

## **Antiquity Matters!**

**Paul Grigsby**

### **Plague and Prophecy: The role of disease in 'many-voiced' Boeotia**

In a paper of 1990, Pierre Bonnechere proposed that the profusion of oracles found in Boeotia was, at least in part, a product of the unhealthy climate. In the immediate surroundings of Lake Copais, where the pestilential atmosphere meant that the local oracles were often called on to perform more than the occasional medical function, this high demand may have played a part in creating what Plutarch termed 'many-voiced' Boeotia.

Although none of the authors in the Hippocratic Corpus maintained that any one Greek state was unhealthier than any other, this paper will discuss why Boeotia's topography made it uniquely prone to disease, providing examples of this unfortunate state of affairs from the written record, especially in regards to episodes of plague and the potential role of malaria. It will be further argued that direct evidence exists for the centrality of healing in a number of the oracular cults surrounding Lake Copais, especially those linked to underground gods and heroes whose origins lie in northern Greece and Thessaly, like the similar healing cult of Asclepius. The elaborate procedures in which the consultants themselves took part will be examined for the part they may have played in the popularity and presumed efficacy of these oracles. Finally, it will be argued that although disease can only be positively linked to a small number of these Boeotian oracles, its influence on their geographical distribution was paramount.