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Sacred Laws in the Cult of Asclepius

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Introduction

Asclepius was the healing god of antiquity, with more than 900 temples and sanctuaries located across the Graeco-Roman world.¹ Masses of supplicants travelled to be healed by the god and these worshippers needed to be controlled and informed of what was regarded as proper behaviour within a sanctuary. One of the ways in which this could be done was via so-called Sacred Laws, the *leges sacrae*. The study of sacred laws is important for the research of any cult as it gives central information about all cultic aspects such as sacrifices and votives.² This paper examines the use of these sacred laws in the cult of Asclepius. Some general points and previous scholarship on sacred laws will first be examined and some specific case-studies from various Asclepieia across the Roman provinces will then be studied. The main questions for this paper are:

1. To what extent did specifically local religious rites occur in the laws?
2. How did display affect sacred laws?

Ancient Sacred Laws

Previous scholarship stresses from the outset that sacred laws occurred in a variety of ancient contexts but that it should be noted that the term is, to a certain extent, an artificial modern construct.³ Robert Parker tries to define what the term precisely means. He states that sacred laws are laws just like any other except that they differ in subject matter.⁴ Eran Lupu helps with the issue as he defines two criteria for a document to be classed as a sacred law:⁵

- 1) The law is prescriptive and sets out rules and regulations by means of imperative forms either written or implied.

¹ As listed by Riethmüller 2005.

² Riethmüller 2005: 60.

³ Lupu 2005: 4.

⁴ Parker 2004: 58.

⁵ Lupu 2005: 5.

- 2) The subject matter pertains to religion and particularly to cult practice.

Thus, sacred laws are concerned with cults and their organisation. However, it is perhaps possible to add a third criterion, that of placement. If a law was positioned inside a sanctuary or within a defined sacred space, would its location not make it a sacred law by default? The display of the inscription is vital here, with its location seen as another factor in classifying a law as sacred.

When erecting an inscription, it was very important that this be done in the appropriate place as the setting of this monument could either reinforce or alternatively detract from the message carried within it as specific places had particular connotations.⁶ The surrounding structures as well as the positioning of the inscription would have affected how the law impacted upon the viewer.⁷ Furthermore, these inscriptions were imbued with a collective shared memory which allowed a community, sacred or secular, to articulate its defining characteristics which formed the basis for its self-image and identity.⁸ This information had an educational function, integrating members into a group, and also a nominative function as it contained instructions on the correct conduct within this community.⁹ In the case of sacred laws, these regulations would have reinforced the appropriate and acceptable attitudes which were expected within the sanctuary, but could also prepare a worshipper to expect new rites.¹⁰ Even if sacred laws could not have been read by the supplicant, their monumental function would have impressed upon the viewer. If a sacred law was placed at the entrance to a sanctuary, this would have had the purpose of preparing the worshipper for meeting the god and creating the right state of mind in the supplicant.¹¹ A sanctuary entrance was the place where sacred and secular met; it was a liminal area. A sacred law helped the worshipper transition from one state of being to another. Display is key in this, as the setting reinforces the message contained within the inscription. The impact of a law on the viewer would also have been greater when placed at the entrance as it would have been visible to all. This is not unlike the placement of statuary and other inscriptions

⁶ Shear 2007: 100; Hölkeskamp 2005: 252.

⁷ Barber 1990: 246.

⁸ Hölkeskamp 2005: 251.

⁹ Hölkeskamp 2005: 251.

¹⁰ Barber 1990: 257-8

¹¹ Barber 1990: 250.

close to roads and pathways, where they would immediately catch a passer-by's eye.¹² As well as placement, the medium of the inscription mattered. Wood was a temporary medium whereas stone was permanent. Texts with on-going significance would have been inscribed in a durable medium, while texts with a limited relevance would have been inscribed in temporary media.¹³ However, many of these monumental texts had no claim within them to lasting relevance and they must have had an additional symbolic function; the inscribed text outlived the immediate relevance of the message and became tradition over time.¹⁴ The visual aspect and display of these monuments could have mattered more than the ability to read them.

Even with Lupu's criteria, there can still be some ambiguity whether or not a document can be classed as a sacred law, as in ancient society there was, of course, no separation between religion and state.¹⁵ It should, furthermore, be noted that these laws are generally concerned with things which are not the norm - they are concerned with exceptions.¹⁶ There was no need for these laws to tell the supplicants and cultic officials things which they already knew because they were common practice. Most extant laws come from the Greek East, although some from the Latin West do survive. These are mainly standardised versions which refer to and claim to follow the rules laid down for the cult of Diana on the Aventine.¹⁷

Parker differentiates between two different kinds of laws, firstly, official ones of which the inscription states that they were decreed by the assembly or council.¹⁸ The second kind comes from the exegetical tradition and its aim is to advise. These lack any procedures for enforcement when the rules are broken. Their primary aim is to advise those who wish to be counselled, namely the supplicants entering a

¹² Barber 1990: 251.

¹³ Hedrick 2000: 132.

¹⁴ Hedrick 2000: 133.

¹⁵ Parker 2004: 57; Carbon 2005; Clinton 1971: 497.

¹⁶ Lupu 2005: 56.

¹⁷ *CIL* 12.4333.II.20–22.

¹⁸ Sacred laws did not always state who issued them, but Parker argues that even when not explicitly stated, it should be assumed that the Assembly or equivalent should be seen as the place of origin for these laws.

sanctuary.¹⁹ Most of the laws found in Asclepieia concern the second kind and prescribe the supplicants' behaviour.

Lupu's criteria make clear that this kind of law is concerned with cult practice. Its rules, therefore, affect and govern both priests and other cultic officials, as well as the cult's supplicants. These rules were inscribed in order to make running a sanctuary smoother. The regulations were written down for supplicants' benefit - to prevent them making mistakes.²⁰ This was also done to protect the sanctuary itself as the easiest way to preserve ritual purity is by informing supplicants upon entry how to keep themselves pure.²¹ As such, even though many sacred laws have been found out of context, it is logical to assume that laws concerned with these rules were placed somewhere close to the sanctuary's entrance. It would be counterintuitive for these regulations concerning behaviour within a shrine to be placed somewhere where they could be overlooked by supplicants.²²

Purity was generally very important in ancient religion, but especially for the cult of Asclepius. Wells were often found near the entrances to sanctuaries to preserve purity and protect against pollution.²³ The importance of purity for the cult of Asclepius will be shown in all of the sacred laws discussed here, especially in the first from Balagrae. It was not just in the best interests of the sanctuary to adhere to these rules but it was also beneficial to the supplicant. Ancient sources are full of tales of divine wrath and even though Asclepius was called *philanthropos*, testimonies attest that he too could inflict harsh punishments when angered. Issues

¹⁹ Parker 2004: 65; Priests' tenures and their perquisites can both be regulated via sacred laws: *LSCG* 60; Parker 2004: 60.

²⁰ Parker 2004: 62.

²¹ Lupu 2005: 14.

²² Not all sacred laws were placed at the entrance of a sanctuary. See for example an Asclepieian law from Lissos (*SEG* 28.750) which was inscribed upon a statue base located within the sanctuary. The law was not concerned with entry requirements, however, but laid out regulations about the consumption of the sacrificial meat.

²³ For example at Epidaurus where a well was located by the early Propylon: Tomlinson 1983: 46, Figure 3 and Riethmüller 2005: 1.162 figure 19 no.3. See also Porphyry *On Abstinence from Animal Food* 2.19. Water generally played an important role in the cult and cults were mainly founded in the most salubrious of places. In most sanctuaries there was some kind of natural water source available, usually a spring: Vitruvius *De Architectura* 1.2.7. See Croon 1967 for an examination into the use of hot springs in the cult of Asclepius.

such as festival regulations, protection from fire, lodging, pasturing animals, littering, water sources, sacred animals and sacred equipment also all occur in sacred laws.²⁴

Sacred Laws in the Cult of Asclepius

Moving on from sacred laws in general, three Asclepieian sacred laws will now be examined, namely one from Balagrae in modern Libya, one from Pergamum, and one from Thuburbo Maius in Roman North Africa. All of these laws are dated to the Roman era.

Balagrae

The first inscription which will be examined comes from Balagrae in Cyrenaica, and is dated alternatively to the 2nd or the 3rd-4th centuries AD. Out of all of the laws discussed here, it is striking as it is the most explicit in demonstrating the purpose of sacred laws.

Those taking shelter in the temple [.....]
They must enter [.....]
[They must] be purified and clean purged for three days
And those being neglectful of purity fail to gain deliverance from suffering [...] ²⁵

The text is very short and fragmentary but still very interesting as it illustrates the importance attached to being pure in the cult of Asclepius. The law states that the worshippers who do not pay careful attention to the need for purity will not 'gain deliverance from suffering' i.e. that they will not be healed. These *leges* were displayed to inform supplicants of the correct entry requirements. However, the law does not specify here exactly how this purity should be achieved just that it must.²⁶ Impurity meant a break in the relationship with the divine: if the worshipper did not adhere to the rules set out by the sanctuary, Asclepius would withhold healing.²⁷

²⁴ Lupu 2005: 26-8; Rules indicating that meat should be consumed within the sanctuary are especially common. See for example, Lissos – SEG 28.750 and Athens LSCG 54.

²⁵ SEG 20.759.

²⁶ The fragmentary nature of the stone should of course be taken into account.

²⁷ The god could become offended by this breaking of the rules and could even take vengeance on this person. If the slight was bad enough, the god could even represent a danger to the entire city. Parker 1983: 178: a break could entail the purification of the entire sanctuary.

Sokolowski believed that the law was erected near the sanctuary's entrance in order to explain to supplicants how they should behave before entering the sanctuary.²⁸ It would make sense for the law to be situated here as it was concerned with requirements previous to entry. The law, therefore, prepared the worshipper to transition from a normal state of being to one appropriate for meeting the god. In all of the laws discussed here the need for purity strongly comes forward, though in this one more explicitly than in the others.

Pergamum

The next sacred law to be considered comes from Pergamum and is dated to the 2nd century AD on the basis of its letterforms.²⁹ The inscription has been pieced together from two fragments but is still quite fragmentary.

- 1 [vacat] and he is to set on the table
[the right] leg and entrails and once he has taken another wreath of olive
he is [to make a preliminary offering to Zeus] Apotropaios of a nine-
knobbed, ribbed round cake and [vacat]
- 4 to [Zeus Meilichios] a nine-knobbed, ribbed round cake and to Artemis
[c.7 letters] ... and to Artemis Prothyraia and to Ge, to each a [nine-]
knobbed, round cake [vacat?]
[vacat] Then having done this he is to sacrifice a suckling pig [vacat]
[to Ask]epios on the altar and to set on the table the right left
- 8 and entrails. Then he is to put three obols into the offertory box.
[At] evening he is to add three nine-knobbed, round cakes,
of [these first] two on the outdoors altar for burning to Tyche and
Mnemosyne [vacat]
[and then the third] to Themis in the incubation chamber. [vacat] He
who [vacat]
- 12 [enters] the incubation chamber is to keep himself pure from all the
things mentioned above [vacat]
and from sex and from goat meat and cheese and
[c.14 letters] ... on the third day. [vacat] The incubant is then to
[lay aside] the wreath and leave it on his straw bed. [vacat] If someone wants
- 16 to inquire several times about the same thing, he is to make a prelim-
inary sacrifice of a pig.
[and if he also] makes an inquiry about another matter, he is to make a
preliminary sacrifice of [another] pig
[according] to the above instructions. He who [enters] the small incu-
bation chamber
is to observe the same rules of purity. [vacat] And he is to make a
preliminary offering to Zeus Apotropaios

²⁸ LSCG Supp. 118.

²⁹ Sokolowski 1973: 407.

20 of a nine-knobbed, ribbed round cake and to Zeus Meilichios of a
[ribbed] round cake
with nine-knobs [.....]
35 [c. 2 letters C]Iodius Glykon
The sacred official set this up³⁰

This inscription is far more elaborate and detailed than the one from Balagrae. The law shows that Asclepius was not worshipped alone here, but mentions sacrifices to other gods such as preliminary offerings to Zeus Apotropaios (line 3). Whilst the previous law was concerned only with purity obtained prior to entry, this sacred law actually sets out a supplicant's actions within the sanctuary and it forms a general code of sorts which aims to give incubants, both new and returning, an idea of what to expect and what rites they will undergo. The *lex* illustrates the necessity to inform worshippers of all aspects of rites in this sanctuary, perhaps due to the larger number of supplicants who travelled greater distances to be healed at Pergamum than those who sought healing at Balagrae. Local supplicants would have been generally aware of what the rules and rites at this specific sanctuary were.³¹ This law also had entry requirements and states that the supplicant had 'to keep himself pure from all the things mentioned above and from sex and from goat meat and cheese and

(lines 12-14).³² The purity requirements, therefore, took on a different guise to those at Balagrae. As such, it would have been necessary to specify to the incubants the form which these requirements took.

The Pergamene need for alimentary abstentions is corroborated by Aelius Aristides who mentions that he refrained from beef, sweetmeats, fish, and pork for a long time. On another occasion he also states that he abstained from all things except chicken and greens, but does not mention goat-meat at all.³³ There is a perhaps a clearer reason why supplicants to the Pergamene Asclepieion were not allowed to eat goat. Pausanias informs us that an Archias went to Epidaurus from Pergamum to seek healing as he had sprained his foot while hunting.³⁴ Having been cured of his ailment by the god there, he decided to transport the god from Epidaurus to Pergamum,

³⁰ *AvP* 3.161.1-20; 35-36; translation: Petsalis-Diomidis 2010: 224-6.

³¹ Hoffman 1998: 47: No distance was too great and no journey too perilous for those seeking better health.

³² Lupu 2005: 60.

³³ Aristides *Or.* 49.34-5.

³⁴ Pausanias 2.26.8.

making the Pergamene sanctuary, thus, a daughter-sanctuary of the Epidaurian one.³⁵ The goat is significant here as Epidaurian Asclepieian origin-myths state that Asclepius was abandoned on Mount Kynortion by his mother Coronis. He was found by a shepherd and nursed by a goat.³⁶ As goats played such a vital part in Asclepius' early life, they were banned from being sacrificed at Epidaurus and this cultic regulation must have been transferred to Pergamum with the god himself.³⁷

The law tells incubants to whom they should sacrifice and what they should sacrifice, both bloodless offerings such as cakes, and sacrificial victims. Many of these sacrifices were suitable for people of modest means, indicating the usual openness of the cult to people from lower socio-economic strata. Sacred laws can, thus, be used as valuable evidence to indicate the socio-economic make-up of supplicants. The law is very prescriptive and adheres to Lupu's criteria. It places, once again, special emphasis on purity and also on what was deemed suitable for supplicants to sacrifice here, for example, incubants were directed 'to sacrifice a suckling pig to Asklepios [sic]'.³⁸

The existence of a small and a normal incubation chamber is also interesting. In most Asclepieia there was only one incubation chamber and all supplicants slept together.³⁹ Yet, here there were multiple chambers which implies that a need was felt at Pergamum for some way to separate people and to regain control over them. For Lupu these regulations were never meant to be read as a comprehensive code, but should be seen as a compilation of sanctuary's rules and regulations.⁴⁰ Sokolowski, however, argues that it should be read as one code, but one which in fact

³⁵ *IG* IV² 60.

³⁶ Pausanias 2.26.4; Lupu 2005: 273 goats were also a favoured sacrificial animal for Apollo and his altar at Delos was made from goat-horns.

³⁷ Pausanias 2.26.9.

³⁸ *AvP* 3.161.6-7.

³⁹ A typical incubation chamber is found, among others, at Athens where the East Stoa was used for this purpose, see Riethmüller 2005: 1.266 Figure 38. This stoa, and the one at Epidaurus were separated in two parts, one for male supplicants and one for female ones presumably: Riethmüller 2005: 1.284 Figure 41 (D); Figure 35. However these were not two separate chambers but one split in two parts. Hoffman 1998: 54-5: The basement of the southern portico at Pergamum may have been the large incubation chamber. These substructures were not necessary for support and remains of stone benches running around the walls have been excavated. It would probably not have been the smaller one as there were three main staircases leading to the ceremonial courtyard indicating the importance of the room.

⁴⁰ Lupu 2005: 60; Sokolowski 1973: 408.

accommodated multiple types of visitor.⁴¹ The first part of the law, concerning the large incubation chamber, was written for worshippers who supplicated the god for the first time. The second part of the *lex*, concerning the small chamber, was for supplicants who had already consulted Asclepius on a prior occasion.⁴² As they had already performed the more costly sacrifices and rites, it would be enough for them to perform pared down versions of these rituals. However, a third group of supplicants should additionally be taken into consideration and that is those who claimed to enjoy a special relationship with the Pergamene Asclepius, such as Aelius Aristides. Aristides, of course, enjoyed an extraordinary treatment at the sanctuary and did not feel the need to adhere to the rules explicitly laid out in this law. Comprehensive code or not, these regulations indicate that the law was intended for use in a sanctuary which had a high number of visiting, non-local, incubants and that a need was felt to control and guide their actions. These supplicants would have generally been aware of the Asclepieian cultic regulations but not the precise form they took in each individual sanctuary. These laws clarified the particular application of the general Asclepieian regulations for each sanctuary and imposed control on the supplicants' bodies by imposing rules such as fasting and prescribed movement.⁴³

Sokolowski makes a final important point by stating that this law was not intended for use by the cultic officials but was in place for the supplicants' benefit, showing them where to go and how to act.⁴⁴ This would imply that the supplicants would have been thought capable of accessing the information on the stone either by reading the text themselves or finding someone close at hand who could read it for them. Display is once again vital here. The law informs worshippers of acts they should undertake while in the sanctuary, but also regulations which should be followed before entry, namely those concerning purity. It follows that the law would have been displayed somewhere easily accessible and somewhere where the sanctuary could protect itself from pollution incurred by supplicants acting incorrectly. Placement close to the sanctuary's entrance seems the most logical conclusion as that was the place where the supplicant transitioned between secular and sacred space. The placement of the inscription at the sanctuary's entrance reinforced to the supplicant that they were

⁴¹ Sokolowski 1973: 408.

⁴² Sokolowski 1994: 408.

⁴³ Petsalis-Diomidis 2010: 226.

⁴⁴ Sokolowski 1994: 413.

now entering sacred space. The law had a multifaceted function as it showed the worshipper the correct behaviour within the sanctuary and created an openness necessary for meeting the deity and reinforced and aided in the formation of a cohesive sacrificial community by underlining that a transition from one sphere of being to another was taking place.⁴⁵ The placement of this inscription at the entrance would have reinforced the regulations on the stone and would have given it monumentality.

Thuburbo Maius

The last law which will be examined is a stele from Thuburbo Maius in Proconsular Africa.⁴⁶ Asclepius was the most commonly worshipped healing deity in Roman Africa with most extant inscriptions dating to the 2nd century AD, indicating the height of the cult at that time.⁴⁷ This stele is dated between AD 117 and 138 and was set up by a Lucius Numisius Vitalis,⁴⁸ whose family were known civic benefactors - Lucius' father also erected a temple to Mercurius Augustus at his own expense.⁴⁹

By order of the god Asclepius, Lucius Numisius Vitalis, son of Lucius, built a podium at his own expense. Whoever wishes to enter the podium must have abstained from women, from pork, from beans, from barbers, from public baths for three days. It is not allowed to enter wearing sandals.⁵⁰

The podium was built by order of the god, presumably on account of a dream.⁵¹ Vitalis would therefore probably have been a previous supplicant of the god and

⁴⁵ The Epidaurian *Iamata* had a similar function when preparing the supplicant for meeting the god. The testimony relating to Ambrosia of Athens aptly illustrates this. Though blind and seeking healing, she ridiculed the god and stated that some of his cures were impossible. However, she too was cured through incubation and had to offer an extra-costly dedication, a silver pig, in recompense for doubting the god: *IG IV² 1.121-124.A4*

⁴⁶ The stone was found re-used in the *palaesta* of the city baths where it was being used as a threshold, and sets out conditions for entry to the podium: Benseddik 2010: 2.85.

⁴⁷ Kleijwegt 1994: 210.

⁴⁸ Benseddik 2010: 2.86.

⁴⁹ *AE* 1961 71: Mercurio Aug. sacrum / Pro salute Imp. Hadriani Caesaris Augusti / L. Numisius Vitalis aedem a solo sua pecunia fecit. The family was originally from Carthage and were still Carthaginian citizens: Benseddik 2010: 2.86.

⁵⁰ *ILAfr* 00225: lussu domini / Aesculapi / L(ucius) Numisius L(uci) f(ilius) / Vitalis / podium de / suo fecit / quisq(uis) intra / podium ad/scendere vo/let a muli/ere a suilla / a faba a ton/sore a bali/neo commu/ne custodi/at triduo / cancellos / calciatus / intrare no/lito.

⁵¹ A podium should be understood as a continuous base, surrounded by columns and a supporting wall: Benseddik 2010: 2.86. Purity was essential in order to be able to access this podium.

might have been cured of an illness. When examining the stone, a clear gap between the first and second part of the inscription becomes obvious. The first part is concerned with the actual building of the podium, and the second with the cultic regulations. Nothing is said about Lucius Numisius Vitalis' relation to the cult so presumably, he was just a supplicant who dedicated a podium to the god. In the previous inscription from Pergamum, it was carefully stated that the law was erected and inscribed by Clodius Glykon, who was a cult official.⁵² His position adds legitimacy to the rules and regulations listed in the Pergamene law and implied that all of the rules which were laid down were sanctioned by the cult. The break in the text between the first and second part in the law from Thuburbo Maius could signify the same; that these regulations and abstentions were not just rules laid down by Lucius Numisius Vitalis, but were those enacted by the sanctuary itself. The need for such a text may have been felt as some of the abstentions listed here were for the most part very unusual. These could be construed as Lucius' personal wishes vis-a-vis abstentions and not those of the god.

This inscription differs from the previous two as it is solely interested in what people should abstain from. The first rule, concerning abstinence from women, i.e. sex, is not uncommon within Asclepieian cultic regulations and also occurs, among others, in the law from Pergamum, which was discussed previously. What is noteworthy, is that here it is explicitly stated that the supplicant should have abstained from women, whereas before it was simply said that the worshipper should have refrained from sex. This raises the issue of who this law was aimed at, as it would imply a largely male audience, even though it is known from other Asclepieia, such as the one at Athens, that women generally made up an equal or even larger part of the body of supplicants.⁵³ The military context of the temple should perhaps be taken into consideration here. The temple was utilised by the Third Augustan Legion and the law was perhaps aimed at these soldiers.

Abstention from various foodstuffs is attested in a variety of cults, most of which concern a temporary and local taboo on the consumption of a specific animal.⁵⁴

⁵² *AvP* 3.161.35-36.

⁵³ Aleshire 1989: 45.

⁵⁴ Parker 1983: 358.

Dietary abstentions were often used as metaphors for purity or virtue, the importance of which for the cult of Asclepius has previously been shown.⁵⁵ It is, therefore, not too surprising to find an interdiction on the consumption of certain foods here. Abstention from pork is mentioned in several other Greek laws, but nowhere else in connection with Asclepius. Abstention from beans is also not found elsewhere in the Asclepieian cult, but does occur during the Eleusinian mysteries at Athens.⁵⁶ Asclepius was initiated into these mysteries and the fact that the two sanctuaries shared a ban on the consumption of beans may signal soteriological connections between the cults. It has been argued that beans were connected with sex, the cycle of life and death, and Hades. This may be connected to the association of both Demeter and Asclepius with the border between life and afterlife.⁵⁷

The regulations against visiting barbers are not found in any other Asclepieia. Rules as to hairstyles and headdress are known in sacred laws but nothing about actually not visiting a barber.⁵⁸ This abstention could be a conscious action which separated the supplicant from normal life. When the worshipper was healed, they could resume cutting their hair, signalling a return to ordinary life. The rule could also perhaps be read in connection with abstention from public bathing. As mentioned before, purity played an important role in the cult of Asclepius.⁵⁹ It is possible that it was the public and communal part of this act which the cult at Thuburbo Maius was affronted by and this same revulsion might have occurred for communality in hairdressing. However, if the supplicant was wealthy enough, he might have had a private slave to cut his hair. A passage from Ovid's *Ars Amatoria* may provide a further explanation as it states that men love to watch a woman's hair being combed, but cautions that assaulting the hairdresser in front of one's lover is a real turn-off.⁶⁰ This passage implies that the cutting and styling creates sexual tension.

The interdiction on wearing shoes is again found elsewhere but not in an Asclepieian context.⁶¹ This law is therefore concerned with circumstances unique to the cult in

⁵⁵ Beer 2010: 19.

⁵⁶ Kleijwegt 1994: 212.

⁵⁷ Kleijwegt 1994: 213.

⁵⁸ Stephens 2008: 111.

⁵⁹ Pausanias 2.11.6.

⁶⁰ Ovid *Ars Amatoria* 3.240-42.

⁶¹ Benseddik 2010: 1.214.

this specific sanctuary. Why these specific things were banned from the Asclepieion at Thuburbo Maius is not clear, but it may have had something to do with what was locally available, especially for the alimentary regulations. It is, furthermore, possible that there was a Pythagorean element to these regulations. In this doctrine, beans and similar items were banned from consumption.⁶² It is also interesting to note that the Pythagoreans were known for their untrimmed nails and unruly hair, both things one would visit a barber for.⁶³ In the Pythagorean world-view, beans came to symbolise something polluting and threatening. Their consumption, then, could jeopardise purity. Favism, bean-allergy, could be another explanation for this ban as it seems that especially people from Sicily, an area in which the Pythagoreans were especially active, and also North Africa, where this law comes from, suffered from this. A further explanation could be that as beans were thought to resemble male and female sexual organs, that they were banned as part of the abstention from women and sex. These regulations could then be interpreted as part of a general concern for sex and purity.

Conclusion

Sacred laws are, thus, a wide and varied category of inscriptions. The inscriptions examined here give some indication of their application in the cult of Asclepius and the multifaceted forms they can take in this context. They serve to indicate that it is possible to speak of a regional cultic nature of Asclepius. This regionalism comes forth strongest in the laws from Pergamum and Thuburbo Maius as they both have rites and regulations particular to that sanctuary. The fact that pork is banned from consumption before entering the podium at Thuburbo Maius, but at Pergamum suckling pigs were one of the animals which supplicants were ordered to sacrifice before incubation, indicates that the cult adapted to suit the needs of the local population and visitors of the cult. This individuality is also shown by the Pergamene law where, in contrast to most sacred laws, a need was felt to tell supplicants how to act in minute detail. As mentioned above, in general, sacred laws were concerned with exceptions and did not tell visitors that which they were expected to know. At Pergamum every part of the ritual of supplicating Asclepius was laid out, perhaps

⁶² The Pythagoreans refused to walk through a bean field in bloom as they believed that the souls returned to the earth via bean-blossoms; Kleijwegt: 1994 213; Brumbaugh and Schwartz 1980: 421; Scarborough 1982 355; Aristotle *Frag* 195; Pliny *NH* 18.118-119.

⁶³ Beer 2010: 45.

due to the large number of supplicants who visited the sanctuary in this period and also the presence of non-Greeks.⁶⁴ There was a greater degree of mobility to and inside this sanctuary and therefore there was a greater need to control these movements, perhaps in part because the supplicants were not local and did not possess a regional knowledge of how things worked in the sanctuary, as worshippers at Thuburbo Maius may have done.

All three sanctuaries, from different geographical areas, share a deep concern for the purity of those entering the shrine. As it occurs in these places, amongst others, it is possible to argue that this rule was at the core of the cult as no matter where or how the cult was transported, this regulation would travel there. This indicates that there were aspects of the cult which were at its core and virtually unchangeable, but also others more connected with specific locations which were adaptable to local wishes. The ban on eating goat at Pergamum is an example of the latter as it only makes sense when considered together with the Epidaurian origin myths.

Only the Pergamene law gives direct evidence for the socio-economic make-up of the supplicants. The small incubation chamber mentioned in the law could also have been used by poorer supplicants, those who could not afford to sacrifice a pig, relatively cheap though this offering may have been.⁶⁵ The other laws do not explicitly state anything about the supplicants though it is interesting that the law from Thuburbo Maius states the visitors should have abstained from women specifically, whereas the one from Pergamum mentions abstention from sex. The military context of the cult in Thuburbo Maius may imply a higher degree of male supplicants here than was normally found in Asclepieia, as was shown by the Athenian Asclepieian Inventories, where female supplicants outnumber the male ones.

Therefore, these laws highlight the customs and regulations which differed from the norm. In doing so, they show how the cult of Asclepius adapted to suit local needs, for example the ban on visiting the hairdresser in Thuburbo Maius. They also show

⁶⁴ See Tapari and Atiki who dedicated to Asclepius in Greek, following Asclepieian customs *AvP* VIII.3.89 and 111b.

⁶⁵ This would mean an adjustment of Sokolowski's argument (see above) who argued that the small chamber would only be used by returning supplicants.

global Asclepieian cultic concerns, especially the issue of purity. The laws reflect the ways in which this purity was sought to be achieved by each local, sacred area. The issue of display and monumentality lies at the heart of this. Many supplicants would have only been aware that there was an need for purity within the cult and that the preservation thereof was in their best interests as the law from Balagrae shows. The laws, then, show for each individual sanctuary or temple how this purity was to be achieved. The easiest way to inform supplicants exactly how to accomplish this was to inscribe these regulations and place them close to the sanctuary entrance making them accessible to all. The display of these laws signalled to the viewer that they were transitioning from one space to the next and would have aided in the creation of a cohesive group of supplicants. The monumentality and display of these laws was what enacted them.

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