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## Healing dreams at Epidaurus : analysis and interpretation of the Epidaurian iamata

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Tekst jest udostępniony do wykorzystania w ramach dozwolonego użytku.

Monika Błażkiewicz<sup>1</sup>

To Cosmas – the first person who encouraged me  
to explore Greece when I was twelve years old.

## Healing dreams at Epidaurus. Analysis and interpretation of the Epidaurian *iamata*<sup>2</sup>

One type of the most important sources for the Epidaurian worship of Asclepius are the *iamata* inscriptions engraved on the four *stelai* that were erected in the fourth century BC by the authorities of a sanctuary of Asclepius at Epidaurus. The body of the surviving texts contains approximately seventy tales, which are basically records of the cures and ‘medical therapies’ carried out by Asclepius. However, the *iamata* inscriptions cannot be simply considered as an official index of afflictions registered and healed at the Epidaurian medical centre: the analysis of the particular inscriptions enables modern scholars to reveal their didactic, moralistic, economic and even advertising role. In my paper, I discuss different aspects of the *iamata*: at the beginning, I cite the leading theories concerning the nature, veracity and authenticity of the *iamata*, since this particular issue constantly attracts scholarly attention and remains controversial. Subsequently, I retrace the development of the Asclepiad worship and explain the phenomenon of the spread of the cult of Asclepius as healing god. Since the problem of the *iamata* cannot be discussed without references to other sources, in my paper I frequently refer to iconographical, architectural and literary pieces of evidence. The cited sources enrich my research with diverse perspectives: visual evidence allows us to comprehend the healing process; accounts left by the classical authors, in turn, offer us a glimpse of the ancients’ attitudes towards the phenomenon of the ‘divine healing’ in Epidaurus and other medical sites. Finally, the architectural details and reports from archaeological excavations make it possible to reconstruct to a degree the infrastructure of the most famous medical centre in the Greek and Roman world. The content of the preserved inscriptions together with the aforementioned

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evidence reveal a detailed picture of the Asclepiad worship, expressed through the phenomenon of the *iamata* inscriptions.

**Key words:** *abaton*, Asclepius, Epidaurus, healing, *iamata*, inscription, sanctuary, *stelai*, suppliant, worship

## Introduction

Among ancient Greek testimonies concerning worship of Asclepius the *iamata* (gr. ἱαμᾶτα) inscriptions play a crucial role. These inscriptions are basically records of the cures that were carried out by Asclepius. The healing process was held in the *abaton*, the most significant part of the Asclepieion, where those suffering from diseases slept, in hope of meeting the god in their dreams. People at Epidaurus were healed in different fashions: Asclepius cured some of his patients in their dreams, by incubation, whereas some others he healed through personal epiphany or through a proxy.

The *iamata* were carved in four *stelai*, which were erected in the fourth century BC by the authorities of a sanctuary of Asclepius at Epidaurus, a small Greek polis at the Saronic Gulf on the Peloponnese (Edelstein 1945). The body of the surviving text contains traces of at least seventy tales (LiDonnici 1995)<sup>3</sup>. However, Pausanias (about AD 115–180) mentions that he saw six *stelai* in his own day and says that there used to be more (Paus. II. 27. 3). The *stelai* with inscriptions, marked as A, B, C and D were not found in the same place or at the same time (LiDonnici 1995). The fragments of *stelai* A, B and D were found around the eastern portion of the *abaton* (1883). Broken up and used as *spolia*- they served as rubble, filling the walls of a medieval house. *Stele* C was discovered as the last of the group (1900): broken into two parts, it was used as a threshold. The inscriptions were written in stoichedon form (LiDonnici 1995) with the letters concurrently aligned into vertical columns and horizontal lines. The inscriptions recount numerous afflictions, many of which possibly disappeared due to spontaneous remission (LiDonnici 1995). This has led some commentators to interpret both the illness and the healing as psychological in origin (Edelstein 1945). However, some tales in their preserved form simply cannot be explained by such wishful thinking. At any rate, the tales accurately reflect the mode of thinking of the suppliants: what they considered to be a true and what they believed in.

What distinguishes the *iamata* most dramatically from the majority of contemporary sources for the study of Greek religion is their relative ‘intimacy’ (LiDonnici 1992). As Lynn R. LiDonnici notes, this feature makes the *iamata* particularly

<sup>3</sup> All discussed inscriptions as well as their English translations are taken from this edition. The *stelai* that have survived are published as *IG IV*<sup>2</sup>.

important to the study of personal devotion and the ways in which ordinary men and women conceptualised the divine element at work.

Hence, the inscriptions cannot be simply treated as dry and repetitive records of afflictions registered at the Epidaurian medical centre. As the analysis of several inscriptions will demonstrate, the *iamata* did not fulfil purely instructive and votive roles: they display both ideological bias and traces of the didactic and moralising attitudes of those who wrote them. The erection of the *stelai* was apparently a carefully planned undertaking. Their content, subject matter and location were diligently crafted to elicit appropriate reactions and emotions. It was meant to straighten the suppliants' belief in the curative powers of Asclepius and demonstrate the efficacy of his 'healing methods'.

A relatively substantial number of references to the Epidaurus along with other ancient medical centres throughout Greek literature prove the immense popularity of such sites and the purported efficacy of their cures. These references are of different types: some of them relate to the existing *stelai* (Pausanias, Strabo), while others provide a degree of insight into the cult of Asclepius (*The Suda Lexicon*, Pindar) or the process of healing (Aristophanes, Hippocrates, Origenes).

### Tell-tales or historical events?

A brief summary of scholars' attitudes towards the veracity and authenticity of the inscriptions may be in order at this stage. Some scholars accept them as genuine cures, in other words, as miracles (Dillon 1994). This attitude is represented by the Edelsteins, who have produced the most detailed account of the cult of Asclepius (Edelstein 1945)<sup>4</sup>. Others believe that the priests in the temple at Epidaurus were trained in medicine; they interpreted the dreams of the ill by crediting the god with the cures which they worked with their skills and sought to increase the fame and prestige of the Asclepiad temple at Epidaurus. In this hypothesis, the priests were charlatans and their 'miracles' frauds<sup>5</sup>. Currently, this extreme view seems to have been somewhat downplayed. According to some scholars, ancient medicine and physicians played a secondary role in the healing process (Bernard 2009) and the cures came from the inner, spiritual realm. Following this thought, the dreamer made profound contact with his innermost self – the-self that not only knows how to sustain physical, mental, emotional and spiritual well-being, but also has a divine connection to the healer god within. This self was thought to exist in *psyche* and the ancients created convenient conditions in which dreamers could forge a connection between the sick individual and the god (Bernard 2009). The issue of a doctor or 'healer' also has to be addressed. In Edelsteins' view, these miracles

<sup>4</sup> To read more, see: (Kerényi 1960; Krug 1993; Schouten 1967).

<sup>5</sup> Early verdicts on the *iamata* were adverse (Edelstein 1945). According to Wilamowitz-Moellendorf there was medicine at the Asclepieion, but on Kos, not at Epidaurus, where the cures were frauds.

can be accepted as 'historical facts' and they provide evidence for faith-healing. Individuals were cured in the Asclepieia, but the statement, that the priests were doctors, can be ruled out (Dillon 1994). On the other hand there is a testimony that seems to confirm the theory as if the doctors were healers. One inscription (no C5 (48)) describes the case of a man called Eratocles. He was suffering from a suppurative wound. In the tale there is information that when the man was waiting for some doctors to cauterize his wound, the god appeared, forbade him to have the cauterization and ordered him to fall asleep in the Asclepiad sanctuary. At Oropos, incubation and healing could occur without the presence of a priest and on Kos there was an Asclepieion which had no connection with any medical fraternity (Shervin-White 1978). Strabo (64/63 BC–AD 24) relates that there were also other *iamata*, but they have not survived (Strab. 8. 6. 15). All of these interpretations concerning the nature of the *iamata* share the flawed assumption (Dillon 1994) that every cure described on the *stelai* did occur. It should be noted that some of them are too fantastic in nature to offer any credence. These *iamata* are rather a record of some sort, but the veracity of some of them is extremely doubtful. However, they can be taken as indications of the beliefs held about Asclepius – and they can be used, in conjunction with other evidence, to describe the experiences that individuals encountered at Epidaurus (Dillon 1994). The *iamata*, except for their main role as an expression of gratefulness for a cure, also had a didactic and informative purpose, assuring the suffering that, like others before them, they could be cured (Dillon 1994). Nevertheless, the *iamata* are not to be taken simply as records of cures to be explained as faith-healing or the work of a 'doctor-priest' (Dillon 1994). Rather, the *iamata* are the *aretologiai*, records of cures attesting to the *arete* and *dynamis* of the god<sup>6</sup>. The fact that those who were cured often left testimonies about the divine power emphasizes Asclepius's appeal to the individual (Rice 2009). He was a god who produced immediate results in the devotee's own lifetime and he approached the devotee as an individual, not as a member of the polis or family.

### Asclepius: from the abandoned child to the most powerful god of medicine

In the Classical Period, Asclepius was an immensely popular deity, and not without reason: as the major Greek god of medicine and healing, he governed a domain of life that ultimately concerned all mortals. Asclepius is thought to be a pre-Greek deity (Meier 1989) or alternatively a demon: a hypothesis that can be set when one analyses old variants of his names like: Aischlabios or Aislapios. Sired by Apollo, he was born of Coronis, a Thessalian princess. Two main versions of the myth describing the birth of Asclepius have been preserved. The former affirms that Coronis

<sup>6</sup> To read more about the connection between the *dynamis* and the Epidaurian *iamata* see: (Pleket 1981).

had betrayed Apollo with Ischys (having just been impregnated by Apollo); after finding out Apollo killed her and subsequently rescued the baby from her womb. Apollo carried the boy and gave Asclepius to the centaur Chiron who raised him and instructed him in the art of medicine. This version has been mentioned by Pindar (about 518–438 BC) in one of his odes (Pind. *P.* III. 5.). According to the second version, Coronis delivered a baby in the sanctuary of Apollo, near Epidaurus on Peloponnese; she abandoned the baby on the Tittion Mountain, which was famous for producing curative herbs. At the same time, the local shepherd called Arestanas realized that one of his goats and his dog had gone missing. He started to seek his animals; he found them feeding the baby by turns (Apollod. frag. 138). Arestanas wished to take the baby, but a great light restrained him. Arestanas understood that he must not interfere in divine affairs, so accordingly he turned away. Hence, young Asclepius was left in the custody of his father, Apollo (Paus. IX. 36. 1). The second story explained Asclepius's association with a dog and a goat, which together with snakes are his symbols. It is also worthy of note that Apollo himself was a great hunter and lover of dogs, a passion shared by his sister Artemis. His sanctuary on the Cynortion at Epidaurus was called 'Cyon', 'dog' in Greek (Meier 1989), and he was worshipped there as 'Maleatas'<sup>7</sup>. A snake, as a divine symbol also abounds in Greek mythology. Connected to gods such as Zeus, Demeter, Cora, Helios and Hecate it evokes an incredibly complex imagery, but as far as Asclepius is concerned, it symbolizes an auto-rejuvenative power (by shedding its skin) and, by extension, healing. Another attribute of Asclepius is rejuvenative the rod. Most of the time, it is depicted with a serpent (sometimes two serpents) entwined around it. Associated in the subsequent period with Hermes in the Hellenistic period it became his symbol. The mythical back story for this rod states that Hermes, looking at two fighting snakes, stuck his magic rod between them and in this way forced them into reconciliation. The snakes wind around the rod: each of them making three and a half coils, which total seven coils. Denoting transitions and changes, the rod was used for redressing peace and harmony, both physical and mental. The name of this rod is *caduceus* (gr. τό κηρύκειον) (*to kerykeion*). Originally the *caduceus* was an attribute of a *ceryx*, the royal herald, who was responsible for public order in the courts. The Asclepiad rod with entwined serpents was probably derived from Sumerian mythology (Buckland 2003), namely from the attribute of the Sumerian deity Ningishzida (sum. nin-ġiš-zi-da), the Sumerian god of the underworld and healing. Another deity, Eshmun of Phoenician origin, was a renowned god of healing. Worshipped mainly in Sidon, this god is thought to be the model for later depictions of Asclepius (Baker 2011). Asclepius was killed by Zeus with a thunderbolt (Apollod. III. 10. 3–4; Luc. *Salt.* 45; Hyg. *Fab.* 49). He was guilty of raising people from the dead and Hades, the god of the underworld, feared that no more spirits would come to his kingdom. According to another version

<sup>7</sup> To read more about the temple of Apollo Maleatas at Epidaurus, see (Guthrie 1970; Papadimitriou 1949).

of the myth, Asclepius was charged with corruption: he was accused of accepting bribes in gold. After murdering Asclepius, Zeus deified him and placed him among the stars, transforming Asclepius into the constellation Ophiuchus (the serpent-bearer) (Hyg. *Poet. Astr.* II. 14; Ov. *Met.* 642).

### The spread of the Asclepiad cult

The origins of the Asclepius cult are difficult to determine with any exactness and in several cases it is hard to distinguish it from pre-existing Apollo cults. The archeological and literary evidence suggest the expansion of the cult in the fifth century BC (Wickkiser 2003). These conjectures are strengthened by literary evidence: Pindar mentions athletic victories in three of his odes (Pind. *N.* III. 84; V. 52.; V. 95–7; *I.* VIII. 68). These contests rejuvenative were presumably in honor of Asclepius (Wickkiser 2003) because no other games are attested for Epidaurus and ancient commentators of these odes specifically identify them as such (Schol. ad Pind. *N.* V.95–96, *N.* III.84.). The *Odes* of Pindar are the only direct evidence that overtly suggests cult practice (Wickkiser 2003). Although the testimonies to the games and victories at Epidaurus are assumed to relate specially to Asclepius and his cult therein, it must be noted that Asclepius himself is not explicitly tied to the games in these particular odes. The first datable center of the Asclepiad cult outside the Peloponnese is on the island of Aegina (Wickkiser 2003). Aristophanes's (about 445–385 BC) comedy entitled *Wasps* (gr. Σφήκες) (*Sfekes*), produced in 422 BC, explicitly mentions an Asclepiad sanctuary which existed there. In said comedy, one of the characters, called Bdelycleon takes his father Philocleon to the Asclepieion on Aegina for healing (Aristoph. *Vesp.* 121–3). According to the *Suda*, Aristarchus of Tegea (in the fifth century BC) wrote a tragedy entitled *Asclepius* as an expression of gratitude for healing (Wickkiser 2003). The fifth, fourth and the beginning of the third century BC was a period of great development for the Asclepiad cult. According to some estimates, more than two hundred new sanctuaries were built throughout the Greek world (Wickkiser 2003). In the Peloponnese, the cult spread to Argos, Troizen, Halieis and Gortyn. Even if the existence of the Asclepiad cult in Corinth and Sicyon in the fifth century BC was uncertain, it may be said without a doubt that the cult reached those places in the fourth century BC. The cult also spread to Eleusina in Attica and to Delphi in Phocis. As far as the islands are concerned, it reached Eretria, Euboea, and Lebena on Crete. Worshippers appeared in Greek colonies, including even such distant ones as Balagrae (current El Beida) in the vicinity of Cyrene in northern Africa and Taranto in southern Italy. In Asia Minor, the cult arrived in Eritrea and Kos. Pergamon was reached by the early third century BC and in 291 BC the Asclepiad cult entered Rome. In the fourth century BC, when the popularity of the Asclepiad cult burgeoned, many of the sanctuaries that had been in existence by that time were rebuilt and renovated. The redevelopment included Athens and

Corinth, but the most significant place was Epidaurus (Wickkiser 2003). At that time the sanctuary was in the process of being expanded and monumentalized (LiDonnici 1992). Possibly, as a part of this project, earlier inscriptions, both individual votives and larger groups, were selected for preservation and then transferred onto the monumental format of the *stelai*.

Although the Asclepieion at Epidaurus had a primacy over all other Asclepieia, Strabo claimed that the earliest and the most famous one was at Trikka, and the birthplace of Asclepius could be found there (Strab. 9. 5. 17; 14. 1. 39; 8. 4. 4). It is highly possible that the *iama* B 3 (23) is one of the votives that were added or re-exposed in the process of renovation. The said *iama* not only illustrates the special status of the sanctuary at Epidaurus, but also reveals an informative role of the inscriptions. The main character of this *iama* is not a pilgrim coming to Epidaurus to get some medical help from the god Asclepius, but a woman called Aristagora from Troizen, who went to a local Asclepieion. She was suffering from a tapeworm and went to the *abaton* in Troizen where she was incubated. She had a dream that the sons of Asclepius operated on her, cutting off her head. Asclepius could not do it personally because he was away in Epidaurus. His sons could not replace Aristagora's head, so they sent a message to Epidaurus asking the god to come. Aristagora had a vision: he came, reattached her head and afterwards, by cutting her stomach, he removed the tapeworm, the very reason why she was incubated. This *iama*, fantastic in nature is not only a simple expression of gratitude; it serves to advertise Epidaurus as a place where the god Asclepius habitually abode. Even his sons could not execute an 'operation' without his help. One more point should be discussed as far as this *iama* is concerned: namely, the very significant choice of the word ἐπιδημῶ (*epidemeo*) (LiDonnici 1995). This verb was used in regard to the god Asclepius and it has two basic meanings: the first is 'to be at home' and the second one is 'to visit some place'. The former meaning may imply that Troizen was the home of Asclepius and that he merely visited Epidaurus. At any rate, this inscription depicts Epidaurus as an eminent site where the god either lives or abides at times. It advertises the Epidaurian sanctuary and reminds us about the primacy of Epidaurus as a main medical center and shrine of the god Asclepius.

“Come into the *abaton*, lie down and...”

In the ancient western world, the Asclepiad temples served as religious centers for healing, relying upon the patient's dreams to reveal and direct courses of medical therapies for the dreamer (Pettis 2006). The inscriptions indicate that among the ill seeking help in the Epidaurian Asclepieion there were people from all corners of the Hellenistic world, for instance from Halieis, Aigina, Argos, Heracleia, Keos, Mytilene, Athens, Thebes, Cnidus, Pherai and many others. *Iamata* demonstrate not only the huge popularity of the cult, but also the great prestige that the site enjoyed. The Asclepieia, the temples of healing, at sites in Epidaurus, Kos and Per-



gamon, eventually achieved the status of Panhellenic sanctuaries. They attracted the sick from all over the Hellenic world; nevertheless the ill could also seek help in a local Asclepieion if there was one nearby. This attitude arose from a prevalent belief among the Greeks: that all gods had their own area of life for which they were responsible. Thus, to get divine assistance in the case of illness, a suffering person should visit an Asclepieion, a temple dedicated to Asclepius who was expected to appear and heal the suffering. It is possible that that *iamata* played an important role in the psychological preparation of patients (LiDonnici 1992), setting up the conditions and expectations which would help them to generate a suitably miraculous dream. The idea of reading and discussion of *iamata* as a preparatory activity sounds even more probable, if one takes into consideration internal evidence, which several times mentions suppliants' responses to the inscriptions. Hence, one may assume that the *stelai* were deliberately displayed in places where the suppliants would surely see them during their preparation for incubation.

At the sanctuary the sick person was lain down for the night in *abaton* and left to fall asleep. The *abaton* lies to the north of the temple of Asclepius (LiDonnici 1995) and is constructed in a form of long *stoa*, opening to the southern side. The first excavations of the Epidaurian Asclepieion were conducted in 1881 (LiDonnici 1995) by the Archaeological Society of Athens under the direction of P. Kavvadias and later by B. Staïs, the latter expedition being concluded in 1928.

The relief from Asclepieion in Piraeus (350 BC) depicts the god Asclepius revealing himself to the sick individual, probably a woman, while she is sleeping. He is in the process of curing her, placing his hands on her neck and back; his daughter Hygeia, the personification of health, is standing behind him. On the left side a group of people was carved, probably the relatives or friends of the suffering woman. Their poses suggest they are carrying something and it can be inferred that they were depicted as the suppliants.

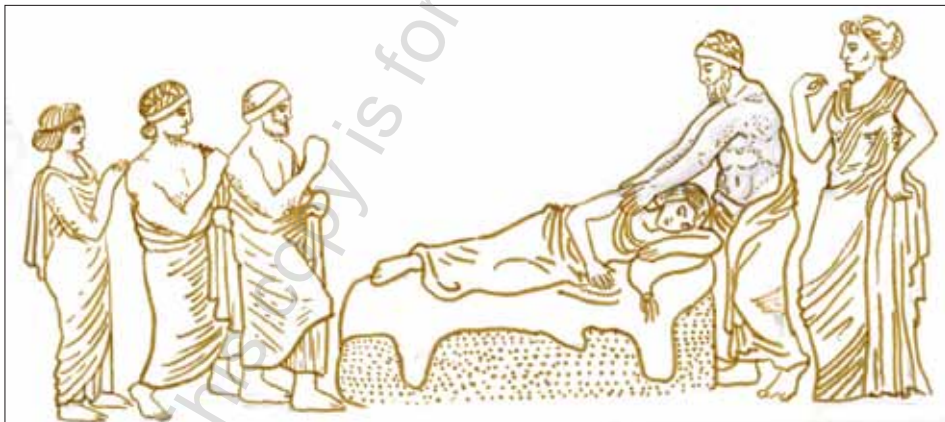


Fig. 1. Votive relief to Asclepius (350 BC), a drawing from a relief, Piraeus Museum, catalogue number 405

Their role in this depiction is quite unclear: assuming this relief presents a scene from the *abaton*, it is hardly possible that the non consultants inside would be shown there (Dillon 1994). One of the inscriptions (A11) presents the case of a man called Aischines, who was punished for curiosity. When the patient had fallen asleep, Aischines climbed up a tree and he was attempting to look into the *abaton*. He subsequently fell down from the tree, landing on some thorns or the fence that delimited the area of the sacred space. In this inscription a Greek word (ὁ σκόλοψ) (*ho skolops*) was used. It can mean either 'a stilt', 'a board' or 'a spiny bush'. His eyes were injured and he became blind. Afterwards, he went to the *abaton*, fell asleep and his eyes were cured. This inscription indirectly warns that no one beyond the incubant could and should stay in the *abaton*. This relief probably illustrates two depictions: the first one shows a healing act taking place in the *abaton* and the second one presents the pilgrims who could have waited outside. Indeed, one of those waiting is a little child and it is known from the Epidaurian inscriptions that children were also among the patients who expected to be healed by the god Asclepius. There is yet another interpretation of this depiction that has to be discussed. There are two Greek verbs which are commonly used to describe the process of incubation in the inscriptions (LiDonnici 1995): ἐγκαθεύδω (*enkatheudo*) and ἐγκатаκοιμάω (*enkatakoimao*). In most inscriptions these verbs are used with no specification of location. Admittedly, whenever the location is mentioned it is always the *abaton*, but there is no assurance that the incubation process was always held there. In the comedy *Ploutos* (gr. Πλούτος), by the dramatist Aristophanes, one can find a comic description of a night spent in an Asclepieion. In this scene, the god of wealth, Ploutos is cured from his blindness so that he could distribute wealth fairly and only to those who deserve it (Aristoph. *Plout.* 410–12, 633–747).

### Trust in god, but tie up your camel<sup>8</sup>

Consultation of Asclepius involved preliminary sacrifice and payment of a consultation fee (Dillon 1994). The full cycle of Asclepiad ritual consisted of abstinence, ritual bathing, payment of a fee, sacrifice, incubation, faith, healing and thanksgiving. Aristophanes in *Wasps* ridicules the preliminary sacrifices (Aristoph. *Vesp.* 112–35). If the supplication of the god was unsuccessful or a patient beyond help, he or she was removed from the *abaton*, because there was a ritual law that no one could die or be born within it. One of the *iamata* (no A5) mentions 'preliminary sacrifices and customary rites', but there are no more details. Another *iama* (no A4) provides a very good example of the didactic nature of the Epidaurian inscriptions. It concerns a woman from Athens called Ambrosia, who was blind in one eye. She came seeking aid from the god and walking about the sanctuary,

<sup>8</sup> Persian proverb.

she was ridiculing some of the cures as unbelievable, also deriding the lame and the blind that were healed through seeing a dream only. Sleeping there, she had a vision. It seemed to her that the god appeared and told her that he could make her well, but she would have to pay a fee by dedicating a silver pig in the shrine as a memorial of her ignorance and impiety. Then, he cut her eye and applied some medicine. Another *iamata* that also perfectly depicts the didactic aspect of the Epidaurian inscriptions, is a tale concerning the case of a man who had all his fingers paralyzed except one (A3): the subject did not believe in the efficacy of the cures that were described in the plaques in the sanctuary. He had a vision in which he was playing knucklebones; when he was about to throw the dice, the god appeared and stretched all of his paralyzed fingers. When he realized that he could bend and stretch them, the god asked him if he still did not believe in the cures described in the plaques. After that, the god told him that since he did not believe in them before, his name would be 'Unbeliever' from then on. The aforementioned *iamata* particularly distinctively showcases a moral and didactic side of these inscriptions. It has to be remembered that the *stelai* with *iamata* in all probability were shown in public and everybody who came to a sanctuary in Epidaurus could read them. The discussed *iamata* presents a very positive image of Asclepius as a fair, moral and righteous god. He has the ability to punish people by denying them the favor they desired the most, but instead providing them with one more chance for improvement in the sphere of piety. Indeed, he cherished the financial condition of his sanctuary, requiring sacrifice and fees. The *iamata* no B 2(22) provides additional information about the doctor's fee. As the patient referred to did not pay for the cure, Asclepius withdrew his power and made him blind again. Subsequently, the man came back and slept in *abaton* and the god restored him to health. Two interpretations of Edelsteins' should here be quoted (LiDonnici 1995). According to the first, in many cases an illness was caused by nervous disorders and the mental effort was all that was necessary to improvement. In the second, the actual illness often coincidentally entered remission when the patient was inside the sanctuary. In the latter case, the illnesses discussed are self-limiting. This inscription also presents unshakeable faith in the god's power, since Hermon came back to the sanctuary. The relapse of blindness is explained away by blaming the patient (he failed to fulfill his end of the deal). There is one other possible interpretation: this story could also be an example of an unsuccessful healing act. The *iamata* no A8 pertains to the financial aspect of healing in Epidaurus, but in an unexpectedly humorous sense. It concerns Euphanes, a boy from Epidaurus, who was suffering from a 'stone'. Whenever the patient is plagued by this particular kind of affliction, a word  $\acute{o}$ ,  $\acute{\eta}$  λίθος (*ho, he lithos*) appears. If the context does not explain itself, there is no knowing which one of the two possible illnesses is described, if it is a kidney stone or a gallstone. The sick individual had a vision in which the god asked him what he would give him, if he made him well. In this vision, the boy answered 'ten dice' (the dice were a regular means of minor divination at many oracular shrines). The god responded with gales of laughter and promised that he would

stop it, the answer not being completely clear. Nevertheless, this *iama* is rather humorous, due to the special, rather meager form of payment, the particular cheekiness of the patient and the fact that the god seems to banter with the ill. A similar situation is described in the *iama* no B 16(36). Unfortunately, the majority of this inscription is missing, but from what survived one can gather that the main character called Caphisias is ridiculing the god and his power. The god cured him only when the patient repented and prayed earnestly.

In the cult of Asclepius, cockerels were the most favored form of thanksgiving and their use as thanksgiving sacrifices is easily explicable (Dillon 1994). Asclepius was a very popular deity and ill health affected everybody, the rich and the poor alike. Many of the ill were probably too poor to afford sacrificial oxen or pigs, and cockerels were much cheaper, which accounts for their prevalence in thanksgiving sacrifices for the cure. Ancient testimonies attest to the preceding assumption. From Plato's *Phaedo* (Plat., *Phaedo*, 118a) (424/423–348/347 BC) we know of Socrates's debt of a cockerel to the god. Cynno, one of the characters in the fourth mime of Herodas (the third century BC) (Herod. IV, 11–18), offers a cockerel during her visit to a Asclepieion. The surprising fact is that there is no mention of the explicitly thanksgiving role of cockerels in these inscriptions. Presumably, the lack of explicit mention means that this kind of offering was acceptable, but other forms were accepted too.

### Meeting the god: personal epiphany or healing by proxy

Surprisingly, incubation by proxy was not unheard of, and some inscriptions attest these cases. The *iama* no B1(21) not only illustrates the possibility of replacing the ill with somebody else, but also presents a sliver of ancient 'thinking'. The main character of this *iama* is a Lacedemonian girl called Arata who suffers from dropsy. Her mother slept in the *abaton* in her place and she had a vision (her daughter had the same one at home) that the god cut off the head of Arata and hung the body, the neck turned downwards. After the majority of fluid had run out, he untied the body and reattached the head. Having seen that dream, the mother of Arata came back home and she found her daughter had the same dream and she was healed. Another *iama* (no B4 (24)), describing a similar event, demonstrates the case of the boy Aristocritus from Halieis. While swimming in the sea, he dove, and remaining under the water, he came upon a dry place that was completely surrounded by rocks; consequently, he could not find any way out. His father slept in the *abaton* and had a dream in which the Asclepius showed him the whereabouts of his son. Another surprising fact is that the dream was not the condition *sine qua non* of the ritual in the Asclepieion. Some inscriptions attest that healing acts were held when the patient was awake. *Iama* no A16 describes the case of the lame boy Nicanor. When he was sitting down, another boy took his crutch and ran away. Nicanor stood up and miraculously chased after the boy; from that time

on he was able to walk. However this case can hardly be classified as an epiphany of the god. Some scholars interpreted this particular tale as a simple affective healing of a hysterical complaint (Herzog 1931). Consequently, the psychological aspect was of more importance than the religious one. According to some *iamata*, the cause of the illness should be removed first and then given into the hands of the sick by the god. It might have been the condition of a total cure, like the *iama* no A12 purports. It tells the story of a man, who had a spear head embedded in his jaw for six years. It is a fantastic tale in nature, but the issue worth discussing is that the god removed the offending element from the body of a man and then placed it in his hands, so that he left the sanctuary with it. Another *iama* (no A13) recounts a very interesting case: it describes the circumstances in which an illness appeared. The main character of this inscription is a man suffering from a leech infestation. In the Greek text an odd word appears: δεμελέας (*demeleas*). Possessing only the accusative form, it is a *hapax legomenon*. The *spiritus movens* of the man's disease was his stepmother who seasoned his drink with leeches. The potion that is mentioned in this inscription was called ὁ κυκεών (*ho kykeon*) (Aristoph. *Pax*. 712; *Od.X*. 290, 316; *Il*. XI. 624, 641), containing barley-groats, grated cheese, and Pramnian wine. The recipe can also include honey or magical drugs. The stepmother of the main character did it deliberately, an assumption attested to by the Greek verb δολόω (*doloo*), denoting 'to cheat' and 'to trick'. In the sanctuary, the suffering man had a dream that the god cut his chest with a knife, removed the leeches and then placed them in his hands.

Among the ancient testimonies there are some records of the epiphanies of Asclepius. Origen (*circa* AD 185–254), in *Against Celsus* (III. 24.), mentions that Celsus was trying to argue that many people, both Greeks and Barbarians acknowledged that they have often seen and still could see, not a phantom or an image of Asclepius, but the god himself. What is more, they admitted that they have personally seen the god healing worshippers and foretelling the future (Coxe 1885). Another record is ascribed to Hippocrates (about 460–370 BC) describing his own dream-vision of the god:

It seemed that I saw Asclepius himself, and he appeared very close... Asclepius appeared, not as his statues portray him, mild and gently, but with animated gesture, fearsome to behold. Snakes were following him, enormous specimens of serpents, speeding along in broad coils, hissing horribly, as in the desert or in forest dells. Companions came behind him with very tightly bound boxes of drugs. Then the god stretched out his hand to me; I took it joyfully and besought him to join me and not to neglect my ministrations. But he said, "At present you have no need of me, but this goddess [i.e., Truth], whom immortals and mortals share, will be your guide..." And then the divinity departed (Smith 1990).

## Drugs, animals and a bit of psychology

In the *iamata* inscription a word used for medicine is τὸ φάρμακον (*to farmakon*); regrettably, there is no direct information about its kind or composition. However, some information can be gathered from the texts. Given indirectly, pieces of information were most probably not provided on purpose. Presumably the name, composition and mode of preparation of the medicines that were used in Asclepion were a guarded secret. For instance, the main character of the *iamata* no A19 is a bald man called Heraieos. The medicine that he received from the god made his hair grow again. Unfortunately, no details about this medicine are provided (cf. no A4). Some information about the fluid consistency of the medicine is given in *iamata* no A9. The said *iamata* concerns a man who was blind in one eye. In his dream, it seemed that the god boiled some drugs and then poured the decoction into the blind eye. Thus, some information about the preparation of this medicine can be derived. The Greek verb ἔψω (*hepsō*) means 'to boil', 'to cook' and 'to brew', so presumably the medicine was a liquid or maybe an ointment. The verb ἐγγέω (*enheō*) that describes the application of the medicine can mean 'to pour down', 'to douse', 'bedew', but also 'to sprinkle'. The same verb can refer to an application of the medicine mentioned in the *iamata* no B20(40). The god was supposed to cure the man wounded by a spear below his eye. He did so by grinding up the herb and then putting it into the eye. The noun ἡ πόα (*he poa*) means 'grass' or 'plant', but in this context it should be understood as some herbs, herbaceous plants or a medicinal mixture (Thphr. *HP.* 1. 3. 1; 7. 3. 1; 9. 8. 1). Just as in the previous inscription, the verb ἐγγέω (*enheō*) is used, and here it can mean 'to pour', as if the medicine was some kind of liquid or maybe a brew, but it can also mean 'to sprinkle', as the medicine was a herbal poultice. The inscription A17 describes the application of a medicine by sprinkling it over the wound. Undoubtedly, the medicine mentioned in the *iamata* no B21(41) has a fluid consistency, because in the dream of the supplicant, a woman called Erasippa, the god gave her some mixture in a bowl to drink. The woman probably suffered from a pain in her stomach (the word 'pain' is assumed from context). The medicine that was given by the god was probably a purgative, because he ordered her to drink it and then to throw it up. In the Greek text two similar verbs were used: ἐμέω (*emeō*) and ἐξεμέω (*eksemeō*). Both of them mean 'to vomit', 'to throw up'. Some *iamata* describe probable events, for example the case of the boy with a growth on his neck (no B6 (26)). He was cured by being licked by a dog: a believable scenario since infected wounds respond well to natural antibiotics present in canine saliva. Other *iamata* contain fantastic tales of wonder, miracles of the most extraordinary kind, like a pregnancy literally years overdue (no A1).

Some of the healing acts involve the participation of animals. In several inscriptions it is directly conveyed that an animal cured a suffering individual. Two of the inscriptions demonstrate healing by dogs. In the first one (no A20) there is only a brief statement that a blind boy called Lyson was cured by a dog in the vi-

cinity of the sanctuary. The second one (no B6(26)) concerns a boy with a growth on his neck (the story is told above). Many inscriptions involve the participation of snakes. This animal is almost always called ὁ δράκων (*ho drakon*); only in one inscription does the name ὁ ὄφις (*ho ofis*) appear. This inscription (no A17) presents the tale of a man who suffers from malignant ulceration of his toe. During the day he was carried out of the *abaton* and was sitting on a seat. He fell asleep there (the noteworthy fact is that the place of the incubation was not inside the *abaton*, but beyond it) and a snake came out of the *abaton* and cured his toe with its tongue. After the snake healed the man, it slid back into the *abaton*. When the man woke up he was healthy and presented his vision of a handsome young man who had sprinkled some medicine over his toe. Unfortunately, the majority of the inscription no B17(37) is missing, but the fragments that survived suggest that its main character was a man from Argos called Cleimenes who was paralyzed. It seemed to him that the god wound an immense snake around his body. The tale recounts that he went away unharmed. Two inscriptions from *stele* B that are situated in the vicinity of each other. They contain tales of women concerning children, the conclusion of both is a multiple birth. In the former (no B19(39)), the woman (her name missing) had a vision that a snake placed itself down upon her stomach and five children were born to her. The second tale of this kind (no B22(42)) presents a story about a woman called Nicasiboula. It seemed to her that a god came to her bringing a snake crawling beside him. In this vision, she had intercourse with it. Within a year, twins were born to her. This remarkable case is described in the *iamata* no C1(44). The ill person is a mute girl. She became well after she had seen the snake moving away from the grove. Very scared, she yelled and ran away. The strange detail is that in every other inscription concerning snakes, these animals are presented in a favourable light. It is a healing and helpful animal, no one is afraid of it (LiDonnici 1995). Surprisingly, the animal that cures can also be a goose (no B23(43)). A man, suffering from gout, being awake came across the goose. It bit him on the feet and by making them bleed, healed them. Also worth mentioning is the fact that *stele* A and B end with a brief tale concerning an animal cure (no A20, no B23(43)).

## Conclusion

Aristagora of Troizen, tapeworm; Nicanor, lameness; Arata of Lacedaimon, dropsy; Eratocles, suppurative wound; Euphanes of Epidaurus, gallstone.

The Epidaurian *iamata* presents a great variety of diseases and health problems that afflicted people from all corners of the Hellenistic world: men, women, children, young and elderly people. An impressive social, demographic and geographic range covered by the body of the surviving texts not only points to the immense popularity of the Epidaurian medical center and the phenomenon of healing by the god in the *abaton*; the analysis of the *iamata* inscriptions may also

provide a window into the religious devotion of individuals from all walks of life. The social stratification of the suppliants seeking the realm in pain in the Asclepieia, together with the 'intimate' character of the tales, make the *iamata* inscriptions exceptional in comparison with other sources concerning Greek religion and Asclepiad-worship. The reading and analysis of particular tales enable modern scholars to catch a glimpse of ancient 'medical thinking' and attitudes towards health, life and death: what seemed to the ancients to be possible, probable and believable.

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