

Historical Note

Dione, Nursing Care among the Olympians

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All divine ancient Greek gods of the higher class, both celestial and chthonic, even though they had been considered as immortals, according to the writers of the era, they had "human" weaknesses. Thus, they were in a constant need for medical care when they were wounded. Their physician was the ancient Greek god Paeon (Greek: Παιήων), who was later been coincided with the god Apollo, renamed to Paeon Apollo, and finally Apollo only. Paeon was familiar with all remedies to cure the gods and as his helper had the nymph Dione (Greek: Διώνη), the first midwife-nurse-healer in the Greek mythology. Paeon possessed the key for life and disease, and for the first time the treatment had a medical nature, away from the miraculous medicine. Although his magical touch was considered as a therapeutic mean, the medical rationalization was apparent as basic pharmacology (mainly herbs), pain killers, epidesmology (Greek: επιδεσμολογία, the art of bondage dressing), and basic surgery were in practise (Euaggelou 1991, Hunter 1989, Babrius 1986, Kazantzakis & Kakridis 1985, Aristonici 1853, Nicander 1856, Hesiod 1908).

Dione was placed among the Titanides, the daughter of Oceanus and Tethys, hence an Oceanid, a water-nymph [Figure 1]. She and Zeus are called as the parents of the god Aphrodite. She was an oracle and was worshipped alongside Zeus at the earliest Oracle in Greece that was located at Dodona [Figure 2] (Kerenyi 1951). She was lauded in Hesiod's

"Theogony" as one of the principle goddesses, present during the birth of Apollo, thus was probably his midwife or wet nurse (Greek: τροφός). Her name represented the female nature of Zeus (Greek: Δίας, Dias, with the stem "Di"), thus connected to the gods who had as their prerogative the ability to heal or to provoke death (Hesiod 1908, March 2014). Dione was presented by Homer as an experienced therapist (Greek: θεραπαινίδα) expert in "epidesmology", a well known medical art of the era [Figure 3]. She made her appearance in Iliad, when her daughter Aphrodite was wounded and she tried to heal her. She was the one who treated Pluto when he was wounded by Hercules in Pylos. She had also cured Aris when he was wounded in battle by the ancient Greek hero Diomedes, by administering the herb "paeonia" [Figure 4].

In the Oracle of Zeus in Dodona she was mentioned in several private inquiries, praised for good fortune and health, celebrated as the goddess of childbirth (Parke 1967). The Homeric Hymn to Apollo includes Dione to the gods who attended Leto's childbearing (Hard 2004). She was strongly connected as the assistant both in life and medicine with Apollo, who had also great healing abilities, composing an active duo to treat the Olympians (Euaggelou 1991, Berdoe 1893).



Figure 1: Dione, imaginaire portrait, Impressioni Artistiche, Brenda Burke.

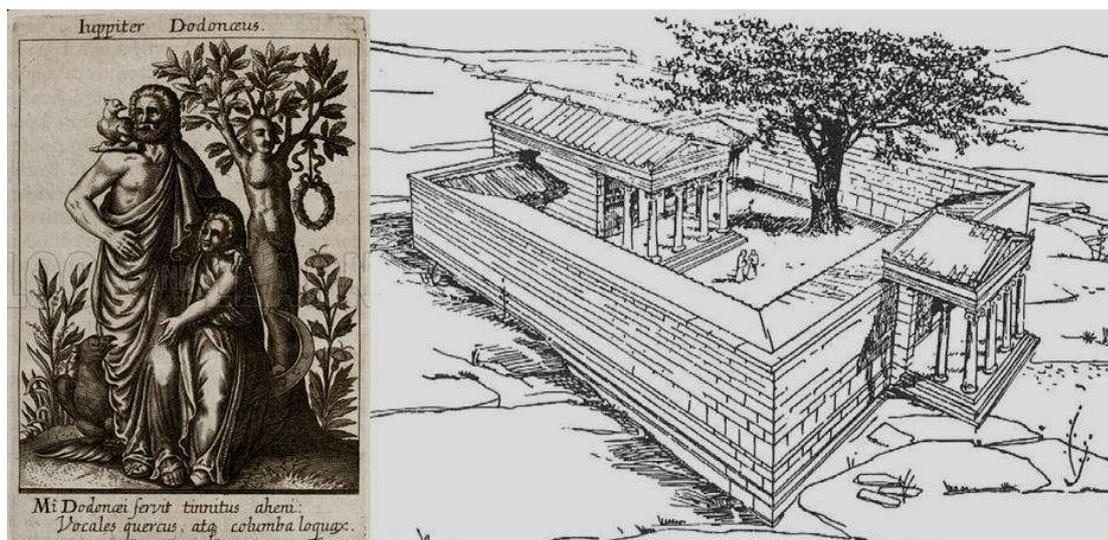


Figure 2: Zeus/Jupiter Dodoneus, depicted here as having human form, Tractatus posthumus Boisardii JJ vesuntuni de divinatione et magicis praesigiis, 1615 (right side). The Sanctuary of Zeus at Dodona, located in Epirus, a reconstruction (left side).



Figure 3: Painting on a Greek Vase, Achilles tending Patroclus wounded by an arrow. Tondo of an Attic red-figure kylix, ca 500 BC.



Figure 4: Diomedes, Attic Red Figure, ca 490-480 BC, Museum of Fine Arts, Boston, Massachusetts (right side). Paonia albiflora inside "The botanist's repository, for new, and rare plants", Bensley T, London, 1797.

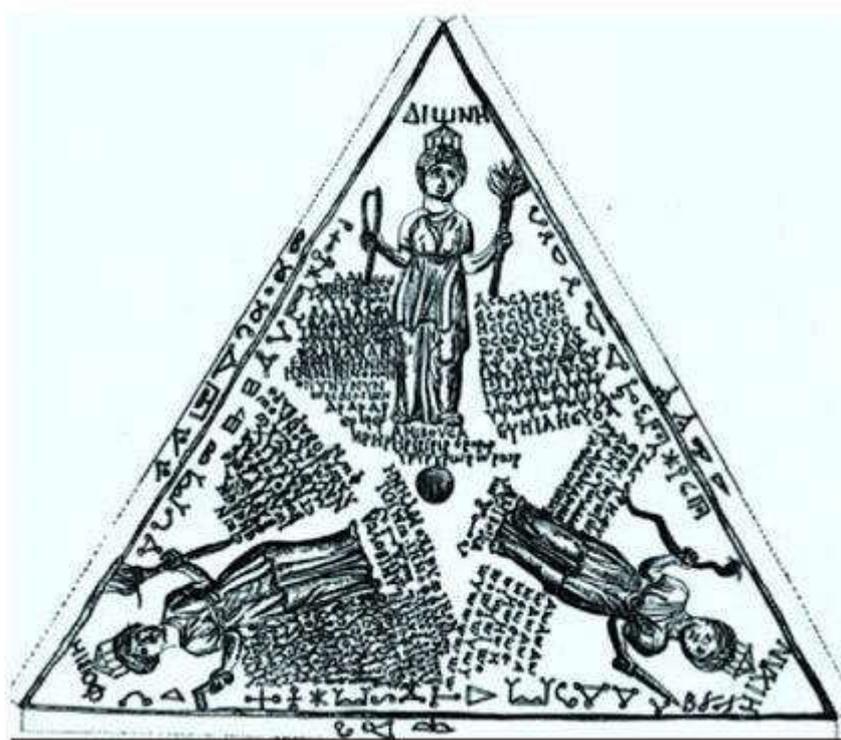


Figure 5: Bronze tablet from Pergamon, depicting Dione, Phoebe, and Nyche, 3rd century AD.

The ancient Greek gods, habitants of the famous mount Olympus (Greek: Όλυμπος) with their heroic and dynamic characteristics were no longer able to meet the needs of the mortal citizens, so that they have acquired more bland and consoling character. The social ethics of the era should have been favourable for the development and dissemination of god therapists, and the intense resorting towards divine for health's restoration (Bengston 1991, Neumann 1978). Nymph Dione was one of them, being mentioned inside the poems of the Orphic Greek poets, a fact the most probably indicates that she was not a secondary deity, but actually a more significant godlike figure (Mueller 1840). Dione remarked that the gods of the mount Olympus had remedies unheard of by mankind, mentioning ambrosia, and realized that any god could heart another. She had lived among the Olympians, practise her art to treat and heal the diseased, to succour birth, and nurse the wounded. She had distinguished Apollo to have been a comparable to a resident physician and decided to devote her live in his aid, gaining a place among the gods (Westmoreland 2007) [Figure 5].

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