The Greek mythology is characterized by a large corpus of narrative texts describing the adventures and life of a constellation of gods, goddesses, heroes and heroines as well as various mythological creatures. The purpose of this article is to present gods and heroes which were considered to practice medicine. A thorough study of ancient texts of the Greek and Roman literature, revealed that Greek mythology abounds with examples of Gods such as Apollo, semi-gods such as Asclepius and Ampiarus, and creatures such as centaur Chiron who practiced and taught medicine in pre-historical times in Greece. In general, the chronological order of the appearance of those figures in Greek mythology depict the course of transformation of Medicine from divine gift to practical art.

Keywords: mythology, medicine, ancient Greece.

INTRODUCTION

One could define the beginning of Myth in the fiction of human mind during the early times of human history, which originates from dream activity and breaks out in symbolic form. The word “µύθος” (mythos) in Greek is totally different by the word “παραµύθι” (fairy-tale): the second is a compound word of the word “παρά” and the word “µύθος” which literally means “on the side of myth” or alternatively “a story very close to that of myth” (“παρά το µύθον”), whereas the former implies also the allegoric narration of real events.

It is true that in the past, what was unable to be explained by reason, was attributed to transcendental entities, which had either a human or animal form. Natural phenomena were deified, whereas everything that happened in the world was accredited to the will of Gods; in that way, pantheism was a natural outcome, since a constellation of Gods satisfied primitive desires, successes and failures. The innate inability of the individual as a unit or within the family or the tribe led man to device different means with the superior, invisible deities, giving birth, in that way, to Magic and Ritual.