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## Victor A. Leuci, *Chance Remarks On Dreams in Aelius Aristides*

What are 'chance' remarks on dreams and how valuable are they? In his book *Greeks on Dreams*, Van Lieshout says: "It should be stated explicitly beforehand that those casual references to dreams and dreaming register a low esteem for dream-knowledge in Plato's mind. This observation should continue to counterbalance any view gained from the substantial evidence."<sup>1</sup> Van Lieshout's 'casual references' are what I have chosen to call 'chance' remarks. His statement says, in essence, that 'chance' remarks are as valuable in revealing an author's true view on dreams as his substantive statements. The aim of this paper is to assess the value of 'chance remarks' on dreams in the writings of another author, Aelius Aristides, a person whose personal views on dreams are well documented and whose public writings afford us examples of 'chance' remarks. Thus we will be able to determine whether the assumption Van Lieshout made about Plato is valid for Aristides as well, that 'chance' remarks do indeed reflect an author's actual views on dreams.

Aelius Aristides, the son of a wealthy landowner in Mysia, lived in the second century A.D. and was one of the well-known orators and writers of the Second Sophistic.<sup>2</sup> Aristides' education was typical for someone of his socio-economic background for his time period. He studied Greek literature under Alexander of Cotiaeum, who also tutored the emperors Marcus Aurelius and Lucius Verus. Several famous orators took him on as a pupil: Antonius Polemo in his native Smyrna, Claudius Aristocles in Pergamon and later Herodes Atticus in Athens. After Aristides' formal education was completed, he traveled to Egypt to broaden his education and declaimed at various cities and islands along the way.<sup>3</sup> While in Egypt he fell ill and was forced to go back to Smyrna. It was at this time that he turned to the god Sarapis for healing.<sup>4</sup> After his recovery Aristides made the customary trip to Rome to further his oratorical career. A cold which he got just before his starting out for Rome in December of 143 progressed into a very severe illness by the time he reached Rome, no doubt because of the harsh conditions and weather along the way.<sup>5</sup> This caused him to shorten his stay at Rome and return home to Smyrna.

After the failure of the medical profession both in Rome and later in Smyrna to cure him, Aristides turned first to Sarapis and then to Asklepios for assistance. The appearance of Asklepios in one of Aristides' dreams had a profound influence on his life. From then on he came to rely more and more on the guidance of Asklepios

through the medium of dreams, in regard to his public life, speeches, travels, exercise, eating habits, bathing, even in his choice of toothpaste. From 145 to 154 he divided his time between Smyrna, his estates in Mysia, and the Sanctuary of Asklepios at Pergamon. After the first few years of his illness he began again to write, deliver speeches, and lecture; at first before some of his friends at the Sanctuary, then later to larger groups. His *Sacred Tales* provide evidence for some of the medical practices in the second century A.D. and also describe the personal religious experiences of their author. By 154 he was well enough to make lecture tours throughout Greece and conduct a successful speaking engagement at Rome. He started to accept students but refused payment, possibly because he was uncomfortable about making any long-range commitments. In 165 he contracted smallpox, which was spreading throughout the empire at the time.<sup>6</sup> The psychological effects of the disease lasted long after his health returned.<sup>7</sup> He stayed thereafter mainly on his estates in Mysia and only occasionally made public appearances. It was in Mysia that he died around the age of sixty-three.<sup>8</sup>

Let us look at some examples from the *Sacred Tales* illustrating the importance of dreams to Aristides.<sup>9</sup> Bathing or not bathing was a prominent topic of Aristides' dreams. He was often given specific instructions on when and where to bathe, or how long to abstain from bathing. Or, in Aristides' own words: "I have not bathed for five consecutive years and some months besides, unless, of course, in winter time, he [the god] ordered me to use the sea or rivers or wells" (*Sacred Tales* I. 59). One of his more memorable baths occurred at Smyrna in 149 on account of a dream. As Aristides says: "It was the middle of winter and the north wind was stormy and it was icy cold, and the pebbles were fixed to one another by the frost so that they seemed like a continuous sheet of ice, and the water was such as is likely in such weather. (20) When the divine manifestation was announced, friends escorted us and various doctors, some of them acquaintances, and others who came either out of concern or even for the purposes of investigation. There was also another great crowd, for some distribution happened to be taking place outside the gates. And everything was visible from the bridge. ... (21) When we reached the river, there was no need for anyone to encourage us. But being still full of warmth from the vision of the god, I cast off my clothes, and not wanting a massage, flung myself where the river was the deepest. Then as in a pool of very gentle and tempered water, I passed my time swimming all about and splashing myself all over. When I came out, all my skin had a rosy hue and there was a lightness throughout my body. There was also much shouting from those present and those coming up, shouting that celebrated phrase, 'Great is Asklepios'" (*Sacred Tales* II. 19-21).

The "tale of the tumor," as one might call it, in 147-148, is also worthy of note. Again in Aristides' words. (62) "And a tumor grew from no apparent cause, at first as it might be for anyone else, and next it increased to an extraordinary size, and everything was swollen and terrible pains ensued, and a fever for some days. At this point, the doctors cried out all sorts of things, some said surgery, some said cauterization by drug, or that an infection would arise and I must surely die. (63) But the god gave a contrary opinion and told me to endure and foster the growth. And clearly there was no choice between listening to the doctors or to the god. But the growth increased even more, and there was much dismay. Some of my friends marveled at my endurance, others criticized me because I acted too much on account

of dreams, and some even blamed me for being cowardly, since I neither permitted surgery nor again suffered any cauterizing drugs. But the god remained firm throughout and ordered me to bear up. He said that this was wholly for my safety, for the source of this discharge was located above, and these gardeners did not know where they ought to turn the channels. (64) Wonderful things kept happening. There were approximately four months of this kind of life. But during these, my head and upper intestinal tract were as comfortable as one could pray for. There was also, as it were, a national assembly in the house. For my friends, who were the foremost of the Greeks of that time, were always coming to see me and were present for my speeches. For I declaimed right from my bed. (65) ... All these things were done while the inflamed tumor was at its worst and was spreading right up to my navel. (66) Finally the Savior indicated on the same night the same thing to me and to my foster father--for Zosimus was then alive--, so that I sent to him to tell him what the god had said, but he himself came to see me to tell me what he had heard from the god. There was a certain drug, whose particulars I do not remember, except that it contained salt. When we applied this, most of the growth quickly disappeared, and at dawn my friends were present, happy and incredulous. (67) From here on, the doctors stopped their criticisms, expressed extraordinary admiration for the providence of the god in each particular. But they considered how the loose skin might be restored to normal. Now it seemed to them that there was full need of surgery, for it would not otherwise be restored to its original state. And they thought that I should grant this, for what concerned the god had been wholly accomplished. (68) He did not even allow this. And he brought everything back together, so that after a few days had passed, no one was able to find on which thigh the tumor had been, but they were both unscarred in every respect" (*Sacred Tales I. 62-68*).

Aristides attributed both the life and the death of Zosimus to Asklepios. When Zosimus fell quite sick in the summer of 148, Aristides entreated Asklepios in a dream to save Zosimus from death, and "Zosimus recovered beyond all expectation" (*Sacred Tales I. 72*). Several month later, because of a dream, Aristides commanded Zosimus not to move about. But, as Aristides notes, out of concern for another fellow slave, Zosimus "disobeyed me and went, and because of this he died" (*Sacred Tales I. 76*).

Asklepios also helped Aristides with his profession: "Indeed the greatest and most valuable part of my training was my access to and communion with these dreams. For I heard many thing which excelled in purity of style and were gloriously beyond my models, and I dreamed that I myself said many things better than my wont, and things of which I had never thought. As many of these as I remembered, I put in the copies of my dreams (*Sacred Tales IV. 25*)."

Finally, on a lighter note, Asklepios also told Aristides, through dreams, how to take care of his teeth: "Burn the tooth of a lion, and grinding it up, use it as a toothpaste. Second: Clean your teeth with that famous ointment, sap of silphium. After this, pepper, which he added for warmth. After all these things, came Indian nard, this also as a toothpaste (*Sacred Tales III. 36*)."

From all of the above it should be clear that dreams were of supreme importance to Aristides and that he would do whatever the dreams commanded, no matter how insignificant or how foolish or how dangerous it appeared to be. But what of his

'chance' remarks? How does he refer to dreams and dreaming in his speeches? It should come as no surprise that there are instances in his speeches where he treats dreams and dreaming with the same high regard as he does in the *Sacred Tales*. In fact Asklepios gave Aristides the topic for one speech, and even supplied the opening for him. Naturally enough the speech was about the sons of Asklepios (*Oration* 38). But is that the only way he refers to dreams in his speeches? The answer to that is both a simple and perhaps surprising "No." Let us look at these remarks more closely.

There are three references to dreams in the *Panathenaic Oration*, and all three qualify as 'chance' remarks. In the first example he compares the sight of Attica, as one approaches it from the sea, to "a joyful dream" ὄνειρατος εὐφροσύνη (*Orat.* 1. 12). Just after this he also compares this sight to "a preliminary initiation into a sacred ceremony." Later on he states "what fair dream" ποῖον ὄναρ χρηστόν (*Orat.* 1. 137) was left to the other Greeks if in 480 B.C. the Athenians had sided with the Persians or had left Greece for some other land. In the last example from this speech he compares Lysander's belief that he had conquered Athens to a "childish dream" ὠνειροπόλησεν τοῖς παῖσι παραπλησίως (*Orat.* 1. 268). None of these three examples demonstrate that Aristides has a belief in the power of dreams, though the first example is not dissonant with such a belief. The second example is simply a metaphorical way of saying the Greeks didn't have any chance of success against the Persians without the Athenians, and the implication concerning dreams and dreaming is that they are less than waking reality. The last example is clearly pejorative. Thus the examples from the *Panathenaic Oration* are not exactly a ringing endorsement of the value of dreams.

In several other speeches Aristides uses dreams as a metaphor to indicate that something is unattainable or unreal. For example, in *To Plato: In Defense of the Four*, (*Orat.* 3. 116), he says to Plato "either you are telling us a dream or a riddle, or I know not what"--this in reference to Plato's charges that Pericles made the Athenians "garrulous, idle, cowardly and illiberal" despite the fact that Pericles was a good speaker, capable of action, courageous and superior to money. Later in *Orat.* 3. 382, he refers to the fact that Plato has been turned over by Dionysius to a Spartan to be sold is so unexpected as to be "beyond dreaming:" οἴου μηδ' ὄναρ ἦλπισεν. In *On Sending Reinforcements to Sicily*, (*Orat.* 5. 48), Aristides states that the Athenians won't have "even a dream of conquest" καὶ οὐδ' ὄναρ ὑμῶν τῶν ἐκεῖ πραγμάτων ἐπιλείπεται left to them if they do not send reinforcements to Sicily. In *On Making Peace with the Athenians*, (*Orat.* 8. 15), when the Spartans have defeated the Athenians and are deliberating what to do, he states "those many glorious enterprises [that is, those of the Athenians] like a dream have flown away from them and are gone." In his speech *Concerning Concord*, (*Orat.* 23. 63), Aristides compares the rivalry among the cities of Asia for titles and symbols of rank to dreaming and fighting over shadows. In his speech *Regarding Rome*, Aristides states Athens and Sparta did not in fact possess real empires; they

just dreamed (ὄνειροπολήσαντες , (*Orat.* 26. 43), that they did. Later in the same speech, (*Orat.* 26. 69-70), Aristides describes the idyllic state created by the *Pax Romana* and that the former hostilities and conflicts between peoples have been forgotten, much as those who awaken forget their dream--in fact the people now believe those conflicts to be myths. There is no hint here of Aristides' belief in dreams or that there is any important information to receive from dreams. Instead, Aristides gives us a simple description of a well-known fact: that people usually forget their dream once they awaken. The combination, however, of this casual reference to dreaming with the use of myth in the next sentence to refer to the same thing would speak against a belief in dreams. From all of these examples it should be clear that Aristides does not always employ 'chance' remarks to refer to dreams in a positive light and as inspired by the gods, yet we know from the *Sacred Tales* that he did believe this.

It could be suggested that these speeches were written before Aristides' "conversion," if we may call it that. While some of these orations are undated, and hence might reinforce this idea, *On Sending Reinforcements to Sicily* was written after 147, the *Panathenaic Oration* was written in 155, and *To Plato: In Defense of the Four* sometime during the period 161-165, *Regarding Rome* in 155, and *Concerning Concord* in 167--all after his "conversion."

It might be asked whether, in each individual speech, Aristides only referred to dreams one way, i.e. either positively or negatively. While this is true for the most part, there is an example where he combines the two, namely, *To Plato: In Defense of Oratory*, written between 145-147 during Aristides' first serious illness. Towards the beginning of the speech, Aristides uses the value of oracles, such as those at Delphi and Dodona, to refute one of Plato's arguments against oratory. In the course of this argument (*Orat.* 2. 70-75), Aristides raises dreams to the level of the oracle of Delphi as a means of receiving communication and/or aid from the gods and cites personal experience. Indeed, he attributes his being alive to the aid received from the gods through dreams. Much later in the speech (*Orat.* 2. 400), however, he makes a harsh statement against dreams: "from the matter itself it is clear that this is no vain myth or dream, but reality and a factual account." Here dreams are like "vain myths" and are clearly inferior to "reality"--quite different from his statement earlier in the speech which elevates them to the level of the oracle at Delphi. This speech illustrates that Aristides had no qualms in referring to dreams in a pejorative fashion, and yet could in the same speech praise them very highly and even credit them with saving his life.

I hope this brief overview has shown the contrast between Aristides' attitude toward dreams in the *Sacred Tales* and in his other works. The *Sacred Tales* reveal a strong belief in the power of dreams, but 'chance' remarks in other works treat dreams as anything but positive and valuable. Further investigation may reveal why we see this dichotomy between his 'chance' remarks and what we know to have been his personal beliefs. However, just the fact that Aristides' 'chance' remarks do not reflect his true attitudes argues that this may be true for other authors as well, challenging Van Lieshout's statement about Plato and demonstrating that there is no *a priori* reason to believe that 'chance' remarks about dreams give true insight into an author's beliefs.

## Appendix

### I. Examples from the *Sacred Tales*

- I. 59, a recounting of his bathing the past five years, winter 171
  - Τὸ μὲν οὐτῶν ἀλουσιῶν τί τις ἀν λέγοι... ἤδη γὰρ καὶ πέντε ἐτῶν συνεχῶς ἐγένοντό μοι καὶ προσέτι μηνῶν, ὅσα γε μὴ χειμῶνος ὥρα θαλάττη ἢ ποταμοῖς ἢ φρέασιν ἐκέλευσε χρήσασθαι.
- II. 19-21, a memorable bath in a river near Smyrna in 149
- I. 61-68, the tale of the tumor, Oct. 147-Jan 148
- I. 72-76, concerning salvation then death of Zosimus the summer of 148
  - ἐγὼ οὐ ἐπὶ τούτῳ τῷ ὄνειρατι οὐκ εἶων αὐτὸν κινεῖσθαι, ὅθ' ἢ περὶ οἰκέτου ἠάγγελία. ὁ δ' ἀπειθήσας ὄχετο, ἐκ δὲ τούτου ἡ τετελευτὴ ἐγένετο αὐτῷ.
- IV. 25, assistance given to Aristides' oratory by Asklepios
  - πολλὰ μὲν γὰρ ἤκουσα νικῶντα καθαρότητι καὶ λαμπρῶς ἐπέκεινα τῶν παραδειγμάτων, πολλὰ δ' αὐτὸς λέγειν ἐδόκουν κρείττω τῆς συνηθείας καὶ ἂ οὐδεποποτε ἐνεθυμήθην· ὡδσα γε ἐμνήσθην ἐν ταῖς ἀπογραφαῖς τῶν ὄνειράτων ἔστησα
- III. 36, prescriptions for toothpaste, 170/171
  - ' Ἰάματα δὲ ὀδόντων ἔδωκε. πρῶτον μὲν ἠλέοντος ὀδόντα καῖσαι καὶ κόψαντα χρῆσθαι σμήματι, δεύτερον δὲ ὀπῶ διακλύζεσθαι, ταύτῳ δὴ τῷ χρίματι· μετὰ ταῦτα πέπερι, καὶ προσέθηκεν' θερμῆς οὐνεκα'· εφ' ἅπασιν δὲ στάχυς Ἰνδικός, σμῆμα καὶ οὐς. καὶ ταῦτα μὲν τῶν νεωστὶ φανθέντων ἐστίν.

### II. Examples of 'chance' remarks from Aristides' speeches

- *Oration 38: The Sons of Asklepios*, opens thus:
  - Κλῦτε φίλοι, θεῖός μοι ἐνύπνιον ἠδνειρός, ἔφη αὐτὸ τὸ ὄναρ· ταύτην γὰρ δὴ ἐδόκουν ἀρχὴν τοιεῖσθαι τοῦ λόγου
- *Oration 1: Panathenaic Oration*
  - 12 οὕτω γὰρ παντάπασιν ἡ ψυχὴ προκαθαίρεται καὶ μετέωρος καὶ κούφη γίγνεται καὶ σφόδρα τῶν Ἀθηνῶν τῶς θεᾶς ἐν παρασκευῇ ὥσπερ ἐν ἱεροῖς προτελουμένη. ... ὥστε ἔοικεν ὄνειρατος εὐφροσύνη τὰ θεάματα ...

- 137 τίς μηχανή σωτηρίας ἢ ποῖον ὄναρ χρηστὸν κατελίπετο τοῖς ἄλλοις
- 268 καὶ τότε δὴ Λύσανδρος ἀκριβῶς ἤσθετο, ὅτι οὐχ, ὡς ᾔετο, ἐνενικέει τὴν τῶν Ἀθηναίων πόλιν, ἀλλ' ὥσπερ ὄνειροπόλησεν τοῖς παισὶ παραπλησίως.
- *Oration 3: In Defense of the Four*
  - 116 ἢ γὰρ ὄναρ λέγεις, ἢ γριῖφον, ἢ οὐκ ἔχω τί θῶ.
  - 382 οἴου μηδ' ὄναρ ἤλπισεν
- *Oration 5: On Sending Reinforcement to Sicily*
  - 48 ἀπανιστάμενοι μὲν ἐκεῖθεν πάσας καταλύσετε τὰς ἐλπίδας, καὶ οὐδ' ὄναρ ὑμῖν τῶν ἐκεῖ πραγμάτων ἐπιλείπεται
- *Oration 8: On Making Peace with the Athenians*
  - 15 τὰ δὲ πολλὰ καὶ λαμπρὰ ἐκεῖνα ὄναρ δὴ διαπτάμενα αὐτοῖς οἴχεται
- *Oration 23: Concerning Concord*
  - 63 τί οὖν μαθόντες εἰπέ μοι πράγματα ἡμῖν αὐτοῖς παρέχομεν καὶ ὄνειρώττομεν καὶ περὶ τῆς σκιᾶς μαχόμεθα
- *Oration 26: Regarding Rome*
  - 43 ὄνειροπολήσαντες ἡγεμονίαν μᾶλλον ἢ κτήσασθαι δυνηθέντες
  - 69-70 ἀλλὰ πεπόνθασιν οἶον οἱ ἀφυπνισθέντες καὶ ἀντὶ τῶν ὄνειράτων ὧν ἀρτίως ἑώρων ἐξαίφνης ταῦτα παριδόντες καὶ ἐν αὐτοῖς γενόμενοι. πόλεμοι δὲ οὐδ' εἰ πόποτε ἐγένοντο ἔτι πιστεύονται, ἀλλ' ἐν ἄλλως μύθων τάξει τοῖς πολλοῖς ἀκούονται
- *Oration 2: To Plato: In Defense of Oratory*
  - 67-75 Aristides cites his own experience of receiving healing and aid from the gods through dreams.
  - 400 ὅτι δ' οὐκ ἄλλως μῦθος ταῦτα οὐδ' ὄναρ, ἀλλ' ὕπαρ, καὶ ὁ τῶν πραγμάτων αὐτῶν ἐστὶν λόγος δῆλον ἐξ αὐτῶν.

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<sup>1</sup> R.G.A. Van Lieshout. *Greeks on Dreams*. (Utrecht 1980), 104. I would like to take this opportunity to thank Gene Lane for all the aid and stimulus he provided me while working on my M.A. and Ph.D., especially as my dissertation adviser, at the University of Missouri-Columbia. In fact, the topic of this article sprang from a seminar I had with him on the Age of the Antonines and is a reflection, favorable I hope, of his interest in various aspects of Greek religion. This article is a slightly

revised version of a paper I gave at the 1995 CAMWS annual meeting.

<sup>2</sup> A good introduction to the Second Sophistic is G. Bowersock's *Greek Sophists in the Roman Empire* (Oxford 1969). For a more detailed account of Aristides' life, see Wilamowitz-Möllendorff, "Der Rhetor Aristides," *SPAW*, 28 (1925), 333-353; A-J Festugière, review of C. A. Behr, *Aelius Aristides and the Sacred Tales*. Amsterdam 1968 (Behr 1968) in *REG* 82 (1969), 117-153; R. Klein *Die Romrede des Aelius Aristides* (Darmstadt 1981), 71-90; and C.A. Behr, *P. Aelius Aristides: The Complete Works*, Vol.II (Leiden 1981-1986), 1-4. The most complete discussion of Aristides' life is by Behr (1968), 1-115. Behr's latest views are in "Studies on the Biography of Aelius Aristides," *ANRW* II. 34.2 (1993), 1140-1233. A-J Festugière has an excellent chapter dealing with the nature of Aristides' religious experience in *Personal Religion among the Greeks*, Sather Classical Lectures Vol. 26 (Berkeley 1954), 85-105. This chapter (in French) forms the introduction to his translation of the *Sacred Tales: Aelius Aristide, Discours sacrés: Rêve, religion, médecine au IIe siècle ap. J.C.*, published posthumously with preface by J. Le Goff and notes by H.D. Sattrey (Paris 1986), 12-27. The most complete bibliography on Aristides is in P.W. Van der Horst's *Aelius Aristides and the New Testament* (Leiden 1980), 87-93. All dates in this section, unless noted otherwise, are A.D.

<sup>3</sup> E.g., Kos, Knidos, Rhodes, and Alexandria after he arrived in Egypt. See *Or.* 33. 27; 24. 53.

<sup>4</sup> See *Or.* 36. 49 and Behr 1968, (above, note 2) 21-22. For Aristides' relationship with the Egyptian gods, see C. A. Behr, "Aelius Aristides and the Egyptian Gods," *Hommages a' Maarten J. Vermaseren* Vol. I, ed. M.B. de Boer and T.A. Eldridge, *EPRO* 68 (Leiden 1978), 13-24.

<sup>5</sup> For more on the illnesses and the journey, see Behr 1968, (above, note 2) 23-26.

<sup>6</sup> For symptoms and identification, see Behr 1968, (above, note 2) 96 n. 8 and 166-167 n. 13, and more recently R.J. and M.L. Littmann, "Galen and the Antonine plague," *AJP* 94 (1973), 243-255.

<sup>7</sup> See *Sacred Tales* II. 37-45; IV. 9; V. 25.

<sup>8</sup> Behr 1968, (above, note 2) 162-165.

<sup>9</sup> The translations I will use are all by Behr.