

PHEIDIAS APOLLONIUS (CA. 4TH CENTURY BC), UNVEILING THE ANCIENT GREEK MEDICO-PHILOSOPHICAL SCHOOL OF THE ISLAND OF RHODES

PHEIDIAS APOLLONIUS (OKO 4. STOLJEĆA PR. KR.), OTKRIVAJUĆI DREVNU GRČKU MEDICINSKO- -FILOZOFSKU ŠKOLU OTOKA RODOSA

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SUMMARY

The ancient Greek medico-philosophical school of the island of Rhodes was lost in the fog of history. However, the discovery of a stone column dedicated to Pheidias unveiled somehow some parts of its tale. The Island of Rhodes became in the 4th century BC a place of significant process in philosophy and medicine. Having both an Asclepieion and a Medical School with a rich library, the Rhodian Asclepiades transmitted their knowledge to future schools. Pheidias Apollonius was a member of the School of Rhodes, who was celebrated for his practise by the city-state of Athens. His magnitude testified in a way the supremacy of the school that he originated from.

Keywords: Rhodes, medico-philosophical school, Pheidias Apollonius, ancient Greece

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INTRODUCTION

The Medico-philosophical School of Rhodes contributed significantly in the evolution of the ancient Greek medicine. Unfortunately, all its scientific work was lost, and all Rhodian physicians were neglected, resulting to the evanescence of an important part of the Greek antiquity.¹

In the 6th century BC, Asclepieia failed to follow the philosophical evolution that was happening in ancient Greece since the beginning of the Classical period. Primitive therapeutic techniques combined with huge rewards, rendered the temples to places where magic may happen, but cure was rare. At the same time, the “comedian” authors, like the playwright Aristophanes (ca. 446-386 BC), ridiculed the shameful bribery and the cunning of the priests. At last, the priests fearing the medico-philosophers outside their sanctuaries, regarding them as opponents, began to learn how to really treat the patients. Their experience helped them quickly to become capable practitioners, without ceasing to attribute the healing to their god Asclepius. The priests permitted outsiders to enter the temples and together they opened the first medical schools inside the Asclepieia. Thus, a mix of experience and new knowledge paved the way towards a new era of medicine, introduced by a new sect of physicians - the Asclepiades.²

These schools soon gained fame, while the city-states of the ancient Greece constantly recruited the best physicians for their citizens. The impact of every school was reflected on its physicians and vice versa. For a city-state to call a “touring” physician for a public health care incident, or to hire him for his services, meant that he must have been of the highest calibre, especially when this was happening by the most significant cities like Athens.¹⁻²

Our manuscript tries to connect various ancient Greek fragments to compose the history of the ancient Medico-philosophical School of the island of Rhodes, while at the same time the figure of Pheidias Apollonius is celebrated.

THE SCHOOL OF RHODES

Galen (ca. 129-210 AD) referred to the three cities that had established Medical Schools in Greek antiquity, namely Knidos, Kos and Rhodes.³ The School of Rhodes was placed on a large island just out from the coast of Asia Minor.¹

It was at the end of the 5th century BC, in 408 BC, when the ancient city of the island of Rhodes was founded, soon after the unification of the

three major cities of the island, namely Ialysos, Kamiros and Lindos. Due to its strategic geographical position between Europe, Africa and the Middle East, at the crossroads of the most significant civilizations of the era (Greek, Egyptian, Median, Persian), the city prospered and became the centre of sea trade and culture (Colossus of Rhodes, library, conservatory, gymnasium).⁴ At proximally the same time, at the dawn of the 4th century AD, Aristotle (384-322 BC) founded the peripatetic school of the Lyceum of Athens. It was the time when medicine flourished through a philosophical approach to become a noble practise of the ancient Greeks. One of Aristotle's notable pupils, Eudemus of Rhodes (Greek: Εὐδήμος) (ca. 370-300 BC), returned to his native island and set up a school in the time of Theophrastus (ca. 371-287 BC).⁵ Soon in the city centre an Asclepieion was built, devoted to the patron god of medicine, for citizens and travellers who wished to seek a holistic treatment, or to offer some votive offerings for their health.⁶⁻⁸ These two facts combined together, the temple and the school, boosted the ancient Greek Medico-philosophical School of Rhodes in such a magnitude to be considered at least equal to the School of Knidos (Cnidus).⁹⁻¹⁰ An ancient Greek



Ancient Greek text

Επι Φερεκλίου ἄρχοντος ἐπὶ τῆς
 Οἰνεΐδος ἑβδόμης πρυτ
 ανείας, ἢ Ἐπιχαρίνου Δημοχ
 ἄρου Γαργήτιος ἐγραμμάτευεν
 Γαμηλιῶνος δευτέραι μετ' εἰκάδας,
 ἐνταῖ καὶ εἰκοστῆ τῆς πρυτανείας,
 ἐκκλησίᾳ τῶν προέδρων
 ἐπιψηφίξεν Φυλαξίας Φωνίου
 Ἀναγυράσιος καὶ συμπρόεδροι
 ἔδοξεν τῷ δήμῳ· Εὐβουλίδης
 Εὐβούλου Ἐλευσίνιος εἶπεν
 ἐπι[δ]ῆ [Φ]ειδίας ὁ ἰατρός διατελεῖ
 πράττων τὰ συμφέροντα τῷ δήμῳ
 τῷ Ἀθηναίων καὶ τοὺς δεομένους
 Ἀθηναίων θεραπεύων
 [φ]λοτῆμος καὶ νῦν ἐπιδέδω[φ] [ε]ν
 ταυτὸν δημοσιεύειν δωρε[ά]ν
 ἐνδεικνύμενος τὴν εὐνοίαν ἣν ἔχει
 πρὸς τὴν πόλιν, ἀγαθῆι τύχῃ
 δεδόχθαι τῷ δήμῳ ἐπανέσαι
 Φειδίαν Ἀπολλ[ω]νίου Ῥοδίων
 εὐνοίας ἕνεκα [κ]αὶ ἐπιμελείας ἣν
 ἔχων διατελεῖ πρὸς τὸν δῆμον τὸν
 Ἀθηναίων καὶ στεφανώσαι αὐτὸν
 θαλασσῷ στεφάνῳ· ἀναγράψαι δὲ
 τόδε τὸ ψήφισμα τὸν γραμματέ[α]
 τὸν κατὰ πρυτανείαν ἐν στή[λ]αι
 λυθίνοι καὶ στήσαι ἐν τῷ[]
 Ἀσκληπιεῖω.

English Translation

With Pherecles Presiding during the seventh presidency of the Oeneis clan and whilst Epicharinus of Gargettos, the son of Demochares, was the Secretary; on the 29th day of prytany which fell on the 22nd day of the Gamelion, Phylaxias of Anagyryus, the son of Phanias, on behalf of the other presidents put to the assembly for the vote the following, proposed by Eubulides of Eleusis, the son of Eubulus; it is resolved by the people that since **Phaidias the physician** has continually acted in the interests of the Athenian Demos, diligently treating the Athenian patients in his care, and now he has made himself freely available for *demosieuein*, demonstrating the goodwill which he holds towards the city; it is therefore resolved, with good fortune, by Demos to praise **Phaidias Apollonius of Rhodes**, on account of his diligence and the care which he has continually shown towards the Athenian people, and to crown him with an olive-wreath. The secretary of the prytany shall inscribe this decree on a stone slab and place it in the Asclepieion.

Figure 1: Stone column, EM 7279-IG II² 483 (Left side), the ancient Greek text on the column (Right side), published with the licence of the Epigraphical and Monetary Museum of Athens, Ministry of Civilization, Hellenic Republic (no 47359/26796/320, in 22/02/2016).

fragment «Τω ν εν Κω και Κνίδω διττόν γαρ έτι το γένος ην των επί της Ασίας Ασκληπιαδών, επιλιπόντος του κατά Ρόδον» testifies that most probably the Schools of Kos and Knidos were founded by Asclepiades (physicians worshipping Asclepius) from the School of Rhodes.¹¹ The School of Rhodes had a significant library since the 3rd century BC¹² and flourished alongside with Asclepieion until the second half of the 1st century AD.¹³

Although Rhodian physicians served faithfully Asclepius and practised medicine at the highest level, they remained anonymous, forgotten by their famous colleagues in other cities. The School progressively lost its fame, declined, and was doomed to oblivion.¹ The discovery of a stone column, presenting a pediment finial (Height 1.01 m, Width 0.351 to 0.39 m, Thickness 0.076 to 0.082 m) in the south part of the Athenian Acropolis territory between the Theatre of Dionysus and the Odeon [Figure 1], dedicated to Pheidias Apollonius of Rhodes, commenced once more the discussion about the lost school.

PHEIDIAS APOLLONIUS

Little is known about Pheidias Apollonius (Greek: Φειδίας Απολλώνιος), an Asclepiad-physician, who had left Rhodes and was celebrated for his skills and compassion during 304-303 BC in the city-state of Athens. Pheidias successfully practised medicine on the Athenian territory (Attica), mostly in the Eleusinian province, for some years before deciding to offer his services for free. To honour him the Athenian city-state decided to crown him with a wreath of olive leaves and put in his memory a stone column inside the Athenian Asclepieion.¹⁴ Pheidias most probably devoted himself to the Athenian citizens during a difficult time, in an economic crisis, or in a war period, or during a natural disaster, or an epidemic, and he was awarded with the ancient Greek sacred symbol of the olive tree.¹⁵

DISCUSSION

From the Medical School of Rhodes, according to the testimonies of Empedocles and Galen, we may only recognize the “descendant schools”, the successor trainees of the Rhodian Asclepiades in Asia Minor (Greek fragment: Γιατί, ήταν διπλή η γενιά-η προέλευση των Ασκληπιαδών στην Ασία, αφότου εξέλειψε η γενιά από τη Ρόδο).³¹¹ Thus, during its prime, or soon after its decline (war, plaque, immigration, economics?), its knowledge and practice were transmitted into Asia, contributing further to the evolution

of the Ionian philosophy. The school was even celebrated by the Cretian Andromachus the Elder (1st century AD), the Archiater (first physician) or the Roman Emperor Nero (37-68 AD).¹³ Although some researchers wrongfully believe that the medical school located on the island of Rhodes was not very prominent,¹⁶ in fact it was the cradle of the medical knowledge which founded medicine in south-east of the Aegean Sea and the south-west of Asia Minor.

Major city-states were strongly dependent on the “touring” physicians (Greek: περιουδευτές), who could peregrinate in the cities to offer home care and provide advice for serious public health issues. These were highly trained healers (Greek: πεπαιδευμένοι), capable to diagnose and grant the appropriate remedy.¹⁷⁻¹⁸ The selection of a physician to be appointed by “Demos” (Greek: Δήμος, township, with the meaning of the summary of citizens) was made only among those who were “sophoi” (Greek: σοφοί, “wise”, with the meaning of being acquainted with “sophia”, thus philosophers), “pepaideumenoi” (Greek: πεπαιδευμένοι, trained, experienced, educated) in a medico-philosophical school and “famously talented”.^{16,19-20} Pheidias may have been a “touring” physician who became a “demosios” (Greek: δημοσιεύειν, demosieuein, appointed as a public health care physician).^{14,21}

Although a regulated remuneration for the medical practice existed, named “iatra” (Greek: ιατρα, the fee to be paid to “iatros”-physician),²² it seems that Pheidias offered his skills (for at least a period of time) for free, or for shelter and food only. His, or most probably his father’s name, was Apollonius, something which could imply that he was also a member of the “Apollonistes” sect, a worshiper of the ancient Greek god of healing Apollo, who was once instructed by Zeus to stay in the world of mortals and to serve without a reward (Greek fragment: Τω Δία προστάξει τω Απόλλωνι θητεύσαι παρ’ ανθρώπω).²³ The fact that the Athenian “Demos” decided to put the stone decree inside the Asclepieion indicated Pheidias capacity as an Asclepiad and merciful medico-philosopher.

Some authors consider that Pheidias was a “metic” (Greek: μέτοικος), an inhabitant of the Attica territory without being a citizen of Athens. The laws of classical Athens clearly demanded both parents to be of Athenian birth for someone to be considered as a citizen, thus an inherited privilege.²⁴ However, due to his medical practice the stone decree concerning his celebration implied that he was once selected by “Demos” public physician who finally decided to offer his services freely.¹⁴ On the other hand, the

glowing life in Athens attracted philosophers, artists and technicians. The name Apollonius was strongly connected with philosophy, rhetoric skills, poetry and sculpture on the Island of Rhodes. With an origin from Egypt's Alexandria, Apollonius, the author of *Argonautica*, taught philosophy on the Island, while Suidas informed us that in fact two great men introduced philosophy, Apollonius of Rhodes (4th century BC) and Apollonius of Alexandria (early 3rd century BC), making a clearly distinction between two great scholars.²⁵ Furthermore, his namesake, Pheidias, the son of Charmides (ca 480-430 BC), was the most brilliant sculptor, painter, and architect of the classical Athens. Whether Pheidias' the Asclepiad name was associated with philosophy and arts or not, whether he was a "metic" or a "touring physician", still remains unclear. What is clear, was the capacity of a democratic city-state to recognize the excellence and honor a deserving individual.²⁴

EPILOGUE

Pheidias seems to have been privileged with a number of noble characteristics. In a way, gifted with sublime features, the charismatic physician proved not only to himself but also to the huge calibre of the Rhodian medicine, and unveiled the magnitude of the forgotten Medico-philosophical School of the island of Rhodes.

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SAŽETAK

Drevna grčka Medicinsko-filozofska škola otoka Rodosa bila je tijekom povijesti zaboravljena. Međutim, otkriće kamenog stupa posvećenog Pheidiasu otkrilo je dijelove priče njezine povijesti. U 4. stoljeću prije Krista otok Rodos postao je mjesto značajnih zbivanja u filozofiji i medicini. Imajući i Asklepijeve hramove i Medicinsku školu s bogatom knjižnicom, Asklepijadi otoka Rodosa prenosili su svoja znanja budućim školama. Pheidias Apollonius bio je član rodoske škole, a grad-država Atena slavila ga je zbog njegova djelovanja. Njegova je veličina na neki način svjedočila nadmoći škole od koje je potekao.

Ključne riječi: Rodos, medicinsko-filozofska škola, Pheidias Apollonius, drevna Grčka