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Aelius Aristides as Orator-Confessor: Embodied Ethos in Second Century Healing Cults

Josie Rose Portz

University of Tennessee, jportz@vols.utk.edu

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I am submitting herewith a thesis written by Josie Rose Portz entitled "Aelius Aristides as Orator-Confessor: Embodied Ethos in Second Century Healing Cults." I have examined the final electronic copy of this thesis for form and content and recommend that it be accepted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Arts, with a major in English.

Janet Atwill, Major Professor

We have read this thesis and recommend its acceptance:

Jeffrey Ringer, Tanita Saenkhum

Accepted for the Council:

Dixie L. Thompson

Vice Provost and Dean of the Graduate School

(Original signatures are on file with official student records.)

**AELIUS ARISTIDES AS ORATOR-CONFESSOR:
EMBODIED ETHOS IN SECOND CENTURY
HEALING CULTS**

A Thesis Presented for the
Master of Arts
Degree
The University of Tennessee, Knoxville

Josie Rose Portz
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ABSTRACT

The diverse corpus of Aelius Aristides helps to demonstrate the various ways ancient ritual practice in the second century influenced rhetorical production, especially through the orations composed in the *kathedra*--the two-year period he spent in the Pergamene Asclepion. The rhetorical moves of religious hymns and orations composed during this time parallel closely with a certain non-ordained, yet distinct role called the confessor. Using this traditional role as a paradigm, I explore how ritual practice characterizes the orations Aristides writes in and about the *kathedra*. I suggest that considering this section of Aristides' work through the cultic confessor paradigm helps to explicate Aristides' unique way of constructing ethos. To this end, I give special attention to an oration Aristides composed for a wide audience: *In Defense of Oratory*. Like a confessor, Aristides uses this argument to position himself between both human and divine as a divinely-inspired orator. In this way, Aristides provides a starting point for thinking about intimacy with the divine as a strategy for ethos-construction in the second century.

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INTRODUCTION

In the First Sophistic, during the fifth and fourth centuries BCE, Gorgias and Protagoras infuriated many by their ability to speak on both sides of a question and “vaunt their powers with utter disregard of the truth” (Isoc. 13.1). These “wise men,” these itinerant teachers of rhetoric, set something of a standard for Greek education. Sophists found roles during the Roman Empire as municipal and imperial chairs and maintained roles as educators, using material from respected orators of Greece’s Golden Age as models (Pernot *Rhetoric in Antiquity* 189-190).

The works of these orators, as well as the myths, histories, and philosophies of Greek-speaking peoples, contributed to a cultural storehouse that became central to rhetorical education (*paideia*). In the Second Sophistic,¹ each teacher negotiated the boundaries of this *paideia*, vying for a place of distinction and a loyal following of students. For the elite, *paideia* was not merely a curriculum in the service of Greek thought, but the only way to fully “become Greeks in the full, cultural meaning of the word” (Whitmarsh 14; emphasis in original). However, as Tim Whitmarsh notes, “the genuine virtuosi were rule-breakers and paradigm-shifters,” preferring novelty and improvisation over strict adherence to prescribed rhetorical performance (40).

Through an emphasis on the power of the audience, and the nature of Second Sophistic performance culture, scholars approach local questions of power, negotiation,

¹ A number of contemporary works consider Second Sophistic oratorical training, often relying on this term *paideia* to refer to cultural expectations inherent in developing the oratorical skill. See Anderson, *The Second Sophistic: A Cultural Phenomenon in the Roman Empire*; Bowie, “Second Sophistic” (2016); Gleason, *Making Men: Sophists and Self-Presentation in Ancient Rome*; Whitmarsh, *The Second Sophistic*.

and embodiment. However, religious practice as a direct influence on rhetorical strategy during this period remains largely unexplored.² Only recently have scholars begun claiming relationships between oratorical composition and expressive religious experience as less “unusual” than may be assumed. Prominent orators of the period like Apuleius and Aelius Aristides receive attention for their texts demonstrating typical rhetorical performances and religious narratives, but there is little scholarship which considers the influence of religious experience across a corpus. To address this gap, I examine the second-century orator and sophist Aelius Aristides as one rhetor whose compositions were heavily influenced by religious practice. I argue that Aristides’ compositions were shaped by the religious customs common to second-century votive healing cults.

My argument aligns with calls of classical rhetoric scholars to consider rhetorical production across knowledge domains and institutions, writing histories which are embodied, emplaced, and intertextual.³ Beyond these concerns, however, this study contributes to scholarship which points to a shift in religious expression towards the personal in Late Antiquity,⁴ wherein communication between human and divine was less-mediated through public institutions and more often considered a direct dialogue.

² Alexia Petsalis-Diomidis remarks, “It is not an exaggeration to claim that religion has been marginalized in Second Sophistic studies from the 1960s until relatively recently. Traditionally emphasis has been placed on Classicism and Greek cultural identity, and religion has tended to be seen as only one aspect of these overarching cultural trends” (2).

³ See Lamp, “Rhetoric *In Situ* [Special Issue].” (2017) p. 120.

⁴ Robert Parker describes Aristides’ *Hieroi Logoi* as a “document of a kind of personal religion virtually invisible in Greco-Roman antiquity until that point.” He remarks that they will continue to be seen in this light although “recent re-evaluations . . . relate them more closely to the sophistic culture from which they emerge. (88).

Specifically, I demonstrate how Aristides' compositions manifest the rhetorical performance of a healing cult confessor, even across genres. I suggest that considering ways the role of cult confessor shaped Aristides' rhetorical and autobiographical texts provides alternate ways of recognizing material and embodied practices of ethos-construction, revealing shifts in the way pagans conceived of relations with the divine.

The term used for this study, confessor, comes from John J. Winkler's monograph on Lucius Apuleius, *Auctor and Actor*. In Winkler's usage, a confessor was a specific kind of devotee in the healing cults who occupied a more vocal role. Commonly, after being saved from disease or peril at sea, she or he "announc[ed] to all and sundry" the saving work of the god (234). This first-hand experience gave the confessor authority to speak, having experienced such acts of gods, or miracles, personally. Further discussion of the confessor's role will be made in the first chapter. The key idea of this framework is the value of a confessor's testimony: it presupposed divine intervention, served as a pleasing offering to the god, and secured a uniquely authoritative position for its offeror.

This arrangement between god and confessor suggests a certain shared understanding as the narratives of those able to personally testify regarding the deeds of the gods required no interpretation and no mediation. They were delivered directly. This study demonstrates that Aristides refers to his relationship with Asclepius in a similar manner.⁵ Further, this study identifies a shift in ancient pagan religion from place-based religious commitments to lived relations with divinities interested in the fate of mankind. For Aristides, this divinity was Asclepius, a god interested not only in Aristides' health,

⁵ "Perhaps the most compelling argument for describing the religious experience of Aristides as personal or private is the abundance of occurrences where Aristides communicated directly with a deity" (Israelowich 154).

but his oratorical career. After all, Aristides consistently claimed that it was the god himself who guided his orations.⁶

Chapter 1 lays the framework of Winkler's confessor as understood within the healing cults of the second century. This chapter clarifies the function of some key temple artifacts, important to understanding the rhetorical aspects of religious practice in the healing cult of Asclepius, including votive offerings and inscriptions. Finally, this chapter briefly reviews key scholarship that informs my comparison between Aristides' rhetorical strategies and the politics of the healing cults.

Chapter 2 considers how the principles of second-century healing cults and the confessor apply to Aristides' *kathedra* period. In this chapter, I discuss Aristides' experiences just before and during the two years of his *kathedra* to provide some context for understanding Aristides' relationship to the (Asclepian) cult. Using A. J. Festugière's discussions of ancient personal religion, I conceptualize the *kathedra* as a kind of retreat—not in the way we understand retreats today as isolated experiences, but as a step back from civic life in which Aristides is immersed in the routines and communities of Asclepian incubants.

After Chapter 2 reviews the motivations of a religious confessor and establishes a basis of inquiry within Aristides' works, Chapter 3 discusses the expectations of Aristides' dual audience: the demands of the divine and the conventional expectations of mankind. On one hand, Aristides continually dedicates payment in the form of testimony to testify to the assistance of the god as payment to the cult of Asclepius; on the other,

⁶ See Downie, p. 34.

Aristides negotiates the rhetorical conventions of both fellow orators and devotees to varying degrees depending on the purpose and genre of his works. Both “An Address Regarding Asclepius” and “To Sarapis” help to illustrate how Aristides used oratory as payment to the gods. As such, these prose hymns demonstrate Aristides’ use of oratory as a confessor. Simultaneously, these prose hymns demonstrate the ways in which ideas of the supernatural affected the expression(s) of his devotion over time and across genres.

Chapter 4 continues by clarifying the nature of the confessor’s authority. It compares how Aristides constructs his ethos in *In Defense of Oratory* to how an incubant constructs ethos with his or her own body—as an object to be viewed (Petsalis-Diomidis 272). The devotees of the Asclepieia gained standing among their contemporaries by placing representations of their very bodies in the worshipping space of others. Aristides speaks of his own situation as a divinely-inspired orator in a similar way; he builds ethos as a confessor: one who, having been saved, “enlist[s] the god as guide and patron of his life and his works” (*In Defense* 430). The idea of the god’s guidance becomes a major theme of *In Defense* when Aristides playfully pushes back against some of Plato’s criticisms of oratory in order to establish the pursuit of oratory as legitimate. I close by analyzing how the argument of this oration presents a view of oratory in which authority is based on the logos of an oration, which, for Aristides at least, is guaranteed from the god. On these grounds, he argues for equal consideration between his arguments and Plato’s. In this oration, Aristides not only defends the practice of oratory, he affirms the agency of an orator like himself, which he explains in the terms of a confessor—the

ability to narrate one's own account and to place it among those which have already earned a place of distinction.

CHAPTER ONE: SECOND CENTURY GREEK RELIGION: SHIFTING PARADIGMS

Judith Perkins writes that after reading “Oration 16” of Apuleius’ *Florida*, she suddenly understood a unique element of second century discourse. Apuleius, addressing the Senate of Carthage, compares himself to the poet Philemon, describing the circumstances behind the delay in his speech-giving: “As you surely remember, when a shower interrupted my recitation, I postponed it to the next day with your consent, and indeed very nearly with Philemon as a precedent. For that same day I twisted my ankle so badly in the wrestling ground that I very nearly quite broke the joint from the leg” (*Florida* 16.19-20). Apuleius continues to describe the acute pain from which he was which engendered “immediately bathed in sweat and for a while . . . paralyzed” so that a sharp pain found its way into the orator’s bowels, threatening to “finish [his] life before [his] story” (*Florida* 16.21-22). As Perkins explains, though other figures of the second century—she had been reading works such works as those of Aelius Aristides, Ignatius of Antioch, Galen, and Marcus Aurelius among others—certainly demonstrate an interest in the body, Apuleius’ almost attention-seeking self-presentation as a sufferer made clear the significance of this presentation. For Perkins, Apuleius’ oration demonstrated “part of an extensive formulation in the culture of the second century that represented the human self as a body in pain, a sufferer” (Perkins 2). In speaking about religion specifically, Perkins notes an intense focus on suffering and death shared between Ignatius, Marcus Aurelius, and Aristides, and concludes that “if there is a pathology it belongs to the culture rather than to the psychology of any individual” (193). It seems that for many in the second century, bodily suffering was simply a part of religious experience.

Though Perkins uses her discoveries to explore the growth of Christianity, they have important implications for the discourse of the early Roman Empire more widely. For example, Hannah Willey argues that many ancient Greek prose texts mimic rhetorical features of religion in order to more fully connect to their audiences: “Even without a performative religious context, prose texts can key into or subtly play with religious contextual frames (such as, for example, dedication or divine inspiration), to engage actively with the religious experience of their audiences” (68-69). Additionally, notions of a privileged “suffering body” are consistent with the ritual practice of the healing cults of the second century and Winkler’s model of a “confessor.”

In this chapter, I lay the framework of Winkler’s confessor as understood in the healing cults of the second century. Through this framework, Aristides’ texts⁷ yield a richer understanding of how material, embodied, and even divine rhetorics shape the rhetorical practices both within and without the “sacred space” of the temple.

The Cult of Asclepius

Some scholars locate a shift in the development of ancient Greek religion towards personal religious experience. A. J. Festugière, for example, identifies three components that gave rise to the personal dimension of religion in the Hellenistic Age: 1) an inclination towards living apart from public life, 2) indifference to “the old civic gods,” and 3) a feeling of “instability” as regards human affairs (39-40). Others, however, speak of movements towards “private” religion. In Ido Israelowich’s terms, private religion signifies a less-mediated

⁷All translations of Aristides are taken from Behr’s *The Complete Works* except for *In Defense of Oratory*, which is taken from a newer translation in the Loeb Classical Library by Michael Platt unless otherwise noted. All other classical sources are from the Loeb Classical Library unless otherwise noted. In cases, text section numbers are used instead of page numbers.

communication between human and divine. He indicates that scholars who distinguish between private and public religion “view the second century as a turning point . . . which manifested itself in the form of a shift from communicating with the god through public institutions . . . to a more direct approach” (137). Instead of communicating through priests or oracles, devotees had a chance to receive messages from the gods themselves (137). Strict distinctions between “public” and “private” religion are complicated in communities like those of the Asclepius healing cults, which formed exclusive groups designed to be eminently visible, but encouraged direct communication with the god Asclepius as a prerequisite of membership.

Asclepius was generally considered to belong to the Homeric Age. As the son of Apollo—god of light, music, oracles, archery poetry, and medicine—Asclepius also became known for his skill in medicine and crafting oracular messages to his devotees (Israelowich 147-149). Apollodorus writes that after Asclepius’ mother, Coronis,⁸ showed interest in marrying a mortal named Ischys, Apollo slew her and entrusted Asclepius to the care of Chiron the centaur (3.10.3). With Chiron’s training, Asclepius grew in the arts of medicine so that his skill in surgery was unsurpassed, which he often used on behalf of mortals, saving them from death. Zeus, fearing that mortals would lose an appropriate fear of death, struck Asclepius with a lightning bolt and killed him for using his powers of medicine and sorcery a little too freely (3.10.4).

⁸ Asclepius is always said to be son of Apollo, but depending on mythological tradition, his mother may have been born of either Coronis or Arsinoë (Apollodorus 3.10.3). Apollodorus’ account of Coronis as Asclepius’ mother was the one most commonly referenced by the ancients, and further, the account that Aristides believed (Israelowich 147-148).

This is the vast extent of Asclepius' myth. While other gods were known for their rather human-like misadventures and exploits, Asclepius was known solely for his medical expertise. As a result, he became the Greeks' foremost resource for healing beyond human medicine and was associated with mortals rather than his fellow gods. The present understanding of ancient Greek medicine is that there was no sharp distinction between scientific and religious medicine, so illness was either believed to be sent from the gods or caused by some natural occurrence (Graf 505). Regardless of cause, Greeks generally believed illness might be alleviated through an appeal to gods like Asclepius, should human skill prove ineffective (505).

Asclepius' worship was established later than the Olympian gods, but he had a strong following, especially from many sick people deemed "hopeless cases" by their physicians (Israelowich 150). Additionally, because his personality subsisted in his craft, Asclepius did not have specific local ties, which meant that he had Panhellenic appeal; all worshiped him and sought healing from him in his temples called the Asclepieia.

The Asclepieia attracted many pilgrims who often they traveled in groups, dividing their time in the temple between ritual practice and leisure. For the most part, pilgrims spent time in the sanctuary either reviewing the narratives displayed there (often through inscription or votive dedication) or seeking some degree of physical healing from the god, which could take any amount of time. As Fritz Graf explains, this sense of indeterminacy explains the presence of a theatre within the temple precinct—it took time to be healed: "We hear even about philosophers meeting and debating" (507). Most often, patients coming to the sanctuary during the day entered the abaton (enclosure for sleeping) in the evening to receive guidance from the god through dreams. First, sacrifice was often made to Mnemosyne, god of memory, and Themis, god of

divine law and order. These sacrifices were meant to aid in accurately remembering the dream, according to the regulations of the Pergamene Asclepion (508). Dreams took different forms. At times, a devotee's dream might consist merely of a simple communication, often a promise of healing. Usually, priests assisted the patients with interpreting their dreams and applying the appropriate treatments (Burnett 4). It is likely that some of these priests were experienced surgeons, though patients spoke of Asclepius as the surgeon (5). Their dreams could include vivid sequences of surgery in which Asclepius himself played physician—sometimes with, sometimes without, a surgical knife (Graf 508). Afflictions of the eye are most common in the texts of the devotees who were healed. Additionally, breast ailments and difficulties in the lower body were common. Aristides, for example, suffered chronic digestive problems, which he speaks of in his *Hieroi Logoi*.

Asclepieia were filled both with the artifacts of the healed as well as numerous sick people waiting to join the ranks of those lucky enough to have had such experiences. Cult communities offered ritual consecrations of various kinds of artifacts, but most often they were offered by individuals (Vlassopoulos 261). Aristides writes about one kind of artifact, the votive offering, in Oration 42, “An Address Regarding Asclepius”: “[S]ome, I mean both men and women, even attribute to the providence of the god the existence of the limbs of their body, when their natural limbs had been destroyed; others list other things, some in oral accounts, some in the declarations of their votive offerings” (42.7). These votive offerings, or thank offerings, expressed gratitude to the god for healing. These offerings could be in the form of a statue, marble relief (Fig 1.1), or, as Aristides suggests, a representation of the limb healed (Fig 1.2). Figure 1.1, for example, shows a relief from the Asclepion in Piraeus (350), which depicts



Figure 1.1. “Votive relief to Asclepius (350 BC), a drawing from a relief, Piraeus Museum, catalogue number 405” (Błażkiewicz 61).



Figure 1.2. “Votive body parts from the Sanctuary of Asclepius at Corinth. Image courtesy of Alexandra L. Lesk” (Hughes 220).

Asclepius treating a woman in her sleep as the god's daughter Hygeia, personification of health, stands behind (Błaśkiewicz 61).⁹

Figure 1.2 depicts the life-size terracotta votives of Corinth. Jessica Hughes writes that the traces of paint correspond to the gendered *Contrastcoloristik* of contemporary vase painting—white for women and red for men (220). Additionally, the design of these votives indicated not only the illness of their dedicant, but also their manner of display:

One of the legs has prominent arteries, which some scholars have seen as indicating the nature of the illness suffered by its dedicant. Most of the limbs have pierced holes at their tops, suggesting that they were suspended by cords from the walls or ceiling of the temple. The heads and some of the legs have flattened bottoms, which may indicate that they originally stood on the floor of the temple, or on specially constructed shelves.

(Hughes 220)

Often votive offerings were presented in conjunction with an inscription, which narrated the healing event as shown in Figure 1.3.

In the temple, inscriptions could be used for anything. They related mythical tales and melodramatic novellas, but often told “historical anecdotes of curious and marvelous events” (Winkler 235). When these inscriptions treated narratives of healing, they were called *iamata* inscriptions, or simply *iamata* (Versnel 400). These were often engraved on stone tablets, or *stelai* and provided “records of the cures that were carried out by Asclepius” (Błaśkiewicz 54).

Pausianus, for example, writes of the six *stelai* remaining in the Asclepius sanctuary of

⁹ Monika Błaśkiewicz identifies the group on the left as the friends or relatives of the woman being depicted supplicants, from their post suggesting that they are carrying something (61).



Figure 1.3. “Marble relief representing part of a leg with an inscription dedicating it from Tyche to Asclepius and Hygieia as a thank offering, presumably for the cure of some affliction of the left leg. Tyche [dedicated this] to Asclepius and Hygieia as a thank offering” (“Relief”).

Epidaurus where names of those healed by Asclepius and their diseases were inscribed (Graf 506).

The epigraphic evidence of these votive offerings and *iamata* provided a legible landscape for the pilgrims:

The inner space of the Asclepion contained numerous visual testimonies of past patients expressing their gratitude to the god that healed them and reassured the present convalescents of the god's healing prowess. Indeed, viewers of works of art in Aristides' day were expected to look for implicit meanings within them. The worshippers in the Asklepion were inclined and even actively encouraged to read narratives of salvation into epigraphic votives—both textual and pictorial. Local priests offered help to pilgrims in interpreting such enigmatic offerings of thanks. (Israelowich 176-177)

For the pilgrims who journeyed to the Asclepion, an extensive collection of these votives and inscriptions was reassuring. There was a heightened sense of immediacy between the pilgrim and miracle: “[D]isplaying old votive offerings would have been the evocation of a sense of a plethora of past miraculous cures in the very space where the viewers stood” (Petsalis-Diomidis 272). For Aristides, Alexia Petsalis-Diomidis describes the epigraphic evidence he left behind as an “itinerary around places of particular importance to him, . . . specifically of heightened contact with the divine” (117). Many of these artifacts were dedicated to “Asclepius the Savior” (117).

In collecting such artifacts, temples confirmed the efficacy of devotion to the god(s) honored within; by offering these artifacts, the faithful secured the “availability of future help” from the god(s) (Taylor 102, Winkler 239). These practices of continual ritual practice and interpretation produced an ecology of contact between human and divine in which pilgrims interacted with the god by offering sacrifice and receiving revelations through visions or dreams (Petsalis-Diomidis 231).

The Incubants of Pergamon

In the healing cults, a sickly body was a privileged body. It functioned as a “locus for divine manifestation” (Petsalis-Diomidis 238). However, because Asclepius was considered a moral god, it was believed that only those whom he considered worthy would be healed (Israelowich 151). The Asclepion in Epidaurus displayed an inscription above its entrance reading “pure must be he who enters the fragrant temple” (151).

It was a privilege to even enter the Asclepion, but those able to enter the abaton of the temple were an even more select group called incubants. In Pergamon, incubants adhered to the rules laid out in a second century inscription called the *Lex Sacra*. The *Lex Sacra* of Pergamon defined an incubant as “he who goes into the incubation chamber” (Petsalis-Diomidis 237). Incubants were defined by their spatial separation from other devotees and their participation in exclusive rituals which allowed them closer access to Asclepius (234).

Before approaching Asclepius, incubants performed rites of purification, often including bathing, burning incense, fasting, and abstinence (Petsalis-Diomidis 136, 227). Such control exerted over the body helped regulate “what went in and out of the bodies of the pilgrims” and bound the group together (235). As Petsalis-Diomidis states, these regulations were common

across religious practice in general, but were particularly appropriate for healing cults as disease was often considered an imbalance or disorder in channels of the body (235). In regards to binding the group together, these rites of purification also included regulation in dress, which effectively “homogenize[d] the appearance” of the incubants’ bodies. Each incubant dressed in white, stripped of any rings or belts, and went barefoot (136). According to Israelowich, priests also normally dressed in white, but Israelowich notes that in Pergamon, Aristides writes of priests dressing in purple and wearing Egyptian sandals, while Ovid writes of them binding their hair, both adding to a truly distinctive ritual appearance (Arist. 30.27, 47.61, Ovid 15.676).

Incubants were further distinguished by their ritual procession. It was customary for this group to process around the sanctuary behind a priest and present themselves as a “select religious group” to other pilgrims in the sanctuary (Petsalis-Diomidis 237). As Petsalis-Diomidis explains, “Despite the radical second-century building programme, the sense of continuity with the past community of pilgrims would have been maintained ritually through this choreography” (237). Within this ritual, incubants were able both to view previous dedications of votives and inscriptions and to participate in a “timeless miraculous community” by walking the pathways of those who had been healed before. After these rituals were completed, sick and deformed bodies were transformed through their interaction with the sacred spaces in the temple, including such places as the temple of Asclepius Soter (Savior) and the sacred drawing well (238). It was also said that sacred images and votive offerings contributed to this transformative, healing effect so that the incubants bodies were “animated by divinities and images of miraculously healed bodies” (Petsalis-Diomidis 238).

After the completion of these rituals, incubants hoped for the transformation of their bodies to be fully realized in their dreams so that in waking life they would be healed (238). According to Georgia Petridou, “The incubant would normally see the god in his sleep or in an interstitial state between sleep and waking” (297). Asclepius’ dream cures cannot always be understood as separate from the prescriptions of doctors to their patients. Sometimes, however, (as in the case of Aristides) the dream prescriptions Asclepius communicated to the devotee contradicted the doctors’ (Graf 508). Additionally, Asclepius was considered “an oracular god as much as he was an healer and purifier” and therefore, often consulted for assistance with personal as well as physical problems (Graf 509).

After receiving guidance from the Asclepius and interpreting any prescriptions he might have given in dreams, those who received healing were considered to be very highly favored; the greater the suffering and illness—the more impressive the claim to recovery. At this completed stage of the healing process, some devotees occupied a more vocal role by giving witness to the god’s deeds personally in addition to presenting votive offerings. This role John J. Winkler called “the confessor.”

The Confessor

Winkler describes two classes of temple functionaries: the exegete and the confessor. Both gave testimony to deeds of the gods, but exegetes performed their roles as guides or as *aretologoi* in reciting the miracles of the gods presented in the temple’s votive offerings and inscriptions. These *aretologoi* were not necessarily considered to possess a temple office, but

rather a skill that enabled these temple occupants to earn a livelihood (Winkler 236).¹⁰ Local priests were also known to help pilgrims to interpret the circumstances under which offerings had been made as well as the miraculous effects that they commemorated (Israelowich 177).

Confessors, on the other hand, were not restricted to an interpretative role. They recounted tales of the gods from their own experiences. Winkler writes that confessors' testimonies often mention dangers such as shipwrecks or diseases¹¹ from which the god had delivered them: "Saved by a god from shipwreck or disease, a survivor owes payment to the cult: an appropriate sacrifice or offering (*σῶστρα ἴατρα*), a testimonial plaque, an image of the limb cured, a picture of the catastrophe survived, the story itself" (Winkler 239). This idea of an offering as payment (*σῶστρα ἴατρα*) is not specific to Winkler; H. S. Versnel notes that the word *ἴατρα* refers to a "doctor's honorarium," and that it is a term common to the cult of Asclepius (416).¹² Israelowich also writes that "[w]hen the patient (of Asclepius) was healed he was obliged to fulfill his vows" (152).

What most distinguishes Winkler's confessors from other devotees would be an attention to sharing the deeds of the god in person. In fact, Winkler initially refers to confessors as "persons in the vicinity of an ancient sanctuary" (239). According to Winkler, "it was considered a normal return for an important divine favor to spend some time at the temple announcing to all and sundry that the god had manifested his or her power in one's own life" (234). In lieu of a living testimony, it was also customary for confessors to provide a written account to the temple

¹⁰ Winkler explains that in Plutarch's "Why the Pythia No Longer Gives Oracles in Verse" these guides are called *periegetes*, as the word "exegete" likely retained a strong connection in meaning to interpretation of ritual. In Pausanias's references, however, these guides were regularly called "exegetes" (Winkler 234).

¹¹ Aristides experienced both.

¹² "The rare word *σῶστρα* can take a related meaning, as in an inscription from Rome where a doctor, who calls himself the helper (*βοηθός*) of Asklepios, gives him *σῶστρα καὶ [χα]ριστήρια* (IG XIV 967 a1 b1)" (Versnel 416).

as a gift.¹³ This served not only as an offering of goodwill and edification toward those who worshipped in the temple, but as a form of payment to the god as well. Petsalis-Diomidis notes this aspect of debt in an epigram by Kallimachos to Asclepius. The dedicated tablet stands as proof that the dedicant fulfilled his vow: “Know, Asklepios, that you have received the debt which Akeson owed you by his vow for his wife Demodike. But if you forget and demand payment again, the tablet says it will bear witness (*παρέξεσθαι μαρτυρίην*)” (269-270).

Any devotee could be a confessor as it was not an official temple role, but Winkler’s framework seems to make clear that some in the temple occupied a role of greater distinction and interpretative authority because they were directly involved in the miraculous tales they told. As Petsalis-Diomidis explains, the goal of a pilgrim was to “inscribe [his or her] own story into the miraculous history of the sanctuary, and to become the viewing object of subsequent pilgrims” (272). Israelowich refers to this as “therapeutic competition” (235). Claire Taylor explains, “Epigraphic evidence like this (votives and inscriptions) shows how religious practice both created and defined communities, reinforced local hierarchies, and provided a forum for negotiating social networks and social status” (108). Ultimately, what conferred status in this environment was to *be seen*.

Viewing and interpreting the dedications of the temple was considered a “vital” part of pilgrimage to the Asclepieia (Petsalis-Diomidis 272),¹⁴ so making a dedication would literally claim a space in the history of the cult, to be viewed by all who journeyed to the temple. Like the

¹³ “[A]n exceptionally worthy hymn was considered in itself a gift to the god” (Israelowich 170).

¹⁴ “Indeed, viewers of works of art in Aristides’ day were expected to look for implicit meanings within them” (Israelowich 176).

procession of incubants, these dedications were displayed prominently, but they remained in the temple long after the devotees who offered or viewed them. As these physical representations claimed space in the god's sanctuary, the body of the sick became a site of potential for divine healing while a healed body signified authority through previous experience of close association and favor with the god (265).

In sum, there seem to be three main components included in the framework of Winkler's confessor: 1) an understood divine act of deliverance, 2) the *ἵατρα*, or payment, demanded by the god, and 3) the unique authoritative position earned by one able to narrate the deeds of the god through direct experience.

The Confessor as a Framework for Aristides

Petsalis-Diomidis describes Aristides' *Hieroi Logoi* as a text expressing a similar first-hand authoritative tone: "[I]t is the author himself who has experienced the *thaumata* (wonders) while the reader is also rhetorically included in this experiential proof by means of the invitations to search out the original dream diaries" (160). Consider, for example, the ownership and pride Aristides expresses in his narration of the sickness he suffered and the sea-bathing he was prescribed in the winter of 145/146 CE:¹⁵

If one were to take these things into account and consider with how many and what sort of sufferings and with what necessity causing these he (Asclepius) took me to the sea and rivers and wells, and ordered me to do battle with the storm, he will say that all is truly beyond wonders (*ἀληθῶς περαιτέρω θαυμάτων*) and he will see more clearly the power

¹⁵ According to Behr's timeline of the *Hieroi Logoi*.

and foresight of the god, and he will join me in joy at the honour with which I was honoured, and would not rather be grieved on account of my illness. (HL 48.59)

Aristides suggests that suffering is necessary, and the god dispensed "foresight" and wisdom with his prescriptions. Aristides writes of his illness as an honor bestowed on him by god. Petsalis-Diomidis points out also that Aristides emphasizes the continuous nature of his encounters with Asclepius, in contrast to other pilgrims, many of whom are healed once and for all (115). The passage above demonstrates this point in recommending one "consider with how many and what sort of sufferings" Aristides is afflicted. His sustained relationship of close communication is a cause for joy despite and because of Aristides' sufferings. It is through these sufferings that Aristides' relationship with Asclepius is maintained.

The *Hieroi Logoi* are filled with narrations and revelations in which Aristides analyzes both his sicknesses and healings from the god in a very deliberate, detailed, and compulsive manner. This has earned him the branding of a hypochondriac for some scholars, while others simply comment on the nature of the *Hieroi Logoi* as being "transgressive both in content and style" (Downie 188). Janet Downie, for example, sees Aristides' rhetorical production as experimental. She argues that the *Hieroi Logoi* serves as the final installment in Aristides' attempts to "[portray] the link between human and divine when literary decorum separates divine hymn from human encomium" (186). On the other hand, both Israelowich and Petsalis-Diomidis add a more nuanced understanding to the *Hieroi Logoi*.

Israelowich allows that the content of the *Hieroi Logoi* are unique, but calls Aristides' religious experience "a 'product of its time' rather than a manifestation of eccentric behavior" (180), explicitly rejecting Downie's claims of a "transgressive" style. Petsalis-Diomidis calls the

Hieroi Logoi “a literary re-enactment of [a] series of *thaumata* (marvels) and at the same time a thank-offering for them” (264). This supports the interpretation of Aristides’ rhetorical production through the framework of Winkler’s confessor. Petsalis-Diomidis already understands the *Hieroi Logoi* as a thank-offering. She even comments that Aristides’ mention of oral accounts in his description of votive offerings¹⁶ suggests that these oral narrations of the god’s saving acts functioned in the same way as visual inscriptions and sculptural votive offerings (264). This aligns with Winkler’s presentation of the confessor as one who primarily narrates in order to give testimony. In this study, any payment to the gods is referred to as a thank-offering; testimonies are understood to meet the criteria of a thank-offering.

Aristides’ *Hieroi Logoi* presents the acts of the god, satisfies the payment due to the god, and, like a votive offering, claims “a space” of distinction in the healing cult of Asclepius. The *Hieroi Logoi* serves as the main source material for the *kathedra* (Aristides’ two-year period as an incubant in the Pergamene Asclepion), so the following chapter covering the *kathedra* continues to explore the *Hieroi Logoi* in the light of Winkler’s confessor. At the same time, Aristides’ other orations have much to say about the ideal relationship between orator and god, conceived as a particular situation or “sacred space.” Therefore, as this chapter provided the framework of Winkler’s confessor, the next chapter introduces the argument for using Winkler’s confessor as a paradigm through which to understand Aristides’ rhetorical production more widely.

¹⁶ But some, I mean both men and women, even attribute to the providence of the god the existence of the limbs of their body, when their natural limbs had been destroyed; and each lists different things, some thus in oral accounts, others setting them forth in votive offerings” (42.7).

CHAPTER TWO: ARISTIDES AS CONFESSOR

In addition to epigraphic evidence which has been confidently attributed to Aristides in the second century, one inscription survives from the Pergamene Asclepion which has not been officially attributed to Aristides, though R. Herzog and C. P. Johns have both argued that Aristides dedicated it. R. Herzog suggests the marble inscription is linguistically similar to Aristides' writing beyond the *Hieroi Logoi*. This marble votive inscription tells the story of a rescue from a sea voyage (Figure 2.1). Though the usual form of testimony for Winkler's confessor would be an oral narration, written accounts were customary as well (234). The inscription is a perfect example of a dedicatory act within the framework of Winkler's confessor:



Figure 2.1. Marble votive inscription (Petsalis-Diomidis 118)

within the framework of Winkler's confessor: it 1) presents an act of deliverance, 2) serves as payment (*ἱάτρᾳ*) to the god, and 3) secures an authoritative positioning. A significant component of this inscription's message is the claim to "renown":

[I]n addition to the references to being saved from the raging landscape (bodies of water and winds), the dedicant refers to himself as "companion of the Ausonian kings" (the emperors) and describes his great renown in terms of its geographical extent. In this respect the inscription displays significant thematic parallels with the *Hieroi Logoi* as well as linguistic similarities to the writings of Aristides, as argued by R. Herzog (Petsalis-Diomidis 117-118).

In this case, the votive inscription seems to comprise the aspects of a confessor. The reference to deliverance from the raging landscape inscribed in marble allows the dedicant to claim a certain space of authority, apparent when he calls himself the "companion of the Ausonian kings"—"Ausonian" referring to the southern and central regions of Italy in ancient Greek. As will be shown throughout this study, Aristides frequently claimed a place of distinction among his contemporaries, especially because of his relationship with Asclepius, which preserved him from death and provided him guidance as an orator. Because all Aristides' works considered in this study were written about or around the time of the *kathedra*, this chapter begins by exploring this influential time of Aristides' life by considering the circumstances in which the *Hieroi Logoi* was written and in what ways a confessor framework applies to them.

"Personal" Devotion and the *Kathedra*

Of course, in addition to the almost disastrous sea-voyage referenced by the marble votive, Aristides also suffered continual respiratory and digestive illness, which gave him reason

to continue his devotions to Asclepius. Following the onset of Aristides' sickness, Aristides spent most of his time in the Pergamene Asclepion beginning around 144 and 145 and lasting until 147 CE—a period Aristides calls the *kathedra*. During this time, Aristides focused on practicing incubation and dream interpretation along with rhetoric, which Aristides had abandoned because of his illnesses. At the least, the *kathedra* was a period in which Aristides felt it necessary to manage his health, but he did so through nurturing his relationship with Asclepius, which he further explored by including his personal experiences involving the god in his orations.

Though Aristides could be considered to have developed a certain discipline of devotion in the *kathedra*, it was not exactly what one would today call an ordinary retreat. He was away from his estate in Mysia, and away from Rome, where he had originally hoped to practice oratory; however, as the previous chapter would suggest, life within the healing cults of Asclepius was not without community. Yet, Aristides describes the time as the “*kathedra*,” meaning “seat” or “chair” in Greek: a time of inactivity. Some discussion of this name is warranted.

As Festugière indicates, concepts of personal piety became increasingly common in Late Antiquity, especially through such structures as the healing cults (Israelowich 137). These ideas had even existed since the writings of Plato. Festugière observes, “We must note a tendency to prefer the hidden life, the life in retreat, which Plato had already, in the famous passage of the *Republic* (VI 496B-E), recommended to the wise man when the affairs of his country have become too corrupt” (39). For philosophers, especially, the idea of a necessary separation from distractions and mundane concerns became a commonplace. For example, themes in the *Phaedo*

likewise convey a need for peace before contemplation (Festugière 40). Aristides would have been familiar with both texts; he demonstrates vast knowledge of Plato's corpus throughout *In Defense of Oratory* (1 n. 1). It is no surprise then, that Aristides displays tendencies toward life in retreat. These tendencies are illustrated most thoroughly in Aristides' *Hieroi Logoi*, which Israelowich calls "first and foremost a record of religious devotion" (137).¹⁷ The tales included in this text detail the evolution of Aristides' relationship with Asclepius over three decades. In fact, Israelowich and Festugière, among others, agree that the *Hieroi Logoi* exemplify some developments of religion in Antiquity—the inclination to avoid others.

Festugière speaks in greater depth about withdrawal from the world (*ἀναχωρεῖν*)¹⁸ as a practice seen in Stoic philosophers Seneca and Marcus Aurelius, but also more widely as a habit of mind disseminated through the doctrine Plato attributes to Socrates in the *Phaedo*. Just as a mollusk detaches itself at all points from its shell, Plato says that "the soul must learn to isolate itself" (59). As Festugière explains, *ἀναχωρεῖν*, originally signifying a retreat in the simple sense of retirement from politics, later came to mean a total detachment which took on spiritual meaning in the time of the Roman Empire. The image of the mollusk meant not only a detachment from external stimuli; it also symbolized a "withdrawal into oneself" (57).¹⁹ Some were very intentional about this withdrawal. For Aristides, withdrawal became something of a neurosis, demonstrated by his decision to name his the "*kathedra*."

¹⁷ It was a record "in which the god saved him from the grip of disease, trained him as an orator and generally reinvigorated his will to live" (Israelowich 137).

¹⁸ See Festugière 53-67.

¹⁹ "The example of Cicero is a case in point, and one has only to open one's eyes to see instances in any period: the man of action is no sooner torn from his manifold occupations than, if he has in him the stuff of a philosopher, he is led to ask himself the more serious questions which concern all mankind. The withdrawal from the world (*ἀναχώρησις*) leads in turn to the withdrawal into oneself (*ἀναχωρεῖν εἰς ἑαυτόν*)" (Festugière 57).

The *kathedra* likely took place between the summer of 145 CE until the winter of 147 CE, when, after his first year of illness, Aristides had become too physically infirm and “despondent” to continue his travel and focus on rhetoric. He instead sought comfort in the healing cults in Pergamon (HL 50.14). It was a time characterized by frequent incubation practices, hymn composition, and oratorical performance, as Aristides records in the *Hieroi Logoi*. In this context Aristides also decided to once again take up the practice of oratory. The *Hieroi Logoi* contributes most of what we know about Aristides’ experiences these two years, thereby allowing a glimpse of the cyclical exigence of illness and healing that lead to Aristides’ return to rhetoric. However, as a collection of dream records, the *Hieroi Logoi* were written over time and only later compiled and presented to the Asclepion. Therefore, I suggest that, in waiting until 170 CE to compile this comprehensive text as a testimonial gift, Aristides used moments in his orations composed during the *kathedra* to respond to the exigence of his near-death experiences.²⁰

It is not difficult to imagine this movement from public life to self-reflection for Aristides. Though he used his limited influence to benefit surrounding *poleis* at times—even going so far as to addressing emperors directly in requesting aid²¹—he was also famously known for keeping emperors waiting, as Philostratus notes. Apparently, “[W]hen the mind is absorbed in meditation it must not be distracted from the object of its search” (VS 582-583).²² It was quite

²⁰ For a discussion of metanoia resulting from near-death experiences, see Ustinova, *Divine Mania: Alteration of Consciousness in Ancient Greece*, p. 27.

²¹ See “A Letter to the Emperors Concerning Smyrna” in which Aristides requests aid for Smyrna after an earthquake from Emperors Marcus Aurelius Antoninus and Lucius Aurelius Commodus: “In the past, O Emperors most high, I sent you pieces from oratorical contests, lectures, and such things. But now the god of fortune has given you another subject. . . . In the name of god offer a helping hand, and one such as befits you. . . . You saw the city. You know the loss” (19.1).

²² This was supposedly Aristides’ reply to the same Marcus Aurelius after forcing him to wait three days before declaiming.

a journey for Aristides to actually reach a place where he could pursue meditation, however. Early events in Aristides' life as a devotee of Sarapis help to show how Aristides transitioned from his education abroad to becoming an incubant of Asclepius. Such events also dramatically present similarities between Aristides and Winkler's confessor.

Travels and Travails

Aristides was born to a respectable family in Mysia, Asia Minor in 118 CE.²³ After his initial education writing and speaking in Smyrna, he was sent to get the best oratorical education in Athens under Platonist Lucius. After completing his studies, he left Athens May 141 CE to round off his studies in Alexandria, where he spent much of his time learning the customs and religion of Egypt and enjoying the tourism. Aristides embarked upon a desert journey at Syene, for example, to do research for his "Egyptian Discourse." Here he met his first major setback in his career by falling sick. During this time of need, he turned to the local deities and began his devotions to Sarapis—a syncretized god whose worship became widespread at during the Hellenistic period.

Eventually, a sickly Aristides left Alexandria in 142 CE to sail back to Smyrna, but was caught in a violent storm. In the midst of the storm, Aristides invoked Sarapis and reached harbor without harm (Behr 21). Worship of the god was quite prominent in Smyrna, so upon arriving, he composed a hymn to the god in thanksgiving and delivered it at the festival for Sarapis on April 25. Aristides' biographer Charles Behr infers that, as the hymn included no mention of

²³ For Aristides' early life, see Behr, *Aelius Aristides and the Sacred Tales*, pp.1-22.

physical cure and closes in the hopes of Sarapis' continued assistance, Aristides' found some relief, but his illnesses returned and followed him to Rome (22).

In Rome 144 CE,²⁴ Aristides had intended to pursue his career as an orator, but found himself too sick to perform and departed after six months' discomfort and fruitless medical procedures (Behr 24). Putting his orations on hold, he sailed to Miletus and made his way back to Smyrna, where he arrived in November and found that his own doctors could not help him. Instead, they sent him to the Warm Springs where Aristides would receive his first revelation from the god Asclepius. This episode appears in Book II of the *Hieroi Logoi*. After spending days in Smyrna with a constricted throat and constant fits of shivering, Aristides reached the Warm Springs, where Asclepius indicated that he should "go forth unshod" and walk out barefoot on the cold winter ground. It is unclear whether this was accomplished in dreams or in a conscious state, but Aristides writes that upon completing the task, he cried out "Great is Asclepius! The order is accomplished" (HL 48.7). He would later attribute not only his health, but also his success as an orator to Asclepius.²⁵

Shortly after, he began his dream record. From the beginning of his narrative, Aristides attaches the utmost importance to his dreams as a means of making contact with the gods:²⁶ "And indeed the greatest and most valuable thing for my training was the arrival and communion of my dreams" (HL 50.25). In these dreams Aristides perceived the guidance of "the god." Of course, which particular god commanded Aristides' full attention varied initially, but generally,

²⁴ See Behr *Aelius Aristides and the Sacred Tales*, pp. 23-40.

²⁵ See Aristides 42.

²⁶ "Still I can say this much that straight from the beginning the God ordered me to write down my dreams" (HL 48.2).

Aristides recognized the importance of one god at a time, according to which god was most proximate to his current needs.²⁷ While in Egypt, for example, Aristides attributed any reprieve in his symptoms to the providence of Sarapis. Later on, Aristides would primarily address his supplications to Asclepius.

After arriving at the Warm Springs and receiving dreams from Asclepius, Aristides relied more and more on the guidance of this healing god, considering him an essential conductor of his travels (HL 48.5-7).²⁸ Aristides notes being encouraged by Asclepius to come to his temple in Pergamon.²⁹ He had “[given] up the study of rhetoric” and become “despondent,” but ultimately Aristides submitted: “[B]ecause of a divine summons, and my supplication, I received from the god a command and exhortation not to abandon rhetoric” (HL 50.14).

This is the feeling with which Aristides begins his period in the *kathedra*—assurance in a divine endorsement. For Aristides, it was the more than a confirmation of his ambitions. In suffering chronic digestive and respiratory problems, he attributed even his ability to speak at times to the god: “For in my circumstances, I must be saved³⁰ before declaiming. Yet, as it seems, these contrivances were for the present moment, but at the same time he (Asclepius) had better plans than salvation alone. Therefore he saved me by means worth more than the act of

²⁷ Behr describes Aristides’ religious practice as motivated by the need of the moment, which often included gods outside of the Greek pantheon: “Bereft of religious consolation and impatient for a cure, Aristides had turned to Asclepius. But we can hardly denominate this act as a conversion, for Aristides, a true polytheist, continued to worship Sarapis and Isis, and it took years before Asclepius’ dominance completely eroded away any feeling for the Egyptian gods” (Behr 25).

²⁸ Such guidance came not without some interpretation: “In oracles and dreams he (Asclepius) prescribed treatment and drugs” (Israelowich 151). Aristides’ records follow a strict and literal adherence to the prescription of the gods in the *Hieroi Logoi*, even sometimes to the concern of his friends.

²⁹ “After this (“the Savior began to make his revelations”), an invitation and a journey from Smyrna to Pergamum with good fortune” (HL 48.7).

³⁰ Behr asserts that “Aristides had not the slightest belief in the Greek underworld,” and that references to being “saved” referred primarily to physical safety (Behr 150).

being saved” (HL 50.29). As to these plans beyond physical salvation, Aristides writes a good deal about the progress he makes in oratory and eagerly begins study again, not in order to fashion himself after the classical models available to him, but to go beyond them—as if securing the authoritative position of a confessor. *In Defense*, for example, comments on the natural phenomenon that many authors “eclipse their predecessors.” Aristides continues, “it is right to feel respect for all the classics, but it not right to be scared of them” for the sake of the “arguments themselves” (*In Defense* 10-12). Later discussion will show that Aristides justifies his critical treatment of Plato partially through his own experiences with Asclepius.

Aristides does not, however, rest merely in his own self-assurance; he also writes about many affirmations he received from his contemporaries, especially after taking up the practice of oratory with newfound zeal. These affirmations often point back to the god, either directly or in Aristides’ attribution of success to Asclepius. In one passage of the *Hieroi Logoi*, Aristides records Maximus the Libyan observing, “For us you have surpassed Demosthenes in dignity, so that not even the philosophers can scorn you” (HL 50.19). In reflecting on this particular compliment, he wrote: “This remark kindled all my later ambition. This made me feel that everything, which I might do in rhetoric, was less than I should do” (HL 50.19). One feels in this utterance some personal duty, something owed, which suggests a likeness to Winkler’s description of the “confessor” as someone who feels compelled to relate the actions of her or his divine benefactor. I take Aristides’ preoccupation with testimony as part of what ultimately informed what he wrote in his incubation periods at Pergamon.

The likenesses between Aristides’ practice of recording his dreams and preserving an account of deliverance becomes clear. Winkler cites the stories from cults of Sarapis and

Asclepius as the “most likely examples of what the *aretologoi* would narrate (237),³¹ meaning that the tales of both Sarapis and Asclepius were considered wondrous enough to merit frequent attention from these storytellers. The difference in Aristides’ position from that of the *aretologoi* is that he experienced these tales himself. Therefore, he could narrate the acts of the gods, paying them tribute, and claim a space of authority. Just as material offerings claimed space in the Asclepion, these testimonies claimed a certain amount of distinction for Aristides. For example, Aristides often inserted himself in tales of the gods—and in no small way. In the *Hieroi Logoi*, he writes that he heard a “tale . . . pertain[ing to his] rhetoric and divine communion” indicating his mind should “associate with the [g]od, and in association, be superior to man’s estate.” He says that neither revelation was “remarkable” (HL 50.52); he believes himself unique.³² Aristides embodies the typical narrative themes of the *aretologoi* not by witnessing fantastic events, but taking part in them.

“Containing” the Divine Presence

Petsalis-Diomidis identifies another relevant characteristic of votive offerings: divine presence. In *De Pythiae Oraculis*, one of the books of his *Moralia*, Plutarch pens an exchange between Philinos and Boethos about divine presence in votive offerings at Delphi. Drawing from the conversation between the two, Petsalis-Diomidis explains that it was common to believe in a divine indwelling of votive offerings. Philinos remarks, “[A]mong votive offerings also, those dedicated here have movement and significance in sympathy with the god's foreknowledge, and no part of them is void or insensible, but all are filled with the divine spirit (ἀλλά πεπλῆσθαι

³¹ Winkler even gives Aristides’ oration “To Sarapis” as an example.

³² Immediately after this tale, he recalls receiving the name “Theodorus” and explains that everything he possessed was a gift from the god to him specifically, which occasioned the gift of a new name (HL 50.3).

πάντα θεϊότητος)” (398A). Not only are the offerings meaningful to the god, in some way, they are considered to “contain” the divine presence (Petsalis-Diomidis 274).

According to Petsalis-Diomidis, this sense of divine presence was communicated at the Pergamene Asclepion in a statement commissioning a votive: “‘in accordance with a command,’ *κατὰ ἐπιταγήν, κατὰ συνταγήν* ‘in accordance with a dream,’ *κατ’ ὄνειρον.*”³³ The dialogue continues:

‘Yes indeed,’ said Boethos. ‘It is not enough to incarnate the god once every month in a mortal body (*τὸν θεὸν εἰς σῶμα καθειγνῶναι θνετόν*), but we are bent upon incorporating him into every bit of stone and bronze (*ἀλλὰ καὶ λίθῳ παντὶ καὶ καλλκῶ συμφυράσομεν αὐτόν*), as if we did not have in Chance or Accident an agent responsible for such coincidences’ (398B).

The offerings this pair speaks of both symbolized the dedicant’s contact with the divine and “gave other viewers access to that encounter” (Petsalis-Diomidis 274). This understanding would explain the attention that pilgrims gave to the narratives behind votive offerings. As Chapter 1 indicated, local priests and exegetes would often help visiting pilgrims interpret the meaning behind votive offerings. This ability signified a certain amount of privilege conferred by the god, of which confessors were inherently a part because they gave their own testimonies. We hear some of this privilege when Aristides speaks about the saving acts of the gods in “An Address to Asclepius”:

³³ Petsalis-Diomidis says also that this sense is demonstrated by a note in the *Lex Sacra* that the god also might ask pilgrims for something in addition to the customary fees (274).

I have heard some people say that the god has appeared and stretched forth his hand to them when they sailed and were in trouble, and others will tell of their successes in various enterprises by following the instructions of the god. *And we are no more an audience in these matters than able to speak from experience on this subject (οὐδὲ ταῦτα ἀκούειν μᾶλλον ἢ λέγειν ἔχομεν πεπειραμένοι)*. Everything of this nature, that can be mentioned, is also found in *The Sacred Tales (Hieroi Logoi)* (42.10; emphasis added).

When it comes to divine encounters, Aristides says he is more than an audience member; literally, he does not listen to these things more than he is able to speak about them (*οὐδὲ ταῦτα ἀκούειν μᾶλλον ἢ λέγειν ἔχομεν πεπειραμένοι*). He can actually attest to the guidance of the god (Asclepius) in, for example, the case of sea voyage. Aristides claims that one could find success “in various enterprises” if one were to follow the god’s “instructions” (6.10).

Aristides reveals here a focus on two ideas: he notes the general privilege of speaking about divine encounters, but he also stresses the fact that anyone curious for more information about his experiences with the guidance of Asclepius need only consult the *Hieroi Logoi*. However, even having authorship of a testimony referenced by others would be a sign of distinction.

The *Hieroi Logoi* as Evidence of Aristides’ Concern with Speaking from Experience

For Aristides, “Asclepius’ benefits in this world outweighed the promise of the next” (Behr 150). From at least the time of Homer, Greeks commonly considered the after-life devoid of any promise of happiness (Hus 35). In Homer’s *Odyssey*, Achilles declares to Odysseus, “I should choose, so I might live on earth, to serve as the hireling of another, of some portionless

man whose livelihood was but small, rather than to be lord over all the dead that have perished” (XI, 489). Glory meant little to the dead. Alain Hus writes that this is why Classical Greek heroes such as Hector “attach so much importance to such substitutes of immortality as the assurance of the . . . acquisition of such glory as will perpetuate their name in the memory of men” (Hus 35). For Aristides, a significant amount of this assurance comes in the form of his *Hieroi Logoi*, a text which will guide one to knowledge of “what has befallen [him] from the God” (HL 48.8), much like the artifacts kept in the Asclepion.

While Chapter 1 emphasized the transformation incubants hoped to achieve in their own bodies (from sickness to health), it is certainly true that artifacts, such as the votive offerings, contributed to the sacred ecology of the Asclepion in a more lasting way because they remained in the temple. Petsalis-Diomidis writes that certain material realities in the Asclepion actually enhanced the transformative effect of the rituals which took place. This potent quality was called “charisma” and signified the power of images or material structures to “engender in the viewer direct recognition of [a] miraculous quality” (19). Aristides, for example, wrote “Regarding the Well in the Temple of Asclepius” speaking of this charisma in relation to the Sacred Well in the Pergamene Asclepion: “When the god came here from Epidaurus itself, he fell greatly in love with the spot, as is clear when he selected it and preferred it to the others, he remained here for the future Thus it can be said that it is in the fairest spot in the world” (39.5-6).

As noted in Chapter 1, this heightened sense of the god’s presence among the material components of the temple, functioned in such a way that incubants’ bodies were “animated by divinities and images of miraculously healed bodies” (238). The votive offerings depicting healed body parts of devotees especially helped to achieve this work and “suggested an even

more intense ‘embodiment’ of divine charisma within the object itself and the actual body of the pilgrim” (275). However, the bodies of healed pilgrims do not remain in the Asclepion forever. Eventually pilgrims leave, hence the importance of the material records left behind in the form of votives and inscriptions. In the same way that written accounts stand for the living testimony of Winkler’s confessors (234), the votive offerings of other devotees remain in the Asclepion in order to represent the healing in their bodies. They provide an account of the healing narratives, but also help facilitate the sacred activities within the Asclepion.

Downie comments on this idea of a record in relation to Aristides. She writes that “while the god (Asclepius) speaks through the body, it is the literary record in book form that makes the god’s salvation most real for Aristides. . . . This for him, is safety ‘once and for all,’ and hence it matters to him that the [*Hieroi Logoi*] have the status of a lasting record and commemoration” (177). Even though some proof of Asclepius’ healing power is demonstrated in his health, Aristides still seeks the status of commemoration for his work as a lasting remembrance. To be treated as a commemoration would mean that the *Hieroi Logoi* would be kept in honor as a temple artifact for the sake of others and the record it would be said to keep would be the acts of the god. As a matter of legacy, this status would be desirable for Aristides to apply to his work.

CHAPTER THREE: “HE WAS OBLIGED”: THE PAYMENT OF THE ORATOR-CONFESSOR

In 1970, one of Aristides’ inscriptions was found on the road to Therme in a region where an earthquake in 149 CE was particularly severe:

“Aristides
has paid a vow
to Asclepius the Savior.” (*The Complete Works* 425)

According to Behr, Aristides likely “paid this vow” to Asclepius for preserving his Laneion Estate in Mysia which was spared from the earthquake (505 n. 6). Inscriptions and votives were often accompanied by sacrificial offerings, but testimonies of healings and payments to fulfill vows were just as necessary, if not more so. Regarding bodily illness, Israelowich writes, “When the patient (of Asclepius) was healed he was obliged to fulfill his vows” (152); to leave a divine benefactor unthanked was quite a serious offense. Winkler comments on the dangers of neglecting a thanksgiving to the gods: “Asklepios can harm as well as heal” (239).

In exploring some of Aristides’ orations as thank-offerings, this chapter deals with both the issues of genre and style in order to later discuss the aspects of *In Defense* that mimic the function of a thank-offering. Aristides wrote prose hymns, philosophical treatises, and speeches. To what extent can we consider Aristides’ orations as thank-offerings and how do the themes of these orations support or challenge this interpretation? This chapter first focuses on “An Address to Asclepius” to establish the link between oration and offering and to raise some questions of genre. Then, it considers “To Sarapis,” a prose hymn in which Aristides explicitly argues orators as fitting speakers for the gods. Both prose hymns were dedicated to gods that Aristides referred

to as “Savior” and both help demonstrate the rhetorical moves of ethos construction that I later identify in *In Defense*.

Oratory as Divine Gift and Thank-Offering

It seems that for Aristides, the thought of a divine audience engendered plentiful activity. In response to the actions of the gods, he dedicated physical votive offerings, kept his testimonial-like dream records of the *Hieroi Logoi*, and composed epideictic orations praising the god. He himself comments on all the literary output of his devotions:

But if someone wishes to know with the utmost precision what has befallen us from the God, it is time for him to seek out the parchment books and the dreams themselves. For he will find cures of all kinds and some discourses and full scale orations and various visions, and all of the prophecies and oracles about every kind of matter, some in prose, some in verse, and all expressive of my gratitude to the God, greater than one might expect (HL 48.8).

These all function very much like the *ἵατρα*, or payment, demanded by the god for an act of healing or deliverance. Because Aristides conceptualizes the divine help of the god in terms of both physical healing and oratorical coaching,³⁴ Aristides determines oratory itself to be the most appropriate form of thanksgiving.

From the start, it seems clear in the *Hieroi Logoi* that Aristides claims some external guidance in resuming his practice of oratory at the start of the *kathedra*: “[B]ecause of a divine

³⁴ “For in my circumstances, I must be saved before declaiming. Yet, as it seems, these contrivances were for the present moment, but at the same time he (Asclepius) had better plans than salvation alone. Therefore he saved me by means worth more than the act of being saved” (HL 50.29).

summons, and my supplication, I received from the god a command and exhortation not to abandon rhetoric” (HL 50.14). Those familiar with Aristides’ journey from Rome to Smyrna, readily assumed divine providence led Aristides to the *kathedra*. For example, Aristides mentions that Pardalas, a rhetorical expert visiting the Asclepion, claimed some insight regarding Aristides’ experiences. Pardalas indicated troubles at sea and physical illness had not and would not hinder Asclepius in guiding Aristides back to the practice of oratory. In one particular encounter, Aristides says that Pardalas “dared to say and affirm to me that I had become ill through some divine good fortune, so that by my association with the God I might make this improvement” (HL 50.27). Unfortunately for Aristides, this sentiment did not make suffering through his illnesses any easier.

Aristides often considered the ability to deliver an oration at all a victory because his body was so frail: “And he (Asclepius) commanded me to go to the Temple Stoa . . . to offer to him the very first fruits of these improvised and competitive orations . . . [T]he prescription was like an order to fly, the practice of rhetoric, for one who could not breathe” (HL 50.15-17). Asclepius was asking quite a lot given Aristides’ illness. Aristides indicates here that the proof of the god’s work lies in the strength of his performance: “And pausing a little, I contended, and my other strength was such as is the God’s devising” (HL 50.18). These two passages demonstrate that for Aristides, both telling tales of his own oratorical acclaim and praising the god directly give witness to the power of the god.³⁵

³⁵ Though clarifying a narcissistic nature to Aristides’ rhetorical practices, Laurent Pernot argues that Aristides “did not allow himself to speak about himself or his successes except when this emphasized the power of the god” (“The Rhetoric of Religion” 247).

What remains constant in these expressions, however, is Aristides' choice to use oratory as a way of offering thanks to the god. With its continual reflection on the wisdom and action of the god, "An Address Regarding Asclepius" gives some indication as to the character of the developing relationship between the orator and the god during the time of the *kathedra*. Aristides remarks in his "Address to Asclepius," "Of course, I am concerned to express my gratitude and show my respect by means of sacrifice and incense But the expression of gratitude through oratory appears particularly proper for me" (42.2). Even that his oratory "is a gift of the god himself." Therefore, his prose hymns would be a worthy return to the god. Robert Parker describes this transactional relationship saying, "His (Aristides') obligation to the gods might be seen as the reverse side of his claim that his own eminence as an orator was divinely-inspired, that he practised a kind of sacred oratory" (67). Next, he lists many of the god's deeds, including physical healing,³⁶ but says the best and "most wholesome" must be oratory, it being the very "sum of life" (42.3, 4.12):

For if in general the study of oratory means for man the point, and, as it were, the sum of life, and of speeches those concerning the gods are most necessary and just, and our career in oratory clearly is a gift of the god himself, there is no means of showing greater gratitude to the god . . . than through oratory, nor would we have a better use to which to put our oratory (42.3).

For Aristides, oratory *is* the reason to live—the "point" of life (42.3). It is that which makes Aristides' life meaningful. Therefore, Asclepius not only saves Aristides from sickness and death in the body, he spares Aristides a mundane existence; exercising this gift of oratory, then, must

³⁶ Aristides even claims that Asclepius prolongs his life (42.6).

serve as the best way of giving thanks to the god. Aristides says he has nothing better to do with oratory than offer its fruits, much as a confessor would offer thanks for Asclepius' divine beneficence by means of testimony.

He Who “Best Knows Our Tempests”

Aristides delivered “An Address Regarding Asclepius” at the Night Festival at the Temple of Zeus Asclepius at Pergamon in 177 CE (Behr 416). As such, this prose hymn was not written in the *kathedra*, but still focuses on Aristides' relationship with the god and the many ways in which the god has rescued, healed or preserved him: “Some say that they have been resurrected when they were dead, and their stories are accepted, of course, and it is an old practice of the god. We have received this benefit not only once, but it is not even easy to say how often” (42.6). Asclepius not only preserved Aristides from death (HL 50.29), he became the “patron” of Aristides' oratorical career (*In Defense* 430). Though he says that “the providence of the god (Asclepius)” benefits community and individual alike, and that Asclepius “possesses all power [and] has chosen to benefit mankind in every way,” Aristides does not hesitate to claim a certain understanding between himself and Asclepius: “He himself best knows our tempests”³⁷ (42.5, 42.7).

Aristides begins by acknowledging his habit of calling upon the god and describes his relationship with the god in terms of a sea voyage, one of the most typical metaphors of the confessor:³⁸

³⁷ "τὰς δὲ γε ἡμετέρας περὶ ταῦτα τρικυμίας αὐτὸς μὲν ἄριστα σύννοιδεν, αὐτὸς δὲ καὶ παύσας φαίνεται."

³⁸ As Behr mentions, Orations 42-46 were all concerned with the theme of “tempests, whether metaphorical or actual, and might have even comprised a separate volume (416).

O Lord Asclepius, how glad and eager we were when you granted us, as it were, from a great sea of despair to reach a calm harbor and to address the common hearth of mankind, in which no one, indeed, under the sun is uninitiated—and we can affirm that no Greek to this day has enjoyed more advantages! (42.1)

There is a direct connection here between the god and physical safety, and further, the god's *desire* for the well-being of mankind. While not all characterizations of the gods may have presented them as particularly concerned about the human condition, Aristides considers Asclepius a benevolent god, not uninterested in the situation of those who worshipped him.³⁹ Additionally, Aristides claims all this goodwill towards his own person. “No Greek,” he says, “has enjoyed more advantages” (42.1). Therefore, it would seem that the “calm harbor” to which Aristides refers in the opening of this oration is the *kathedra* at Pergamon.

By narrating the miraculous events that occur in his own life, Aristides gives testimony to the gods, making known their deeds beyond simply cataloging them. Instead, he connects these deeds to the success of a hero—himself. Parker relates that “Aristides is keen to show that his gods are still active in the world today” (70). Through the rhetorical role of the confessor, the providence and renown of the gods is made known through proof and testimony. In much the same way that the salvific acts of the gods engender a response from the ones they deliver, *testimony*, whether as physical votive offering or narrative, demonstrates an outward sign of the god's favor in efforts to inspire deeper devotion and loyalty to the cult.

³⁹ “Since the god possesses all power, he has chosen to benefit mankind in every way, giving each man what is his due” (42.5). See also Parker “Religion in the Prose Hymns,” (2016) on this point (76).

Israelowich, however, comments that “Aristides’ lectures on theology in his epideictic orations and prose hymns” function more as “public displays of rhetorical skill” (138). They demonstrate Aristides’ work in assembling ideas and features that would have been familiar to his audience. In other words, Aristides simply delivered what he believed would be well-received by a human audience. Israelowich claims that these orations and hymns should not be understood as representing Aristides’ actual thoughts and beliefs concerning the gods (144 n. 39). This position is not opposed to the purposes of this argument, however. Aristides’ narrations of the deeds of the gods, formulaic or not, might include an account of the part he plays in these deeds. It should not matter how scripted Aristides praises were; if they were rhetorically appropriate for the cult and acceptable to the god, Aristides might at once conform to the conventions of the prose hymn and press forward in his own interests. Even Israelowich identifies “two interlinked goals” of this oration: to “eulogiz[e] Asclepius” and to “glorify himself as an orator, by hinting that he was trained by Asclepius himself” (144). My argument implies that the act of simply dedicating an oration adds to Aristides’ glory. Therefore, one could consider a prose hymn focusing on personal experience like “An Address Regarding Asclepius,” to function both as a confessor’s thank offering and an expression of rhetorical skill. This goal, however, requires more reconciliation between the codified nature of the genre and the individualistic expression belonging to confessors.

The Prose Hymn

Prose hymns did not replace traditional choral hymns, but they were the result “of a new rhetorical culture,” which placed the orator in a new position—“addressing the gods in gratitude

for gifts granted to himself . . . before an audience” (Parker 68). This section explores the genre in terms of dialect, subject matter, and rhetorical strategies and figures.

Philostratus, among others, has commented in *Vitae Sophistarum (Lives of the Sophists)* on the meticulous nature with which Aristides crafted his arguments. As previously mentioned, Aristides did not deliver orations *ex tempore*, but instead “strove after extreme accuracy.” For example, Philostratus records Aristides as famously declaring, “I am one of those who do not vomit their speeches but try to make them perfect” (*VS* 2.9, 583). Rhetors of this time were measured by their command of the Attic dialect and their ability to speak on well-known subjects from Greek *paideia* (Behr 481 n. 1); so rather than associate himself with “the custom and pomposity of the sophist” (28.128), Aristides built his career upon his capacious knowledge of classical works, his impeccable replication of the Attic dialect, and his thorough and discerning style of argumentation (*VS* 2.9, 583).

Contemporary scholarship has frequently noted the codified nature of both the formal features and subject matter of the prose hymn.⁴⁰ Consequently, there has been much speculation about whether these hymns were composed in response to genuine religious belief. Since Julius Amman published *Die Zeusrede des Aelios Aristides* in 1931, there has been an alternate view that three of Aristides’ prose hymns relate authentic religious experience: the hymns to Zeus, Asclepius, and Sarapis (Amman 16-18, Parker 69-70, Russell 201). Amman claims that these three orations read much less mechanically than the others as a result of Aristides’ inherited devotion to Zeus and his direct relationship with Sarapis and Asclepius.

⁴⁰ See Israelowich, *Society, Medicine and Religion in the Sacred Tales of Aelius Aristides*; Parker, “Religion in the Prose Hymns,” (2016); Pernot, *Epideictic Rhetoric: Questioning the Stakes of Ancient Praise*; Russell “Aristides and the Prose Hymn,” (1990).

D. A. Russell does not seem impressed by this reasoning, however. His assertion is that we find personal devotion in Amman's three prose hymns because we already know of Aristides' devotions. He places prose hymns on a spectrum. On one end, more "hymnic" features derived from the language of Plato prevail —short cola, asyndeton, anaphora, isocolon, ornamented diction. The other end of the spectrum includes prose hymns closer to epideictic orations in the regularity of their features (200-201). Because Aristides composed both prose and verse hymns concomitantly, Russell states no chronological arguments can be made regarding the stylistic differences of Aristides' hymns (201). Therefore, why must the "authenticity" of these orations determine style? He asks, "What is to prevent him (Aristides) also using diverse rhetorical techniques as the fancy moved him, sometimes tending to the Platonic part of his repertoire, sometimes more to the Isocratean?" (201). It is true that Aristides prided himself on intentionality and control in his work, but with various topics and styles.

I agree in part with Russell. Aristides' literary and rhetorical proficiency would allow him to write in whatever style he might prefer. Furthermore, if he was known for his linguistic precision and extensive knowledge of classical works, why should traditional commonplaces and periodic or non-periodic structures negate authentic personal expression?

Parker, for one, assumes a religious sincerity behind Aristides' prose hymns. He says that Aristides' work in the prose hymn genre comes from the same kind of feeling that might "elicit from a more ordinary individual a dedication or sacrifice" (67-68). Instead, Aristides *performed* his gratitude through the composition of these orations. Indeed, Parker describes Aristides' orations in terms of religious act, given in sight of both a human and divine audience. He suggests that this "supposedly personally-motivated offering" might have been regularly

delivered in a public performance context (68). Why the hesitation to identify the prose hymn as personally motivated? Does a lack of “personal motivation” behind the rhetorical moves of an offering limit the extent to which we can consider an oration as a testimony? One might look to the subject matter of the hymns to answer this question.

Though Israelowich describes “An Address Regarding Asclepius” as far less personal than the *Hieroi Logoi* (144), he asserts that the religious themes of Aristides’ orations can be considered “indicative of his own religious sentiments” when located in his private life (144). The closer the themes, examples, and narrations follow Aristides’ own experiences, such as those recorded in the *Hieroi Logoi*, the more personal the oration will be, and the more fitting it would be to call it a testimony. An oration that discusses personal experiences in relation to the gods will draw more from the framework of the confessor: narrating a divine act as payment to the god in the hopes of securing a place of distinction.

The kind of discourse most meaningful to Aristides gives him a place of distinction among his peers. As long as Aristides is able to narrate the deeds of the gods in an experiential way, the prose hymn seems to facilitate this kind of work easily. If the confessor framework provides Aristides a rhetorical strategy for achieving distinction, the prose hymn provides a method. He certainly composed many hymns that followed similar patterns. Acting as a confessor in a particular genre helps Aristides establish the worthiness of oratory as a legitimate pursuit, an art within which the god can, and often does (according to Aristides), act. It is this discourse of the confessor that provides Aristides the most agency and expresses his sense that oratory is a sacred vocation.

“To Sarapis” (And Not the Poets)

Aristides composed “To Sarapis” early in life, just before the start of the *kathedra*. This was likely in the year 142 for the festival of Zeus Asclepius. As one of Aristides’ earliest orations, it predates Aristides’ prose hymn style (Behr 419 n.1), which may be another reason to group “To Sarapis” with “To Zeus” and “An Address Regarding Asclepius” as set apart by actual religious feeling. However, this oration also serves as an example of an actual oration composed in thanksgiving for being delivered by the god—Sarapis, in this case.⁴¹

Aristides comments in this prose encomium how much easier it is to praise the gods through song than through prose. However, he allows, “Still we must try to accomplish our address, especially in our fulfillment of a vow since we were saved” (45.13). Aristides is not satisfied with this opportunity because of the limited discursive allowances of the orator, compared to the poets, who might use song. Even so, Aristides says he must attempt an address to fulfil the vow he made at sea promising an oration to Sarapis (Behr 419 n. 1), even though it may be difficult to do without the “agency of song”—never mind the fact that these narrating divine acts “[has] been left to poets alone” (45.13). This is primarily where Aristides reveals his preoccupation with wanting his work to be recognized for its intimacy with the gods.

In fact, Aristides begins the oration by commenting on the license of the poets⁴² before even speaking about the deeds of the god. Far from being limited in their subject material,

⁴¹ In the earlier part of his life, Aristides fostered a devotion to Sarapis, although later in life he primarily focused on his relationship with Asclepius: “[I]t was Asclepius who was the focus of Aristides’ religious devotion, no doubt due to his own fragile health” (Israelowich 142).

⁴² This discussion contributes to scholars’ speculation about whether or not this particular oration, being one of Aristides’ first, was innovative in its approach, especially considering this passage taking issue with the verse being preferred to prose. For more about this issue, see Russell “Aristides and the Prose Hymn,” (1990).

Aristides asserts that the poets may treat whatever subject matter they choose in whatever form they enjoy best. Meanwhile, orators are left without such privilege:

There is nothing which they (poets) do not dare or which presents difficulties for them. But they raise up their gods on machines, and embark their gods on voyages to sail with whomever they wish them to. And when they have . . . declared that they are the ‘creatures of the Muses’ and ‘invincible in their wisdom,’ they believe their hymn to be sufficient, and no ordinary persona seeks any more from them. Then do poets have need of the gods, while we—? But this is not fitting to express. Indeed, it is attested by the poet themselves that “all men need the gods”. Therefore it is also reasonable for all men to honor them with the means which each possesses. (45.2-5)

In these opening lines, Aristides shows contempt for both the position of these poets and their storytelling methods. Poets were believed to compose in a kind of *mania* through the Muses. Further, poets had special status both in a religious and a literary sense. Therefore Aristides remarks that they may compose their pieces “with whatever thoughts and conceptions they choose,” regardless if they be true or false (45.1). Aristides challenges such methods, however, through an old commonplace from the poets themselves. He reminds the audience that “all men need the gods,” and therefore, it is appropriate to offer to the gods honor through whatsoever means each might possess, whether verse or prose. So much the better if these means be prose, for Aristides comments that prose predates verse and is therefore more natural to man, having been given by the gods while verse was only later introduced (45.8).

What seems even more urgent to Aristides, however, are the roles of the poets as speakers for the gods more than their own works. He bristles at the authority they claim. Because

of the poets' seemingly established role as speakers for the gods, the common folk do not question their position. "So very sacred do we regard them," relates Aristides, "and we honor them so much that we ourselves have conceded to them to write hymns and to address the gods, as if they were truly the prophets of the gods" (45.5).

However, Aristides is thinking about his own relationship with the gods:

But are poets alone dear to the gods and do the gods receive their gifts with the greatest pleasure? Why then have we not also made poets alone priests of the gods? Is it, by Zeus, that all the prophets of the gods, who can predict the future, indicate metrically what must be done? Yet, by Zeus most oracles are not given metrically by the prophetess herself in Delphi, by the priestesses in Dodona, by Trophonius, and by the dreams from Asclepius and Sarapis. . . . Therefore if we honor nature, we would honor the very ordinance and intention of the gods. (45.6-8)

Aristides suggests (or almost argues that) intimacy with the gods is not restricted to poets; priests also have authority to speak about and/or on behalf of the gods. Further, if prose is most natural to man and thus most proximate to the gods' intentions of human expression, orators should share this privileged position, for "the gods would honor [humanity] more if [humans] were to place the highest value on the same things that they do" (45.8-9). In light of this argument, Aristides continues to write hymns in prose rather than verse. I suggest, however, that is the framework of the cultic confessor that helps Aristides to develop the rhetorical strategies which ultimately give him the agency he seeks he is able to proclaim himself a divinely-inspired orator.

The next and final chapter presents *In Defense* as an argument in which Aristides clearly develops these strategies. Within the oration he describes the ideal relationship between orator

and god, but the main argument is that with the help of the gods “a modern” (Aristides) has agency to place her or his opinion amongst those of “the classics” (Plato his contemporaries) (10).

CHAPTER FOUR: “SPEAK[ING] FROM EXPERIENCE”: A NEW RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN GOD AND ORATOR

In the preface of *Making Men: Sophists and Self-Presentation in Ancient Rome*, Maud Gleason references John J. Winkler’s *The Constraints of Desire: The Anthropology of Sex and Gender in Ancient Greece*. This was an expression of thanks for his work on ancient gender roles, which helped to inform her own work on ancient self-presentation. She quotes Winkler, “Mediterranean anthropocentrism is both an unquestioned truth and universal fib: each man acknowledges its force, nodding sagely and silently, with his fingers crossed behind his back” (Gleason xii). The original passage in Winkler’s work, however, reads “androcentrism,” not “anthropocentrism” (*The Constraints* 5). Of course, “androcentrism” makes more sense in context—Gleason had just referenced the sometimes-overwhelming nature of approaching gender stereotypes in her work—but this simple error poses an important question for current researchers: How can scholars circumvent an anthropocentric focus in work concerning ancient religion?

Studies in rhetoric champion inquiries into material and embodied rhetorics, but invariably avoid what might be termed “divine rhetorics”—rhetorics that consider supernatural forces as endemic to certain rhetorical production. If one is to thoroughly discern all one can from the rhetorical production shaped by ancient religious practice, one must account for rhetorical production that presupposes divine actors. Consider, for example, more of Winkler’s discussion of androcentrism:

As such, the convention of androcentrism is a limited language of men in certain conditions; it does not adequately represent the entire social world, as we would like to

describe it, but rather serves to mark off a restricted area of importance (that of public transactions) and to speak of it in absolute terms as if it were the whole. (*Constraints* 5)

Again, if “anthropocentrism” had replaced “androcentrism,” we should understand that ancient religious and rhetorical contexts were complex. Ignoring the effect that genuine belief in the gods had on the actions and motivations of actors both within the temple and beyond renders a fragmentary image of social relations among Greek speakers. To present a complete picture of rhetorical production in religious contexts, one must account for religious belief, religious non-belief, opportunism, political aspiration, and everything in between: “We must learn to read our texts from several angles” (*Constraints* 5).

In regards to the current study, this chapter presents the culmination of the thesis presented—that Aristides’ corpus provides alternate ways of recognizing material and embodied practices of ethos-construction and that considering his production in the context of the healing cults demonstrates a shift away from place-based religious obligations to a profession of experience-based relations with the gods.⁴³

The preceding chapters proposed that some of Aristides’ orations could be viewed as thank offerings. This chapter is not meant to engage with the specific arguments that Aristides makes in his orations, but to propose a consideration of Aristides as orator-confessor beyond simply the *Hieroi Logoi* or his prose hymns. I argue that for Aristides rhetorical currency subsists in intimacy with the gods, therefore Aristides’ expressions of personal experience with the gods

⁴³ “Scholars who accept the distinction between private and public religions view the second century CE as a turning point in the history of religious beliefs and cultic habits, which manifested itself in the form of a shift from communicating with the god through public institutions such as a college of priests or a temple based oracle to a more direct approach” (Israelowich 137).

go beyond conventional aretologies (codified praises) or commonplaces typical of the prose hymns. Instead, I use *In Defense* to present evidence for how Aristides connects intimacy with the gods to rhetorical success.

Defending Oratory in the *Kathedra*

Downie discusses the *Hieroi Logoi* as “Aristides’ most overtly personal text” (153). She writes,

[T]heir (the *Hieroi Logoi*) central concern with a double, divinely inspired, authorial voice, and their self-consciousness about the social consequences of literary experimentation, are themes that we can trace also in the corpus of prose hymns that are an important and distinctive part of his literary legacy (153).

She explains that in the imperial era, a new kind of informal rhetorical feature was developing: the *lalia*. *Lalia* served as “informal chats” that allowed authors to speak about their own experiences. Downie argues that Aristides was looking for a way to incorporate personal narrative and praise of the god in his works. Consequently, his experimentation with *lalia* resulted in a “self-consciousness” that she traces both in the *Hieroi Logoi* and in his prose hymns (152-3). *In Defense*, too, displays an overt concern with the voice of the author in its argument to legitimize criticism of the texts of canonical rhetorical figures based on the arguments of the author. This emphasizes the agency of an author, and what is possible for him or her. I build a more specific argument: Aristides legitimizes the criticism of texts from figures like Plato by incorporating “self-conscious” and self-referential discussions—the most significant being his discussion of the “true orator.”

At the end of *In Defense*, Aristides describes an orator who practices in private and “enlist[s] the god as his guide and patron.” “Such a man,” he says, “would not find it hard to respond to Plato . . . and in fact would have by far the noblest and best justified case of all ready to hand” (429-437). The central theme of the piece, to be sure, is the refutation of Plato’s identification of oratory with flattery, but this passage also reveals a religious motivation for *In Defense*. Aristides gives “personal testimony [of] the helping power of the god” (Winkler 234). In delivering him from sickness and death to the *kathedra*—a place which made consistent rhetorical (and religious) edification possible for Aristides—Asclepius would certainly have qualified as a guide and patron to Aristides’ rhetorical studies.

As a response to a classic argument in Attic dialect, *In Defense* shares some qualities of the typical of the sophistic exercise called *meletai*. In this kind of oration, orators of the period practiced argumentation and linguistic conformity (Israelowich 138 n. 5). Typically, Second Sophistic orators would declaim historical themes *ex tempore* before an audience. However, as was the case with Aristides, orators often wrote these orations without delivering them. *In Defense* works through a traditional problem in Attic like the *meletai*, but it also makes use of many themes, features, and techniques of other genres. In this way, *In Defense* seems to provide the same goals that Downie says belonged to the *Hieroi Logoi* as a “narrative of divine healing”: it helps Aristides claim professional status and allows for stylistic experimentation (34). *In Defense* presents extensive argumentation, but one also finds very specific autobiographical elements and religious practices. Further, because this oration serves a wide audience in its argument, it has the potential to contribute to a larger understanding of rhetorical production if

one observes how a confessor-like inclusion of personal experience facilitates the way Aristides constructs his ethos.

Specifically, *In Defense* responds to Plato's claims in the *Gorgias* that oratory is not an art (τέχνη), but merely a form of flattery. Aristides first responds that oratory is not merely a flattery, but that it works by means of conjecture. All human experience must function this way because knowledge belongs to the gods:

The case is not that oratory has no element of science (τέχνης) because she takes aim by conjecture (δι' ἐν τούτῳ μέτεστι τὸ στοχάζεσθαι), but that it is thanks to this one property, aiming by conjecture, even if not through a single one of all the others, that she does have such an element, if indeed Plato was right to say that she takes aim by conjecture. (175)⁴⁴

Again, for Aristides, oratory must depend on conjecture because all certainty comes from the gods and is beyond the reach of mankind: “[D]o you not yourself confess, [Plato], that even your own treasured science or wisdom . . . forms conjectures about the most important things, at any rate when you say that firm assertion is impossible and leave the precise truth to god (ἀλλ' ἀφίης τῷ θεῷ τὰκριβές), quite properly and in a truly philosophical manner? (εὖ ποιῶν καὶ φιλοσοφῶν ὡς ἀληθῶς)” (176).⁴⁵ For Aristides, legitimate inquiry assumes that “precise truth” comes from the gods.

Aristides connects the interests of the gods to the well-being of mankind as he explains that oratory was given by the gods in order for human civilization to function (*In Defense* 207-

⁴⁴ “οὐκοῦν οὐχ ὅτι στοχάζεται, διὰ τοῦτο οὐ μέτεστι τέχνης αὐτῆ, ἀλλ' εἰ καὶ μὴ δι' ἐν τῶν ἄλλων πάντων, δι' ἐν τούτῳ μέτεστι τὸ στοχάζεσθαι, εἰ τοῦτ' ἀληθές εἶρηκε Πλάτων ὅτι δὴ στοχάζοιτο” (175).

⁴⁵ “ἀλλ' αὐτὴν τὴν πολυτίμητον εἴτ' ἐπιστήμην εἴτε σοφίαν χρὴ προσειπεῖν, οὐκ αὐτός, ὧς πρὸς θεῶν, εἰκάζειν περὶ τῶν μεγίστων ὁμολογεῖς, ὅταν γέ που φῆς μὴ εἶναι διῆσχυρίσασθαι, ἀλλ' ἀφίης τῷ θεῷ τὰκριβές, εὖ ποιῶν καὶ φιλοσοφῶν ὡς ἀληθῶς;” (*In Defense* 176).

211). He remarks that its purpose is “to save the whole of humanity” (σῶσαι πάντας ἀνθρώπους) and that being “[d]evised for such a noble and weighty purpose, she alone has made our life livable”⁴⁶ (207, 211). Human beings do not always act in justice, so oratory was invented to provide a check on problematic behavior:

It is this state of affairs that moved human beings to invent something for themselves, or the gods to invent it for them, that would restrain physical force and be a kind of guarantee of equality and fairness to all, acting in the interests alike of the many and of those naturally inclined to the use of force (207).⁴⁷

It seems that the topic of oratory inevitably leads Aristides to expressions of devotion because he closely associates oratory with the gods’ concern for mankind. In this oration, Aristides argues that oratory is one of “mankind’s greatest and fairest blessings, which come from the gods” (34), and in so connecting this faculty to them, Aristides attributes to oratory some supernatural qualities.

He identifies oratory as an unquantifiable resource; it cannot be divided or supplemented: [T]he man who excels in powers of speech outstrips his rivals alike individually and combined; the measure of his superiority endures without interruption and cannot be destroyed. Oratorical ability cannot be gathered together from different sources like money, nor can any shortfall be made good by further contributions (405).

If one’s skill in oratory surpasses that of others, neither a group nor singular challenger could exceed it because Aristides claims that oratory belongs properly to the individual as something

⁴⁶ εὐρεθεῖσα δὲ ὑπὲρ τοιούτων καὶ τηλικούτων μόνη βιωτὸν ἡμῖν πεποίηκε τὸν βίον (In Defense 211).

⁴⁷ “οὗτο οὖν εἶναι τὸ ποιῆσαν εὐρεῖν τι τοιοῦτον ἀνθρώπους ὑπὲρ αὐτῶν, ἢ θεοὺς γε ὑπὲρ τῶν ἀνθρώπων, ὃ τὴν μὲν ἰσχὺν ἐπισηήσει, τοῦ δὲ ἴσου καὶ δικαίου πᾶσιν ὥσπερ ἐνέχυρον γενήσεται ταῦτόν τοις τε πολλοῖς συμφέρον καὶ τοῖς πρὸς τὸ βιάζεσθαι πεφκόςιν αὐτοῖς” (In Defense 207).

given: “For as long as the superior man’s superiority does not desert him, banding together and weight of numbers count for nothing, even if you have Darius’ army behind you” (407).⁴⁸ Rather than a discussion of gradual development in oratory, Aristides emphasizes the inseparability between orator and oratory. On these grounds, he compares oratory to beauty: “This is indeed the biggest single indication of how closely eloquence and beauty are related, and that words are to the soul what beauty is to the body” (407).⁴⁹

As with beauty, when oratory is bestowed, it is a cause for thanks or giving back to the god. Unlike beauty, which fades in time, talent in oratory is not “consumed with use,” but instead increases (408-409). Aristides insists, “words come to us from sources that lose nothing from the benefits they do us. It is thus plausible to say that they alone partake of the divine nature” (410).

I begin with this later passage of the oration because it presents two significant images for Aristides: 1) oratory as divine gift, and 2) oratory as the possession of an individual. These images demonstrate the components of the confessor framework in two parts. First, in a divine act, the god sends inspiration. When Aristides describes oratory as a blessing of the gods “from sources that lose nothing from the benefits they do us” (410), he describes a divine act on behalf of mankind analogous to the inspirations and healings he experiences from Asclepius. Second, if oratory belongs properly to the individual as a skill bestowed, Aristides can claim a unique role as an orator-confessor. He would identify himself as one chosen by the gods for health and oratorical skill. Aristides could offer testimony of these events.

⁴⁸ ἕως γὰρ ἂν μὴ παρ’ αὐτοῦ τὸ κρεῖττον παρέλθῃ, ἢ γε κοινωνία καὶ τὸ πλῆθος οὐδενὸς ἄξιον, οὐδ’ ἂν τὴν Δαρείου στρατιάν ἄγῃς (407).

⁴⁹ ᾧ καὶ μεγίστῳ δείκνυται ὅση τις ἢ τῷ λόγῳ πρὸς τὸ καλὸν συγγένεια, καὶ ὅτι τοῦτ’ ἐν ψυχῇ λόγοι, ὅπερ κάλλος ἐν σώματι (407).

This sequence is shown even more fully in Aristides' description of the "true orator" near the end of *In Defense*. Aristides explains that in drawing solely from a divine source, words become valuable in themselves. Through this intrinsic value, they attract the orator worthy enough to recognize them:

What then is oratory in and of itself, and the true orator? I would not hesitate to say that the best with words is he who is the best man. Suppose then there were to emerge among us an individual who was of such a kind as not readily to participate in the citizen assembly, or argue over public policy because he sees that things are in a bad state, even though he is by no means at the bottom of the heap in terms of reputation and status and timely benefactions, but instead practices the use of words by himself, holding their essential character and the beauty that resides in them in high honor, and enlisting the god as guide and patron of his life and his works. Such a man as this would not find it hard to respond to Plato either, and in fact would have by far the noblest and best justified case of all ready to hand.⁵⁰ (430)

Many have suggested that this passage is self-referential. Behr, of course, places this oration during the time of the *kathedra*,⁵¹ and as Michael Trapp notes, it is likely that "Aristides has his own case in mind in the characterization of the good orator" (Behr 128, *In Defense* 403 n. 244).

Of notable interest is Aristides' first assertion, that the "best man"—the true orator worthy of

⁵⁰ τί δήτα αὐτή γε καθ' ἑαυτήν ἡ ῥητορικὴ καὶ ὁ ῥήτωρ; ἐγὼ μὲν γὰρ οὐκ ἀποκνήσαιμ' ἂν φάναι τοῦτον ἄριστον εἶναι περὶ λόγους ὅστις ἀνὴρ [ῥήτωρ] ἄριστος. εἰ τοίνυν τις καὶ τοιοῦτος ἐγγένοιτο οἷος ῥητορικὴν ἔχων εἰς μὲν δὴ μους ῥαδίως μὴ εἰσιέναι, μηδὲ περὶ πολιτείας ἀμφισβητεῖν ὁρῶν ἐτέρως ἔχοντα τὰ πράγματα, καὶ ταῦτα οὐκ ἐν ὑστάτοις ὦν δόξης ἔνεκα καὶ τιμῶν καὶ τῶν ἐπικαίρων φιλοτιμιῶν, αὐτὸς δὲ ἐφ' ἑαυτοῦ τοῖς λόγοις χρῶτο, τὴν αὐτῶν φύσιν καὶ τὸ ἐν αὐτοῖς καλὸν τετιμηκώς, καὶ θεὸν ἡγεμόνα καὶ προστάτην ἐπιγραψάμενος τοῦ τε βίου καὶ τῶν λόγων, οὐδὲ τούτω χαλεπὸν πρὸς Πλάτωνα ἀντειπεῖν, ἀλλ' οὗτος ἂν καὶ πολὺ καλλίστων καὶ δικαιωτάτων εὐπορήσειεν λόγων.

⁵¹ For Behr's chronology of Aristides' literary activity, including the events in the *Hieroi Logoi* and the dating of his larger corpus, see *Aelius Aristides and the Sacred Tales*, Appendix A, pp. 121-130.

recognition—is the one who is “best with words.” This will be the one who prizes oratory above all else, knowing it “as a fine and noble possession” (*In Defense* 437). As Aristides asserts, oratory “[f]rom the beginning . . . has obtained and continues for all time rightly to obtain the greatest regard and honor not only among men but also among the gods” (437). Therefore, the one skilled with words, by means of close association with them will be “justified” as if partaking somehow also in the divine nature (430). In recognizing the beauty of words as belonging to the god, the orator will seek them and the god together “by himself.” Again, the gods are worthy of praise because oratory is available to the individual.

Analogous to the sentiment that Aristides expresses in the *Hieroi Logoi* about inevitably doing “less” than he ought in regard to rhetoric (HL 50.19),⁵² Aristides stresses the importance of oratory to the “true orator.” The true orator honors “practic[ing] the use of words” above all else, being “impelled by words themselves, and in the belief that fine words are a fitting possession for a man to have” (*In Defense* 430-431). Therefore, such a man works to the best of his abilities, perhaps as Aristides considers himself to do in composing his perfect orations.

After writing of the beauty of words in his passage about the true orator, Aristides speaks of Asclepius in a similarly elevated way: “I am entitled to forgiveness for treating the gods of eloquence as more important than the beautiful Plato. Asclepius too, best in all, exempts me from blame, with his own far from valueless endorsement, <. . . .> both in verse and like this in prose” (466). In the framework of the confessor, any kind of divine act on behalf of mankind would necessitate testimony from a worthy devotee.

⁵² “This remark kindled all my later ambition. This made me feel that everything, which I might do in rhetoric, was less than I should do” (HL 50.19).

As Israelowich points out, it was believed that only those whom Asclepius considered worthy would be healed (151). Aristides seems to apply this principle to his training in oratory from Asclepius. Asclepius gives him an “endorsement” in verse and in prose such that Aristides is exempted from blame (466). Therefore, because the god will associate himself so closely with the true orator as a guide and patron, “Not only must he (the orator) necessarily within himself be free of all taint of flattery and have nothing counterfeit in his soul; he must also necessarily be far removed from all flatterers and all kinds of reprehensible society and associations” (*In Defense* 435). The force of this statement obviously results from the stylized way in which Aristides confidently responds to Plato in order to draw a line between flattery and oratory in the conclusion of his argument. However, because Asclepius was considered a “moral deity” (Hus 64, Israelowich 151), Aristides’ reverence would be expected. Furthermore, stressing the moral nature of Asclepius and the orator’s need to “have nothing counterfeit in his soul” would help Aristides assume a certain superiority if he refers to himself.

Aristides’ Testimony of Oratory

In his breakdown of the oration, Behr describes sections 32-134 of *In Defense* as the “[r]esult of conceding that oratory is not an art” (449 n.1). Aristides argues that the value of oratory would not be lost even if it were not considered an art (τέχνη). However, it is not the logical reasoning of these pieces that appeals to Behr. He states, “What makes the work interesting is these personal remarks, the emotional description of the incubants’ life in the Temple, the discussion of medicine, dreams, and the apology” (55). Like Behr, I am less interested in Aristides’ specific argument than his consistent commentary and explanations of religious life that accompany it. Specifically, I have noted places where Aristides comments on

the ability to be a witness to an event. I see this as an expression which would embody the values of the confessor: one who is delivered, offers testimony of the event, and consequently is afforded a place of distinction.

In his argument, Aristides tries to defend oratory by recalling past comparisons made of oratory to medicine, as in the case of Aeschines (61). Aristides speaks of the sick becoming well without recourse to the art of medicine. Just after explaining that oratory should be also considered potentially effective outside of an art, he must demonstrate his own experience in this claim. “Not rely[ing] any longer on literary evidence” to argue against Plato, Aristides confirms in this oration that many have been “saved by divine intervention”:

I do not think that Aeschines son of Lysanias or anyone else will resent it if I assert that I can myself bear witness (*ἔχειν μαρτυρῆσαι*) to the truth of what I say too well to need any additional support from his testimony in this matter (66).

Aristides relates his ability to testify or “bear witness,” with *ἔχειν μαρτυρῆσαι*, a construction of infinitives in which *ἔχειν* signifies the ability to do something, and *μαρτυρῆσαι* specifies the action, witnessing. *Μαρτυρῆσαι*, from the same word we get the word “martyr.” So what did Aristides bear witness to? He explains that he has a direct connection to the gods.

The following section reveals how Aristides is able to make a claim that the argument at hand has personal relevance. In his own life, he experiences a connection to the god as beneficial to his well-being. It is the gods who support his health and through them he knows of the possibility of healing outside of an art:

Truly, like inspired seers initiated into the mysteries of the gods who gave their name to their sphere of operation, I possess my knowledge from the gods themselves. It is thanks

to them that, *with the aid of different kinds of divine encouragement and advice* (συμβουλαῖς ἐκ τοῦ θεοῦ) *on different occasions*, I have escaped from diseases which no doctor could even put a name to, let alone cure, or knew ever to have occurred in medical history, and *am still alive in defiance of everything* (ζῶ παρὰ πᾶν) *that the circumstances would have led you to expect.* (67-68; emphasis added)⁵³

In spite of everything—his sicknesses, the challenges of his life—Aristides proudly states that he lives on, helped by the divine “encouragement and advice” he has received, not because of the art of medicine.

Aristides takes pride in this testimony because he considers it to come directly from the god as a matter of religion more than medicine. Like Winkler’s confessor, those who had direct experience with the gods’ healing power would have more authority to speak, not having to interpret another’s experience. In being favored by the god in this way, Aristides could lay claim to the “divinely inspired, authorial voice” that he so desired (Downie 151). In fact, this is what Aristides seems to do next in his discussion of oratory considered outside of art (τέχνη).

In order to complete his argument, Aristides must explain how divine support can be applied to both oratory and health. He explains the process of dream incubation first, how the devotees receive prescriptions for healing in their dreams: “We have dreams, without knowing in advance, the evening before, what we are going to see, and we know what we must do to be saved, although ignorant of it up to the minute of the hour in which the blessing comes to us

⁵³ ἀλλ’ ὡς ἀληθῶς ὥσπερ οἱ θεομάντις οἱ τοῖς τῶν πραγμάτων ἐπονύμοις τετελεσμένοι παρ’ αὐτῶν τῶν θεῶν ἔχω τὸ μάθημα, ὅφ’ ὧν ἂ μηδεὶς ἰατρῶν μήτε οἶδεν ὅ τι χρὴ προσειπεῖν, οὐχ ὅπως ἰάσασθαι, μήτ’ εἶδεν ἐν ἀνθρώπου φύσει συμβάντα, ἄλλοτε ἄλλαις παραμυθίαις τε καὶ συμβουλαῖς ἐκ τοῦ θεοῦ διαφεύγων ζῶ παρὰ πᾶν τὸ ἐκ τῶν παρόντων εἰκόσ. (In Defense 67-68)

from the gods” (*In Defense* 71). Then, Aristides questions what might prevent the same kind of process from being possible while awake. He asks,

What then is there, o greatest of Greek tongues, to quote Cratinus’ poetic phrase, *to prevent people seeing what is for the best without the aid of science in waking life as well*, (ἔσθ’ ὃ τι κωλύει καὶ ὕπαρ γινώσκειν τὰ βέλτιστα ἄνευ τέχνης καὶ συμβουλεύειν ἑτέροις ἔχειν) and being able to advise others, if it is indeed the case that dreams allow one to be able to advise others? (72; emphasis added)

According to Aristides, “it is rather a scorn for science that prompts us to take refuge with the gods” (69). Therefore, if dreams sent from the gods can help heal someone without the art of medicine, surely one is able to inform another (*συμβουλεύειν ἑτέροις ἔχειν*) about what is best (*τὰ βέλτιστα*) without art (*ἄνευ τέχνης*). Reasoning is not enough, however. Aristides also seeks to demonstrate this phenomenon by claiming to have been carried away with his theme by divine inspiration.

Impelled by the theme itself, which is as it were a sacred one, I have perhaps extended these remarks further than I should. May Plato himself and everyone else forgive me for *experiencing exactly what I was talking about* (τοῦτ’ αὐτὸ παθόντι ὅπερ ἐν τοῖς λόγοις ἐνήν): I could not restrain myself, when my thoughts turned to divine dispensation and salvation. That is why, although citing the evidence of others, I was compelled to add my own too in support of the argument. (73-74; emphasis added)⁵⁴

⁵⁴ καὶ ταυτὶ μὲν ὑπ’ αὐτοῦ τοῦ λόγου κινηθεὶς [καὶ] τοῦ τοῖς θεοῖς ὡσπερὶ τετελεσμένου ἐπὶ πλεῖον ἴσως ἐξήγαγον· καὶ μοι συγγνώμη καὶ παρ’ αὐτοῦ τοῦ Πλάτωνος ἔστω καὶ παρ’ ἄλλου παντὸς τοῦτ’ αὐτὸ παθόντι ὅπερ ἐν τοῖς λόγοις ἐνήν· οὐ γὰρ ἦν κατασχεῖν αὐτόν, ἐπειδὴ θεία μοῖρα καὶ σωτηρία παρέπεσεν. διὸ καίπερ μαρτυρία χρώμενος ἠναγκάσθην αὐτὸς μαρτυρεῖν τῷ λόγῳ (*In Defense* 73-74; emphasis added)

More than providing his own testimony of divine inspiration, he seeks to show it, embodying the principle in the moment, just as a confessor ideally gives testimony to divine experiences in person. Aristides performs these values.

In selecting passages which demonstrate a focus on personal testimony, I close with a passage of Aristides' prose hymn to Asclepius:

And there was a sign that summoned me when you showed (*σοῦ δείξαντος*) in fact that you brought me before the public (*εἰς μέσον*) for many reasons, *so that we might be seen engaged in oratory* (*ὡς φανείημεν ἐν τοῖς λόγοις*) and that the most perfect men might hear with their own ears our superior work (*τῶν κρείττωνων οἱ τελεώτατοι*). (42.14-15; emphasis added)⁵⁵

This passage from “An Address to Asclepius” indicates the purpose of Aristides' oratorical career. He notes that he feels chosen by Asclepius to be an example or leader for others. Behr translates this phrase as “be[ing] seen engaged in oratory,” but the actual construction uses an active verb, not a passive one. Aristides is “showing” rather than “being shown,” but either way, this move “before the public” (*εἰς μέσον*) demonstrates Aristides' work to be the best of the best (*τῶν κρείττωνων οἱ τελεώτατοι*). It also does not change the fact that Aristides gives Asclepius the credit: “you showed” (*σοῦ δείξαντος*).

Much like the sick of the Asclepion believed they were favored in their sicknesses because they possessed the opportunity of being healed, it seems that Aristides' illness and subsequent association with Asclepius provided him a position from which to speak. The role of

⁵⁵ *καὶ ταῦτά τε οὕτως ἐπέπρακτο καὶ τὸ σύνθημα παρῆν ἀνακαλοῦν, ἔργῳ σοῦ δείξαντος ὅτι πολλῶν ἔνεκα προήγαγες εἰς μέσον, ὡς φανείημεν ἐν τοῖς λόγοις, καὶ γένοιτο αὐτήκοοι τῶν κρείττωνων οἱ τελεώτατοι* (emphasis added).

the confessor seems to tie together all of Aristides' "available means of persuasion." It allows him to demonstrate 1) purpose in life through literally being saved from death, 2) *ethos* in oratory from serving as living proof of the god's benevolence to mankind in all matters (including oratory). In the context of the Asclepion, the potential that Aristides' relationship with Asclepius provided would have indicated favor; it is clear that Aristides perceived this favor to subsist in oratory.

CONCLUSION

Part of my goal in this inquiry was to uncover relationships and social structures of second century healing cults in order to understand more about the rhetorical strategies embedded in them. Having read Aristides' narrations of both religious and rhetorical practice in the *Hieroi Logoi*, I felt that understanding more about the politics of temple life might shed light on Aristides' rhetorical strategies and composing processes. The *Hieroi Logoi* is a document that was written and compiled over time, so it offers a great deal of insight if read alongside other texts—at least this was my first impulse. I was not alone in thinking this way. It seems that the *Hieroi Logoi* has often been used as a measuring stick for theories about others of Aristides' texts. Israelowich, for example, considers Aristides' prose hymns in comparison to the *Hieroi Logoi* (144). Therefore, aware of Aristides' high opinion of oratory as a profession—one could say vocation—I made it my goal to discover how Aristides' religious and rhetorical writings of the *Hieroi Logoi* could inform a reading of Aristides' first major treatise of rhetoric, *In Defense of Oratory*.

Charles Behr's notes are most enabling in this kind of work. Both his volumes of *The Complete Works* and *Aelius Aristides and the Sacred Tales* contain indispensable information for becoming familiar with Aristides' work. For example, his collection of Aristides' corpus in *The Complete Works* provides not only copious annotations and cross-references of the text, it supplies the approximate date of composition for all of Aristides' orations as well as each separate part of the *Hieroi Logoi*.

Beyond Behr's writings, Alexia Petsalis-Diomidis' treatment of the culture behind healing cults of Asclepius in *Truly Beyond Wonders* provided much of the religious and

rhetorical backdrop of the Asclepion. Here, pilgrims sought to become ever closer to the sacred histories of the temple through (proof of) healing encounters with the god. This culture of “therapeutic competition” helps to explicate the rhetorical dimensions of Aristides’ prose hymns (Israelowich 235); I argued that it illuminated *In Defense* as well.

I argued that John J. Winkler’s explication of a non-ordained temple role called the confessor helped to make clear the significance of testifying miraculous events as compared to interpreting them. The most privileged devotees were those who experienced divine intervention from Asclepius and were able to give testimony of their experiences with the divine. This is the kind of relationship I sought to point out in Aristides’ *In Defense*. Such a close and experiential relationship with Asclepius suggests the kind of shifts toward the personal in ancient pagan religion that some locate in the second century (Israelowich 137). It also suggests a new paradigm through which to consider rhetorical practice.

Janet Downie provides some of the best support toward this line of inquiry. Before I joined others like Robert Parker in considering hymns and orations as offerings to the god, Downie wrote of a similar kind of rhetorical experimentation. Her monograph *At the Limits of Art* discusses what she sees as Aristides’ stylistic development in his discovery of the affordances and limitations of “literary decorum” when speaking of the divine, which she argues culminates in the *Hieroi Logoi* (186). This argument gives precedent to mine, which agrees with a theory of Aristides as innovator to a certain extent. Certainly, my argument considers Aristides as an actor. I, however, am concerned not only with the expectations and constraints of a human audience, but also with the expectations and constraints with what Aristides might have called a divine audience. He dedicates both his prose hymn to Sarapis and to Asclepius as offerings and

calls Asclepius his patron in the “true orator” passage of *In Defense*; I wanted to explore the significance of these acts.

The result of my argument is that Aristides definitely considered demonstration of intimacy with the gods as a rhetorically effective choice within the Asclepion, but that he might have considered it effective beyond that context as well. I observed such rhetorical choices in multiple of Aristides’ texts, but I was not able to discuss all in this consideration. Furthermore, this argument opens up considerations of rhetoric a practice no longer singularly human. For example, Aristides’ “Concerning a Remark in Passing” discusses the divine mania behind what Aristides calls “true and living oratory” (28.110). In this process, the god takes an active role in rhetorical production. Even *In Defense* refers to the true orator not only as one who “practices the use of words,” but who seeks the god’s guidance not only in life, but as patron of his or her works (430).

My hope is that this consideration opens up lines of inquiry for considering rhetorical practice in new and broader ways from a historical, religious perspective. Perhaps a good place to start is by reconsidering Ciceronian and Quintilian conceptions of the “good man speaking.” Aristides’ discussion of the “true orator” would add an explicitly religious sensibility to these models. One might reconsider all five of the traditional rhetorical canons from Aristides’ perspective of the true orator. Certainly, the discourse in rhetorical studies surrounding reflection and metacognition indicates that now is an appropriate time to reconsider inventional processes.

The works of Aristides have more to offer—not *even*, but *especially*—to the religious and rhetorical questions of the present day. To what extent does rhetorical work rest on the shoulders of humanity? How much of it is beyond us? And in light of those answers, what ought one do?

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VITA

Josie Rose Portz earned her Master's of Arts in the Rhetoric, Writing, and Linguistics program at The University of Tennessee, where she specialized in classical rhetorics.