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EXTRA
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Extra

No account of post-traumatic recurrent dreams in the second century AD

Greg Wilkinson

Artemidorus,¹ whose books encompass a system of dream interpretation in the second century AD, was overwhelmed by the vast amount of research involved in the work and by the abundance of material. He adds that not only has he taken special pains to procure every book on the interpretation of dreams, but he has consulted for many years with the diviners of the marketplace. Although trauma is likely to have been highly prevalent, Artemidorus gives no account of post-traumatic dreams. This suggests that these dreams were not a feature of his wide reading, consultation and practice, but rather that they are a product of later cultures:

'Recurrent dreams, if they appear at small intervals and continually, should be considered as always having the same meaning. And because they are seen frequently, we should be more attentive to them and place greater faith in them. As a matter of fact, whenever we have something important to say, we usually say it frequently. Similarly, then, our mind also presents these dreams frequently either because it is prophesying matters that are serious, meaningful and not of secondary importance or because it has begun to see them long before their fulfilment and continues to see them uninterruptedly.

But whenever the intervals between recurrent dreams are long, one must realise that the dreams will mean different things at different times. For just as the same dream comes true in different ways for each person who has seen it because the circumstances of all men are not the same, so too the same dream when seen at different times by one person will come true in different ways because he himself does not always remain in the same circumstances.

For example, a man dreamt that he lost his nose. He was a perfume dealer at the time. Since he did not have a nose in the dream, he lost his store and stopped selling perfumes. For he no longer possessed the means to test his perfumes and it was obvious that he would not continue in the perfume business. When he was no longer a perfume dealer, the same man dreamt that he did not have a nose. He was caught forging a signature and fled his own country. For anything that is lacking to a face disfigures and degrades it. And the face is the image of one's respectability and reputation. It is understandable that this man was disgraced.

During an illness the same man dreamt that he did not have a nose. He died not long afterwards, for the skull of the dead man has no nose. The first time, when he was a merchant, the dream referred to his perfumes. The second time, when he was a citizen with full rights and franchises, it referred to his reputation. The third time, when he was sick, it referred to his body itself. In this way, then, the same dream came true in three different ways for the same man'.

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