

SUSAN M. SHERWIN-WHITE, *Ancient Cos. An historical study from the Dorian settlement to the Imperial period*, Göttingen, Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1978, 8vo, pp. 582, £33.55.

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The medical history of Cos is a minefield. Almost any theory is likely to be blown up by one of the “phantom inscriptions” unearthed in the 1900s by Rudolf Herzog and still largely unpublished, or to be trapped in the tangles of Hippocratic scholarship. New excavations at Astypalaea, the chief town of the island before the transfer in 366 B.C. of most of the population to the modern town of Cos, may produce new evidence for the historical Hippocrates, and papyrological discoveries of Hellenistic poets continue to give tantalizing glimpses of the island’s rich religious, social, and intellectual life. It is no mean compliment to the author to say that she has safely made her way with enviable caution and sound judgement.

Her major conclusions are opposed to those of Herzog and his followers. Epigraphic evidence suggests that on Cos, certainly by 600 B.C., the doctors were not only a trade but also a family group, the Asclepiads, and that this restrictiveness was maintained until the time of the great Hippocrates, c. 420 B.C., who taught outsiders for money. But the idea of a “school” is anachronistic – there is no evidence for any “heads of the school” (the interpretation of *archiatros*, p. 282, as a head of the doctors’ guild in Roman times is unlikely, given the doctor’s youth) or for any provision for its physical continuance, and, *pace* the Loeb editor, plane trees do not live for millennia. Any doctor, like Onasander, p. 274, might have pupil-assistants, but they were associated with an individual, not an institution. There is similarly no state-run medical curriculum or career-structure: Coan public doctors are chosen in the same way as elsewhere, and one may speculate as to why Xenotimus, p. 265, was no longer such a physician. In general, Coan doctors were, perhaps unusually, men of wealth and high social status, even aristocrats, and, for two centuries, c. 350–150 B.C., they attracted foreign pupils and were regularly sought by other cities as public doctors. The ostentatious C. Stertinus Xenophon, fl. A.D. 50, doctor to Claudius and Nero, turned the shrine of Asclepius into a fashionable *Kurort*, with a library and a health-giving spring. The apparent later decline in the medical importance of Cos may be the result of competition from elsewhere and in part also the fault of our limited inscriptional evidence.

The links between the doctors and the great Asklepieion are also scrutinized. What preceded the building of the shrine in the early third century B.C. is uncertain, but it would be unwise to posit, with Edelstein, that Asclepius’ cult was thus unknown before 400 B.C. Local tradition clearly placed it much earlier, even if we do not accept the fanciful Hippocratic letters and speeches as genuine, although they show definite signs of a Coan origin. When the great temple was built, doctors played little part in its healing functions, and the egregious Xenophon is the first doctor known to have been a priest at the shrine. The guild of doctors naturally revered Asclepius, but there are many other cults of healers, including one of the great Hippocrates himself. Legends grew up around him, just as later they did about Thessalus of Tralles (whose letter, despite p. 354, is a later forgery). It is the great merit of this book to have at last in a recognizable historical and social context.