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The Afterlife of a Dream and the Ritual System of the Epidaurian Asklepieion

Abstract: This study looks at the ways that the healing inscriptions at the Epidauran Asklepieion transfer the private experience of a supplicant into the public realm of the life of the sanctuary. This process imbues the individual dream with a potential for influence that can honor the god in unforeseen ways well into the future. The study then examines the role of one god, Mnēmosyne, in the afterlife of the dream in order to gain an appreciation of the overall ritual system at the Asklepieion. It will be argued that Mnēmosyne plays a key role ritually not just in preserving the memory of the dream for the individual, but also in intellectually ordering the mind for the dreamer to articulate the dream to the sanctuary officials, in enabling the construction and inscription of the account for public display, and in creating opportunities for others to honor Asklepios well into the future and well beyond Epidaurus. Mnēmosyne’s involvement at the Epidauran Asklepieion attests to a complex ritual system of human action within a perceived divine group-effort to benefit the divine and human worlds.

1 Healing Inscriptions and Their Public Significance

As is well known, the worship of Asklepios was widespread throughout the Ancient Mediterranean world and lasted almost 1000 years. The success of the cult rested on the very practical results of one’s encounter with the god, namely being cured of one’s malady or maladies for which one sought relief, usually by sleeping at the cult sanctuary. Part of the publicity for the cult came in the form of the votive offerings left for Asklepios at his sanctuaries in thanksgiving for a cure, which could be almost anything valued by the person offering the votive—from clothing associated with the healing or a simple wooden plaque (pinax) to pictures of Asklepios painted as a well-doer or marble statues with hymns dedicated to Asklepios inscribed on its base. The most basic function of these objects, as described by those who left them, was to honor the god by witnessing to his actions and by following his command to make a particular offering. The command usually came in the course of a dream vision where the supplicant either was cured or was given the means by which to be cured after awakening. There are remains of a particular kind of inscription at a few of the Asklepieia that have been excavated—Rome, Lebena, Pergamon, and Epidaurus.

dauros, in particular. These inscriptions are more literary in nature in the sense that they are not simply an individual’s dedicatory offerings that had been posted in the temple, but they are semi-official reports of healings that became part of the sacred landscape of the cult site.² The largest body of these inscriptions that survives is from Epidaurus, where these stories of miraculous cures at the hand of Asklepios were inscribed on a series of stelae and prominently and permanently displayed in the sanctuary for hundreds of years.³

Epigraphical analysis dates these inscriptions to the fourth century BCE, which gives the inscriptions the potential for wide-ranging influence on individuals and perhaps other cult sites as the Asklepios cult grew and spread over time and place. In a word, the inscriptions could extend the scope of perceived divine-human contact beyond the individual supplicant who undergoes incubation and perceives some sort of healing or revelatory prescription for healing. The inscriptions offered the potential for an untold number of people and cities to participate in the ebb and flow of the divine activity believed to occur at the sanctuary. This activity was not simply an individual’s encounter with one god, namely Asklepios, but it included participation in a complex ritual system that incorporated one into a community of pilgrims seeking to improve their situations.

Alexia Petsalis-Diomidis aptly describes the process at Pergamon:

She goes on to describe Philostratus’ account of the sophist Antiochus’ stay at the Asklepieion at Aegae, which included both incubation and much conversation with the fellow suppliants and with Asklepios, who “used to converse with [Antiochus] while awake.” The most striking part about the account is the phrase, “and [Asklepios] held it to be a triumph of his healing art to ward off disease from Anti-

² Lebena’s healing inscriptions were not added at a later time to the sanctuary, as were those of Epidaurus. Instead, the sanctuary probably was built at the founding of Lebena, and the inscriptions were found within the stoa, which was adjacent to the temple, engraved onto the walls of the stoa themselves. So, these healing inscriptions were part of the construction of the sacred space of the Asklepieion at Labena when the stoa were added to the complex. See L. R. LiDonnici, The Epidauran Miracle Inscriptions: Text, Translation, Commentary, Atlanta, 1995, p. 46–7.
³ Pausanias, II, 27, 3 describes them as such (trans. W. H. S. Jones): “Within the enclosure stood slabs; in my time six remained, but of old there were more. On them are inscribed the names of both the men and the women who have been healed by Asklepios, the disease also from which each suffered, and the means of cure. The dialect is Doric.”
ochus.”

The healings and conversations, then, extended beyond just medical care and socializing; it contributed to the ongoing relationship between divine and human realms and the glorification of the divinities involved in the activities in the sanctuary. I will unpack this more below with respect to the rituals involving Mnemosyne.

2 The Story of Aristagora

One story in particular exemplifies how one of these inscriptions from Epidaurus transformed an individual’s dream into something with influence extending beyond its significance for one person. In On the Nature of Animals IX, 33, Aelian writes about the curative powers of wormwood for tapeworms. And while describing

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5 Petsalis-Diomidis, o.c. (n. 4), p. 232. The relevant passage from Philostratus discussed by Petsalis-Diomidis is from Vitae Sophistidarum 568 and reads, “τάς δὲ πλείους τῶν νυκτῶν ἐς τὸ τοῦ Ἀσκληπιοῦ ιερὸν ἀπεκάθευνεν ὑπὲρ τε ὀνειρίατον ὑπὲρ τε ἴνυνουσίας, ὧπος ἐγγηγοροῦσεν τε καὶ διαλεγομένων ἄλληλος, διελέγετο γὰρ αὐτῷ ἐγγηγορώτι ὁ θεός καλὸν ἀγώνιαμα ποιοῦμένος τῆς ἐσεμοῦ τέχνης τὸ τάς νόσους ἔριξεν τοῦ Ἀντίοχου. “He used to spend very many nights in the temple of Asklepios, both on account of the dreams that he had there, and also on account of all the intercourse there is between those who are awake and converse with one another, for in his case the god used to converse with him while awake, and held it to be a triumph of his healing art to ward off disease from Antiochos.” (trans. Petsalis-Diomidis o.c. [n. 4], p. 232). Petsalis-Diomidis also points out a similar “ideology of pilgrim communitas” in the autobiographical writings of Aelius Aristides, especially Oration 23 Concerning Concord and Oration 42 An Address Regarding Asklepios, even though he somewhat undermines the sentiment by his assertions that he surpasses all other pilgrims, and Greeks, for that matter, in his devotion and the favors he received from Asklepios. See Petsalis-Diomidis o.c. (n. 4), p. 232–8 for a more in-depth discussion of the community of pilgrims at Asklepieia around the time of the 2nd century CE, and see p. 238–75 for an interesting analysis she titles, “Miraculous Bodies on Display: Encountering the Diachronic Community of Pilgrims.” Her discussion centers on how viewing votive offerings possibly affected the ways that pilgrims’ experience in the Asklepieia.

6 The full text of On the Nature of Animals IX, 33 is as follows, with the relevant lines underlined: ζῷῳ δ’ οὖν πονηρῷ πολέμιον ἔστι, καὶ ἀναίρετη τὴν ἐλμονὴν, ἦπερ οὖν ἐπὶ πλέον ἱσόζα θηρίου γίνεται σπλάγχνοις μὲν ἐντικυμένων, ἀνθρωποτειας δὲ νόσους ἐναρθυμένων, καὶ ταῦτα ταῖς ἄγαν ἀνάτοις τε καὶ ὑπὸ χειρὸς δεήτης ἐς ἄκεισιν ἥκειν ἄδινάτοις. τεκμηρίωσα τούτο καὶ Ἰππικόν ἀνάρτος ὁ δὲ λέγει ὁ συγγραφεὺς ὁ Ρηγίνος, τοιοῦτον ἐστι. γυνὴ ἦλεν ἐλμονὴ, καὶ ἰδάσαι οὕτων ἀπείποι οἱ τῶν ἱερῶν δεινοί. οὐκοῦν ἐς Ἐπίδαυρον ἔλθε, καὶ ἐδέσποτο τοῦ θεοῦ ἐξάντης γε νέσθαι τοῦ συνοίκου τάδε, οὐκαὶ παρὴ ὁ θεός· οἱ μὲν ξάρκοροι κατακλίνουσι τὴν ἀνθρωπον ἐνδέα ἱάσατας ὁ θεὸς εἰώθει τοὺς δεομένους, καὶ ἢ μὲν ἄνθρωπος ἤσχαζε προστασθεὶς, οἱ γε μὴν ὑποδρότοις τῷ θεῷ τά ἐς τὴν ἴασον αὐτῆς ἐποίουσι, καὶ τὴν κεφαλὴν μὲν ἀπὸ τῆς θερές ἀφαιρόμενος, καθίησι δὲ τὴν χεῖρα ο ἔτερος, καὶ ἐξαιρεὶ τὴν ἐλμονήν, θηρίου μέγα τε κρήμα. συναρμόσα δὲ καὶ ἀποδοῦναι τὴν κεφαλὴν ἐς τὴν ἱεραίαν ἀρμονίαν οὐκ ἐδύνατο ὑπέκειτο, ἵνα τοῖς θεοῖς ἀφικνεῖται, καὶ τοῖς μὲν ἐχαλέλην ὅτι ἄρα ἐπεθέντο ἔργα δυνατωτέρα τῆς ἐσεμοῦ σοφίας· αὐτοῦ δὲ ἀμάχῳ τινι καὶ θείᾳ δυνάμει ἀπέδωκε τῷ σκῆρει τὴν κεφαλὴν, καὶ τὴν ἐξήλαν ἀνέστησε. καὶ οὔ τι ποι., ὁ βασιλεύς καὶ θεῶν φιλανθρωπότατος Ἀσκληπιός, ἀβρότονον ἔγονεν ἀντικρόνη τῷ σοφιᾷ τῇ σῷ, μὴ μενείναι ἐς τόσοῦτον· ἀλλὰ ἐπελθὼν εὐμνησθεὶν εὐφρενίας τῷ σῷ, καὶ ἰδεές ἐκπληκτικῆς, ὡς δὲ καὶ ἥδε ἢ πόσα σοὶ διώρον ἔστιν οὐδὲ ἀμφιβάλλειν χρή. (Underlined text: “Not in any way whatsoever, Asklepios, king and most human-loving of the
this, he recounts a story that the historian Hippys of Rhegium tells about a woman with a tapeworm who was cured through incubation at an Asklepieion; the story matches up enough with the third story on stele B from Epidaurus that it probably was taken from it. The woman’s name on the stele is Aristagora. One significant detail of Aelian’s discussion of wormwood and Asklepios comes just after he tells the story of the woman’s healing. He says, “Not in any way whatsoever, Asklepios, king and most human-loving of the gods, do I compare wormwood to your wisdom. May I not be driven mad in regard to such a thing! But when it occurred to me, I remembered (ἐμνήσθην) both your good deed and your astounding remedy. So also, one must not doubt that this plant is your gift.”

If we trace the process of this healing from the point that Aristagora visited the Asklepieion to Aelian’s account, it can help us understand how an inscription about a healing procured during dream incubation might potentially play a vital role in facilitating and disseminating the effects of the dream, and it can help us begin to understand the complexity of the ritual system at work at Epidaurus:

1. Aristagora visits an Asklepieion.
2. She participates in the preparatory rituals, which probably include some offering to Asklepios, but also to the other gods in the sanctuary.
3. She sleeps in the abaton and has some sort of dream after which she claims to be cured.
4. She remembers enough of the dream and either (a) she inscribes her dream-experience on a votive offering of some sort, or (b) she tells the temple attendants or priests at the Asklepieion about her dream.

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7 See LiDonnici, o.c. (n. 2), p. 71–5 for translation and discussion of Hippys’ story as told by Aelian and the Epidaurian story B3. (All Epidauran miracle inscriptions will henceforth be referred to as “Epidauran Story #” and use LiDonnici’s nomenclature [e.g., Epidauran B3].) As LiDonnici aptly points out, it is very difficult, if not impossible, to determine the literary relationship between these two stories with regard to their origin. While the two stories are remarkably similar, they have significant differences, as well, which lead us astray when trying to pin down the story’s origin or original place of composition. However, the similarities of the two stories make it likely, in my mind, that they both relay a single person’s dream experience only in different ways for the purposes of each of the sanctuaries that likely recorded a version of the story (at Epidaurus and at Troizen, two poleis within the same vicinity whose sanctuaries could have been rivals).

8 Either at Epidaurus (Aelian) or Troizen (Epidaurian B3).

9 Cf. Pausanias II, 27, 1 and V, 13, 3; Epidauran Δ5 = IG IV² 1, 121, V; and IG IV² 1, 41 (which talks about sacrificing to Asklepios and the goddesses who share his temple).

10 Perhaps a pinax from which the inscriber(s) of the stelai derived the final form (see LiDonnici o.c. [n. 2], p. 40 – 3)].
5. The temple attendants or priests put her story in the form of a narrative, either from her oral story or from a *pinax/votive offering*, and inscribe it on a stele to include among others in the temple.¹¹

6. Hippys of Rhegium either visits the Asklepieion or hears about the cure and uses it as an authoritative source for his work.

7. Aelian draws upon Hippys’s work because he “remembered” Asklepios’ “good deed and astounding remedy.”

Unpacking these steps will help us see how an inscription can perpetuate the effects of the overall ritual system involved in dream incubation at Epidauros.

The whole process starts with Aristagora approaching the Asklepieion in need of a cure. One did not simply go into the sanctuary and request a dream cure; instead there is a significant ritual process in which a person had to participate in order to approach Asklepios properly and increase the chances of being cured.

At Epidauros,¹² Pergamon, Erythrae,¹³ and Thessalian Tricca,¹⁴ we know that there were preliminary sacrifices and other rituals to gods before one could undergo incubation at these Asklepieia. We do not know much about the details of the rituals at Epidauros, but at Pergamon, an inscription with parts of a *lex sacra* for the Asklepieion has survived, and this gives us at least an analog to what might have happened at Epidauros.¹⁵ The preliminary rituals there included offerings of the right

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¹¹ “These inscriptions from Lebena show that a corpus of tales, originally votives on wood, could be consciously drawn together by sanctuary authority, resulting in a single text whose component parts may reflect different ages, personal aspirations, and sanctuary traditions. Yet despite their possibly disparate sources, there is a clear similarity in phrasing and methodology of cure between the preserved Lebena tales” (LiDonnici, o.c. [n. 2], p. 48). LiDonnici goes on to argue that it may be different for Epidaurus because of the different development of the sanctuary. There could have been many sources for the Epidauran inscriptions, in part because the internal patterns indicate several redactions to reach the final form (LiDonnici, o.c. [n. 2], p. 49).

¹² Pausanias, XXVII, 2, 1; Epidauran A5 = *IG* IV² 1, 121, V; cf. *IG* IV² 1, 41 which includes instructions to sacrifice a bull to the gods and goddesses that share Asklepios’ temple; *IG* IV³ 1, 126 (for Asklepios, Epione, and Demeter).

¹³ I. Erythraea, lines 25–38: U van Wilamowitz (ed.), Berlin, 1909 where the supplicant must march around the altar to Apollo three times and sing a paean three times before sacrificing to Asklepios.

¹⁴ *IG* IV² 1, 128, III, 27–31.

¹⁵ The text of the Pergamene *Lex Sacra* (*IvP* III 161 A; transcribed from the Packard Humanities Institute Database of Greek Inscriptions [http://epigraphy.packhum.org/inscriptions/]) is as follows:

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και τραπεζούσθω σκ[ε]λ[

[λος δεξιόν και σπλάγχνα καὶ] λαβών ἄλλον στέφανον ἐλάσσας π[ρο]-

[θυέσθω Δί] αποτροπαίων πόσαν ραβδιωτόν εννεόμυραλον καὶ ν


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leg and entrails (probably of a pig; the recipient is lost at the fragmentary beginning of the inscription), and offerings of nine-knobbed round cakes while holding a wreath of olive branches. The offerings were for Zeus Apotropaios and Zeus Meilichios, Artemis (epithet lost) and Artemis Prothyraia, and to Ge. Then one had to offer a suckling pig to Asklepios at the main altar, while leaving the right leg and entrails on the table, and after this, to leave a monetary offering of three obols in the-offertory box. At nightfall, three more nine-knobbed round cakes were to be offered, one each on the outside altar to Tyche and Mnemosyne, and one to Themis within the incubation chamber. There are also purity regulations—abstinence from sex and goat meat and cheese for three days. The lex sacra also contains regulations for perhaps a different group (it is unclear), πάντες οἱ θεραπεύοντες, who are instructed to sacrifice in a circle (περιθυεθωσαν) and with honey- and oil-dipped

cakes with incense as they follow the priest, perhaps as he leads a group procession around the sanctuary. They also are to offer the nine-knobbed round cakes to Themis, Tyche, and Mnemosyne, as well as to bring forward down-payments for the healing fee in specific denominations. Once they become healthy, they are to pay a Phokaian hekte each to Apollo and Asklepios.¹⁸

Although the preliminary rituals at Epidaurus remain unknown, we do have evidence that the cult complex included statues and/or temples to many other gods. Demeter,¹⁹ Tyche,²⁰ Mnemosyne,²¹ Epione,²² Artemis,²³ Aphrodite,²⁴ Themis, Hygeia,²⁵ and Apollo²⁶ are all mentioned in the literary or inscriptive evidence about the Epidauran Asklepieion. It is likely that at least some of these gods were worshipped in some way during the preliminary rituals of the incubation process.²⁷ Our supplicant, Aristagora, certainly would have participated in these rituals before she entered the abaton for incubation. Even the actual incubation was ritualized. According to the Pergamene lex sacra, the supplicant was to carry the olive wreath held throughout the rituals before entering the abaton, and place it on the bed of incubation before lying down. And the bed was not a normal bed but a makeshift one made out of twigs.²⁸ Again, we are not sure if these exact rituals were the same at Epidaurus, but it is probable that something analogous happened there.

After incubation and the hoped-for dream vision/cure, Aristagora’s process was not completed until she gave the thank offering, which could take the form of a sacrifice of various kinds or a more permanent offering (pinax, terra cotta body part, inscription, statue with inscription, etc.), and paid the required fee. This would most likely have ended the process of interaction with Asklepios for Aristagora, as it would for most individuals. However, the votive gifts, due to their public nature, allow the dream to have an afterlife. The durable votive pinakes or stelai would have the most lasting impact, and if these votive texts were then used to produce


¹⁸ I describe the Lex Sacra in this kind of detail to indicate the complexity of the ritual life of the Pergamene Asklepieion.

¹⁹ IG IV² 1, 126.

²⁰ Peek, Asklepieion 37, 164, 334; Peek, Neue Inschriften 51; IG IV² 1, 409.

²¹ IG IV² 1, 303; Peek, Asklepieion 128.

²² IG IV² 1, 126 and 384; Peek, Asklepieion 162(2).

²³ IG IV² 1, 516; Peek, Asklepieion 162(2), 183, 201, 203, 204, 210(1), 312; Peek, Neue Inschriften 54, 55, 56.

²⁴ IG IV² 1, 281; Peek, Asklepieion 119; Peek, Neue Inschriften 57.

²⁵ IG IV² 1, 472; Peek, Asklepieion 59(3), 59(4), 59(6); Peek, Neue Inschriften 51.

²⁶ Epione, Artemis, Aphrodite, Themis, Hygeia, and Apollo are all mentioned in Pausanias, II, 27, 5 and II, 29, 1.


the semi-official inscriptions on the stelae posted in the temple at Epidauros, then
the dream would be elevated to a whole different level of importance and influence.

This is what seems to have happened for Aristogora. She either related her dream
experience to the temple officials or inscribed her cure on a votive offering to be kept
in the sanctuary; either could have been used by the officials to contribute to the col-
lection of stories on the stelai.²⁹ Her once private dream then began its afterlife as a
sacred inscription presented publically for the promotion of the sanctuary of Askle-
pios. Let us now consider the potential influence of this inscription.

The ways that ancient writers, including the authors of certain inscriptions about
Asklepios, articulate the significance of the healing inscriptions is instructive for in-
terpreting the impact of these inscriptions on the perception of Asklepios and what
goes on in his sanctuaries. Strabo says that the manifestation (τὴν ἐπιφάνειαν) of As-
klepios brings distinction to Epidauros, Cos, and Tricca both because of the sick that
fill his temple and the inscriptions that record the cures.³⁰ In Libanius’ Epistle 695, in
the midst of praising the power of words, he says that words display or make known
d(δείκνυμι) “the power of the god [Asklepios] by means of the inscriptions of those
who had become healthy [at Aegae].”³¹ And an Epidauran inscription from the
third century BCE gives the following reason for the inscription: “As an example
of your power, Asklepios, I have put up this rock which I had lifted up, manifest
for all to see, a vision of your art.”³² These writers, who span the course of about

²⁹ See LiDonnici o.c. (n. 2), p. 40–49 for and excellent discussion of the possible sources for the
stelae inscriptions.
³⁰ καὶ αὐτὴ δ’ οὐκ ἄσημος ἢ πόλις καὶ μάλιστα διὰ τὴν ἐπιφάνειαν τοῦ Ἀσκληπιοῦ θεραπεύειν
νόσους παντοδαπάς πιπετευμένου, καὶ τὸ ἱερὸν πλήρες ἔχοντος ἄεὶ τῶν τε καµνῶντων καὶ τῶν
ἀνακειμένων πινάκων, ἐν οἷς ἀναγεγραµµέναι τυγχάνουσιν αἱ θεραπεία, καθάπερ ἐν Κῷ τε καὶ Τρίκκῃ
(Στράβο, Εὐγεραφία 8, 6, 15).
³¹ οἱ δὲ πῶς οὐκ ἔµελλεν ἐν τοῖς ὑπὲρ αὐτοῦ συλλήψεσθαι λόγοις: ἐνεπέλευν ἀπὸ τῆς πρώτης μέχρι
tῆς ἐγκατάθης συλλαβής Μουσῶν ἀνθρίψιον ὁ λόγος κάλλει τε στίλβει καὶ πείθει ἐνθυµήσαι καὶ
πράπτων ἑ σπεῦδι, νῦν μὲν τὴν τοῦ θεοῦ δύναµι δεικνύς ἐκ τῶν ἐπιγραµµάτων ἢ ἐν τῶν ὑγιαι-
νώντων, νῦν δὲ τραγῳδιῶν τῶν ἀδέων κατὰ τοῦ νεὼ πόλεμον, τὴν κατασκαφήν, τὸ πῦρ, τοὺς
ὑβριζοµένους βωμούς, τοὺς ἀδικοµένους ἵκετας οὐκ ἐφωµένους ἀπαλλαγήναι κακῶν (Λιβανίου, Επι-
στολαὶ 695, 2 [4th c. CE]).
³² More literally: “an appearance” or “apparition” or “vision” of your skill/art). The inscription
reads:

Ἐρμοδίκοις Λαμψάκιν, |  Σης ἀρετῆς [παράδειγµα], Ἀσκληπεῖ,
tόνδε ἀνέθηκα | πέτρων ἄειρα-
μενος, πάσι[ν ὀράν] φανερόν, | Οὐκ ἡ δέ πενθήμασι κατά τοῦ νεὼ πόλεμον, τὴν κατασκαφήν, τὸ πῦρ, τοὺς
ὑβριζοµένους βωµούς, τοὺς ἀδικοµένους ἵκετας οὐκ ἐφωµένους ἀπαλλαγήναι κακῶν (Λιβανίου, Επι-
στολαὶ 695, 2 [4th c. CE]).
600–700 years, see the inscriptions as contributing to the ongoing manifestation of Asklepios and his healing powers. They act as a sort of icon or window to the divine world and its power among humans.

A few inscriptions also talk about the role they play for future generations, something that is implied in the writers I just mentioned. A 2nd to 3rd c. CE inscription from Rome reads: “To the Savior Asklepios, Nicomedes the physician gives gifts for deliverance and thank-offerings. This beautiful image of the divine child, Paean, who has just been borne by his mother, you, Boethus, cunningly devised, a reminder of your inventive wisdom even to those yet to be.” In an Epidaurian inscription from ca. 300 BCE, the writer, a certain Isyllus, narrates how he consulted the oracle at Delphi about the best way to make known the paean he composed in honor of Apollo and Asklepios. The oracle’s answer was: “It would be better for him to inscribe [the paean] on stone both now and for later times.”

Other evidence mentions the power of these inscriptions to remind, either people or the gods, of the dreams and cures. Aelian says that the gift offerings would be required by the gods to positively affect the people that offer them: “with a human-loving and good purpose” (φρενὶ φιλανθρῶπῳ καὶ ἀγαθῇ). Instead, the offerings actually are required by the gods to positively affect the people that offer them: “By these small things [sc., as thank-offerings], then, they wish us to be neither ungrateful nor forgetful, and with these things showing [us to be] better.”

In Epigram 55, Callimachus also talks about the function of in-

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33 IG IV 1, 125 [3rd c. BCE]; cf. IG XIV 967b

34 The inscription reads:

35 The text reads: Αρισταρχός Τεγεάτης, ὁ τῶν τραγῳδίων ποιητής, νοσεῖ τινα νόσον· καὶ ἱκαί αὐτὸν ὁ Ἀσκληπιός, καὶ προστάτησε χαριτώρια τῆς ὑγείας. ὃ δὲ ποιητῆς τὸ δράμα τὸ ὁμώνυμον οἱ νέμει. θεοὶ δὲ ὑγείας μὲν οὐκ ἂν ποτὲ μισθὸν αἴτησαν οὐδ᾽ ἂν λάβοιεν. ἂν πως ὄν; εἰγε τὰ μέγιστα ὑμῖν φρενὶ φιλανθρῶπῳ καὶ ἀγαθῇ παρέχουσι προῖκα, ἤλθον τε ὅραν καὶ τοῦ θεοῦ τοῦ τοσοῦτον τῆς παναρκοῦς ἀμοίβῃ μεταλαμβάνειν ἀκτίνος, καὶ χρῆσιν ὤδας, καὶ πυρὸς συντέχουσαν μυριάς ἐπιγονᾶς καὶ ποικιλὰς ὄμως καὶ συνεργοὺς ἐπικουρίας, καὶ ἀέρος αὐτῶν ἄγαθος. ἐθέλομεν δὲ ὅρα ἐν τούτῳ τοῖς μικροῖς μήτε ἀγαρίστους εἶναι μήτε ἀμφίμοιον ἡμᾶς, καὶ ἐν
scriptions to remind and bear witness to past events: “Know, Asklepios, that you have received the debt which Aceson owed you by his vow for his wife Demodice. But if you should forget and demand payment again, the tablet (πίναξ) says that it will offer evidence.”

Both people (cf. Aelian) and gods (cf. Callimachus) sometimes need reminding, and inscriptions can serve to do so for both.

Callimachus’ epigram also shows that inscriptions can function for ancient writers as authoritative sources of information of past events. When describing the deserted city of Halice, Pausanias’ only “noteworthy document” (σύγγραμμα...ἀξί-όχρεων) on which to base his reconstruction of the history of the city is one of the inscriptions in the Epidaurian Asklepieion. And Pliny the Elder tells an interesting story about Hippocrates the physician. Having been born on the island of Cos, Hippocrates was witness to the popular Asklepieion there, which included inscriptions of cures that happened in the temple. After the Asklepieion was burned, Hippocrates copied the cures that were inscribed there and used them to establish what was called “bedside” or clinical medicine.

As we can see, there was a wide range of potential influence of these inscriptions based upon the high value put on them by those who had seen them or knew about them. Going back to our supplicant, Aristagora, the inscription about her dream had importance as an authentic source for at least one historian, namely Hippys of Rhegium. Perhaps he saw the inscription itself in the Epidaurian Asklepieion, or he had some access to the story through some other source, but he seemed to consider it authoritative enough to include in his writings. Aelian then read Hippys’ account of this story at some point in his life, and it left enough of an impression on him to cause him to interrupt his rather dry discussion of the curative powers of wormwood with a mini-encomium for Asklepios. Aelian remembered the story, and that memory was...

36 Τὸ χρέος ὡς ἀπέχεις, Λακηπέ, τὸ πρὸ γυναικός
Δημοδίκης Ακέσων ὄφελεν εὐξάμενος,
γεγνώσκειν· ἂν δ’ ἄρα λάθη καὶ μιν ἀπατής,
φησὶ παρέξεσθαι μαρτυρίην ὁ πίναξ.
(Callimachus, Epigrammata 55 [3rd c. BCE]).

37 ἡ δὲ Ἀλίκη τὰ μὲν ἔροι ἤμοιν ἐστὶν ἔρημος, ὥσπερ δὲ καὶ αὐτὴ ποτὲ, καὶ Ἀλικῶν λόγος ἐν στήλαις ἐστὶ ταῖς Ἐπιδαυρίων αἱ τοῦ Ἀσκληπείου τὰ ἱάματα ἐγγεγραμμένα ἐχουσιν· ἄλλο δὲ σύγγραμμα οὐδὲν οἶδα ἀξίχρεων, ἐνθα ἡ πόλεως Ἀλίκης ἢ ἀνδρῶν ἐστίν Ἀλικῶν μνήμη (Pausanias, II, 36, 1).

38 Tunc eam revocavit in lucem Hippocrates, genitus in insula Coö in primis clara ac valida et Aesculapi dicata. Is, cum fusset mos, liberatos morbis scriber in templum eius dei quid auxiliatum esset, ut postea similitude proficeret, exscripsisse ea traditur atque, ut Varro apud nos credit, templum cremato iis instituisse medicinam hanc, quae clinice vocatur (Pliny, Natural History XXIX, 1(2), 4 [1st c. CE]). However, Hygenus claims that Asklepios discovered “bedside” or clinical medicine: Asclepius Apollinis filius clinicien repertit (Fabulae 274, 9).

39 Although Aelian’s extant works do not have as their main topic things religious, he wrote two works that were explicitly on the topics of religion, On Providence and Divine Manifestations. So, it makes sense that he would think of Hippys’ story about Asklepios’ cure when writing about the...
the occasion for him to relay the story to a new audience, honoring the god in the process and granting his audience the potential for encountering the divine beneficence of Asklepios, as well. Even for those who do not have direct access to the inscription, it reminds one of Asklepios’ great wisdom, power, and benefit to humans. Thus, it becomes a window into the workings of the god and an impetus to further honor the god even hundreds of years after the original dream. The inscription can be understood as part of the greater ritual and religious system at the Asklepieion, the center of which is the perceived meeting of supplicant and god in the dream. Once the inscription becomes a public document about the dream, set in stone, it functions as a point of contact with the divine world. It would be helpful to flesh out the system at work in the Asklepieion in greater detail in order to situate the way the inscriptions function within that greater system.

3 Mnemosyne and the Ritual Complexity of the Asklepieion

We can surmise several things about the rituals that preceded incubation at the Epidaurian Asklepieion. First, as mentioned above, there were probably offerings to more gods than Asklepios; based upon literary and inscriptional evidence, among the other gods were probably many of the ones that appear in the Pergamon lex sacra, including Apollo, Artemis, Tyche and Mnemosyne. The rituals prepared the supplicant to undergo incubation in the proper way; without them, one risked not encountering Asklepios favorably. And without completing the process after incubation, the supplicant risked dishonoring the god and undoing the cure received during incubation. The whole process is important, which means that it is not just Asklepios at work here, although he is at the center of the action. All the gods at the sanctuary work together ritually before and after incubation, and any disruption of the ritual process risks negative ramifications, individually or civically.

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As an example of the importance of the other gods in the ritual process involved in incubation, I would like to focus on the role of Mnemosyne, worship of whom, I think, relates directly to the dreams and the resulting inscriptions. Without the basic gift of memory from the goddess, none of the process that I just described with regard to Aristagora would be considered possible, nor would any of the processes leading up to the other inscriptions. But the powers and gifts of Mnemosyne went beyond just remembering things. Perhaps more accurately, memory was a multi-faceted idea and religious force in ancient Greek cultural history.

The process of remembering a dream vision is no simple matter, let alone interpreting it in a sensible way. Both modern and ancient people would certainly agree with this. Mnemosyne’s presence in this process was a way that Greeks and Romans thought they could ensure the accurate recollection of a dream vision of Asklepios, but her presence also made logical sense of nonsensical images. This was due to Mnemosyne’s powers to order the mind as described in two Orphic Hymns and in Diodorus Siculus’ description of Mnemosyne. In book 5 chapters 64 – 80, Diodorus recounts some of the myths about Crete and the gods who traditionally have their origin there. Mnemosyne is one of them; in chapter 67, he says, “Of the female Titans, they say that Mnemosyne discovered the power of reason (λογισμούς),” a power that allows humans to account for phenomena and think through their various dimensions in a logical and orderly manner. Diodorus goes on to explain that Mnemosyne also “prescribed the determinations of names for each of the things that exist through which we also explain each and every thing and converse with one another.” So, it is not simply the internal intellectual powers of reason that were attributed to Mnemosyne, but also the power of human knowledge of the world through which humans can then interact intellectually and culturally. For without knowing the names of “everything that exists,” humans would not be able to communicate with each other in any meaningful way. Mnemosyne is credited with reason, human knowledge, and one of the basic tenets of human culture—meaningful verbal interaction. This is not unrelated to the last thing that Diodorus describes about what the Cretans attribute to Mnemosyne: “They also attribute to this goddess the powers of

viewing cult statues and making offerings, and their ritual movement around the sanctuary, animated the religious landscape of the Asklepieion” (p. 227). She then goes on to discuss Victor and Edith Turner’s study of Christian pilgrimage sites in Mexico and Ireland in 1960s and 1970s as comparative material. Laudably, Petsalis-Diomidis takes seriously the complex system that a pilgrim must participate in at Pergamon.


44 W. V. Harris, Dreams and Experience in Classical Antiquity, Cambridge, MA, 2009, p. 93: “It is elementary, after all, not only that dreams are, with minor exceptions, wholly interior experiences, but that they are hard to remember accurately and that they are subject to easy misrepresentation.” See also p. 97–100 on the problem of memory and dreams.

45 τῶν δὲ Τιτανίδων φασὶ Μνημοσύνην λογισμούς εύρειν καὶ τὰς τῶν ὄνομάτων θέσεις ἐκάστω τῶν ὄντων τάξαι, δι’ ἀν καὶ δηλοῦμεν ἑκαστα καὶ πρὸς ἀλλήλους ὀμιλοῦμεν (Diodorus Siculus, V, 67, 3).
possessed by humans that are inclined toward recalling to memory and the power of memory.” While these are the traditional qualities one thinks of with respect to Mnemosyne, they are closely related to the powers of reason, naming things, and human discourse. One would have trouble with all these other powers without the ability to call things to mind and remember them. At the root of Mnemosyne’s powers, then, are the very fundamentals of what makes humanity rational and social, at least as the Cretans thought of Mnemosyne.

Two Orphic Hymns also speak of the intellectually oriented power of Mnemosyne and her daughters the Muses. The *Hymn to the Muses* praises them for being “givers of correct thought” and for taking charge of and being the leaders of the power of the mind. The *Hymn to Mnemosyne* points to her ability to “hold together every mind that dwells together with the souls of mortals” and to increase the power.

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46 *prosáptouai de tē theō taútai kai tā prōs ananēōsai kai mnήμηn ginómena para tōs anphrōpous* (Diodorus Siculus, V, 67, 3). The word ἄνανέωσιν is a strange word to use for remembering. It literally means to renew or revive something, and Diodorus’ usage here seems to be the only one where it has a specific meaning associated with the powers of memory. One might expect ἄνάμνησις here, and perhaps this was a slip of the hand by Diodorus or a later scribe, but none of the manuscripts have an alternative word to ἄνανέωσιν.

47 Μουσών, θυμίαμα λίβανον.

Μνημοσύνης καὶ Ζηνός ἐργαζόμενος θύγατρες, Μόσαι Περίδες, μεγαλώνμην, ἄγλαφημοι, θνητοῖς, ὡς κε παρῆτε, ποθεινόταται, πολύμορφοι, πάσης παιδείας ἄρετιν γεννόταται ἄμερτων, θρέπτειραι ψυχῆς, διανοίας ὀρθοδότειραι, καὶ νόον εὐδύνατου καθηγήτειραι ἄνασσαι, αἱ τελετάς θνητοῖς ἀνέδειξατε μυστικῷ ὀλύτωτοις, Κλειώ τ’ Ἐυτέρπην τε Θάλειά τε Μελπομένη τε Τερψιχόρη τ’ Ἐρατῶ τε Πολύμνια τ’ Ὀυρανίη τε Καλλιόπην σὺν μητρὶ καὶ εὐδύνατη θεά λυγή. ἀλλὰ μόλοιτε, θεὰ, μόσαι, πολυποίκιλοι, ἀγναί, εὐκλεῖαν ζήλων τ’ ἐρατῶν πολύμυμων ἄγουσαι (Orphic Hymn 76).

48 Line 6.

49 Line 7.

50 Μνημοσύνης, θυμίαμα λίβανον

Μνημοσύνην καλέω, Ζηνός σύλλεκτρον, ἄνασαν, ἢ Μοῦσας τέκνων’ ιερὰς, ὀσίας, λιγυφώνως, ἕκτος ἐόσα κακῆς λήθης βλαψίφρονος αἰεὶ, πάντα νόσον συνέχουσα βροτῶν ψυχαί σύνουκον, εὐδύνατον κρατερὸν θνητῶν αὐξούσα λογισμόν, ἡδυτάτη, φιλάγγυρονς ὑπομισθούσα τε πάντα, ὁν ἄν ἐκαστὸς ἄεί στερόνων γνώμην κατάθηται, οὕτω παρεκβαίνουσα’, ἐπεγεύσασα φρένα πάσιν. ἀλλὰ, μάκαρα θεά, μόσαις μνήμην ἐπέγειρε εὔνεροι τελετῆς, λήθην δ’ ἀπὸ τῶν(δ’) ἀπόπεμπε (Orphic Hymn 77).

51 Lines 5–6.
to think, always “raising up the mind in everyone.” It is not just the content of these hymns that indicate the powers of Mnemosyne. Fritz Graf has argued recently that the Orphic Hymns are carefully arranged to follow a nocturnal ritual by Bacchic initiates. The particular function of the hymn to Mnemosyne (h. 77) within this collection is indicated by its placement directly before the hymn to Dawn (h. 78), which marks the last stages of the ritual. The hymn to Mnemosyne specifically exhorts the goddess in its last line “to awaken for the initiates the memory of the sacred rite and to send away forgetfulness of it.” Graf goes on to argue, “This is a fitting prayer at the end of the sacred night with its rituals that it is crucial to remember, both because of the immediate bliss they have brought and because of the eschatological consequences.” The goddess ensures the proper memory of the events experienced in the Orphic rituals, memory that can be confused by the “emotional complexity and seriousness of the Bacchic mystery cults,” to use Graf’s characterization of these. These rituals, in part, tried to deal with the fear of possibly encountering a divinity that would drive them mad, so the risk of forgetting the rituals and the ritual experience threatened their effectiveness. Mnemosyne’s power to order the mind and enable initiates to remember the ritual was necessary for the overall effectiveness of the ritual itself. One can see why Mnemosyne’s presence would need to be evoked in the ritual process of incubation in the Asklepios cult; she orders one’s fuzzy and muddled thoughts about the dream vision (some of which were quite bizarre and disturbing) and allows the dreamer to articulate it clearly to others. These were crucial to the overall efficacy of the incubation rituals to bring the adherents to good health and to honor the god both immediately and in the long term.

This same ritual dynamic of intellectual order involving Mnemosyne can be found in the ritual at the oracle of Trophonius as described by Pausanias. The preparatory rituals at the oracle lasted several days, and they culminated with descending into a cave where the enquirer purportedly encountered Trophonius directly and received some sort of revelation or answer to his enquiry. The descent into the cave was bookended by two appeals to Mnemosyne: priests would escort him to two fountains from which he would drink, first from the waters of 

λήθη (oblivion/forgetfulness) and then from the waters of μνημοσύνη (memory), and after ascending from the chasm, the priests would sit the inquirer upon the throne of Mnemosyne and question him about his experience. He would then go back to the sacred building where he would be required to dedicate a tablet describing all that he saw and heard in the chasm. It is the post-descent appeal to Mnemosyne that concerns us most because Pausanias describes the post-chasm inquirer as “still overcome with terror and similarly ignorant both of himself and those near him.” And this lasts even beyond the debriefing on the throne of Mnemosyne. How would one be able

52 Line 9.
54 The most extensive description of the ritual and the oracle is found in Pausanias, IX, 39.
55 κάτοχόν τε ἔτι τῶν δείματι καὶ ἄγνωτα ὁμοίως αὐτοῦ τε καὶ τῶν πέλας (Pausanias, IX, 39, 13).
to remember the encounter in the cave with Trophonius and then rehearse it to the priests in such a state of mind?\textsuperscript{56} The priests and enquirers must have thought that Mnemosyne’s involvement in the oracular process would lend a certain order to the mind of the enquirer so that he could remember \textit{and} articulate what just happened in the cave. Remembering the experience was only part of the issue here; intellectual integrity also was crucial, and appeal to Mnemosyne at the end of the ritual ensured both.

As mother of the Muses, Mnemosyne is also credited by epic poets for their poetic inspiration. At the beginning of the \textit{Theogony}, Hesiod says that the Muses “breathed into me an \textit{αὐδὴν θέσπιν}, a wondrous or divine voice, in order to make famous the things that will happen and the things that happened previously.”\textsuperscript{57} Hesiod envisions himself as channeling the divine world through the Muses, thus mediating the divine powers of Mnemosyne. This claim also shows up in different forms in other epic poetry. The longer Homeric \textit{Hymns to Hermes} and to \textit{Aphrodite} begin, respectively, “Sing of Hermes, Muse, the son of Zeus and Maia”\textsuperscript{58} and “Muse, speak to me the works of golden Aphrodite.”\textsuperscript{59} Nine other shorter Homeric Hymns also invoke the Muses’ authority in some way.\textsuperscript{60} In the \textit{Hymn to Selene} 20, singers (\textit{ἀοιδοί}) are called “servants of the Muses (\textit{Μουσάων θεράποντες}).” \textit{Θεράπων} oftentimes denotes particular cultic service to a god, thus dedicating the servant to the god’s sacred workings. Homer also claims a certain sort of infusion of the power of the Muses to know and speak of things beyond human capability. In the \textit{Iliad} Book 2 we find:

\begin{quote}
Sing to me now, you Muses who hold the halls of Olympus! You are goddesses, you are everywhere, you know all things—all we hear is the distant ring of glory, we know nothing—who were the captains of Achaea? Who were the kings? The mass of troops I could never tally, never name, not even if I had ten tongues and ten mouths, a tireless voice and the heart inside me bronze, never unless you Muses of Olympus, daughters of Zeus whose shield is rolling thunder, sing, sing in memory all who gathered under Troy. Only now can I tell the lords of the ships, the ships in all their numbers!\textsuperscript{61}
\end{quote}

\textsuperscript{56} One could see this state of mind as akin to the madness that the Graf argues is at the root of the fears that the Orphic Hymns witness to regarding the Bacchic mysteries.

\textsuperscript{57} \textit{ἐνέπνευσαν δὲ μοι αὐδὴν θέσπιν, ἵνα κλείσωμε τὰ τ’ ἐσούμενα πρὸ τ’ ἔοντα} (Hesiod, \textit{Theogony} 31–32).

\textsuperscript{58} \textit{Hymn to Hermes} 1.

\textsuperscript{59} \textit{Hymn to Aphrodite} 1.

\textsuperscript{60} See also hymns 9, 1; 14, 1; 17, 1; 19, 1; 20, 1; 25; 31, 1; 32, 1–2; 33, 1.

This introduces the catalogue of ships, which establishes the enormity and epic nature of the war, and through the power of the Muses, the bard claims to know how it all happened. Jean-Pierre Vernant describes aptly the role of Mnemosyne for epic poets: “History as celebrated by Mnemosune is a deciphering of the invisible, a geography of the supernatural.” The dreamer at an Asklepieion and those who created the healing inscriptions have a task similar to the epic poet. He or she needs to recall and make logical his or her encounter with Asklepios in order to act on the prescription of the god and to honor him with the proper offering. Mnemosyne’s presence grants this power both to the dreamer and to those who compose the story of the dream cure and inscribe it for public display. The god is honored for the foreseeable future through the enduring witness of the dreamer’s memory and articulation of the healing encounter with Asklepios.

4 Conclusion

The understanding and recollection of the dream and the production of a narrative to be inscribed and publicly exhibited are all made possible by Mnemosyne in the Epidaurian system, and the authoritative nature of the inscription speaks to its ability to be a window into the divine world, constantly reminding humans of the ways that the gods benefit humanity long after the person’s original visit to the sanctuary for incubation. Mnemosyne makes it possible for humans to glorify Asklepios. This is not simply a mutual exchange between one god and one supplicant; instead, the rituals and actions that take place are imbued with a variety of divine significances, all working together to highlight the proper interaction between human and divine worlds. In this system, the gods cooperate with each other and with supplicants to enact meaningful and efficacious rituals that empower humans to comport themselves in a sacred way by offering pleasing sacrifices, purifying oneself properly, processing, praying, singing, dreaming, remembering, articulating narratively, inscribing, posting in the sanctuary, using the inscriptions as reminders of divine benefaction, retelling the stories, etc. Mnemosyne plays a key role in this process, the

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62 “The poet invokes the Muses to tell him how it all happened. He behaves as an instrument, as it were, in the hands of the Muses, whose message is equated with that of creative tradition....In a word, the Hellenic poet is the master of kléos. ‘That which is heard,’ kléos, comes to mean ‘glory’ because it is the poet himself who uses the word to designate what he hears from the Muses and what he tells the audience. Poetry confers glory” (G. Nagy, Best of the Achaeans. Concepts of the Hero in Archaic Greek Poetry, Baltimore, MD, 1979, p. 16).


64 Cf. Ig IV 1 128, III, 27–31; I. Erythraea: Wilamowitz, U van Wilamowitz (ed.), Berlin, 1909, lines 25–38; Ig IV 1 126). Petsalis-Diomidis insightfully says, “Each time pilgrims performed the ritual perambulation of the sanctuary outlined in the Lex Sacra they animated the religious topography. Through their participation in sacrifices and incubation in the Asklepieion they became part of the
removal of any part of which would jeopardize the proper ebb and flow of divine-human relations.

The afterlife of dreams at the Asklepieion could last for many hundreds of years and had the potential to be widely influential in the ongoing perception of the ways that the gods interacted with humanity. The ancient Asklepieion was not just about Asklepios granting a cure in a dream, but it was about a system of human action within a perceived divine group-effort, a system thought to mutually benefit the divine and human worlds.

community of the sanctuary which spanned the human-divine spectrum. They interacted with the divinities by viewing their images and offering them sacrifices, and some experienced the presence and revelation of Asklepios in dream visions” (o.c. [n. 4], p. 231).