

The Role of Incubation in Ancient Greek Asklepieions

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The sanctuaries of Asklepios served a healing function in the Greek world throughout antiquity. In modern historiography, it is believed that the sick were treated there by incubation, i.e., sleeping in the temple to obtain a divinatory dream. However, the sources are not clear on this matter. In this article, I analyse four sources that, in my opinion, are the most representative of the issue of treatment methods in the Asklepieions. From the classical period, inscriptions describing healings from Epidaurus and the comedy "Wealth" by Aristophanes are extremely important, while from Roman times they include "The Sacred Tales" by Aelius Aristides and the Apellas' inscription from Epidaurus. It is significant that none of these sources describes the incubation ritual, and the treatment methods presented in them are rational from the viewpoint of contemporary medicine. Incubation was practiced in the Asklepieions, but its role, in my opinion, was much smaller than commonly believed.

Introduction

"(...) the gentle craftsman of body-strengthening relief from pain, Asklepios, the hero and protector from diseases of all sorts"¹ – this is how Pindar, a Greek poet from the 5th century BC, wrote about Asklepios, the later god of medicine. At that time, the cult of Asklepios, initially a hero and later the god of medicine and patron of doctors, began to spread throughout the Greek world. Nearly a thousand years later, the Latin author Macrobius wrote why Asklepios was so closely associated with the art of medicine: "Aesculapius is in charge of prophecies and auguries. And that is not surprising, seeing that the disciplines of medicine and divination are closely allied: a physician foresees both the good states and the bad that a body will experience, just as Hippocrates says that a physician must tell about a sick person "the things that are and were before and those that are going to be», that is, the things that are, that were, and that soon will come to follow. And that squares with prophecies, which know the things that are, that will be, and that were before."² This quote indicates Macrobius'

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1. Trans. William H. Race, Pind. *Pyth.* III.6-8: (...) τέκτονα νωδυνίας ἡμερον γυιαρκέος Ἀσκληπιόν, ἦροα παντοδαπᾶν ἀλκτῆρα νούσων.

2. Trans. Robert A. Kaster, Macrobius *Sat.* I.20.4-5: "(...) Aesculapius divinationibus et auguriis praesit nec mirum, si quidem medicinae atque divinationum consociatae sunt disciplinae. nam medicus vel commoda vel incommoda in corpore futura praenoscit, sicut ait Hippocrates oportere medicum dicere de aegro, τὰ τε παρεόντα καὶ τὰ προγεγονότα καὶ τὰ μέλλοντα ἔσεσθαι, id est, quae sint, quae fuerint, quae mox ventura sequentur. quod congruit divinationibus quae sciunt τὰ τ' ἔοντα τὰ τ' ἐσόμενα πρό τ' ἔοντα".

belief in the connection between medicine and the art of prophecy. Asklepios was the mythical son of Apollo, hence the suggestion that, like his father, the god of medicine predicted the future. However, it is primarily a metaphor depicting the nature of medical art, as understood by Macrobius. This connection between medicine and predicting the future did exist in ancient times, but it is not always properly understood by modern researchers, which may sometimes lead to drawing incorrect conclusions.³

The popularity of Asklepieions in the ancient world can certainly be evidenced by the effectiveness of the help provided there. Temples of Asklepios were situated in nearly every polis, with the most significant ones being Panhellenic, operating often far from urban centres, attracting patients from across the Greek and later Greco-Roman world. An essential consideration is the historical period under discussion: Asklepieions and their functions evolved over the centuries. Therefore, this paper focuses on sources from the classical and Roman periods, emphasizing the largest and most significant ancient sanctuaries. This choice is informed by both the state of preservation of the sources and the opportunity to observe the changes that occurred over several hundred years of their operation.

The prevailing view in contemporary scientific literature suggests that patients in the Asklepieions were treated through a practice known as incubation, wherein individuals slept in the temple with the aim of obtaining a divinatory dream. The concept of incubation gained prominence through the work of Ludwig Deubner, who published *De incubatione* in 1900. L. Deubner emphasised the significance of dreams in foreseeing the future, particularly in the Christian world during late antiquity. He posited that incubation was a common practice in the pagan world, particularly in sanctuaries dedicated to chthonic gods or heroes associated with the underworld, such as Trophonios, Amphiaraos, and Asklepios.⁴

3. It should be noted here that the connection between medicine, magic and religion also existed much earlier in the ancient Near East. There too, as with the Greeks, dream interpretation was practiced. However, there is no indication that incubation, i.e., sleeping in a sacred place in order to obtain a divination dream, was widespread, as there are very few sources confirming such a practice, particularly concerning healing, see Sally A. Butler, *Mesopotamian Conceptions of Dreams and Dream Rituals* (Münster, 1998), 217-239; A. Leo Oppenheim, *The Interpretation of Dreams in the Ancient Near East* (Gorgias Press, 2008), 187-188; diagnosing diseases through dreams was quite widespread in the ancient Near East, but as a rule it had nothing to do with incubation, see P. J. Eijk, "Divination, Prognosis, and Prophylaxis: the Hippocratic Work "On Dreams" (De Victu 4) and its Near Eastern Background" In *Magic and Rationality in Ancient Near Eastern and Graeco-Roman Medicine*. Edited by H. F. J. Horstmanshoff, M. Stol (Leiden-Boston, 2004), 187-218, especially 215.

4. Ludwig Deubner, *De incubatione* (Lipsia, 1900), 1-14; on incubation and healing dreams in the Christian world: Ildikó Csepregi *Incubation in Early Byzantium: The Formation of Christian Incubation Cults and Miracle Collections* (Turnhout, 2024); I. Csepregi "Who Is Behind the Incubation Stories? The Hagiographers of Byzantine Dream-Healing

Since then, subsequent researchers have generally assumed that incubation was the primary method of treatment in the sanctuaries of Asklepios.

The role of incubation as one of the treatment methods in the Asklepieions has been examined by numerous researchers, including Rudolf Herzog, as well as the authors of an extensive collection of sources on Asklepios with commentary – Ludwik and Emma L. Edelstein.⁵ Eric Dodds' book *Greeks and the Irrational* significantly influenced the understanding of incubation. Dodds argued that the content of incubation dreams experienced by patients in the temple of Asklepios reflected the cultural norms of the time, as well as the particular atmosphere prevailing in the temples, where patients were immersed in stories of miraculous healings before sleep. However, Dodds regarded dreams depicting realistic scenarios, such as surgical procedures, as highly improbable products of imagination. Moreover, he made several simplifications by juxtaposing sources of varying specificity and, notably, from different historical periods.⁶

The theme of incubation is also prominently featured in Lynn LiDonnici's book, where the author presents a new translation of inscriptions from Epidaurus, one of the most significant sources describing healings attributed to Asklepios. These stories are interpreted as accounts of patients' dreams during incubation.⁷ In recent years, two highly important works on incubation have been written. The first, authored by Hedvig von Ehrenheim, focuses on reconstructing the progression of incubation rituals during the classical and Hellenistic periods, drawing from Epidaurian inscriptions, Aristophanes' comedy *Wealth*, and the sacred laws (*leges sacrae*) from the sanctuaries of Asklepios as well as Amphiaraos of Oropos.⁸ The second monograph, by Gil H. Renberg, provides an extensive examination of incubation not only in the Greco-Roman world but also in the ancient Near East.⁹ It is noteworthy that Renberg distinguishes between divinatory and therapeutic incubation. This is, so far, the only such detailed, in-depth, and documented study on the practice currently called incubation.

Miracles, in *Dream, Healing, and Medicine in Greece. From Antiquity to the Present*. Edited by Steven M. Oberhelman (London, 2013), 161-187; in the same collective volume also Timothy S. Miller, "Hospital Dreams in Byzantium", 199-215.

5. Rudolf Herzog, *Die Wunderheilungen von Epidaurus. Ein Beitrag zur Geschichte der Medizin und der Religion* (Leipzig, 1931); Emma J. Edelstein, Ludwig Edelstein, *Asclepius. Collection and interpretation of the testimonies* (Baltimore, 1945), vol. I-II.

6. Eric Dodds, *The Greeks and the Irrational* (Berkeley-Los Angeles, 1959), 110-119.

7. Lynn R. LiDonnici, *The Epidaurian miracle inscriptions. Text, translation, and commentary* (Atlanta, 1995), 12: "Most commonly, *Iamata* tales deal with the practice of 'incubation'".

8. Hedvig von Ehrenheim, *Greek Incubation Rituals in Classical and Hellenistic Times* (Stockholm, 2011).

9. Gil H. Renberg, *Where Dreams May Come. Incubation Sanctuaries in the Graeco-Roman World*, Vol. I-II (Leiden-Boston, 2017).

However, a significant question arises regarding whether ancient sources, often cited as evidence of incubation in the temples of Asklepios, actually describe this ritual. Many expressions found in these sources are ambiguous, lacking terms that unequivocally indicate incubation. Another research challenge associated with this issue is whether patients in the Asklepieions primarily received medical assistance, or if healing predominantly involved sleeping in the temple and receiving a divinatory dream. The resolution of this question could be pivotal in attempting to define the concept of so-called temple medicine.

I begin this article by delving into an exploration of what incubation entailed in the ancient Greek world and how it was perceived during that era. Subsequently, I analyse four sources that are regarded as particularly significant for the examination of the *sacred dream* phenomenon in the Asklepieions: namely, from the classical period, inscriptions from Epidauros dating back to the 4th century B.C. and Aristophanes' comedy *Plutus (Wealth)*, and from Roman times, *The Sacred Tales* by Aelius Aristides and the so-called Apellas' inscription from Epidauros. While these testimonies are not exhaustive, I believe they are the most illustrative in terms of understanding incubation, thereby facilitating the derivation of conclusions regarding the nature of the assistance rendered in the Asklepieions.

Incubation in the Greek World

A widely acknowledged definition of incubation is articulated by Fritz Graf in *The Oxford Classical Dictionary*: "ritual sleep in a sanctuary in order to obtain a dream, mostly for healing".¹⁰ Graf identifies the sanctuaries of Asklepios and the Amphiareion in Oropos as the main sites for incubation practices. Moreover, he references the incubation oracles of Calchas and Podalirius, albeit our understanding of their operations remains limited due to the absence of preserved sources that could offer further insights into their functioning.

The term "incubation" originates from Latin (*incubatio*), derived from the verb "incubo", meaning "to lie upon", implying sleeping in a temple. Its Greek equivalent is the word ἐγκοίμησις, which, however, appears only once in the sources, specifically in Diodorus Siculus, within the context of Egyptian gods.¹¹ In sources concerning treatment in the sanctuaries of Asklepios or the temple of Amphiaraos, "sleeping in the temple" is described using various verbs associated with sleep, including καθεύδω, κατάκειμαι, κατακλίνω, κατακοιμάω,

10. Fritz Graf, "Incubation", In: *The Oxford Classical Dictionary*, 4th Edition. Eds. Simon Hornblower, Antony Spawforth (Leiden-Boston, 2005), 731-732.

11. Diod. Sic. 1.53.

ἐγκατακοιμάομαι.¹² Consequently, there was no single Greek term exclusively corresponding to "incubation." This raises doubts as to whether each instance of a source mentioning sleeping or lying in a temple denotes incubation.

In the case of the temple of Amphiaraos, it can be inferred that incubation was the primary purpose for pilgrims visiting there. Amphiaraos, a seer and hero swallowed by the earth, possessed a chthonic nature that enabled him to prophesy the future through sacred dreams, namely incubation.¹³ Conversely, Asklepios, although also considered a chthonic god (originally a hero, only later revered as a deity around the 5th century B.C.), had a distinct nature: he primarily embodied the role of a healing deity, serving as the archetype of a physician who employed both mystical spells and "rational" methods such as surgery and medicinal treatments.¹⁴ It is noteworthy that no source directly outlines the incubation procedure. Of course, this may be due to the fact that no evidence has survived to this day about how the rituals took place and what such treatment looked like. However, analysing the sources that have survived, one may have doubts whether incubation played as important a role as is attributed to it in the sanctuaries of Asklepios.

Inscriptions from Epidauros

The most significant sources from the classical period concerning treatment in the Asklepieion are primarily epigraphic sources. Four stelae with descriptions of healings dating back to around the mid-4th century BC have been preserved in Epidauros.¹⁵ They contain 70 stories detailing the patient's name, the disease they suffered from, and the method of their cure. These texts were composed by

12. List of Greek words for incubation: Ehrenheim, *Greek Incubation Rituals in Classical and Hellenistic Times*, 15, footnote. 21, and Renberg, *Where Dreams May Come*, 8, footnote. 11.

13. Albert Schachter, *Cults of Boiotia*. Vol. 1: Acheloos to Hera (London, 1981), 21-23.

14. Pind. *Pyth* III 51-53: τοὺς μὲν μαλακαῖς ἐπαιδαῖς ἀμφέπων, τοὺς δὲ προσανέα πίνοντας, ἢ γυίοις περάπτων πάντοθεν φάρμακα, τοὺς δὲ τομαῖς ἔστασεν ὀρθούς – "some he tended with calming incantations, while others drank soothing potions, or he applied remedies to all parts of their bodies; still others he raised up with surgery", trans. William H. Race; Steven M. Oberhelman, "Inscribing Votive Offerings and Tamata: Narratives, Artefacts, Asklepios, and Panagia Megalochari", *Athens Journal of Humanities & Arts*, Volume 7, Issue 1, (2020), 15-16.

15. IG IV² 1 121-124; LiDonnici, *The Epidaurian miracle inscriptions*, 80-82; these are probably four of the six stelae that Pausanias described: II.27.3.

The stelae (A, B, C and D) are currently in the Archaeological Museum of Epidauros, they are heavily damaged (only a small fragment of stele D has survived), some of the texts are broken, so not all stories can be analysed. The text was written in stichedon, and you can still see the extraordinary care taken in making the inscriptions, especially when looking at the inscription squeezes.

priests, drawing upon oral testimonies of cured patients, votive offerings of gratitude, as well as earlier inscriptions that remain unknown to us.¹⁶

The original locations of the stelae are still unknown, as they were not discovered *in situ*; instead, their fragments were utilised in the construction of subsequent Christian buildings. There are speculations that they may have been exhibited in the Abaton, where stone bases were found, at least one of which matched the dimensions of one of the stelae.¹⁷ However, recent findings indicate that the dimensions of the four bases found do not align with those of the stelae, and Pausanias reported seeing six. The ancient traveller also notes that they were displayed "within the circle" (περιβολος), indicating placement within the temenos, rather than explicitly within the Abaton itself.¹⁸ Abaton was a relatively small structure¹⁹, suggesting that it may have been dimly lit inside. Placing stelae with inscriptions there would likely have restricted their readability and accessibility to a limited number of people. It is more plausible that the inscriptions were situated outdoors, perhaps in proximity to the Abaton, allowing all visitors, including those accompanying the sick, to read their contents.²⁰

Learning about healing stories undoubtedly influenced the mental outlook of patients. Strengthening the patient's belief in recovery, even if not immediate, was crucial.²¹ The inscriptions employ simple, unsophisticated²² language devoid of medical terminology, often repeating stereotypical formulas. As such, they were tailored for ordinary people, particularly patients awaiting treatment. Notably, most of the depicted events occur during sleep, although the content often suggests this was merely a convention.

The didactic aspect of these stories was equally significant. Patients could learn about what to expect and which ailments could be cured in the sanctuary.

16. LiDonnici, *The Epidaurian miracle inscriptions*, 40-49.

17. LiDonnici, *The Epidaurian miracle inscriptions*, 15-19.

18. Paus. II.27.3; Ioannis G. Mavrommatidis, *Η Ιωνική Στοά του Ασκληπιείου της Επιδαύρου το λεγόμενον Άβατον* (Αθήνα, 2021), 846-852.

19. Sebastian Prignitz, *Bauurkunden und Bauprogramm von Epidauros II* (München, 2022), 173-175 indicates that the Abaton consisted of three rooms: the front hall (προκοιτατήριον), the inner sleeping room (ένκοιμητήριον), and the smallest of them, the so-called Building K, built on the site of an earlier structure. Mavrommatidis, *Η Ιωνική Στοά του Ασκληπιείου της Επιδαύρου το λεγόμενον Άβατον*, 854-857 believes that building K could have served as a surgery room, because this place was the only one in Abaton that was completely closed to the eyes of outsiders.

20. Speculations on this matter are also put forward by Rachel J. Levine, *Dreaming the Divine: Ritual and Architecture at Ancient Greek Healing Sanctuaries of Asklepios* (Toronto, 2008), 257-258.

21. For example, Sostrata from story B5, who was cured after she had already left the sanctuary; here and below, I am using the designations of individual steles (A, B, C, and D) and the numbering of the stories according to LiDonnici., *The Epidaurian miracle inscriptions*, 85-131.

22. Herzog, *Die Wunderheilungen von Epidauros*, 58-60.

They were instructed to offer a votive offering for their recovery, and neglecting to do so could result in a recurrence of the illness. Additionally, several narratives depict patients who mocked the notion of instantaneous cures for their ailments. Although they were ultimately healed, they faced repercussions for their disbelief.²³

The majority of the cures recounted on the stelae occur during sleep and are attributed to Asklepios. Typically, the patient arrives at the Asklepieion, falls asleep, experiences a vision while sleeping, and departs the sanctuary the following day healed. However, the descriptions of these dreams often include quite rational actions. In story A4, the god administers medicine into Ambrosia's eye, in A12 Asklepios draws a spear from Euhippus' jaw, while in A13 the god performs surgery on the man's chest, removing leeches and then suturing the wound. Similarly, on stele B, there are additional accounts of such interventions: Asklepios operates on a man's stomach, excises a tumour, and closes the incision (B7) - it is further noted that "the floor in the Abaton was covered in blood".²⁴ In B20, the god "ground up an herb and poured it into his eye," while in B21 Asklepios provided Erasippa with a cup of medicine to ingest, resulting in vomiting. These narratives may indicate specific medical and surgical interventions undergone by patients. As these events occurred within the sanctuary, they carried a religious significance, with Asklepios' role in all healings being emphasised. However, these accounts do not describe incubation, as sleep in these instances was not utilised to receive divine instructions; rather, patients underwent various treatments while asleep. There are theories that this sleep was induced artificially, potentially through the use of substances like opium, as surgical procedures necessitated sedation.²⁵

In some of the descriptions on the stelae, it is unclear how the cure occurred. This ambiguity is evident in stories concerning issues with fertility. For instance, Kleo from story A1 "slept in the Abaton" and upon leaving, immediately gave birth to a boy who, moreover, promptly bathed in the spring and walked with his mother. While these accounts contain elements of fantasy, their purpose was to convey a sense of miraculous events and the extraordinary actions of Asklepios. Similarly, in story A2, Ithmonika "saw a vision" twice, resulting in her becoming pregnant and then giving birth to the desired girl. In B11, Andromache had a dream and subsequently became pregnant, a pattern mirrored in stories B14, B19, and B22. Many descriptions of other ailments are also unclear. For example, the healing of a mute boy who simply made a sacrifice and performed "the required

23. The man in story A3 was named "Unbeliever", and Ambrosia of Athens in story A4 had to offer a silver pig as a votive offering; Mathew Dillon, "The didactic nature of the Epidaurian Iamata", *Zeitschrift für Papyrologie und Epigraphik* 101 (ZPE, 1994), 253-257.

24. All quotations from Epidaurian inscriptions from the 4th century BC translated by Lynn LiDonnici.

25. Helen Askitopoulou et al., "Surgical cures under sleep induction in the Asclepieion of Epidauros". *International Congress Series* 1242 (2002), 15-17.

things" and underwent spontaneous healing, as it seems (A5). In story A11, a man named Aischines inserted thorns into his eyes, fell asleep, and awoke healed. Likewise, a stone in a man's penis was removed while he was sleeping (A14). There are also cures described involving being licked by a dog (A20 and B6), cures of blindness (A18, B2, C22) in an unknown manner, removal of birthmarks on the forehead (A6, A7), treatment for kidney stones (A8), dropsy (B1), tapeworm (B3), headaches (B9), and numerous other similar ailments. What all these described cures have in common is that the patients received specific physical assistance. In these cases, it is not a matter of sleeping in a temple to obtain a dream vision and treatment instructions, but rather the cure itself, likely performed by physicians and/or surgeons present in the sanctuary.

Among the Epidaurian inscriptions, there are stories involving incubation, although they do not pertain to medical treatment. For instance, in B4, a father searching for his missing son slept in the sanctuary and had a vision where Asklepios guided him to his son's whereabouts. Consequently, after seven days, the father found his son. Similarly, in story C3, a woman named Kallikrateia sought to uncover the location of her deceased husband's hidden treasure. She turned to Asklepios and received precise instructions in a dream regarding where to search for the treasure. Of course, she found valuable gold in the place that god had given her in her dream. It appears that Herakleitos of Chios (C20) also approached the god for a similar purpose, i.e. searching for gold, although the text is heavily damaged at this point. From the surviving fragments, it can be inferred that Herakleitos successfully recovered gold he may have previously lost. These narratives exemplify typical instances of incubation dreams, wherein the god imparts instructions and guidance during a dream vision within the sanctuary.

The practice of incubation is possibly depicted in story B1. The patient, Arata of Lacedaemon, was suffering from dropsy, preventing her from traveling to Epidauros. Her mother slept in her place in the Asklepieion. She experienced a somewhat fantastical dream wherein the god severed her daughter's head, allowing the excess fluids to drain out, and then reattached the head to her neck. Upon the mother's return home, it was discovered that her daughter was cured and had the same dream. Performing a religious act on behalf of another individual is not uncommon, reminiscent of the narrative recounted by Herodotus, where a certain Mys sends a non-Theban to the temple of Amphiaraos to "sleep in the shrine" on his behalf to obtain a divination, as Thebans were prohibited from entering.²⁶ Amphiaraos prophesied during his incubation sleep, so it can be assumed that something similar happened in the Asklepieion. However, in Arata's case, we are not dealing with fortune-telling or future prediction. The outcome of sleeping in the temple is healing, indicating some

26. Hdt. 8.134; Ehrenheim, *Greek Incubation Rituals in Classical and Hellenistic Times*, 88-89.

form of intervention, albeit not within the sanctuary itself. Since there is no alternative interpretation for this story, it can be inferred that Arata was healed through incubation in this instance.

The text of the Epidaurian inscriptions lacks descriptions of the rituals accompanying visits to the Asklepieion. This is one of the reasons why it is so complicated to interpret the treatment's nature, specifically whether it relied on the practices of physicians or surgeons, or if the religious aspect held greater significance. A hint regarding rituals is found in story A5, where the boy is mentioned as having "performed the opening sacrifices and did the required things." Given the sacred nature of the Asklepieion, it is reasonable to expect that sacrifices and specific rituals were deemed necessary. "The required things" were probably activities so widely known, perhaps also performed in other sanctuaries, that there was no need to name them specifically; for the Greeks they were obvious. Expressing gratitude to Asklepios for the healing was also deemed necessary. It is probably no coincidence that a plaque (pinax) appears in the first story as an offering of thanks. Other offerings included a silver pig (A4), a mug (A10), and even dice (A8). Additionally, in three stories, payment of *iatra*, i.e. doctor's fee, is mentioned (A5, B2, and B5). While this could be viewed as an expression of gratitude, it also implies the presence of doctors at the Asklepieion.

The content of the Epidaurian inscriptions does not provide a clear answer to the question of the nature of the assistance received by the sick there. However, the descriptions suggest that the patients were treated by medical practitioners or surgeons. This is primarily indicated by the specific and tangible results of the cures. Incubation also seems to have been practiced in the Asklepieion, albeit to a limited extent.

"Plutus" (Wealth) by Aristophanes

Aristophanes' comedy, performed in 388 BC, particularly one of its scenes, is regarded as the sole source depicting treatment through incubation in the Asklepieion. However, the credibility of this source may be questionable since it is a work of literature. The scene depicting the Asklepieion is comedic and undoubtedly exaggerated, but for it to resonate with the audience, it likely drew from real practices.²⁷

In the comedy, the protagonists, seeking wealth, opt to cure the god Plutus (Wealth), who is blind. Intriguingly, their initial plan involves consulting a doctor.

27. Ar. *Pl.* 665-747; Ehrenheim, *Greek Incubation Rituals in Classical and Hellenistic Times*: 17-18; as the second literary source from pre-Roman times, Hedvig von Ehrenheim mentions *Mimiambi* of Herodas from the 3rd century BC, but there is only a description of making a sacrifice for the sick, and the work focuses on the description of works of art in the Asklepieion and does not contain a report on treatment in the sanctuary.

However, due to the high cost, they abandon this option, as reflected in the line, "The pay's not here, so the profession's not there either".²⁸ Consequently, they resolve to "to bed him down in Asclepius' temple."²⁹ This portrayal highlights the Asklepieion as an alternative to medical intervention.

In the play, the account of Wealth's visit to the sanctuary is narrated by one of the characters, Karion, a slave who relays the incident to his wife. The setting is the Asklepieion, likely located in the Athenian port of Piraeus.³⁰ Initially, as part of the purification ritual, Chremylos and Karion, along with the god, opt to immerse Wealth in the sea and bathe him in cold water. The practice of symbolic purification before entering sacred precincts was common, and bathing in seawater was believed to possess special cleansing properties.³¹ However, this was not typically observed before visiting the Asklepieion. It appears that in the case of Wealth, it was intended purely for comedic effect, as a simple sprinkling with water or washing of the hands and face would have sufficed for cleansing. As indicated in the few surviving *sacred laws* (*leges sacrae*), the emphasis was on ritual purity rather than the necessity of bathing.³² It is worth noting that at the beginning of the comedy, when Chremylos and the slave Karion encounter Wealth, he is depicted as unkempt and dirty.³³ This likely prompted the need for a bath, and the comedic aspect was amplified by treating the bath as a ritual purification before visiting the sanctuary.

When the characters entered the sacred precinct, they burned cakes (*popana*, singular: *popanon*) and preliminary offerings – *prothymata*³⁴ – on the altar. This practice was in accordance with the customs of the time, as we find references to preliminary offerings in an inscription containing *sacred laws* from the Asklepieion in Piraeus, dating back to the 4th century B.C., a period close to the

28. Trans. Alan H. Sommerstein, *Ar. Pl.* 408: οὔτε γὰρ ὁ μισθὸς οὐδὲν ἔστ' οὔθ' ἡ τέχνη.

29. Trans. Jeffrey Henderson, *Ar. Pl.* 411: κατακλίνειν αὐτὸν εἰς Ἀσκληπιοῦ. The word κατακλίνειν literally means "lay down", and the entire phrase can also be translated as "lay a sick person in the temple of Asklepios" (LSJ). Therefore, it is not necessarily about spending the night in a sanctuary. A. H. Sommerstein's translation is slightly less adequate here: "to have him spend the night in the sanctuary of Asclepius."

30. There are also speculations that the action takes place in Athens itself; different views on this subject: Ehrenheim, *Greek Incubation Rituals in Classical and Hellenistic Times*, 17, footnote 31; Renberg, *Where Dreams May Come. Incubation Sanctuaries in the Graeco-Roman World*, 133-136.

31. Ehrenheim gives examples, *Greek Incubation Rituals in Classical and Hellenistic Times*, 36.

32. Renberg, *Where Dreams May Come. Incubation Sanctuaries in the Graeco-Roman World*: 241.

33. *Ar. Pl.* 84-85: "Chremylus: Then tell me, how come you're walking around in such a filthy state? Wealth: I've just come from Patrocles' place; he's not had a bath since the day he was born." trans. A. H. Sommerstein.

34. *Ar. Pl.* 659-661.

time when Aristophanes' play was performed.³⁵ The sacred laws require a preliminary sacrifice to be made to other deities associated with Asklepios (including Apollo, Hermes, Iaso, Akeso), which is omitted in the comedy, probably due to the past pace of the story.³⁶ After making sacrifices, the characters place Wealth in the Asklepieion and prepare their place to rest.³⁷ It is implied that patients had to bring their own bedding and some other items, but Aristophanes does not specify what these were. The expression *ὡς νομίζεται* used in the text means "as is the custom". We do not learn what it was customary to bring with them to the Asklepieion or what to wear. Hedvig von Ehrenheim, based on the translation of A.H. Sommerstein: "the customary garb", draws from this the conclusion that it is possible that the incubators in Piraeus could have been dressed in simple, white clothes.³⁸ The researcher highlights sources mentioning the wearing of white clothes in the Asklepieion, such as the *Hymn of Isyllos*³⁹, *The Sacred Tales*⁴⁰ of Aelius Aristides, and a heavily damaged inscription containing sacred laws from Pergamon.⁴¹ However, all these accounts refer to white clothing in the context of holidays, processions, or other rituals performed in honour of the god. There is no indication that any special clothing was required for patients visiting the sanctuary for treatment. It can only be assumed that the attire must have been comfortable if patients were expected to lie down or sleep, but any conclusions on this matter remain speculative. Furthermore, Aristophanes' description does not provide any insights into this aspect.⁴²

Karion, when asked by his wife whether there were other sick people in the Asklepieion, mentions that there were many people there, although he only specifies the presence of the thief Neocleides, who was blind.⁴³ The storyline involving the blind thief, juxtaposed with his proficiency in his craft, is evidently comedic, aimed at entertaining the audience. Karion then recounts what he observed while unable to sleep. It is important to note that this sequence does not occur within a dream; Karion, who covered himself with his cloak and peered at

35. LSCG 21.

36. Ehrenheim, *Greek Incubation Rituals in Classical and Hellenistic Times*, 50.

37. Ar. *Pl.* 662-663: "we bedded Wealth down (*κατεκλίναμεν τὸν Πλοῦτον*) in the proper fashion, and rigged up bunks (*στιβάδες*) for ourselves", trans. J. Henderson.

38. Ehrenheim, *Greek Incubation Rituals in Classical and Hellenistic Times*, 75-77.

39. *IG IV² 1*, 128, line 17-21.

40. Aristid. *Or.* 48.30-31.

41. LSAM 14.

42. Ar. *Pl.* 624-626: *τὰ στρώματ' ἐκφέρειν ἐχρῆν αὐτόν τ' ἄγειν τὸν Πλοῦτον, ὡς νομίζεται, καὶ τὰλλ' ὅσ' ἐστὶν ἔνδον ἠτύρεπισμένα* – "You should be bringing out our bedding, and also bringing Wealth himself in the customary garb, and all the other things that have been got ready in there", trans. A.H. Sommerstein; "it's time to fetch the bedding and bring out the god himself, with due ceremony, as well as the other things we've got ready", trans. J. Henderson.

43. Ar. *Pl.* 664-668.

the god through a hole in it, witnessed the entire situation while awake. The portrayal of the priest caught stealing cakes and figs from the sacred table, intended to evoke laughter from the audience. Finally, the god Asklepios himself, accompanied by his mythical daughters – Iaso and Panacea, appeared. This was also a highly exaggerated, comedic element, as the god assumed the role of a physician, meticulously visiting all the patients and examining their ailments.⁴⁴ He was equipped with a stone mortar, pestle, and a box, which, as later revealed, were essential for preparing medicines.⁴⁵ Asklepios proceeded to prepare a poultice (φάρμακον καταπλαστόν) for Neocleides, applying it to his eyes and rolling his eyelids. The action, causing pain to Neocleides, served as a form of punishment for him – it was another manoeuvre by Aristophanes aimed at amusing the audience, as well as the fact that not only was the patient not cured, but Asklepios inadvertently worsened his blindness.

Finally, the god approaches Wealth. A supernatural element is introduced here, as Asklepios wipes Wealth's eyelids, then Panacea covers the sick man's head, and suddenly two large snakes emerge from the temple. Karion observes as the snakes appear to lick Wealth's eyelids. This action results in Wealth's healing. The snake was a symbol of Asklepios, and it also features in Epidaurian inscriptions, where it is depicted as curing various ailments by licking or through other, unspecified means.⁴⁶

Analysing Aristophanes' text, one might question whether it truly depicts incubation. The renowned comic playwright presents a scene of treatment in Asklepios' sanctuary, which is evidently exaggerated, interwoven with comedic elements meant to entertain the audience, along with supernatural occurrences. This scene can be interpreted similarly to the viewpoint of Alan H. Sommerstein⁴⁷, the editor and translator of Aristophanes, who suggests that everything depicted until the patients fall asleep is a realistic portrayal. Further events described by Karion, such as the appearance of Asklepios and his daughters and the actions performed by the god, could not have been witnessed by those undergoing incubation, according to Sommerstein; thus, they are artistic creations by Aristophanes. However, akin to the Epidaurian inscriptions, in "Wealth", Asklepios' interventions and the outcomes of the treatment are tangible: Wealth recovers his sight through the administration of medicine and other undisclosed actions, while Neocleides undergoes specific medical procedures that result in pain. Aristophanes' portrayal may aim to depict the doctor as the embodiment of

44. Ar. *Pl.* 707-709: "and he went right round, looking very carefully at all the patients' afflictions", trans. A.H. Sommerstein.

45. Ar. *Pl.* 716-725.

46. For example, A17: a snake healed a man's finger by licking it, B13: Tersandros healed by a snake; Edelstein & Edelstein, *Asclepius. Collection and interpretation of the testimonies*, vol. II, 228.

47. Alan H. Sommerstein, *Introduction*. In *Aristophanes Wealth*. Edited with translation and commentary by Alan H. Sommerstein (Warminster, 2001), 13.

the god himself, with snakes serving as a form of therapeutic agent. If the healer were not Asklepios but an ordinary individual – a physician aided by assistants – this scene would be rather realistic and potentially less engaging for the audience. The scene described by Aristophanes may not necessarily have been a depiction of the patrons' imaginings at the Asklepieion but rather could have been a reflection of situations occasionally observed by the sick in the sanctuary.

The Sacred Tales by Aelius Aristides

In Roman times, the most significant Asklepieions underwent a slight transformation and became specialised spa centres. This transformation is evident in the substantial expansion of the sanctuaries of Asklepios in Epidaurus and Pergamon.⁴⁸ These expansions included the construction of buildings to accommodate patients who sometimes stayed for extended periods, as well as the addition of swimming pools, baths, and areas for socializing. The sanctuaries evolved into luxurious venues frequented by the Greco-Roman elite. One of the members of such elites, who frequently visited the Asklepieion in Pergamon, was Aelius Aristides, a rhetorician and sophist living in the 2nd century, known for his many preserved orations.

The Sacred Tales (Hieroi Logoi), six orations titled as such by Aristides himself, were not meant for public speaking. In these orations, the author recounts years of struggle with various illnesses and the methods used to treat them. However, above all, Aristides wrote them, as he claims, at the behest of Asklepios – a deity with whom the rhetorician had a deeply personal relationship, considering him his mentor and benefactor.⁴⁹ Aristides sought guidance from Asklepios for various matters, especially concerning his persistent health issues. He frequently describes dreams in which the god appears to him, offers diagnoses, and prescribes treatments.⁵⁰

It is indeed challenging to infer from Aristides' text the situations in which he underwent the incubation ritual, as he does not describe any associated rituals. The word that might suggest the rhetorician is writing about incubation is "κατάκλισις," meaning "making one to lie down." This term appears only twice

48. Two excellent doctoral dissertations provide detailed descriptions of these expansions, clearly visible on the plans of both of these sanctuaries.: David R. Hoot, *The Sanctuary of Asclepius at Epidaurus in Roman Times* (University of Florida 2014), 49; Ece S. Okay, *Healing in Motion. The Influence of Locotherapy on the Architecture of the Pergamene Asklepieion in the second century CE* (Los Angeles, 2016), 24.

49. Aristid. Or. 48.1-4.

50. For Example, Aristid. Or. 47.6-9; 48.7; for the role of dreams and methods of treatment in *The Sacred Tales* see: Aneta Liwerska, *Asklepios i medycyna w II w. Metody leczenia w Świętych mowach Eliusza Arystydesa* (Asklepios and medicine in the 2nd century - methods of treatment in "The Sacred Tales" of Aelius Aristides) (Poznań, 2020), 42-67.

in *The Sacred Tales*. In the second oration, Aristides mentions "my incubations throughout the whole Temple"⁵¹, and in the third oration, he states, "I was sent from the incubation which I was performing (ἐγκατεκεκλίμην) in the Temple of the Saviors."⁵² Additionally, in another excerpt from the second oration, the term κατακλισις appears, but here the rhetorician simply writes about insomnia: "the impossibility of reclining at night."⁵³ Only in one instance does he indicate that he was lying in the sanctuary according to a dream vision: "I was lying, in accordance with a certain dream vision, between the doors and the latticed gates of the Temple, and the god gave me the following verse as an oracle...".⁵⁴ Here, the term ἐγκατεκεκλίμην is used, meaning "put to bed in a place", similar to the previously quoted fragment.

Aristides visited the Asklepieion occasionally for most of his life, but at the onset of his illness, he spent two years in Pergamon, referring to this period as *Cathedra*: "we came to the Cathedra in Pergamum."⁵⁵ In another passage, recalling the events of that time, he employs a similar expression: "during the Cathedra in Pergamum."⁵⁶ In this context, the term "cathedra" is translated by C.A. Behr as "the time of inactivity," during which Aristides underwent incubation at the Asklepieion.⁵⁷ Behr, however, casts doubt on the idea that anyone could reside on the sanctuary's premises, especially for an extended period, given the absence of a designated incubation area there. Aristides likely lived in the city of Pergamon, either with his friend Asklepiakos or at an inn.⁵⁸ The distance between the sanctuary and the city was small, making it feasible to visit daily. Moreover, Aristides's phrase ἐν Περγάμῳ suggests that he stayed in the city itself, rather than at the sanctuary, for two years. In the sacred laws from the Asklepieion of Pergamon dating from the Hellenistic and later Roman periods, two structures are referenced: a small and a large enkoimeterion. Given their names, they were likely utilised for incubation or patient treatment.⁵⁹ It is conceivable that incubation might have occurred in other buildings within the sacred precinct as

51. Aristid. Or. 48.80: διὰ παντός τοῦ ἱεροῦ κατακλίσεις. All fragments of Aristides in the translation by Charles A. Behr.

52. Aristid. Or. 49.7: ἐπέμφθη μὲν ἀπὸ κατακλίσεως, ἦν ἐν Σωτήρων ἐγκατεκεκλίμην.

53. Aristid. Or. 48.57: ταῖς νυξὶν ἀμηχανία κατακλίσεως.

54. Aristid. Or. 48.71: ἐγκατεκεκλίμην μεταξὺ τῶν τε θυρῶν καὶ τῶν κιγκλίδων τοῦ νεῶ κατὰ δὴ τινα ὀνειράτος ὄψιν.

55. Aristid. Or. 48.70: ἐπὶ τὴν ἐν Περγάμῳ καθέδραν ἤλθομεν.

56. Aristid. Or. 49.44: ἐπὶ τῆς ἐν Περγάμῳ καθέδρας.

57. Charles A. Behr, *Aelius Aristides and "The Sacred Tales"* (Amsterdam, 1968), 26.

58. Behr, *Aelius Aristides and "The Sacred Tales"*, 29-30.

59. AvP VIII 161A; LSAM 14.

well.⁶⁰ These locations seem not to have been intended for extended stays but rather for intermittent visits for incubation or treatment purposes.

No fragment of *The Sacred Tales* explicitly indicates an incubation ritual. H. von Ehrenheim suggests that Aristides' text reflects the evolving nature of incubation in Roman times, which could be practiced anywhere within the sanctuary, outside its sacred confines, or even in one's own home.⁶¹ However, there are serious doubts as to whether one can speak of incubation every time Aristides describes a divinatory dream. The challenge lies in the lack of corroborating sources to confirm whether rhetorician's experiences were shared by others visiting the sanctuary. Consequently, it is impossible to verify Aristides' narrative due to the absence of alternative perspectives.

It is known that there were also doctors in the Asklepieion of Pergamon. Aristides had contact with them, and they sometimes gave him advice. An example is Satyros, probably the teacher of Galen himself, who recommended Aristides to use the healing cataplasm, which, unfortunately, did not help the rhetorician.⁶² There was also Theodotos, who interpreted Aristides' dream visions.⁶³ A certain Asklepiakos likely served as a temple attendant but also possessed medical expertise.⁶⁴ Aristides' treatments reflected a rational approach, considering the medical knowledge of the time. The rhetorician frequently engaged in bathing rituals, including mud baths⁶⁵, river baths⁶⁶, and sea baths.⁶⁷ It happened that god, as Aristides claimed, forbade him to bathe when he had stomach problems.⁶⁸ Additionally, the rhetorician used various plant-based remedies such as elaterium⁶⁹, wormwood⁷⁰, the so-called royal ointment containing malabathron⁷¹, kyphi – an Egyptian herbal concoction⁷², and the so-called mixture of Philo⁷³, which included opium among other ingredients. He also received dietary recommendations.⁷⁴ From this, we can infer the pivotal role

60. Hedvig von Ehrenheim, *Identifying incubation areas in Pagan and Early Christian times* (Athens, 2009), 249-251; The buildings and places of probable incubation are identified by Okay, *Healing in Motion. The Influence of Locotherapy on the Architecture of the Pergamene Asklepieion in the second century CE*, 92-112.

61. Ehrenheim, *Identifying incubation areas in Pagan and Early Christian times*, 251.

62. Aristid. Or. 49.8-11.

63. Aristid. Or. 50.38.

64. Aristid. Or. 49.21-23.

65. Aristid. Or. 48.74.

66. Aristid. Or. 48.48-49.

67. Aristid. Or. 48.54-55.

68. Aristid. Or. 47.59.

69. Aristid. Or. 48.63.

70. Aristid. Or. 48.28-35.

71. Aristid. Or. 49.21.

72. Aristid. Or. 47.26.

73. Aristid. Or. 49.29.

74. Aristid. Or. 49.34-35.

of the Asklepieion of Pergamon in providing medical care and genuine assistance to patients. Aristides would also visit Allianoi, situated a few kilometres away, where a lavish spa complex existed, likely somehow affiliated with the Asklepieion of Pergamon. Excavations uncovered a plethora of surgical tools there, suggesting the performance of surgeries and medical procedures.⁷⁵ Furthermore, medical instruments dating back to the Roman period have been unearthed in Epidauros and Pergamon.

It is noteworthy to highlight the significant role of divinatory dreams in ancient times, particularly during the Roman era. Dream interpretation held considerable popularity, encompassing not only medical dreams but also those relating to various aspects of human life. Dating back to the 2nd century AD, Artemidoros' work *Oneirocritica*, or *The Interpretation of Dreams*, provides insights into dream meanings based on the dreamer's identity and circumstances. Artemidoros mentions medical dreams, noting instances of people being healed through this means, including cases in Pergamon.⁷⁶ He also suggests that some individuals believe that medical knowledge originated from such divine guidance received in sanctuaries. While the claim may be somewhat exaggerated, it is important to highlight that the interpretation of dreams was indeed a subject of study by among others: Hippocrates, Aristotle, Herophilos, and even Galen.⁷⁷ Interpreting dreams and linking them with health was such an important factor in medicine that doctors and scientists referred to it. Among them, Galen is the sole individual to mention receiving instructions from Asklepios in a dream,⁷⁸ hinting that he may have undergone incubation.

The dreams recounted by Aristides could have been integral to his extensive therapeutic journey, yet they may not always have been associated with incubation, which entails seeking divine guidance through sacred sleep within the sanctuary. This is particularly evident since many of his dreams occurred outside the Asklepieion. Considering the nature of Asklepios' sanctuaries, their healing purposes, and the presence of medical practitioners, it is plausible to assume that incubation was just one facet of their operation, and not necessarily the primary one.

75. Aristid. *Or.* 49.1; 49.3; a detailed inventory of these findings: Daniş Baykan, *Allianoi Tıp Âletleri* (Surgical Instrument from Allianoi) (İstanbul, 2009).

76. Artem. 4.22.

77. Details on this topic: Steven M. Oberhelman, *Dreams in Graeco-Roman medicine* (Berlin, 1993), 121-156.

78. Oberhelman, *Dreams in Graeco-Roman medicine*, 139.

Apellas' Inscription from Epidaurios

Of the epigraphic records from the Asklepieions, few have survived from Roman times, and they offer less extensive information compared to the classical period Epidaurian inscriptions discussed earlier. The inscription of Apellas⁷⁹ stands out as unique since it is the sole testimony from Epidaurios dating to the 2nd century AD, and remarkably, it is exceptionally well-preserved. This inscription represents the longest epigraphic account from a patient, presented in the first person.⁸⁰

The patient in question is Marcus Julius Apellas from Mylasa in Asia Minor. He himself acknowledges at the beginning that he was "send for by the god"⁸¹ due to persistent illness and digestive issues. Apellas spent a minimum of nine days in the sanctuary, undergoing treatment through two main avenues: firstly, he received detailed medical advice, and secondly, he was required to make offerings not only to Asklepios but also to Epione, Asklepios' mythical wife, and the "Eleusinian goddesses."⁸² The instructions purportedly received by Apellas from the god⁸³ resemble prescriptions one might expect from a physician: "to consume cheese and bread, and celery with lettuce, to wash myself on my own, to exercise on the track, to take lemon peels in advance (and) to soak (them) in water, to rub against the wall in the bathhouse by the akoai, to use the upper level as a place for walking, (to engage in) passive exercises, to smear myself with wrestling sand, to go about barefoot, in the bathhouse before getting into the warm water to pour wine over myself, to bathe on my own..."⁸⁴ Asklepios also recommends Apellas to drink milk with honey for indigestion⁸⁵, rub himself with

79. IG IV² 1, 126.

80. Renberg, *Where Dreams May Come. Incubation Sanctuaries in the Graeco-Roman World*, 169; Aneta Liwerska, "Inskrypcja Apellasa jako źródło poznania charakteru opieki nad pacjentem w asklepiejonie epidaurijskim w II w. n.e." (The Apellas Inscription as a source of knowledge about the nature of patient care in the Asclepieion of Epidaurios in the 2nd century AD), *Klio. Czasopismo poświęcone dziejom Polski i powszechnym*, t. 52 (1), 2020, 3-29.

81. IG IV² 1, 126, line 2-3: μετεπέμφθη ὑπὸ τοῦ θεοῦ. All fragments of this inscription in the translation by Gil Renberg.

82. IG IV² 1, 126, l. 14: κοινῇ θῦσαι Ἀσκληπιῶ, Ἡπιόνῃ, Ἐλευσεινίαις.

83. IG IV² 1, 126, l. 5-6: ἐπεὶ δὲ ἐγενόμην ἐν τῷ ἱερῷ ἐκέλευσεν... - "When I was present in the sanctuary he ordered me...".

84. IG IV² 1, 126, l. 7-13: τυρὸν καὶ ἄρτον προλαβεῖν, σέλεια μετὰ θριδάκος, αὐτὸν δι' αὐτοῦ λούσθαι, δρόμῳ, γυμνάζεσθαι, κιτριῶ προλαμβάνειν τὰ ἄκρα, εἰς ὕδωρ ἀποβρέξαι, πρὸς ταῖς ἀκοαῖς ἐν βαλανείῳ προστριβεσθαι τῷ τοίχῳ, περιπάτω χρῆσθαι ὑπερῶ, αἰώραις, ἀφῆ πηλώσασθαι, ἀνυπόδητον περιπατεῖν, πρὶν ἐνβῆναι ἐν τῷ βαλανείῳ εἰς τὸ θερμὸν ὕδωρ οἶνον περιχέασθαι, μόνον λούσασθαι.

85. IG IV² 1, 126, l. 16-17: μέλι ἔμβαλλε εἰς τὸ γάλα, ἵνα δύνηται διακόπτειν - "Add honey to the milk, so that it will be able to cut through".

salt and mustard⁸⁶, and use dill with oil for headaches.⁸⁷ The patient also had to pay the doctor's fee, i.e. the *iatra*.⁸⁸

In the inscription, there is also an indication that Apellas received a dream from Asklepios: "When I asked the god to release me more quickly, I thought [i.e., in a dream] that I exited from the abaton in the area of the akoai fully anointed with mustard and salt, and a small boy holding a smoking censer led me, and the priest said, "You have been cured, but it is necessary to pay the medical fees." And I did the things I had seen".⁸⁹ None of the typical terms indicating incubation are employed here; instead, the term ᾤμην is used, meaning "I thought" in the sense of "it seemed to me." However, the final words clearly indicate that Apellas acted upon what he perceived, presumably in his dream. It is noteworthy that it was not Asklepios who appeared to Apellas, but rather the priest. While this does not exclude the possibility of an incubation dream – given that it was sent by god – the description is so concise that we can only speculate it was a *sacred dream* received within the sanctuary.

It is crucial to highlight that the inscription was issued by Apellas as a votive offering of gratitude to the god and the sanctuary for his cure. Its aim was, on the one hand, to present the way in which the patient was cured, but above all, it was to show the power and agency of Asklepios. The motivations behind its presentation determined its content, hence the inclusion of supernatural themes. However, once again, we lack definitive indications that would allow us to conclusively determine whether incubation took place. The offerings mentioned in the inscription were customary in every sanctuary and do not appear to have had any specific connection to incubation in this instance. Once more, the source fails to provide insights into the incubation ritual, leaving us to speculate about its practice in Epidauros during that period.

Conclusions

The sources mentioned above do not offer a definitive portrayal of treatments in Asklepieions, as they vary in form and audience. However, one

86. IG IV² 1, 126, l. 17-18: <v>ἀπυῖ καὶ ἄλσιν κεχρημένος ὄλος – "fully anointed with mustard and salt".

87. IG IV² 1, 126, l. 26-27: ἐπιμείναντί μοι ἄνηθον μετ' ἐλαίου χρήσασθαι πρὸς τὴν κεφαλαλίαν εἶπεν – "He said to me, as I remained there, that for my headache I should use anise with olive oil".

88. IG IV² 1, 126, l. 20: χρῆ δὲ ἀποδιδόναι τὰ ἱατρὰ – "it is necessary to pay the medical fees".

89. IG IV² 1, 126, l. 17-21: ἐπεὶ δὲ ἐδεήθην τοῦ θεοῦ θᾶττόν με ἀπολύσαι, ᾤμην <v>ἀπυῖ καὶ ἄλσιν κεχρημένος ὄλος ἐξιέναι κατὰ τὰς ἀκοὰς ἐκ τοῦ ἀβάτου, παιδάριον δὲ ἠγείσθαι θυμιατήριον ἔχον ἀτμίζον καὶ τὸν ἱερέα λέγειν "τεθεράπευσαι, χρῆ δὲ ἀποδιδόναι τὰ ἱατρὰ." καὶ ἐποίησα ἃ εἶδον (...)

might be tempted to infer certain conclusions from them. Primarily, most of these sources do not provide a detailed account of the incubation ritual. The Epidaurian inscriptions from the 4th century BC are crafted in a style reminiscent of dream descriptions, yet the content suggests actual interventions by doctors or surgeons. Importantly, the outcome of these actions is specific: patients are cured. The descriptions exhibit occasional exaggeration, incorporating unrealistic elements as part of the literary convention, yet the treatment outcomes remain specific. These texts notably lack divinatory dreams or instructions from Asklepios regarding treatment. Instead, they depict the administration of drugs and surgical procedures purportedly carried out by a god, though it is theorised that these actions were realistically performed by surgeons and physicians. The account of Arata of Lacedaemon (B1) is the sole narrative casting doubt on the actual involvement of physicians. Other instances of incubation, involving prophetic dreams, do not pertain to treatment. Hence, it can be postulated that the *sacred dream* constituted only a minor aspect of the activities at the Asklepieion.

Analysing Aristophanes' comedy leads to similar conclusions. Wealth's visit to the Asklepieion does not represent an instance of incubation. Treatment is administered through pharmacological agents, akin to a conventional medical consultation, albeit within the sacred confines of the sanctuary, involving requisite rituals and sacrifices. Lying down in the sanctuary did not signify an incubation for divinatory dreams; rather, it facilitated examination by a physician and subsequent treatment. The nature of Aristophanes' work means that we cannot treat the text literally, but at the same time we must be aware that the audience in the theatre received a parody of a real situation that they knew from their own experience. Therefore, the description of Wealth recovery can be treated as close to reality.

During the Roman period, the character of the Asklepieions, at least in Epidauros and Pergamon, changed slightly, as evidenced by the new buildings and spaces created at that time. *The Sacred Tales* by Aelius Aristides shows us the image of a sanctuary as a place where the sick could spend time on various activities and exercises, but also get advice from a doctor, and maybe even a surgeon. This source may indicate the practice of incubation. Aristides has divinatory dreams in the Asklepieion, but he also dreams in other places, outside the sanctuary. He also does not describe the incubation ritual, although he tries to interpret each dream, sometimes with the help of doctors and staff at the sanctuary. However, it is impossible to unequivocally treat any of Aristides' descriptions as evidence of incubation. The situation is similar with Apellas' inscription, which does not contain any indication that the sick person underwent the incubation ritual. It is true that he received instructions, as he claimed, from god, but the inscription was a votive offering of thanks to Asklepios because the treatment took place in the sanctuary, so it must have included references to the role of Asklepios and his agency. The instructions allegedly received from the

god are consistent with the medical practice of the time, and Apellas probably received them from doctors or temple staff.

Based on the above sources, it is difficult to definitively determine the role of incubation in the treatment of patients at the Asklepieion. However, they do not suggest its special significance. Incubation was certainly practiced due to the chthonic nature of the god Asklepios, but ancient testimonies rather indicate that patients received medical assistance in the Asklepieions. This was the essence of temple medicine: providing medical aid in accordance with contemporary medical knowledge but within the sacred precinct. The specific rituals and sacrifices performed by patients were integral to receiving this assistance. The psychological disposition of patients was also crucial; their faith in healing within such sanctified spaces had to surpass that of visiting a *secular* physician. Given the scarcity and limitations of sources, we can infer that incubation was practiced as one of several methods of aiding patients when other treatments were ineffective or unavailable. However, it was not the predominant form of treatment in the Asklepieions.

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