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## Soignés et guéris par les dieux

Bassir Amiri, Guy Labarre, Christian Stein, *Soignés et guéris par les dieux: actes du colloque international de Besançon 17-18 novembre 2022*. Institut des sciences et techniques de l'Antiquité. Besançon: Presses universitaires de Franche-Comté, 2025. Pp. 318. ISBN 9782385491550.

### Review by

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[Authors and titles are listed at the end of the review]

The collective volume entitled *Soignés et guéris par les dieux* originates from an international conference held on 17–18 November 2022, organized by Bassir Amiri, Guy Labarre, and Christian Stein in Besançon, France. The contributions in this volume refer to the relationships between ancient societies and issues related to health. Although these topics are by no means new, they are approached here through the interesting lens of “religion” and by examining the interactions between the history of medicine and the history of ancient cults and sanctuaries.

From a strictly formal perspective, the volume comprises 318 pages. It includes an introduction, with a general bibliography (p. 15–16), but no conclusion. The book gathers nine contributions (eight written in French and one in Italian), often organized in the same way: introduction, argumentation, conclusion, and a brief bibliography. The volume is not structured into thematic sections and simply consists of a sequence of articles. Summaries of the contributions, written in French, English, or Spanish, are provided at the end of the volume (p. 307–318). There is no general index or list of figures, which, however, would have made consulting the book easier. From a strictly methodological point of view, one should note the use, and especially the comparison, of several sources, including archaeological, epigraphic, and literary ones. While the chronological scope of the volume largely concerns Classical Antiquity (the Greek and Roman periods), Pierre Mbid Hamoudi Diouf’s article draws parallels between ancient practices and contemporary issues among the Serrer Sine. The geographical scope studied is also particularly broad. The contributions take the reader from Greek cities to cities of the Roman Empire, from Epidaurus to Pergamum, including Alexandria, Italy, sub-Saharan Africa, and even northeastern Lydia. The great diversity of the presentations, both in terms of geography and chronology, thus characterizes this collection.

Several articles compare the respective roles of “rational” medicine and “ritual” medicine in the history of ancient medicine. The former is based on a medical consultation with a healthcare professional possessing medical expertise, τέχνη ἰατρική (technè iatrikè). The latter relies on divine intervention and the patient’s personal contact with the deity, for example through incubations, ex-voto or offerings. Véronique Boudon-Millot and Annie Verbanck-Piérard show that “rational” medicine and “ritual” medicine intertwine and complement each other far more than they oppose one another. Both authors focus on how medicine engages with traditions through the experience of two of the most prominent figures in ancient medicine, Hippocrates and Galen.

Véronique Boudon-Millot demonstrates that the physicians’ inability to overcome disease often encouraged recourse to the divine, particularly to Asclepius and the deities frequently associated with him. Hippocrates’ recommendations, therefore, do not in any way prohibit visits to the incubation chambers in Asclepius’ sanctuaries. The author highlights the importance of direct and trusting relationships between the god and the patient and between the patient and the physicians.

Annie Verbanck-Piérard examines the particular role of the *therapeutai* (θεραπευταί), a functional group “in the service of the deity,” rather than, as has often been thought, merely “attendants” of the deity. Relying on certain inscriptions found in the Asclepius sanctuary of Pergamum and on the examples of Galen and Aelius Aristides, the author shows that the *therapeutai* formed a specific cultic association that carried out religious functions, *although without direct religious responsibilities*. She also demonstrates that the Pergamene *therapeutai* were part of the city’s elite, thereby gaining privileges such as exemption from military service granted by the emperor.

Drawing on the only Oneirocritic treatise preserved in its entirety, Artemidorus of Daldis’ *Oneirokritikà* (2nd century—from the reign of Antoninus or Marcus Aurelius to that of Septimius Severus), Margherita Cassia focuses on divination through dreams. The author notably compares the interpretations of dreams performed by the priests of Asclepius with those of the *oneirokritai* (professional dream interpreters). In the first case, it is the patient (possibly through the mediation of the god’s priests) who gives meaning to their dream. In the second case, the interpretation of the dream comes from a qualified professional, the lay oneirokrit.

Jean-Christophe Vincent provides a comprehensive inventory of the deities associated with healing in the text of Pausanias, drawing in particular attention to the five-compartment altar of the Amphiaraoon at Oropos. This altar is meticulously described and analyzed. Of course, Asclepius was honored as the principal divine power of health. He was accompanied by Amphiaraoos, his “avatar,”<sup>[1]</sup> as well as by Heracles, Zeus, Apollo Paion, various heroes, Hestia/Hermes, Amphilocheus, Aphrodite, Panacea, Iasô, Hygieia, Athena *Paiônía*, the nymphs, Pan, Achelous, and Cephisus, among others. However, not all of them should be considered iatric deities. Vincent also presents a study of functional networks. The way Pausanias addresses the subject will come as no surprise. Indeed, as is often the case, Pausanias selects the facts that deserve attention and says almost nothing about ritual practices or the functioning of the Asclepieia: only a few local cases and the importance of the natural setting in healing are presented.

Guy Labarre focuses on cultural and cultic interactions and transfers. The first one examines the lunar god Men whose poorly known cult is attested in several regions, notably in Asia Minor (more specifically in northern Lydia and Anatolia) and in “mainland” Greece. Guy Labarre examines two classificatory categories: anatomical *ex-voto* and confession stelae—epichoric stelae dedicated to Men with depictions of human body parts. Rather than opposing these two types of evidence,<sup>[2]</sup> the author emphasizes the influence of “Greek” practices on the Anatolian cult of the Moon and notes that *ex-voto* and confession stelae depicting body fragments also existed in the world of mainland Greek cities (notably Corinth and Athens, but also in various Peloponnesian cities) as well as in the Greek cities along the coast.

Olivier de Cazanove focuses more specifically on Roman Italy, between Rome and Latium and southern Etruria.<sup>[3]</sup> The author returns to the “assemblages with anatomical offerings,” a term he prefers to “votive deposits of Etrusco-Latio-Campanian type.”<sup>[4]</sup> He studies in particular the polyvisceral terracotta votives representing internal organs, found in the sanctuaries of healing deities in central Italy, where they are most widely distributed. Long considered Etruscan, they actually come mainly from Rome, Latium, and Veii, and may have been influenced by “Greek” practices. The text is accompanied by numerous high-quality figures of the ex-votos mentioned in the article (pp. 187, 191, 193, 196–198).

Christian Stein offers a paper on the place of Roman ritual medicine in historiography (prior to the influence of Greek medicine from the 3rd–2nd centuries BCE). The author reports on the limited scope of studies devoted to Roman medical practices and attempts to explain this situation. Most works emphasize the irrationality of Roman practices, the practice of magical medicine, and “patriarchal” medicine. According to the author, these practices show that Roman medicine was fundamentally ritualistic.

The study by Bassir Amiri complements the issue addressed by Véronique Boudon-Millot and Annie Verbanck-Piérard concerning the complementarity between medicine and the sacred. Relying on epigraphic evidence (seven inscriptions bearing the formula *pro salute*), he also shows that physicians practicing in the Roman Empire during the first three centuries of our era interfered with supra-human powers. The author mainly analyzes the context, the choice of deities, and the networks they formed in order to heal. Like Véronique Boudon-Millot and Annie Verbanck-Piérard, Bassir Amiri highlights the eminently collective and civic nature of iatric practices.

Francesca Prescendi focuses more specifically on the goddess Febris and on how to worship a *vis*, a dangerous and feared goddess (prayers, places of worship, offerings). As is often the case, the personality of the deity is ambivalent.

Evelyne Samama focuses on the plague that struck Constantinople in 542. The work of Procopius of Caesarea is an essential source of knowledge about this epidemic, which remains the subject of considerable debate among historians. The information provided by the sources is treated with caution. Evelyne Samama analyzes Procopius’ perspective on this “Plague of Justinian”, particularly the connection he makes between the disease and this newly Christianized territory. The author situates Procopius within the same descriptive tradition as Thucydides; his account is that of a historian. Unlike Christian authors, Procopius refuses to seek a solely religious explanation for the 542 plague and describes the events using neutral terminology. For example, he invokes “divinity” and Fate.

The final presentation is by Pierre Mbid Hamoudi Diouf. In this study, the author revisits the notion of illness through the stelae of the Iamata of Epidaurus. In Antiquity, illness was understood as the result of the actions of the gods. This perception still persists in certain contemporary popular traditions.

“Popular” works focusing on the study of ancient medicine have multiplied in recent years. Unfortunately, their organization is particularly stereotypical and still too often contrasts “ritual” medicine (which relies on the gods) with “rational” medicine (which relies on physicians). They still too easily invoke only the figures of Asclepius and Hippocrates. One of the strengths of the volume *Soignés et guéris par les dieux* lies precisely in bringing together perspectives on ancient medicine and religion, without necessarily opposing them. These analyses clearly reflect a complementarity between professional medicine and the healing practices associated with cults. However, it should be noted that other studies had already highlighted this association. This book also offers a wide range of local studies. In this way, the reader becomes aware of how medical practices were appropriated within particular communities, making the dialogue between ancient medicine and the sacred more tangible. The volume clearly fits within a framework of religious study and allows for a better understanding of relationships with the divine, cults, sanctuaries, and rituals in the context of combating disease. This collective work will therefore appeal both to specialists and to readers curious to deepen their knowledge of ancient medicine and/or healing cults.

### Authors and titles

Bassir Amiri, Guy Labarre, Christian Stein: Introduction

- Véronique Boudon-Millot: Soigné par le médecin, guéri par le dieu : quand la médecine hippocratique dialogue avec Asclépios
- Annie Verbanck-Piérard: Galien, *thérapeutes* d’Asclépios à Pergame : médecin et servant du dieu, un réel privilège
- Margherita Cassia: Fra incubatio e oniromanica : Asclepio in Artemidoro di Dadi
- Jean-Christophe Vincent: Amphiaraoos, Asclépios et au-delà : la place et l’importance des divinités guérisseuses chez Pausanias
- Guy Labarre: Les *ex-voto* anatomiques dans le culte de Mén
- Olivier de Cazanove: Dons d’entrailles. Offrandes de terre cuite représentant des organes internes dans l’Italie romaine
- Christian Stein: Des rites pour se soigner : pistes pour repenser l’ancienne médecine rituelle romaine
- Bassir Amiri: Préserés par les dieux : quand les médecins en appellent à la protection divine
- Francesca Prescendi: Febris, déesse de la maladie ou/et de la santé
- Evelyne Samama: Procope, la peste et le Destin
- Pierre Mbid Hamoudi Diouf: Conception traditionnelle de la “maladie” dans les *Iamata* d’Épidaure et dans la culture *Sereer Sine* actuelle en Afrique Noire »

### Notes

[1] The expression used by J.-C. Vincent is taken up by Pierre Sineux (2007, *Amphiaraoos, Guerrier, devin et guérisseur*).

[2] Contra Justine Potts (2017), “Corpora in Connection : anatomical Votives and the Confession Stelai of Lydia and Phrygia,” in J. Draycott, E.-J. Graham, *Bodies of Evidence. Ancient Anatomical Votives Past, Present and Future*, pp. 20–44).

[3] This article is based on an earlier paper presented in 2020 and not previously published. The author also informs readers that its work has been updated.

[4] Annamaria Comella (1981), “Tipologia e diffusione dei complessi votivi in Italia in epoca medievale e tardo-repubblicana,” *Contributo alla storia dell’artigianato antico, MEFRA* 93/2, p. 717–803).

