

## A Not-So-User-Friendly Manual? The Utility of Artemidorus' *Oneirocritica*

Divination manuals make up a unique—yet understudied—branch of surviving technical literature from the ancient world, and Artemidorus' *Oneirocritica* occupies a particularly significant position in this literary tradition. A monolith of its genre and perhaps the only surviving dream manual of its kind from Greco-Roman antiquity, Artemidorus' text is noticeably expansive and detailed; in attempting to be as thorough as possible regarding the art of dream interpretation, Artemidorus has compiled a text from widespread sources, including his own experiences as a diviner. Published in parts during the late 2<sup>nd</sup> and perhaps even early 3<sup>rd</sup> centuries AD, the *Oneirocritica* finds resonances with other intellectual compendia and technical treatises of this time, most notably Galen's medical texts.

The study of technical writing in the ancient Greco-Roman world is a relatively new and expanding area in the field of Classics. From Pliny's *Natural Histories* to Galen's massive medical corpus, investigations into Greek and Roman scientific manuals approach the material from a variety of angles, including the relationship between knowledge and power (especially imperial power), didactic qualities, authority of a work or author, organizational structures, and the transmission of knowledge (König and Whitmarsh 2007; Taub and Doody 2009; Formisano and van der Eijk 2017). Common to many of these approaches is a question concerning the practicality of technical manuals: are these texts meant to be used? Considerations of utility also prompt another set of questions about intended audience, functionality, and actual readership.

Similar questions come to bear on another group of technical manuals for the practice of divination—including works on dreaming, palmomancy (prophetic practice from body twitches), and *sortes* texts. A set of Byzantine Greek dreambooks spans nearly a thousand years with the

*Oneirocriticon of Daniel* dating as early as the 4<sup>th</sup>-7<sup>th</sup> cen. AD (see Oberhelman). There are also several Egyptian dream manuals: one rather famous Hieratic manual (c. 13<sup>th</sup> BC), but also several Demotic ones, primarily from 1<sup>st</sup>-2<sup>nd</sup> cen. AD and a few from 3<sup>rd</sup> cen. BC (see Prada). A collection of palmomantic fragments, dating between the 3<sup>rd</sup>-4<sup>th</sup> cen. AD (see Costanza), is most well-known in the version attributed to Melampus, the *Peri Palmōn Mantikē*. Finally, a pair of fortune-telling books use complex numbering systems and sets of pre-written questions and responses to divine one's future: the *Sortes Astrampsychi* (Greek, perhaps 1<sup>st</sup>-2<sup>nd</sup> cen. AD; see Stewart) and the *Sortes Sangallenses* (Latin, perhaps 3<sup>rd</sup> cen. AD; see Klingshirn).

Scholars do not seem to doubt the practicality of divination manuals in general, nor Artemidorus' more robust variation. Indeed, most of their organizational structures lend themselves well to encyclopedic use. Yet many of the divination manuals (even those with simple structures, let alone Artemidorus' comparatively complex text) still pose apparent difficulties for users in terms of their practical application—especially if one is to imagine consultation of them by lay-users as some scholars have suggested (Oberhelman).

This paper explores the utility of Artemidorus' dream manual by situating it among other texts of its genre—not only divination manuals, but also other technical and encyclopedic treatises. Artemidorus' manual finds much in common with its divinatory counterparts, but it also feels at home with its intellectual contemporaries: its attempt to cover thoroughly the topic at hand (which also results in a continued expansion of the text as it is found lacking), a focus on organizational structure and methodology, and a defensive posture towards would-be skeptics. Such an alignment begs the question: was Artemidorus' *Oneirocritica* actually intended for practical use? Galen especially offers a ready parallel for Artemidorus as the physician finds himself in between worlds, both fitting into and standing out among contemporary authors and

intellectuals of the Roman Empire. Artemidorus too exists in the interstices—between divination and science, between the intellectual and the practical. This paper examines Artemidorus’ navigation between spaces while interrogating how “user-friendly” his manual actually is.

#### Works Cited

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