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The stuff of the gods

The material aspects of religion
in ancient Greece

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ABSTRACT

The “material turn” in the humanities and social sciences has brought about an expanded understanding of the material dimension of all cultural and social phenomena. In the Classics it has resulted in the breaking down of boundaries within the discipline and a growing interest in materiality within literature. In the study of religion cross-culturally new perspectives are emphasising religion as a material phenomenon and belief as a practice founded in the material world. This volume brings together experts in all aspects of Greek religion to consider its material dimensions. Chapters cover both themes traditionally approached by archaeologists, such as dedications and sacred space, and themes traditionally approached by philologists, such as the role of objects in divine power. They include a wide variety of themes ranging from the imminent material experience of religion for ancient Greek worshippers to the role of material culture in change and continuity over the long term.

Keywords: Greek religion, Etruscan religion, Mycenaean religion, materiality, religious change, *temenos*, temples, offerings, cult statues, terracottas, *omphalos*, cauldrons, sacred laws, visuality, purity, pollution, gods' identities, divine power, inscribed dedications

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4. Incubation rituals

Creating a locality for the divine?

Abstract

This paper argues that the epiphany of a god or hero in incubation cults was tied to a certain locality above all because the assignation of one place of epiphany for the group incubating made it easier for them to imagine the presence of the divine. In particular the *iamata* of Epidaurus as well as the Lex Sacra Hallenstrasse from Pergamon are examined with respect to this question.*

Keywords: incubation rituals, incubation dormitory, locality of epiphany, cult of Asklepios, Greece, Asia Minor, Classical, Hellenistic, Roman

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Introduction

Incubation rituals aimed to communicate with a deity in a dream and like many Greek rituals they involved a great number of material objects.¹ One central material aspect of incubation rituals, and the very definition of incubation as a phenomenon, is that it is to take place within the *temenos* of the god or hero. Here we shall discuss why it was important in incubation rituals to seek the god or hero out in his or her

* I wish to warmly thank the organizers of this conference, Matthew Haysom, Maria Mili and Jenny Wallensten, for inviting me, as well as Maria Mili, Vinciane Pirenne Delforge and Jenny Wallensten for reading and ameliorating the text with their comments. I also wish to thank the anonymous peer reviewers for improving the text. This text was written in 2016 and has been updated to include more recent research.

¹ Those were, for instance, purificatory water, sacrificial animals and cakes, incense, special clothes, wreaths, monetary fees as well as the architectural setting of the sanctuary, modelling the acts of the ritual. On incubation rituals in general, see Ehrenheim 2011; 2015; Renberg 2017. On the archaeology of Asklepieia, see Riethmüller 2005; Melfi 2007a; 2007b; Ehrenheim 2009. On the cult of Asklepios, see Edelstein & Edelstein 1945; Wickkiser 2008.

imagined dwelling place, and what this might say about the perception of the divine.

I will firstly explore the extent to which the deity or hero who was to be contacted by sleeping in his or her *temenos* was more or less *tied* to this locality (e.g. heroes worshipped at their tombs), or if the strict “locality of performance” was to a greater extent a needed setting or frame for the ritual, making it a means by which the normal world was set apart and how distinguishing factors and acts (being pure, giving a sacrifice) could make this communication with the divine “real”. Starting at a standard view of space as material and external, limiting off and secluding the ritual, this paper thus aims to move into the concept of space as a social creation.²

Secondly, I will try to investigate if different groups of worshippers perceived the importance of locality in the ritual of incubation differently, and if this was somehow tied to the level of immateriality or physicality in the perception of the deity.

The gods’ presence in the world

In Homer the gods move about in the world, but mainly live on Olympus, from where they descend when need calls for it or when humans sacrifice to them.³ A god could also have several preferred dwelling places; the classic example of how a god is seen to live in different places is Apollo. In a *paian* by Alkaios, Apollo is said to have visited the Hyperboreans and then returned to Delphi on a chariot driven by swans.⁴ In

² Cf. Löw 2016.

³ E.g. Hom. *Il.* 1.44, 2.167 and 4.74. They can also observe the smoke of the sacrifice, but decide not to heed the prayer: Hom. *Od.* 9.551–555. See further e.g. Naiden 2013, 109–122.

⁴ Alc. fr. 307c V. See also Hdt. 4.32–35; Ap. Rhod. *Argon.* 2.674–675; Callim. *Hymn* 2. For references to the myth of Apollo’s non-Greek origins and its use in iconography, see Cooper 1992, 21, n. 28.

other words, there was the perception that he actually stayed at Delphi.

When the gods show themselves to humans, they often adopt human features, but are tall and handsome.⁵ They can appear in the shape of strangers or disguised as friends or acquaintances.⁶ The gods might appear without warning for good or bad, giving the worshipper a feeling of uncertainty, the gods being everywhere and acting at their often unpredictable will.⁷ They can also act through the senses, giving a feeling of “presence”, not wholly tangible, but decidedly something out of the ordinary for the recipient.⁸

In oracle cults the worshipper actively called upon the god to come and attend to a need or query. Now a strict locality of communication was sought. At Delphi the Pythia spoke for the god in the *adyton*,⁹ a space where only the most prepared priest might go, as Apollo himself in all his unpredictable power might appear there. In the cult of Apollo in Patara in Asia Minor, a priestess stayed alone overnight inside the temple in order to obtain an oracle from the god.¹⁰ This was made presumably because Apollo was thought to come and visit his temple in person, and that, when he did this, it was not safe for anyone except the especially prepared priestess, to communicate with him.

Incubation was not possible in cults of Apollo, the god was probably much too terrifying for this purpose.¹¹ But his sons Amphiaraios and Asklepios (and, in turn, Asklepios’ son Podaleirios) did show themselves to common worshippers who slept in their sanctuaries.¹² As dreams are ubiquitous and had anywhere, how important was the locality of the dream in in-

cubation cults, and did it function as to streamline the experience of the incubants?

Tombs, dormitories and material evidence of divine actions

The first incubation cult attested in Greece was that of Amphiaraios close to Thebes, where the hero according to myth was swallowed up by the earth.¹³ From there, Amphiaraios foretold the future and gave answers or healings through dreams;¹⁴ Amphiaraios was thus somehow seen to dwell around his old city Thebes, and thought best to be consulted in the vicinity. There is thus a connection between his physical (though mythical) body and the place of worship and oracular consultation. The Boiotian sanctuary was later, according to Strabo, in compliance with an oracle moved to Oropos (c. 50 km from Thebes on the borders between Attica and Boiotia), where it has been archaeologically identified.¹⁵ Ancient stories explained that Amphiaraios reappeared in Oropos after being swallowed by the earth, and so again we see a link between the bodily presence of Amphiaraios and his sanctuary.¹⁶

The state of research used to be that heroes¹⁷ were worshipped by their tombs, or tied to a specific locality.¹⁸ One

⁵ Hom. *Od.* 2.268–270, 16.157–158, 20.30–33. That people believed that gods could have human form (although taller) is demonstrated in the story of a woman escorting Peisistratos safely to Athens dressed as Athena (Hdt. 1.60).

⁶ Hom. *Od.* 2.268–270 (Athena as Mentor); Hom. *Hymn Dem.* (Demeter as old woman); Hdt. 6.61 (Helen appears as ordinary woman).

⁷ This can be seen in Homer of course (cf. Hom. *Il.* 20.131, see also the above mentioned examples), as well as Dion. Hal. 6.13; Plut. *Vit. Theb.* 35.7; Paus. 8.10.8–9, 10.30.9; *FGrH* 87, F29; *Mir. ausc.* 122; Eur. *Bacch.* 1077–1095; Eur. *Hipp.* 86.

⁸ See the discussion in Burkert 1997, 19–22. As for example when Athena lights up the great hall in Ithaka; Odysseus and Telemachos are removing the weapons of the suitors, and her presence is only noted as an unnatural light, making Telemachos ill at ease: Hom. *Od.* 19.30–45.

⁹ Hom. *Il.* 5.448, 5.512; *Hymn. Hom. Ap.* 3.443; Aesch. *Eum.* 39–40; Pind. *Ol.* 7.32; cf. *Pyth.* 11.4.

¹⁰ Hdt. 1.182.

¹¹ Cf. Plut. *Mor. De def. or.* 438b. The lot oracle at Delphi, however, attest to a more practical way of obtaining answers at Delphi (Amandry 1950, discussion in Eidinow 2007, 36). Further, the oracular lamellae at Dodona attest to the popular appeal of oracle cults (e.g. Eidinow 2007, 56–138). It might be argued that the specialization in healing offered by the cult of Asklepios increased its popularity and at the same time shaped the imagined approach of the god himself.

¹² On Amphiaraios being the son of Apollo: Hyg. *Fab.* 70. Contrary, in the oldest myths he is the son of Oikles (e.g. Pind. *Pyth.* 8.39). For an excellent synopsis of healing epiphanies, see Petridou 2015.

¹³ As for the location of the first sanctuary of Amphiaraios: Strabo 9.2.10–11 (Knopia or Harma); Paus. 9.8.3 (on the road between Potnia and Thebes). Amphiaraios died in Thebes: Hom. *Od.* 15.243–255. For the latest discussion of the evidence with further references, see Gorrini 2015, 58–62. The source for him being swallowed by the earth is possibly Thebais *EGF* fr. 9.

¹⁴ Hdt. 1.46.2, 1.52, 8.134.

¹⁵ Strabo 9.2.10; Philostr. *VA* 2.37. Petropoulou (1991, 58) and Sineux 2007, 96–97 have however argued convincingly that Athens founded the Oropian Amphiaracion. For the sanctuary, see Petrakos 1968; 1997; Schachter 1981.

¹⁶ Paus. 1.34.4, see Parker 1996, 147–148.

¹⁷ It should be noted that in an inscription regulating the cult at Oropos Amphiaraios is called θεός, not *heros* (*IG* VII 235.22 = *I.Oropos* 277.22, dated 386–374 BC). The strict differentiation between hero and god is partly a scholarly construction based on the sharp boundary necessarily drawn between God on the one hand, and angels and saints on the other by the Early Christian church. For one thing, rituals directed to heroes and to gods were not as different as scholars of the 19th and 20th centuries tended to suppose, see e.g. Ekroth 2002. In the Greek world the concept seems to have been more fluent, the gods were superhuman beings and mythical heroes, or even to some extent inspired men, might acquire the status of *theos*. See for example how the followers of Pythagoras gave him a status between man and god (Arist. *De Pyth.* fr. 2 Ross = 156 Gigon; cf. Iambl. *VP* 143–144; *FGrH* 1026 F 24) and dead initiates in the Orphic texts might require the condition of a *theos* (Bernabé & Jiménez San Cristóbal 2008, 49, with further references). Thus, labelling Amphiaraios a *theos* at Oropos most probably just indicates that his cult was popular and henceforth in my discussion, I will treat him as a hero. Further on this problem, see Bremmer 2019, 92–93.

¹⁸ Larson 1995, 9 n. 25 (considering the setting aside of a space for a heroic tomb a cult act in itself); Kearns 1989, 3 (with some doubt as

might thus argue that the locality of incubation was dependent on the material remains of the hero with whom contact was sought. However, much of the evidence for a hero or heroine cult with his or her tomb as focus is, because of the state of the sources, only literary and from later authors such as Strabo or Pausanias.¹⁹

Archaeologically, the focus and means of identification of hero cults are not very clear.²⁰ When there are archaeologically good grounds for identifying a hero cult (e.g. altar, dedicatory inscriptions), there is rarely a tomb or such structure, even if literary evidence mentions the grave of the hero as the focus of the cult.²¹ If the presence of a tomb is noted by the use of the term *heroon* in late sources, the use of *hieron* appears instead in the Classical and Hellenistic epigraphical sources.²²

Still, for Amphiaraios one must say that even though he later became internationally sought for oracles, as Philostratos testifies to,²³ he was always tied to his mythical home in Thebes, Boiotia, bordering to Attica. Thus, it is the locality of the myth which matters and not any identified remains of his body.

Another hero cult in which incubation was practised for the sake of oracles was the cult of Kalchas and Podaleirios in Apulia. The cult is attested from at least Hellenistic times but may possibly have older roots, as the shrine was at the end of an old transhumance route and Homeric heroes are known to have been connected with Greek colonies: Kalchas was the famous seer in the *Iliad*, and Podaleirios was the son of Asklepios and like his father well-known for being a skillful doctor.²⁴ A Hellenistic source tells of oracle-seekers who sleep in skins on the tomb of Podaleirios, close to the “empty tomb of Kalchas” in order to obtain dream visions. Later, Strabo tells us that the incubants sleep on the hide of the sacrificial animal still, but now on the tomb of Kalchas, whereas Podaleirios has become the healer of animals by the stream below.²⁵ Here the tomb thus serves as focus when the hero is to be called upon in a dream, a connection to the hero strengthened by sleeping in or on the hide of the animal which has been sacrificed and thus sacralized to the hero.²⁶

to the consistency of this rule as heroes could be worshipped even if their remains were not present). Tied to a locality: *New Pauly* online, s.v. Asklepios (F. Graf).

¹⁹ Larson 1995, the catalogue.

²⁰ Ekroth 2009, 123; Gorrini 2015, 15 *et passim*.

²¹ This is apparent, among other instances, in the cults of Heros iatros and Amyntos in Attica, where the (late) literary sources speak of a *heroon* or tomb, but the archaeological evidence does not support this. See Gorrini 2015, 29–35.

²² See Gorrini 2015, 19–35, esp. 35.

²³ Philostrat. *VA* 2.37.

²⁴ E.g. Hom. *Il.* 1.69–70, 1.93–99 and 2.300–330 (Kalchas), 11.833 cf. 2.731 (Podaleirios).

²⁵ *FGH* III B, frg. 566, F56 = Lycoph. *Alex.* 1047–1051; Strabo 6.3.9.

²⁶ Hubert & Mauss 1964, 97–103. Cf. Graf 1992, 190.

In oracular cults where heroes are contacted, the locality thus seems important, and to be connected with the myth rather than an actual tomb (or any such architectural structure), whereas gods are possibly imagined to travel around more easily. What about Asklepios, a hero turned god whose cult spread all over the Mediterranean world?

Asklepios started out as a hero, the son of Apollo, but when incubation is first attested in his cult, he is called a *theos*.²⁷ No *heroon* of Asklepios has ever been attested,²⁸ but the large Asklepieia did make claims of being situated at his birthplace, a locality connecting to the human past and bodily presence of the god.²⁹

The Epidaurian *iamata*, probably collected from a number of smaller cure tablets in the sanctuary and inscribed at the middle of the 4th century BC (but possibly dating back another 100 years), reveal a specific locality in the sanctuary for meeting the god, and also reveal how most people who came to the sanctuary imagined, or were induced by the cult officials to imagine, the presence of the god.³⁰ The absolute majority of the cures took place in dreams inside a special dormitory, called *abaton* or *adyton*.³¹

²⁷ In Pindar (*Pyth.* 3.1–58) Asklepios is still a hero, but in the Epidaurian *iamata*, *IG* IV², 1 121–124, Asklepios is called *theos*. In the Telemachos inscription, *IG* II² 4960a = *IG* II³ 4 665, c. 400 BC, he is neither called god nor hero, but it is generally assumed that he is imported to Athens in 420 BC as a god (e.g. Wickkiser 2008, 62). The *iamata* inscriptions date to c. 350 BC, but may go back to individual cures at the sanctuary dating back 100 years (LiDonnici 1995, 80–82, see also Melfi 2007b, 35). On the late arrival of Asklepios to the pantheon: Cic. *Nat. D.* 3.15–39; Luc. *Iupp. trag.* 21; Arn. *Adv. nat.* 3.39. They will be referred to here as Epidaurian *iamata* and according to the enumeration in LiDonnici 1995: she denotes stele 1 (*IG* IV², 1 121) as A, then B (122), C (123), and D (124), with enumeration of the separate healing stories or *iamata* starting from 1 for every stele, but keeping the consecutive enumeration of all healing stories through stele 121–124 within parenthesis.

²⁸ However, the hypothesis has been put forward by Riethmüller that the so-called Tholos (or *thymele* as it was earlier called) was in fact a *heroon*. See Riethmüller 1996; 2005, vol. 1, 318–324 with further references to the many different hypotheses put forward. See also Burford 1969, 66, 162 and 220–221 and the building accounts of the tholos/*thymele*: *IG* IV², 1 103 A and B.

²⁹ In Classical times, there was a struggle between the largest Asklepieia, making claims of Asklepios' mother having come from Thessaly, Epidaurus, or Messene. For collection of and discussions on all myths on the birth and descent of Asklepios, see Edelstein & Edelstein 1945, 17–64; Riethmüller 2005, vol. 1, 37–46. Pindar gave this myth a set form in c. 476 BC in *Pyth.* 3.14 (for the date of the Ode, see Farnell 1961, 135). In the *Homeric Hymn to Asklepios* (16), written some time at the end of the 5th century BC, Apollo is the father and Koronis, the daughter of Phlegyas, the mother. Epidaurus eventually won this struggle, being given the acceptance of Delphi as the birthplace of Asklepios: Paus. 2.26.7.

³⁰ *IG* IV², 1 121–124; LiDonnici 1995, 80–82. Note Lebena: probably much the same, as in Troizen.

³¹ Epidaurian *iamata*, *passim*. The dormitory is named *abaton* in Epidaurian *iamata* A1, A2, A6, A7, A11, A15, A17, B4(24), B7(27), B8(28), B9(29), B17(37), C7(50) and C21(64) and *adyton* in *iamata* B38(18). For the identification of the stoa as the *abaton* at Epidaurus, and for the

The choice of words indicates that the space was not for any worshipper, but only those prepared by the ritual.³² It is clear from the accounts that it was not possible to look into this building.³³ For practical reasons, a special building would have been needed for many people sleeping there, and the seclusion is vital if the idea is that the god is thought to walk around among the sleeping at night, curing them. It is clear that the worshippers believed (or, the priests wanted them to believe) that the miraculous healing took place in the physical world and not inside the dream, since it can be noted that different proofs of what happened in the dream are left beside them when they wake up.³⁴ For example two stories tell of help-seekers who were operated on in their dream and when they woke up in the morning the floor of the *abaton* was covered in their blood (as a result from the operation).³⁵ In other words, the dormitory was the place designated by the ritual for an epiphany. It is easy to argue that worshippers sleeping in a holy place together, expecting to see the same thing, aug-

mented the experience and put the imagination of the incubants at work.³⁶

Concerning the tangible perceptions of the god and material proof of the cures, these stories must have been retold many times and become more and more fantastic. Indeed, in the later account of Aelius Aristides such a process can be seen for the Pergamene miracles.³⁷ In the *Hieroi Logoi* Aristides relates that in his time there were no surgical cures in the sanctuary of Pergamon, but that no doubt they were frequent at the time of “the present priest’s grandfather.”³⁸ Eric R. Dodds remarks a bit ironically on this passage saying that it takes a while for a good story to brood.³⁹ Indeed this creation of a fictitious past is a known historical process, but the good stories also serve as a model for interpreting the present worshippers’ (more blurred) experience of the divine.⁴⁰

In other words, Asklepios at Epidauros was tangibly tied to his locality of epiphany (the dormitory) where material proof of his actions was (allegedly) left for all to see. Indeed, Apollo did not do this at Delphi. Did the alleged presence of evidence for the tangible presence of Asklepios in some way influence his imagined persona?

When reading the accounts of the *iamata* and also the famous incubation scene of Aristophanes’ *Ploutos*, it is striking how very human Asklepios appears, especially when compared to his father Apollo.⁴¹ He is more or less portrayed as a doctor of the time, with assistants carrying his medicine chest, performing surgery, and making his rounds together with his helpers. What was the role-model for these imaginations of how the god should look? It might be that the perception of the god was influenced by the popularity of Greek medicine and Greek doctors, shaping the ideas of the Greeks on what also religious healing looked like.⁴² It is striking that Asklepios’ image and behavior is very homogenous across all his cults, and modelled on human behavior (of a certain profession).

It would be simplistic to ascribe one perception of Asklepios to all the worshippers coming to Epidauros. Some were no doubt influenced by reading the *iamata* before sleeping, others may have reshaped the memory of their dreams upon waking up according to the image conveyed in the *iamata*: a kind

problem of identifying dormitories at other incubation sanctuaries, see Ehrenheim 2009 with further references. Not all miraculous healings took place through dreams in the dormitory, though. Some took place in the sanctuary with the help of snakes or dogs. Snake: Epidaurian *iamata* A17, C1(44) and C2(45), goose: B23(43), dog: A20, B6(26) and B13(33). In some dream visions inside the dormitory, Asklepios uses snakes to cure or make childless woman pregnant: B17(27), B19(39) and B22(42). In two miracles Asklepios helps worshippers who had not received a clear dream or otherwise did not get help on the road back from the sanctuary (Epidaurian *iamata* B5(25) and B13(33)). Here, it is important though to recognize that Asklepios only shows himself to his worshippers in his superhuman form inside the dormitory, but in disguise when meeting up by the road.

³² The word *abaton* itself need not signify a higher probability of the god’s presence or likelihood to arrive when called upon. What does *abaton* and *adyton* for dormitory signify? Some uses of the words indicate that they are places that should be avoided by mortals, as places where lightning had struck (Eur. *Bacch.* 10; Pollux 9.41; *IG II²* 4964.5 [Zeus Kataibates]). Also places of worship of lesser gods and heroes could be denoted with this word (Tritopatores: *IG I³* 1066; A heroized dead woman: *IG XII 3* 1626 = *Syll.*³ 1223; The Hyakinthids: Eur. *Erechtheus* fr. 370.87 (Kannicht). See further Parker 1983, 167 n. 132. On the archaeology of emerging epic heroes, see Antonaccio 1994, ch. 3. Like any word, *abaton* can be used to denote simply this: stay out, don’t sully this enclosed area with litter (probably the case for tomb inscriptions, *IG XII* 3.453–455, cf. *SIG³* 1223 commentary and Parker 1983, 167 n. 132. In an inscription from the sanctuary of Amyntos at Athens, the word probably denotes just this, to protect the enclosed area from non-worshippers). See Parker 1983, 167, n. 132, with further references, on the *abaton* characterizing the area to which cult participants were (normally) not allowed access.

³³ Epidaurian *iamata* A11.

³⁴ Epidaurian *iamata* B10(30): a man with an arrow barb stuck in his lung walked out of the *abaton* with the barb in his hands in the morning (following an operation in his dream), B21(41): a woman being cured from intestinal parasites saw all the parasites on her robe in the morning (after the god had given her a potion and made her throw up in the dream).

³⁵ Epidaurian *iamata* B3(23) and B7(27).

³⁶ Ar. *Pl.* 742–744; Dodds 1951, 115; Ehrenheim 2015, 94, 120 and 132–133.

³⁷ There is a vast literature on Aelius Aristides and the *Hieroi Logoi*, e.g. Behr 1968; 1981–1986; Festugière 1986; Petsalis-Diomidis 2010; Platt 2011; Israelowich 2012.

³⁸ Aristid. *Or. sacr.* 4.64.

³⁹ Dodds 1951, 115.

⁴⁰ Dillon 1994.

⁴¹ Epidaurian *iamata*, e.g. A4, A9, A12, A13, A19, B3(23), B5(25), B7(27), B8(28), B10(30), B12(32), B20(40), B21(41), C23(66), cf. C5(48), where Asklepios advises against cauterizing, and lets the pus come out naturally; Ar. *Plut.* 659–663 and 732–734.

⁴² Ehrenheim 2022.

doctor making his rounds. If this were not the case, the cult officials would not have promoted this image of the god in the *iamata*. Promoting this image of the god seems also have made for a huge success of the cult, wherefore one might say the efforts of cult officials to promote the cult worked together with the expectations of the worshippers coming to participate in its rituals.

How would this have worked in practice? Some worshippers might have had the in-between-wake-and-dream kind of experience attested in later texts, a vision in a not fully awake state, interpreted as a divine presence.⁴³ Still others might have had normally inconsistent dreams, and by reading the *iamata* and with the help of their imagination, as well as that of friends and priests if present, made the most to attribute divine agency into the dream.⁴⁴ In Roman times, Aristides attests to just this willingness of the temple staff to interpret unclear dreams, and the eagerness of the dreamer to believe in the interpretation offered.⁴⁵ Since one of the worshippers described in the *iamata* first “misinterpreted” her dream, but then got it right with the help of a seer at home, we know that a whole lot of interpretations of the dreams were at play.⁴⁶ Still others, as the *iamata* actually also attest, did not dream anything they interpreted as of significance, and went home disappointed.⁴⁷ There were also worshippers who were given the advice to stay several months in the sanctuary. They would probably not have slept in the *abaton* and had divine dreams all of those nights, but maybe profited from some kind of “heightened sense of presence of the god” anywhere in the sanctuary, and certainly discussed their experiences with other worshippers and temple staff.⁴⁸

⁴³ Cf. *P Oxy* 1381 (2nd century AD); Aristid. *Or. sacr.* 2.31–32.

⁴⁴ This is hinted at in *iamata* B5(25) and B13(33), where incubants go home after not having had any clear dreams, but are met up by Asklepios and cured on the way home. Thus, more people than these two must have had unclear dreams, but are encouraged in the inscription thus not to give up, but to continue to see meaning in their dreams.

⁴⁵ See e.g. Aristid. *Or. sacr.* 2.35, 3.14 and 3.21–24.

⁴⁶ Epidaurian *iamata* C3(46).

⁴⁷ Epidaurian *iamata* B5(25) and B13(33).

⁴⁸ C5(48) and C21(64) (a four-month stay). Cf. the *Anth. Pal.* 6.330 (a three-month stay). Also, in C22(65), a blind man who had lost his oil bottle in the bathhouse was told by the god, in a dream, to look for it in the large inn. He did so with the help of a servant, they came upon the oil bottle and the man could see again. The presence of a bath and a big inn (presumably there was a small inn too) suggest that many suppliants stayed for more than one night.

Ubiquity of dreams and divinity as an exclusive presence

In order to find substantial testimonia for the perception of the presence of Asklepios in Hellenistic and Roman times, we must turn to the Asklepieion at Pergamon. Here, the locality in which the god is met reflects different worshipper groups, as two different *enkoimeteria* could be used and are recognized by the cult. We thus have evidence of different worshipper groups receiving epiphanies at different locations. The question begs itself if the different settings of epiphany influenced the expectations and subsequent interpretations of the different groups’ dream experiences.⁴⁹

The Lex Sacra Hallenstrasse is dated according to letter-forms to the turn of the 1st and 2nd centuries AD, but at least parts of the text date back to Hellenistic times.⁵⁰ The inscription clearly separates four types of worshippers at the sanctuary.⁵¹ There are those who just come to the sanctuary to sacrifice and pray, then there are the ones who come to incubate a first time, then those who come back a second time to incubate concerning the same matter, and, fourth, there are the *perithyontes*. The ones who come a first time to incubate are to use the dormitory called *enkoimeterion*, the ones coming back for the same matter use “the small” *enkoimeterion*, and both these groups sacrifice a piglet and cakes.⁵² As to the *perithyontes*, they are prescribed only sacrifices of barley groats dipped in honey and oil, and incense.⁵³ Nothing is said of which *enkoim-*

⁴⁹ See the edition and commentary of Habicht & Wörrle 1969. For a recent interpretation of the Lex Sacra Hallenstrasse as reflecting traditions from 4th century BC Epidaurios, in order to legitimize the cult at Pergamon, and probably not displaying rites of the Roman period, see Melfi 2016; 2018. As I am concerned with locality of the god irrespective of time period, these interesting new interpretations would alter the time period and connection with Aristides, but not in essence the presence of several *enkoimeteria*.

⁵⁰ Habicht & Wörrle 1969, 161A, see also Lupu 2005, 61–63 and Ehrenheim 2015, 126–135, 227 for commentary. On the date: Habicht & Wörrle 1969, 187. The coin *phokais* is prescribed as a fee for the healing at the end of the inscription (*IvP* III 161 A.31–33). The coin, *phokais*, was used in Asia Minor in the 5th and 4th centuries BC, but not minted after Alexander, although used for much of the Hellenistic time as many coins were in circulation. See the discussion in Habicht & Wörrle 1969, 186, nn. 96 and 97, who argues that the coin was kept in the inscribed text for cultic reasons. Because of the coin, it has plausibly been suggested that at least this part of the text originated in the Hellenistic period, was recopied on a larger inscription, possibly collecting also other parts of rules for the sanctuary on one stone.

⁵¹ Sokolowski 1973 convincingly identifies three different groups of incubants; I have previously also argued for a fourth group: those coming to the sanctuary just to pray and sacrifice: Ehrenheim 2015, 129.

⁵² Lex Sacra Hallenstrasse, *IvP* III 161 A (dormitory: *enkoimeterion* lines 11–12; small *enkoimeterion* line 18). The reason for incubants coming back for the same matter is not stated, but apparently the inquiry was still relevant.

⁵³ *IvP* III 161 A.23–25.

eterion they should use. Maybe the *enkoimeteria* were attached to the ritual designed for first- and second-time-comers. Who were the *perithyontes*? *Perithyo* means “to sacrifice in a circle”, but as convincingly argued by Franciszek Sokolowski the prefix *peri-* can mean iterated action, and be interpreted as “those who sacrifice very often”.⁵⁴ The *therapeutai*, who perform *perithyo*, have been identified with a group of semi-official worshippers, also attested on other inscriptions from Roman time at Pergamon, as well as some literary sources, as servants of the god.⁵⁵ The *perithyontes* or *therapeutai* are not attested as a group at Pergamon in Hellenistic times, though. They were probably rich people who stayed a longer time at the sanctuary and, like Aelius Aristides, the author of *Hieroi Logoi*, took part in every aspect of the worship there. Aristides writes that he incubates “throughout the whole sanctuary”, in the open air, on the road even, and under the Sacred Lamp of Hygieia.⁵⁶ Might this have been the habit of also the group called *therapeutai* or *perithyontes*? How singular a testimonia is the *Hieroi logoi* and to what degree does it reflect the elite religiosity of those who could afford to stay at Pergamon for a longer time, Aristides’ friends? No doubt many of his fellow *perithyontes*, probably equally literate and learned in the *enkyklios paideia*, had the same expectations and experiences of the god, as well as cures undertaken, as Aristides.⁵⁷

According to Zsuzsanna Várhelyi the *therapeutai* consist of a group of elite Romans, who not only shared the same dream world, but also shared the different treatments they thought to have been prescribed by the god.⁵⁸ Aristides’ perception

on dreams seems to have followed the contemporary three-fold classification schema also to be found in Artemidoros: non-significant, predictive and oracular.⁵⁹ He attributes many dreams as oracular even though they were not dreamt in an incubation dormitory.⁶⁰ There seems to be a shift here from the basics of an oracle cult where you seek out a god in his or her sanctuary, to a more general belief in the oracular capacity of dreams, wherever you sleep. Thus, according to Aristides and presumably also his fellow *perithyontes*, you did not have to sleep in the dormitory in order for Asklepios to visit you in your dream.⁶¹ They would accordingly have been less prone to think of Asklepios as the god making his rounds inside the dormitory, the image conveyed by the *iamata* and no doubt still valid at least in the expectations of most incubants coming to Asklepieia also in Roman times.⁶²

Did this wealthy elite group perceive itself as gifted with an easier presence of and communication with the god than those who had to pay the fee, make the sacrifice, and hope for an appearance inside the dormitory? Or was it generally perceived that this easier contact with the god was due to their longer stay and generally pious behavior at the sanctuary? It is difficult to say, but whatever the cause for their presence and perceived success at divine communication, rich people with entourages formed a notable group at any Asklepieion.⁶³ Possibly this ease at communication with the divine created a less singular expectation and experience of the god’s appearance and behavior. In Aristides, the gods (foremost Asklepios but also Sarapis) could be perceived in many ways, as a sensation (in all the senses not exclusively visual),⁶⁴ as the image of

⁵⁴ Sokolowski 1973, 409; cf. Habicht & Wörrle 1969, 183–184; Pfister in *RE* Suppl. 6, 1935, 149–150.

⁵⁵ Inscriptions from Roman times in Pergamon on *therapeutai* (and *perithyontai*): *IuP* III 47, 79, 122, 140 and 152. On *therapeutai* in Aristides: *Or. sacr.* 1.23, 2.47, 4.16, 4.18 and 4.50. In 2.27 Aristides uses the word *συμφοιηταί* and *συμθεραπευταί*, while calling himself *θεραπευτής*. Cf. an inscription from the cult of Asklepios at Astypalaia of the 2nd century AD, where the word *περιθύειν* is used on a list of chiefs or eponyms in a cult association to Asklepios: Peek 1969, 48–49, no. 100; *BE* 1971, 486; Sokolowski 1973, 410.

⁵⁶ Aristid. *Or. sacr.* 2.78–80. On the recurring convergence between the epiphany of the deity and the cult statue, and Aristides’ perception of the gods as real entities active in physical space, see Platt 2011, 265.

⁵⁷ See Petsalis-Diomidis 2010, esp. 122–150; Várhelyi 2010, 82–85 on Aristides as a model of elite behavior of his time. Várhelyi does not, however, believe in the concept of pilgrimages (preferred by Petsalis-Diomidis), as most visitors at Pergamon were either members of the local elite, or there on Imperial business. See further Israelowich 2012, 122–128, placing the religious cures of Aristides and his sojourns at Pergamon among mainstream Roman elite behaviour of the time.

⁵⁸ Várhelyi 2010, 83–85. This taking part of each others’ dreams and cures can be seen in the *Hieroi Logoi*, e.g. 2.30. Downie 2013, 57, however accentuates the singularity of the dreams presented by Aristides, set apart from both contemporary votive material as well as dreams in the literature of the time. I think, though, that given their irrational and dream-like nature (eminently described by Downie 2013, 63–64), as well as the fact that he constantly refers to this sharing of dreams with his fel-

low *therapeutai*, this dream representation may have been typical in the social group Aristides belonged to. See further the elucidating article of Petridou (2017), adding Galen to the interesting group of *therapeutai*.

⁵⁹ Behr 1968, 190–191, 196–204; Israelowich 2012, 75–85. Behr (1968, 196) finds it, though, unlikely that Aristides had read Artemidoros’ *Oneirokritica* (published some 30 years before the *Hieroi Logoi*).

⁶⁰ Aristid. *Or. sacr.* passim.

⁶¹ Aristides probably learnt from an early age that communication with the divine was possible through dreams, see Arist. *Or. sacr.* 4.54. Here Aristides writes that the foster father Epagathos was “a very good man, and was most clearly in communion with the Gods, and related from memory whole oracles from his dreams” (translation Behr). See further Israelowich 2012, 154–163 on the dreams of Aristides in their contemporary context.

⁶² E.g. *IGUR* I 105 and 148, technically being dedicatory inscriptions, but they tell of miraculous healings at the Tiber Island, and are denoted as *iamata* in Girone 1998, V.1 and V.2a–d. Cf. Sineux 2008, 403.

⁶³ In a passage in the *Or. sacr.* 4.5, Aristides is incubating at the Asklepios of Poemamenon. A farmer who is incubating at the sanctuary only knew Aristides by reputation, but had a dream in which Aristides figured (vomiting the head of a viper), and told the entourage of Aristides (possibly hoping for a reward of some kind).

⁶⁴ Aristid. *Or. sacr.* 2.31–33. Here the god is sensed to be close, as in a physical sensation.

his statue,⁶⁵ or even established among the stars in heaven.⁶⁶ When seen as human, Aristides describes the gods as “marvellous in beauty and magnitude.”⁶⁷ Aristides is described by most scholars as having a fairly mainstream polytheistic theology, but it is clear that his god is not the more traditional image of a divine doctor.⁶⁸

Concluding discussion

Designing a ritual, the nexus of which is meeting a god in a particular locality, close to the temple of the god, preceded by reading stories of how the god would appear in this locality and perform healings, helps to streamline expectation and experience of how this god should look and act.

The limiting of the locality for meeting the god would, in a manner of speaking, make him materialize more easily. Considering the material proofs of the cures that are described in the *iamata*, and no doubt also represented on many votives dedicated at the sanctuary, material proof of the god was what people wanted. Thus, the *iamata* reveal a notion where the god, if not being a material entity at least can perform real surgery on the incubants in the dormitory, and where given spatial limits were important for the ritual to work.

But still, different groups in society tend to perceive the divine in ways which affirm their identity and place in society,⁶⁹ wherefore one must presume that the image of Asklepios varied between times and groups in the ancient world, and that the cult of course accommodated for different ways of perceiving the god.

Greek ritual norms are often described as a result of a political process of discussion.⁷⁰ The *Lex Sacra Hallenstrasse* gives us a key insight into this type of dynamic. Rituals as they are

presented in the *leges sacrae* are compromises between different perceptions of a deity and the most proper mode of communication with the divine held by different groups and different cultures in society.

Aristides (and probably also his fellow elite Romans staying at the Pergamene sanctuary) reveals a more immaterial perception of the divine, where the god gives advice through dreams or points to the future but where everything which is said and done remains in the dream-landscape: the god never acts on the incubant other than through words. Here the locality of the sleeping is not as important for a successful contact with the god, the channel (if you like) of contact with the divine is the dream itself. The self-assuredness of Aristides as being chosen by the god⁷¹ probably made it easy for him to believe that his dreams, wherever dreamt, were sent by the god. Other worshippers might have needed the ritual and the specific locality to hope for this communication with the divine.

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⁶⁵ Aristid. *Or. sacr.* 3.47 (Sarapis), 4.50 (Asklepios, though the statue looks different in the dream), 2.41 (Athena appears in a waking vision as the sculpture by Pheidias in Athens). It was fairly common to imagine the gods in the form of their statues. Artemidoros writes that if either the god appears to the dreamer as according to his imagination, or as the statue of the god, the dream is valid (*Oneirokritika* 2.35). To imagine the gods in the shape of their statues was in other words not unusual at the time.

⁶⁶ Aristid. *Or. sacr.* 4.56.

⁶⁷ Aristid. *Or. sacr.* 3.46 (on Asklepios and Sarapis).

⁶⁸ Behr sees Aristides as an eclectic, though fairly conventional, believer within the Greco-Roman polytheistic system, arguing against previous scholars who have spotted traces of Neoplatonism in the *Hieroi Logoi*. Behr 1968, 148–161, esp. 158 and nn. 64–65 with further references. Among other things, Aristides' use of “the One” in *Or. sacr.* 4.50, is argued by Behr to be a conventional term and not an indicator of a singular devotion. On Neoplatonism in Aristides, see Boulanger 1923, 208; Edelstein 1967, 107 n.22. See further Israelowich 2012, 145, commenting on Aristid. *Or.* 43.25 and 43.29.

⁶⁹ Cf. Wuthnow 1989, e.g. 518–526, 538–543.

⁷⁰ Stavrianopoulou 2007, 184–185. See further Parker 2004; Lupu 2005, 4–9.

⁷¹ Aristid. *Or. sacr.* 2.23, 2.31–34, 4.6–7 and esp. 4.45–54.

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