



# Dreams and Experience in Classical Antiquity

*William V. Harris*

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From the Iliad to Aristophanes, from the gospel of Matthew to Augustine, Greek and Latin texts are constellated with descriptive images of dreams. Some are formulaic, others intensely vivid. The best ancient minds? Plato, Aristotle, the physician Galen, and others? struggled to understand the meaning of dreams.

With *Dreams and Experience in Classical Antiquity* the renowned ancient historian William Harris turns his attention to oneiric matters. This cultural history of dreams in antiquity draws on both contemporary post-Freudian science and careful critiques of the ancient texts. Harris traces the history of characteristic forms of dream-description and relates them both to the ancient experience of dreaming and to literary and religious imperatives. He analyzes the nuances of Greek and Roman belief in the truth-telling potential of dreams, and in a final chapter offers an assessment of ancient attempts to understand dreams naturalistically.

How did dreaming culture evolve from Homer's time to late antiquity? What did these dreams signify? And how do we read and understand ancient dreams through modern eyes? Harris takes an elusive subject and writes about it with rigor and precision, reminding us of specificities, contexts, and changing attitudes through history.



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