirits, possibly to destroy the pathologic germ, according to the principle of oriental medicine, which attributed the power of catharsis to fire as one of the cosmic elements (Delcourt 1965, 36).

All of the rites are similar on one point: the sudden arrival of a parent who frustrates the goal of immortality, thereby justifying man’s inevitable mortality. The ritual of fire seems to preserve the rite of amphidromy, which welcomed the newborn into the family. It was a complex ceremony in which the first part was cathartic, having the function of purifying the home and those who came into contact with the birth mother and child. Birth was considered impure, like death, hence the need for special rites aiming to purify the birth mother and those who assisted her, along with the tools used. Olive branches or wool bandages were hung on the door, depending on the sex of the child, to complete the catharsis. The main ceremony probably took place on the fifth day after birth. The baby who hadn’t been named yet was brought near the fire, ideally at the center of the home, according to myth in the arms of the suckler, and the other members of the family followed them. The rite of amphidromy preserved a record of the ancient ordeals of legitimacy.

The trials that Teti made Peleo’s children undergo were interpreted this way, so that if a newborn swam and didn’t burn, it would be a sign of its divine origin. After the death of six children, Peleo discovered the rite and frustrated it, and recognized the last-born child, saving the life of Achilles. The family ceremony of the newborn passing through fire served as a test of its health and capacity to survive in an environment full of dangers. If the child survived the trial of fire, it would be able to survive any future test, but if it was weak or sickly it would die. If the child was born abnormal, the amphidromy didn’t take place, and the father simply decided to make the child die. The Kourotrrophos was probably entrusted with the duty of selecting the births.
Socrates, in particular the medicine of Pythagoras, was related to the philosophical school of pre-Socrates, in the service of Persia. The figure of the cripple, described by Herodotus as prodigious, was an isolate case of Eristenea whose self-mutilation was considered distinctive signs of divinity. The Dactyls and Curetes such as the Cretan Heracles who created the Olympic Games, were dwarfs. The Moliones were Siamese twins who fought together and married two twins. Hermaphroditus was an abnormal person and the god Hephaestus was deformed - a child who was judged weak or deformed was not conserved worthy of life. Newborns also underwent the ritual of so-called washing with wine. Women soaked the baby in wine, which was believed to reveal if the child had epilepsy because there would be convulsions, while a strong and healthy baby passed the test with no convulsions. The caregivers then let the child eat everything.

In Athens minor congenital anomalies were tolerated and some deformities were considered distinctive signs of divinity. The Dactyls and Curetes such as the Cretan Heracles who created the Olympic Games, were dwarfs. The Moliones were Siamese twins who fought together and married two twins. Hermaphroditus was an abnormal person and the god Hephaestus was deformed - a child who was judged weak or deformed was not conserved worthy of life. Newborns also underwent the ritual of so-called washing with wine. Women soaked the baby in wine, which was believed to reveal if the child had epilepsy because there would be convulsions, while a strong and healthy baby passed the test with no convulsions. The caregivers then let the child eat everything.

In Sparta parents had no right regarding the life of a newborn, who was brought to a place called the Lesche, where the baby was examined by the elders of the tribe. If the baby was healthy it had to be raised, but if the child was amorphon (deformed) it was sent to a place called Apothetas, where it had no chance of surviving. Consistent with the eugenic racial principle ante litteram, a child who was judged weak or deformed was not conserved worthy of life. Newborns also underwent the ritual of so-called washing with wine. Women soaked the baby in wine, which was believed to reveal if the child had epilepsy because there would be convulsions, while a strong and healthy baby passed the test with no convulsions. The caregivers then let the child eat everything.

The rite of the cripple of Geneva, who had a serious congenital deformity, highlights the treatment of the handicapped in ancient Greece.

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In contrast, in Athens minor congenital anomalies were tolerated and some deformities were considered distinctive signs of divinity. The Dactyls and Curetes such as the Cretan Heracles who created the Olympic Games, were dwarfs. The Moliones were Siamese twins who fought together and married two twins. Hermaphroditus was an abnormal person and the god Hephaestus was deformed - a child who was judged weak or deformed was not conserved worthy of life. Newborns also underwent the ritual of so-called washing with wine. Women soaked the baby in wine, which was believed to reveal if the child had epilepsy because there would be convulsions, while a strong and healthy baby passed the test with no convulsions. The caregivers then let the child eat everything.

It's believed that the condition of being physically handicapped might connect the cripple to the divine realm, emulating Tiresius, as the name implies: “he who interprets the signs sent by the gods” in Homer or Phineus. However, blindness is a special kind of handicap that prevents the individual from seeing the earth, but put the individual in contact with the supernatural world. We have no information about other seers with different kinds of handicaps. The case of Eristenea whose self-mutilation was described by Herodotus as prodigious, was an isolated case and in any case his special powers were in the service of Persia. The figure of the cripple was related to the philosophical school of pre-Socratics, in particular the medicine of Pythagoras, which Democedes and Alcmaeon of Croton appeared to belong.

In Sicily the most famous representative was Empedocles, but according to Galeno the student of Empedocles Giorgia belonged to the same school, (Hinks 1940, 61 ss), or was a follower of Pythagoras (Dolio 2004, 119, 122, 150) - a teacher of the art of persuasion, which the physician needs to be an expert in to convince the patient of the appropriateness of the treatment. Medicine was widely practiced in Sicily, and the Agrigentum doctor Acron was known and respected even in Athens.

The oldest evidence of medical practice (6th century BC) is from the necropolis at Megara Hyblea after the Mycenaean period: the sculptured funerary head of Kouroi of Somrotidias, as stated on the inscription on the leg: “Somrotidas, you healer,” the Mandroklos (Siracusa, Museo Paolo Orsi, inv. N. 49401, Arias 1967, 214, fig. N. 303). The Kouroi offers an idea of the high social position or merits of the person to whose honor it was dedicated, just as some objects that doctors had, especially bottles for eyedroppers, one in lead from Morgantina with an Antigenes inscription, and one from Taranto with an Athens inscription (Manganaro 1996, 80 s.). The cult of Asclepius was practiced in Gela and Agrigentum in Sicily since ancient times: The physician Asclepius and Pausanias of Gela and the existence of a medical school, were reported by Acron and Empedocles.

It was also hypothesized that there were strict ties between these medical groups and the sanctuary of Asclepius (Bonanno Gorgone 1985, 232), and perhaps we may also hypothesize their role as traveling physicians (as in the tradition of Pythagoras), who contributed to important contacts and exchanges of knowledge in the ancient world. It may have been a Sicilian doctor who wanted to preserve the memory of a clinical case in a statue in his tomb, as was common among the Egyptians, who loved being buried with an image of their favorite dwarf. That practice need not be considered foreign to the Greek world, since one of the sides of Peytel’s red aryballos in the Louvre museum depicts a doctor seated in the act of performing a bloodletting, while on the other side there is a dwarf - perhaps a servant, entertaining a patient. This is another case of unguentariums on jars with komos scenes (Dasen 1997, 22). Hence the medical art in Greece was not exclusively male.

Some of the names of mythical heroines reveal the ties with medicine, such as Medea, daughter of Hekate (Cassola 1999, 469) and sister of Circe,
whose name derives from the root med- meaning good fortune in Latin, from which the word medicine also derives\(^{(22)}\) (Usener 1948, 160-163). Stavrianoupolou substituted the Greek term iatros\(^{(23)}\) (Stavrianoupolou 1999, 577 s.). Medea, the ancient mother-goddess or primordial priestess\(^{(19)}\) (Magnelli 2012, 153 ss.) was also considered a daughter of Helios, who cured the Argonauts using medicinal plants and roots, was called Polypharmakos or an expert in all kinds of medicine and a specialist in handling poisons. In Thessaly, a region rich in magical plants, Medea planted magical seeds while fleeing on a chariot of dragons\(^{(24)}\) (Musti, Torelli 2000, 311),\(^{(25)}\) (Hopfner, 1974 I, 257 s.). Medea also had the gift of prophecy, and according to Diodorus she healed Heracles from the insanity that made him kill his children at Thebes.

The first drug Kykeon reported in an epic was prepared by a woman Hecamede for Neleus and for Makaon who was mortally wounded. The blond Agamede, daughter of Augeas (wife of Mulio), was an expert on all drugs. Helen was also an expert on drugs, and had poured a pharmakon (remedy) in wine she brought from Egypt to put Telemacus and Nestor’s son to sleep to rest from their tiring voyage. Epione, a name that derives from the word epios (soothing) was a divinity who soothed pain. She was the wife of Asclepius and mother of Iaso (panacea) Akeso,\(^{(22)}\) (Usener 1948, 164), all goddesses involved in healing.

Aigele, who was sometimes the mother of Asclepius and other times the daughter, was clearly related to light and purely for the Apollonian goal, fundamental in healing diseases. Among the women of various names related to Asclepius, the principle fire was Hygieia, Asclepius’ daughter, especially venerated at Athens and present with Asclepius at Corinth\(^{(26)}\) (Lang 1977, 18 ss.). The goddess of health was depicted with Asclepius in the ancient ark of Cypselus, where on the second side some women are immortalized with pestles in hand and in the act of beating something in mortars to prepare a drug.

In the sanctuary of Oropos a part of the five-part altar was dedicated to the divinities of health: Panakeia, Iaso, and Hygieia. At Pyonia they were depicted with Aphrodite and seem to have taken on the healing powers of Pionios. Pausanias says that the altar of Apollo Paion at Oropos in the temple of Amphiaraus was divided into several parts, one dedicated to Zeus, Heracles and Paionios, another to heroes, and a third to Estia, Hermes, Amphiaraus, and Amphilocho. The fourth part of the altar was reserved to Aphrodite, Panakeia, Iaso, and Igea, and Athena Pionios. The fifth part was devoted to the Nymphs, Pan, and the rivers Achelous and Cephisus. The fountain of Amphiaraus nearby was not used for purifications. Whoever was healed by the oracle, threw silver and gold coins into the fountain. None of the soothsayers called themselves oracles unless possessed by Apollo. However, in ancient times soothsaying consisted of interpreting signs, the flight of birds, and the entrails of sacrificial victims. Amphiaraus was a seer who was expert in interpreting signs.

Whoever consulted an oracle had to first purify himself and then offer sacrifices to the god or goddess specified by name, sacrifice a ram on the altar, wrap himself in the animal’s skin, and then lie on the ground waiting for the revelation from the god during sleep\(^{(27)}\) (Musti, Beschi 2000, 397 ss.). The incubation rites and interpretation of dreams in the temple of Amphiaraus were similar to those in the temple of Asclepius. Minor healing divinities were originally local gods, incorporated in the family of those which became predominant, became invocations of Hera, Athena, and Artemis. It is said that the women of Elis prayed to Athena to make them fertile, and their request was accepted. They founded a temple to Athena with the epithet “mother”\(^{(28)}\) (Maddoli 1999, 21), a version that places the goddess in a very different light compared to the usual image of warrior, recalling her ancient function as Kourotrophos.

It’s possible that in ancient times the goddesses had specializations in treating some diseases.

The Spartan Lycurgus built a temple to thank Athena Ophthalmitis after his eye was gouged by Alcandro, and the Laconians prevented him from losing the other. Artemis was ‘a mistress of the animals’ with complex powers often identified with Demeter/Erinyes, and she too was associated with the tradition of medicine\(^{(29)}\) (Dietrich 1962, 130ss). She had healing powers, and the ancients sought her to heal them from diseases. Representations of ears and hands, gift offerings for healing prayers answered, adorned her sanctuaries. She was also associated with Apollo and Asclepius, and among those most invoked were Soteina, Lysia, Orthosia, Orthia. Along with Demeter and Iliithyia she was part of the female entourage of Asclepius.

Her special field was the diseases of women and children, and the anatomical gift offerings to her were related to maternity, pain reduction and the risks of childbirth. IG IV 1, 195 suggests her intervention in a woman’s disease. According to
Diodorus, Artemis was related to water and thermal springs, and had discovered a way to heal newborns and nourish them, hence her power as caregiver whose name was given to the herb with an unspecified value\(^{(20)}\) (Hopfer 1974, I, 287). Like the entire Apollonian trio, Artemis was invoked as Hygieia\(^{(30)}\) (Bultrighini 1993, 60, 75, 101 ss, 113) in the Orphic hymn as Diktynna who protects and speeds up the organs, melts away cares, but prosecutes madness. She was also called redoubtable in the pain of childbirth. A temple and statue at Fares were dedicated to Tyche, the most powerful of the gods in the realm of human affairs. She was mentioned in the hymn to Demeter as one of the daughters of Oceanus who played with Persephone.

Minor gods who had healing powers and were invoked as caregivers in cultural hymns, are the Nymphs, Horaе, Kalliphaeia, Synallaxis, Pegasae, Iasis, spoken name of the healer. According to the Messenians it was Zeus when just born who was taken by the Curetes to save him from his father. He was washed by the Nymph Ithome who gave her name to the nearby mountain, and Neda, from whom the name of the river is derived. Even before Apollo the premiere healing and prophetic center of Delphi, blessed with the ritual fountain of Castalia and adyton, there was the prophecy expressed by a female deity Pythia of the chthonic dragon Python killed by Apollo.

**References**

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