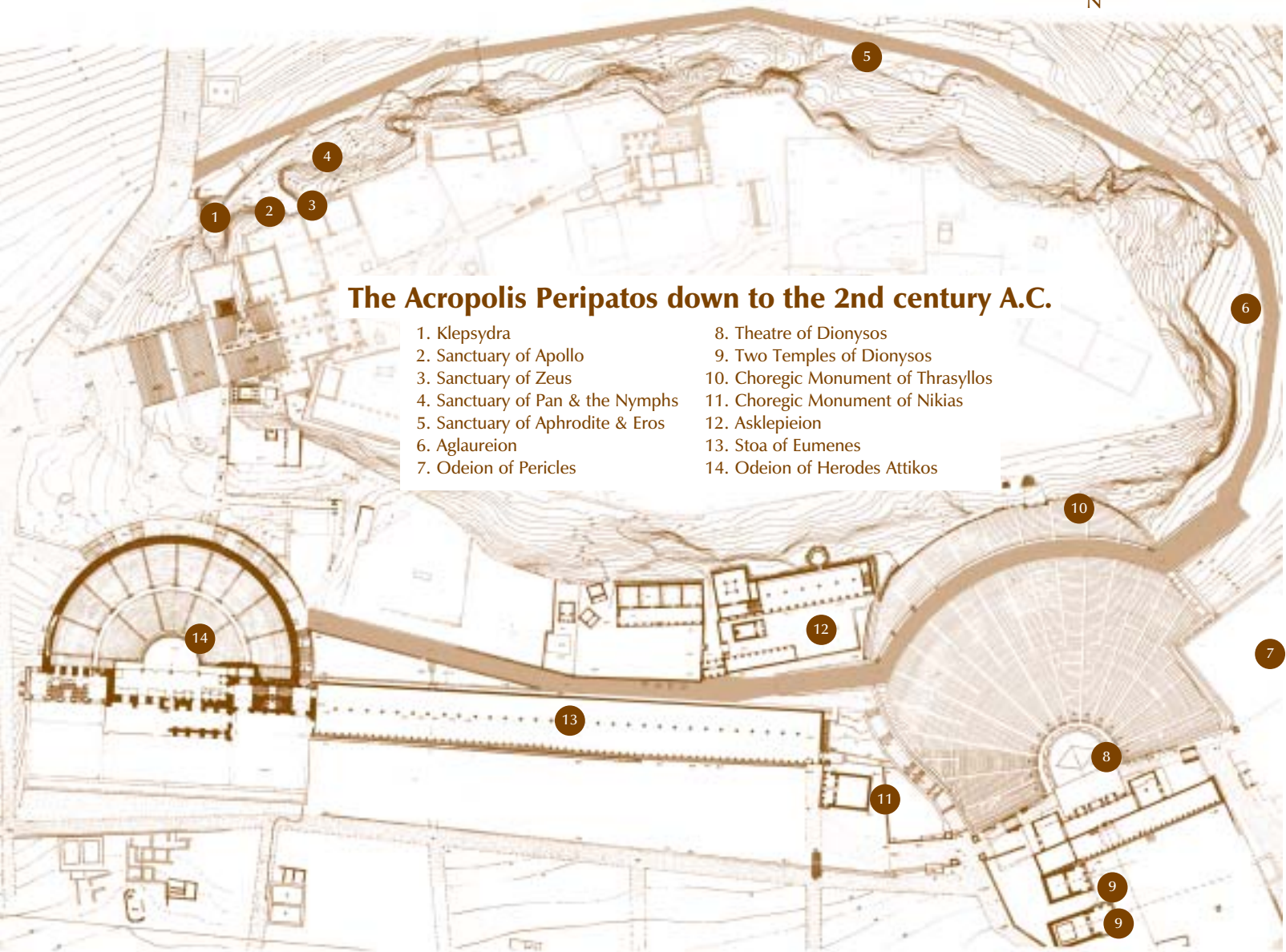




# Let's Go to the Acropolis Peripatos

A Child's Pathfinder

Ministry of Culture  
Acropolis Restoration Service  
First Ephorate of Prehistoric & Classical Antiquities  
Department of Information & Education



## The Acropolis Peripatos down to the 2nd century A.C.

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| 1. Klepsydra                     | 8. Theatre of Dionysos              |
| 2. Sanctuary of Apollo           | 9. Two Temples of Dionysos          |
| 3. Sanctuary of Zeus             | 10. Choregic Monument of Thrasyllos |
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**H**e opened his eyes and he made a wish that this time it would really be daylight. Three times during the night he had waked up thinking it was morning. He could hardly wait for this special day to come.

This was the day that his tutor, his paidagogos, Phoinikas, had promised to take him to the Sanctuary of Asklepios, just below the Acropolis. There he could ask the god, who was the patron of medicine, to grant him his great wish: to become some day himself a physician, to help his fellow human beings, to lessen pain and to cure illness, even the most difficult and severe! He was sure the healer-god would make his dream come true...

Phoinikas had told him that Asklepios was the oldest and best physician of all time, way ahead of all the others. It was even said that he could raise the dead; and there was a story that once upon a time Hades, the god of the Underworld, had complained to Zeus that Asklepios had raised so many of the dead that there were fewer people living in his underworld kingdom, which was in danger of becoming empty. So Zeus hurled a thunderbolt to kill Asklepios, to keep in balance the natural laws that determine life and death for all mankind.

All these myths about the life and powers of the great physician had stirred the imagination of Menon who was waiting so eagerly for the day he would go for his very first time to the Asklepieion, the sanctuary of the god and oldest hospital in Athens. And now the day had come!

It took Menon only a few moments to leap from his bed, put on the new chiton woven for him as a birthday present by his elder sister, Alkinoe, eat a hasty breakfast and rush out to the inner courtyard of the house to meet Phoinikas. But what an unpleasant surprise he found here! Phrasikleia, the oldest and most trustworthy family servant, appeared on the upper storey where the bedrooms were. As fast as she could on her old legs, she had rushed out of Phoinikas' bedroom. Alas! Menon's tutor had gotten sick during the night and it was impossible for him to get out of bed, let alone go to the Asklepieion with him. The boy was overcome by disappointment. He couldn't believe his ears! He had so looked forward to this day, yet his visit to the Asklepieion was in danger of not happening. No! This was not

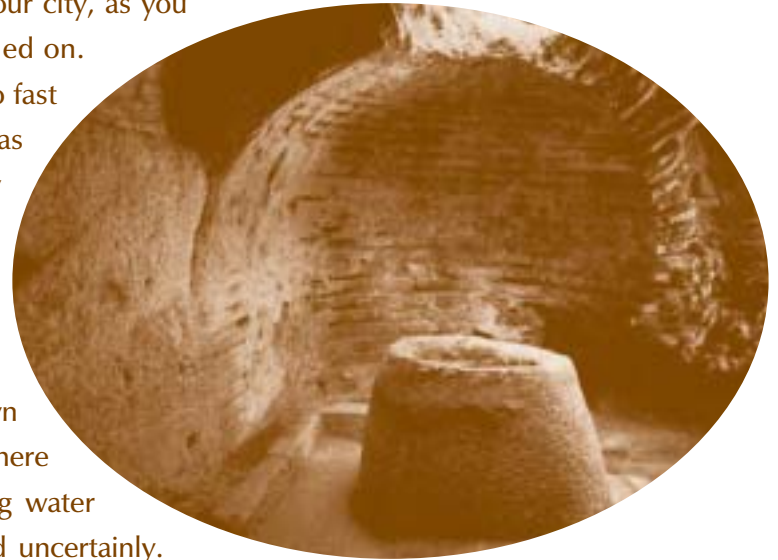
possible. He would not allow this to happen. He had made up his mind. Even if Phoinikas could not come with him, he would go anyway, alone, to find the god's sanctuary. Without a second thought, he made for the outside door and, at the same moment that Phrasikleia was entering the kitchen, he slid out of the house and ran along the narrow pathway leading to the city centre. His adventure had begun...

His neighbourhood was Melite, at the west side of the city. The further he went away from home, the more curious he became about all the new places he was finding. He had almost reached the Agora, which he had visited quite often with his father. He quickened his pace leaving the noisy motion of the more commercial sector of the city to his left and continued on an uphill street that opened up in front of him to the right. This certainly looked as if it led toward the Acropolis! Just to be sure, he decided to ask two boys, a little older than himself, who were coming towards him from the opposite direction.



Model showing the Asklepieion down to the 2nd century A.C.

**T**he two boys told him that this was indeed the right road and that it was the Street of the Panathenaia. “At the time of the Panathenaia, the great festival of Athens, the citizens’ procession passes here on its way up to the Acropolis to give the goddess her gift, a brand new robe, the peplos,” said the boys. Menon was envious indeed of anybody who had been at that special festival! “At the end of the road high up on the rock, you will see the Klepsydra, one of the most important springs of our city, as you must have heard,” concluded the boys as they hurried on. Menon continued on his way. He had been walking so fast that he was pretty well out of breath by now and he was perspiring in the hot sun. Finally he arrived just below the Acropolis. He had come this far once before with Phoinikas, but for some reason it all seemed larger and more imposing now. For a moment he hesitated. Just opposite him, quite a bit higher up than the level he had reached, he saw two women coming down with jars of water on their shoulders. Somewhere there in the rock must be the cave from which the spring water of Klepsydra flowed, thought Menon, looking around uncertainly. He was standing at a point where the road divided and he was not sure which path to follow. He finally chose the one that went off to the left, chiefly because he was fascinated by the view in that direction. Left and right of the road were masses of trees and flowers. The air was fragrant. Myrtle, thyme and olive trees were just a few of the plants he could recognise.



Klepsydra today



Pretty soon he saw to the right of the road a series of caves in the rock. He was going ahead cautiously toward the first cave when suddenly he heard a voice. "Welcome to the Sanctuary of Apollo Hypoakraios. Remember that Apollo was the father of Asklepios, and he is therefore willing to help you reach your goal." Menon blinked two or three times until he was used to the dimness and could make out the figure of a man seated in the depths of the cave. "I am the priest of Apollo," continued the man, "and I can explain to you how to go to the Asklepieion." "Thank you very much," whispered Menon. "Is it still a long way to the Sanctuary of Asklepios?" "It is on the south slope of the Acropolis. You have come to the north side, the slope where the Sacred Caves are. So you have to walk around all of this side and then you will come to the place you are looking for. But be careful! You must not forget a single sacred place or god, for if you do the gods will be angry and they will not let you find the Asklepieion and ask the god for the favour you desire." "Will I find many sanctuaries on my way?" asked Menon humbly.

“**T**hat you must discover for yourself. I cannot tell you more,” replied the priest and from his look Menon realised that now was the time to go.

Yet before he had taken more than a few steps, he saw to his right a second cave quite close to the first. Was some god worshipped here too? He spied a small altar just in front of the entrance to the cave, so this answered his question. This is certainly a shrine, he thought, as he went inside the Sanctuary.

This time he immediately saw the priest, standing in his long, white chiton, with his back to the entrance. “Good-day,” Menon managed to say shyly.

“Please can you tell me...” “I know quite well who you are and what you would like to know,” replied the priest, turning to face the child.

“You have come to the Sanctuary of Zeus Olympios or Astrapaios, who strikes with lightning, the father of gods and mortals. I am the god’s priest and I know far more than you can imagine.” Menon did not dare interrupt him. “You will have to pass two more Sacred Caves on the north slope of the Acropolis, dedicated to two different gods. Then you will go south until you come to the great theatre. That is all I have to tell you,” said

the priest, turning back into the depths of the cave. Menon thanked him quietly and hurried to leave the cave. “The priest of Zeus seems very severe. Well, how lucky I am to have found both him and the priest of Apollo to explain so much to me. But isn’t it strange to find the priests here when it’s not a festival day,” thought the child. And the mention of the great theatre definitely reminded him of something. Probably something Phoinikas had told him. But now he had no time to puzzle over it. In any case he already saw another cave in front of him. Or was it really a cave?





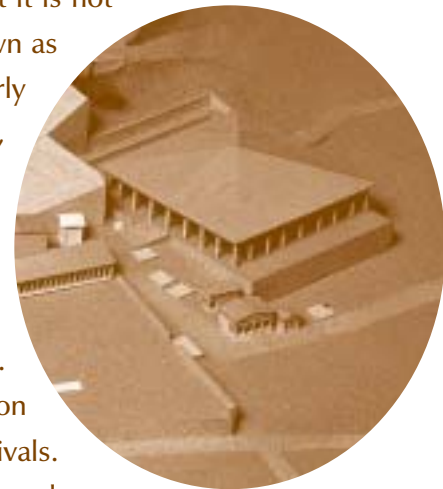
Looking more carefully, he realised that there were three little caves, one next to the other. He passed each one in turn without meeting anyone. Yet he observed little openings in the walls, like holes cut into the rock, in which figurines had been placed that were dedicated to the god Pan and the Nymphs. He had no doubt at all that he had reached the third sanctuary. Hastily he continued along the path that would lead him to the next god. He now realised that the pathway he was following was actually the Peripatos that went around below the Acropolis. Phoinikas had told him about it. He had told him how beautiful it was, especially on the north side, where he was walking. Yet the area he saw around him was more beautiful than anything he could have imagined. He had already walked quite a distance, and he was beginning to be afraid that perhaps he had passed some cave without noticing it. According to the words of the priest, there should be still another Sanctuary on the north side of the Acropolis. To what god could it be dedicated?

Suddenly his thoughts were interrupted by a melodious voice behind him. "Why are you so late? We expected you earlier!" Three lovely girls were perched on the end of a rock considerably higher than the point where Menon stood. As he walked toward them, he discovered the fourth Sanctuary.



Just above this, within the Acropolis fortification walls, stood one of the finest and most beautiful temples of the Sacred Rock. Menon had seen it many times from far away, as it appeared from the centre of the city. It was the Erechtheion.

“You have reached the Sanctuary of Aphrodite and her winged son, Eros,” one of the girls, priestesses of the goddess, said smiling. You also passed another cave without seeing it. Fortunately it is not sacred to any god, so you can continue your course to the Asklepieion. You must be tired after so much walking. Would you like to sit with us for a while?” “Thank you very much,” said Menon, “but I am in such a hurry to get to the Asklepieion!” “You still have quite a walk ahead of you. There is another cave that you will see on the east end of the Acropolis. It is very large, but it is not dedicated to a god, so you will not have to visit it. It is known as the Aglaureion, named after Aglauros, daughter of a very early king of Athens, named Kekrops. As you probably have heard, that is where the Athenian youths take the oath that they will faithfully serve their land. There you too will take your oath some day. Leaving the Aglaureion behind you, you must go ahead to the south side, still following the Peripatos. To your left you will first see a building with a strange roof. That is the first and earliest odeion of the city, the Odeion of Pericles, where musical contests were held during festivals. The road continues on, leading you to the Theatre of the god Dionysos. The Asklepieion is beside it.”



Model of  
the Odeion of Pericles



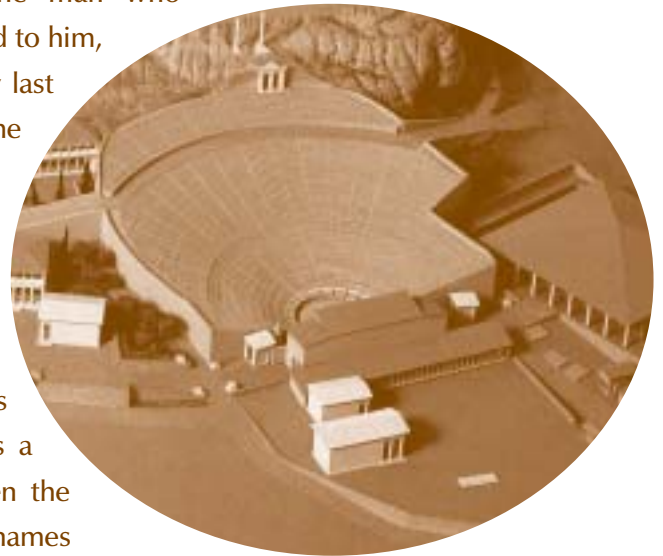
View of the Theatre of Dionysos from the south

**M**enon jumped for joy. He did not even feel tired any more! In a second he had thanked the priestesses of the goddess Aphrodite and continued on his way, practically at a run. This time the walk was much more than he had counted on. As it turned eastward, the road around the Sacred Rock of the Acropolis became very much steeper. Continuing a bit further to his right he spied the big cave mentioned by the priestess. A little stairway led up to it. To the left he saw the precinct wall of the little sanctuary, the Aglaureion. He would have liked very much to get closer, to climb up and see what was hidden in that cave! But now he was in a hurry. "I shall just have to wait," he thought, "and in a few years when I take the eternal oath of belief in my land, then I can find out!" So he continued along the path taking care not to stumble on the rocky ground. Suddenly there was a remarkable change. The peace and relative isolation of the north and east sides gave way to the noisy atmosphere of the south side of the Acropolis. The landscape became less dramatic, the ground less rough and even the plants seemed less wild.

To the left of the road he saw the Odeion of Pericles that the priestess had told him about. What impressed and surprised him most of all, however, was the Theatre of Dionysos, which was spread out before him.

**S**o this was the great theatre that the priest of Zeus was talking about! It seemed enormous. And look at all the seats! They were of stone and they covered a large part of the hillside. The Peripatos ran between the seats in the upper part of the theatre. For Menon it was great fun standing there high up at the top of the theatre, where the biggest section of seats ended. The view below took his breath away.

Suddenly he saw a man, much further down, in one of the first rows of seats. He was waving his hands in an effort to signal the boy to come down to where he was sitting. The seats had little steps at intervals between them, so that the theatre was divided into wedges, the kerkides. Menon jumped quickly from step to step and reached the man who was waiting for him. “You should be very pleased,” he said to him, laughing. “You are in the Theatre of Dionysos, your very last stop before the Asklepieion. This is where, during the Great Dionysia, the festival of the god Dionysos is held. It happens once a year and there are theatrical contests lasting three whole days.” “What happens in these contests?” asked the boy curiously. “Three poets compete, each presenting four works. The performances begin very early in the morning every day. When all the works have been presented, the victor is chosen. The prize is a crown of ivy leaves, the sacred plant of Dionysos. Then the decision of the judges is carved on a stone slab with the names of the poet and the others who played a part in the performance.



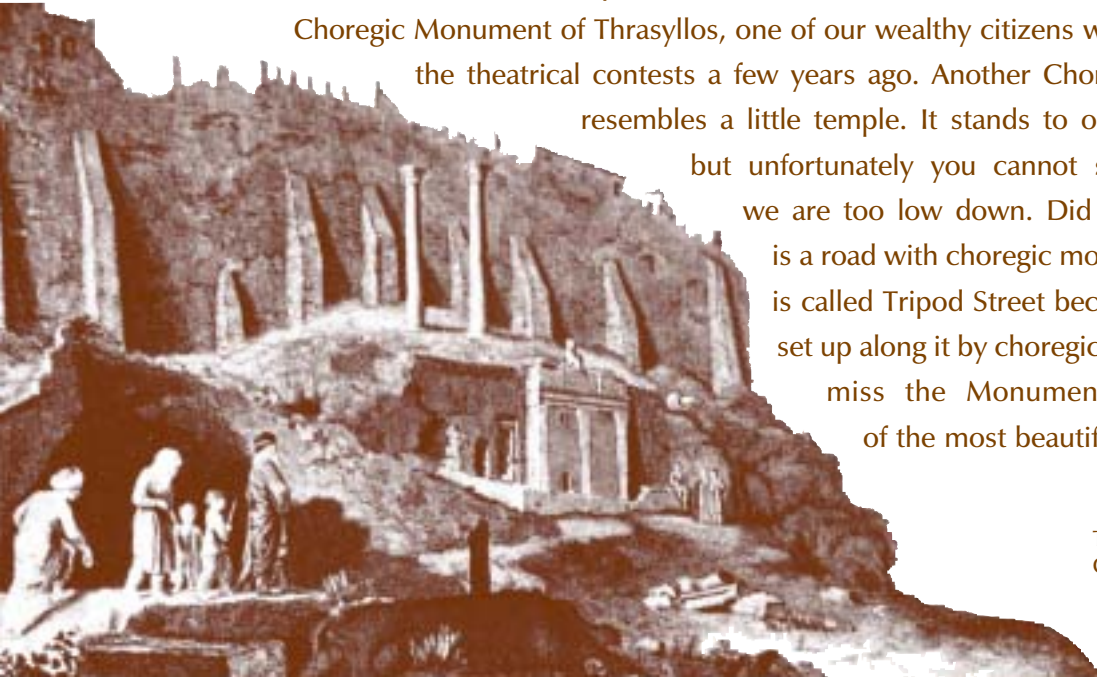
The Sanctuary of Dionysos Eleutheros

The choregos or sponsor holds a special place of honour. He is the wealthy Athenian citizen who sponsored the theatrical presentation with his own money. The victorious choregoi of the theatrical contests receive as a prize a large bronze vessel or lebes on a tripod stand. They are known simply as tripods. Usually the choregoi present them to the city in memory of their victory. They place them on tall columns or on little buildings, like those you see above the theatre, in order to display them better," said the man, pointing up to the top of the theatre.

Indeed, higher up than the Peripatos, where Menon had been standing before, he saw quite a collection of bronze tripods. One tripod that caught his eye stood above a closed door. "It looks as if there might be a cave behind that closed door, as if the space behind had been cut out," said Menon. "You are right. That is the

Choregic Monument of Thrasyllus, one of our wealthy citizens who won a victory as choregos in the theatrical contests a few years ago. Another Choregic Monument, that of Nikias, resembles a little temple. It stands to our left, behind the theatre wall, but unfortunately you cannot see it from this point because we are too low down. Did you know that near here there is a road with choregic monuments like these all along it? It is called Tripod Street because so many tripods have been set up along it by choregic victors. If you go that way, don't miss the Monument of Lysikrates which is one of the most beautiful monuments of this kind."

The Monument of Thrasyllus with the two Choregic Columns of Roman times above



“What is this big building in front of us used for?” interrupted Menon. “It is the stage building or skene of the theatre. This is where the hypokrites (actors) appear, while the chorus stands in the circular area, the orchestra. The entire space with seats for the audience climbing up the hillside is called the koilon (cavea), because of its hollow shape.” He continued: “But before you leave here, you must also go to see the Temple of Dionysos, where I am the priest. It is right next to the theatre, just behind the stage building. Let’s not lose any more time. Follow me!”



Quickly the priest left the theatre itself, and a few metres further down he entered a precinct. Here, Menon realised, was the temple of the god. “As you can see, there are two temples of Dionysos, one older and slightly smaller and nearby a second, more recent building, which houses the chryselephantine (gold and ivory) statue of the god. The stoa you see next to the old temple is just behind the skene of the Dionysos theatre; their walls adjoin each other. Look at the large altar in the southern part of the sanctuary. I could show you many other things as well, if only we had a little more time. But I am afraid you are already late enough for your Asklepieion visit.” “The theatre and the Temple of Dionysos are very interesting and I promise I’ll come back soon. Thank you so much for everything you showed me,” replied Menon as he left, following again the road that had led him to the theatre. In a few moments he had climbed the steps between the seats to reach the Peripatos once more.

Continuing along, he left the theatre behind him, his heart beating harder and harder. He knew he was getting closer to his goal. A slight breeze cooled his face as he proceeded along the shady path. Two men, one old, one young, passed him and disappeared to the right, at the place where the entrance to the sanctuary should be.

Walking hesitantly, Menon followed them through a propylon (gateway) and now found himself in a courtyard. Quite a few people were moving about, especially at the end where there was a building like a stoa, with a second, lower construction just to his left as he entered the courtyard. "This must be the temple of Asklepios," thought Menon excitedly on spotting the altar that was opposite where he had entered. "Quite right," said a hoarse voice just behind him. Startled, he turned to see who it was had read his thoughts! "Don't be afraid! I am the priest of Asklepios and I have been expecting you here for some time. I hope you enjoyed your walk around the Acropolis and that you did not get too tired walking here." Menon nodded in the affirmative, without saying anything. How could he? For it was practically time to ask the god to grant his wish and his happiness and agony were so strong, he could not say a word.

"Before we enter the temple, come and see the Sacred Sleeping Chamber, the Dormitorium" continued the priest, walking toward the building that looked like a stoa. This is the special place where the patients receive therapy. Inside a little cave, there are springs of pure water. Here the patients must bathe. Then the god appears to them in their sleep to show them their course of therapy. There is also another building, next to the Sleeping Chamber, at the end to the left. It is a second stoa, a sort of hostel where the visitors stay. This we shall see later on. Now let us go to the temple of the god. Are you ready?"



Model showing the Asklepieion down to the 2nd century A.C.



Relief of Asklepios  
from Epidauros (ca. 360 B.C.),  
National Archaeological Museum

**M**enon felt as if his heart would burst. And suddenly as he stood at the threshold of the temple, prepared to reply to the priest that he was ready for this great moment, he felt a hand shake him strongly and a voice he recognised was shouting in his ear: “Come, Menon, wake up! You have overdone it today with your sleeping!” He opened his eyes and saw above him the laughing face of Phoinikas bringing him back to reality. “Get yourself up in a hurry and get ready. You were late to sleep last night since we were talking about the Asklepieion and the Acropolis Peripatos and now you can hardly open your eyes. Today you will be seeing marvelous things. I am going to take you to all the places I told you about yesterday: to the sanctuaries of the north slope, to the Odeion of Pericles, to the Theatre of Dionysos. The best of all I shall leave to the end! The Asklepieion, where you will be able to ask the god to grant you your wish. Now hurry up! Don’t lose a minute. Asklepios is waiting for us...



The booklet tells a story and is addressed to children. The hero of the tale is Menon, a little boy who lives in Athens at the end of the 4th century B.C. (315-300 B.C.). He follows the course of the Peripatos all the way around the Acropolis, hunting for the sanctuary of the god Asklepios.

The booklet is accompanied by a second with the same title, which is addressed to the teacher and describes the topography of the north and south slopes of the Acropolis. The two booklets form part of the educational material of the Museum Kit, “Let’s Go to the Acropolis”, but they may also be used independently.

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