HOT SPRINGS AND HEALING GODS1)

BY

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1. The Problem

The cults, myths and legends connected with hot springs in the ancient world have been a subject for investigation both, occasion-
ally, by others and by the present author in a number of studies, which will, as far as necessary, be referred to in the course of this article. Now it may have caused surprise that in these studies mention was seldom made of healing deities, in particular of Asklepios and his dependents. For it would a priori seem obvious that cults of these gods were attached to springs that are sometimes renowned until the present day for their healing powers. Moreover those scholars who have made a special study of Asklepios and his cult never fail to mention the fact that, according to ancient testimonies, very salubrious places were mostly chosen for the cult, that water plays an important role in it, and that particularly salubrious waters were mostly found in the sanctuaries. The excavator of the Kos Asklepieion, R. Herzog, even wrote 2): "Die Quelle, die in keinem Asklepieion fehlen dürfte, wurde aus einer Wesensform der Gottheit zum heilbringenden Wasser". In a recent thesis on the history of the snake-rod as an emblem of medicine these facts are usefully summarized 3). No one who ever studied

1) A travelling grant given by the Netherlands Organisation for Pure Research (Z.W.O.) enabled me to discuss several of the problems involved in the preparation of this article at the University of Cambridge with some scholars working there. I wish to express my gratitude for this.

2) Münchener Mediz. Wochenschr. Jubiläenausg. 1853-1933, p. 2. The remark about the "Wesensform" refers to the view expressed on p. 1 that Askl. was originally an earth-spirit, who could manifest himself as a source or a snake (cf. infra, p. 246).

the cult of Asklepios will have failed to notice the two famous panegyries of Aristides on the waters of Pergamum 1). The connection with springs is also mentioned several times by Pausanias 2).

But the healthfulness of the places where Asklepia were situated is contradicted by modern investigators 3). There is no real evidence of cures by the mineral waters in these sanctuaries. Moreover the writers of the Hippocratic corpus do not seem to think highly of these springs, whereas they sometimes strongly recommend baths in general 4). Furthermore the sacred springs of Asklepios are mostly expressly stated to be cold waters 5). The distinction drawn here may invite criticism. For as we are going to deal with healing cults, the healing properties of the water would seem to be more important than their temperature. Even in modern surveys of health resorts springs are listed as 'thermal' that vary from cold to really boiling hot. Against this I postulate that a hot spring belongs to a category sui generis. A good supply of water may be necessary for any human settlement, and certainly for a cult-centre too. But

1) Or. XXXIX; Or. LIII, fully quoted by E. J. and L. Edelstein, Asclepius (Baltimore 1945) (henceforth quoted: Edelstein), Test. 804-5.
2) Athens: I 21,4-5 (Edelstein, Test. 725), cf. Xen. Mem. III 13, 3 (Edelst., Test. 723); Plin. N.H. II 103 (106), 225 (Edelst., Test. 724); Epidaurus: Paus. II 27, 6 (Edelst., Test. 739); Cyphanta near Zarax (Laconia): Paus. III 24, 2 (Edelst., Test. 755); Gythium: Paus. III 21, 8 (Edelst., Test. 761); Pellene: Paus. VII 27, 11 (Edelst., Test. 782). Cf. the spring Gurna at Tricca where the Asklepieion was localized: Stählin, Das hellen. Thessalien, 119; Athen. Mitt. 17 (1892), 195 sqq., and the spring Hypereia in Phereac (Thess.), where a dedication to Ask. was found: Stählin, op. cit., 107. In Troezen was a spring of Herakles, where probably ritual baths were taken in the cult of Asklepios: E. Meyer, RE VII A, 627; U. Hausmann, Kunst u. Heiltum (Potsdam 1945), 28; 133. For a connection between Herakles and Asklepios cf. spec. I.G. IV, 12, 414 (Epidaurus) and Ginouvès (supra, p. 225, n. 3), 350.
3) Edelstein II, 159 with earlier literature contra Vitruv. Arch. I 2, 7; Schouten, op. cit., 53 n. 7.
4) E.g. Πειρ ορηδων χρήσας CMG I, 1, 85 sqq., Littre VI, 118 sqq. passim. Πειρ δισχηρ το δέρων 65, Littre II, 364 sqq.; cf. also Littre VI, 76 sqq., 264 sqq., 320 sqq. As regards drinking of natural thermal waters the strongest disapproval is in Πειρ δέρων etc. cap. 7, CMG I, 61, Littre II, 30. I owe these references in a field with which I am totally unfamiliar to Dr. G. Lloyd of King's College, Cambridge; cf. Ginouvès, 368; 369 n. 6.
5) The only, rather vague, exception is Xen. Mem. III 13, 3.