

CLSK5002: Research and Methods for Classics:

Exploring Sustainability in the Ancient World:

Health and Well-being in Antiquity

Seminar 1: Hippocrates: Fact or Fiction?

1. Plato, *Protagoras* 311 b-d [a dialogue between Protagoras and Socrates, early fourth century BC]

I, to test Hippocrates' grit, began examining him with a few questions. Tell me, Hippocrates, I said, in your present design of going to Protagoras and paying him money as a fee for his services to yourself, to whom do you consider you are resorting, and what is it that you are to become? Suppose, for example, you had taken it into your head to call on your namesake Hippocrates of Cos, the Asclepiad, and pay him money as your personal fee, and suppose someone asked you—Tell me, Hippocrates, in purposing to pay a fee to Hippocrates, what do you consider him to be? How would you answer that?

A doctor, I would say.

And what would you intend to become?

A doctor, he replied.

And suppose you had a mind to approach Polycleitus the Argive or Pheidias the Athenian and pay them a personal fee, and somebody asked you—What is it that you consider Polycleitus or Pheidias to be, that you are minded to pay them this money? What would your answer be to that?

Sculptors, I would reply.

And what would you intend to become?

Obviously, a sculptor.

Very well then, I said; you and I will go now to Protagoras prepared to pay him money as your fee, from our own means if they are adequate for the purpose of prevailing on him, but if not, then drawing on our friends' resources to make up the sum.

2. Plato, *Phaedrus* 270 c-d [a dialogue between Phaedrus and Socrates, early fourth century BC]

Socrates

Now do you think one can acquire any appreciable knowledge of the nature of the soul without knowing the nature of the whole man?

Phaedrus

If Hippocrates the Asclepiad is to be trusted, one cannot know the nature of the body, either, except in that way.

Socrates

He is right, my friend; however, we ought not to be content with the authority of Hippocrates, but to see also if our reason agrees with him on examination.

Phaedrus

I assent.

Socrates

Then see what Hippocrates and true reason say about nature. In considering the nature of anything, must we not consider first, whether that in respect to which we wish to be learned ourselves and to make others learned is simple or multiform, and then, if it is simple, enquire what power of acting it possesses, or of being acted upon, and by what, and if it has many forms, number them, and then see in the case of each form, as we did in the case of the simple nature, what its action is and how it is acted upon and by what?

Phaedrus

Very likely, Socrates.

3. Aristotle, *Politics* 7.1326a 15-16 [political philosophy, mid fourth century BC]

For a state like other things has a certain function to perform, so that it is the state most capable of performing this function that is to be deemed the greatest, just as one would pronounce Hippocrates to be greater, not as a human being but as a physician, than somebody who surpassed him in bodily size.

4. Soranus (of Cos? Of Ephesus?), *Life of Hippocrates* [second-sixth centuries AD]

Hippocrates, of Coan stock, was the son of Heracleidas and Phainarete. Tracing his family back to Heracles and Asclepius, he was the twentieth in line of descent from the former and the nineteenth from the latter. His lineage is mentioned by Eratosthenes, Pherecydes, Apollodorus, and Areius of Tarsus. He first studied with his father, Heracleidas, then Herodicus, and according to some, Gorgias of Leontini, the orator, and also the philosopher Democritus of Abdera. Hippocrates flourished during the period of the Peloponnesian Wars – specifically, as Isomachus says in the first book of his *On the Sect of Hippocrates*, he was born in the first year of the eightieth Olympiad [460/459 BC] and, as Soranus the Coan adds after research in the Coan archives, when Abriadas was presiding as monarchus, on the twenty-seventh day of the month of Agrianus. For this reason, he says, the Coans have honoured Hippocrates with sacrifices on that very same day, even up to the present. When he had completed his general education and was fully trained in medicine, after his parents had died, Hippocrates left his

homeland. Andreas spitefully says in his work *On the Descent of Medicine* that Hippocrates left because he had burned the archives on Cos. Others say he did so to see how things were done in the surrounding districts and to widen his experience. But as Soranus of Cos relates, a dream came to him, ordering him to settle in Thessaly. He treated all Greece and was so admired that he was summoned by the King of the Macedonians, Perdiccas, who was thought to be consumptive, to come to him at public expense with Euryphon, who was slightly older than he. Hippocrates interpreted by certain signs that the affliction was psychic in origin. For after the death of his father Alexander, Perdiccas fell in love with his mistress Phila. Hippocrates explained the situation to her after he caught Perdiccas changing colour when he looked at her. He freed him from his illness and revived him. And he was summoned by the Abderites to come to them and cure Democritus, because he was insane, and to save their whole city from the plague. But when the plague attacked the barbarians, the Illyrians and the Paeonians, and the kings of those regions begged him to come to them, Hippocrates, learning from their ambassadors what the predominant winds were there, sent them away unsuccessful. After concluding that the plague would come to Attica and foretelling what would happen, he took care of the cities and his pupils. He was such a Philhellene that when his fame reached the Persians and Artaxerxes, hearing it, begged him to come to him, making his request through Hystanes, Governor of the Hellespont, and offering great gifts, Hippocrates refused. This was due to his dignity, indifference to money, and love of home, as is shown by his letter to Hystanes. And, by begging help from the Thessalians, he saved his homeland, which was about to be attacked by the Athenians. For this he won brilliant honours from the Coans and also from the Thessalians and Argives and the Athenians. The Athenians also initiated him at public expense in the Eleusinian Mysteries – the next after Hercules – and enrolled him as a citizen and granted him and his descendants the right to dine for free in the Prytaneia. Ungrudgingly he taught his close friends the art of medicine, in accordance with his own oath. He ended his days in Larissa, at the same age that Democritus is said to have died – some say at ninety years, others eighty-five, some 104, and still others 109. He lies buried between Gyrtion and Larissa, and his tomb was still pointed out until recently. For a long time there was a bee hive on it that produced honey. When infants were afflicted with thrush, wet nurses, anointing their infants at the tomb, rid them of their disease. In many likenesses he is pictured with his head covered, as some say, by a felt cap, which is indicative of his noble birth, like Odysseus', but as others say, by his cloak. Of those who say he covered his head with his cloak, some claim that he did so for appearance's sake, since he was bald; others say it was due to some weakness of the head; still others say it was to show the necessity of guarding the site of the body's governing principle. Others say the gesture is a sign of his love of travel; others a sign of his works' lack of clarity; while some say it represents the need to guard against injuries, even in medical treatment. Finally, still others say that he is shown this way because in surgery, to prevent anything from interfering with his hands, he used to gather together the hanging portion of his cloak and place it on his head. Much disagreement has arisen about his work, and a variety of conjectures has been made. Therefore, it is not easy to give one's opinion about them because many factors cloud one's judgement – first, the problem of his name; second, the difficulty of perceiving the character of his style; third, the fact that the same man sometimes wrote powerfully, sometimes poorly, depending on his age. And it is possible to name other factors besides these. When he died he left two sons, Thessalus and Dracon, and many students, but the most notable, it is said, were his own sons.

5. Suda [encyclopaedia, tenth century AD, section on Hippocrates taken from an epitome of Hesychius of Meletus' *Onomatologos*, sixth century AD]

Hippocrates, the Coan physician, son of Heracleides. Let him be placed before his grandfather, father of Heracleides, even though he was named after him, because he constituted the stars and light of the art of medicine, which is most useful for life. And he was the descendent of Gold and his son, Fawn, themselves physicians. Hippocrates was a student first of his father and after this of Herodicus the Selymbrian and Gorgias of Leontini, an orator and philosopher. But as some say, when he was an old man, he studied with the young Democritus of Abdera. As others say, he was the student of Prodicus. And he spent time in Macedonia, for he was a good friend of King Perdiccas. After he had two sons, Thessalus and Dracon, he died, being 104 years old. He is buried in Larissa in Thessaly. In his likeness he is represented with his head covered by his cloak, which is thrown on top of his head, either because this was his habit or due to his love of travel or his own custom in surgery. This man wrote many works and was considered so distinguished by all that the king of the Persians, the one named Artaxerxes, because he needed his wisdom, wrote to Hystanes:

'King of Kings, the great Artaxerxes, to Hystanes, Governor of the Hellespont, greetings. Hippocrates, the Coan physician, descendent of Asclepius, has a skill in medicine whose fame has reached even me. Give him, then, as much gold as he wants and everything else he needs in abundance and send him to us. For he will be equal in honour to the noblest of the Persians. And if there is some other man in Europe who is good, make him a friend of the royal household, sparing no wealth; for it is not easy to find men capable of giving advice. Farewell'.

The works written by Hippocrates have been conspicuous among all who have followed in the medical profession. As a result, they even revere them as the utterings of a god instead of sayings that came out of a human mouth. Except for the first books, let us also recall them. The first papyrus roll includes the Oath, the second represents the prognostic works, and the third roll, of aphorisms, surpasses human comprehension. Place fourth in the order the much mentioned and much admired roll of sixty works that includes the whole of medicine's skill and knowledge.

6. Ioannes Tzetzes, *Biblos Historike/Chiliades* 944-89 [twelfth century AD]

On Reaping Personal Pains According to Hippocrates

This is the Coan physician, the great Hippocrates;

His father was Heracleidas, his mother Phainarete;

From Asclepius descended, he was the seventeenth.

After the capture of Troy, on the coast of Asia, opposite Rhodes,

Podalirius, son of Asclepius,

Begat Hippolochus. And he begat Sostratus,
Father of Dardanus, who begat Crisamis. And he begat Cleomuttades,
Whose son, Theodorus, fathered another Sostratus.
And from this Sostratus was born a second Crisamis.
This Crisamis, in turn, begat the second Theodorus of that name.
From this Theodorus came Sostratus the third,
Who begat Nebros, who begat Gnosidicus, who begat Hippocrates.
To this first Hippocrates, son of Gnosidicus,
Was born Heracleidas. And he and Phainarete
Begat the great, the second Hippocrates.
His father Heracleidas taught him the medical art;
Then Herodicus of Selymbria and Grgias the Leontine
Imparted the rhetor's persuasive skills.
Next, with Democritus he studied some philosophy.
On Cos, as head librarian,
Hippocrates burned the ancient books of medicine
And the library. Because of this he had to flee.
He spent some time among the [Macedonians], in Northern Greece, and Thessaly.
He was, you know, contemporary with Perdiccas and Artaxerxes.
Hippocrates' sons were two – Thessalus and Dracon;
These two, Praxagoras the Coan, and other sons
Of doctors he taught. And he wrote books – three and fifty. And then he came to the end of his life,
Being one hundred and four years in all.
When he died he was buried between Larissa and Gyrtion.
Take note, there are seven Hippocrates.

The first, son of Gnosidicus, the second, of Heracleidas,

The next, of Thessalus, then Dracon's son, and both boys of Thymbraius. Praxianax's son is the seventh Hippocrates.

Yes, in that family, there were seven named Hippocrates.

The great healer's pictured hiding his head with his cloak.

Four reasons they say there are for this:

A pain in the head it showed or that he travelled abroad; or that he taught that the head was the organ of reasoning

Or the way to cover one's head in surgery.

This habit belonged to the man, and that's how he's pictured.

Some mistakenly call the man an Empiric.

Soranus of Ephesus is my source for what I've said of Hippocrates.

This Hippocrates, the physician, Heracleides' son, the Coan,

Proved that the race of physicians

Suffer themselves from other people's misfortunes.

7. The Brussels *Life of Hippocrates* [fifth - twelfth centuries AD]

Hippocrates was Coan in origin, the son of Heracleides and Phainarete, born of Asclepian stock. For Asclepius and Epione, the daughter of Hercules, produced two offspring, Podalirius and Macaon. Of the two, Macaon, as most relate, died during the destruction of Troy, leaving no offspring. Podalirius, however, settling at Syrna, died at Rhodes, as Antimachus mentions in Thenitus, after having fathered two sons, Rodo and Ippolochus by Ifianassa, daughter of Ucalegon. Ippolochus was the father of Apollonius and Sostratus. To the latter were born Dardanus and Cimno, to Dardanus were born Ablavias and Crisamis; to Crisamis ...

Likewise Thessalus, correcting what Apollodorus said about the honours accorded the book of Hippocrates, used other records and indications. Hippocrates left two sons by his wife, Ablavia – Thessalus and Dracon. He had a great many students, inasmuch as he was the first medical writer. Of these he instructed his own noble and justly glorious sons, Dracon and Thessalus, in the skill of medicine; also Polybius and Filio, Dexippus, Apollonius, Praxagoras the elder; also many Coans and slaves of the Coans and, especially, his own slaves, Archipolis, Timbreus, Tumulicus, Menalcus, Siennesius, Poliarcho, and Bonus. Furthermore, Hippocrates is said to have had a rather small body and

a weak head. Finally, they say that due to this he always went about with his head covered; this is the way most of his likenesses appear. Some say that he perceived that the head was the foremost part of the body and, by demonstrating it, made this known. Others say that he, gathering together the edges of his clothing (that is, the sleeves) and joining them by an inward twist, showed that they were to be put on his head for the sake of speeding his surgery once the hindrance was removed. Furthermore, overcome by old age, he ended his life, as they say, in his hundred and fourth year in the vicinity of Larissa in the state of Thessaly. He is buried between Gyrton and Larissa, which is revered in memory of him. He wrote, as many mention, seventy-two books.

... Furthermore, at this time he received seven books from the city of Memphis, from Polybius, son of Apollonius. These he carried with him into Cos, and from these books he correctly arranged the canon of medicine. From this, the *Oath* is found first. After the *Oath* he wrote, as many mention, the following four books: *Joints*, *Fractures*, *Prognostics*, and *Regimen*. But Heraclides of Ephesus adds, as Comarchus of Bithynia corroborates, that *Regimen* was written by him. After this he wrote other books that he called *Epidemics*. After these a theoretical work that he called *In the Surgery*, then *Aphorisms*. Baccius, moreover, the follower of Herophilus, mentions that after *Aphorisms*, Hippocrates put *On the Nature of the Child*. After this, *On the Use of Liquids* and *On Places*; then *Prorrhetic*; and next, *On the Epitome*; then *On Breaths*. Next, *Instruments of Reduction*. Next, *Airs, Waters, Places*. After this, *Ulcers* and *On the Withdrawal of Missiles*. Next, two *Diseases*; after these, one *On the Excision of the Foetus* and one that is *Regimen for Health*.

- A. Read passages 1-3. How useful are these for gathering information about the historical Hippocrates? How reliable are they?
- B. Read passages 4-7. How useful are these for gathering information about the historical Hippocrates? How reliable are they?
- C. Which details regarding Hippocrates' life remain consistent? Which do not? Why might this be the case?
- D. Which details regarding Hippocrates' works remain consistent? Which do not? Why might this be the case?

Selective Bibliography

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