ΠΕΠΡΑΓΜΕΝΑ
Θ' ΔΙΕΘΝΟΥΣ ΚΡΗΤΟΛΟΓΙΚΟΥ ΣΥΝΕΔΡΙΟΥ

ΑΝΑΤΥΠΟ

ΕΤΑΙΡΙΑ ΚΡΗΤΙΚΩΝ ΙΣΤΟΡΙΚΩΝ ΜΕΛΕΤΩΝ

ΗΡΑΚΛΕΙΟ 2006
Although he sub-titled his article 'Preliminary Research', Umberto Bultrighini left little for himself or for anyone else to add. The 69 pages of his article make thorough use of the collection of testimonies for Aesculapius throughout the Mediterranean by the Edelsteins as well as Nikolaos Platon’s seminal publication on the observance of the rites of Aesculapius. Much more recently, Milena Melfi has written her thesis on the Aesculapium at Lebena and given a series of impressive presentations, including one last year at Heraklion and another at this congress. Serious study of the remains had not been undertaken for decades and thus it is most welcome that she has engaged in such detailed research of a site whose importance had made it too long ignored.

1 Umberto Bultrighini, 'Divinit6 della salute nella Creta ellenistica e romana. Richerche preliminari', RCCM 35 (1993) 49-118. I should particularly like to thank Milena Melfi for her assistance, as well as my Research Assistant, Rebecca Muich. This paper, as so much else, would not have been possible without Jane Francis.


7 Their understanding clearly goes well beyond my own earlier work, primarily on the
It is thus possible to extrapolate from their work to address an issue raised by the Edelsteins in discussing the veneration of Aesculapius as a god, rather than as a hero (II. 108):

The cult of Aesculapius ... is first to be found in such cities of Greece as were of small influence in the religious or political affairs of the ancient world. Nevertheless the god soon lost his merely provincial character. His worship spread everywhere; it became one of the most renowned among the many ancient cults; it outlasted most of them; it was the hated enemy and dreaded competitor of Christianity.

They then investigate the cult of Aesculapius in terms of what features the pre-basilica Christian community found objectionable. It would seem that they are looking retrospectively, that is, from the end of the process towards its beginning with all of the dangers of anachronism it entails. One might learn more if instead the inscriptions, architecture, statues, and literary references were sifted for what features gave resilience and flexibility to the cult of Aesculapius at a time when other pagan practices proved brittle.

1. Multi-purpose facility

The Edelsteins point out correctly that the cult of Aesculapius was found first in small and politically unimportant centers. The testimonies they collected over-look a significant aspect of the cult of Aesculapius which

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metrical inscriptions of the sanctuary; cp., George W.M. Harrison, *The Romans and Crete*. Amsterdam, Hakkert, 1994, 170-76.

My term, not theirs, but the Edelsteins are careful to distinguish between the actions and creed of the Christian church during its formative centuries from its creed and actions after it became the exclusive religion of the empire and before the Catholic schism.

Investigation of this topic has additionally proven difficult since it has attracted unusual theories. One need only cite a study which claims the bearded Christ was in imitation of Aesculapius; cp. Erich Dinkler, *Christus und Asklepios: Zum Christustypus der polychromen Platten im Museo Nazionale Romano*. Heidelberg: Carl Winter, 1980.

One might note especially the preface to volume I; to be fair to the Edelsteins, one must acknowledge the historical circumstances in which their texts were gathered and the book written, and also that a considerable amount of information has come to light on Aesculapius in the last fifty years. Johns Hopkins is to be congratulated for giving sanctuary not only to the Edelsteins but also to Doro Levi, Antonino di Vita's predecessor as Director of the Scuola archeologia italiana di Atene.
made it particularly appealing to the civic life of the late Classical/Hellenistic πόλις, and ultimately to the Roman bureaucracy. Treaties were often put on public display in front of Temples to Apollo, one need only think of Gortyna, yet smaller centers seem to have used the Sanctuary to Aesculapius for the exhibition of treaties, such as Lebena itself, Arcades, Olus, Ierapetra, and Itanos. Inscriptions found in Aesculapeia in Cretan centers other than Lebena tend to be treaties, rather than sanationes. For Lebena, however, almost all inscriptions from 67 B.C. on record cures; the exceptions are all decrees honoring donors of funds for reconstruction.11

2. Compatibility with imperial outlook
The cult of Aesculapius also benefitted from practices within the cult from the Hellenistic period which harmonized with imperial policy and initiatives. These were observances which were already in place; if the cult had consciously changed to make itself more compatible with imperial propaganda, reasonably it would have undermined support among its core adherents at the time and it would as likely have drawn Christian ire even earlier than it did.

One notes in passing, for example, that Aesculapius, like numerous of the emperors, was deified. Even though the model for deification of the emperors was Romulus and Julius Caesar, it certainly would not have bothered the emperors that there was a tradition of divine kingship among their eastern possessions and that even the Greeks had several examples of apotheosis. The Edelsteins make much of the change in status for Aesculapius from hero to god without drawing the further conclusion that

11 So IC lxvii.54 from the Empire in Latin. The evidence, however, is not as decisive as one might wish since the number of inscriptions falls off dramatically after the earthquake of 46 BC. One would be tempted to take this as a sign of the decay of the cult, except for the number of Roman repairs, and more significantly improvements. There must be the suspicion that during the Roman Empire dedications were more frequently pinakes (wooden votive tablets, sanides in the Cretan dialect). The pattern for inscriptions on stone at Lebena closely parallels that at Epidaurus: the second century BC is the high point with a steady decline after that. Even so, the vitality of the cult and sanctuary at Epidaurus during the Roman Empire is beyond question. One can make similar comparisons between the high point of inscriptions (ii BC) and high point of the influence of the cult (AD ii) with the Aesculapium at Athens; cf. Sara B. Aleshire, The Athenian Aesculapium: Their people, their dedications, and the inventories (Amsterdam: Gieben, 1989) 16-19.
such a deification would have been to the liking of Augustus and his successors. As someone who forfeited his life in the service of mankind, Aesculapius would have been an extremely sympathetic figure in contrast to heroes such as Hercules.

Secondly, there was a tradition which received emphasis starting about the time of the Severans which stressed the connection between Apollo as father/mentor healer and Aesculapius as his son and successor as healer. It would seem inescapable that statue groups with Hygieia, Apollo, and Aesculapius would have brought to mind immediately dynastic coinage and groups which emphasized the connection of the emperor and his heir through the presence of his wife. At a later date, Apollo and Aesculapius could have been a subliminal affirmation of the tetrarchic system of an Augustus with his Caesar protege.

One should not make a claim that there was ever a concerted and officially sanctioned attempt to link the emperor to Aesculapius, or later the junior Caesar with Aesculapius; even so one might observe that Aesculapius as a human who became a god would have been attractive to imperial apologists. Much more interesting than the emperor and Aesculapius was imperial propaganda which linked the empress with Hygieia, devoted daughter of Aesculapius. Mary T. Boatwright notes that the iconography of several statues of imperial women is that of Hygieia. There are indications that Livia liked to have statue busts of herself as a

12 Hercules had similarly been admitted among the gods but his cult was associated with Marc Antony. Coins of Marc Antony heralded his claim of descent from Hercules, and the Hercules fighting Amazons on the pediment of the Temple to Apollo as repaired by Sosius in 33 BC is transparently Antony opposing the women who (so Antony’s faction claimed) dominated the young Octavian.

13 Recorded significantly in Hippocrates, Epistula 17 [Edelsteins T463].

14 The statuary is adduced by Marguerite Bieber, ‘A Bronze-Statuette in Cincinnati and his place in the history of Asklepios-Types’, AmerPhilSoc 101 (1957) 70-92. The possible link between art and policy was not drawn by her.

15 Groups, rather than individual statues, are typical in the later Empire, although most often Aesculapius and Hygieia or Apollo and Hygieia. For a discussion, see Sobel (1990) 48-53.


mature woman placed on types identifiable by attributes as Salus (i.e. Hygeia),\textsuperscript{18} Iustitia, Pietas, and Felicitas.

*Testimonia* to Hygeia belongs overwhelmingly, although not exclusively, to the Empire.\textsuperscript{19} No single author makes a specific statement linking the empress to *Salus/Hygeia*, and so it is to physical evidence that one looks for support. Nearly every emperor minted coins to Salus,\textsuperscript{20} and beyond the use of coins announcing imperial policy, during the Empire coins could be and were punctured and worn as talismans.\textsuperscript{21} An *aureus* of the reign of Marcus Aurelius has Faustina Augusta as Hygieia with the caption *Salus Augusti*, while a denarius of Hadrian has Sabina as Hygieia, and a sestertius of Commodus of AD 180/183 has Crispina, his wife, as Hygieia.\textsuperscript{22}

3. Expansion of Cult. *Syncretism*l*absorption*l*synergasia with other deities*

Parallel to the depiction of female members of the imperial family as *Salus/Hygeia*, one observes that Aesculapius and Hygieia in the Empire become tutelary deities of cities, side by side with *Tychel*Fortuna, or sometimes perhaps replacing them.\textsuperscript{23} Inscriptions to Aesculapius as

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\textsuperscript{18} Macrobius, *Saturnalia* 1.20.1-4 in referring to statues makes it clear that the Romans identified *Salus* with *Hygeia* and that the two were not merely equivalents of one another. His astral symbolism equating Aesculapius with the sun and Hygieia with the moon is very typical of his time which saw a syncretism of sun worship with numerous male deities, as well as the emperor himself.

\textsuperscript{19} There are exceptions: Benseddek claims that the cult of Hygieia in the western part of North Africa is Hellenistic in origin and disappears with the coming of the Romans; cp. Naëra Benseddek, ‘Esclape et Hygie en Afrique: classicisme et originalité’, *AntAfr* 33 (1977) 143-54.

\textsuperscript{20} See Gerald M. Hart, *Aesclepius, the God of Medicine*. London: Royal Society of Medicine Press, 2000, 29-30 with fig. 13, a coin of Maximinus with caption *Salus Augusti*; p. 117 lists in a table 46 emperors with known *Salus* coinage.

\textsuperscript{21} *Ibid.* 24 fig. 10 (AD 207) identified by Hart as Apollo Medicus, but coin type is closely similar to the ‘Aesculapius adolescens’ type, known from Cyrene (Hart 25 fig. 11) and elsewhere. For his discussion of coins as good luck pendants, see pp. 104-107.

\textsuperscript{22} Sobel (1990) catalogue 122.4, 122.15, and 122.5 respectively. The case is not proven and it is right to note the reservations of Melfi on this point.

\textsuperscript{23} I take this as a sign not so much of syncretism and winnowing of the number of pagan deities as an indication of the increasingly unsettled conditions of the Empire and an
Soter and Polioukhos are known in other parts of the Greek-speaking Mediterranean and a statue type of Hygieia in the posture of Tyche is found in parts of the Roman Empire which were not formerly Greek possessions. More informative are a number of syncretisms in which the cult of Aesculapius and Hygieia is renewed and strengthened by taking on the numina or nomina of other deities. One very intriguing statue from Epidauros, which Sobel dates to the Antonine period, depicts Hygieia with her legs together with a single snake winding around her body in a manner very suggestive of the lion-headed god statuary in the cult of Mithras. Such an identification, if credible, is much more significant than Hygieia types in which she has replaced a closely analogous native healing goddess, such as Gallic Sirona.

increase in the number of mass disasters such as earthquake and plague. This certainly would be consistent with the testimonies in Edelsteins T 463-466.

Cp., e.g., IC I.xvii.19 and 26. The vocative Σοτερ in IC I.xvii.24 in Guarducci's translation refers to the deity of Dreams (Onar), and she would place a small statue to Onar on top of the inscribed plinth. In the inscription, however, "Οναρ ιερος introduces a genitive absolute as the last word of the hexameter which then is completed in the distich. It would be highly unusual for the antecedant of the dative reflexive σοτερ and its vocative also to be the subject of a genitive absolute. In my view Soter and soi should refer to Aesculapius, and the statue on the plinth should be that of Aesculapius. Guarducci herself seems to have had reservations since her note indicates that there are no other known surviving statues to Onar.

See Giacomo Manganaro, 'Divinità salvatrice e protettrice della città a Messina', ZPE 113 (1996) 82-84. The small altar has ΑΟΣΤΗΣΙΟΣ | ΣΟΤΕΡ | ΥΓΙΕΙΑ | ΠΟΛΙΟΥΚΗΣ on one side and Α Thor | ΑΘΡΟΥΙΑΡ | ΑΝΤΟΝΕΙΝΟ | ΕΥΘΕΟΕΙ | π<πριπ> π<πριππ> on the other.

See Sobel (supra n. 25) 29 and catalogue 98-99. She dates the prototype of the group to the fourth century BC, but most of the 14 items in her catalog are imperial. Unfortunately Sobel (88 #7) places the Hygieia statue associated with the altar in Messina (n. prior) in her Hope type. The one possible inscription in Lebena (IC I.32 -] I ΘΕΟΙΣ | -ΙΟΙΣ) is imperial in date but too fragmentary to be useful or even certain.

Paganism would seem to be moving in the direction of monotheism (or at the least trinitarianism) much as Isis had absorbed the attributes of the Memphitic Egyptian deities by the time of the composition and recording of the Phylae hymn.


The cult of Aesculapius absorbed numerous other local cults during the middle Empire, particularly healing ones, and so inscriptions are known to Imhotep Aesculapius in Egypt, Eshmun Aesculapius in Phoenicia, Zeus Aesculapius at Pergamum and even Jupiter Aesculapius at Rome. In this regard the small inscribed column to Serapis Aesculapius at Lebena (IC I.27) is indicative of a process apparently taking place throughout the Empire. Dated to the third or forth centuries AD, it was apparently an end of office dedication by Vedius Alkisthenes, accountant (συνήγορος) to the sanctuary.

4. Au courant/Consistent with contemporary values. Magic, mysticism, cures
Performing miracle cures was one of the signs of a divinely sanctioned ruler. Examples span the centuries from Perikles in the Life by Plutarch through Vespasian (Tacitus, Histories 4.81-83). While Vespasian was watching political events unfold in Italy from the safety of Alexandria, his cure of a blind man and a cripple was the event which made him determined to declare himself princeps, since he was informed that it was a sign of the favor of Serapis, god of healing. Although writing about the fifth century BC, Plutarch was the early major figure in the Second Sophistic and a contemporary of Tacitus. His writing as much as that of Tacitus reflects contemporary values, among which is a strong interest in magic, mysticism, and miracle cures.

It is within the lifetimes of Plutarch and Tacitus that Apollonius of Tyana visited the Sanctuary to Aesculapius at Lebena as recorded by Philostratus (Vita Apollonii 4.34) during the reign of Claudius. Increasing interest in magical cures resulted in a number of other pagan cults discovering medical benefits bestowed by a particular god or goddess, or touting ones already known but not perhaps widely celebrated. Such an increased interest would doubtless have benefitted the sanctuary of Aesculapius at Lebena, as well as healing sanctuaries everywhere.

It is during this time too that mantic dreams, which had always been part of the rite of Aesculapius in his several centers, became an

31 Hart, op. cit., n. 20 178.
33 Cp., e.g., IC I.xvii.14a of the second century BC.
increasingly popular part of folk medicine. Stories abound in the *Historia Augusta* and histories of the reigns of the last pagan and first Christian emperors. The one inscription at Lebena (*IC* I.xvii.24) to "Ovop is datable to the third century AD, and is one of the few metrical inscriptions on the site. The small plinth once carried a statue, below which was inscribed a couplet giving thanks for the restoration of sight.34

Changing within the framework of continuity allowed the sanctuary to respond to the tastes of the Romans, and perhaps also afforded an opportunity to introduce new and different cures.35 Comparison of inscriptions from the Hellenistic period which name *farmacopia* and medical instruments compare closely with ones from the Roman period. This makes sense since once a cure was found for an ailment it should cure that ailment regardless of the epoch in which it occurred. Nevertheless, there are some important distinctions to which attention has already been drawn in the past such as Roman penchant for wine in potions, pepper, and heated water. All of these items occur in inscriptions from Lebena.

5. Geographical Placement

Location might be the greatest reason for the importance and long duration of the cult of Aesculapius at Lebena. At first it might seem a fairly out-of-the way place but it had proximity to a considerable number of medicinal herbs which notoriously lose potency during transport and other favored medical products. Pliny the Elder made a list of the most effective medicinal ingredients and which areas of the Mediterranean had the best sources. For seventeen of the items he listed, Crete was one of the three best sources, and significantly adjudged best for the two most used products, honey and anise.36 An apothecary at the source of the medicines would have stood a chance to enrich itself greatly and attract pilgrims from all over.

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34 An abaton is mentioned in *IC* I.xvii.11B.2, in which pilgrims would sleep in order to receive a vision of their cure, and potentially should be understood for ἄδυτον at *IC* I.xvii.15.7 since an adyton is not normally a feature of a temple to Aesculapius.

35 M. Guarducci, "Guarigioni miracolose (sanationes)", TITLE OF mag 158.

36 Harrison, *Romans and Crete*, 109-18. Many of these herbs would appear to have grown wild in the maquis of Crete and were made economically viable through price supports and subventions established by Augustus who recognized the need for plentiful and inexpensive medicine.
Further, each of the Aesculapeia which prospered the longest had a
distinct geographical niche, and dominated its region: Pergamum in
Anatolia, Cos in the Aegean, Epidaurus in the Peloponnese, Rome in Italy,
and Lebena, which served not just Crete but the north African littoral
opposite to Crete. One dedication at Lebena (*IC I.33*) is by someone from
Alexandria, but this would not seem unusual since its second century BC
date makes it contemporary with *hadra* of Cretan mercenaries serving in
Egypt. More informative are the three statues, one statuette, and one
group of Aesculapius and Hygieia from Cyrene, all of imperial date. The
statues and statuette are of types known in Lebena and Gortyn and there
might thus be reason to connect them to Lebena. Pausanias (II. 67. 9)
records a tradition that the sanctuary of Aesculapius at Balagrai in the
Pentapolis came from Epidaurus and in turn Balagrai colonized Lebena.
The information is given in the context of indicating the different animals
for sacrifice at Epidaurus and Balagrai; Pausanias had noted elsewhere
that the Cretan choice was the same as the Libyan one, hence his suppos-
tion. Such a filiation rather than direct colonization from Epidaurus goes
against the normal practice and flies in the face of two inscriptions from
Crete. Philostratus in his *Life of Apollonius of Tyana* makes a direct com-
parison of the markets served by the Aesculapeia at Pergamum and
Lebena, and mentions prominently πολλοι δὲ καὶ Λιβυων as second in
number of pilgrims only after Cretans. One would posit that the Cy-
renaican Aesculapeion had either declined in importance or that the
renown of the sanctuary at Lebena overshadowed it.

Because of evidence of the popularity of the Aesculapium at Lebena by
citizens of the Libyan Pentapolis, it would seem fairly obvious that the
Aesculapion at Lebena was a point of unity and exchange with Greeks in
the Cyrenaica, and thus an important consideration in the decision to
combine Crete and Cyrenaic into a province. By way of confirmation one
might observe that the decline of the sanctuary at Lebena gains great

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37 Athens is substituted for Cos in the lists of Aleshire and Maria Girone, but importantly
Lebena, with Rome, Epidaurus, and Pergamum is on all of the lists of the most
important Aesculapeia during the Empire.

38 See P.J. Callaghan and R.E. Jones, 'Hadra Hydriae and Central Crete: A Fabric
Analysis’, *BSA* 80 (1985) 1-17, and P.J. Callaghan, 'The Trefoil Style and Second-

39 Sobel (1990) catalogue 88#6, 90#10, 90#11, 91#4, and 108#3
momentum after the re-organization of the provinces by Diocletian. At that moment when Crete and the Cyrenaica were split into separate provinces dedications in Lebena from the north African littoral cease.

6. Secular and embracing

There may be reason to believe that in small centers veneration of the cult of the emperor could happen in the vicinity of Temples to Aesculapius. If true, this could be one explanation of an extremely fragmentary inscription at Lebena (IC I. 40), dated to the first century AD, which preserves little other than Αὐγουστη[λον].\textsuperscript{40} If one views the cult of Roma et Augustus as a focus of civic loyalty and patriotism, as Ando\textsuperscript{41} rightly does in his recent book, then the inclusion of it within the precinct of Aesculapius in small towns would emphasize the essentially secular and inclusive nature of the cult of Aesculapius.

Conclusion

Two points seem to become clear: first, the cult of Aesculapius at Lebena enjoyed a popularity out of proportion to the political importance of Crete and the cult of Aesculapius in general seems to have survived longer and stronger than most of its pagan relatives. These unquestionable observations need an explanation. For that a model is needed which brings together six factors, no one of which is sufficient in and of itself, to explain the two observations. But when the advantages which accrued either intentionally or passively to (1) having a facility with several uses, not just one, (2) having a cult which was compatible with imperial dogma, (3) having a cult which was more likely to absorb other cults than be absorbed, (4) having a cult whose core practices were very conducive to folk practices

\textsuperscript{40} IC I. 39 is by a certain slave of Rufus, a chaser of metal, from Selinus (as I would emend and read Σελεύσιος as a attributive nominative adjective instead of Ἰούς). Since by a law of Claudius slaves left at a sanctuary of Aesculapius were freed, this inscription could possibly be construed as equivalent to one of manumission. IC I. 39 has been dated by Guarducci to the first century BC, although a later date is not impossible.

and beliefs of the early and middle empire, (5) having geographical positioning both for transport of pilgrims and supply of essential materials, and (6) having a cult which was largely secular and unifying – when all these advantages are added, the special position enjoyed by the healing sanctuaries of Aesculapius becomes explicable.

Second, it has been written in all of the handbooks\textsuperscript{42} that Crete was one of the most conservative regions of the Roman Empire. This statement has been printed and reprinted without argument or documentation. When, however, one compares what was occurring at Lebena with other sanctuaries to Aesculapius, and when one compares the society of visitors and officials at Lebena with the rest of the Empire, the conclusion must be that at least the central, commercial part of Crete was as prosperous in social, material, and spiritual aspects as any part of the rest of the Mediterranean.