EPHESUS · 2ND CENTURY · FROM THE GREEK

The Dream Book of Artemidorus

III · Dreams That Came True



What your dream foretells — love, wealth or your future

ARTEMIDORUS OF DALDIS · BOOKS III–V

BOOKS OF WISDOM · DREAMS AND OMENS · NO. 105



The Dream Book of Artemidorus

III. Dreams That Came True

The oldest dream book to survive complete — what a dream promises the rich and the poor, the lover, the traveller and the ruler. Book III of three: Artemidorus' Books Three to Five: 67 + 86 chapters and 95 dreams that came true. 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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with pebbles, or sees another playing, it is bad, especially if he himself is left behind: for the loser, holding more pebbles, is the one left over[1]. The dice themselves, when seen, foretell discord and enmity; when they are lost, they end the discord close at hand, and when they increase, they intensify it.

To see a child playing with dice, knucklebones[2] or pebbles is not bad, for children are always in the habit of playing. But for a grown man or woman it is bad to dream of playing with knucklebones — unless the dream is seen by someone who hopes to inherit: for knucklebones are made from dead bodies, and so for everyone else they foretell dangers.

2. On Stealing

To dream of stealing is good for no one, except those who wish to deceive someone: for the ancients also called cheating by false reckoning "stealing". The greater, or costlier, or more securely guarded the things a man steals, the greater the danger he will undergo. For it is natural that the dream should subject the dreamer to the same things to which the law subjects the thief.

3. On Robbing Temples

To rob temples and steal offerings dedicated to the gods is by nature bad for everyone. Only for priests and seers is it profitable: for custom allows them to take the first-fruits of the gods[3], and in a way they are fed by the gods, and not all of them take openly.

4. On Lying

Lying is not fitting, except for those who appear on the stage, for vagrant conjurers, and for those whose habit it is to lie. It is less bad to lie to strangers than

1 In the game the loser was the one left with the most pieces at the end; for a sick man, "being left over" means being left behind by the living — dying.
2 Knucklebones (astragaloi) were the ankle bones of sheep or goats, used in games and in divination.
3 "Aparchai" were the first portion of a harvest or sacrifice, dedicated to the gods; the priests received it.

will have to endure disparagement and mockery. Only for jesters could it be good, because of their custom.

25. On Writing Towards the Left

To write towards the left[1] signifies doing something knavish, and by using deceit and craft, getting round someone and wronging him. Often too it signifies becoming an adulterer and secretly begetting bastard children. I know a man who after this dream became a composer of comic songs.

26. On the Stepmother and the Stepfather

To see a stepmother, whether living or dead, is not good. If the stepmother in the dream is harsh or angry or harms the dreamer, she intensifies the dangers; if she behaves moderately, she makes the dangers lesser. If she does the dreamer some kindness in word or deed, she declares that his hopes and expectations are false, for a stepmother would never love her stepchild sincerely or by her own free choice.

The stepfather signifies the same as the stepmother, but with less force. Often both the stepfather and the stepmother become signs of life abroad and of journeys, for father and mother resemble one's own country, while stepfather and stepmother resemble a foreign one.

27. On Forebears and Descendants

Forebears seen in a dream — by which I mean those relatives who lived before one's parents — signify cares on account of old matters; and if they do or say something good or pleasant or agreeable, the cares will end well; if not, the reverse. Descendants, if they are still infants and small, are a sign of cares; I have spoken of them more precisely in the first book, in the chapter on the birth of children. But those already grown are a sign of help, support and protection.

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1 The Greeks wrote from left to right; to write in the opposite direction meant writing "backwards", dishonestly and in secret.

50. On the Squill and the Asphodel

The squill[1] is a sign of barrenness for farmers, because it has nothing edible in it. But for shepherds it is good, because it is its nature to destroy wolves. It would be good for all who are in cares and grief, for it is considered purifying. But for those who are prospering it has been observed to bring fears and cares, for those who are in no trouble have no need of purification.

The asphodel turns out the same as the squill and in the same way, only it kills the sick, as I have often observed. The reason I cannot state clearly, but it is likely that it is because the plain in Hades is thought to be full of asphodels[2].

51. On Suffering the Same as Another

To dream that one suffers the same as some acquaintance, for example in the same foot or the same hand or some other part of the body, and in general to be ill or in pain together with him, signifies sharing in his wrongdoings. For diseases of the body and maimings of its parts resemble the licentiousness of the soul and irrational desires; and the one who suffers the same things might reasonably sin along with him. I know a man lame in his right foot who dreamed that his servant had the same foot lame and limped in the same way. And indeed he caught him with the mistress with whom he himself was smitten — and this was what the dream had foretold to him: that the servant would sin together with him.

52. On a Dunghill

To see a dunghill is good for those who make their living from the crowd and for those who do dirty work, for a dunghill is made of many leftovers and is thrown together by many. It is good also for those who take on public works or lease

1 The squill (skilla) is a large Mediterranean bulb, used in antiquity in purification rites and as a poison for rats and wolves.

2 According to Homer's "Odyssey", the shades of the dead wander through an asphodel meadow in the underworld.

Wayside Gift»[1]. But there is, it seems, among men a certain Momus[2], driven out from among the gods and divinities, no good one, whom one must resist with all one's strength, knowing that he assails the better works with all the more weapons. For even now I perceive some who find fault with the books: that what is written in them nowhere falls short of the truth, but that not everything has been worked out nor explained by its causes, and that some things necessary to the subject have been left out. Therefore, with great care, both for my own sake and for yours, I set about the writing of this book, so that you may judge each matter shrewdly, if you should have to judge alone, and answer readily those men who love to question. Remember that the book is dedicated to you, so that you yourself may use it and not share it with many in copies. What will be written here, if it stays with you, will make you an interpreter of dreams superior to all, or inferior to none; but if it is made common, it will show you no more knowledgeable than others. For know well that many fall short before our words, and almost all who take care to set right their own affairs in the art of divination. Therefore I shall write out for you from the beginning, by rule and definition, each of the things that are asked, according to the plan of the first books. To those who say that not everything has been explained by its causes, you will rightly answer with what was said in the preface of the first book: unless perhaps for others the matter is so certain that an explanation of it seems superfluous. To those who say that not everything has been worked out and that some things have been left aside, you will say that some things, being similar to others, have been passed over or not worked out as easily understood — as a headband like a diadem, a hare like a deer, a camel like an elephant, saffron like perfumed oils and all other fragrant things; and that a pig and birds do not have the same meaning as their own flesh. To those who ask about the difference between the dream (oneiros) and the mere dream (enhypnion), I have already carefully said before that the mere dream is something other than the dream, and elsewhere not the same. Yet you may rightly call the mere dream a dream too: when one speaks

1 So Artemidorus himself names Book III. «Enodios» means «by the road»: like a lucky find on the roadside, which the Greeks regarded as a gift of Hermes, god of roads.

2 The god of mockery and fault-finding; in myth he was cast out of the company of the gods for it.