THE TEMPLES AND RITUAL OF ASKLEPIOS

LECTURE I

LADIES AND GENTLEMEN,

You are aware that during the last twenty-five years the energy and enthusiasm in archæological research of such men as Dr. Schliemann have not merely thrown light on historic and prehistoric Greece, but have also awakened a keener enthusiasm among classical scholars and in those Societies which in various countries are devoted to archæological investigation. Even Governments have been influenced and induced to help on the progress of these highly interesting studies. The Germans have spent large sums in the excavation of Olympia and Pergamos. The French government has wisely and liberally incurred a considerable expenditure in the excavation of Delphi and on other important works. The Greek Government, aided by members of the Greek Archæological Society, has devoted money and an infinitude of labour to investigations of the classic wealth of Greece and the Greek colonies.

In these three instances, although the amount paid may be trivial when viewed in the national balance-sheet, its archæological equivalent is great. These three countries have not only made the whole world their debtor by the liberality they have displayed, but each has quickened and stimulated a taste for learning and for art among its own people.

One or two other nationalities have had a share in the progress made, though of a more private and individual kind. The American School has explored the Argive Heræon and certain other classical sites, and our own British School in Athens, whose chief wealth has been the enthusiasm of its

members, has done much, when we consider the difficulties to be met and the lack of that sufficient pecuniary support with which other countries have endowed their representatives.

Although considerable interest is felt by the English public in regard to much of the work just referred to, one important field of investigation has remained comparatively unknown in this country—I mean the exploration of the shrines of Asklepios, the god of healing, at Epidauros and Athens, about which I am to have the honour of speaking to you. As the time allotted is brief, it is needful to avoid all prefatory remarks, and to restrict this paper almost entirely to a consideration of the new discoveries and to inferences from them. As a matter of fact, apart from the Hippocratic writings there is but scant information as to the sanitary and medical aspects of Greek life in ancient literature. Homer and Pindar have brief references to Epidauros and other sanctuaries of the god; so also have Plato, Hippys of Regium, Strabo, and some of the dramatists, as Aristophanes, and certain of the late Greek writers, especially Pausanias. Under these circumstances most precious are the researches made by the spade.

The pioneer in this inquiry was M. Cavvadias, the eminent archæologist, Ephor of Antiquities and late Minister of Education in the Greek government. To him more than to any one else we owe the important additions lately made to this branch of archæology.

He worked in conjunction with the Greek Archæological Society, and was aided by M. Staïs, the Conservator of the National Museum. Herr Baunack and others helped to restore and decipher the hundreds of inscriptions which were found—a work of no small difficulty.

Various authorities more or less associated with the French School, such as M. Gérard, MM. Defrasse and Lechat, and Prof. Reinach; Dr. Dörpfeld, Prof. Furtwängler, Herr Baunack, Dr. Köchler, and others associated with the German School, have had a share in the work or in recording its results.

Comparatively little has been done by the English, and only a limited amount of description has been published in our language. An interesting paper by Professor Percy Gardner, in his *New Chapters in Greek History*, some valuable references by Miss Jane Harrison and Mrs. Verrall in their *Mythology and Monuments of Ancient Athens*, the admirable notes in Mr.

Frazer's new edition of *Pausanias*, and one or two articles in American journals, such as the *American Antiquarian* and *Cornell Studies*, are among the chief.

For details of the work of the various writers *see* appended list of authorities consulted.

I have to express my acknowledgment to the authorities I have named, but chiefly to M. Cavvadias for his kindness in giving me special facilities in Greece, and for allowing me the use of some of his plates; also to MM. Defrasse and Lechat, and to their publishers, who permit me to show you some of their beautiful restorations. Apart from these the lantern slides I shall show you are from photographs or sketches taken by myself on the scene of the various excavations or in museums.[1]

I. The Hieron of Epidauros

According to tradition, Asklepios, the son of Apollo and Koronis, was born in the Hieron valley, in the Argolic peninsula; the place names still preserve the legend; the hamlet of Koroni commemorates his mother, the hill Titthion owes its name to his having been there suckled by a goat, while on the opposite hill, Kynortion, stood the temple of the Maleatean Apollo.

The Hieron six miles from the town of Epidauros was the chief seat of the worship of Asklepios, though minor ones existed in Athens, at Delphi, Pergamos, Troizen, Kos, Trikke, and other places.

*Plate I is an outline restoration, representing some of the principal buildings in the Hieron.

I must warn the reader that this plan does not profess to be accurate. The structural detail of the buildings is always more or less conjectural, even their relative size and their distances from one another are only approximately correct. The object of the plan is to give a general idea of the arrangement of the chief buildings hitherto discovered, exclusive of the theatre. (It should be stated here that the numbers which follow refer to the illustrations, while the capital letters correspond with those on Plate I).

[1] About one-third of the lantern slides are here reproduced.

*available for download from www.cambridge.org/9781107656222

A represents the gateway or Propylæa (or perhaps temple of Hygieia) on the south of the precinct. Its close relation to the quadrangle *B* has caused some observers to suppose it was the entrance to *B* alone, but to the writer this seems improbable.

B is a large quadrangle about 250 feet square, reminding one of the Palæstra at Olympia. The central space was surrounded by small rooms and a colonnade; some of the columns of the latter remain, embedded in the later Roman brickwork of a music hall or Odeon, constructed within the quadrangle. Nine rows of seats and part of the stage of the Odeon still remain. The building has been supposed to be a gymnasium; but if so, must have ceased to be the scene of gymnastic exercises after the quadrangle was built upon in Roman times. Was it a hostel?

PLATE II—Restoration of East End of Temple of Asklepios
(Defrasse)

C represents the temple of Asklepios, the central shrine, a richly decorated and coloured doric building, erected in the fourth century B.C., the east end of which is shown in the accompanying restoration by Defrasse, Plate II. At the west and east gables were pediment groups representing a battle

PLATE III—Remains of Amazon from Pediment

PLATE IV—Remains of a Nereid, one of the Acroteria

with Centaurs and a combat of Greeks and Amazons : one of the latter is shown in Plate III ; together with acroteria, as in Plate IV, which shows one of the two Nereids alighting from horseback ; these stood on the two sides, while a central winged victory occupied the apex of the gable.

A beautiful ivory door, which cost 3,000 drachmæ, closed the sanctuary ; within, the cella was a single chamber ; there was no opisthodomus.

Plate V, a restoration by M. Defrasse, represents the south side of the temple, and also, towards the left, a part of the Abaton.

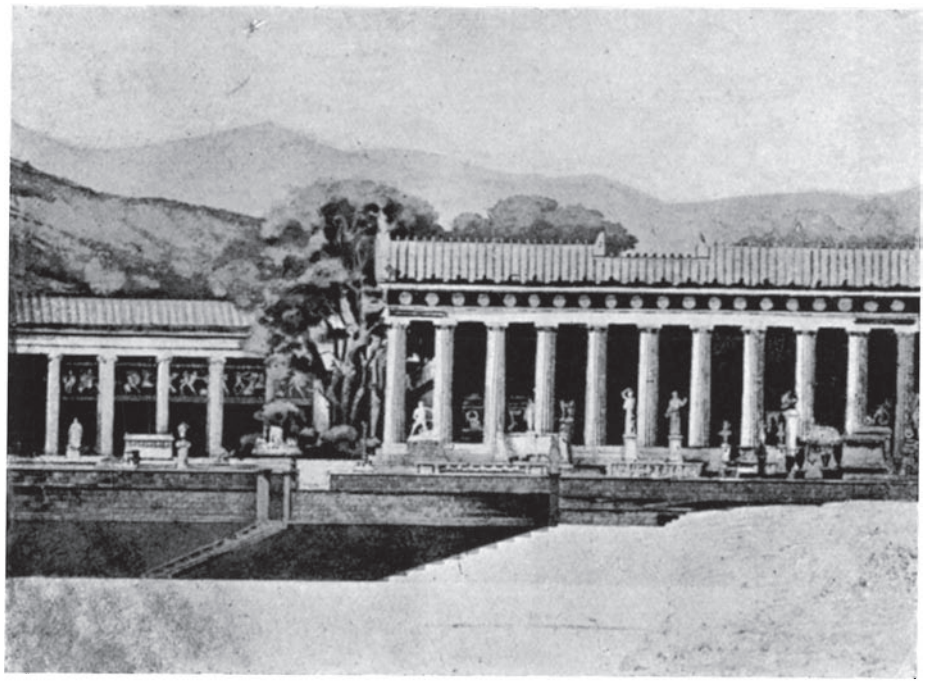

PLATE V—Restoration of part of Abaton and of Temple of Asklepios (Defrasse)

Within the temple stood, as shown in Defrasse's drawing, Plate VI, the great chryselephantine statue of Asklepios made by Thrasymedes of Paros, a work somewhat resembling the Parthenon figure, or the vast Zeus of Olympia, or the Hera at the Argive Heræon ; the flesh was ivory, the rest gold splendidly enamelled in colours. So many small replicas of

this figure remain—sculptured copies found at Epidauros, or small representations on ancient coins—that by the aid of Pausanias' description M. Defrasse has doubtless reproduced the image with a near approach to accuracy.

The god was sitting on a throne, a large golden serpent rising up to his left hand; on his right lay a dog, and in front was an altar.

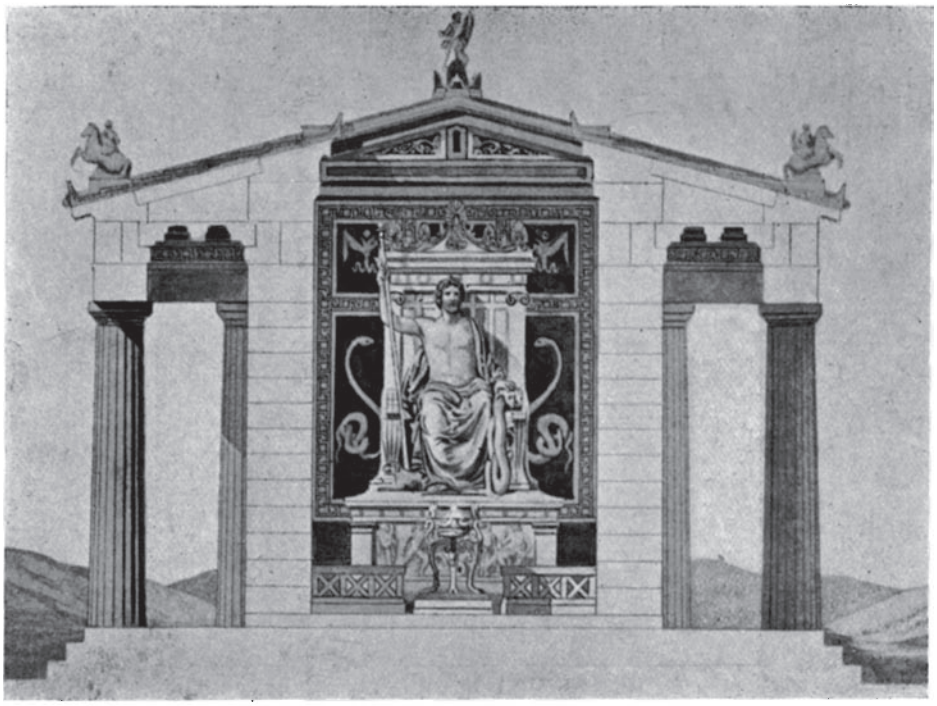

PLATE VI—Restoration of chryselephantine figure of Asklepios
(Defrasse)

Gold and ivory were beautiful materials for the sculptor, though involving much difficulty when combined. The disappearance of all attempts at chryselephantine sculpture in modern times is perhaps due to this difficulty in production and to the cost, but probably more to the fact that the ivory usually tended to crack. The great figure of Athena in the Parthenon needed, we know, to be frequently moistened on its ivory surface with water. At Olympia, oil was applied to the great figure of Zeus, but curiously enough the Asklepios at

Epidauros needed neither. As the god of medicine, it may be supposed that he was able to preserve his own integument, but Pausanias tells us that a well, beneath the pavement of the temple, diffused sufficient moisture to prevent contraction and cracking of the ivory.[1]

On the throne were representations, doubtless in relief, of Bellerophon killing the Chimæra, and of Perseus with the head of the Medusa.

PLATE VII—Base of Temple of Asklepios

Plate VII. represents the remains of the temple as they exist to-day. Fragments of column, capital, pediment, &c., with pavements and bases of walls, render the hypothetical reconstruction of the building fairly easy.

D D in my first illustration is the Ionic portico or Abaton, a part of which is seen in Plates V. and X.; the western part is in two stories, the lower one being in the

[1] Montfaucon (L'Antiq. Explic. I ii 289) quotes a curious story to the effect that Dionysios, the Tyrant of Syracuse, visiting Epidauros, stole the massive golden beard from the figure of the god. He excused the theft on the ground that it was unseemly for Asklepios to wear a beard when his father Apollo had none!

basement. It is open on the south side; a double colonnade supports the roof, the eaves of which, together with the walls and columns, showed colour decoration. This constituted the ward or sleeping place for the sick who were awaiting the miraculous interposition of the god. The Abaton was furnished with pallets, lamps, tables, altars, and probably curtains, the patients themselves supplying their own bed clothing. Other details of this building will be given in the next lecture. It may be added here that from one point of

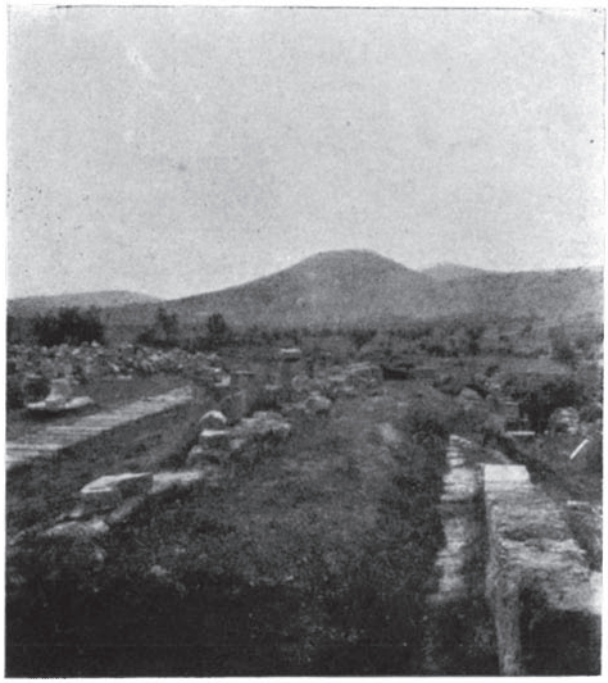

PLATE VIII—Remains of East Abaton

view these remains are highly interesting, for they constitute the earliest known example of a Hospital Ward. There is reason to believe that institutions closely related to Infirmaries or Hospitals existed in Egypt many centuries earlier than the founding of the Hieron, but no structural trace of such a building has been discovered.

The back or north wall of the Abaton, the front or south line of Ionic columns and the central line of columns can be clearly made out from the remaining fragments.

Plate VIII shows these remains of the eastern part of the Abaton. The photograph unfortunately is defective, and it gives the idea that the remains are less considerable and important than they really are.

In Plate IX the remains of the lower story of the western part are shown. This photograph was taken from the top of the stairs leading down to the area-like court from which access was obtained to the lower story.

PLATE IX—Remains of lower story of West Abaton

The Tholos or Thymele, shown at *E* in Plate I and in the annexed restoration by Defrasse, Plate X, was probably the most beautiful circular temple that the Greeks ever built, far surpassing the Philippeion at Olympia. It was built in the fourth century B.C., by Polykleitos the younger, and took twenty-one years to build; externally it presented a beautiful doric colonnade, with peculiarly rich cornice, coloured. Within was a circle of sixteen graceful corinthian columns of marble; the wall and floor were also decorated with variously coloured marbles. Here were two celebrated paintings by Pausias, the