

Don't Sleep on Dreams: Medical Dream Interpretation in Galen and Aristides

1 Galen's Distinction Between the Art of Medicine and the Art of Divination

1.1 The Precision of (Proper) Prognosis by (Proper) Physicians

1. Galen *CAM* (*de constitutione artis medicae*) I.291-293K (text and translation Johnston):

τὸ δ' οἶσθαι τοιαύτην εἶναι τοῖς ἰατροῖς τὴν πρόγνωσιν, οἷαν οἱ μάντεις ἐπαγγέλονται, γελοῖον...ὁ δ' ἰατρὸς οὐχ οὕτω προερεῖ τὸ μέλλον, ἀλλ' εἰ πάντα γίγνοιτο θεόντως, ἐβδομαῖον, εἰ οὕτως ἔτυχε, λυθήσεσθαι τὸ νόσημα...προγνώσεται μὲν οὖν ὁ ἰατρὸς ὑγείαν τε καὶ θάνατον οὐκ ἐξ ἄλλων ἀσκημάτων ἢ τοῦ γνωρίζειν ἀκριβῶς ἰσχὺν νοσήματός τε καὶ φύσεως.

To think that such prognosticating by doctors is like prophets prophesying is absurd...The doctor, on the other hand, does not predict what is going to happen in this way, but that if everything happens as it ought, the disease will be resolved on the seventh day, should this happen to be the case...The doctor, then, makes a prediction of health or death on no other basis than a **precise knowledge** of the strength of the disease and the strength of the [patient's] nature.

2. Galen *Prognosis* 1.1 (text and translation Nutton):

ὅσον μὲν ἐπὶ τοῖς πολλοῖς τῶν ἰατρῶν, ὧς Ἐπιγένης, ἀδύνατόν ἐστι προγινώσκειν τὰ τοῖς κάμνουσιν ἐσόμενα καθ' ἐκάστην νόσον.

How impossible it is, Epigenes, for the majority of doctors to foretell what is going to happen to their patients in each illness.

1.2 The Inconsistencies of Prognosis from Dreams

1. [Pseudo?] Galen *On Diagnosis of Dreams* VI.835K (text Kühn; translation Oberhelman):

ἃ τοίνυν ὁρώσιν οἱ κάμνοντες ἐν τοῖς ἐνυπνίοις καὶ πράττειν δοκοῦσιν, ἐνδείξεται πολλάκις ἡμῖν ἐνδείας τε καὶ πλεονεξίας καὶ ποιότητος χυμῶν.

We may say that whatever ill people see in their dreams or whatever they imagine that they are doing in their dreams **will often indicate** for us the lack, excess, or quality of their humors.

2. [Pseudo?] Galen *On Diagnosis of Dreams* VI.833K:

ἐπεὶ δὲ καὶ μαντικά τινὰ συγχωροῦμεν εἶναι, πῶς ταῦτ' ἂν διακριθεῖη τῶν ἀπὸ τοῦ σώματος ὁρωμένων, οὐ ῥάδιον εἰπεῖν.

But since we concede that some dreams are also prophetic messages, it is not easy to say how these dreams are to be distinguished from those which originate in the body.

3. [Pseudo?] Galen *On Diagnosis of Dreams* VI.834K:

ἐθεάσατο γοῦν τις τὸ ἕτερον τῶν σκελῶν λίθινον γεγονέναι, καὶ τοῦτο ἔκριναν πολλοὶ τῶν περὶ τὰ δεινῶν ὡς πρὸς τοὺς δούλους τείνειν τὸ ὄναρ, ἀλλὰ παρελύθη τὸ σκέλος ἐκείνο ὁ ἄνθρωπος, οὐδενὸς ἡμῶν προσδοκῆσαντος τοῦτο.

For example, someone dreamt that one of his legs turned into stone. Now this dream was interpreted by many skilled in these matters as a reference to the man's slaves. However, **contrary to all of our expectations**, the dreamer became paralyzed in that leg.

4. [Pseudo?] Galen *On Diagnosis of Dreams* VI.834K:

τὸν μὲν γὰρ παλαιστὴν ἐν αἵματος δεξαμενῇ δόξαντα ἐστάναι καὶ μόγις αὐτῆς ὑπερέχοντα πλήθος αἵματος ἔχειν ἐτεκμηράμεθα, καὶ δεῖσθαι κένωσεως.

Likewise, a certain wrestler dreamt that he was standing in a cistern of blood and was scarcely able to keep his head above the level of blood. We took this dream as an indication of excess blood in his body and recommended that he undergo bleeding.

2 [Pseudo?] Galen, Galen, and the Imprecise Nature of the Soul

1. [Pseudo?] Galen *On Diagnosis of Dreams* VI.833K:

ἐπεὶ δὲ ἐν τοῖς ὕπνοις οὐκ ἐπὶ ταῖς τοῦ σώματος ἢ ψυχῇ διαθέσει φαντάζεται μόνον.

The conditions of the body do not account for all of the soul's dream images in sleep.

2. Galen *Prop. Plac. (de propriis placitis)* 14 (text and translation Xenophontos & Polemis):

Ἐγὼ τοίνυν ἐν τούτοις μέσῃν τινὰ τάξιν ἐμαυτὸν ἔταξα. Περὶ γὰρ ἄλλων δογμάτων ἀποφαινόμενος ἀπλῶς, τῶν μὲν ὡς εἰδείην τὴν ἐν αὐτοῖς ἀλήθειαν, τῶν δὲ ὡς ὅλως οὐδὲν αὐτῆς εἰδείην, ἐν οἷς ἄρτι διήλθον, ἄχρι τοῦ πιθανοῦ προέρχομαι, βέλτιον μὲν εἶναι νομίζων εἴπερ ἐγνώκειν οὕτω περὶ αὐτῶν, ὡς ἀποφαίνεσθαι καθάπερ ἐπ' ἄλλων, οὐ μὴν ἀναπειθῶν ἐμαυτόν, ὥσπερ ἕτεροι, βεβαίαν ἔχειν γνώσιν ὧν οὐκ ἔσχον ἀπόδειξιν βεβαίαν. Εἰπεῖν οὖν βούλομαι καὶ περὶ τῶν τοιούτων ἀπάντων, ὅσα τὴν μὲν γνώσιν οὐκ ἀναγκαίαν ἔχει πρὸς ὑγίαν σώματος ἢ τὰς τῆς ψυχῆς ἠθικὰς ἀρετάς, ἐπεκόσμησε δ' ἄν, εἴπερ ἐγνώσθη βεβαίως, τὰ διὰ τῶν γινωσκομένων ἀκριβῶς ἀποτελούμενα κατ' ἰατρικὴν τε καὶ τὴν ἠθικὴν φιλοσοφίαν.

In this debate I took a middle position. For even though for other doctrines I frankly declare that I recognise the truth contained in some, while for others I know nothing of it whatsoever, in the matters I just discussed, **I concede only the probable**, believing that it would be better if I knew them to such an extent as to be able to pronounce about them as I did about others, **without however persuading myself, as others have done, that I have certain knowledge of matters of which I have no certain proof**. I therefore also want to discuss all such things, knowledge of which is unnecessary for the health of the body or the moral qualities of the soul, but which, were they known with certainty, could have been an additional ornament to those things accomplished thanks to an exact knowledge in the field of medicine and moral philosophy.

3. Galen *Prop. Plac.* 15:

Τὴν γε μὴν ψυχὴν εἰ μὲν ἀθάνατος οὖσα ταῖς σωματικαῖς οὐσίαις κεραννυμένη τὰ ζῶα διοικεῖ, γινώσκειν βεβαίως οὐκ ἐπαγγέλλομαι, καθάπερ οὐδ' εἰ μηδεμία καθ' ἑαυτὴν ἔστιν οὐσία ψυχῆς, ἐκεῖνο μὲντοι φαίνεται μοι σαφῶς, ὅτι, καθ' ὃ εἰσοικίζεται τοῖς σώμασι, δουλεύει ταῖς φύσεσιν αὐτῶν, αἵπερ εἰσὶν, ὡς ἔφην, ἐκ τῆς τῶν τεσσάρων στοιχείων ποιᾶς κράσεως γινόμεναι, καὶ κατὰ γε τοῦτο πρὸς τὴν ἰατρικὴν τέχνην οὐδὲν ἡγοῦμαι βλαβήσεσθαι τινα διὰ τὴν ἄγνοιαν τῆς καλουμένης ἐμψυχώσεως τε καὶ μετεμψυχώσεως...καὶ διὰ τοῦτο τὴν οὐσίαν αὐτῆς, ἥτις ἐστίν, οὐκ ἀναγκαῖον οὔτ' εἰς τὰς ἰάσεις τῶν νοσημάτων οὔτ' εἰς τὴν φυλακὴν τῆς ὑγείας ἐπίστασθαι, καθάπερ οὐδὲ εἰς τὴν ἠθικὴν τε καὶ πρακτικὴν καὶ πολιτικὴν φιλοσοφίαν.

I do not claim to be certain whether the soul is immortal and governs living beings by mingling with bodily substances, just as [I do not claim to know] whether the soul has no substance in itself. But the following seems clear to me, namely that as long as the soul resides in bodies, it is subservient to their natures, which, as I said, result from a mixture of the four elements. And in this respect, I believe that no one will be damaged as far as the practice of the medical art is concerned from ignorance of what is called empsychosis and metempsychosis...**And for this reason, it is unnecessary to know what the substance of the soul is either for the cure of diseases or for the preservation of health or even when it comes to moral, practical and political philosophy.**

3 Galen's Dream Interpretations

1. Galen *On My Own Books* 18-19 (text Müller; translation Singer):

μεταστάντος δ' ἐξ ἀνθρώπων τοῦ Λουκίου κατὰ τὴν ὁδὸν εἰς Ῥώμην αὐτοῦ κομίσας τὸ σῶμα τὴν ἀποθέωσιν Ἀντωνίνος ἐποιήσατο καὶ μετὰ ταῦτα τῆς ἐπὶ τοὺς Γερμανοὺς στρατείας εἶχετο περὶ παντὸς ποιούμενος ἀπάγειν με, πεισθεὶς δ' ἀφείναι λέγοντος ἀκούσας τάναντία κελεύειν τὸν πάτριον θεὸν Ἀσκληπιόν, οὗ καὶ θεραπευτὴν ἀπέφαινον ἑμαυτόν, ἐξ ὅτου με θανατικὴν διάθεσιν ἀποστήματος ἔχοντα διέσωσε.

Lucius himself departed this world on the way back to Rome, and Antoninus performed the ceremony of deification. After this he concentrated on his campaign against the Germans, and was extremely keen to take me with him. But he was prevailed upon to release me on hearing of the contrary instructions of his personal patron god Asclepius—whose servant I, too, professed myself, ever since he saved me from a fatal condition due to an abscess.

2. Galen *de curandi ratione per venae sectionem* XI.314-315K (text Kühn; translation Brockmann):

ἔγωγ' οὖν ὅθεν ὀρμηθεὶς ἐπὶ τὸ διαιρεῖν ἀρτηρίας ἦκον ἤδη σοι φράσω. προτραπείς ὑπὸ τινων ὀνειράτων δυοῖν ἐναργῶς μοι γενομένων ἦκον ἐπὶ τὴν ἐν τῷ μεταξὺ λιχανοῦ τε καὶ μεγάλου δακτύλου τῆς δεξιᾶς χειρὸς ἀρτηρίαν, ἐπέτρεψά τε βεῖν ἄχρις ἂν αὐτομάτως παύσῃται τὸ αἷμα, κελεύσαντος οὕτω τοῦ ὀνειράτος.

I shall now tell you how I got the inspiration to have recourse to arteriotomy. Urged on by certain dreams I had, two of which were particularly vivid, I went for the artery in the space between the index finger and thumb of the right hand, and allowed the blood to flow until it stopped of its own accord, as the dream commanded.

4 Positing Galen's Theory of Dream Interpretation

1. Dreams arise from the soul. Since theories of the soul are less axiomatic, medical practices related to the soul will be less consistent than medical practices linked to other medical/somatic axioms. Thus, dream interpretation will be less consistent than medical prognosis.

2. When Galen experiences his own dreams, he seems to be more confident in the dreams themselves, and by extension, the interpretation of those dreams. As a trained doctor, he is able to interpret his own dreams without worrying about the mediation of the dream through an additional party—i.e., the patient.

5 Aristides, Asclepius, and Medical Dream Interpretation

5.1 Aristides' Styling as Initiate and Priest of Asclepius

1. Aelius Aristides *Sacred Tales* 2.32-34 (text Keil; translation Behr):

καὶ τίς ἀνθρώπων ταῦτα γ' ἐνδείξασθαι λόγῳ δυνατός; εἰ δέ τις τῶν τετελεσμένων ἐστὶν, σύνοιδέν τε καὶ γνωρίζει.

And what man could describe these things in words? If any man has been initiated, he knows and understands.

2. Aelius Aristides *Sacred Tales* 4.101-102:

ὥς δὲ παρήλθον εἰς τὴν κοινὴν ἐκκλησίαν καὶ ὁ δῆμος τὰ εἰωθότα ἐπεθορύβησεν, ἔργου εἶχοντο οἱ παρεσκευασμένοι κροτοῦντές τε καὶ τὴν ἱερωσύνην τὴν κοινὴν τῆς Ἀσίας ἀνατιθέντες μοι καὶ τὸν δῆμον ἐπεσπᾶσαντο οὐ καλεπῶς· καὶ ἅμα αἱ ἀρχαὶ περιστάντό με, ἄλλος ἄλλοθεν ἐπαινῶν καὶ βοῶν καὶ πρὸς τὸν δῆμον τῇ παρακλήσει φιλοτιμούμενοι. ἐγεγόνει δέ μοι σημεῖα ἐξ ὄνειράτων λαμπρὰ καὶ ἐπιφανῆ, οἷς ἐθάρρουν καὶ πάνυ. λόγον δ' αἰτήσας οὕτως ἔπεισα ὥστε ὁ δῆμος ταύτης μὲν ἀπέστη τῆς ἀξιώσεως, ἐψηφίζετο δέ μοι τὴν ἱερωσύνην τοῦ Ἀσκληπιοῦ μάλα φαιδρῶς ἅπας· ἔτι δ' ἦν ἐν κατασκευῇ τότε ὁ νεὼς ὁ πρὸς τῷ ἔξῳ λιμένι. καὶ οἶδα εὐδοκίμησας οἷς ἀπεκρινάμην· ἔφην γὰρ ὡς οὐδὲν οὔτε μείζον οὔτε ἔλαττον οἶόν τ' εἶη πράττειν μοι ἄνευ τοῦ θεοῦ, οὐδ' οὖν αὐτὸ τὸ ἱεράσθαι νομίζειν ἐξεῖναι πρότερον, πρὶν ἂν αὐτοῦ πύθωμαι τοῦ θεοῦ. οἱ δ' ἐθαύμασάν τε καὶ συνεχώρουν.

When I came to the assembly and the People shouted their approval, those, who had prepared themselves, held to their work, applauding and offering me the Common Priesthood of Asia, and they won over the People without any difficulty. And at the same time, the officials stood about me, each from a different place praising me and shouting out and vying with the People in their request. But I had had from my dreams clear and manifest signs, in which I was thoroughly confident. Having asked the right to speak, I was so persuasive that the People gave up this demand, **but they unanimously voted me with great pleasure the priesthood of Asclepius.** The Temple at the outer harbor was then still under construction. And I know I found approval with my reply. **For I said it was impossible for me to do anything, either important or trifling, without the God, and therefore it was not possible to think even of serving as a priest, until I had learned this from the God himself.** They marvelled and yielded.

5.2 Aristides' Dream Interpretations

1. Aelius Aristides *Sacred Tales* 4.38:

ἥ τις ἄλλη γένοιτο ἄπορος προσβολή, παρῶν ἂν Θεόδοτος ὁ ἱατρός καὶ μεμνημένος τῶν ἐνυπνίων ἐκέλευε τοὺς παῖδας ᾄδειν τῶν μελῶν.

Whenever I had some other troublesome attack, the doctor Theodotus, being in attendance and remembering my dreams, would order the boys to sing some of my lyric verse.

2. Aelius Aristides *Sacred Tales* 1.63:

πάντως γὰρ αὐτὸ ὑπὲρ σωτηρίας εἶναι· εἶναι γὰρ τοῦ ρεύματος τούτου τὰς πηγὰς ἄνω, τοὺς δὲ κηπουροὺς τούτους οὐκ εἰδέναι τοὺς ὁχετοὺς ἢ χρῆ τρέπειν.

[Asclepius] said that this was wholly for my safety, for the flow of the discharge was upwards, and these gardeners did not know where they ought to turn their channels.

3. Aelius Aristides *Sacred Tales* 1.21:

ὁ γδὴ ἔμετος εἰς ἑσπέραν κατὰ ὄναρ καὶ οὗτος.

On the twenty-third, vomiting again in the evening according to a dream.

4. Aelius Aristides *Sacred Tales* 3.6:

αὐθις αὖ πέμπει με προστάξας πιεῖν ψυχρόν, καὶ ἔπιον τὸ σύμπαν.

Again [Asclepius] sent me, after commanding me to drink cold water. And I drank it.

5. Aelius Aristides *Sacred Tales* 4.23:

ἐγένετο δὲ καὶ ἄλλοις ὀνείρατα ὑπὲρ ἐμοῦ φέροντα εἰς ταὐτόν.

And others also had dreams about me, which pertained to the same end.

6. Aelius Aristides *Sacred Tales* 4.5:

καὶ γίγνεται ὄναρ ἀνθρώπων γεωργῶ, ὅς ἐμὲ οὐκ ᾔδει πω, πλήν ὅσον ἤκουεν· ἐδόκει τινὰ αὐτῷ λέγειν ὅτι Ἀριστείδης ἐχίδνης κεφαλὴν ἐξεμημεκῶς εἶη· ταύτην δὲ ἰδὼν τὴν ὄψιν φράζει τῶν ἐμῶν τινι, ὁ δ' ἐμοί.

A farmer, who did not know me, except by reputation, had a dream. He dreamed that someone said to him that Aristides had vomited up the head of a viper. Having seen this vision he told one of my people and he told me.

7. Aelius Aristides *Sacred Tales* 3.37:

βοείων δὲ εἵρχθη τοῦτον τὸν τρόπον. χρησμὸν ἐδόκουν ἐκπεπτωκέναι Ζωσίμῳ, μέχρι τούτου βιώσεσθαι μέχρι ἂν ἡ βοὺς ἡ κατ' ἀγρὸν ζῇ. καὶ δῆτα φάναι πρὸς αὐτόν· 'οἶσθ' οὖν τὸν χρησμὸν ὁ τι νοεῖ; βοείων κρεῶν ἀπέχεσθαί σοι κελεύει'. ὁ δὲ ἐλέγετο ὁ Ζώσιμος πρὸς τῇ ψύξει, ἐξ ἧς ἀπέθανεν, καὶ βοείου τινὸς ἐκ θυσίας ἀψάμενος βλαβήναι. ἦν οὖν οἷα εἰκὸς ἀκρίβεια πολλὴ καὶ πρόνοια μὴδ' ἄκρῳ τῷ δακτύλῳ προσαιψάμενον λαθεῖν.

I have been kept from beef in this way. I dreamed that an oracle had fallen to Zosimus, 'that he would live as long as the cow in the field lived.' And then I said to him: 'do you know what the oracle means? It commands you to abstain from beef.' Zosimus was said, in addition to the cold from which he died, to have been harmed also by touching some beef from a sacrifice. Therefore there was, as is likely, much exactitude and care not even secretly to touch it with the tip of my finger.

6 Bibliography

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