

BELLARIA (XIII)



Morpheus, god of sleep and dreams, by Jean-Bernard (appropriately) Restout (1732-1791)

ARTEMIDORUS: THE INTERPRETATION OF DREAMS (3)

Artemidorus from Daldis, near Ephesus, writing c. AD 200, composed his Interpretation of Dreams (Oneirokritika in Greek) in five books, showing the beginner how it should be done. This run of Bellaria will introduce supporters of Classics for All to this enthusiastic hero of the genre.

Note: 'Hammond ID' refers to Martin Hammond, The Interpretation of Dreams (Oxford World's Classics, 2020). For grateful acknowledgement of all the sources of this Bellaria sequence, see Bellaria XI.

The six elements

The big question that faced the person presenting a dream to the interpreter was whether the dream predicted a favourable or unfavourable outcome. One can imagine the client sweating over what the possible significance might be of dreaming about a donkey or a sideboard, a red mullet or teeth.

But for Artemidorus there was much more to a dream than its actual subject. The circumstances of a dream, and their alignment, whatever the subject, with any one of his six *stoicheia* ('elements, characteristics') were of high importance: a dream in accordance with them was auspicious, otherwise it was bad news.

Here are the six *stoicheia*:

So we have a common principle, that all dream-visions which are in accordance with **nature, law, custom, art, names, or time** are auspicious, and those which go against these elements are malign or unprofitable.

Hammond ID 4.2.7

κοινὸς μὲν οὖν λόγος ἐστίν, ὅτι πάντα τὰ κατὰ φύσιν ἢ νόμον ἢ ἔθος ἢ τέχνην ἢ ὀνόματα ἢ χρόνον βλεπόμενα ἀγαθὰ, τὰ δὲ ἐναντία τούτοις πονηρὰ καὶ ἀλυσιτελεῖ.

Ὀνειροκριτικά 4.2.7

Here are some examples of *stoicheia* at work:

(i) Nature and custom

To drink **cold water** is auspicious for all. But **hot water** signifies illness or lack of success for all except those habituated to hot drinks, as drinking hot water is not natural.

Hammond ID 1.66.1

πίνειν ὕδωρ ψυχρὸν ἀγαθὸν πᾶσι· θερμὸν δὲ ὕδωρ νόσους ἢ ἀπραξίας σημαίνει πᾶσι, χωρὶς τῶν ἔθος ἐχόντων θερμοποιεῖν· οὐ γὰρ κατὰ φύσιν ἔχει τὸ θερμὸν ὕδωρ.

Ὀνειροκριτικά 1.66.1



Horace's *fons Bandusiae*?

(ii) Time

Figs in their proper season are auspicious (and white figs are sweeter than black), but if they appear in a dream out of their season they foretell calumnies and insults—the ancients spoke of insulting someone as ‘defigging’† him.

†The association between figs (suka), sycophancy and denouncing or insulting people was as lost on the ancients as it is on us

Hammond ID 1.73.3

σῦκα δὲ κατὰ μὲν τὴν ὥραν τὴν ἰδίαν ἀγαθὰ, (καὶ τούτων τὰ λευκὰ ἡδίονα τῶν μελάνων), παρὰ δὲ τὸν καιρὸν φαινόμενα, συκοφαντίας καὶ ἐπηρείας προαγορεύει· ‘συκάζειν’ γὰρ καὶ τὸ ἐπηρεάζειν ἔλεγον οἱ παλαιοί.

Ὀνειροκριτικά 1.73.3

(iii) Name

Artemis is auspicious for those who are afraid of something: because of the meaning of the word *artemēs*, which is ‘safe and sound’, she keeps them free from fear.

Hammond ID 2.35.3

Ἄρτεμις τοῖς φοβουμένοις ἀγαθή· διὰ γὰρ τὸ ἀρτεμές, ὅπερ ἐστὶν ὑγίης, ἀφόβους αὐτοὺς διαφυλάττει.

Ὀνειροκριτικά 2.35.3

Warning signs

But Artemidorus also made it clear that any stoicheion might on the face of it look as if it should have led to the one conclusion, but could in fact lead to the other:

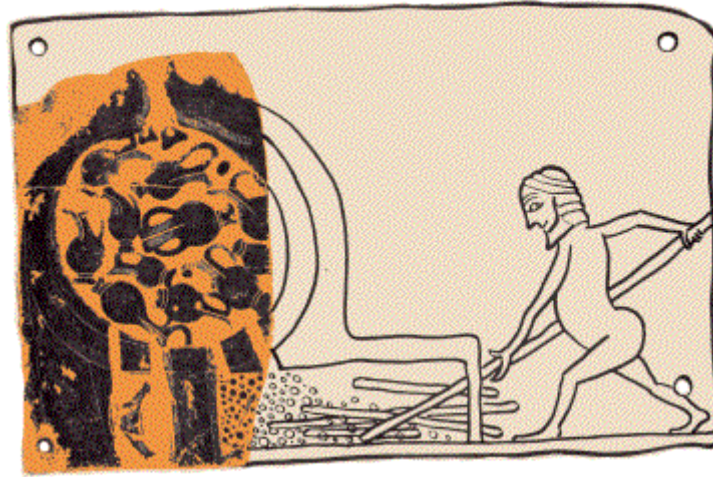
(i) The law

For example, someone imagined that he was beating his mother. This was something contrary to law, but even so he profited from it. He happened to be a potter. We call earth our mother, and a potter works by kneading the clay of earth. As a result he produced an extensive output.

Hammond ID 4.2.7

οἷον ἔδοξέ τις τὴν μητέρα τύπτειν. ἦν μὲν οὖν παράνομον, ἀλλ’ οὐδὲν ἤττον ἐλυσιτέλησεν αὐτῷ, ἐπειδὴ κεραμεὺς ἔτυχεν ὧν· μητέρα δὲ τὴν γῆν καλοῦμεν, ἦν ὁ κεραμεὺς τύπτων ἐργάζεται. τοιγαροῦν εἰργάσατο πολλά.

Ὀνειροκριτικά 4.2.7



Potter's kiln

(ii) Custom

Here the stoicheion was 'custom, habit'. In this case it looked auspicious, but turned out to be the reverse:

Remember that, when two sorts of **custom** are involved, the more widely observed custom prevails over the less. An example is the case of Aristides the lawyer.

Although it was his habit to wear white in public, when he fell ill he had a dream in which he was dressed in white clothes. The fact that this was already his own habit was of no help to him, and he died not long afterwards. The influencing factor was the more widely observed custom of dressing dead bodies in white when they are carried out for burial.

Hammond ID 4.2.8

μέμνησο δὲ ὅτι μείζον ἔθος μικροτέρου κρατεῖ. ὡς Ἀριστείδης ὁ νομικός, καίτοι ἔθος ἔχων ἐν λευκοῖς προϊέναι, νοσῶν ἔδοξε λευκὰ φορεῖν ἱμάτια, καὶ οὐδὲν ἀπώνατο τοῦ ἔθους· οὐ γὰρ εἰς μακρὰν ἀπέθανεν· ἦν γὰρ μείζον ἔθος τὸ ἐπεῖγον, καθ' ὃ οἱ νεκροὶ ἐν λευκοῖς ἐκφέρονται.

Ὀνειροκριτικά 4.2.8

(iii) Art



Surgical instruments

A final example of a stoicheion not turning out quite as expected was taken from an example relating to 'art', or skill:

Among the **arts**, those which have similar effect, even if their means of operation are different, result in the same outcomes. An example is that of Apollonides the surgeon. After imagining himself in a dream as a player in a Homeric re-enactment and wounding many, he then had many patients to treat. The point is that actors in Homeric scenes inflict wounds and shed blood, but without any intention to kill: and the same is true of a surgeon.

Hammond ID 4.2.9

καὶ τῶν τεχνῶν δὲ αἱ δυνάμεις ὅμοιαι, καὶ εἰ τῇ ἐνεργείᾳ εἶεν ἀνόμοιοι, εἰς ταῦτ' ἀποβαίνουσιν. ὡς Ἀπολλωνίδης ὁ χειρουργός, ὁμηρίζειν νομίσας καὶ πολλοὺς τιτρώσκειν, πολλοὺς ἐχείρισε. καὶ γὰρ οἱ ὁμηριστὰι τιτρώσκουσι μὲν καὶ αἱμάσσουσιν, ἀλλ' οὐκ ἀποκτεῖναί γε βούλονται· οὕτω δὲ καὶ ὁ χειρουργός.
Ὀνειροκριτικά 4.2.9

The numbers game

Ancients took the view that there was something magical about numbers, especially 3, 7 and 9. Writing to his grandson Gaius, Augustus remarked that he was relieved to have reached the age of 64 'since I have now passed the most dangerous point of my life, common to all older men—the sixty-third year.' Do the sums: 63 is $7 \times 3 \times 3$. Forty-nine (7×7) and eighty-one (9×9) were equally suspect.

For Artemidorus, number theory went far further, because each letter of the alphabet also stood for a number, and so had a numerical value too, as follows:

α (a)	β (b)	γ (g)	δ (d)	ε (e)	ς (st)	ζ (z)	η (ê)	θ (th)	ι (i)
1	2	3	4	5	6†	7	8	9	10

† The letter representing 6 is ς stigma, not final sigma. It was a name given in the Middle Ages to the squiggle which replaced the original sixth letter of the Greek alphabet Ϝ [digamma]. That squiggle continued to be called digamma in the ancient world. The result is that stigma meaning 'six' does not appear in the Ancient Greek Lexicon!

	κ (k)	λ (l)	μ (m)	ν (n)	ξ (x)	ο (o)	π (p)	Ϟ †	ρ (r)
	20	30	40	50	60	70	80	90	100

† this symbol is koppa (Latin q), placed in early Greek alphabets between p and r, and replaced by κ

	σ (s)	τ (t)	υ (u)	φ (ph)	χ (ch)	ψ (ps)	ω (ô)	Ͱ †	
	200	300	400	500	600	700	800	900	

† this symbol is sampi. It represented a sibilant sound and was placed after omega. The name is a medieval invention. We do not know its classical name.

Note: numbers greater than ten were put together by adding, e.g. $55 = 50 + 5 = \nu\epsilon$, $639 = 600 + 30 + 9 = \chi\lambda\theta$.

So: what is the numerical value of αγαθος (agathos), the Greek word for 'good'? $1 + 3 + 1 + 9 + 70 + 200 = 284$.

Artemidorus regarded words of equal numerical value as very significant. Dream of a γραιύς (graus), 'old woman' (704) and you could be for the chop because η εκφορα (ê ekphora) 'the cortege' also came to 704; if you were planning to travel by foot or by boat and dreamed of rho (100), that had the same value as πεζή (pezê) 'on foot'; but if you were wondering whether to travel or stay and dreamed of rho, you had better stay, since what also added up to 100 was μένε (mene), the Greek for 'stay!'

And then you had the problem that e.g. the Greek for 'six' was [h]ex, but add the letters up and you got 65. But enough: this way madness lies.

PS An early Christian graffito pointed out that κυριος (kurios) 'lord' and πιστις (pistis) 'faith' both added up to 800.

The final two of these 'dream' Bellaria will abandon the technicalities and concentrate on the picture of the social world which the dreams conjure up.



This is an extract selected for you as part of Classics for All's 'Bellaria' series to cheer us up during the COVID-19 pandemic. The full series of weekly instalments may be found on our website classicsforall.org.uk/bellaria/