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Death, Rebirth, and Pilgrimage Experience in Aelius Aristides' *Hieroi Logoi*

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Abstract: The close conceptual links between symbolic death, rebirth, and pilgrimage are widely known to modern sociologists and anthropologists and can be observed in several modern pilgrimage traditions. This study argues that the same connections can already be detected in Aristides' *Hieroi Logoi*, "the earliest detailed first-person account of pilgrimage that survives from antiquity". In terms of methodology, this article follows recent scholarly work on ancient lived religion perspectives and religiously motivated mobility that favours a broader understanding of the notion of pilgrimage in the Greek-speaking world. Rutherford, in particular, has produced a plethora of pioneering studies on all aspects of 'sacred tourism' experience in various media including documentary papyri, inscriptions, and graffiti. This chapter builds further on Rutherford's work and focuses on Aristides' accounts of his visits to smaller, less-well known healing centres. The main aim is to demonstrate how Aristides' pilgrimage experience to the healing temple of Asclepius at Poimanenos or Poimanenon (a town of ancient Mysia near Cyzicus) is wholly recast and presented in terms of travelling to the sacred site of Eleusis, one of the most important cultural and religious centres of the Roman Empire in the Antonine Era. Thus, Aristides' pilgrimage experience to Poimanenos is successfully reframed as a mystic initiation that marks the death of the previous ill self and the birth of the new, enlightened, and healthy self.

Keywords: Aelius Aristides; Asclepius; conceptual mapping; death; Eleusis; illness; initiation; Mysteries; pilgrimage; rebirth; sacred travelling; *theoria*

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1. Introduction: Sacred Travelling in Antiquity and Illness as Initiation in Aelius Aristides' *Hieroi Logoi*

The conceptual links between symbolic death and initiatory rites, on the one hand, and pilgrimage, death, and rebirth, on the other are widely known to modern sociologists and anthropologists. The close correlations between inherent dangers in travelling to a sacred location and symbolic death and rebirth have been very aptly summarised by Turner (1977, p. 29) as follows: "pilgrimage is also a rehearsal of the pilgrim's own death". This truism is applicable to a great number of modern pilgrimage traditions and practices. For instance, terminally ill Muslims often attempt to perform a pilgrimage (Hajj) to the Holy Mosque or a "mini pilgrimage" (Omrah) that takes only a few hours to complete, as opposed to Hajj which takes days on end and is far more demanding, both on physical and financial levels. The reason behind this risky undertaking is that "according to Islamic teachings, those who perform Hajj or Omrah in the proper way will be cleaned of sins as if they were newly born" (Zafir al-Shahri and al-Khenaizan 2005, p. 434). In the Greek Orthodox tradition, on the other hand, a pilgrimage to Jerusalem can be construed as both an initiatory rite, in which the previous self dies and a new, enlightened self is established, and a rehearsal for dying. Bowman (2013), a socio-anthropologist who has worked extensively on Christian pilgrimage practices in Jerusalem, observes how closely linked pilgrimage and death really are for Greek Orthodox pilgrims who visit Jerusalem to get re-baptised in the river Jordan wearing their own shrouds in which they hope to be buried (cf. also Bowman 1993,

2010, 2011, 2012). What is truly fascinating is that this relational mapping of pilgrimage experience onto initiatory rites appears to have already been firmly established in Aristides' *Hieroi Logoi*, "the earliest detailed first-person account of pilgrimage that survives from antiquity" (Rutherford 2001, p. 51). This chapter builds further on Rutherford's work and focuses on Aristides' accounts of his visits to smaller, less-well known healing centres, as well as on recent scholarly work on ancient lived religion perspectives and religiously motivated mobility that favours a broader understanding of the notion of pilgrimage in the Greek-speaking world.[1]

The last couple of decades have seen some remarkable advances in our understanding of the *Hieroi Logoi* and their author, Publius Aelius Aristides Theodoros, one of the most renowned rhetoricians of the Second sophistic (born in Northern Mysia in 117 CE). The *Hieroi Logoi* (henceforth *HL*) are no longer thought of as the fevered fables of an incurable hypochondriac. Instead, they are considered to be a rare first-person illness narrative, which, while extremely elaborate and self-conscious, offers a unique, patient-centred insight into the socio-political, religious, medical, and cultural life of the Antonine Era (Petridou 2016, 2019).

The main aim of this paper is to demonstrate that the emphasis placed on the potential threat of death and dying in the *Hieroi Logoi* makes for an even fitter component to Aristides' pilgrimage experience than has been previously thought, because it dovetails nicely with his conceptual recasting of his illness experience as a mystic initiation (Petridou 2020, 2021, 2024). To flesh this premise out, this study looks at (a) how Aristides' pilgrimage experience to the temple of Asclepius at Poimanenos is wholly recast and presented in terms of the sacred travelling to Eleusis, one of the most important cultural and religious centres of the Roman Empire in the Antonine Era (Lippolis 2013; Nasrallah 2011; Bremmer 2014; Petridou 2024); and (b) the paradoxical coexistence of the danger of dying and promise of rebirth as one of the most important conceptual similarities that drive this process of the relational mapping of illness onto initiation at Poimenanos.

More importantly, this close conceptual link between death and Aristides' smaller sacred travels is further employed to challenge previously dominant scholarly notions of Aristides as deliberately perpetuating his physical agony and illness and leveraging it to prolong his exclusive relationship with the healing god Asclepius.[2] What Aristides truly wants, I submit here, is not a life of compromised health that would secure a direct line with Asclepius; what he is truly after is a rebirth, that can only be guaranteed by this close conceptual mapping of his illness experience to mystery initiation rites.[3] An intense pilgrimage experience complemented by the threat of death and promise of rebirth offered by sacred travelling is thus construed as one of the direct ways to achieve this sort of physical, psychological, and professional recovery in the *Hieroi Logoi*.

2. Pilgrimage Experience in the Second Sophistic

Along with Uusimäki's excellent ANINAN project, the last couple of decades have seen a plethora of extremely important advances in our understanding of Graeco–Roman mobility and travelling. For example, Adams and Laurence (2001)'s volume challenged scholarly certainties about immobility being the norm in the Roman Empire and threw further light on the socio-economic background of travelling in that period, which apparently was not the sole privilege of the wealthy. Montiglio (2005), on the other hand, argued convincingly for a distinct ambivalence towards travelling in the Roman period. More significantly, for the purposes of this study, a number of scholars (such as Alcock et al. 2001; Coleman and Eade 2004; Elsner and Rutherford 2005; Petsalis-Diomidis 2005, 2010; Harland 2011; Rutherford 2013; Kristensen and Friese 2017; Bremmer 2017 and others) have focused on the intersections of travelling and religion with an extra emphasis on the Antonine Era. In those studies, the Antonine Era is thus construed as a period of intense intellectual exploration and movement instigated by religious needs, such as visiting certain sanctuaries and sacred sites, participating in sacred festivals, or being initiated into extremely popular mystery cults, such as the Great Mysteria of Demeter and Kore in Eleusis (Petridou 2021, 2024).

Pilgrimages were a popular mode of religious expression in the Hadrianic and Antonine periods and was not restricted to individuals—communities dispatched state officials who engaged in diplomatic discourse with other officials from friendly or fiendish communities within the culturally familiar contexts of *panegyris* (festival) or *theōria* (Rutherford 1995, 1998). Indeed, as Rutherford (2001, p. 5) puts it rather aptly, "The Antonine Age thus emerges as a golden age for pilgrimage". This section, however, is more concerned with personal pilgrimages or sacred travelling, what the Greeks would call *theoria*. During that period, pious individuals, both wealthy and of modest means, embarked on longer or shorter journeys to local festivals or Panhellenic centres of international prestige (like Eleusis, Epidaurus, Delos, Olympia, etc.) in quest of an initiation into a mystery cult, an oracle, or a cure. At the same time and within the same socio-cultural framework of pilgrimages, high-browed intellectuals and members of the socio-political elite of the Roman Empire, who still identified themselves as culturally Greek (Goldhill 2001), embarked on sacred sightseeing in their own cities and abroad on a quest for knowledge.

No knowledge is truer and more for the literati of the Second Sophistic than that received during an initiation ceremony. To put it in Van Nuffelen's (2007, pp. 18–19) words: "Mysteries are not only *loci* of truth, they are *loci* of primordial truth: they preserve in the best possible way the wisdom of the ancients. [. . .] This wisdom is in essence identical to the one achieved by philosophy, although not necessarily so in language: the truth is not expressed in plain philosophical language but in the mythological idiom of enigmas and suggestions one finds in other religious manifestations. But apparently it was preserved in a much purer state in mystery cults than anywhere else". And no passage in the *Hieroi Logoi* is more exemplary of how physical suffering can be thought of as conducive to acquiring religious knowledge during a pilgrimage than Aristides' theoric journey to the temple of Asclepius at Poimenenos and the sanctuaries of the Nymphs and Artemis Thermaia by the river Aisepos.

3. Death–Rebirth and Pilgrimage in the *Hieroi Logoi*

In the winter of 152, Aristides was instructed by Asclepius to return to the warm springs (quite possible of Artemis Thermaia) near the river Aisepos (most commonly identified with Gönen in northern Mysia) ten years after falling ill for the first time in 143 A.D. Whilst being en route to the warm springs by the river Aisepos, he also visits one of Asclepius's temples situated in the village Poimanenos (most commonly identified with the modern Eski Manyas in Turkey).[4] He thus performs a smaller pilgrimage within a wider pilgrimage context. The text occupies the first part of the fourth book of the *HL* (*Or*. 50.2-8) and is worth quoting at length in translation.

> "Then we set out in high spirits, as on a *theoria* ('pilgrimage'), for the clear weather was marvelous, and the road was inviting. (3) Poimanenos is a place in Mysia, where there is a sacred and famous temple of Asclepius. There we completed about one hundred and sixty stadia, and nearly sixty of these at night, as we started when the day was advanced. And about this place we were also met with some mud from earlier rainfalls, which was not easy to cross. The journey took place in the light of torches. (4) There, in particular, I was completely with the god, as if wholly devoted and possessed. And I composed many hymns to the *Soter* ('Saviour') himself, while I was sitting in the carriage, and many to Aisepos, the Nymphs, and Artemis Thermaia, who presides over the warm springs, to provide a solution for all my troubles and to reinstate me to my original constitution. (5) When I reached Poimanenos, the god called upon me by means of oracles and kept me on the spot for some days, and he purged my upper intestinal tract and [. . .] that nearly once for all. And a farmer, who did not know me, but had heard of me, had a dream. He dreamed that someone said to him that Aristides had vomited up the head of a viper. Having seen this vision, he told one of my people and he told me. So much for this. (6) So, when the god sent me to the Aisepos river, he ordered me to abstain from the baths there, but he prescribed

> my other regimen every day. And here there were purifications at the river by means of libations, and purgations at home through vomiting. And when three or four days had passed, there was a voice in a dream that it was over, and it was necessary to return. (7) It was not only like a mystery initiation, since the ritual *dromena* ('acts') were so divine and paradoxical, but there was also coincidentally something unaccustomedly marvelous. For at the same time there was gladness and joy, and a sense of tranquility as far as my psyche and body were concerned, and again, as it were, an incredulity if it were ever possible to see the day when one will see himself free from such great troubles, and in addition, a fear that one of the usual things will again befall and spoil one's hopes about the whole. This was my state of mind, and my return took place with such pleasure and at the same time agony. (8) Since the Gods so granted, from that time onwards, a change in my whole body and regimen now became clear, and it was easier to bear the open air and to travel, on the whole no less than those who were exceptionally healthy. And the excessive coverings were dispersed, and the countless catarrhs, and the throbbing in my veins and nerves ceased. My food-intake now was somehow regulated, and we engaged in full scale rhetorical contests in private and in public. And we toured around the cities with the God as our leader, with good fame and fortune."

The smaller pilgrimage he performs to the holy and famous temple of Asclepius at Poimenenos, a nearby Mysian village, is framed as a journey fraught with dangers and difficulties: much of the travelling takes place on roads covered in mud, the result of earlier rain, and in darkness, where light is provided exclusively by torches (ἔστι δὲ Ποιμανηνὸς χωρίον τῆς Μυσίας καὶ ἐν αὐτῷ ἱερὸν Ἀσκληπιοῦ ἅγιόν τε καὶ ὀνομαστὸν, ἐνταῦθα ἐτελέσαμεν σταδίους ἑξήκοντα μάλιστα καὶ ἑκατόν, καὶ τούτων τοὺς ἑξήκοντα σχεδὸν νυκτὸς, ἅτε καὶ προηκούσης τῆς ἡμέρας κινηθέντες·καί τινι καὶ πηλῷ περὶ τοῦτον ἤδη τὸν τόπον ἐνετύχομεν ἐξ ὄμβρων προτέρων οὐ ῥᾳδίῳ διεξελθεῖν· ἡ δὲ πορεία ἐγίγνετο ὑπὸ λαμπάδων). The difficulties and the inherent dangers of the trip, nonetheless, not only do not impede Aristides' religious experience, but they seem somehow conducive to a feeling of complete religious immersion and devotion which he is said to have experienced. More specifically, Aristides says he felt completely devoted to the god and possessed (ἐνταῦθα δὴ παντελῶς οἰονεὶ καθιερώμην τε καὶ εἰχόμην). He was, in fact, so moved by the experience that he composed hymns in honour of Asclepius himself, the river Aisepos, the Nymphs, and Artemis Thermaia, in which he requested to be delivered from all of his current ailments and to be returned to his original state of physical health (καί μοι πολλὰ μὲν εἰς αὐτὸν τὸν σωτῆρα ἐποιήθη μέλη, ὡς ἔτυχον καθήμενος ἐπὶ τοῦ ζεύγους· πολλὰ δὲ εἴς τε τὸν Αἴσηπον καὶ Νύμφας καὶ τὴν Θερμαίαν Ἄρτεμιν, ἣ τὰς πηγὰς τὰς θερμὰς ἔχει, δοῦναι λύσιν ἁπάντων ἤδη τῶν δυσχερῶν, καὶ καταστῆσαι πάλιν εἰς τὸ ἐξ ἀρχῆς).

Chapter 5 pertains to Aristides' purification, which is twofold and involves (a) medically induced purgations via emesis ('vomiting') at home and (b) sacred purifications in the form of libations by the river (κἀνταῦθα δὴ καθαρμοί τε ἐγίγνοντο ἐπὶ τοῦ ποταμοῦ ὑπὸ σπονδῶν καὶ καθάρσεις οἴκοι δι᾽ ἐμέτου).[5] The benefit of the divinely prescribed emesis is already foreshadowed in the dream one of the local farmers has, in which Aristides is seen as having vomited the head of a viper. The viper's head is symbolic of the original ailment that is now imagined as having been vomited away from Aristides' body. In Greek literary and medical tradition, the viper's venom is thought of as one of the most potent poisons and the viper's bite is often said to cause one of the most painful sensations known to humans.[6]

The theoric journey to the temple of Asclepius in Poimanenos and the visit to Aisepos are said to have brought a radical improvement to Aristides' health, which was not only dramatic but all-encompassing too. In fact, it pertained to everything it had to do with his body and his dietary regime, but overcoming his respiratory problems and advancing his resilience and endurance in travelling on foot are singled out (θεῶν δὲ οὕτω διδόντων

ἐγένετο ἀπὸ τούτων ἤδη τῶν χρόνων μεταβολὴ περὶ πᾶν τὸ σῶμα καὶ τὴν δίαιταν σαφὴς, καὶ τόν τε ἀέρα ὑπῆρξε μᾶλλον φέρειν καὶ ὁδοιπορεῖν ἐπιεικῶς οὐδὲν ἔλαττον τῶν πρὸς ὑπερβολὴν ἐρρωμένων). Long gone were his excessive clothing, the unaccountable catarrhs,[7] and the excruciating throbbing in veins and nerves,[8] the latter two described in the usual ostentatiously medical mode, whilst his irregular and problematic food-intake came also somehow under control (ἀπὸ τούτων ἤδη τῶν χρόνων μεταβολὴ περὶ πᾶν τὸ σῶμα καὶ τὴν δίαιταν σαφὴς, καὶ τόν τε ἀέρα ὑπῆρξε μᾶλλον φέρειν καὶ ὁδοιπορεῖν ἐπιεικῶς οὐδὲν ἔλαττον τῶν πρὸς ὑπερβολὴν ἐρρωμένων. καὶ τῶν σκεπασμάτων τὰ περιττὰ ἀφῃρέθη, οἵ τε ἀνώνυμοι κατάρροι καὶ σφάκελοι περὶ τὰς φλέβας καὶ τὰ νεῦρα ἀπεπαύσαντο. τροφὴ δέ πως ἤδη διῳκεῖτο). More importantly, under Asclepius' leadership, Aristides felt well enough to pursue his beloved rhetorical contests both at home and under the scrutiny of the public eye (καὶ ἀγῶνας ἐντελεῖς ἠγωνιζόμεθα οἵκοι τε κἀν τοῖς δημοσίοις, καὶ δὴ καὶ πόλεις εἰσήλθομεν ἡγουμένου τοῦ θεοῦ μετὰ τῆς ἀγαθῆς φήμης καὶ τύχης.). But what kind of miraculous cure brought all these about?

The Greek leaves it open as to whether this extraordinary transformation was the result of the regimen the god prescribed for his chosen patient, or simply the direct impact of the pilgrimage to Poimanenos. More significantly for our purposes, the text likens the pilgrimage to the Asclepieion at Poimanenos to a *telete*, that is, an initiation rite into a mystery cult. Indeed, the whole journey to and his stay at the aforementioned sanctuaries appear to have been both conceptualised and conveyed in terms which were analogous to those describing the journey the *mystai* undertook on the so-called *eikas*, i.e., 'the twentieth day' of the Attic month of Boedromion, to accompany the *hiera* (sacred objects) back to the sanctuary of Demeter and Kore at Eleusis.[9] All the integral elements are present: the procession (*pompē*) in the light of the torches, the joyful singing in the form of the hymns (*melē)* composed by Aristides, the sacred exhilaration the Mysian orator is said to have experienced, the carriage to facilitate the transportation of the *mystae* in the form of the carriage that transports Aristides, the ritual purification in the shape of both the libations at the river and the emesis at home, and, of course, the culmination of the solemn *teletē*, the divine and awe-inspiring *drōmena* of the initiation (ἦν οὖν οὐ μόνον τελετῇ τινι ἐοικός, οὕτω θείων τε καὶ παραδόξων τῶν δρωμένων ὄντων),[10] the auditory epiphany of Asclepius (καὶ τριῶν ἢ τεττάρων ἡμερῶν διαγενομένων γίγνεται φωνὴ δι'ὀνείρατος, ὅτι πέρας τε ἔχοι καὶ ἐπανήκειν δέοι), which came after three or four days and marked the time for the return of the pilgrim.[11]

More to the point, the relational mapping of the sacred journey to Poimenenos and to Aisepos is not restricted to the formal structure of the Eleusinian procession *pompē* and *teletē*. In the same passage, the orator closely maps the emotional impact of the Asclepieian auditory epiphany onto the extreme and often contradictory psychosomatic reactions that initiates to mystery cults were said to have experienced.[12] More precisely, Aristides is said to have experienced an amalgamation of co-existing and conflicting emotions: gladness over a general feeling of mental and physical wellbeing (χαίρειν, ἐν εὐκόλοις εἶναι καὶ τῆς ψυχῆς καὶ τοῦ σώματος) as well as disbelief and fear as to whether it would have even been ever possible for him to live completely free from his illness and fear that something may happen which will render his hopes and expectations completely groundless (ἅμα θ' οἷον ἀπιστεῖν εἴ ποτε ταύτην ἰδεῖν ἐξέσται τὴν ἡμέραν, ἐν ᾗ τις ἐλεύθερον αὐτὸν τῶν τοσούτων πραγμάτων ὄψεται, πρὸς δὲ καὶ δεδιέναι μή πού τι τῶν εἰωθότων αὖθις συμβὰν λυμήνηται ταῖς περὶ τῶν ὅλων ἐλπίσι). In the same vein, his return from Poemanenon is also marked by the simultaneous presence of the contradictory emotions of pleasure and agony (κατεσκεύαστο μὲν οὕτω τὰ τῆς γνώμης καὶ μετὰ τοιαύτης ἡδονῆς ἅμα καὶ ἀγωνίας ἡ ἀναχώρησις ἐγίγνετο).

The whole passage has been wildly misunderstood as meaning that Aristides was ridden with anxiety and insecurity about the duration of this feeling of recovery primarily because he was really worried about whether this freedom from physical pain and discomfort may also coincide with a separation from his divine mentor, his physical and professional life-coach. To put it simply, if illness had opened to Aristides the channel of

direct communication with the divine, it was healing and therapy that threatened to close it. The reader thinks immediately here of Festugière,[13] who was interested in Aristides and his devotion to Asclepius as a paradigmatic expression of his own version of 'personal religion' (Petridou Forthcoming). Positivist reductionist interpretations like the aforementioned one ignore the fact that despite being a chronicle of his lived experience with illness and healing, Aristides' *Hieroi Logoi* are infused with mystery imagery and terminology (Petridou 2020). Illness is widely conceptualised and described as sharing physical boundaries with both life and death, as being between the two states. Illness is thus recast as the liminal period that disrupts healthy life within the community, segregates the sufferer, and prepares them by means of excruciating physical pain and/or mental anguish (the medical equivalent of the Eleusinian *pathos*?) for their reintegration into common healthy life. This end is achieved by the resolution of the medical crisis that is brought about by the epiphany of Asclepius.

The basic similarity that drives the relational matching of medicine onto mysteries and illness onto initiation is, of course, suffering (*pathos/pathein*), which in our passage is further exacerbated by the dangers and the difficulties of sacred travelling. As I have argued elsewhere (Petridou 2020, 2021, 2024), this sort of matching runs through the entirety of the *Hieroi Logoi.* In particular, Aristides appears to conceptualise illness in general, and his two-year period of incubation at the Pergamene Asclepieion (a period which he refers to as the καθέδρα, on which, see above), as a dangerous and, at times, extremely painful initiatory process into a mystery cult of the type that was extremely popular in the Imperial Era.[14] The perception of extreme physical pain and anguish as an initiation rite may not make immediate sense to the clinician or, indeed, the patient of the twenty-first century. However, this view of pain did resonate with the 'lived' bodies of members of the socio-political elite in the Antonine period (cf. also Petridou 2018, 2020, 2023).

4. Conclusions

To pull the threads together, Aristides does not simply cling to his illness because he cannot contemplate a life deprived of Asclepius' continuous support and the self-definition that goes along with it. Rather, it is primarily the way Aristides conceptualises illness as a whole, as a painful initiation, which eventually yields in rewards of profound revelations about his own body and mind, their relationship, and, above all, as a painful initiation which rewards him with perpetual proximity with the divine. It is the relational mapping of medicine onto the mysteric rites (possibly those that took place in Eleusis in honour of the two goddesses) that prompts Aristides to view illness as the means to gain high rewards. What Aristides truly desires, I submit, is not a life of compromised health that would secure a direct line with Asclepius; what he is truly after is a rebirth, that can only be guaranteed by this close conceptual mapping of his illness experience to mystic initiation rites. An intense pilgrimage experience complemented by the ever-present promise of the death of the previous uninitiated self and the birth of the new enlightened self is thus construed in the *Hieroi Logoi* as one of the direct ways that directly facilitates his physical, psychological, and professional recovery.

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Notes

1 Ancient Lived Religion (LAR) perspectives: (Rüpke 2011, 2016, 2018). Cf. also the introduction in the edited volume by (Raja and Rüpke 2015), as well as (Albrecht et al. 2018). Pilgrimage: (Elsner 1992; Coleman and Elsner 1995a, 1995b; Elsner and Rutherford 2005; Galli 2005; Harland 2011; Rutherford 1999, 2000, 2001, 2003, 2012, 2017).

2 Aristides has been repeatedly suspected of insincerity and exaggeration of his pain experience from as early as (Festugière 1954, pp. 13–14) to as late as (Harris 2009, 2016). More importantly, his close engagement with narrating his bodily functions and changes has been repeatedly interpreted as a sign of hypochondria. More on this topic in (Petridou 2019) with further bibliographical references.

3 On the close conceptual mapping of his illness experience to mystery initiation, see also (Petridou 2021).

4 Steph. Byz. s.v. Ποιμανηνόν. On the identification with the modern village of Eski Manyas in modern Turkey, see (Hasluck 1906); (Behr 1968, p. 5, n. 8; Rutherford 2001, p. 51). (Kaufmann and Stauber 1992, pp. 58–81) have compiled a comprehensive catalogue of inscriptions and coins for the area. On recently excavated honorific inscriptions dedicated to Asclepius and Apollo in Eski Manyas, see (Ünver 2016). Other candidates for the Poimanenos include Aisepos at Gunen, or the Tarsius valley in Mysia.

5 Note here how the verb *kathairomai* ('to be cleansed', 'to be purified') operates in both the religious and medical semantic fields.

6 E.g.: Aesch. *Cho.* 249; Soph. *Tr.* 770–771 and 1099; Plat. *Symp.* 218 a; *Sch.E.Ph.*1136. The viper has extremely negative connotations in Greek, where it is often associated with evil and treacherous people, e.g.: *Act.Ap.*28.3; Ev.Matt.3.7.

7 *anonymous* here in the sense of *amythēton* (cannot be told), i.e., the catarrhs were so many that cannot be named. Something similar in *HL* 2. 62: "Then I noticed for the first time the shortness of breath in my chest, and I was attacked by strong fevers and other indescribable/unutterable things (καὶ ἄλλα ἀμύθητα)". For *katarroos* (lit. meaning, down-running stream) as substance running from the head, see *Aph.* 3.12, Plat. *Rep.* 405d and Gal. 7.263. cf. also Arist. *EE* 1221a40 and Alex.Aphr.*in Mete.*197.23.

8 For *sphakelos* as referring to extremely painful spasms or convulsions that attack the head, see *HL.* 3. 1: καὶ σφάκελοι πυρώδεις ἐχώρουν εἰς τὴν κεφαλὴν ἄνω. Cf. also Eur. *Hipp.* 1350–1353: ἀπόλωλα τάλας, οἴμοι μοι. /διά μου κεφαλῆς ᾀσσουσ᾽ ὀδύναι, /κατὰ δ᾽ ἐγκέφαλον πηδᾷ σφάκελος. / σχές, ἀπειρηκὸς σῶμ᾽ ἀναπαύσω; and *PV* 877–80: ἐλελεῦ ἐλελεῦ, / ὑπό μ᾽ αὖ σφάκελος καὶ φρενοπληγεῖς / μανίαι θάλπουσ᾽, οἴστρου δ᾽ ἄρδις. Behr (Behr 1986–1989, p. 435, n. 14) translates σφάκελοι περὶ τὰς φλέβας καὶ τὰ νεῦρα αφτερ συππλψινγ <είς τὴν κεφαλὴν καὶ τάσις> as "pains in my head and the tension in my arteries and tendons" which agrees with Festugière (1969, pp. 82, 138, n. 5) that the combination of *sphakelos* and *phleves* is peculiar. Behr compares our passage with *HL.* 2. 57 where the genitive plural of *phleves* qualifies *kyklōi* in the structure *τάσιν ἐν κύκλῳ*, a tension all around the *phleves* ("and a tension everywhere in my arteries", B. translates). However, I think that Behr's earlier translation as "throbbing of my pulse" is much more to the point, although adding the word 'pulse' may be slightly misleading. Perhaps 'throbbing' alone works better.

9 The 19th of Beodromion was called εἰκάς (=twentieth) because Greeks used to count the beginning of a day from sunset onwards. The procession would reach Eleusis towards the evening of the 19th; i.e., at the start of the twentieth day. More on this topic in Mylonas (1961, p. 256, n. 151). The elaborate procession, with the priestesses of Eleusis in the lead, would escort the *hiera* from the Athenian Eleusinion, through the Agora, to the Dipylon and the temple of Iacchus, the Iaccheion, and then back to Eleusis (Plut. *Arist.* 27). In the Iaccheion they would find Iacchus in the form of his wooden statue. The youthful god, often depicted holding torches and wearing hunting boots, would lead the mystae to their final destination, the Eleusinian Telesterion. Clinton (1986, p. 70) and Mansfeld (1985, pp. 434–37) argue in favour of two separate ephebic processions, one that would escort the *hiera* back to Eleusis on the 19th of Boedromion, and one other that would escort the Iacchus' statue and the *mystae* to Eleusis the next day, that is on the 20th of Boedromion. More on the debate in Parker (2005, p. 348). Cf. also Bremmer (2014, pp. 1–20) and Petridou (2018) with more bibliography.

10 On *drōmena* in mystery cults, esp. in that of Eleusis see (Mylonas 1961, pp. 261–72; Burkert 1987, pp. 89–114; Bremmer 2014, pp. 1–20); and Belayche (2021).

11 The road to Eleusis, of course, was covered on foot, but Aristides himself is mounted on a carriage (καθήμενος ἐπὶ τοῦ ζεύγους). However, we also know already that from the fifth century onwards some people travelled in carriages. More on this issue in (Mylonas 1961, p. 252).

12 The reader may be thinking here of the contradictory emotions in the initiatory rite described by Plutarch Fr. 178 = Stobaeus IV.52.49: πλάναι τὰ πρῶτα καὶ περιδρομαὶ κοπώδεις καὶ διὰ σκότους τινὲς ὕποπτοι πορεῖαι καὶ ἀτέλεστοι, εἶτα πρὸ τοῦ τέλους αὐτοῦ τὰ δεινὰ πάντα, φρίκη καὶ τρόμος καὶ ἱδρὼς καὶ θάμβος. 'At first there is wandering, and wearisome roaming, and through darkness fearful travelling with no end in sight; then, just before the end, there is every sort of suffering, shudder and trembling, as well as perspiring and amazement'. Lucius in Apuleius' *Metamorphoses* (11.7) has analogous mixed reactions to Isis' epiphany: "With mingled emotions of fear and joy I arose, very much in sweat, utterly amazed by so clear presence of the powerful goddess" (tr. Walsh); pauore et gaudio ac dein sudore nimio permixtus exurgo summeque miratus deae potentis tam claram praesentiam.

13 Festugière (1954, p. 86): "Let us imagine a sick man who places all his confidence not in a doctor, but in a god. The god appears before him at night, gives him directions, usually paradoxical, which account to a series of ordeals. That he may be closer to the

god, the sick man takes up residence in the sanctuary itself . . . The sick man obeys all orders blindly (emphasis mine); and since, the imagination plays a large part in certain chronic illnesses, particularly when the patient is of a nervous temperament, the orders actually do him good, bodily and especially mentally. They help him; but he is not cured. Better say: they help him, and therefore he is not cured, because fundamentally he does not want to be cured. To be cured would mean no longer to enjoy the presence and companionship of the god . . . Thus, he comes to be no longer able to do without the god, and by the same token to be no longer able to do without his sickness". Kindt (2015, Forthcoming) offers a more sober reassessment of the concept of 'personal religion' and does justice to its situational and generic contexts.

[14] *Kathedra*: *Or*. 48.70; 49.44 Keil. On the word's playful, but no less meaningful, semantic oscillation between 'inertia' and 'professorial seat', see also (Behr 1968, p. 26; Behr 1986–1989, p. 432, n. 115; Petsalis-Diomidis 2010, pp. 113, 141; Downie 2013, pp. 14–16, 156–57). On the popularity of the mystery cults in the imperial era, see (Van Nuffelen 2007, 2011, 2014).

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