

# INTEGRATED PROGRAM FOR THE ENHANCEMENT OF THE SANCTUARY OF ASCLEPIUS AT EPIDAUROS

## A GLOBAL JOURNEY FROM MAGIC TO REAL MEDICINE SANCTUARY OF ASCLEPIUS AT EPIDAUROS: THE GREATEST INFIRMARY OF THE ANCIENT WORLD

### 1. INTRODUCTION

The Asclepieion of Epidaurus is one of the most important monumental ensembles of Greece, which attracts every year a large number of visitors (between 2012 and 2013 the Asclepieion of Epidaurus was the second most visited site after the Acropolis of Athens). It is surrounded by an untouched natural environment with strictly designed protection zones, while since 1985 it has been included in the list of *UNESCO World Heritage Sites*.

In ancient times the sanctuary of Asclepius was an organized medical - treatment center that signaled the transition from magic to real medicine, namely the healing of any disease by diagnosing and implementing tailor-made treatment or surgery, which was believed to be guided by God.

From Asclepieion of Epidaurus the cult of Asclepius and the medical science spread not only in Greece but throughout the Mediterranean world. More than 100 Asclepeia (subsidiary sanctuaries - nursing centers) were founded and the healing cult spread to Attica, the Peloponnese, Western Greece, the Aegean islands, Crete, Asia Minor up to the distant Cilicia, Rome and Cyrene in Africa.

However, in modern times, the restoration and use of the ancient theater has led the wider Greek and foreign public to an erroneous concept of the archaeological site. The site is not seen as what it was, namely a very large complex of worship and medical practice, but simply as a theater building of admittedly exceptional architecture and beauty.

The objective of the Integrated Program briefly outlined herein is to restore the original status of the monumental complex and offer visitors a unique experience: to get to know and understand what the Asclepieion really was and how it functioned in ancient times, how religious worship combined with the the discovery of medical science.

In short, the aim is to invite not only the specialized (medical) public, but all the people, from every corner of the world on a journey through time and space. On a trip to man's timeless pain and hope, which until today has been inspired by a distant past of human prehistory. On a trip that departs from the era of therapeutic magic and takes us ultimately to the medical science of the modern era, which originated from the practices of the physicians - priests of the Asclepeia.

This Program will have immediate positive financial results as:

- It will attract visitors to Asclepieion of Epidaurus.
- It will extend the tourist season.
- It will create opportunities for companies operating in the region of Epidaurus to raise revenue.
- It will attract new investment.

## 2. INTERVENTION AXES

The first axis of intervention is to organize the aforementioned narrative. This narrative will be structured around a story that must be coherent and understandable by non-specialists, and should be written by a qualified scientist (story-teller).

The narrative will be supported by specific signage and digital applications, and by a website allowing users to browse into the archaeological site, the network of paths, see the events and scientific activities, read experiences of visitors, and know the local producers and businesses that participate in the Program.

However, it should be noted that the key players will be the very monuments (movable and immovable) of the Asclepieion. The monuments and especially the route to them will unravel history's thread, offer visitors a unique intellectual, aesthetic and experiential, eminently human, experience.

Already from the appropriately configured route Lygourio-Asclepieion, visitors will be able to reach their destination on foot or by bicycle and, as an introduction to what is to follow, enjoy the "Garden of Epione" (wife of Asclepius and personification of mild medicines). The garden will include ancient healing plants and herbs, explained by proper labeling with all relevant botanical, medical and historical information.

Followingly, it is proposed to change the entrance to the archaeological site, since the current entrance is basically designed to serve the needs of the theater. Visitors will be going through the ancient entrance, the gateway of the sanctuary, and consecutively will get to know the monuments of the site: the fountains, the statue of Asclepius, the Temple, the Stoa of Abaton and the Dormitory, the Tholos, the ceremonial Hestiatorion (restaurant), the Guesthouse the Stadium, and finally the Theater.

Through their itinerary, visitors will take part in individual short stories that gradually compose the image of the Sanctuary:

- Water as a means of ritual cleansing of the soul and healing element.
- Diet as a means of healing.
- Sleeping and dreams as elements of treatment.
- The use of medicines (combined with the garden mentioned before).
- Interventional - surgical medicine.
- Healing and Miracle.
- The practice of sports as an element of conservation and restoration of health.
- The theater and entertainment in general as means of treating mental illness.

Through these stories, visitors will comprehend how the practice of magic with actions that caused divine intervention, such as water cleansings and sleeping as a means to meet the God in a dream, gave gradually way to actual knowledge and resulted in the real practice of medicine, as indicated by the tomb of family of physicians in the city of Epidaurus.

To fully comprehend the narrative, it is proposed the creation of a new museum having on display findings from the archaeological site, organized into sections:

- Ritual dinners (Theoxenia - dinner parties).
- Sleeping.
- Well-wishing and thanks-giving tributes.
- Early surgeries and knowledge.
- Medications.
- Medical tools.

- Ancient physicians.

In addition, the existing museum will be upgraded as one of the first museums of ancient architecture in the world. At the same time it will be the museum of the main buildings in the site, housing reconstructions of the main buildings of the Sanctuary with the sections that cannot be exhibited in the countryside, for reasons of protection. It will be also showing the ancient inscriptions (4th and 3rd century BC) mentioned in the contracts and the individual works for their construction.

The second axis of the program is to create a network of itineraries in the surrounding area:

- The Asclepieion is directly connected to the Sanctuary of Apollo Maleatas, which is located at a short distance. This is where the roots of Epidaurian cult can be found since the 3rd millennium BC. During the Mycenaean period, in the 15th century BC at the latest, this is where the worship of a deity named Maleatas started. That deity possessed healing powers to cure people. This is the same cult that came and was developed at the Asclepieion of Epidauros in the historic period.
- There is also a direct correlation of the Sanctuary with the ancient city of Epidauros, which is home to the exceptionally preserved theater (known as the "small theater of Epidauros"), as well as other important monuments (part of the agora, reservoirs, baths, etc.). The Sanctuary is connected to ancient Epidauros through a main road, but there's also the ancient road, which has been preserved and already partly emerged.
- Finally, there is very easy road access from the Asclepieion to the region of Argos and Nafplion, an area which is actually a timeless open-air museum. Also preserved are many parts of the ancient road to Epidauros, which runs parallel to the contemporary road. Along that ancient road, one can admire Mycenaean (in cyclopean building system) bridges and ancient outposts.

The third axis includes the Sanctuary's interconnection - networking with the principal Asclepeia of the Mediterranean space, as well as with universities or institutions that are either located in their area or have active research programs. At the Asclepieion of Epidauros, a study center will be created, which will focus at the history of medicine, and of course at the history of Asclepeia, in collaboration with similar scientific institutions of the Mediterranean area.

The fourth axis includes organizing events and a wide range of activities that can be supported by the Asclepieion of Epidauros:

- Educational Programs.
- Entertaining and healing theater.
- Sports and musical events.
- Theatrical and medical awards.
- Medical conferences.

The fifth axis refers to the promotion of local products and the support of local tourism and tourism-related or complementary businesses. These will be companies and products following specific standards and criteria that will have the right to use the Program's logo and promote their participation in it, as an added value. They too will be advertised on the website of the Program.

### **3. ORGANIZING THE PROGRAM – REQUIRED STUDIES AND SERVICES**

The organization and implementation of the program will be closely monitored by the Committee for the Restoration of the Monuments of Epidaurus (CRME), chaired by Professor V. Lambrinoudakis. In order to implement the program as a whole it is needed to conduct many different studies, in correspondence with the Program's variety of objects to be implemented.

Particularly important of course are the recovery and restoration studies of the monuments, such as the studies for defining and shaping itineraries within the site. These studies have either been already conducted or will be conducted by the scientific staff of CRME.

It should also be noted that several of the required studies may focus on details during the Program's implementation, while work are under way.

However, there is a subset of studies, which is particularly critical because:

- a) It is not possible to be conducted by the scientific staff of CRME.
- b) They are necessary for the Program to take shape and be able to start with a high degree of maturity, which is a prerequisite in order to secure funding from the co-financed Operational Programs of the the new Programming Period (2014-2020).

These studies are:

1. Writing the narrative of the Asclepieion of Epidaurus (collaboration with specialized story teller). Budget: 15,000 €. Duration: 6 months with an intermediate deliverable in three months.
2. Drafting the initial marketing plan with a proposal for branding, design the logo and produce the creative material of the Program - initial promotional activities (first events and publicity). Budget: 15,000 €. Duration: 3 months.
3. Presenting a documented proposal and locating the business sectors or facilities that will be included in the Program - configuration of Quality Agreement. Budget: 20,000 €. Duration: 6 months with an intermediate deliverable in three months.
4. Conducting the study for the configuration of the garden with its healing plants. Budget: 15,000 €. Duration: 3 months.
5. Complete architectural - static and electromechanical study (up to the stage of tender documents and the issuance of building permit) for the building of the new museum and the pavilion located at the new entrance of the archaeological site. Budget: 120,000 €. Duration: 6 months (actual time will depend on the time needed for the relevant approvals from by the Ministry of Culture and Sports).

At an appropriate time (upon delivery of the intermediate deliverables studies 1 and 3, the deliverables of the study 2, as well as the preliminary design or final design of the study 5) a media event will be organized (in the form of seminar - conference with touring and sightseeing at the Asclepieion) which will produce publicity both in Greece and internationally (Budget: 5,000 €).

Finally, for the proper and effective preparation of these studies, it is necessary to have management services by a qualified consultant (drafting specification, contracts, monitoring schedules, receiving of interim and final deliverables). Budget: 10,000 €. Duration: 6 months.

Conclusion: The above "package" of studies and services will be completed over a period of six months from the time the necessary funding will be available, with a total cost of 200,000 €.