

EPIDAVROS

ARGOLIS



United Nations
Educational, Scientific and
Cultural Organization



World Heritage
Convention



In the hinterland of Epidavros, on a site enjoying a mild climate and plentiful water from healing springs, the Epidavrians founded the sanctuary of Asklepios, the most brilliant centre of healing in the ancient world.

The worship of gods of healing in Epidavros goes back to the prehistoric period. In the Mycenaean period, the hero-doctor Malos, or Maleatas, was worshipped on a peak of Mount Kynortion. After 1000 BC, Apollo displaced the prehistoric deity, and assumed his name. Apollo Maleatas continued to be worshipped in his sanctuary even after the foundation of the Asklepieion, until the end of the ancient world. His cult evolved into that of Asklepios, culminating in the 6th c. BC with the foundation of his major sanctuary of healing.

The prestige and reputation acquired by Asklepios as the major god of healing led to great economic prosperity for his sanctuary, which made it possible to implement a large building programme in the 4th and 3rd c. BC, to house his cult in monumental buildings.

The peripteral Doric temple of Asklepios, erected between 380 and 375 BC, was the work of the architect Theodotos. The pedimental sculptures were carved by Timotheos, while the chryselephantine statue of Asklepios was the work of Thrasykmedes of Paros. The Tholos was built next to the temple in 360-330 BC. This circular, peristyle building was the centre of the chthonic mystery cult of Asklepios, and its famous sculptures

are attributed to the Argive architect and sculptor Polykleitos, who is also considered to be responsible for the theatre at Epidavros, one of the most perfect, and the best preserved of the ancient Greek theatres.

To the north of the temple and the Tholos is the *Abaton* or *Enkoimeterion*, a porticoed building in which the sick, having first been purified and having offered sacrifice, were required to go to sleep, so that the god could appear to them in a dream to cure them, or indicate to them the treatment to be followed. The discovery during the excavations of a large number of medical instruments affords evidence for the view that practical medical operations were also carried out in the sanctuary. Around the sacred precinct of Asklepios were erected temples to other deities (Artemis, Aphrodite and Themis), along with buildings to provide services for the hosts of pilgrims, and installations for the athletic and music contests (stadium, palaestra, baths, odeon and theatre).

After three centuries of prosperity and world renown, the Asklepieion was dealt a series of major blows. The Roman general Sulla plundered its treasures in 86 BC, and a few years later it was ravaged by pirates from Kilikia.

The sanctuary enjoyed a second period of prosperity in the 2nd c. AD, when new buildings were erected and the old ones repaired. In AD 395 the sanctuary was plundered by the Goths of Alaric and it finally ceased to function when the ancient cults were banned by the emperor Theodosius II in AD 426.



The ravages of time were completed by two major earthquakes in AD 522 and 551, and the sanctuary remained silent until the excavations conducted by the Archaeological Society (1879-1928) uncovered its ensemble of monuments.

THE MUSEUM

The Museum was built between 1905 and 1909 by P. Kavvadias, who excavated the site, to house the most important of the finds.

In the first room are the *sanationes* (inscriptions with accounts of the miracles and cures of Asklepios), and an inscription containing the hymn to Apollo and Asklepios, composed by Iylos, the epic poet from Epidavros (280 BC). There are also inscriptions recording tenders for and the accounts of the building work in the sanctuary. A small showcase contains medical instruments and small finds from the sanctuaries of Apollo and Asklepios.



The second room houses mainly votive sculptures dating from the later years of the cult, and casts of works now in the National Archaeological Museum in Athens. At the back of the room are reconstructions of the colonnade of the propylon.

The third room contains reconstructions of parts of the temple of Asklepios and Hygeia, casts of the sculptural decoration from the pediments of the temple of Asklepios, and a temporary display of drawings, photographs and a few characteristic architectural members, to help the visitor gain an understanding of the form of the Tholos.



1. Greek baths
2. "Gymnasium" complex (Ceremonial Hestiatorion-Banquet Hall)
3. Propylon of the "Gymnasium" (300 BC) - Temple of Hygeia (2nd c. AD)
4. Roman Odeon
5. Stadium (4th c. BC)
6. Athletes quarters (4th c. BC)
7. Palaestra or Sanctuary of the Egyptian Gods, Apollo, Asklepios and Hygeia (2nd c. AD)
8. Temple of Artemis (330 BC)
9. Square "building E"- Priests' residence (4th c. BC)
10. Tholos or Thymele (360-330 BC)
11. Abaton or Enkoimeterion (4th-3rd c. BC)
12. Baths of Asklepios (5th c. BC, repaired in the 2nd c. AD)
13. Temple of Asklepios (380-375 BC)
14. Building complex - Library (2nd c. AD)
15. Temple of Themis or Aphrodite (4th c. BC)
16. Hellenistic cistern
17. Monumental Propylon (330 BC)
18. Stoa of Kotys - group of commercial buildings (3rd c. BC)
19. Aquae (Roman baths)
20. Epidoteion (sanctuary of the benevolent gods, 4th c. BC)
21. Anakeion (sanctuary of the Dioskouroi, 4th c. BC)
22. Roman villa
23. Katagion or Hostel (late 4th c. BC)



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