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Restituta: The Training of the Female Physician

The Restituta inscription

The ‘Restituta Inscription’, IG XVI 1751, is a unique inscription dedicated by a woman, Restituta, to her professor and patron Claudius Alcimus, who was also a doctor of Caesar.\(^1\) The inscription is unique because it is the only excavated epigraph that documents the relationship between a female physician and her male teacher. The content alone makes the ‘Restituta Inscription’ significant to understanding the role played by women in the medical profession of first-century-CE Rome. The purpose of this paper is to place the ‘Restituta Inscription’ within its historical context and to interpret its content in terms of both the dedicator’s connection to the medical profession as well as the interaction between males and females within that profession. Supplementary inscriptions and literary evidence will assist in this analysis.

The ‘Restituta Inscription’ falls into the category of evidence about professional women which has generally been neglected by contemporary scholarship due to a lack of evidence in the ancient literature.\(^2\) Alongside other inscriptions that detail

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\(^2\) The history of ancient women in general has been limited by the sources pertaining to women being few in comparison to men. This is not surprising considering that texts of the ancient world were almost exclusively written for men by men. Modern theories and interpretations have also a limited value as the scholars are influenced by their own comprehension of the place of the woman in ancient communities. We must also remember that studies of women and healing traditions in the
the working lives of women, Restituta is subject to the typical failings of previous studies. These studies acknowledge that questions concerning the involvement of women in the medical tradition exist but do not attempt to answer them. F.P. Retief, for example, notes that it would be particularly interesting if a study were to be undertaken into the topic of the instruction of female medical practitioners, and yet, beyond expressing this sentiment, he makes no attempt to do so. Ancient literary sources always assert that medicine in the Greek and Roman worlds was a male-based profession. As a result, the reception of women who belonged to healing traditions in these sources is decidedly negative. Owing to the introduction of naturalistic theories and the advent of the Hippocratic schools of thought, women are generally assumed to have been excluded from the healing profession. Moreover, it is also thought that, because of their greater educational opportunities and social dominance, males were in a better position to learn and practice medicine. The Restituta and other inscriptions will be discussed in later sections to show that, while medicine was a male dominated profession, women could also become and be received as professional healers under certain circumstances.

The inscription, uncovered in Rome and dated to the first century CE, reads ‘Τι(βερίω) Κλαυδίω Άλκιμω ιατρῶ Καίσαρος ἐποίησε Ρεστίτουτα πάτρωνι καὶ καθηγητῇ ἄγαθῳ καὶ ἀξίῳ ἔζη(σε) ἐτη πβ’ (‘For Tiberius Claudius Alcimus, first century CE are Athenian, masculine focused and often ambiguous. Once we have accepted these limitations of the modern scholarship we can begin to interpret the evidence in a light more fitting to the contemporary ideas of the ancients themselves.

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Doctor of Caesar. Made by Restituta, for her patron and professor, good and worthy, he lived 82 years!\textsuperscript{6} The text explicitly provides an example of the education of a woman in the male-dominated medical profession that does not involve a male relation. This indicates that some women were educated in medical matters not only by laymen but also by men of some repute who, like Claudius Alcimus, were recognised for the teaching of their remedial knowledge. This shows that there were first-century-CE communities whose attitudes accommodated the education of women as healers and who valued their subsequent work as medical professionals.

Hellenistic and Eastern cultures held a combined influence on Roman society in the first century CE and existed alongside the more traditional Roman ideals.\textsuperscript{7} Restituta is presented to us from within this context as the student of a doctor, although she is not named as a doctor herself. Alongside the evidence that Restituta was a female doctor or assistant, the Hellenistic and Eastern influences within Rome are significant for analysing this inscription, as we will see below. It will be argued that evidence for Restituta’s role as a student of medicine can be drawn from other inscriptions relating to \textit{medicae} and Greek-influenced female doctors which have been found in Rome and the Eastern Empire.

\textbf{Identity and ethnicity}

The name Restituta is telling because it stands alone and is a typical slave name, which usually described a person's role. Restituta means ‘restored’, which could relate to her role in the household to which she belonged upon first arriving in Rome. Based on the name of the individuals involved and their place in the household of Caesar, Herman Gummerus, among the original publications of the ‘Restituta Inscription’, concludes that Restituta is Claudius Alcimus’ freedwomen.\textsuperscript{8} Jakka Korpela expresses strong doubt about this but does not further explain his doubt.\textsuperscript{9} That Restituta was indeed a freedwoman is suggested by her position as the student of a

\textsuperscript{6} All translations are my own except where indicated.
\textsuperscript{7} For a comprehensive study of change in the Hellenistic period in relation to Eastern influences see P. Loman, \textit{Mobility of Hellenistic Women} (Nottingham: University of Nottingham, 2004); R. Van Bremen, \textit{The Limits of Participation: Women and Civic Life in the Greek East in the Hellenistic and Roman Periods} (Amsterdam: J.C. Gieben Publishers, 1996).
\textsuperscript{8} Gummerus, ‘Der Ärztestand im römischen Reiche I’, 43.
\textsuperscript{9} Korpela, \textit{Das Medizinalpersonal im Antiken Rom}, 166.
doctor to Caesar as well as her name. However, the reason why she was personally responsible for this inscription requires further discussion because the occurrence is unique and outside the common formulations of epitaphs. There is evidence for the name Restituta among freeborn Roman women. There are five instances in the Pompeian corpus of informal inscriptions where Restituta is believed to be a prostitute and one from Beneventum in which Crispia Restituta, a wealthy free woman, is described as setting up an alimentary program in 11 CE. In addition to her activities, the difference between the higher status of Crispia Restituta and the prostitutes of Pompeii lies primarily in the praenomen ‘Crisipia’. The praenomen is only seen in the names of freeborn Romans, particularly of Patrician status, and was bestowed on Roman children on the dies lustricus. The Restituta of IG XVI 1751 parallels the examples from the Pompeian corpus in standing alone and is a possible indication of her low status. The Pompeian Restitutae can safely be said to be prostitutes judging from the content of the various inscriptions, such as Restitutus (dicit): Restituta pone tunica; rogo, redes pilosa co(nnum) (‘Restitutus says: Restituta, take off that dress; come on, give us your hairy cunt.’). The relationship between the name Restituta and the lower status roles suggests that the Restituta of IG XVI 1751 was indeed a slave or freedwoman of Claudius Alcimus.

Claudius Alcimus is not only Restituta’s patron and professor but also a ‘Physician to Caesar’, which suggests that his status was higher than the average physician. This is especially possible because this title is used in place of the typical nomenclature describing whose freedman he is. It seems likely that Claudius Alcimus was a Greek freedman. The argument that he is a freedman is supported by elements of his name alongside the use of foreigners and slaves in medical matters. ‘Alcimus’ is a Greek name and is accompanied by the traditional praenomina suggestive of freedman status (Tiberius Claudius). The lack of a paternal nomen suggests that he was personally freed rather than coming from a freed family. Claudius Alcimus’ position was as high as a ‘Physician to Caesar’, but evidence suggests that he may have been one of many. Augustus in Suetonius is recorded as having many medical staff whom he could easily spare on a permanent basis. It is difficult because of this
evidence to pin point the status and attitude towards physicians like Restituta and Claudius Alcimus; what is easier to interpret is the educational association between them.

In the first century CE, there was an abundance of skilled slaves in large and imperial households like that of which Restituta and Claudius Alcimus were part. Livia, for example, in the first century CE, is known to have owned a huge contingent of slaves for all manner of tasks.13 The large number of slaves was partly the result of the introduction of skilled slaves through conquest. Slaves and freedmen were often trained as physicians, and we have records of valetudinaria (‘infirmaries for slaves’) where slave physicians may have looked after other slaves.14 But P.A. Baker argues that the evidence for military valetudinaria has been over-interpreted in the past, noting that we have even less information for civilian valetudinaria who may have worked with or been treated by them, since only Aulus Cornelius Celsus mentions them.15 Rome’s higher social classes perceived involvement in the medical profession to be beneath their dignity but Restituta, as a freedwoman associated with a large household, was in a position to study a healing profession. Wealthy Romans hired well-trained doctors and midwives from the Graeco-Roman East where the professions were more highly esteemed. That Claudius Alcimus might have been chosen for his existing medical skills is suggested by the Greek origin of ‘Alcimus’. We can also assert that Restituta may have originated in the East or was a student of Greek medicine through Claudius Alcimus, although this cannot be definitely determined. This is suggested by the Roman habit of bringing in skilled persons from the East and the Roman view that scientific medicine was a decidedly Greek skill. The educated and literate ἡ νήμε (‘female doctor’) had an established existence in the Graeco-Roman East in the first centuries, where the reception of women in healing

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14 Forbes, ‘Supplementary Paper’, 345
roles was positive because of the long standing regional traditions which equated women with natural healing techniques. The literate female physician is seen in Eastern Greek epigraphy in the form of women like Mousa, who is depicted on an epitaph of the first century BCE with a book-roll in her hand as a sign of education and named in the inscription as a female doctor. However, Restituta’s role as the student of Claudius Alcimus indicates that she was trained by him in Rome and was not herself necessarily directly of Eastern traditions.

Restituta’s dedication suggests that she was personally affected by Claudius Alcimus’ death and that she was of a status that allowed her to dedicate an elaborate epitaph in the absence of the deceased’s family. We can determine that Restituta herself was not a family member of Claudius Alcimus because the inscription does not follow the standard formula by citing the relationship between the two characters. In the majority of other inscriptions related to female doctors, we see a mention of a familial relationship: between the woman and the man, husband and wife, father and daughter or sometimes mother and son. Pleket 12 of Antiochis of Tlos and the reference to an Antiochis by Heraclides of Taras exemplify the fact that the familial connection was mentioned. The female doctor Antiochis is praised as an individual of high standing but is still associated with her father, Diodotus of Tlos. Domnina of Pleket 26 is both connected to her husband in the text and is also recognised in her own right for her contribution to the fatherland by saving its population from a ‘terrible malady’. Consequently we can argue that Restituta was not related by blood to Claudius Alcimus, because Greek inscriptions typically express such a connection when describing a female character. Additionally these inscriptions show


that a female doctor, the ἱετρίνη, could hold a prominent position and profession in the Graeco-Roman world of the first century CE, since both inscriptions, to Antiochis and to Domnina, date to this period. The respect that some female physicians received parallels the more personal level of respect that is indicated between Claudius Alcimus and Restituta through the latter’s dedication.

In the ‘Restituta Inscription’ it is apparent that Restituta and Claudius Alcimus hold the roles of professor and student which conform to the popularised method of instruction that overtook the traditional master and apprentice relationship in the first century CE. Restituta’s choice of the term καθηγήτης (‘professor’) is particularly illustrative of these roles. This professor and student affiliation was increasingly considered the best type of medical education because it made use of the theoretical side of medical practice in addition to the practical. The professor and student relationship was increasingly preferred from the Early Hellenistic period onward because of the teaching techniques undertaken by the likes of Erasistratus and Herophilus.20

The apprenticeship form of education was available to females in the first and second centuries CE around the Graeco-Roman world. This is seen in Graeco-Egyptian contracts that record female slaves who were entrusted to weavers for training. One papyrus from 150 CE records that the slave-girl Taorsenuphis was given by her mistress to the weaver Pausiris for a fourteen-month apprenticeship so that the girl could be ‘taught in the craft just as he knows it himself’.21 Forbes asserts that in the case of girls, the only apprentices are slaves since free girls were traditionally excluded from the money-earning industries.22 The ‘Restituta Inscription’ indicates that apprenticeship instruction was available to women in Rome of a low status who were not as restricted by societal ideals.

Feminisation of traditionally male nouns

Restituta is not given a title within the inscription, but, considering the use of the

20 Drabkin, ‘Medical Education’, 291.
term ἰατρός to describe Claudius Alcimus and the teacher-student relationship between the two characters, it is probable that Restituta was herself an ἰατρίνη (‘female doctor’) or a σοφείρα (‘helper’). The fact that Restituta could afford and was afforded the opportunity to dedicate this detailed inscription to Claudius Alcimus suggests that she was the higher of the two forms, an ἰατρίνη, which was accompanied by some respect as we have seen with Domnina and Antiochis.

The terms ἰατρός and ἰατρίνη attribute a theoretical knowledge to the role of healer in addition to practical duties. The connection between the professor and student in the ‘Restituta Inscription’ also indicates that these terms could be applied in a case where a theoretical and practical knowledge was being taught. That the term ἰατρίνη can be connected to Restituta is demonstrated by other epigraphical evidence that attests to women who hold this same title alongside their described roles and associations. The term ἰατρίνη has distinctly medical and theoretical associations. It is the feminine form of the term ἰατρός, which means ‘one who heals’ or ‘physician/surgeon’. This meaning is seen in Homer and Herodotus. It is also attested in the feminine to mean doctor in Diogenes as ‘of Artemis’ and ‘of Aphrodite’ in Plutarch. Helen King asserts that the ἰατρίνη may have had a healing role that extended beyond that of a midwife’s duties. The association of the term with medical art suggests that a ἰατρίνη was more than just a midwife and that this term signified a woman skilled in many avenues of the medical profession.

The use of the term καθηγήτης in the ‘Restituta Inscription’ is indicative of a relationship between the theoretical and practical. Plato had argued that a medical apprenticeship based only on experience was impersonal in comparison to those practitioners who strived to understand the nature of their art. This indicates that Restituta, as a healing professional, was trained in a way deemed superior to the

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23 Hom. Il. 16.28; Hdt. 3.130.
26 Nutton, however, argues that anyone could claim to be a physician with some healers calling themselves ἱατρός while only having a very limited theoretical knowledge: Vivian Nutton, ‘Murders and Miracles: Lay attitudes towards medicine in classical antiquity’ in Patients and Practitioners, ed. Roy Porter (Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1985), 23–53.
27 Pl. Leg. 720b.
learned mind, gaining experience through practice and theory. The application of the term καθήγητής suggests that both sides of the medical tradition were being explored and practiced.

The medical woman in the Graeco-Roman world: associations with men

Working relationships between male and female doctors like that of Restituta and Claudius Alcimus are also seen in Pleket 27 from Cilicia Trachea, which dates to the second century CE. It records the names of another medical couple, Obrimos the doctor and his wife Ammein the helper. Although Ammein, like Restituta, is not called an ιατρίνη, I argue that there is value in R. Merkelbach and J. Strauber’s assertion that Ammein was a midwife or a female physician. The fact that Ammein was recorded as a helper to her husband Obrimos suggests that it may have been an apprentice and teacher relationship in addition to a professional working association, in which Ammein could have treated the women and Obrimos the men. Thus, I argue that it was a complimentary association similar to that of Claudius Alcimus and Restituta.

Two inscriptions, which also record medical couples, provide evidence of a daughter who was trained and inspired by her father. Pleket 12, mentioned above, dates to the first century CE and records that Antiochis was the daughter of Diodotus of Tlos. It reads Ἀντιοχίς Διοδότου Τλωίς μαρτυρηθείσα ύπο τῆς Τλωέων βουλῆς καὶ τοῦ δήμου ἐπὶ τῇ περὶ τὴν ιατρικῆν τέχνην ἐνπειρίᾳ ἐστησεν τὸν ἀνδριάντα ἐαυτῆς (‘Antiochis, daughter of Diodotus of Tlos, awarded special recognition by the council and the people of Tlos have set up this statue of her for her experience in the healing art’). Modern scholars regard the Diodotus of Tlos referred to in this inscription to be the same Diodotus mentioned by Dioscorides in his first-century-CE Materia Medica. This is indicative of a father and daughter or family profession,
through which Antiochis likely learnt her skills from her father. Dioscorides explains that he is not completely in agreement with writers such as Niger and Diodotus, who are followers of Asclepiades, because they describe commonplace information instead of considering the real value of their personal experience.\(^{32}\) The letter from the Empiricist Heraclides of Taras mentions a female doctor by the name of Antiochis, which indicates that she was well-known and respected in her time and that she was an authority in medical theory.\(^{33}\) The inscription, and accompanying statue, offers special recognition of Antiochis by the council and the people of Tlos for her experience in the healing art. The reference to Antiochis’ medical skill is indicative of a theoretical education in addition to practical experience, the sort of which is described by Herodotus and Plato.

Pleket 20 is a respectful, intimate description of and farewell to the lady Panthia from her husband Glykon.\(^{34}\) As in the case of the Restituta and Antiochis inscriptions, Panthia is praised for her common fame in healing. The inscription comments that, although a woman, she was not behind her husband in skill. This indicates that both she and her husband were in the medical profession and worked together. Panthia is not just an important example of a professional female healer but also of a woman who practiced healing as part of her wifely duties. She is a respected individual amongst her peers and within her community, which is indicated by the term ‘common fame’. Pleket 20 is accompanied by a subsequent inscription dedicated by the same Glykon for Panthia’s father Philadelphus, who was also a physician, which


\(^{33}\) Gossen, s.v. ‘Heraclides of Tarentum’, *RE* vol. 8, 493–496, no. 54.

\(^{34}\) Pleket, *Epigraphica Vol. II*, no.20: ‘Farewell, lady Panthia, from your husband. After your departure, I keep up my lasting grief for your cruel death. Hera, goddess of marriage, never saw such a wife: your beauty, your wisdom, your chastity. You bore me children completely like myself; you cared for your bridegroom and your children; you guided straight the rudder of life in our home and raised high our common fame in healing – though you were a woman you were not behind me in skill. In recognition of this your bridegroom Glycon built this tomb for you. I also buried here the body of [my father] immortal Philadelphus, and I myself will lie here when I die, since with you alone I shared my bed when I was alive, so may I cover myself in ground that we share’.

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indicates a father and daughter training relationship. This father-daughter progression of a family career was not only isolated to the medical profession and is also seen in relation to professional female artists who were trained by their fathers. Most of the evidence for female artists indicates that they were daughters of famous male artists who influenced and trained their daughters in similar career paths.  

The examples quoted above positively depict the relationship between male and female healers and show that it was not the rule that the sexes remained segregated in the first and second centuries CE; Restituta worked and trained with Claudius Alcimus just as Panthia worked alongside her husband and possibly her father too. If it was the case that women lived segregated lives, it would not be possible for women to claim, or to be attributed, fame for professional skills such as art or medicine. If the male and female interaction was frowned upon it is unlikely that we would have epitaphs claiming a common fame, such as the inscription concerning Panthia and her husband Glykon. Moreover, a woman’s skill would not have been worthy of veneration such as that shown to Domnina, who is praised for the saving of her people.

During the first century CE, the instruction of women like Restituta in professions was certainly not unique, even if the recording of it was rare. The philosophical schools contain abundant evidence for educated women in the Graeco-Roman world. Many philosophical schools were closely linked to medical schools in this period, and they may, therefore, illustrate a similar attitude towards the training of women in medical matters. Pythagorean essays by female authors are attested to in the Hellenistic corpus, but there is some debate concerning whether they were women or men using female pseudonyms. The Pythagorean School, however, certainly did include educated females, and Pythagoras’ own wife Theano was a known follower among many other women. In the third century BCE, the Stoic Diodorus Cronus is also said to have had five daughters who were educated and skilled logicians. These women illustrate that females of philosophical and artistic backgrounds were trained in theoretical professions or pastimes. The five daughters of Diodorus Cronus (Argeia, Theognis, Menexene, Pantacleia and Artemisia) and the daughters of Pythagoras (Myia, Damo and Arignote) show us that the passing of knowledge

from father to daughter in male-orientated professions was practised and accepted in some communities from an early period.

Medicine and women have a long-standing tradition in both Greece and Rome. The training of women as midwives is particularly relevant to the idea of the professional women as it illustrates a specialised skill for women. While the women discussed thus far are considered doctors, midwifery offers an important comparison, showing that women could act in multiple areas of healing professions. In his explanation of the ideal midwife, Soranus explains that she should possess theoretical and literary knowledge as well as practical experience. These are skills that all the most renowned healing professionals ideally held. Restituta, Panthia and Antiochis would have gained these skills in order to perform the role of a healer woman or helpers to an ἱερός.

The training of midwives in the first century CE is considered more evident than the training strategies of female physicians because mothers trained their daughters and apprenticeships were common in this female-based profession. There is evidence from Latin inscriptions, dating to the same period and location as the ‘Restituta Inscription’, that young women, who were unlikely to have much personal experience in childbearing, were trained as midwives in apprenticeship positions. CIL 6.9723 of Publilia the Obistrix records that she died at the age of 21, long before she would have been past childbearing age herself. While Restituta was likely a female doctor, the midwife inscriptions provide further evidence that women could be involved in healing professions from a young age through apprenticeship positions.

Conclusion

The Restituta Inscription is important and useful to the overall understanding of how professional women were received in the first century CE. It also confirms our understanding of the education of women in the first century CE as revealed by other inscriptions. Furthermore, it provides insight into the nature of interaction between male and female professionals. What is particularly explicit in the epigraphic evidence that we have encountered is that the interaction between male and female healers could be complementary: husbands and wives might share the same profes-
sion, wives might assist their husbands and professions might be passed down from father to daughter and not just from father to son. Women are sometimes thought to have been segregated in first-century-CE Greece, but such inscriptive evidence indicates otherwise; evidently there was opportunity for a woman to gain respect as a medical professional and work alongside men. The identification of Restituta and other women in inscriptions as female physicians plays a major part in demonstrating that these women were skilled in both theoretical and practical knowledge. In acknowledging this, we see that women were able to become valued professionals, holding roles that modern scholarship sometimes attributes to men. Female doctors and midwives are represented in these inscriptions as interacting with and complementing the work of male doctors, and the inscriptions show that they were received as helpers or even near equals. Restituta’s ability and desire to dedicate an epitaph to her professor also highlights that respect and cooperation existed between the sexes.

In Rome, Restituta is likely to have been a freedwoman, but she represents a tradition of female doctors and slaves with professional backgrounds who contributed significantly to the economy and health of the community in which they lived. IG XVI 1751 is a unique inscription, but it attests to a long-standing practice of women working in healing traditions and is significant to the understanding of medical and female traditions in the first century CE.

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