

Hippocrates known as the father of medicine

By Janet Banerjea, RSHom

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Joint Principal of Allen College of Homoeopathy

Tel & Fax No. 44 (0) 1245 505859

allencollege@hotmail.co.uk

www.homoeopathy-course.com

<https://allencollege.co.uk/>

Kos, the idyllic island in the Aegean Sea was the destination for some reading on the beach, however because the island was the home of Hippocrates and his followers, I found myself on a bicycle going up a very steep hill towards the botanical gardens and museum. It is widely known that Hippocrates is the

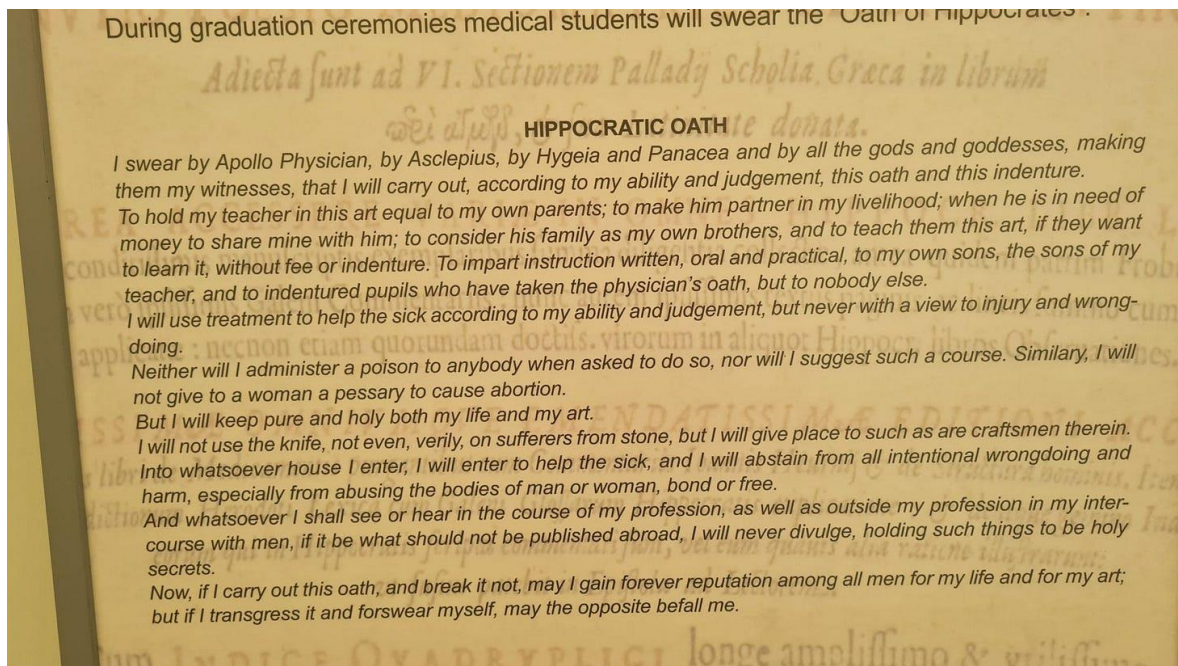
author of the medical oath and founder of a school of thought which is said to be the first scientific method of looking at disease and symptoms.

Visiting the hospital, the tree and museum last month was illuminating.

It was a familiar environment with displays of herbs, Ruta, Chamomile and Teucrium being some. Of course, the familiarity extended to the Hippocratic idea of totality, do no harm, gentle, restorative and natural. His awareness that hygiene was important was also marked. Unlike some later surgeons who wore aprons to protect *themselves*.

The Oath

(As depicted in the Museum and Botanical Gardens Kos)



The Hippocratic Oath abolished in 1973, by the US Supreme Court which rejected the oath as a guide to medical ethics and practice by stating that the oath is incapable of covering the latest developments and methods of medical practice and research.

The difference between the old and modern Hippocratic Oath is that, in the modern version of the oath, there is no prohibition against abortion; there is no promise by the physician to "do no harm" or never give a "lethal medicine" as in the original Hippocratic Oath.

Hippocratic Theory believed that a body became ill when there was an imbalance in the four senses of humor: blood, black bile, yellow bile and phlegm. Medicine therefore aimed to restore this balance. He was also in favour of fever, saying that if the patient presented with a fever, he could cure them.

Hippocrates treated his patients with a therapy focused on simply easing this natural process. To this end, Hippocrates believed "rest and immobilization [were] of capital importance". In general, the Hippocratic medicine was very kind to the patient; treatment was gentle, and emphasized keeping the patient clean and sterile.



Goddess Hygeia

The Goddess Hygeia was venerated independently from Asklepios, she was said to be the first daughter of Asklepios. From her name the terms hygiene or hygienic are derived.



The oldest hospital in Kos not far from Kos city, the Asklepieion is, an ancient hospital, dedicated to the god of health, Asklepios. It was built in 357 BC. In Asclepius' name, the Asklepieion in Kos was founded, which served as a temple, religious site, hospital, and medical research centre devoted to medical science. Patient care at the Asklepieion was holistic: the body was always taken care of in conjunction with the care of the person's mind and emotional state. The Asklepieion physicians believed that an individual's innate healing mechanisms would be activated if their mind and emotional state were seen, so calm and positiveness saturated them.

Therefore, the patient was seen in carefully selected locations in the Asklepion, using the natural environment to promote mental and emotional stability and positivity. Then, therapeutic procedures came in two stages: the Katharsis (i.e., Cleansing stage) and the Dream Therapy stage. During the Katharsis, the patient would receive baths, a special diet, rest, and other practices to ensure absolute comfort and relief from symptoms, promoting mental and emotional calm.

Depending on the ailment being treated, this process could take several days to weeks. It is also likely that this stage was where the scientific part of medicine took place, with actual medical procedures and regimes being applied.

Then came the Dream Therapy, where the patient would be relocated to the Abaton (the “inaccessible” sanctuary). The patient would be coaxed into a state of hypnosis or induced sleep. This could be achieved with various substances, such as hallucinogens, and encouraged to start on the therapeutic dream journey.

The patient’s dreams would then be interpreted, and further treatment prescribed by the physicians. The belief was that Asclepius and his daughters Hygeia (her name means Health) and Panacea (her name means Cure All) would visit the patient and diagnose them further.

Asclepius had several Asklepiions in various locations throughout Greece, but the one in Kos was probably the most significant. The reason for that was Hippocrates.

Though he was fully trained by his father, other physicians in the Asklepion, and even high profile philosophers like Democritus, Hippocrates felt that their existing approach to medicine and medical care was mired in superstition and ignorance.

That’s why he travelled around the then-known world to gather knowledge and practices within medicine. He is credited with rebranding medicine as a more scientific than religious endeavour. The gathering of other ideas and methods is something which separates Hippocrates from others, he was open to learning.

Hippocrates’ medical exploits were many. He is said to have expertise in infectious diseases, especially in arresting their further spread. He managed to get the infamous Athenian plague under control, which granted him honorary Athenian citizenship. Hippocrates wrote a series of textbooks and essays on

medicine, medical subfields including surgery and dentistry, and medical ethics. The famous Hippocratic Oath is one of them.

Hippocrates' renown made the Askleion of Kos the most important medical centre of its time and the most scientifically oriented one, given to using evidence-based techniques more than religious healing.

Functions of the Askleion

As already described, the Askleion of Kos functioned as a medical research centre. It also functioned as a hospital and hospice. Beyond that, the Askleion was also a temple. Many artifacts point to how patients also used part of the complex as a place of worship for Asclepius, complete with dedications and appeals for a speedy recovery.

Another fact that shows how the Askleion functioned as a sacred place for Kos is that anyone within its premises was granted sanctuary, which was observed and respected across ancient Greece. This panhellenic recognition of the sanctuary status was extremely rare, even for other official temples.

The Askleion is a beautiful Hellenistic period temple complex built on the slopes of the hill overlooking Kos' main town. The area is lush with vegetation and has a gorgeous view of the sea and the coast of Asia Minor: a perfect location for Asclepius' doctors, who valued the positive impact of nature and the environment in the healing process.

Walking into the complex, you will see that everything is arranged in three terraces, which matches the patient's journey in the Askleion:

Walk up the 24 steps of the entrance ("propylon") and columns to the patient rooms' foundations. There are also walls with niches where there used to be decorative statues. Of those, some busts remain, and you will see them as you walk by. In the buildings of this first terrace, the patients followed the special diets or fasting requirements, had special baths, and prepared for the second terrace.



The bathhouse is still discernible and the area where hydrotherapy was administered to patients.

The marble staircase delivers to the second terrace. This is where the Abaton was: where the patients would be visited by the god Asclepius in their dreams and where the interpretation and final diagnosis of their condition would occur. This is the oldest part of the complex, featuring an altar dating from the 4th century BCE, dedicated to Asclepius.





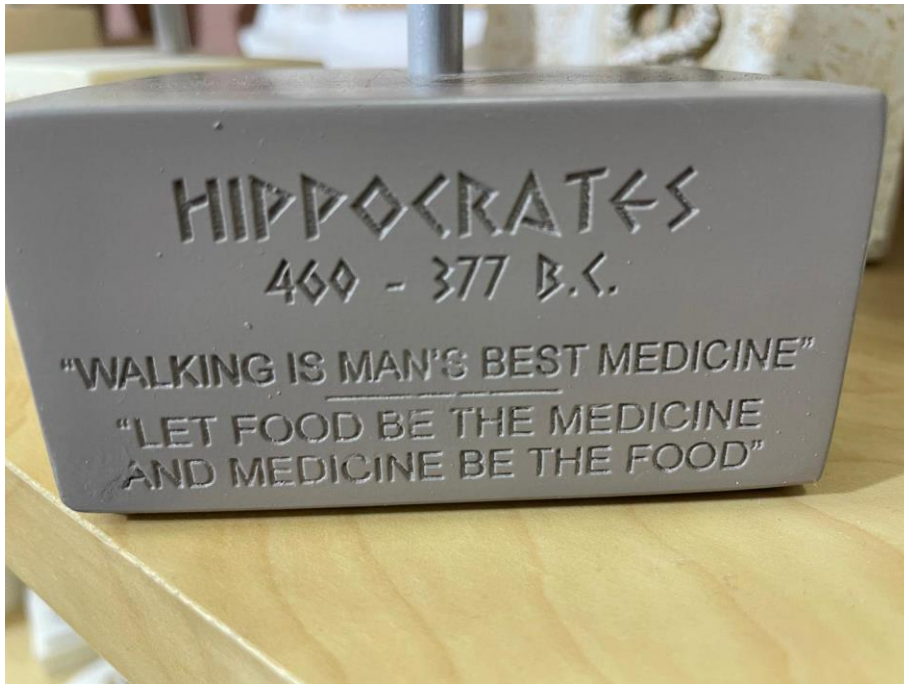
This statue is in the Archeological Museum in the centre of Kos town.

We went in the evening as it was quieter and half a degree cooler than outside.

They also have a beautiful mosaic and other archeological finds, worth a visit to complete the Hippocrates triangle.

Our google map reading whilst balancing on heavy bikes 'could have been better' as teachers are known to say. So, we found the tree where Hippocrates used to teach away from the patients, after dark. It is protected with fencing and does look very very old!





So the trip had a special feeling of being at home with philosophical ideas we include in our own practices and it felt important to pay respects.

Janet Banerjea RSHom

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Trip Advisor

Kos Tour Guide