

## THEME, DREAM, AND NARRATIVE: READING THE SACRED TALES OF AELIUS ARISTIDES

LEE T. PEARCY  
*The Episcopal Academy*  
*Merion, PA*

The *Hieroi Logoi* or *Sacred Tales* of Aelius Aristides comprise five speeches and a fragment, half a page, of a sixth.<sup>1</sup> They narrate about 130 dreams sent to Aristides by the god Asclepius between A.D. 130 and 171 and tell how those dreams proved true, by which is meant simply how they corresponded to events in the waking life of Aristides. Most of the dreams dealt with cures for the many ailments afflicting Aristides, but some concerned other subjects. The god could give legal advice or offer suggestions on Aristides' literary career.<sup>2</sup> So far the narrative type presents no difficulty. "I had a dream last night," any of us might say, and go on to write it down. We are content to leave to the philosophers any dispute over the epistemological status of a narrative of a dream.<sup>3</sup>

Aristides' narrative, however, takes us down a strange and difficult path whose artfulness distinguishes it from other ancient dreamers' accounts of their dreams. Before I consider the art and originality in Aristides' narrative of encounters with divinity, it will be useful to point out the ways in which he clings to convention. The combination in the *Sacred Tales* of dream-narrative and praise of a god may seem unusual. It is not. A desire to praise the healing god motivated the dreamers who set up epigraphic records of cures at Epidaurus and other sanctuaries of Asclepius. The most telling parallels to the narrative of the *Sacred Tales*, however, survive among the documents associated with the cult of Sarapis. Both Sarapis and Asclepius were healing gods who issued divine commands and cures through dreams; both were served by a cult organization of *therapeutai*, and for Aristides at least, whose religious life was dominated by Sarapis before his conversion to Asclepius, Asclepius takes over Sarapis' function as savior from the perils of the sea and as all-encompassing, omnipotent divinity. One of the functionaries of Sarapis' cult was the *aretalogos*,

<sup>1</sup> The *Sacred Tales* are Orations 47-52 in the edition of Bruno Keil, *Aelii Aristidis quae Supersunt Omnia*. vol. 2 [all published] (Berlin 1898=Hildesheim 1958). References in the form 42K,51 are to oration and chapter in this edition. A new edition by C. A. Behr, *P. Aelii Aristidis Opera Quae Exstant Omnia* (Leiden 1976-) has not advanced as far as the *Sacred Tales*. Translations of the *Sacred Tales* appear in Behr's *Aelius Aristides and the Sacred Tales* (Amsterdam 1968) and his *P. Aelius Aristides: The Complete Works* vol. 2 (Leiden 1981). Translations in this article are taken from the latter. I have not yet seen Salvatore Nicosia, *Elio Aristide, Discorsi Sacri* (Milan 1984).

<sup>2</sup> Legal advice: 47K,51-52; 50K,63-108. Literary career: 47K,36-40,46-49; 50K,14-62; 51K,36-48,57-67.

<sup>3</sup> See for example Norman Malcolm, *Dreaming* (London 1959) and Charles E. M. Dunlop, ed., *Philosophical Essays on Dreaming* (Ithaca 1977).

who celebrated the god's wonders. His office could be combined with that of *oneirokritês*, interpreter of dreams.<sup>4</sup>

Neither the idea of recording a god-sent dream nor the belief that a healing god commanded him to write makes Aristides unique. A well-known letter from the physician Thessalus of Tralles to either Nero or Claudius tells how writing material was smuggled into the incubation room to record a divine vision,<sup>5</sup> and a papyrus from near the time of Aristides tells how Imouthes, an Egyptian god associated with Sarapis and identified with Asclepius, ordered one of his worshippers to write in praise of his divinity.

The Imouthes-papyrus, *POxy* 1381, shows a number of interesting parallels with the *Sacred Tales*. Both Aristides and the author of the papyrus text claim to have taken up their pens only after repeated urging by the god. Both texts declare that they are a translation or reworking of an earlier document. The papyrus purports to be a translation into Greek of an earlier Egyptian account of Imouthes; Aristides claims to have produced a *diêgêsis* of his original *apographê*. Both the author of *POxy* 1381 and Aristides can dream of books (*POxy* 1381, col. vi, line 121; cf. e.g. 49K,30; 50K,68; 51K,18 and 19).

These parallels suggest only that the *Sacred Tales* can be associated with a kind of narrative familiar in late antiquity, the aretalogy.<sup>6</sup> The combination of dream interpretation with such an aretalogy was not unusual, nor was the claim that the god had inspired the composition of an account of his wonders. It may be noteworthy that Aristides has taken a form associated with Egyptian deities, Sarapis and Imouthes, and applied it to praise of Asclepius, but I am reluctant to credit him with any high degree of originality in doing so. The identification of Asclepius with his Egyptian counterpart was well established, and Aristides' use of it is hardly a bold stroke. All these parallels, however, cannot efface one crucial contrast: *POxy* 1381 announces itself as a translation of a work by another author, but Aristides presents the *Sacred Tales* as a reworking of a document of his own creation. As I shall show, understanding this contrast is essential to understanding the originality of Aristides' approach to narrative.

<sup>4</sup> The identification of Sarapis with Asclepius gained credence in the late first century (Tac. *Hist.* 4.84); for the identification earlier, see John E. Stambaugh, *Sarapis Under the Early Ptolemies* (Leiden 1972) 75–78. For *therapeutai* in the cult of Sarapis, see Ladislav Vidman, *Isis und Sarapis bei den Griechen und Römern* (Berlin 1970) 68–72; in the cult of Asclepius, 47K,23 and 48K,47. On Aristides' relation to Sarapis, see his *Hymn to Sarapis* (45K) and L. Vidman, *Sylloge Inscriptionum Religionis Isiacae et Sarapiacae* (Berlin 1969) no. 316. *Aretalogos* and *oneirokritês* are combined at e.g. *SIG* 1133=*Inscriptions de Délos* 2072.

<sup>5</sup> P. Boudreaux, *Catalogus codicum astrologorum graecorum*, 8.3, 132–53 and especially 135–36; see also Richard Reitzenstein, *Hellenistic Mystery-Religions*, tr. John E. Stealy (Pittsburgh 1978) 144–6; A. J. Festugière, "Lettre du médecin Thessalos à Claude ou Néron," *Hermétisme et mystique païenne* (Paris 1967) 155–63.

<sup>6</sup> "Kind of narrative" rather than "genre"; see the cautions of John J. Winkler, *Auctor and Actor: A Narratological Reading of Apuleius's Golden Ass* (Berkeley 1985) 234–37.

In this article I shall consider the implications of Aristides' claim that the *Sacred Tales* are a summary narrative standing in contrast to a previously existing and much longer record of his dreams, and that both record and narrative were composed at the command of Asclepius. I shall argue that the relation between narrative and record forms a key to understanding the narrative intentions of the *Sacred Tales*. The originality and authenticity of the *Sacred Tales*, their claim to be taken seriously as literature, comes not from what their surface declares but from what their composition implies: a sophisticated narrative self-consciousness. The *Sacred Tales* proceed from an awareness that the human desire to perceive reality in the shape of a story must give way when the subject is divine, and that sequence, causality, and the other determiners of Aristotelian narrative (*Poetics* 1450 B24) cannot take their accustomed place if the narrative is to represent the condensations and displacements common to dreams and miracles. We must look to Augustine's *Confessions* or, as Frank Kermode has recently suggested, to the Gospels for comparable examples of narrative transformed by profound religious experience.<sup>7</sup> The *Sacred Tales* are not, as they have been called, a diary or a simple account of how a hypochondriac's dreams came true.

Certainly Aristides himself did not see his narrative task as simple. He begins the first *Sacred Tale* with an elaborate *adynaton* intended to make clear from the first the impossibility of any true correspondence between his narrative and the dream events which it seems to record. "It seems to me," he begins, "that I shall speak like Homer's Helen. For she says that she would not tell"—and here he quotes *Odyssey* 4.241—all 'the toils of stout-hearted Odysseus'" (47K,1). In the same way, Aristides continues, he cannot hope to relate every particular of his Savior's works, not even if—here he quotes *Iliad* 2.489—he had "ten tongues, ten mouths" (47K,1).<sup>8</sup>

After his two quotations from Homer, Aristides goes on to describe himself in terms that remind us of the Odysseus of *Odyssey* 5:

I have never been persuaded by any of my friends, whoever have asked or encouraged me to speak or write about these things, and so I have avoided the impossible. For it seemed to be the same as if after swimming through the whole sea under water, I should be

<sup>7</sup> See Frank Kermode, *The Genesis of Secrecy: On the Interpretation of Narrative* (Cambridge 1979).

<sup>8</sup> In the second *logos* Athena appears to Aristides and tells him that he himself is both Odysseus and Telemachus (48K,41–42). Later in the same oration Aristides says that his story exceeds that told to Alcinous (48K,60), and he himself, constantly tossed in rivers and seas or journeying at the command of the god, is an Odyssean figure (e.g. 48K,65). I do not wish to analyze in detail all the allusions to Homer in the *Sacred Tales* or the way in which Aristides uses them to equate himself with the wandering, god-driven hero, Odysseus. He was not the first literary man in the Second Sophistic to see himself in heroic terms. See Charles Segal, "Writer as Hero: The Homeric Ethos in Longinus, *On the Sublime*," *Stemmata: Homages à J. Labarbe* (Brussels 1987) 207–17, and in general, Jan Fredrik Kindstrand, *Homer in der zweiten Sophistik: Studien zu der Homerlektüre und dem Homerbild bei Dion von Prusa, Maximus von Tyros und Ailius Aristides* (Uppsala 1975).

compelled to produce records of the total number of waves which I encountered, and how I found the sea at each one of them, and what it was that saved me. (47K,2)

Not only the variety of experience, which Odysseus, πολύτροπος, met, but also its lack of articulation, as impossible to convey in a concatenation of words as it would be to find the exact place where one wave leaves off and another begins, have prevented Aristides from rendering a conventional narrative account of Asclepius' wondrous works and favor toward him. Faced with a similar task, the author of the Fourth Gospel also took refuge in hyperbole to confess the inadequacy of narrative to encompass his subject: "And there are also many other things which Jesus did, the which, if they should be written every one, I suppose that even the world itself could not contain the books that should be written" (*John* 21:25).

The variety and seamlessness of events present Aristides with a narrative task impossible by ordinary means. So does the lack of any temporal limits in his subject. "For each of our days, as well as our nights," he continues, "has a story" (47K,3). That freeing of events from time, in which a single night's dreams could fill the same space as all the narrative of the *Sacred Tales*, would only be apparent in two kinds of *logos*, if someone wished "either to record the events or to narrate the providence of the God wherein he revealed some things openly in his own presence, and others by the sending of dreams" (47K,3). If someone recorded each separate event as it occurred and produced a transcription of reality, the working of the god would be apparent. Transcribing reality in all its profusion and complexity is clearly impossible, although Aristides will have us believe that he tried. The alternative is to narrate, not to record, and to narrate not events, but the providence of the god. That task Aristides will attempt. Narration, not recording, has a chance of conveying the variety and the lack of articulation and temporality which Aristides finds in his dreams.

"Either to record the events or to narrate the providence of the God," ἢ τὰ συμπίπτοντα ἀπογράφειν ἢ τὴν τοῦ θεοῦ πρόνοιαν διηγέσθαι. With this distinction between recording and narrating, Aristides cautions his readers that there is more than one way to tell the story of his dreams. In what follows, I shall be careful to observe Aristides' distinction between *apographê*, record, and *diêgêsis*, narrative. We now want to know what exactly is the relation between record and narrative.

On this point Aristides is explicit. In several places he tells us that he kept notebooks in which he recorded by dictation the dreams sent by Asclepius.<sup>9</sup> This record, ἀπογραφὴ, which amounted to at least 300,000 lines (48K,3), treated the same events presented in the *Sacred Tales* and could have formed the basis of his narrative there. It seems, however, that he did not have the *apographê* before him during the actual composition of the *Sacred Tales*. Near the beginning of the second *Sacred Tale* he says that the condition of this record made it impossible to use:

<sup>9</sup> The notebooks are mentioned at 47K,3; 48K,2-3; 48K,8; 49K,26; 49K,30; and 50K,25.

But it is neither very easy to go over them [i.e. the notebooks] nor to fit them into their proper chronology. Besides, some have also been scattered through various losses and confusion at home during these times. The only thing left is to speak in summary fashion, as I remember different things from different sources, however the God will lead and stimulate me. (48K,3-4)

Scholars have been altogether too quick to take Aristides at his word. Paper and ink have been devoted to the powers of memory held by the ancients, or to Aristides' ability to cite accurately and from memory substantial chunks of Plato. Wilamowitz at least sensed that something was unusual in Aristides' claims about his method of composition.<sup>10</sup>

These discussions, useful though they are, fail to take account of the Protean nature of Aristides' *apographê* or the way in which Aristides blurs the distinction between reality and his *apographê* in order to emphasize that between *apographê* and *diêgêsis*. Five chapters after the sober apology quoted above appears this extraordinary statement:

To narrate (διηγῆσασθαι) what came next is not within the power of man. Still I must try, as I have proposed to do, to recount some of these things in a cursory way. But if someone will wish to know precisely what has befallen us from the god, it is time for him to seek out the parchment books and the dreams themselves (ὥρα τὰς διφθέρας αὐτῷ ζητεῖν καὶ τὰ ὄνειράτα αὐτά). For he will find cures of all kinds and some discourses and full scale orations and various visions, and all of the prophecies and oracles about every kind of matter, some in prose, some in verse, and all deserving of a gratitude to the God greater than one might expect. (48K,8)

I do not think that there can be much doubt that the *diphtheras* of this passage are the same as the *apographai* mentioned five sections earlier. In chapter 3 Aristides said that some, but not all, of his *apographai* had been lost or thrown out of order, and that he made no direct use of them in composing the *Sacred Tales*, yet here in chapter 8 he invites the curious reader to consult them for the precise details of Asclepius' working. Someone might be tempted to see a contradiction, or two sets of records. Aristides' point is, in part, that while the notebooks might be of some use to someone, they were of no use to him.

At chapter 8 of the second *Sacred Tale* Aristides asserts once and for all that when the subject of narrative is the working of Asclepius, a faithful record of the facts is not the same as the truth. The facts are there for the curious to seek in his notebooks or *apographai* containing the record of his dreams. The facts are only a great whirl and din of words, not only what happened, the dreams themselves set forth in words, but words on cures, words on visions, words in

<sup>10</sup> E.g. G. Björck, "'Ὅρα ἰδεῖν: de la perception de la rêve chez les anciens," *Eranos* 44 (1946) 306-14; C. A. Behr, *Aelius Aristides and the Sacred Tales* (above, note 1) 116-21. Wilamowitz commented, "Die Lehrzeit bei Alexandros hatte ihm diese zu seiner Zeit nicht gewöhnliche Befähigung verliehen;" U. von Wilamowitz-Moellendorff, "Der Rhetor Aristides," *Sitzungsber. der Preussischen Akad. der Wiss., Phil.-hist. Klasse* 28 (1925) 340.

oration and discourse, words in prose and verse. Aristides even says at one point (49K,30) that his *apographê* contains the text of a book which he had dreamed that he was reading. The facts, like quotidian experience itself, are too varied and seamless, too difficult to "fit into their proper chronology," to be a guide to understanding the truth.

When the *Sacred Tales* began with an almost conventional *adynaton*, it seemed that only the multiplicity and manifold variety of Asclepius' workings made narrative impossible. In the second *Sacred Tale*, as the distinction between *apographê* and *diêgêsis* becomes sharper, it begins to become apparent that the impossibility stems from the failure hidden in the very nature of narrative. A dream may be the quintessential mysterious narrative, but at the heart of all narratives lie darkness and mystery. We do not have to be post-structuralist critics to recognize that central obscurity. Vergil, I believe, felt it at the balance-point of his narrative when he made Aeneas return from the tale of Rome's future through the gate of false dreams. Modern criticism has, however, directed our attention to narrative's essential mysteriousness.

In so doing, modern criticism has reminded us that many narratives become more open to understanding if we suppose that behind them lies another, prior narration. Formalist critics, looking back to Vladimir Propp's influential *Morphology of the Folktale*, distinguish plot, *sjuzet*, from story, *fabula*, a structure of characters and their functions. Understanding any narration, they argue, is easier if we understand the *fabula* underlying it.<sup>11</sup> Structuralists often follow the example of Gérard Genette (*Figures III*, Paris 1972) and distinguish story, *histoire*, from the account of the story, *récit*, and the way in which the account is presented, *narration*. Not only Formalists and Structuralists, but critics of all kinds often acknowledge that a difficult narrative becomes easier to understand if we suppose that its inconsistencies and obscurities derive from the mismatch between its intentions and those of a prior version. English literature has its *ur-Hamlets*, Biblical criticism its synoptic source, and classicists will not have to search their field long before turning up *ignoti* of every variety. An acute critic of narrative has suggested that the tendency to conjecture these prior versions testifies to "the way our minds work when confronted by a problematical text; we find it easier to think about if we imagine something *behind* it rather different from what we have in front of us."<sup>12</sup>

Perhaps so. We do not have to be Formalists, Deconstructionists, or narratologists of any particular sect to recognize that the relation between *apographê* and *diêgêsis* is crucial to any reading of Aristides' narrative. In a way, he has saved us the trouble of discovering the story behind his narrative by creating it himself and bringing it to our attention.

In comparing the relation between Aristides' *apographê* and the *Sacred Tales* to that supposed to exist between *fabula* and *sjuzet* or *histoire* and *récit*, I mean to suggest rather than to specify. Rather than evoking *fabula* or *histoire*, the *apographê* resembles in one sense the lost sources that critics hypothesize. It

<sup>11</sup> See Boris M. Ejxenbaum, "The Theory of the Formal Method," in *Readings in Russian Poetics*, edd. Ladislav Matejka and Krystyna Pomorska (Cambridge, Mass. 1971) 16.

<sup>12</sup> Kermode (above, note 7) 79.

serves to make the narrative before us easier to understand. The bizarre sequences and disjunctions of Aristides' dreams become easier to accept when seen against the reassuring, massive documentation of the *apographê*. If any reader wishes to know more than the narrative tells him, he has only to look it up (48K,8).

There are, of course, two important senses in which Aristides' *apographê* is not at all like the Sullan annalists or the lost source of the synoptic gospels. First, the record behind Aristides' narrative, which he offers the interested reader as documentation of the narrative's events, is also written by Aristides. Second, although he presents the record of his dreams as a potential source for his narrative, he says that he did not use the record during the composition of his narrative.

These two differences in combination subvert the authority of reality to affect and weaken Aristides' narrative. Documentation has authority as transcript of reality, independent confirmation of what actually happened, but that authority cannot survive the revelation that documentation and narrative proceed from the same hand. Sources have authority as material independent of the author, and if we have them, as we have Polybius for parts of Livy, they permit us to assess the author's contribution to the narrative and so his intentions. The authority of sources cannot survive the author's confession that he did not use them.

With the distinction so carefully drawn between record and narrative, *apographê* and *diêgêsis*, Aristides has given reassurance only to take it away. The *apographê* is not in fact what it seems to be, the documentation or source for Aristides' narrative. Instead, the *apographê* is a foil against which the existence of the narrative must be read. As a rejected way of telling the story, it increases the authority and persuasiveness of the narrative before us, and because this rejected way of telling was, as Aristides presents it, a voluminous transcription of reality, its rejection amounts to a rejection of the claims of reality on the narrative. No one can complain that such and such an event is out of sequence, or improbable, or did not actually happen. People who want that sort of account had better go and consult the *apographê*.

If we understand Aristides' *apographê* as a way of describing the narrative of the *Sacred Tales*, then the questions that have been asked about Aristides' powers of memory or his system of record-keeping lose a great deal of their urgency. I prefer to leave open even the question of whether the *apographê* existed, at least in the form described in the *Sacred Tales*. The *apographê*, like the facts it represents, was not useful to Aristides in creating a narrative of the god's providence and greatness. Such a narrative must be summary, even cursory, and cannot be bound by the constraints of a faithful record of the facts. Aristides' description of the contents of the *apographê* (48K,8) explains what those constraints were. Not only did his notebooks contain a record of Aristides' dreams in chronological order, but they also contained utterances in every genre. In order to be a true narrative of the god's workings, the *Sacred Tales* had to free themselves from these notebooks, and from the constraints of chronology and genre that they imply.

I now turn to the question of how the *Sacred Tales* free themselves from the limiting constraints that would operate on a record of the facts in chronological order. First and most obviously, the *Sacred Tales* dis-order events. The order of

dream episodes in the narrative may not correspond to the order in which they occurred in real time, and in which they were recorded in Aristides' notebooks. Nor need the length of time occupied by an episode in real time correspond to the length of the narrative of it. Each day, we have seen that Aristides says, could have its own story (47K,3); in another place, he once again quotes the *Odyssey* to make the point that neither a great span of time nor even a time as long as the events themselves take would be sufficient for a true narrative: "What mortal man might tell all these things? 'For neither five nor six years' are sufficient, but the narration perhaps needs no less time than that, in which the events took place" (48K,58). Both sequence and duration, the determiners of time, are irrelevant to a narrative whose subject, the god Asclepius, stands outside of time.

Second, Aristides frees himself from the limiting constraints of conventional narrative by moving at several points in the *Sacred Tales* to break down the boundary between narrative and event narrated. One of these points we have already noticed. The person curious about what actually happened, Aristides said, will want to consult the parchment notebooks *and the dreams themselves* (48K,8). The line between dreams and the account of them is blurred.

More striking are the moments when Asclepius, the subject of Aristides' narrative, intervenes to direct the composition of it. At 48K,24 Aristides appeals to the god to direct his narrative:

But as to what follows it is your task, O Lord, to make clear and to reveal, by saying what and by turning where, we would do what is gratifying to you and would best continue our tale.

Sometimes Aristides regards Asclepius as a partner in his narrative, a kind of divine editor. At one point in the fourth *Sacred Tale* he appeals to this partner: "Now as to what comes next, if it is fitting, let it be said and written, and if not, may you be fully concerned, Lord Asclepius, to prompt me to describe it without causing any disagreeableness" (50K,50).

It is one thing to appeal to a god for help in ordering the narrative of his wonders—the conventional proem does exactly that—and another to narrate the intervention of the god himself in the composition of the narrative. Later in the fourth *logos* Aristides tells of such an intervention:

But when I had reached this part of the speech, and I intended to turn to the other benefactions of the god and to write in order those which occurred under other governors and other circumstances, *in the midst of composing* (μετὰ τὴν γραφὴν), I had a dream, which pertained somehow again to these things. It was as follows: I thought that I was giving an oratorical display and spoke among certain people, and in the midst of the speech with which I contended, I called upon the god in this way: "Lord Asclepius, if in fact I excel in rhetoric and excel much, grant me health and cause the envious to burst." I happened to have seen these things in the dream, and when it was day, I took up some book and read it. Then I found in it what I had said. In wonder I



said to Zosimus, "Behold, what I dreamed that I said, I find written in the book." (50K,68)

To narrate the providence of the god is a task made impossible by that very providence, *pronoia*. The god's providence must extend not only to the events narrated, but also to all things, even to the narrative itself. The narrator's stance, his position as an observer external to the events narrated, cannot be maintained when his subject is a divine providence whose essential nature is to embrace and foresee all events in time, including the event which is the narrative. Hence it is impossible for Aristides to employ the conventional mode of divine inspiration, in which a divinity stands outside narrator and events narrated and implants in the narrator the subject and form of his narrative. Instead, Aristides claims that his narrative is constantly interpenetrated by the divine providence narrated. Even in the midst of composing, Asclepius can intervene and redirect the narrative.

The narrative of divine providence, in turn, can repenetrate the events it narrates. When Aristides woke from the dream in which Asclepius had told him to add an account of his rhetorical career to the *Sacred Tales*, he found in a book the very words he had dreamed (50K,68). Words sent by Asclepius can appear in a dream, in the waking world, or in Aristides' narrative of dreams and waking. The god's providence expressed in his *logoi* links levels of reality in a unity beyond the powers of conventional narrative to express or conventional reading to distinguish. Aristides concludes his account of Asclepius' intervention in the composition of the *Sacred Tales* by appealing to the god as the only judge of the rightness of his narrative: "If we have understood the god's intent, he himself would know best" (50K,69).

In order to demonstrate the providence of Asclepius, it would not have been enough merely to show how the events sent by the god "came true," as we say; that is, how dream events and waking events corresponded to one another. A demonstration carried no further than that would fail because it would not show the god's providence extending to the narrative itself. His insistence that the narrative itself is part of the story separates Aristides' dream-narrative from ancient and modern oneirocritics. For Artemidorus and his kind, a predictive dream was simply an open window onto the future.<sup>13</sup> For Freud, a dream is an encoded wish or desire; if it turns out to be predictive, it is because our unconscious wishes can influence the choices we make, and those choices may influence our future. Aristides' insistence that his dream is a text, a *hieros logos*, distinguishes his approach from both these. Asclepius' intervention in the narrative, the constant interpenetration of dream by reality, reality by dream, and both by narrative, as well as the interpenetration of narrative by dream and

<sup>13</sup> The distinction between the predictive *ὄνειρος* and the non-predictive *ἐνύπνιον* is fundamental to Artemidorus' system; see *Artemidori Daldiani Onirocriticon Libri V*, ed. Roger A. Pack (Leipzig 1983) I.1. For a perhaps over-complicated antidote to my simplification of dream-classification in antiquity, see C. A. Behr, *Aelius Aristides and the Sacred Tales* (above, note 1) 171–95.

reality, break down the boundaries on which conventional dream interpretations, ancient and modern, are based.<sup>14</sup>

Aristides moves at several points in the *Sacred Tales* to break down the boundary between event and narrative and to show that the words of one are the words of the other. Words form the connection, demonstrating the god's providence, between the world of dreams and the world of waking, and between both and Aristides' narrative. The working of this connection can be seen most easily if we examine the dreams in which books or written texts appear.

Several times Aristides reports dreams of books or writing. At 51K,18, for example, he dreams of reading Aristophanes' *Clouds*. He awakens to find cloudy weather, and rain later in the day. His companions congratulate him on the precision of the prophecy. There is nothing here that one could not find in Artemidorus or in the dreams of any literary man with a smattering of subconscious meteorological knowledge.

At 49K,30 occurs a more complex literary dream. Vexed by a swollen uvula (one of a group of laryngeal symptoms associated with an inability to engage in literary activity),<sup>15</sup> Aristides dreams of "an excellent book, the particulars of which—for I shall say the same thing again—I would not be able to tell. How could I so much later, especially since my record (*apographê*) removed the need to memorize them?" The book, whose title seems to be *The Crown Lover* (Φιλοστέφανος) or *The Crown Desirer* (Φιλησιιστέφανος), advises him to abstain from wine; it appears in a later dream as Antisthenes, *Περὶ Χρήσεως* (*On Use of Wine*).<sup>16</sup>

The contents of this dream book, Aristides implies, can be found by the curious in his *apographê*, his transcription of events. But in his narrative, even the book's title is unclear, and its contents are unimportant. The book in the dream links the levels of reality represented by Aristides' dream, his record (*apographê*) of it, and the narrative of the *Sacred Tales*. The book is there, in the dream and, one presumes, in the waking world as well, if Antisthenes' *On Use of Wine* was available in the libraries of second-century Pergamum. But it can be brought out of the dream world in two different ways. The contrast between the precision of Aristides' *apographê*, which contains the contents of the book he dreamed as well as every other kind of utterance, and the imprecision of his narrative, in which even the book's title is unclear, underscores the difference between mere factual accuracy and a representation of the providence of the god. The words of the book, perceived and represented in such different ways, link the several worlds of Aristides' *logos*.

A third, even more complex interpenetration of dream and reality by the written word appears at 51K,19. The simple dream about weather prediction

<sup>14</sup> For a recent attempt to understand dream-interpretation as textual exegesis, see Liam Hudson, *Night Life: The Interpretation of Dreams* (New York 1985).

<sup>15</sup> 47K,69; 48K,6; 48K,46; 48K,56; 48K,69; 51K,9. I hope to examine this syndrome more fully elsewhere; for some of the issues it raises, see Danielle Gourevitch, *Le triangle hippocratique dans le monde gréco-romain* (Rome 1984) 19–22 esp. note 9.

<sup>16</sup> See Diog. Laert. 6.18, where the alternative titles *Περὶ μεθῆς* and *Περὶ τοῦ Κύκλωπος* appear.

through Aristophanes occurs one chapter earlier and prepares the ground for this bizarre oneiric event. On a journey to Smyrna, Aristides hears that the daughter of his foster sister is gravely ill. He sends a doctor to her and continues on his journey, sped by a dream in which he inspects the entrails of a sacrificial animal, especially the part called "the God and Deliverer."<sup>17</sup> When he hears that the girl has died, he and those with him conclude that "all this did not take place without some divine agency" (51K,21).

The dead girl has not, however, left Aristides' dreams. The remarkable dream that came to him two nights later must be given in full:

Telesphorus was a muleteer. This man seemed to me, starting from there, to come back and to report oracles which had been given for Philumene, for this was the girl's name. He said that they had been given to Alcimus, the father of the girl. And he had a letter, either sealed or not, which he said that Alcimus, after he had heard about her at night, noted and copied down; and it was marvelous in length and power, and pertained to me, so that I wondered how he even noted it down. But the sum was that all of Philumene's trouble had been inscribed on her very body and on her insides, as it were on the entrails of sacrificial animals. There also appeared rather a lot of the intestine, and somehow at the same time I saw it. The upper parts were healthy and in good condition, but what was diseased was on the extreme lower end; and it was all exhibited by one who stood by, whoever he was. And indeed I asked him, "What causes my sluggishness and difficulty?" He exhibited that place. The oracles were somewhat as follows. My name had been inscribed in this way: "Aelius Aristides." And there was, more or less at intervals, different nominal devices. "Sosimenes" had been added and other such names, which heralded safety and declared that Philumene had given a soul for a soul and a body for a body, hers for mine. And the other oracles which pertained to the same were in the dream, all written in certain books, all of which Alcimus wrote and Telesphorus seemed to

<sup>17</sup> ἐδόκουν ἱερεῖόν τι τεθυκὼς ἐπισκοπεῖσθαι τόν τε δὴ θεόν, οἶμαι, καλούμενον καὶ λυτήρα (51K,20). Behr, *Complete Works* (above, note 1) 442, understands "deliverer" to allude to astrology, citing Iamblichus *De mysteriis* 8.1, where gods are called "deliverers from fate" (λυτήρας τῆς εἰμαρμένης). The association of gods with deliverance expressed by λυτήρ and its cognates is not, of course, specifically astrological; see, for example, Aeschylus *Supp.* 267, 1072, *Septem* 174, 941, *Ch.* 820; Euripides *Alc.* 224, *El.* 136; and *Orphei Hymni*, ed. W. Quandt (Berlin 1962) 14.8, 15.2, and 36.7. Further, the Hippocratics recognized certain symptoms as "delivering signs," σημεῖα λυτήρια; see *Prognostic* 24 [*Oeuvres complètes d'Hippocrate* ed. E. Littré (Paris 1839 = Amsterdam 1973) vol. 2, 180]; *Prenotions of Cos* 142 [Littré vol. 5, 614]; *Crises* 39 [Littré vol. 9, 288]; and note Galen's familiarity with the term in *On Critical Days* [*Claudii Galeni opera omnia* ed. C. G. Kühn (Leipzig 1821–34=Hildesheim 1964) vol. 9, 770–1] and his *Commentary on Hippocrates' "Prognostic"* [Kühn vol. 18b, 272=J. Heeg, *Galen in Hippocratis prognosticum commentaria iii, Corpus Medicorum Graecorum* 5.9.2 (Leipzig 1915) 352]. At 51K,20, therefore, Aristides may be exploiting, as he often does, the common terminology of two areas, in this case theology and medicine.

carry back home. There was also in it advice of the doctor Porphyrio, as it were to her mother, particularly to bathe, but if not, at least to take nourishment. (51K,22–24)

Modern readers find something more than a little heartless in Aristides' bland acceptance of the idea that the girl Philumene's death was a substitute for his own. For Aristides' contemporaries the idea that one person's death could be a substitute for someone else's was neither remote nor confined to classical literature like the *Alcestis*. People had said that Antinous' death was an act of *devotio* or a sacrifice to allow Hadrian to live long enough to accomplish his plans.<sup>18</sup> Yet even readers closer to the idea of sacrifice might have been given pause by the picture of Aristides, like some ghastly *haruspex*, consulting the girl's entrails.

Aristides himself approaches the scene with reluctance and shields himself from responsibility for the message on Philumene's vitals. His dream contains another dream and two texts. The first comes to Aristides in the hands of one Telesphorus, a muleteer. It is in the form of a letter taken down by Alcimius, father of Philumene, and recording a dream in which Alcimius has learned many things about Aristides. The sum of Alcimius' dream within Aristides' dream, however, is that Philumene's whole trouble has been inscribed on her body and vitals. The second text is that inscribed on Philumene's entrails, and it is interpreted to Aristides by a mysterious figure, "one who stood by, whoever he was."

The similarities between the two texts are enough to establish their essential identity. Both, of course, come from the god, source of every *logos*. Both come in dreams; the first, in Alcimius' dream within a dream, and the second, in Aristides' dream itself. Alcimius the father and Philumene his daughter both present texts to Aristides through a divinely named or mysterious intermediary. Alcimius' text comes through Telesphorus (a name significant in the Pergamene cult of Asclepius),<sup>19</sup> and Philumene's through the mysterious bystander who exhibits the very place on Philumene's inscribed innards where Aristides will find the answer to his question about himself. These intermediary figures put Aristides at one remove from the texts themselves. Psychologists will recognize them as an expression of the profound uneasiness with which Aristides, and all Greeks, contemplated human sacrifice.<sup>20</sup>

The formal parallels between the two texts make it certain that for Aristides to read the letter from Alcimius was the same as for him to consult the entrails of Philumene. The identity extends from form to content. At crucial points in Aristides' narrative the two texts are merged, their content becomes one, and the transition from one to the other is blurred. Aristides states that Alcimius' dream, "marvelous in length and power," pertained to him. When he comes to summarize it, however, the summary has to do exclusively with Philumene, yet when he "reads" Philumene, he finds an answer to a question about his own

<sup>18</sup> Cassius Dio 69.11, 3–4; *Historia Augusta* "Hadrian" 14.6; Aurelius Victor 14.7–9; Danielle Gourevitch (above, note 15) 53–55.

<sup>19</sup> 49K,15, 21–23; 50K,46; cf. Pausanias 2.11,5–7.

<sup>20</sup> Walter Burkert, *Greek Religion* (Cambridge, Mass. 1985) 59–60, 82–84, 248.

condition. Aristides' narrative moves without a signal from the content of Alcimus, letter to the examination of Philumene's intestines, coil upon coil of them, and somehow Aristides is there, looking at them (καὶ ἅμα πῶς ἑώρων αὐτάς 51K,23). Immediately after the mysterious bystander shows Aristides the answer to his question written on Philumene's intestines, Aristides reports several oracles (χρησμοί). This juxtaposition implies that the oracles are those that he found on Philumene's body, and the verb ἐνεγέγραπτο, repeating ἐγγεγραμμένου used a few lines earlier of the text "written on" Philumene, reinforces that implication. But the term χρησμοί recalls the χρησθέντα given to Alcimus (51K,22), and when at the end of his narrative Aristides reports that "other things which pertained to the same were in the dream, all written in certain books, all of which Alcimus wrote and Telesphorus seemed to carry back in its entirety," a reader can no longer be certain where exactly Aristides has seen the crucial information about Philumene's death being an exchange for his own. The solid structure of ring-composition, beginning and ending with Telesphorus and centering on the inmost parts of Philumene, masks an ambiguity. We can be certain what the crucial text said, but not where Aristides saw it. The sacrifice of Philumene, Asclepius' favor to Aristides, must remain a mystery. It can be narrated, but no accurate account of it can be given.

Elsewhere in the *Sacred Tales* the written word unifies the world of dreams and the world of waking and links both to Aristides' narrative itself. In the extraordinary dream about Philumene this unification extends to the central theme of the *Sacred Tales*, the body, health, and divine healing. To see how this is so, we must look at the correspondence between the texts mentioned in Aristides' narrative of his dream and the texts on and out of which the *Sacred Tales* are built.

In the dream about Philumene, Aristides receives from Telesphorus a long text recording a dream sent to Alcimus, father of Philumene. The text is so long that Aristides wonders how Alcimus has managed to write it down, and it contains a variety of things, even a prescription from the doctor Porphyrio for Philumene's mother. Aristides nevertheless sees that all this text pertains to him and reduces it to a summary: κεφάλαιον δ' ἦν, ὡς ἐν αὐτῷ τῷ σώματι τῆς Φιλουμένης καὶ τοῖς ἐντὸς, ὥσπερ ἐν σπλάχνοις ἱερείων, ἐγγεγραμμένου παντὸς τοῦ περὶ αὐτὴν πράγματος (51K,23). Aristides uses that same word, κεφάλαιον, in several places to describe the relation between his *apographê* or account of the dreams sent by Asclepius, the voluminous notebooks on which the *Sacred Tales* were based, and the narrative itself.<sup>21</sup> Alcimus' dream, so long that the recording of it is a wonder and containing every kind of utterance, bears the same relation to Philumene's summary of it that Aristides' record of his dreams bears to his narrative of the providence of the god.

It follows that the text inscribed on Philumene corresponds to Aristides' own narrative. Like his narrative, it is mysterious, dreamlike, and has no regard

<sup>21</sup> The plural κεφάλαια is used for the general relation of narrative to record, as at 48K,4 and 29; cf. 48K,18; 49K,5 and 13; 50K,98. The singular indicates the point or summarized meaning of a single dream (49K,48 and 80) or document (49K,77).

for the structures we find in waking reality. Again like Aristides' narrative, the text on Philumene's body is a restatement in non-descriptive, non-discursive terms of a longer text, the oracular letter of Alcmus. Finally, the text on Philumene's body illustrates the providence of Asclepius and his special favor toward Aristides. Aristides' question to the mysterious bystander, "What causes my sluggishness and difficulty?" recalls a central topic of the fourth *Sacred Tale*, Aristides' inability to take up the public practice of rhetoric.<sup>22</sup> The answer, Aristides' name followed by "Sosimenes" and other titles indicating the god's favor, recalls the dreams elsewhere in the *Sacred Tales* in which significant names have been signs of the god's favor.<sup>23</sup>

This connection between dream and narrative brings us close to the third element promised in the title of this paper. Theme in a work as complex as the *Sacred Tales* may be an elusive concept, but no attempt to capture it for analysis can neglect health and the body. In their simplest description, the *Sacred Tales* are narratives of how the god of healing sent dreams to cure one of his literary devotees. Seen in their cultural context, they form another instance of the complex, conscious relationship with rhetoric that distinguishes ancient medicine from its medieval and modern successors.<sup>24</sup>

The *Sacred Tales* do not narrate only healing and dreams; they narrate also the creation of a text, or rather of two texts. One is, of course, the *Sacred Tales* themselves. We have seen how complex the textuality (to borrow a useful word) of the *Sacred Tales* is. Aristides made it clear from the beginning of his work that the *Sacred Tales* were not a transcription of reality, an *apographê* or account. Rather they were a narrative, *diêgêsis*, freed, like the god himself, from the constraints of duration, sequence, and genre. Asclepius was not a subject outside the narrative and its author, but could intervene in the creation of the narrative of his own providence.

But the *Sacred Tales* record also the creation of a second text. By directing us to a text of Asclepius' providence on and in a body, the dream about Philumene identifies this second text, which has been before us throughout the *Sacred Tales*. It is the body of Aristides himself. In its illnesses and recoveries,

<sup>22</sup> See especially 50K,14–30 and 48–51.

<sup>23</sup> E.g. the ship "Asclepius," 48K,54; the noble lady "Tyche," 49K,22; "Rosander" and "Theodotus/Theodotes," 50K,21; "Theodorus," 50K,53. I do not think much should be made of the common theophoric name Asclepiacus (48K,35; 49K,22 and 25).

<sup>24</sup> See L. Percy, "Galen and Stoic Rhetoric," *GRBS* 24 (1983) 259–72; "Language, Rhetoric, and Medicine in the Second Sophistic" *ANRW* II.36.5 (forthcoming).

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the medical history of Aristides makes up a narrative of Asclepius' providence and favor. Physical existence is transitory. The myth telling how Asclepius himself was blasted by the thunderbolt of Zeus for restoring Hippolytus to life would have told Aristides the limits of the god's power. The *Sacred Tales* themselves, however, might endure, to present the complex interpenetration of reality by the word of the god and the transformation of the diseased and imperfect text of Aristides' body into the lasting text of the *Sacred Tales*. Aristides knew the importance of the prospect of immortality implicit in the *Sacred Tales*. He dreamed once that a physician reproached him for not declaiming. "Because," Aristides answered in his dream, "it is more important for me to revise some things which I have written. For I must also converse with posterity" (51K,52).

After the bodily health of Aristides, the second major subject of the *Sacred Tales* is Aristides' rhetorical career. We can now understand the connection between the two, revealed in the dream about Philumene and the other dreams in which the word runs through and unifies the diverse levels of reality in Aristides' world. To heal Aristides' body and to inspire his literary efforts are for Asclepius the same activity, the same illustration of his special favor and providence through the creation of a text. Aristides was a rhetorician, not a philosopher, and in the second century that was a distinction that mattered. It was not, however, always a difference. The Stoics' god, whose providence, *pronoia*, pervaded and unified the world in the form of *logos*, the Word, would have been familiar to Aristides. He called him Asclepius.