

ARCH/HIST 353 | Healing in Ancient Greece (Athens, Epidauros, Kos) Summer Session I, 2026

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Course Description

This course explores ancient Greek healing as an archaeological and historical phenomenon, following how people pursued health and interpreted illness through the places they built, the objects they dedicated, and the texts they left behind. Using evidence from healing sanctuaries and their built environments (Asklepieia and other cult spaces), inscriptions, votive offerings, surgical instruments, and medical/technical devices, we will reconstruct the lived experience of the healing process and the diverse social and political contexts that shaped “medical expertise” in antiquity.

Students will learn to read material culture alongside literary sources with the aim not to look to the past for direct answers to contemporary health issues but to ask historical questions: who was seen as qualified expert to heal? What kinds of evidence convinced people that a cure was divine? And how did communities cope with illnesses that lingered or could not be cured? Along the way, we will investigate the archaeological and historical contexts where healing took place in ancient Greece, considering both private sites (households and neighborhood shrines) and public institutions, including Asklepieia, gymnasia, and other civic environments. We'll also examine anatomical votive offerings to the gods to see how they illuminate ancient experiences of disability and what they reveal about the dynamic relationship between patients and healing deities.

Excursions to museums and sites in and around Athens provide hands-on encounters with objects, inscriptions, and architectural remains, alongside visits to major healing sanctuaries such as the the Asklepieion at Epidauros. A four-day study trip to Kos anchors the course, drawing on the island's distinctive healing archaeological landscape to investigate Hippocrates' extended reception: not as an unchanging 'father of medicine,' but as a figure continually promoted as well as debated across antiquity and beyond.

Learning objectives

This course gives students the tools to explore ancient Greek medicine from multiple angles—bringing together archaeology, ancient texts, and modern scholarship. By the end of the course, students should be able to assess different kinds of evidence critically and also:

- Appreciate the realities of health and disease in the ancient Greek world
- Reflect on the different ways in which ancient Greeks understood disease.
- Analyze key texts relating to the emergence of the medicine of Hippocrates and Galen.
- Evaluate the significance of healing sanctuaries as as leading centers for care, learning, and medical practice

Grading and Evaluation:

Your grade for this course will be based on the following distribution:

- 1) ACTIVE PARTICIPATION & CONTRIBUTION 25%.**
- 2) EXCAVATION/MUSEUM REPORT 25%**
- 3) ORAL PRESENTATION 50%**

Course requirements:

Since this is an intense traveling course, students are not required to submit a lengthy final essay (i.e. term paper). A grade will be assigned on the basis of student evaluation throughout the course, principally from presentations and work sheets on sites and in museums.

The following components will contribute to the final grade:

1) ACTIVE PARTICIPATION & CONTRIBUTION (25%): not merely physical presence, but the expression of critical opinions and contribution to class dialogue) and co-operation with the professor and fellow students.

2) EXCAVATION/MUSEUM REPORT (25%) Students will select one major site excavation (fieldwork or rescue), or a museum with clear material evidence of ancient healing spaces or medical objects. They will then write a report explaining why the excavation took place, what was discovered, how the findings fit into the broader history of the site, and how the objects or remains were later presented to the public (for example, through museum display).

The report should be **1,500 words** (bibliography not included).

Deadline: Sunday, June 14 (by 00:00)

3) ORAL PRESENTATION (50%) in the final week of the course, each student will present an oral presentation on a subject of his/her interest related with the topics of the course. The aim of the assignment is not to just reproduce the basic knowledge for an ancient building or a monument or an object but to critically discuss its overall role in the history of a place, its agency, function and form. If you wish to explore the diachronic use of a healing practice or artefact, you can also discuss its development from when it was first constructed to its later uses.

- The overall presentation will take place in class and will last for 15 minutes: each presentation will last 10 min. followed by a 5 min. Q & A.
- **See the Class Schedule below** for the relevant dates.
- NB: You will also need **to send me your Power-Point presentation via email (one day before the day of your presentation)**.

ePolicy on Original Work and Use of Artificial Intelligence

Unless otherwise specified, all submitted work must be your own original work. Any ideas taken from the work of others must be clearly identified as quotations, paraphrases, summaries, figures etc., and accurate internal citations and/or captions (for visuals) as well as an accompanying bibliography must be provided.

The use of generative AI tools is a new, undeniable reality. In this course, the guiding principle for their productive use is that you must always remain the primary author and critical thinker behind all submitted work. AI may be used ethically as a tool for development, but never as a substitute for your own intellectual effort.

Permitted Uses: You may use AI for brainstorming, clarifying concepts and passages, editing your original prose, debating ideas, formatting (not generating from scratch) citations and bibliography sections, or reviewing a completed draft. You may also request a generic outline to organize initial thoughts, provided you substantially modify and expand it into your own work. *In all cases, you are required to review, verify and take full responsibility for the final output.*

Prohibited Uses: It is academic dishonesty to use AI to generate drafts, paragraphs, or answers to assignments, to complete in-class or reflective work, or to submit AI-generated content without your significant intellectual transformation and synthesis. To ensure the integrity of submitted work, I reserve the right to ask students to orally explain or defend the content and reasoning behind any submission. Such a request comprises a standard check, not an accusation. **If a student is unable to do so, I may require the work to be revised and resubmitted. A persistent inability to adequately explain the work may be treated as a violation of academic integrity.**

It is imperative to understand that AI can produce incorrect or biased information. Your critical judgment is essential. You are responsible for fact-checking all content and ensuring your final work reflects your own understanding. Specific applications and citation practices will be further discussed in class. When in doubt, ask for clarification!

Visits To Archaeological Sites/Museums & Accessibility

This course contains specific physical and spatial elements that are crucial to student learning and which cannot be modified.

1st) This course **requires the following physical activities** [especially on the visits to archaeological sites and museum visits]: walking mostly on [streets, sidewalks, uneven ground in the archaeological sites] and standing.

2nd) **This course meets in spaces [e.g., museums, ancient sites]** where there can be significant background noise while the professor speaks. Field walks also entail walking and working in a busy, noisy environment.

3rd) This course **requires students to give a verbal [individual] presentation in front of the class as part of their assessment.**

Class Schedule (Preliminary - subject to revision):

	Day/Date	Topic / Readings (preliminary)
1	Monday 25.05.2026	Athens Arrival. 18.00 Orientation meeting in the CYA cafeteria 19.30 Welcome dinner by CYA at a local restaurant
2	Tuesday 26.05.2026	Introduction (10:00am until 13:00pm/in-class at CYA); room TBA Themes: Homeric Medicine & Athletics and Medicine Readings: Nutton, V. (2004) <i>Ancient medicine</i> . Series of antiquity. London and New York: Routledge. Stamplidis N. & Tassoulas Y. (2014) (eds.) <i>Hygieia. Health, Illness and Treatment from Homer to Galen</i> , Exhibition Catalogue, Museum of Cycladic Art, 20.11.2014 - 31.05.2015, Athens.
3	Wednesday 27.05.2026 (Study Trip to Archaeological Site/Museum)	Study Trip: The Acropolis Museum and the site of the ancient Acropolis Themes: Foreign/New Gods, State Religion, Votive Dedications Afternoon Class 16:00-17:30 Asklepios and Health at the Acropolis Museum 17:30-19:00 Visiting the site of ancient Acropolis Readings: Bronwen L. Wickkiser (2008) "Introduction" (pp. 1-9) and chapter 4 "Documenting Asklepios' Arrival in Athens" (pp.62-76) in <i>Asklepios, Medicine, and the Politics of Healing in Fifth-century Greece: Between Craft and Cult</i> . Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 2008.
4	Thursday 28.05.2026	National Archaeological Museum (Self-Study) Morning: Self-guided tour, looking for 1) portraits of Asklepios 2) the sculpture from the Sanctuary of Asklepios at Epidaurus 3) surgical instruments Afternoon Class: 16:00-19:00 (CYA) on "Healing Sanctuaries in the Attic Demes" Readings: Van Straten, F. (1981) "Gifts for the Gods", in H.S. Versnel (ed.), <i>Faith, Hope and Worship: Aspects of Religious Mentality in the Ancient World</i> 2:65-151, Studies in Greek and Roman Religion, Brill. Rassia A.-I. (2022) "The semantic overlap of ἀδικία and ἀσέβεια in the Amphiareion at Oropos" in <i>Our Beloved Polites Studies presented to P.J. Rhodes, Delfim Leão, Daniela Ferreira, and Rui Morais</i> (eds), Archaeopress, 171-182.
5	Friday 29.05.2026 (Study Trip to Archaeological Museum)	Museum Class: National Archaeological Museum Morning Class: 10:00-13:00pm (A student-led discussion based on the objects viewed the previous day, focusing on how ancient artefacts and, where relevant, human remains can shed light on experiences of disease, treatment, and healing in the ancient world). Reading: Renberg, G., 2017. <i>Where Dreams May Come: Incubation Sanctuaries in the Greco-Roman World</i> , vol. 2, <i>Religions in the Graeco-Roman World</i> 184, Leiden, Boston.
6	Saturday (30.05.2026) (Study Trip to Archaeological Site/Museum)	The Kerameikos and Kerameikos Museum Afternoon Class: 16:00-19:00pm Reading: Thucydides, <i>Pericles Funeral Oration</i>
	Sunday (31.05.2026)	FREE DAY
	Monday (01.06.2026)	FREE DAY
7	Tuesday (02.06.2026) (Study Trip to Archaeological Site/	Study Trip to Pnyx and the Hill of the Nymphs Theme: From Open-Air Healing Spaces to Church: Healing in Athens from the Classical to Late Antiquity Morning Class: 09:00-12:00 Readings:

		Forsén, B. (1993) 'The Sanctuary of Zeus Hypsistos and the Assembly Place on the Pnyx', <i>Hesperia</i> 62.4: 507–21.
8	Wednesday (03.06.2026) (Study Trip to Archaeological Site/Museum)	Study Trip to the archaeological site and museum at BRAURON (Attica) Theme: Gender and Healing in Attica: Women and Children at Brauron 08.30 Leave Athens for Brauron 10:00 Estimated arrival to Brauron Morning Class (Site and Museum of Brauron): 10:00-13:00pm Readings: Nielsen, I. 2009: "The Sanctuary of Artemis Brauronia. Can Architecture and Iconography Help to Locate the Settings of the Rituals?", <i>From Artemis to Diana. The Goddess of Man and Beast</i> , T. Fisher-Hansen, B. Poulsen (eds.), <i>Acta Hyperborea</i> 12, 83-126.
9	Thursday (04.06.2026) (Study Trip to Archaeological Museum)	Museum Class Benaki museum Theme: Beauty and Death: How Greeks Cared for the Body and the Soul Afternoon Class: 12:30-15:30pm
10	Friday (05.06.2026) (Study Trip to Archaeological Site/Museum)	Study Trip to the Asklepieion and museum of EPIDAUROS 08:00 Leave Athens 11:30am Estimated arrival to Epidaurus 11:30-14:30 Visiting the archaeological site of Epidaurus, the theatre and the museum at Epidaurus Reading: Prêtre, Clarisse (2018) "The Epidaurian Iamata: The First 'Court of Miracles?'" M. Gerolemou (Ed.), <i>Recognizing Miracles in Antiquity and Beyond</i> , Trends in Classics - Supplementary Volumes 53; De Gruyter (Ed.), 17–30.
	Saturday (06.06.2026)	FREE DAY
	Sunday (07.06.2026)	FREE DAY
11	1 st DAY (Kos) Monday (08.06.2026) (Study Trip to Archaeological Site/Museum)	Travel by air to Kos [details TBA]/Estimated arrival at 14:00pm 16:00-17:30 Visiting the Archaeological Museum of Kos 17:30-19:00 Visiting the ancient Gymnasium and Stadium
12	2 nd DAY (Kos) Tuesday (09.06.2026)	Class Venue: The International Hippocratic Foundation of Kos (IHFK) Theme: Hippocrates and the Hippocratic Tradition & The Role of Physicians Morning: 10:00-13:00 (Lecture with discussion) Student led discussions, with close analysis of the Hippocratic texts and epigraphic evidence. Readings: Nutton, V. (2004) <i>Ancient medicine</i> . Series of antiquity. London and New York: Routledge, esp. chapters 4 and 5
13	3 rd DAY (Kos) Wednesday (10.06.2026) (Study Trip to Archaeological Site/Museum)	10:00-11:30 Visiting the archaeological site of the Asklepieion 11:30-13:00 Visiting the Epigraphical Collection of the Asklepieion
14	Thursday (11.06.2026)	Class Venue: The International Hippocratic Foundation of Kos (IHFK) Theme: Greek Medicine in the Roman World/Asklepios in the Roman World [Galen of Pergamon and the Asklepieion at Pergamon] Morning Class: 09:00-12:00 (Lecture with discussion) Readings: Eijk, Philip J. van der. "Therapeutics" (pp.283-303), <i>The Cambridge Companion to Galen</i> , R. J. Hankinson (ed.). Cambridge Companions to Philosophy. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

		Vogt, Sabine (2008) "Drugs and Pharmacology" (pp.304-22), <i>The Cambridge Companion to Galen</i> , edited by R. J. Hankinson, 304–22. Cambridge Companions to Philosophy. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
		Flight to Athens
15	Friday (12.06.2026)	1 st) Visit to the Wiener Laboratory at the American School of Classical Studies (Time TBC) 2 nd) Visit to the Museum of Medicine at Sotiria Hospital (Time TBC)
	Saturday (13.06.2026)	FREE DAY
	Sunday (14.06.2026)	FREE DAY ASSESSMENT: Deadline of Report (25 %)
16	Monday (15.06.2026) (Study Trip to Archaeological Site/Museum)	Study Trip to the site and museum at ELEUSIS Theme: Eleusis and the Asklepios Cult 08:30 Depart from Athens to Eleusis 09:30-12:30 Visiting the archaeological site and museum of Eleusis Readings: Rassia, A.-I. (2020) "Cultural Practices and Mentalities of Ancient Greek Religious Fasting", <i>Maigreur et minceur dans les sociétés anciennes: Grèce, Orient, Rome</i> , Sylvie Rougier-Blanc and Estelle Galbois (eds), Scripta Antiqua number 132, Ausonius éditions, Paris, 291-303. van Wijk, R. (2025)"Healing across the Gulf: Eleusis and the Asklepios Cult" (pp.165-190), <i>Beyond Mysteries</i> . Leiden, The Netherlands: Brill.
17	Tuesday (16.06.2026) (Study Trip to Archaeological Site/Museum)	Study Trip to the site and museum of the Ancient Agora (Athens) Theme: Public Hygiene, Healing, and Mortality in the Ancient Agora Afternoon class: 16:00-19:00 Readings: Liston M. and Papadopoulos, J. (2004) "The 'Rich Athenian Lady' Was Pregnant: The Anthropology of a Geometric Tomb Reconsidered" (<i>Hesperia</i> 2004) OR Liston M. and Rotroff, S. (2013) "Babies in the Well" in <i>Childhood and Education in the Classical World</i> , ed. Parkin and Evans Grubbs.
18	Wednesday (17.06.2026)	Students' Presentations (CYA) Morning: 10:00-13:00 (CYA)
19	Thursday (18.06.2026)	Students' Presentations (CYA) Morning: 10:00-13:00 (CYA)
20	Friday (19.06.2026) (Study Trip to Archaeological Museum)	09.00-10:30 lecture (CYA) "Medicine and Surgery in the Byzantine world" 10:30-12:00 walk together to the Byzantine Museum 12:30 Farewell Lunch (CYA) Readings: Touwaide, Alain (2020) "Medicine and Pharmacy", <i>A Companion to Byzantine Science</i> , c. 400-1500 (Brill's Companions to the Byzantine World 6), S. Lazaris (ed.), Leiden and Boston, MA: Brill, 354-403. Geroulanos, Stephanos (2007) "Surgery in Byzantium," <i>Material Culture and Well-Being in Byzantium (400-1453)</i> , M. Grünbart <i>et al</i> (eds.), Vienna 2007, 129-34.
	Saturday (20.06.2026)	End of Program-Departures