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Contesting religious and medical expertise: The *therapeutai* of Pergamum as religious and medical entrepreneurs¹

The paper focuses on the θεραπευταί of Imperial Pergamum, the religious entrepreneurs who operated within the complex of the healing sanctuary of Asclepius and who are usually seen as an innocuous cultic formation of elite patients. By contrast, this chapter argues that this group was one of the most dynamic, prolific groups of religious and to an extent medical experts. Examining this particular group of religious entrepreneurs has wider implications for both the history of medicine and the history of religion in the Imperial Era. Claims to a direct line of communication with Asclepius were made by both physicians and patients: the physicians craved divine legitimation of their methods, while the elite patients defied the need for expert intermediaries between god and knowledge and reclaimed ownership of their bodies.

The general introduction to this volume has stressed that our aim is to move away from civic priesthoods and religious offices in order to examine a wider range of religious specialists and their dynamic interplay with established religious authorities and institutions.² To this end, this paper focuses on the θεραπευταί of Imperial Pergamum, the religious entrepreneurs who operated within the complex of the healing sanctuary of Asclepius and who are usually seen as an innocuous cultic formation of elite patients. My argument here is that the religious group of the *therapeutai* of Pergamum was one of the most dynamic and prolific groups of religious experts of the Imperial period.

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² On the semantic field encompassed by the term ‘religious specialists’, see Rüpke (1996).

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I am particularly interested in the group’s distinct religious practices and behaviours: the ways in which they related to other religious and medical professionals in the temple, how they contested the established monopolies of power (religious, medical and political), and how they dealt with the agonistic tendencies that evidently developed within the group. To remain truthful to the principles of Lived Ancient Religion (henceforth LAR), our innovative take on the study of religion in the Roman Empire which lays emphasis on the individual and the situational, I look at this group closely through the eyes and the experiences of two individuals who proudly proclaimed their alliance to it, namely Galen, the celebrated physician, and Aristides, the conspicuous patient.

My analysis builds partly on recent scholarly work on how elite peer-groups influenced the experience of illness and therapy in the first and second centuries CE, and partly on fruitful applications of social-network theory to the classical world. These studies have already underlined the integral role of networks and voluntary associations in creating meaning and self-identity for their members. This paper, however, lays more emphasis on the competitiveness of these groups with existing power-structures (political and religious alike), rather than their congruence.

The first section provides a brief account of the term *therapeutes* in the works of Aristides and Galen, and of its pivotal role in each author’s self-representation and self-identity. The second part discusses the cultic realities behind this religious group as attested by inscriptions from the Pergamene Asclepieion. The third and final part of the paper returns to the literary sources and explores how these cultic realities are recast in Aristides’ *Hieroi Logoi* (henceforth *HL*), and how they form an integral part of Aristides’ self-representation as the leading light of the group.

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3 For more information on the conceptual framework of LAR, see Rüpke (2011) and Raja and Rüpke (2015).

1. Aristides and Galen as *therapeutai*

The term θεραπευτής belongs to one of these grey areas of expertise where the religious and the medical collide.⁵ It may denote ‘worshipper’, ‘servant of the god’ and ‘medical attendant’.⁶ More significantly, the same term lies at the heart of Aristides’ self-fashioning, as we may judge from his oneiric encounter with the emperor Marcus Aurelius included in the first book of the *HL* (Or. 47.23):

On the sixth day, I dreamed that along with my teacher Alexander I approached the emperor, who sat upon a platform. When Alexander, since he was an old friend and acquaintance, first saluted him and was in turn saluted by him and his entourage, I approached. And when I saluted and stood there, the emperor wondered why I too had not come forward and kissed him (ὡς οὖ καὶ αὐτὸς προσελθὼν φιλήσαμι). And I said that I was a *therapeutes* (a ‘steadfast servant’) of Asclepius. For I was content to say that much about myself (κἂν ἔπον ὅτι ὁ θεραπευτής εἶμι ὁ τῶν Ἀσκληπιοῦ τοσοῦτον γάρ μοι ἤρκεσεν εἰπέν περὶ ἐμαυτοῦ). “Therefore, in addition to other things”, I said, “the god has instructed me not to kiss in this fashion (καὶ τότῳ ὁ θεός μοι παρήγγειλε μὴ φιλέν ὀυτοῦ”). And he replied, “This suffices (καὶ ἄς, ἄρκεί, ἔφη)”. And I remained silent. And he said, “Indeed, Asclepius is better than all to serve (καὶ ἄς ἔφη, καὶ μήν θεραπεύειν γε πάντος κρείττων ὁ Ἀσκληπιός)”⁷.

The young Aristides studied Classical Greek literature under the guidance of one of the most famous tutors of his time, Alexander of Cotyaeion, who also happened to be tutoring the young Caesars, Marcus and Lucius Verus. It is this beloved and much-revered figure who accompanies Aristides to his oneiric meeting with the adult emperor Marcus. However, while Alexander complies with the protocol of offering a form of *proskynesis* to the emperor, his pupil refuses to follow his teacher’s example on the grounds that he is a *therapeutes* of Asclepius, and

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⁵ On other areas or professional expertise that oscillate between medicine and religion or magic, such as dreams, katharsis (‘purgation’) and pharmakon (‘drug, medical portion, poison’), see Gordon (1995) and (1999); and Israelowich (2012, 92–101).


⁷ All translations, unless otherwise noted, are mine. In quoting Aristides’ text, I have used Keil’s edition.
may therefore prostrate himself only to the god himself.\textsuperscript{8} I have intentionally left the term proskynesis untranslated, since its semantic content—especially whether the gesture implied kneeling or not—has been, and to an extent still is, a matter of debate.\textsuperscript{9} It is clear, however, that for the Greeks the gesture belongs to the realm of divine honours (θεία τιμα), and was often associated with humans who were treated as the living embodiment of the divine.\textsuperscript{10} The emperor appears not to mind. He grants Aristides’ request with a comment that implies that not only did he fully understand the religious and cultural implications of the term therapeutes but that he may have had been intimately familiar with the religious enterprise of therapeuein Asclepius.

The hypothesis seems to be further buttressed by yet another tête-à-tête scene, this time between the eminent philosopher-emperor and a contemporary man of letters, the renowned Pergamene physician and philosopher Galen.\textsuperscript{11} In the second book of his De libris propriis (2.19–19 = Scripta Minor 2, p. 99,9–11 Mueller), Galen recounts how his patrios theos Asklepios dissuaded him from accepting Marcus Aurelius’ invitation to join his military campaign against the Marcomanni; and how he vowed to serve the god as his therapeutes after Asclepius had cured him of a life-threatening abscess:\textsuperscript{12}

As soon as I arrived in Aquileia, the plague attacked us as never before. Whereupon the emperors hastily departed for Rome together with a small force of men; but the majority of us barely survived for a long period, since people died not only because of the plague but also because it was the middle of winter. Since Lucius [Verus] had departed from the world of the living whilst en route to Rome, Antoninus [i.e. Marcus Aurelius] brought his body there and performed the customary deification, and after that busied himself with

\textsuperscript{8} Beloved teacher: Aristides seems to have been extremely fond of his teacher, if we are to judge from the funeral oration he wrote in his honour (Or. 33.6–7 K. with Humbel [1994, 28–2]). From Lucian (Nigr. 21) we learn that it was common at Rome in the middle of the second century for eminent individuals to receive a form of proskynesis. More on this topic in Jones (1972).

\textsuperscript{9} See Bowden (2013) for a comprehensive account of the sources that seem to attest to proskynesis involving prostration.

\textsuperscript{10} As Bowden points out, the term may also refer to the allegedly obsequious behaviour of Persians towards figures of authority. Cf. Rhodes (1989, ad Ath. Pol. 14.4): “προσκυνεῖν was an act of homage paid by Persians to their human superiors (e.g. Hdt. 1.134.1) but by the Greeks only to the gods; the original meaning of the Greek word is ‘to blow a kiss’, and this is the essential part of the act, but it might on occasions be accompanied by physical abasement”. On proskynēsis as related to the realm of divine timai, see Arrian, Anab. 4.12.3–4; Plut., Alex. 54 = Chares of Mitylene, Histories of Alexander, FGrH 125, fr. 14 with Lane Fox (1973, 300–301, 536–537) and van Straten (1974). See also Pleket (1981, 295) and Petridou (2015, 77, 152, 174).

\textsuperscript{11} On Galen in Pergamum, see van der Eijk (2011).

\textsuperscript{12} In all likelihood, the same illness that he describes in De bonis malisque sucis 1.16–20 Helmreich [CMG V 4,2] = 6.756–757 K.
his campaign against the Germans, making every effort to take me with him. But he was persuaded against it (πεισθεὶς δ’ ἀφεῖναι λέγοντος ἁκούσας τάναντα κελεύειν τὸν πάτριον θεὸν Ἀσκληπιόν), once I revealed that I had been his therapeutes (οὗ καὶ θεραπευτὴν ἀπέφανον ἔμαυτόν) ever since he saved me from the fatal disposition of an abscess. He [viz. the emperor] performed proskynesis to the god and commanded me to wait for his own return (προσκυνήσας τὸν θεόν καὶ περιμέναι με τὴν ἐπάνοδον αὐτοῦ κελεύσας), for he was confident that he would end the war quickly. He then set off to war having left behind his son Commodus, who at that time was still only a small child, and instructed his carers to try to keep him healthy, but, if he ever fell ill, to call me in to treat him (καλεῖν ἐπὶ τὴν θεραπείαν ἐμέ).

In his World’s Classics version, Peter Singer translates τὸν πάτριον θεὸν Ἀσκληπιόν here as “his personal patron god Asclepius”, implying that Marcus Aurelius was himself a devotee of Asclepius. To my mind, however, the syntactical structure ho patrios theos (echoed in his recently discovered De propriis placitis, on which see below) is an unequivocal reference to Galen’s Pergamene origins and his close links to the Pergamene Asclepieion. Nonetheless, Singer may be right in seeing an intentional ambiguity, implying that Galen and Marcus shared common cultic interests and religious expertise.¹³ However that may be, it seems clear that in referring to Asclepius as his patrios theos Galen is laying claim to shared religious expertise and experience, thus paving the way for his major claim, namely his status as therapeutes of the god. Marcus’ reaction to this revelation is to offer proskynesis to the god and allow the Pergamene physician to disobey his orders and remain behind.

It will be noted that Galen offers no explanation of what it entailed to be a therapeutes of the god. The implication is that there was no need for such explanation since both the emperor and his physician shared the same linguistic tropes, the same ‘speech norms’, that is syntactical structures that members of a group were expected to hear and use frequently.¹⁴ Aristides uses the same expression ‘therapeutes of the god Asclepius’ to describe his devotional relationship with Asclepius in his oneiric meeting with Marcus Aurelius. In that case, as we saw, Marcus endorsed Aristides’ defiance of court etiquette by declaring that it was indeed better to serve (therapeuein) Asclepius than anyone else. This group of therapeutai seems to have developed what the sociologists Nina Eliasoph and Paul Lichterman have termed a ‘group style’ with its distinct ‘group boundaries’ (i.e. assumptions about the group’s relationship with each

¹³ This is also consistent with Galen’s constant effort to present himself as a close friend of Marcus Aurelius. Cf., e.g. Praen. 14.660 K.
¹⁴ Eliasoph and Lichterman (2003, 739).
other and with the healing god), ‘group bonds’ (i.e. assumptions about members’ mutual responsibilities in the course of their meetings, formal and less formal), and, finally, ‘speech norms’. During their sojourn in the Asclepieion, the therapeutai of Pergamum were bound together by co-residence and ritual interaction as well as by the focus on their bodies as the locus of divine communication.

We may thus infer that Marcus shared the same cultural references and spoke the same ritual language with both Aristides and Galen, since he seems fully aware of the privileges and obligations entailed by the cultic role of Asklepioid therapeutai. Yet historians of ancient medicine have often strongly resisted the idea that Galen, the positivist physician, might be a member of the same religious group as Aristides, the pliable patient; or, if they had been, they would surely have had quite different reactions to and functions within it. In 1981 Fridolf Kudlien, for instance, protested vehemently against such an idea, despite recognising that in the Imperial period there were physicians who were reported to have served in the Pergamene Asclepieion as ἱερεὶς or ζάκοροι:

True, he called himself once a θεραπευτὴς Ἀσκληπιοῦ. But one should be cautious not to misinterpret this as, I think, Habicht has done who concluded from this testimony alone, that Galen had occasionally “to fulfil religious duties that required his presence”. This would mean that Galen had an official function in the cult of Asklepios—an assumption for which there is, to my knowledge, no other foundation whatever. [...] even if a group of θεραπευταί formed an organisation which was naturally in some way connected with the cult, this does not at all mean that its members [...] were officials, i.e. post-holders in the cult”.

The truth is that, although Galen mentions his title as a therapeutai of Asklepius once (in De libris propriis 2 as discussed above), in his De curandi ratione per venae sectionem (4.23 = 11.314–315 K.) he gives us another snapshot of his involvement with this intimate network of religious and medical entrepreneurs, the therapeutai in Pergamum:

15 Eliasoph and Lichterman (2003, 739).
16 Cf. also Festugière (1954, 86–87).
17 Kudlien (1981, 120).
18 On this passage and more generally on Galen’s traditional devotion to Asclepius, see Kudlien (1981); von Staden (2003); Brabant (2006); Frede (2010); Pietrobelli (2013), Brockmann (2013), Tieleman (2013), and Horstmanshoff (forthcoming). In his Subfiguratio Empirica, ch. 10, 78 Deichgräber, Galen reports on a patient’s successful healing in the Pergamene Asclepieion: the patient was given specific, albeit extraordinary, dietary advice in his dream encounters with Asclepius (a drug made from snakes); Galen treated this oneiric diagnosis as verification for his own inking and prescribed the same drug, which cured the patient from epilepsy. On the significance
Now I shall explain where from I took my cue to cut the artery (ἐπὶ τὸ διαφρεῖν ἀρτηρίας). Having been instigated by dreams, two of which came to me clearly (δύο ἐναργῶς μοι γεγομένων), I reached for the artery between the forefinger and the thumb of my right hand and allowed it to run until the blood would stop on its own, for this is what the dream ordered me to do (κελεύσαντος οὕτω τοῦ όνείρατος). Not quite a whole litre (of blood) came out. And the chronic pain stopped immediately (παραχρῆμα δ’ ἐπαύσατο χρόνιον ἀλγήμα) especially in that place which was pressed quite hard, where the diaphragm meets the liver. For this happened to me when I was young. Even another therapeutes of the god in Pergamum (θεραπευτὴς δὲ τοῦ θεοῦ ἐν Περγάμῳ) was released from the chronic pain on his side (χρονίου πλευρᾶς ἀλγήματος) by means of severing the artery (ἀπηλλάγη δ’ ἀρτηριοτομίας) by the thumb; he also came to this conclusion by himself after having being prompted by a dream (ἐξ ὀνείρατος ἐπὶ τοῦτο ἐλθὼν καὶ αὐτός).

The passage is part of a long sequence of episodes that aim at self-promotion, by glorifying Galen’s expert knowledge in venesection. While other doctors have injured and some even killed their patients by their sheer ignorance, Galen has mastered the art of venesection to the extent that he employed it to cure his own chronic pain. Oberhelman wonders where Galen’s dream might have taken place, but the answer is in the text: it clearly took place when the physician was in Pergamum as a therapeutes, as an erudite and privileged patient who sought Asclepius’ help when faced with chronic pain.19 Where else could Galen has become intimately familiar with the details of the divinely-ordained dream that urged yet another therapeutes of Asclepius to cure his chronic pain on his side by enduring an arteriotomy? It is interesting to see here that other fellow therapeutes of the god has also no need of expert dream interpretation. He deciphers the dream by himself and proceeds with the recommended course of action.

Moreover, one could hardly miss the emphasis on the enargeia of these two dreams, that is, the clarity that renders other expert advice superfluous and at the same time guarantees their divine origin.20 Most historians of medicine inter-

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pret Galen’s emphasis on the fact that he also came to the same conclusion by himself (i.e. independently of the divine message) as a reluctance to rely wholly on traditional means of treatment such as healing-divination. However, as seen also in the case of Galen’s fellow therapeutes, this revisionistic attitude towards established forms of authority was not restricted to Galen. In fact, it was very common among the members of the religious group of the Pergamene therapeutai, and it is not by mere chance that Pergamum gets special mention here.

More importantly, Galen’s role as a devotee of his ancestral god Asclepius seems to have been as significant for construing his self-identity as a Pergamene physician as it had been for Aristides. In the second chapter of the recently-discovered Greek manuscript of De propriis placitis, expertly edited by Véronique Boudon-Millot and Antoine Pietrobelli in 2005, Galen returns to his cure by Asclepius, the god, as he emphasises, to whom he offered cultic honours in Pergamum despite being ignorant of his ousia:

ο δὲ παρ’ ἐμοὶ τιμῶμενος ἐν Περγάμῳ θεός ἐπ’ ἄλλων τε πολλῶν τὴν ἑαυτοῦ δύναμίν τε καὶ πρόνοιαν ἐνεδείξατο ἐμέ το θεραπεύσας ποτέ. κατὰ θάλασσαν δὲ Διοσκούρων ἐξ ἐμοὶ πείραν οὐ μὴν οúde βλάπτεσθαι τοι νομίζουσι τοὺς ἀνθρώπους ἀγνοοῦντας τὴν ούσιαν τῶν θεῶν· τιμὰν δ’ αὐτοῖς ἐγνώκα νόμῳ παλαιῶν ἐπόμενος Σωκράτους πείθεσα συμβουλεύσαντος τοῖς τοῦ Πυ-θ(ιου) προστάγμασιν.²¹

And the god in Pergamum whom I honour has demonstrated his power and providence again and again, including on one occasion by healing me. But, although I have experienced the protection of the Dioscuri at sea, I still think that people are ignorant of the substance of the gods. I have learned to honour them according to ancient tradition, following Socrates’ advice to obey the injunctions of the Pythian oracle.

Galen intended On my own opinions to be an authentication device, a kind of philosophical testament to protect his medical treatises and philological commentaries from future forgeries.²² It is significant that he chooses here to stress his bond to Asclepius by introducing the god as ὁ δὲ παρ’ ἐμοὶ τιμῶμενος ἐν Περ-
γάμω θεός, which recalls the phrase ho patrios theos of the De libris propriis, thus alluding to Galen’s cultic identity as therapeutes in Pergamum.

On the other hand, Kudlien correctly noted that therapeutes does not denote a priestly role, certainly not a traditionally defined one. Yet it may still be comparable (albeit not identical) to hieres or neokoros.23 There certainly were individuals in the Pergamene temple who professed both expert medical and religious knowledge, and indeed served the god’s clientèle in both roles: Asclepiacus, a close friend of Aristides, who is stated to have been both a neokoros and an iatros, is a fine example of such a dual qualification.24 Galen however did not belong to that category. Even though he was, like Aristides, a therapeutes of Pergamum, and just as keen to flag his membership in the group both in describing his interview with the emperor and in some of his major medical treatises, his relationship with Asclepius was undoubtedly very different from Aristides’. Neither a δημιουργός nor a θεία άρχη feature in the latter’s theological universe, for instance, although at times it appears that his conception of Asclepius is not entirely free from Platonic influence.25 As Antoine Pietrobelli has convincingly argued, Galen seems to have found the perfect balance between paying homage to pre-existing religious schemata and practising an innovative and sophisticated type of agnosticism.26 If that is so, the question must be: what did Aristides, Galen and possibly Marcus Aurelius have in common,27 and how did the reli-

23 Cf. Aristid. Or. 48.47 (where the therapeutai and the neokoroi appear as two separate groups): οἱ τε γὰρ νεωκόροι ἐν τούτῳ ὄντες ἡλικίας καὶ πάντες οἱ περὶ τὸν θεὸν θεραπευταί καὶ τάξις ἔχοντες ὑμολόγουν ἀεὶ δὴ ποτὲ μιθένα πῶ τῶν πάντων συνείδεια τοιοῦτα τιμηθέντα κτλ. See further section 3 below.
24 Doctor: Or. 49.25; temple warden (neokoros): Or. 47.47–49.14 and 49.22.
25 Strohmaier (1965) employed the concept of ‘Gebildetenreligion’, i.e. religious behaviour typical of pepaideumenoi, in order to make sense of Galen’s individualised response to traditional religious schemata. Kudlien (1981, 127) was rightly critical, pointing to the diversity in religious behaviour and writings of famous literati of the first and second centuries CE, such as Cicero, Rufus, Soranus, Aristides and Thessalus. Or. 50.55–56, where Aristides converses with the Platonist philosopher Pyrallianus, who was also counted amongst his intimate circle of friends and intellectual companions (herairos), is one important passage in the HL that betrays Neoplatonic influence, cf. Remus (1996, 151). More on Pyrallianus in Boys-Stones, G. Index of ‘Middle’ Platonists.
26 Pietrobelli (2013) is by far the most informative discussion of Galen’s intricate theological and philosophical views. Horstmannhoff (forthcoming) examines his religious attitudes as a case of cognitive dissonance.
27 There is admittedly no explicit reference to Marcus Aurelius’ membership of the cultic association of the therapeutai, but, as explained above, this does not preclude the possibility that the emperor was aware of the deeper meaning conveyed by the term therapeutes of an intense personal relationship with the god, especially in view of the frequency with which Marcus refers in
gious group of the Pergamene *therapeutai* cater to such diverse religious outlooks and expectations?

2. The *therapeutai* of Asclepius in the epigraphic record

Back in 1980 Salvatore Nicosia cast serious doubt on the notion that the *therapeutai* might have been a formally distinct religious group (what in German is conveyed by the term *Kultverein*).²⁸ In his view, the term *therapeutes* in our context simply designated a ‘worshipper’ of Asclepius. Shortly afterwards, however, scholars such as Lee Pearcy (1988) maintained that the term was used to describe those who enjoyed a special relationship with the god, that these worshippers indeed grouped together to form ‘a cult organisation’ of sorts, and that Aristides was a member of this group.²⁹ Pearcy linked this group of worshippers with the amply-attested group of *therapeutai* who honoured Sarapis, and recalled the close identification between Sarapis and Asclepius in Aristides’ conception.³⁰ Whatever one thinks of Aristides’ or Galen’s self-representation as *therapeutai*, one cannot deny the fact that this group of worshippers was actively and enduringly present in the sanctuary. This is proved beyond doubt by a number of inscriptions from the Asclepieion published by Christian Habicht, in which the *therapeutai* honour Asclepius and related healing deities (e.g. Coronis in *AvP* VIII 3, 122), priests (*AvP* VIII 3, 152) and also fellow worshippers (*AvP* VIII 3, 28, 71, 79, and 140).

Dominique Brabant recently offered a close reading of some of the literary evidence discussed so far, and argued that the *therapeutai* at Pergamum were...
not really seeking social recognition and distinction but longed rather for the close proximity to the divine that membership of this exclusive group of Asclepian devotees could offer.³¹ This view builds on Festugière’s definition of personal religion as ‘closeness to God’ and concludes that this was precisely what the devotees gained from their close association with the divine healer.³² In my view, although Brabant’s analysis rightly emphasizes this intense and personal relationship with Asclepius, it verges on being ‘over-realistic’.³³ I can happily envisage Galen, Aristides and the other members of the socio-political and intellectual elite who frequented the Pergamene temple-complex bound together in an intricate nexus of intimate relationships with the divine, but it seems inadequate to view the case wholly in terms of their emotional need for closeness with the god.³⁴ What Asclepius provided to all those well-to-do gentlemen was legitimation, divine sanction for their chosen courses of action and, above all, a justification for bypassing the intermediaries and claiming to access knowledge straight from the divine source.

One major factor in this group-cohesion must have been the performance of ritual duties. A second-century CE lex sacra (IvP III 161 A) is of particular interest here, since it stipulates the ritual protocol the incubants had to follow prior to entering an incubation-chamber (ἐγκοιμητήριον).³⁵ The document clearly differentiates between two groups of prospective incubants, the ones who were visiting the temple complex for the first time and a second group of returning incubants who were resuming their theoric journeys to seek further consultations on the same matter. The first group had to offer expensive blood sacrifices and pay the fee prior to being directed to the larger incubatory chamber; while the second group of returning theōroi made modest sacrificial offerings and was directed to a much smaller and intimate incubation chamber (ll.15–17).³⁶ It is this second group of devotees, who in ll.23–29 are called therapeuontes and are instructed to follow the god’s priest and perform the rites of περιθεουειν. The original editor, Michael Wörrle, suggested that perithyein denotes a sacrifice offered peri, i.e.

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³¹ Brabant (2006, esp. 63–64) with Versnel (2011, 138 n.421), who is right in thinking that the one does not exclude the other.
³² A fruitful reassessment of the concept ‘personal religion’ can be found in Kindt (2015).
³³ I have borrowed this term from Petsalis-Diomidis (2010), who applies it to scholars who read Aristides’ HL too literally.
³⁴ Equally, I disagree with Cox Miller’s conception of Aristides as an emotionally needy individual on a quest for ‘warmth’ from Asclepius.
³⁵ IvP III 161 A. For a recent English translation, see Petsalis-Diomidis (2010, 224–225).
³⁶ With Sokolowski (1973, 408). Cf. also Petsalis-Diomidis (2010, 227–230), who ingeniously connects the ritual journey of the theōroi as stipulated in the lex sacra with the sacred landscape of the Pergamene sanctuary. More on this below.
‘around’, the altars. Sokolowski, however, pointed out that the prepositional prefix peri- may simply be used as an intensifier, as in the case of Plutarch’s superstitious man, who when ill (lypoumenos) sits around his house and feels compelled to spend his time continually sacrificing (perithyomenos) and repeatedly wiping himself (perimattomenos). Christian Habicht remarks that the cult title perithytēs (which derives from the same verb) occurs in three other inscriptions from the Pergamene Asclepieion, in each case with reference to eminent theōroi, such as Claudius Pardalas (AvP VIII 3, 140), P. Afranius Favianus (AvP VIII 3, 79) and Juventianus Alexander of Nicomedia (AvP VIII 3, 152), who must have had some prominent role in cultic performances as did the prothytēs in the cult of the emperors. Significantly, in all three cases the title of perithytēs is paired with that of therapeutes. In the case of the famous orator Pardalas, in particular, whose cultic activities in Pergamum are attested by a further five inscriptions (MAMA IX 19, 18, 20, 21, and Kolbe, Att. Mitt. 1092, 133, n. 160), these inscriptions reveal that Pardalas held an impressive array of cultic offices, including hieres of Zeus and archiereus of Asia (Asiarch). Pardalas’ membership of the group of the Pergamene therapeutai is confirmed by Aristides’ repeated references to their long-lasting friendship (e.g. Or. 50.27; 87). Moreover, as Klaus-Dietrich Fischer has shown, Pardalas was also an acquaintance of Galen. The closer we look, the clearer this image of the tightly-knit group of the therapeutai becomes. It also becomes more obvious that this group was operating on a higher level than the rest of the theōroi.

Let us now return to our lex sacra (IvP III 161 A). Although the interpretation of the therapōntes of 1.25 as referring to the well-known group of therapeutai is

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37 De sup. 7, 168d (II pp.474–475 LCL): ἂν δ’ ἄριστα πράττῃ καὶ συνὴ πράω δεισιδαιμονία, περιθειόμενος οὖκι κάθηται καὶ περιματτόμενος, αἱ δὲ γράferences ‘καθάπερ παττάλω’ φησιν ὁ Βίων ὃ τι ἂν τύχωσιν σὺτῷ περίατους φέρουσαι καὶ περιαρτῶσι’, “But if he is very fortunate, and but mildly yoked with superstition, he sits in his house, subjecting himself to fumigation, and smearing himself with mud, and the old crones, as Bion says, “bring whatever chance directs and hang and fasten it on him as on a peg” Transl. Babbit. Περιθειόμενος is Hercher’s emendation of perιθυόμενος, which Sokolowski would retain. This understanding of perithyō as ‘sacrificing regularly’ or ‘sacrificing repeatedly’ is further supported by John Chrysostom’s commentary on Galatians and by an inscription from Astypalaia (W. Peek, IvDorischen Inseln, 48–49, no. 100), where three men are described as perithyontes in honour of theos Asklepios.

38 Puech, nos. 192–197.

39 Fischer (2009). Pardalas is mentioned in one of Galen’s pharmacological treatises partially preserved in the Latin codex Cassinensis 69 (p. 261a–475b), and features prominently in the Latin version of De theriaca ad Pisonem preserved elsewhere in the same codex, no. 25, p. 281a–283a, where he is described as “magnus ille Pardalas”. Nutton (as quoted by Fischer) suggests that he may also have featured prominently in the De antidotis.
not quite certain, it seems plausible to assume that the inscription does refer to the group’s ritual duties and privileges of a less costly consultation. Those consulting the god for the first time have to pay a higher fee and are directed to a large incubation chamber, while the recurrent and/or frequent incubants pay less and are directed to a smaller and perhaps more exclusive chamber. “Although the exact reasons for the distinction in the cost of incubation are elusive, the document makes it clear that the differentiation of worshippers is primarily envisaged in terms of the different routes taken in the sanctuary”, Petsalis-Diomidis rightly suggests.⁴⁰ A probable parallel to our lex sacra from Pergamum is to be found in an inscription from Epidaurus, where the therapeutai of the Epidaurian Asclepieion (the term is admittedly an emendation by Sokolowski) are said to perithyein, i.e. perform regular sacrifices, and enter the shrine by a different entrance.⁴¹

3. The therapeutai of Asclepius at Pergamum in the Hieroi Logoi

By themselves, however, the epigraphical sources do not give us much detail, so historians of medicine and religion need Aristides’ works in order to glimpse the therapeutai group in action. Notwithstanding the various methodological problems involved in combining sources from different literary genres and media, this section discusses three extracts from the HL, which illuminate the group’s internal dynamic, the agonistic tendencies among its members and the group’s interaction with other religious professionals at Pergamum.

Of these professionals, the two νεωκόροι (‘temple-wardens, sacristans’) at the Pergamene Asclepieion appear to have been actively involved in the therapeutic procedures of the incubants, at least of the well-off ones, and even, if we are to judge from the HL, occasionally formed close and congenial relationships with the patients. During Aristides’ lengthy residence in the sanctuary, we

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⁴⁰ Petsalis-Diomidis (2010, 228–229): “The Lex Sacra in effect offered two alternative journeys through the sanctuary, one leading to ‘the incubation chamber’ and the other to ‘the small incubation chamber’. Although the identification of these buildings is not absolutely certain, they probably refer to the incubation chamber in the basement of the southern portico ... and the old incubation complex in the middle of the courtyard by the temple of Asklepios Sotēr respectively”.

⁴¹ IG IV² 1, 742 C25–29 with Sokolowski LSCG no. 25.
hear of two such temple-wardsen, Philadelphus and Asclepiacus. Aristides appears to have been on good, even friendly, terms with both men.

The first passage (Or. 48.46–49) comes from the beginning of Aristides’ extended incubancy at the Asclepieion of Pergamum (summer of 145 CE) and is of great interest not only in providing a close-up view of the therapeutai in action but also in revealing details of the competitive atmosphere within the group of long-term or frequent visitors. The text warrants full quotation:

46 I had catarrhs and difficulty with my palate, and everything was full of hoar-frost and heat, and the suffering around my stomach was at its peak, and I was confined to the house during the summer season. 47 And these things happened in Pergamum, in the house of the temple warden Asclepiacus (καὶ ἐγίγνετο ταῦτα ἐν Περγάμῳ ἐν τῷ νεωκόρου τοῦ Ἀσκληπιακοῦ). First he commanded that I have blood drawn from my elbow, and he added, as I remember, “a hundred and twenty liters”. This was to show that there would be need of quite a few phlebotomies, but that became manifestly clear from events that happened later on. For the temple wardsen, being of a certain age, and all those who were therapeutai of the God and those who were of a certain rank (had a certain position), confessed that they knew of no-one else so far who had been cut so much, except Ischyrus, and that his case was among the most incredible ones, but even so that mine surpassed it, without the other strange things which were added to the phlebotomies (οἱ τε γάρ νεωκόροι ἐν τούτῳ ὄντες ἡλικίας καὶ πάντες οἱ περὶ τὸν θεόν θεραπεύει ταύτῃ καὶ τάξις ἔχοντες ὑμιλώγουν ἀεὶ δὴ ποτὲ μηδένα πω τῶν πάντων συνειδέναι τοσάτα τιμηθέντα, πλήν γε Ἰσχύρωνος, εἶναι δ’ ἐν τοῖς παραδόξοτατον τὸ γ’ ἐκεῖνον, ἄλλα καὶ ὡς ὑπερβάλλει τὸ καθ’ ἡμᾶς ἄνευ τῶν ἄλλων παραδόξων, ἀ προσήν ταῖς φλεβοτομίαις), as for example happened almost immediately afterwards. 48 For one, I guess, or two days later, he commanded me to draw blood from my forehead. And he commanded also the same to one of the Roman senators, who was consulting him very often, and indicated (lit. ‘he made signs’) that the same had been ordered for Aristides. His name was Sedatus, most noble among the men, who recounted these things to me in person (Σηδᾶτος ὄνομα αὐτῷ, βελτίωτος ἀνδρῶν, ὃς ἐμοὶ ταῦτα αὐτὸς διηγεῖτο). In the middle of the phlebotomies (‘blood-letting’), he ordered me to bathe in the river Caicus. And it was necessary to walk there and bathe after having cast away flocks of wool. 49 He said that I would see a horse

42 Moreover Aristides uses the intimacy with Asclepiacus implied by the invitation to stay indefinitely at the latter’s residence to convey his own privileged status within the group.

43 Ἰσχύρωνος | εἰό χέφρωνος D (Laurentianus XL no. 7 of the XII cent., vol. 2 p. xii) The proper name is Keil’s emendation. The original meaning may have been that the other patient who underwent as many phlebotomies as Aristides, or perhaps even more, never recovered but died. Lord Byron, suffering from malaria, died after having had 5lbs and a few ounces of blood let between 16th and 18th April 1824; a grown man has about 10lbs of blood. A litra was reckoned to have been ca. 0.27 litres. I thank Richard Gordon for this piece of information.

44 Παρεδρέω means here to ‘frequent’, ‘to attend frequently’, i.e. θυμέλαια: IG V1, 734 (Sparta); γυμνασίους ib. XIV 1728.6; π. ταῖς ἐκκλησίαις ἐν ὀπλοῖς: ΠΠ 1028.35; ἐν τῷ ἱερῷ SIG 695.27 (Imagn. 195a dated c.100 CE). Cf. also Or. 48.9: the ex-consul Salvius “happened to be frequenting the god”. On the affinity of the terms see Sokolowski (1973, 411).
bathing and the temple warden Asclepiacus standing on the bank. Thus he predicted and thus it happened. 49 While I bathed, the temple warden was present and while standing on the bank he saw me (δύσεθαι δὲ καὶ ἔπεισαν καὶ τὸν νευκόρον ἐστώτα ἐπὶ τῆς ὀργῆς τῶν Ἀσκληπιακῶν, ταῦτα προείρητο καὶ ταύτα ἐγίνετο. ἔτι μὲν προσάκιν τῷ ποταμῷ τὸν ἔπεισαν ὑδώ λουμένον. λουμένου δὲ μου παρῆν ὁ νευκόρος καὶ ἐστώτα ἐπὶ τῆς ὀργῆς ἐώρα). The relief and the relaxation that came afterwards is very easy indeed for a God to understand, but for a man to grasp or to write about is very hard.

Methods of bloodletting were widely known in Graeco-Roman medicine and were used for the cure of numerous disorders (ranging from ophthalmic diseases, vertigo, and chronic headache to gangrene and epilepsy), caused by what they believe to have been an excess of humours in the body. 45 The successful application of these techniques required advanced medical skill and experience, as Galen tells us in De curandi ratione per venae sectionem 23 (11, 312–315 K). In the same work, Galen reports cases in which patients died after severing the artery that underlies the inner vein in the inner part of the elbow (presumably where Aristides himself was cut), because the bandage used to stop the bleeding was infected, thus leading to gangrene. Other patients died during operations for aneurysm. 46 Bloodlettings within the temple must have made a compelling spectacle, especially since Aristides remembers surgical procedures as a thing of the past. 47 Quite apart from their value as spectacles, phlebotomies were regarded as

45 In the surviving corpus of Galenic works, three treatises are devoted to exploring the uses and abuses of bloodletting: De venae sectione adversus Erasistratum (11.147–186 K.); De venae sectione adversus Erasistrateos Romae degentes (11.187–249 K.); De curandi ratione per venae sectionem (11.250–316 K.). More on the art of bloodletting in Galen in Brain (1986), where a translation of the three works can also be found. Although Galen has us believe that bloodletting was as common amongst the Hippocratic doctors as it was in his day, this was not true. As King (2004, 64–65) has argued, in the Hippocratic Corpus bloodletting as a medical practice is quite limited (mentioned around 70 times) and mainly performed on male patients, the implication being that women bled naturally via their monthly menstruation. For a brief historical exposition of venesection as a medical practice, see Niki Papavramidou, N., Thomaidis, V, Fiska, A. (2009).

46 In De cur. rat. per venae sect. 16 (11.298 K.), Galen informs us that there were three different ways to perform a phlebotomy in the inner part of the elbow, internal, external and medial, each corresponding to disorders in different parts of the human anatomy.

47 Cf. Or. 50. 64 Keil with Behr ad loc; [...] ταύτη μοι ἔδοξε καὶ ἐξεύρεις ὁ τῶν Ἀσκληπιοῦ ὄντος ὁ ἔτι νῦν ὁν, καὶ ὁ τούτων πάσης, ἐφ’ οὐ τὰ πολλὰ καὶ μεγάλα ἢ ἐπιθυμονύμθω ἐκείνουργηγον ὁ θεὸς, καὶ ἐστὶ δὴ ἐνδοξότατος τῶν μέχρι τούτου. “[...] on that day appeared to me the priest of Asclepius, the is now the priest of the god and his grandfather, in whose time, as we learn, the god performed many and great surgical procedures, and who is even in nowadays very famous [...]” The priesthood of Asclepius was an extremely prestigious office, by a descendant of the Asclepiad family for life. See IPergam on no. 251; Aristid., Or. 30.13–15, 25, 27 Keil.
life-changing and life-saving events, as the dedicatory inscription set up by Julius Meidias attests (fig. 2).⁴⁸

Going back to our text, one is immediately struck by the absence of oneirocritai (dream-interpreters)⁴⁹ and medical experts (who administers the bloodletting?) and by the exclusive focus upon two patients, Aristides himself and the consular M. Sedatus Severianus.⁵⁰ Even if Asclepiacus claimed for himself some medical expertise, he still seems to fade into the background emerging only to focalise the locations of the phlebotomies, oneiric and real, namely a domestic setting and the river bank. All eyes are upon Aristides’ heroic feat of being drained of nearly sixty 60 lbs. of blood, that is six times the total amount of blood in a grown man – he carefully neglects to mention a time-period – and then hastening to comply with the divinely-ordained baths, blind to the exhaustion any ordinary human being would have suffered at this stage. This is very much a self-service medical business which requires no professional expertise. The suggestion is that nothing more is required than the skills of Aristides and his friend Sedatus in interpreting dreams and their knowledge of bloodletting procedures. The narrative stress is laid not on the dreams of the two therapeutai but on Aristides’ hermeneutics and the intimate relationship between the two elite patients, whose friendship seems to have been endorsed by Asclepius himself. Why else would the divine healer share intimate details about one patient’s course of medical action with the other? Asclepius orders Sedatus to undergo a phlebotomy and adds he has prescribed the same treatment for Aristides. So much for the famous patient-physician confidentiality.

⁴⁸ AvP VIII 3 (1969) 141 Kat. No. 139. Taf. 41. The inscription reads: Ἰούλιος Μειδίας / φλεβοτομηθεῖς / ὑπὸ τοῦ μνὸς / κατὰ ἐπιταγήν ἀνέθηκε. On the often enthusiastic belief on the part of laymen in the merits of phlebotomy well into the nineteenth century, see e.g. Porter and Porter (1989, 170).

⁴⁹ On the cardinal role of specialists in dream interpretation (oneirocritai) in healing incubation, see Renberg (2015).

⁵⁰ On M. Sedatius Severianus, cos. suff. 153, see Várhelyi (2010, 83 – 84). Perhaps he is the same Roman consul who allegedly (if we believe Lucian Alex. 27) consulted the oracle of Neos Asclepios-Glykon before invading Armenia in 161 (accepted by Bremmer in his contribution to this volume). Plutarch’s essay How the young should listen to poetry (Mor. 14D, 15 A), is also addressed to M. Sedatus or M. Sedatius, who has a son called Cleander. The identification of the two individuals (first proposed by Bowersock) has been a matter of debate. Behr (1993, 1157 n. 69) rejected Bowersock’s idea, though he did retain ‘Sedatus’ and, following Keune in RE 2 A (1921) 1017 – 18 and Groag ibid.1007 lines 31 – 38, identified Aristides’ friend as Sedatius Theophilus, of praetorian rank (the Greek strategos can mean propraetor as well as proconsul). Cf. also Halfmann (1979, 86 – 87), who argues that Bowersock’s identification is impossible.
But then again, as the next extract for the *HL* (Or. 50.14–18) suggests, these patients seem to have been quite keen themselves on exchanging personal information and discussing their physical ailments and the curatives Asclepius proposed to them. In chapter 16, we read that the discussion was based on the similarity of these patients’ ailments: καὶ γὰρ πώς ἔστιν ἄ καὶ παραπλήσια ἐκάμνουμεν. Unless, we take this similarity as a reference to the duration of their ailments (i.e. they were all chronic illnesses), it is hard to imagine a community of patients with similar health problems. It is far more likely that what Aristides has in mind are the similar circumstances under which these individuals consulted the god. More to the point, in modern sociological terms, this ‘convergence’ of symptoms is a product of the discourse they are familiar with. This is, in other words, a good example of what Eliasoph and Lichterman called ‘speech norms’.

This extract relates to a conversation that took place in the first year of Aristides’ incubancy at Pergamum. The interlocutors are three of the most famous *therapeutai* of the temple (τῶν γνωριμωτέρων θεραπευτῶν), himself, M. Sedatius Severianus and Q. Tullius Maximus, a fellow-incubant and future suffect-consul. Both of these individuals appear to contribute actively in Aristides’ transformation from a panting patient to a powerful orator. Both of them adopt an extremely hands-on approach when it comes to the interpretation of Aristides’ difficulty in performing basic respiratory functions and his divine prescription, which centres on scripting and publicly performing an oration:

While I remained at Pergamum because of divine summons and my supplication, I received from the god a command and exhortation not to abandon rhetoric. (15) It is impossible to say since it happened many years ago which dream came first, or which was the nature of each of these dreams in detail. But those which occurred at the very beginning were exhortatory dreams. “It befits you to speak in the manner of Socrates, Demosthenes and Thucydides. And I was shown one of the distinguished orators who are older than I, in order that I would be especially moved to speak. And the god commanded me to go to the Temple Stoa, which is at the Theatre, and to offer to him the very first fruits of these improvised and competitive orations (καὶ τὸ γε σφόδρα πρῶτον ἀπάρξασθαι με ἐκέλευσι ἕκατῳ προ-σελθόντα εἰς τὴν στοὰν τοῦ ἱεροῦ τὴν πρὸς τῷ θεάτρῳ τῶν αὐτοσχεδίων δὴ τούτων λόγων καὶ ἁγωνιστικῶν). And so it happened. (16) There was a very magnificent spectacle in the amphitheatre, a bull-hunt, I think, or some such thing. Everyone at the temple had rushed down there, and the whole city was agog. We had been left alone in the Temple, two of the more distinguished worshippers, I and a Nicaean, a man of praetorian rank, called

51 This passage seems also to have been central in fashioning Aristides’ group-identity. He cross-references this passage in his *An Address Regarding Asclepius* (Or. 42.8 Keil). I revisit this and other ‘literary and rhetorical remedies’ in a forthcoming article in *Mètis*. See Petridou (2017).
Sedatus, but originally Theophilus. We were sitting in the temple of Hygieia, where the statue of Telesphorus is, and we were asking one another, as we were accustomed, whether the god had prescribed anything new (καταλελείμμεθα δὲ ἐν τῷ ιερῷ τῶν γνωριμωτέρων θεραπευτῶν δύο, ἐγὼ τε καὶ Νικανός, ἀνήρ τῶν ἐστρατηγικῶν Ῥωμαίοις, Σηδάτος δὲ Νικαῖος, τὸ δ’ ἀρχαῖον Θεόφρος. καθήμεθα οὖν ἐν Ἡγιείᾳ, οὐ ὁ Τελεφόρος, καὶ διεσπαράμεθα ἄλληλων ὠσπερ εἰώθειμεν εἰ τι καινότερον εἰπὶ παρηγγελκὼς ὁ θεός). For in a way certain of our diseases were also similar (καὶ γὰρ πῶς ἔστιν καὶ παραπλήσια ἐκάμνυμεν). (17) I said that I did not know what I should do, because what was prescribed to me was something as impossible as flying: a rhetorical exercise, when I could not breathe, and [this exercise was to be accomplish] there—I mean the Stoa—and I recounted the dream to him. And when he heard it, he said, “What will you do, and how do you feel about it?” “What else”, I said “shall do whatever I can? Arrange on my clothes, stand so, make a note of the problem to myself, begin some little thing, and then I shall stop. And so my obligation has been fulfilled”. “Not at all”, he said “not so. But you have me here as a listener. Then contend with all zeal. Strength will be the God’s concern. How do you know whether your dream pertains to more than this?” And at the same time, he told me a marvellous deed of the god, how he commanded some sick man to compete in this way, and by causing him to perspire through the exercise, brought an end to the whole disease. It seemed necessary to do this. (18) And while we were talking and taking counsel, Maximus the Libyan,52 entered in the third place, one of the long-standing worshippers, and in a way keen on oratory. It was he who proposed the problem (καὶ λαλούντων ἡμῶν καὶ βουλευμένων ἐπεισέρχεται Βύβλος ἐκ τρίτων, θεραπευτῆς τῶν παλαιῶν καὶ τινα τρόπουν πρόθυμος περὶ λόγους, οὕτως καὶ τὸ πρόβλημα ἰδὶ ὁ προβαλών). And the problem was as follows, for I remember it, since it was the first I received: “While Alexander”, he said, “is in India, Demosthenes advises that it is time to act”. I immediately accepted the omen of Demosthenes speaking again and of the subject, which was about empire. And pausing a little, I competed, and my new strength was such as is of the god’s devising, and the year seemed not to have passed in silence, but in training.53

This divine prescription has a twofold aim: Aristides is prompted to perform in public and given a technique to improve his delivery by assembling an audience predisposed in his favour, so as to boost his confidence and self-esteem. Predictably enough, he involves the intimate group of therapeutai – his socially-powerful fellow-intellectuals – in remodelling his rhetorical career.54 This time the Roman Senator Sedatus is joined by Q. Tullius Maximus the African, “a fellow

52 The mss read βύβλος or βιβλος; Keil adopted the former reading, assuming a proper name Byblos. Behr adopts the reading <Μάξιμος ὁ Λίβις>, Maximus the African, on the basis of Aristides’ reference to this senator in his Ὑπό Κατιώνα 4.3 Keil (47 Dindorf). See also RE 14.2 s.v. Maximus no. 27.
53 Transl. Behr with alterations.
54 This was a particularly important dream not only for Aristides’ rhetorical career, but also for his relationship with the god himself, since it was he who, by ordering to Aristides to stay in Pergamum in the first place, had thwarted his professional ambitions.
incubant and a man who would later reach the consulship”. Maximus seems to have been himself interested in oratory and must have served as one of the oldest therapeutai. Here again Aristides stresses the socio-economic background of the members of the group. Harold Remus is surely right in thinking that, even if men of lesser financial means were also admitted to the group, Aristides would deliberately fail to mention them in such a context.

Although Aristides claims to have forgotten most of the details of the oneiric prescription, he remembers vividly how the god ordered him to go to the temple of Hygeia. It was there that he found his fellow-therapeutai Sedatus and revealed to him, not without a certain degree of incredulity, that the god’s remedy for his breathing difficulty consisted in urging him to proceed with a full-fledged rhetorical declamation. Aristides lays special emphasis on the difference (both quantitative and qualitative) between these select incubants and everyone else: while the other incubants have left the shrine to enjoy some crowd-pleasing spectacle (a beast-hunt or a theoria of some kind; the off-handedness may be interpreted as a sign of contempt), the select syntherapeutai opt for the lofty pleasures of oratory and passionate exchange of information about their most intimate bodily cavities. While the tight-knit group of therapeutai may have been loosely related to the rest of the patients who consulted the god, nonetheless, it was fairly distinct from them. One is reminded of the two different ritual pathways as well as the two different chambers of incubation in the lex sacra (IvP VIII 3, 161, see above)

Aristides claims that Asclepius told him to go to the stoa by the small theatre of the Asclepieion and offer to him the first fruits of his extemporary, competitive orations. The term ἀπάρξοσθαι implies that sacrificial language was part of the original dream. One thinks again back to the lex sacra and to the extremely detailed stipulations about what was to be offered to the gods prior to ritual incubation. Rhetorical declamation is of course not one of them.

55 Várhelyi (2010, 156).
56 Remus (1996, 156).
57 The term συνθεραπευτής (sing.) is attested in IvP VIII 3. 28 (fig. 1), dated between 172–175 CE. For the date, see Pflaum, Carrières procuratorienes no.252 + additions on Tib. Cf. Vibia-nus Tertullus. The relevant text reads: Κλαύδιον Οὐίβιανον / Τέρτυλλον ἐπὶ ἐπιστο- / λῶν Ἐλλη- 

58 To be fair, none of the ritual offerings prescribed there are intended for Asclepius. For a detailed account of the list of divinities mentioned in the inscription and an explanation of Asclepius’ absence from this list, see Petsalis-Diomidis (2010, 222–238).
interpret this substitution of rhetorical declamation for the prescribed offerings as one of the many ways in which the Mysian orator chooses to manipulate pre-existing ritual schemata and adapt them for his own purposes.

Nonetheless, it is not until he receives a thumbs-up from his fellow-patient Sedatus that Aristides finally proceeds with executing the divine prescription. Sedatus generously offers to be the audience of Aristides’ rhetorical *agōn* and encourages him to overcome his initial disinclination. To be more precise, Sedatus offers an important corrective to Aristides’ hermeneutics: a *token* oration (μικρ’ ἄττα) is not adequate – a full-fledged rhetorical declamation is required. The senator from Nicaea corrects his *syntherapeutes’* interpretation of his dream and even emboldens him by citing an account of another patient’s successful treatment of a physical ailment by means of agonistic rhetorical performance (δι’ ἀγωνίαν λύσει τὸ νόσημα πᾶν). Sedatus’ intervention reaffirms the efficacy of the ‘wondrous’ (*thaumaston*) rhetorical remedy prescribed by Asclepius, and provides an explanation in medical terms, namely, that declamation sets in motion a type of mental and/or physical agitation, which in turn causes one to sweat. The fellow *therapeutes* Maximus contributes to the discussion by suggesting the *πρόβλημα*, the theme of Aristides’ declamation, which, once mastered, provides our Mysian patient with the crucial boost of confidence required to reshape his rhetorical career.

The final passage I wish to discuss (Or. 50.19–21) shows the god providing further career-coaching in the form of a dream vision. An *oneiros*-figure, like those that appear in Homer, appeared in his dreams and kindled his desire for honours (ἐμοὶ τὴν ὑπερον γυναικείαν ἔξηψε) by informing Aristides that in his rhetorical art he had surpassed Demosthenes in ways that even the old debate between rhetoric and philosophy could not diminish. The *oneiros*-figure had the likeness of yet another distinguished member of the Graeco-Roman elite, the philosopher Rhosandros (lit., ‘he, who strengthens men’), who was also a renowned *therapeutes* of the god Asclepius: Ἑρωσάνδρος ἦν τῶν φιλοσοφότητων καὶ ἀλλὰς περί τὴν τοῦ θεοῦ θεραπείαν ἐπιμελής. However, the true

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60 Perspiration along with bleeding, vomiting, and excretion, is viewed, at least in humoral medicine, as a potentially helpful outlet for evacuating excess fluid(s), and thus as means of restoring the equilibrium of humours and elemental qualities in the body, cf. Mattern (2008, 64–75, esp. n. 63); Wilkins (2016).

61 E.g. in *Il.* 2.1–34; *Od.* 4.841.
significance of the dream does not become apparent until §21, where Aristides recounts yet another, which was vouchsafed him at the temple of Olympian Zeus. This dream revealed that the philosopher Rhosandros in reality signified the god in some way and that, in turn, Theodotos (the name of one of the doctors in the Asclepieion) signified the god too. Next and through a highly contrived application of Euclid’s first axiom on transitive equality—things equal to the same thing are also equal to one another—Aristides concludes that Rhosandros and Theodotos are actually equal:

Later I had the following dream, which pertains to Rhosandros. I dreamed that, during some lecture on the grounds of the Temple of Olympian Zeus, either I thought to myself, or someone suggested to me, that Rhosandros may signify the god. And somehow in the writing there was also the name Theodōtēs (‘God giver’ and πως τοῦτο Θεοδώτης ἦν ἐν τῇ γραφῇ). But this was clear, that the doctor Theodotos signified the god. Therefore, “Rhosander” can also signify the same, since “Rhosandros” and “Theodotos” are equal. Such were the things he revealed concerning the name “Rhosandros” (σαφὲς δέ εἶναι τούτο γε, ὡς ἄρα ὁ Θεόδωτος ὁ ἰατρός τὸν θεὸν δηλοῖ, ταυτὸν ὄννυν δύνασθαι καὶ τὸν Ῥώσανδρον, ἐπείτερ ἴσον γε Ῥώσανδρος καὶ Θεόδωτος, τοσάτα μὲν περὶ τοῦ ὀνόματος ἑδήλωσε τοῦ Ῥωσάνδρου).

This dream and its geometric equation may well contain the key to a full understanding of the revisionist attitudes of the Pergamene therapeutai. As far as Aristides was concerned, and not unlike Galen in his De curandi ratione per venae sectionem 4.23 (discussed above), there was neither any real need for dream-interpretation by accredited experts nor was there any need for medical experts (‘doctors’). Between them, the therapeutai, as knowledgeable, high-born individuals, could themselves successfully play all the necessary roles and fulfil all needs, provided, of course, that they had secured Asclepius’ seal of approval (cf. Or. 50.1919: καὶ μέντοι καὶ ὑπάρ αὐτὸς ἐπεσφραγίσατο ὁ θεός), which had the power to enhance the relevant capacities of the most devoted of his worshippers.

That said, it is important to remember that Aristides was not alone in contesting the knowledge and power of institutionalised experts, religious and medical alike. Physicians, dream-interpreters and patients all claimed direct access

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62 In algebraic logic, one would say “if x=y, and if y=z, then x=z”, i.e. things equal to the same thing are also equal to one another. But Aristides in thinking here in terms of Euclidean geometry: Eucl., Κοιναὶ ἔννοιαι 1.1: Τὰ τῷ αὐτῷ ἴσα καὶ ἀλλήλως ἔστιν ἴσα.
to Asclepius. As Pliny reminds us, the gods promise a better outcome.\(^6^3\) When it came to health issues, no one could promise a better outcome than Asclepius could. Claims to religious or medical expertise provided directly by the god, whether made by patients or physicians such as Galen, appealed to higher, privileged, forms of knowledge and authority. Direct access of this kind was especially important for elite patients such as the therapeutai at Pergamum, authorising them to override the professionals’ medical and religious expertise, contest the need for such intermediaries and so effectively reclaim command over their own bodies.\(^6^4\)

### References


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\(^6^4\) As Brooke Holmes (2010, 25) argues, “Physicians secure their authority over the nature of the sōma in part by claiming to understand the causes of its sufferings”.

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Fig. 1: One of the therapeutai-related inscriptions from the Pergamene Asclepieion, honouring fellow members (AvP VIII 3 no. 28, dated c.73–175 CE). Photo: Valentino Gasparini.
Fig. 2: A thanks-giving dedication (AvP VIII 3 no. 139, Taf. 41) from the Pergamene Asclepieion on account of a successful (?) phlebotomy. Deutsches Archäologisches Institut (Istanbul).