EPHESUS · 2ND CENTURY · FROM THE GREEK

# The Dream Book of Artemidorus

## *I · Body, Love and Fortune*



*What your dream foretells — love, wealth or your future*

ARTEMIDORUS OF DALDIS · BOOK I

BOOKS OF WISDOM · DREAMS AND OMENS · NO. 105

# The Dream Book of Artemidorus

## *I. Body, Love and Fortune*

The oldest dream book to survive complete — what a dream promises the rich and the poor, the lover, the traveller and the ruler. Book I of three: Artemidorus' Book One, 85 chapters. Complete translation from the Greek after the Paris edition of 1603, with notes, a foreword and commentary

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Source: Artemidorus of Daldis, «Oneirocritica» (The Interpretation of Dreams, 2nd century), after N. Rigault's edition «Artemidori Daldiani et Achmetis Sereimi f. Oneirocritica», Paris, 1603 (Duke University copy, archive.org); Greek text with J. Cornarius's Latin translation; text in the public domain. Translated from the Greek; no images of the printed edition are reproduced. A few dreams of forbidden sexual relations are omitted in this edition; each omission is marked in the text. A historical source: statements on health or other matters reflect the beliefs of the ancient world, not medical or any other advice.

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# FOREWORD

A man dreams that he has been struck by lightning. For a poor man this promises wealth, for a slave freedom, for one about to sail a favourable wind, and for a gladiator marriage. One dream, four different fates, and in this very difference lies the whole art of Artemidorus. Artemidorus of Daldis[1] lived in the second century. He tells us that he bought every book of dreams he could find, and that for many years he listened to the soothsayers of the market-place — in the cities and festival gatherings of Greece, in Asia, in Italy and on the great islands — collecting old dreams and their outcomes. So the "Interpretation of Dreams" in five books came into being: the oldest dream book in the world to survive complete.

We give the whole work in three books. This is the first of the three: Artemidorus' dedication to his friend Cassius Maximus and his Book One, 85 chapters.

**What you will find here.** First, the method. Artemidorus separates the "mere dream", which only mirrors hunger, fear or desire, from the "prophetic dream", which tells of the future: wealth, marriage, a journey, victory or death. Prophetic dreams are either direct, coming true just as they were seen, or allegorical, speaking in likenesses. Then comes the whole person, from head to foot. The head is one's parents, the teeth the whole household and its property, the feet the servants. Vomiting blood promises a poor man an abundance of money, for "money is like blood". After that come trades and letters, sport and the bath, food and wine, garlands and dreams of love. A garland of olive promises

1 A small city in Lydia, in the west of Asia Minor, the home town of Artemidorus' mother; he himself lived in Ephesus.

begin from the beginning, it seems right to me to start now with this very matter. A dream (oneiros) differs from a mere dream (enhypnion) in this: the one signifies what is to come, the other what is. You will understand it more clearly thus. Certain affections by their nature keep running back to the soul, ranging themselves against it and producing the visions of sleep. For example, a lover must needs seem to be with his beloved, and one who is afraid sees what he fears; and again the hungry man eats and the thirsty man drinks; and one who is overfull of food vomits or chokes, because of the blockage that arises when the food is hard to digest. One can see, then, that these occur when the affections are already present, and that they hold no foretelling of what is to come but a reminder of what is. This being so, you may see that some belong to the body alone and some to the soul alone. For example, for a lover to seem to be with his beloved, or for a sick man to be treated and to meet with physicians — these are common to body and soul. But vomiting and sleeping, and again drinking and eating, must be considered proper to the body, just as rejoicing and grieving are proper to the soul. It is clear from this that of the bodily ones some arise through lack and others through excess, while of the psychic ones some come through fear and others through hope. About mere dreams let this much be said. The name itself is apt, not because all sleepers see it — for a dream too is the work of sleepers — but because it is active only so long as one is in sleep,[1] and vanishes when sleep ceases. The dream (oneiros), on the other hand, though it occurs in sleep, is always at work, for it directs attention to the foretelling of what is to come; and after sleep it becomes effective, prompting undertakings, since by its nature it rouses and stirs the soul. For this reason the name was given to it from the beginning, from eirein, which means «to speak»,[2] as the poet says:

«But I *tell* you the truth.»

And the beggar the people of Ithaca called Irus,

1 A play on words: en-hypnion literally means «that which is in sleep» (en hypnō) — the mere dream exists only while one sleeps.

2 Artemidorus derives oneiros (dream) from eirein, «to say, to tell»; the standard text reads on eirein, «to tell what is».

losing something one has striven for. For such feelings as arise in the soul at the sight of them, such outcomes too tend to come about.

Inwardly good but outwardly bad are such as these. A man dreamed that he dined with Cronus,[1] and in the daytime he was shut in prison: for a dinner with a god is naturally a pleasing sight, but bonds and prison are not pleasing. Again, a man dreamed that he received two loaves of bread from the sun — and he lived just that many days: for the provision of life given him by the god sufficed him for just that length of time. To the same class belong the dream of being made of gold, of finding a treasure, and of receiving from a dead man perfume, a rose or something of the kind.

Inwardly bad but outwardly good are such as these: to dream of being struck by lightning is good for one who is poor, a slave, about to go on a voyage, or fighting as a gladiator.[2] For of these, one will gain wealth, another freedom, another a fair wind for his voyage; and for gladiators it foretells marriage. And the sight of these dreams is bad, but their outcome good.

## 7. On Dreams of Anxiety and God-Sent Dreams

One must bear in mind that the dreams which appear to those who are anxious about something and have asked the gods for a dream, and which do not resemble their anxiety, signify something about the matters in hand; whereas those that resemble one's thoughts are without significance and like mere dreams, as the earlier discussion showed. Some call these dreams of anxiety and requested dreams. But those that come to people who are anxious about nothing, and foretell some of the good or evil things to come, I call god-sent[3] — as Aristotle also did, who was uncertain whether the cause of dreaming comes to us from outside, from a god, or whether it is some inner cause that disposes our soul and

1 Cronus, father of Zeus, was dethroned by Zeus and shut in Tartarus; hence in a dream he signifies bonds and prison.

2 Gladiators (Greek monomachoi) were slaves, condemned men or volunteers who under the Roman Empire fought to the death in amphitheatres in Greek cities too.

3 Greek theopempta, «sent by the gods»; Artemidorus uses the word not in a theological but in an everyday sense — of everything unexpected.

that they will come into extreme danger, yet not die: for men who have survived a shipwreck or a grave illness shave their heads, but the dead do not. For those mentioned above it is good, because of their custom. To have one's hair cut by a barber signifies good for everyone alike. For "to be shorn" may, so to speak, by a change of one letter be taken as "to rejoice"[1]. And indeed no one who is in an evil plight or in some misfortune has his hair cut; it is done by those who care most for their appearance, who are free of grief and not in want. "By a barber" is added because if a man cuts his own hair, it signifies sudden mourning or a misfortune full of great evils. For those who fall into such straits must needs crop their own hair. To have one's nails pared signifies for a debtor that he will pay the interest; for others, harm from those who pared them, if indeed they see themselves pared by some other people. For we also say that a man has "had his nails pared" when he has been cheated to his loss[2]. Of combing and plaiting the hair, looking into a mirror and what follows from these, I shall make mention in the second book, when I speak of all the adornment of men and women.

## 24. On the Forehead

A healthy and fleshy forehead is good for everyone and signifies frankness and manliness. One that is ulcerated or diseased reveals shame and harm together. To dream of having a forehead of bronze, iron or stone is of benefit only to tax-farmers[3], innkeepers and those who live shamelessly. For everyone else it brings hatred.

## 25. On the Ears

To have more ears than usual is good for one who wishes to acquire someone who will obey him, such as a wife, children, a servant. For a rich man it signifies public outcries about him: good ones if the ears are shapely, bad ones if they are misshapen or ill-proportioned. The dream is bad for a slave, and for one engaged in a lawsuit, whether he accuses or is accused. For the slave it signifies that he will

1 A Greek wordplay: "karēnai" (to be shorn) and "charēnai" (to rejoice) differ by a single letter — k and ch.
2 In Greek "to pare someone's nails" also meant to cheat him, to swindle him out of money.
3 The "telōnai" — farmers of taxes and tolls; in the ancient world notorious for shamelessness and greed.

## 37. On Being Beheaded

To dream that one's head has been cut off — whether by sentence, or by robbers, or in single combat[1], or in any other way whatever, for it makes no difference — is bad for one who has parents and for one who has children. For the head resembles parents in that it is the cause of life, and children because of the face and likeness. Some by this dream have already lost a wife, a friend or a good steward, and no longer had the face that watched over their possessions. And one man who had a house lost it: for the head, so to speak, is the house of the senses. But if a man has all of these at once, it is plain that the dream will not come true for all of them; yet, as I have observed, it rather strikes what is most precious, most beloved and most necessary to the dreamer. This dream is good for one on trial for his life: for what happens to a man once and cannot happen twice, once it has happened will not be again, since it has already come to pass. For bankers, moneylenders, heads of mutual-loan clubs[2], shipowners, merchants and all who gather money, it signifies the loss of their "heads", because of the identical name[3]. For those deep in debt it is good for the same reasons. One who is abroad will return to his own land; and one who has a lawsuit about land will win: for the severed head falls to the ground and stays there, and grants the rest of the body to grieve no more. For a slave who is in a position of trust in the household it signifies that he will be relieved of that trust: for no one is beheaded before condemnation — or because one who has no head is not trusted: for we call the disgraced man "headless". For all other slaves it signifies freedom: for the head is the lord of the body, and when it is removed, it signifies that the servant, parted from his master, will be free. Yet many have been sold through this dream alone. In lawsuits about civic rights or money the dream foretells condemnation, and the reason is plain. If a man sees this dream while at sea, it signifies that the ship will lose its masthead[4], unless the

1 The "monomachia" — gladiatorial combat; in Artemidorus' day gladiatorial games were held also in the cities of Greece and Asia Minor.
2 An eranarch was the head of an "eranos" club, whose members kept a common fund and made one another interest-free loans.
3 The Greek "kephalē" is the head, "kephalaion" the capital (the "principal" sum of a loan); so a severed head means lost capital.