The CONSTRAINTS of DESIRE

THE ANTHROPOLOGY OF SEX AND GENDER IN ANCIENT GREECE

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See how they grow. Woman waters phalloi. Attic red-figure pelike in the British Museum, 3819. (Courtesy of the British Museum.)
Appendix One
Artemidoros of Daldis:
Dream Analysis
Book One, chapters 78–80

78. The best set of categories for the analysis of intercourse [sunousia] is, first, intercourse according to nature [kata phusin] and convention [nomos] and customary usage [ethos], then intercourse against convention [para nomon], and third, intercourse against nature [para phusin].

First, this is the way it is with conventional intercourse. To have sex [migêna] with one's own wife [gynê] when she is willing and desirous and non resistant to it is good, equally for all who dream it. For the woman is either the dreamer's professional skill or the business whereby he provides himself with pleasures, or it is that which he manages and controls as he would a wife. This dream signifies the profit he makes on such resources, for as people take pleasure in sex [aphrodissia] so they take pleasure in profits.

If the woman resists or does not offer herself, it signifies the opposite. And let the same analysis apply to a mistress.

To have sex with women who are prostitutes and who take their stand in front of brothels signifies a minor embarrassment and a small outlay; for people who consort with these women incur shame and expense. But they are good for every project of work you may undertake, for some people call them "working girls" and they offer themselves with nary a refusal.

It would be good to dream of entering whore houses and being able to leave, since being unable to leave is certainly bad. I know someone who saw himself enter a whore house and be unable to come out, and he died not many days later, as the logic of the dream demanded; for this kind of place is referred to as a common bawdy house just as a cemetery is called a common resting place and much human seed there perishes. There is a reasonable similarity therefore between a whore house and death. But the women have nothing in common with the place: they signify good things, only the place itself is not good. Therefore prostitutes who walk the street are a more profitable dream to see. The women who mind workshops and stalls, vending merchandise and receiving payment, are good to see and have sex with in dreams.

If in a dream one appears to penetrate an unfamiliar woman and if she is beautiful and gracious and decked out in rich, soft clothes and golden jewelry and offers herself—it is good for the dreamer and shows that he will accomplish something or other fairly major. But if she is old, ugly, repulsive, sloppy, an eyesore in every way and if she does not offer herself, it means the opposite; for one must think of unknown women as images of how projects will turn out for the dreamer. The looks and bearing of the woman correspond to the outcome of the dreamer's business.

To have sex with one's own female slave or male slave is good, for slaves are the dreamer's possessions, therefore taking pleasure in them signifies the dreamer's being pleased with his own possessions, most likely because of their increase in number or value.

To be penetrated by one's house slave is not good. This signifies being despised or injured by the slave. The same applies to being penetrated by one's brother, whether older or younger, or a foster by one's enemy.

Having sex with a known and familiar woman when one is feeling sexy and desires her in the dream predicts nothing, because of the overriding intensity of the desire. But if he does not desire her, it is good, provided the woman is well-favored, for he will undoubtedly achieve something profitable from the woman he sees or with her help. For she who offers her body to someone would in all likelihood offer things that pertain to the body. Often such a dream is beneficial if it occurs to a man who is privy to a woman's secrets, for such a woman allows one to touch her private parts.

To penetrate a woman who is conventionally [kata nomous] married and subject to a man is not good, because of the convention. For the punishments which convention applies to a man caught in adultery are what the dream signifies.

To be penetrated by an acquaintance is profitable for a woman, depending on what sort of man is entering her. For a man to be penetrated by a richer, older man is good, for the custom is to receive things from such men. To be penetrated by a younger, poorer man is bad, for it is the custom to give to such. The same meaning applies if the penetrator is older but poorer.

If a man dreams of manipulating his penis he will penetrate his female slave, because the hands applied to his penis are serving him. If he has no servants, he will undergo some penalty because of the useless ejaculation of semen. I know a slave who dreamed he was masturbating his master and he became the chapmen and overseer of his children, for he held in his hands the master's penis, which signifies his children. Again, I know someone who dreamed he was masturbated by his master: he was tied to a pillar and received many blows, thus being beaten off by his master.

II. Concerning intercourse contrary to convention, one must analyze as follows. To penetrate a son under five years of age signifies the child will die, a result which I have often observed. Probably the significant connection
is the infant's corruption, for we call death a corruption. If the child is over five but under ten, he will be sick and the dreamer will be foolishly involved in some business and will take a loss. The sickness is signified by the pain of a child being penetrated before the right age and season, the dreamer’s loss is through his folly, for it is not the act of a man of sound mind to penetrate his own son or any other boy of that age. If the son is a young adolescent and the father is poor, he will send his son to a teacher and the tuition he pays for his son will be a kind of expenditure into him. If a rich man has this dream, he will give his son many gifts and transfer property to his name, undergoing a loss of substance.

To have sex with a son already grown is good for a man who is out of the country, for the dream signifies coming together and abiding together, by the name “sexual union” [suneúrise]. But for one who is already with his son and living at home it is bad; they will necessarily experience a separation from each other, because the intercourse of men for the most part takes place by one turning his back on the other.

To be penetrated by one’s son signifies violent injury from the son, an injury which the son too will regret. If a man dreams of penetrating his own father, he will become a fugitive from his fatherland or will develop an enmity with his father. For either the father himself will turn away from him or the whole population, which has the same signification in dreams as one’s “pop.”

A daughter who is quite small, not yet five years old, and one who is under ten, signify the same as the son. When the daughter is of a marriageable age, she will move to her husband’s house, and the man who has the dream will provide her with a dowry, thus incurring a kind of loss of substance. I know one man who had this dream and then lost his wife; this makes sense in dream logic, because then the surviving daughter began managing the house and exercised the roles of wife and daughter alike.

If a man dreams he lies with his married daughter, the daughter will separate from her husband and return home so as to be with him and live with him. It is good for a poor man with a wealthy daughter to have sex with her; for it is by receiving many benefits from her that he will take his pleasure. Often times wealthy men who see this dream have, even against their will, given something to their daughters, and sick men have died, being survived by daughters who are heiresses.

Discussion of sisters is superfluous, as they signify the same things as a daughter.

To penetrate one’s brother, whether older or younger, is good for the dreamer; for he will be above his brother and will look down on him. He who penetrates a friend will develop an enmity with him after inflicting some prior injury.

79. The analysis of the mother is intricate, elaborate, and susceptible of many discriminations. It has eluded many dream analysts. It goes as follows:

The intercourse [mênis] in itself is not sufficient to show the intended significance of the dream, but the postures and positions of the bodies, being different, make the outcome different. First we should speak of frontal [sunchrôta, “flesh to flesh”] penetration with a living mother—for it also makes a difference in the meaning whether she is alive or dead (in the dream). So if one penetrates his own mother frontally—which some say is according to nature [kata plusin]—and she is alive, if his father is in good health, he will have a falling out with him, because of the element of jealousy which would occur no matter who was involved. If his father happens to be sick, he will die, for the man who has the dream will assume authority over his mother as both son and husband. It is a good dream for all craftsmen and laborers, for it is usual to refer to one’s craft as “mother” and what else could sexual intimacy [plêsiatêin] with one’s craft signify except having no leisure and being productive from it? It is good too for all office-holders and politicians, for the mother signifies the fatherland. So just as he who has sex [migymenous] according to the conventions of Aphrodite [kata noman Aphrodite] controls the entire body of the woman who is obedient and willing, so too the dreamer will have authority over all the business of the city.

And he who is on bad terms with his mother will resume friendly relations with her, because of the intercourse, for it is called “friendship” [philotês]. And often this dream has brought together to the same place those who were dwelling apart and has made them be together [sunvínai]. Therefore it brings the traveler back to his native land, provided his mother happens to be living in the fatherland; otherwise, wherever the mother is living, that is where the dream is telling the traveler to proceed.

And if a poor man who lacks the essentials has a rich mother he will receive what he wants from her, or else he will inherit it from her when she dies not long after, and thus he will take pleasure in his mother. Many too have undertaken to care and provide for their mothers, who in turn take pleasure in their sons.

The dream sets right the sick man, signifying that he will return to the natural state [kata plusin], for the common mother of all is nature, and we say that healthy people are in a natural state and sick people are not. Apollodoros of Telmessos, a learned man, also remarks on this. The significance is not the same for sick people if the mother (in the dream) is dead, for the dreamer will die very shortly. For the constitution of the dream woman dissolves into the matter of which it is composed and constituted, and most of it being earth-like reverses to its proper material. And “mother” is no less a name for the earth. What else could having sex with a dead mother signify for the sick man but having sex with the earth?
The most awful dream of all, I have observed, is to be fellated [αρρητοποιεισθαί, “do the unmentionable”] by one’s mother. For it signifies the death of children and loss of property and serious illness for the dreamer. I know someone who had this dream and lost his penis; it makes sense that he should be punished in the part of his body which erred. If one dreams of being fellated by his own wife or mistress, there will be bad feeling or a divorce in the marriage or the relationship—for it is not possible [εννια] to share food or kisses with such a woman—unless the woman in question is pregnant, in which case she will lose the fetus, because of the unnatural [παρα πλουσίν] reception of the seed. Further, the wife who is wealthier than her husband will repay many loans for him, and a woman who lives with a slave will use her own money to free the man, and thus it will come about that the man’s “necessity”—which is a name for: the penis—that is, his constraint, will be absolved.

He who is fellated by a friend or a relative or a child who is no longer an infant will develop an enmity with the fellator; he who is fellated by an infant will bury the infant, for it is no longer possible to kiss such a one. He who is fellated by an unknown person will suffer some penalty or other, because of the useless ejaculation of seed.

If one dreams of performing oral sex [αρρητοποιεισθαί] on someone else and that person is an acquaintance, whether man or woman, he will develop an enmity with that person, because it is no longer possible [διανθαί] to share mouths. If it is an unknown person, the dream is a bad one for all except for those who earn their living by their mouths, I mean flutists, trumpeter-players, rhetors, sophists, and others like them.

80. As to intercourse against nature one would say as follows: to dream of having sex with oneself prophesies, for a rich man, loss of substance and great need and hunger, because of the absence of another body; for a poor man, serious illness or incredible torture, for a man could not have sex with himself without great torture.

If a person dreams of kissing his own penis, if he is childless, he will have children; if his children are in another city he will see them and will kiss them. Many after this dream, who did not have wives already, got married.

If a person dreams of fellating himself, it is good for a poor man or a slave or a debtor, for they will circumvent their own necessity. But it is evil for a man who has or wants children, for he will lose his children or never have them. For the penis is like children and the mouth is like a grave; whatever the mouth takes in it destroys and does not preserve. This dream also deprives one of a wife or mistress, for he who can provide himself with sex has no need of a wife. For all others, it prophesies either deep poverty or illness, so that they rely on their essential possessions for nourishment, that is, they will sell what they would rather not, or so that they become thin
and emaciated from illness to such an extent that they can bend their mouth
down to their penis.

If a woman penetrates a woman she will share her secrets [狭義] with her. If she does not know the woman she penetrates, she will undertake
useless projects. If a woman is penetrated by a woman, she will be separated
from her husband or will be widowed; however she will nonetheless learn
the secrets of the other woman.

To have sex with a god or goddess or to be penetrated by a god signifies,
for a sick person, death, for the soul prophesies meetings and minglings
[mixis] with the gods when it is near to leaving the body in which it dwells.
For others, if they enjoy the intercourse, it signifies profits from their better;
if they do not enjoy it, fears and anxieties. Sex with Artemis, Athena, Hestia,
Rhea, Hera, or Hekate alone is not favorable even if one enjoys it; the dream
prophesies the dreamer's death not far off, for the goddesses are awesome
and we suppose that people who make a pass at them will come to no good
pass. To have sex with the moon is very favorable for sea-captains and
navigators and importers and astronomers and men who love to travel
abroad and vagrants, for the rest it signifies dropsy; the former are aided by
the lunar movement and its fundamental necessity for their studies, the latter
are destroyed by its aqueous nature.

Sex with a corpse, whether man or woman, except for one's mother,
sister, wife, or mistress, and being penetrated by a corpse is very unsettling;
they change into earth, and to penetrate them is nothing else than to be
thrust into the earth, while to be so penetrated is to receive earth into one's
body. Both of these signify death, except for people living in some foreign
place and not where the corpses in question have been buried; for them it
prophesies return to that land. And it restrains those who want to leave their
own land.

In dreams of having sex with any kind of animal, if the person dreams
that he mounts the animal, he will receive a benefit from an animal of that
particular species, whatever it is. We will explain this in the section on
hunting and animals. If he is mounted, he will have some violent and awful
experience. Many, after these dreams, have died. So much for sex.

Appendix Two
Physis and Natura Meaning "Genitals"

One of the most significant facts about the words physis and natura is that
in ordinary everyday language they meant genitals. 1 This is a massive fact,
about which the lexicons have little to say because they share the interests
of the more talkative and "legislative" members of ancient society. Physis
meaning genitals is a linguistic usage that takes us out of the ideological
smokers and into the kitchens, the marketplace, the farmyards; it turns up
principally in the quasi-technical writers: physicians, pharmacists, veterinari-
ans, farmers, onen-readers, dream-interpreters and the like.

The earliest instances may be those in the Hippocratic Gynaeology (2.37
= 569 Kühn) and Aphorisms (27 = 643 Kühn), both discussing the prolapsed
womb: "If the womb descends outside the physis . . . ." The usage is found
also in fifth- and fourth-century comedy, 2 and in other distinctly popular
rather than elite contexts, such as in a recipe for a contraceptive that requires
the soaking of chickpeas in menstrual blood and placing them in one's physis
(Papyri Graecae Magicae XXXVI.523). The aphrodisiac plant satirion, applied
in an ointment to a man's penis in the hour before intercourse, promotes
conception because it has a drying effect on the woman's physis. 1 One
handbook of magic contains a poem in catalectic iambic tetrameters designed
to make Hekate angry against someone by repeating the awful things which

1"An extreme case is the Appendix to Lovejoy and Boas, which lists 66 finely discriminated
senses of the words physis and natura, but does not include "genitals." The venerable traditions
of classical philology are unsurpassed in amassing information within certain parameters, but
it is equally true that they have not been critical in examining those parameters. Compared
with the sophistication of modern social studies, we classicists stand on the shoulders of
pygmies.

2Kyrandides 1.18.15 and 23 (cited by book, chapter and line-numbers in the edition of
Kaimakis). This is powerful medicine: "But before anointing your penis, you should smear it
with honey; if you don't it will swell incredibly from the drying agent and overextend itself
to a size incommensurate with the woman on account of unspeakable pleasure. Similarly if a
woman anoints a little piece of wool with it and puts it on her genitals, she will readily conceive
and will experience great arousal and pleasure."