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ASCLEPIUS, CULT OF. Asclepius was the most important god of healing in the Greco-Roman world. In the 1st century C.E. and even more in the 2d, his benefactions as a miraculous healer and divine guide were celebrated in hundreds of temples across the Roman empire. Inevitably, as Christianity emerged proclaiming traditions of Jesus as a miraculous healer, Jesus' virtues were compared with the powers and widely attested wonders of Asclepius.

Asclepius was probably originally an earth deity worshiped before the Greek migrations in the town of Tricca in Thessaly (Hom. *Il.* 2.729-31), though later Epidaurus claimed to be his birthplace (Paus. 2.26.1-27.6). His name was spelled in a variety of ways in its earliest Greek forms, including Aiskalapios, which gave rise to the Latin form, Aesculapius. The etymology of the name is obscure, but by the 4th century B.C.E. a tradition of interpretive word-plays had begun to emerge (Plut. *Mor.* 845B). In the 1st century C.E., for example, Cornutus says that "Asclepius derived his name from healing soothingly (*epios*) and from deferring the withering (*aposhlestis*) that comes with death" (*Compend.* 33).

Asclepius was incorporated into Greek mythology with characteristics of both hero and deity. He was the son of Apollo and the mortal Coronis, according to the most common myth. In a jealous rage Apollo killed Coronis but saved Asclepius from her womb, and gave him to the centaur Chiron, who taught him all the healing arts (Pind. *Pyth.* 3; Ov., *Met.* 2.542-648). Asclepius had a family, which included the heroic sons Podalirius and Machaon, whom Homer identified as physicians among the Greeks at Troy (Hom. *Il.* 2.729-33; 11.833-36). His wife and daughters were his familiar companions in his various sanctuaries and were believed to personify aspects of the healing arts: Epione, his wife; Hygieia, his most prominent daughter; and other daughters, Panacea, Akeso, Iaso, Aigle, and others. Asclepius' skill was such, according to the myth, that he even raised a mortal from the dead and might have done the same for all humankind, but Zeus forestalled granting humanity such salvation from death by striking Asclepius down with a thunderbolt. In his death, however, Asclepius was elevated to the status of a god, and it is as a full deity with both chthonic and celestial characteristics, that he functions in the historical Asclepius cult centers. He was always closely linked to Apollo, sharing the epithet "Paeon," and in the imperial period sometimes even identified with Zeus.

The expansion of the Asclepius cult began in the 5th century B.C.E., especially from Epidaurus, where Asclepius was associated with the ancient cult of Apollo Maleatas. Epidaurus actively promoted the cult and established branch sanctuaries in numerous cities. Perhaps most important was the introduction of the cult into Athens in 420 B.C.E., under the patronage of the aged Sophocles, who

was said to have provided his home as a sanctuary of the god until his temple on the S slope of the Acropolis was finished (*JG II*², 4960a; *Ety. Magn.* s.v. *dexion*). Sophocles composed a paean to Asclepius that continued in use at least into the 3d century C.E. Athenian influence may have contributed to the expansive building program that enhanced the sanctuary at Epidaurus throughout the 4th century. In the early 4th century Epidaurus fostered a branch sanctuary in Pergamon and later in the century sponsored another just inside the city walls of Corinth.

In 293 B.C.E., when a plague struck Rome, the Sibylline Books—perhaps supported by an oracle from Delphi—instructed the Romans to bring Asclepius from Epidaurus to Rome. He was brought, according to legend, in the form of a sacred serpent and chose the Tiber Island for his sanctuary (Livy 10.47; Ov. *Met.* 15:622-745). The only major sanctuary of Asclepius that tried to maintain independence from Epidaurus was that at Cos, the home of Hippocrates, which claimed to have been established directly from Tricca in the 6th century B.C.E. In Ptolemaic Egypt, Asclepius flourished through his identification with the legendary deified physician Imhotep (Imuthes).

The Asclepius cults went through major periods of expansion in the 4th and 3d centuries B.C.E. and again in the 2d century C.E. During the earlier period, Epidaurus, as the god's greatest center, not only expanded its role as place of pilgrimage for healing—promoted in official inscriptions recounting scores of the god's miracles—but also strove to become a Panhellenic center like Delphi or Olympia. In addition to buildings directly related to the cult, Epidaurus added a gymnasium, stadium, baths, and its justly famous 14,000-seat theater. Its wealth was attested in the excellent construction of such buildings as the round Tholos and in the colossal gold and ivory cult statue of the seated Asclepius by the Parian sculptor Thrasymedes. The god's Zeus-like visage expressed grandeur and benevolence; he held a staff in his left hand and extended his right over the head of his sacred serpent (Paus. 2.27.2). In the Roman period, Epidaurus again expanded, adding Roman baths, a music hall, and hotel facilities with 160 rooms.

Epidaurus early developed the regimen of incubation in the sanctuary that was widely used throughout the history of the cult. Typically a pilgrim might undergo a 3-day period of purification with baths and abstinence from sexual intercourse and certain foods such as goat meat and cheese. Afterward, he brought an animal sacrifice to Apollo and offerings of honey cakes to other divinities. He then might sacrifice a piglet to Asclepius and give an offering of money appropriate to his own wealth. As he entered the sleeping chamber (*abaton* or *enkoimeterion*), where he hoped and expected to receive either immediate healing or some helpful prescription from the god in a dream, he would bring offerings of cakes to Fortune, Memory, and Law. The person slept wearing a sacred laurel wreath and left it behind on his bed in the morning (Burkert 1985: 267-68). What followed depended on the dreams experienced by the pilgrim and might vary from an instant cure to a prescribed dietary regimen to an extended period of apparently nonsensical treatments. In any case, the pilgrim was expected to complete his visit to the sanctuary by bringing a thank-offering to the god.

Anchor Bible Dictionary, ed. David Freedman

The effectiveness of Asclepius' ministry throughout the Greco-Roman world is attested by the archaeological discovery of hundreds of votive tablets and graphic representations of portions of the body healed by the god. The cult gave emphasis to the needs of the individual and promoted a personal devotion to the god. Such attachment is apparent in numerous inscriptions, but appears most vividly in *Sacred Tales* of orator Aelius Aristides, who was incapacitated by a variety of maladies and spent many months at the Asclepieion in Pergamon during the 2d century C.E. In that period the sanctuary at Pergamon reached its greatest prosperity. Like Epidaurus it had grown with the affluence of the times and the popularity of its deity to be a large health spa complex, and supported a school of medicine led by Galen, the leading physician of the period.

In pagan debates with Christianity, Asclepius as savior and healer played a distinctive role. Both Celsus and later Julian portrayed his activity as clearly parallel to Christ. Christian polemic disparaged many details of the myths attached to Asclepius, and even when powerful deeds were conceded to him (such as driving the plague out of Rome), these were attributed to the power of the devil, since Asclepius himself was a demon. In spite of Christian persecution, the cult continued until the 5th century C.E.

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ASENATH (PERSON) [Heb 'āsēnat]. Egyptian daughter of Potiphera, priest of On, given by Pharaoh to the patriarch Joseph as wife, and mother of his sons Manasseh and Ephraim (Gen 41:45, 50-52; 46:20). While the Hebrew Bible simply identifies Asenath as Joseph's Egyptian wife and mother of his sons, later Jewish traditions sought to explain how one of the most revered patriarchs could marry the foreign daughter of a pagan priest (Aptowitzer 1924:239-306). By far the longest of these traditions is an anonymous Gk work, JOSEPH AND ASENETH, (*Jos. Asen.*) composed between the 1st cent. B.C.E. and the 2d

cent. C.E., probably in Egypt (*OTP* 2: 177-201). What is striking about this work, vis-à-vis the biblical narrative, is that the female character is as fully developed as that of the patriarch Joseph, if not more so. Asenath is the beautiful 18-year-old virgin daughter of Pentephres, priest of Heliopolis and satrap of Pharaoh. A willful and headstrong woman, Asenath spurns all her suitors, preferring the seclusion of her tower to worship her many idols. After rejecting her father's request for her to marry Joseph, Asenath later falls in love with Joseph upon seeing him. Joseph, however, refuses Asenath's love, insisting that he cannot kiss a foreign woman who worships dumb idols and eats at their table. Asenath then repents of her idols and her arrogance and converts to the God of the Hebrews. She can now become a suitable mate for the most pious and chaste of the patriarchs, Joseph.

The name Asenath is characteristically Egyptian. The first 2 consonants have the meaning, "she belongs to . . ." followed probably by the goddess Neit. This is a common name of the Middle Kingdom and first Intermediate (2000-1500) (*ISBE* 1: 314; Kidner *Genesis TOTC*, 197).

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ASHAN (PLACE) [Heb 'āsān]. Var. BOR-ASHAN. A city which was originally part of the allotment of the tribe of Judah (Josh 15:42, but see below) and which was later given to the tribe of Simeon (Josh 19:7, 1 Chr 4:32). The site has been associated with Khirbet Asan, NW of Beer-sheba (see *IDB* 1:248). This site remains unknown archaeologically (Boling and Wright *Joshua* AB, 438). A variant, Bor-Ashan ("well of Ashan"), occurs at 1 Sam 30:30 as one of the cities to which David sent spoil after his defeat of the Amalekites.

Ashan served as a Levitical city according to 1 Chr 6:44-Eng 6:59. A difficulty arises when one notices that some mss of the LXX have *asan* (the Gk form of Ashan) at Josh 21:16 rather than Ain as in the MT. Since Joshua 21 lists the cities given to the tribe of Levi, this would reinforce the placing of Ashan with the Levitical cities. The relationship between Ain and Ashan in the other city-lists, however, is unclear.

Another problem arises when one compares the Simeonite city-lists of Joshua 19 and 1 Chronicles 4 with the Judahite list of Joshua 15. The terms of the scholarly debate on this comparison center on whether Ashan rightfully belongs at Josh 15:42 (it is missing from the LXX at this point) or at Josh 15:32 on the basis of comparisons with the Simeonite lists. In favor of the first position, see Kallai-Kleinman 1958:159 n. 1. The case for the second position is made by Cross and Wright 1956:214. This debate has implications for the administrative location of Ashan. If Ashan belongs at Josh 15:42, then it was grouped with the cities of the Shephelah, or Lowland, region (cf. Josh 15:33). If Ashan belongs at v 32, however, one would place its administrative district further S (cf. Josh 15:21).