Proposal Abstract

My proposal involves successfully completing two projects. One is a comprehensive study of the cures and treatments in an eighteenth-century Greek medical text; I have already examined this manuscript in Athens, Greece, on two previous research trips and am now ready to write on its role in Ottoman Greek medicine. This lengthy article will form part of the second project, which is the editing for the University of Pennsylvania Press essays by 15 international scholars on dreams in Greek folk and formal medicine and religion from antiquity through the modern day. The grant will permit me to work at the Wellcome Institute for the History of Medicine (London) and at the Institute for the Preservation of Medical Traditions in Washington, D.C., during the summer of 2010 and December of 2010. The libraries are these institutions will be indispensable for writing my own article and editing the contributions in the volume.
Proposal Description

In three of my books I have examined dreams and the role they played in the cultural and scientific history of ancient and Byzantine Greece and medieval Islam. One particular aspect to dreams in those societies was their use by doctors, folk healers, and holy men and women in the treatment of disease. As I have written in many of my studies on ancient and Byzantine medicine, healing was ever sought through a wide variety of naturalistic and non-naturalistic means. In treating illness, the supernatural and natural worlds overlapped and permeated the other. Even Christian priests healed, and their treatments and medicinal remedies relied on ingredients and methods, both religious (e.g., instruments used in the Eucharist) and natural (holy water and oil). Laypeople likewise resorted to exorcisms, incantations, amulets, and magico-medical cures, even as they prayed Orthodox Christian prayers and attended church. The world of religion and the world of non-sanctioned religious activity (this is my term for 'magic' and 'superstition') could operate within the same medical cure, healing ritual, or spell.

The second millennium C.E. of Greece saw the invention of a new genre of medical texts: the iatrosophion. The iatrosophion reflects the encyclopedic fervor of Byzantine savants who aimed to preserve and pass down the best of Greek medical knowledge, in particular Dioscorides’ Pharmacology and Galen’s theories, as well as Hippocrates, Soranus, Oribasius, and Aëtius of Amida. The iatrosophion basically is a compendium of medical recipes and treatments, based on the materia medica of ancient medical and pharmacological treatises supplemented by written accounts of medical practices by hospitals, physicians, and folk healers. There were two basic types of iatrosophia. One type, linked particularly to monasteries and penned by monks, is comprised solely of medical recipes and therapeutics. Most of the recipes are composed of herbs, while others contain minerals or animal substances or offer prophylactic and dietary steps to follow. The prescriptions are meant to cure specific illnesses (listed a capite ad calcem; that is, ‘from the head to the toe’) or to ameliorate symptoms. While many recipes are drawn from ancient and Byzantine formal medicine, others are taken from, or influenced by, folk medicine. In the second type of iatrosophion, there are, in addition to medical recipes and treatments drawn from ancient authorities and folk practices, passages on topics that strike the modern reader as unusual for a medical text: astrology, magical curses, exorcisms of ghosts and demons, advice on agriculture and veterinarian matters, predicting the future, to name a few. The medical aspect of the treatise remains the primary concern, with most treatments drawn from centuries of folk medicine and Hippocratic and Galenic pharmacology; but we have magical spells and amulets, etched with occult symbols and letters, alongside the medical prophylaxis, or advice on diverting evil from one’s household onto the crops of neighbors immediately after a series of recipes for plasters and concoctions for curing severe headaches.

On a research trip to the National Library of Greece, I discovered in the Manuscript Room an iatrosophion in Codex 1350. This eighteenth-century text reflects the second type of Ottoman Greek iatrosophia in that we have not only medical cures and drugs, but also spells, exorcisms, magic, astrology, and advice for everyday life. Of particular interest is the role of dreams. Dreams are a special and critical means of determining not only illness but also the best cure for various ailments. After interpreting a dream symbol (e.g., eating mollusks), the writer advises a prophylactic (usually dietary) cure or treatment for restoring or maintaining health, or recommends a religious prayer or exorcism or an apotropaic magical course of action. Hippocratic physiology and humoral pathology are followed closely, and the regimens and pharmacopoeia are based on the works of Galen and Dioscorides.
I have now copied and transcribed the text, thanks to two trips to the National Library, and have done most of the preliminary research for a full study of the medical cures while working in Athens at the American School of Classical Studies and the Institute for Neo-Hellenic Research (I have membership privileges at both places) and at the Athens Institute of Education and Research (where I am a member of the Research Division, History). One of the purposes of my application for a Program for the Enhancement of Scholarly and Creative Activities grant is to write a lengthy study (c. 50 pages, not counting notes and Works Cited) of how the author of this text seeks multiple means of healing ailments (from sinus congestion to migraines to malaria) through ‘magical’ and folk methods (e.g., in the case of male impotence, avoiding sex [to increase the sperm], or when has ‘weakened’ blood, eating pastas and meats and drinking raki) and ages-old pharmacology (e.g., in the case of swollen gums, one should take 5 drams of rosehips, 5 drams of oak gall, and 3 drams of dry roses, pulverize these ingredients, and after moistening this with drops of olive oil, apply to the gums). Because much preliminary work has been done in situ, I will be able to finish this article this summer.

This article (final acceptance, of course, subject to anonymous outside refereeing) will form part of a volume on dreams in Greek medicine, which I am editing for the University of Pennsylvania Press. While there have been many studies of the role of dreams in ancient Greek medicine, dreams in ancient Greek oniocrítica (popular dream-key manuals), and dreams in the Asclepian healing cult at Epidaurus, there exists no comprehensive examination of dreams in Greek medicine from a diachronic perspective: from the fifth-century B.C.E. Hippocratic On Regimen 4 down to the modern era. I have also expanded for this volume the definition of ‘medicine’ in a wider sense than just formal medical praxis. Greek men and women have always resorted to multiple medical practitioners—root cutters, folk healers, priests, village wise men and women, magicians, old women in a family, besides formally trained doctors—and each of these practitioners have contributed to medical healing. Wise men and women contributed tried-and-true remedies that they knew from a very long tradition of folk medicine handed down from generation to generation or that they had learned from discussions with other wise men and women in the village or in neighboring areas. As mentioned above, priests used exorcisms, rituals, and prayers, and had access to items like holy water, oil, and sacraments that comprised many cures. Magicians formulated incantations, spells, curses, amulets, and charms. Root cutters and druggists knew what plants and herbs were beneficial, and they helped spread their knowledge by sharing it with consultants. For Greeks, saints and demons, priests and lay exorcists, magicians and ‘cunning folk’ (mostly women), midwives, physicians, hospital staffs, authors of medical recipe books, all contributed to the act of preventing disease and restoring health. A few people preferred the magician to the popular healer or surgeon, or the apothecary to the village wise woman, for a number of reasons; for example, the patient’s social background and economic status, the availability of certain types of healers, persecution by social or religious authorities, and the form and severity of one’s ailment could influence which person one consulted. But by and large, most people sought out those they felt most at ease with, and given the poor status of a majority of the population, many doubtless went to unlicensed practitioners, that is, to local folk healers and practical healers. The important, the overriding, concern, though, was to achieve good health and to maintain it; any means to that goal was legitimate and could be exploited. This obsession with keeping safe from disease and staying in a sound physical condition helps explain the use of dreams by patients, physicians, priests, Christian theologians, and philosophers/scientists. Greeks, both pagan and Christian, have always accepted the dream as a legitimate vehicle for healing (whether by direct contact by a god or saint, by a dream vision, or by advice proffered in the dream), and so
dreams were sought by patients at Asclepian cult centers, at the Christian basilica, and at saints’
tombs, and many sick people eagerly related their dreams to a physician in the morning. Ancient
and Hellenistic medical texts in fact specify to the physician that he must enquire of his patient what
dreams he has seen so that proper diagnosis and therapeutic regimen can be determined.

I have secured essays from 15 international scholars which discuss dreams and this kind of
medical pluralism. The papers fall into three broad chronological periods: classical and Hellenistic
Greece; Roman and Byzantine Greece; and post-Byzantine Greece to the present day. The first
group of papers focus on the Hippocratic corpus; the Asclepian healing centers, with their
incubation and miracle dream-cures; and medical dreams in Aristotle and other philosophers. The
second group deals with Galen and other medical writers of the Roman Empire on dreams; and
medical dreams in popular oneirocritic texts (especially the second-century C.E. Dreambook by
Artemidorus of Daldis, the most noted professional dream interpreter of antiquity). Other papers in
this group look to the Christian Byzantine era, when dream incubation and dream healings were
practiced at nearly every church, shrine, and saint’s tomb, while physicians and surgeons are known
to have used dreams in their praxis and at hospitals. One paper, for example, discusses the dream-
incubation healing of male scrotal and genital diseases at one particular shrine in Constantinople
(the fear of surgeons and doctors is clearly evidenced in our extant texts), while another paper puts
the dream healings at Greek mainland saint shrines in the context of similar shrines in Syria,
Turkey, Egypt, and Palestine. The final group deals with dreams and healing in Greece from the
Turkish period of Greece; the healing dreams of a famous general of the Greek War of
Independence; and dreams used for home remedies and cures by modern islanders and villagers.
The final paper brings these to a full circle by discussing the use of Asclepian dream rituals by
modern psychotherapists and psychologists when they escort patients on pilgrimages to Greece.

I am asking for monies through the Program for the Enhancement of Scholarly and Creative
Activities to work at various research libraries and to subsidize my writing and editing through
some summer monies. It is my intention to work this summer at the Wellcome Institute for the
History of Medicine (London) and at the Institute for the Preservation of Medicine (Washington,
D.C.). The Wellcome Institute is the world’s premier research library on the history of medicine and
is home to scholars in the field. I have a working relationship with two Research Fellows at the
Institute, and I have reviewed grant proposals for the director. I will need to consult the library at the
Institute since it possesses all published Ottoman-Greek iatrosophia (necessary for a comparative
analysis), and I wish to discuss my project with Michael Lardos and Barbara Zipser, both of whom
are working on iatrosophia (one Cypriot, the other Cretan). I will also be able to use the library in
editing the volume of papers. Many of the primary and secondary sources cited by the authors, I
have noticed, will require careful scrutiny and cross-referencing; Wellcome’s library (coupled with
the British Library down the street) will fulfill all my needs in this respect. I am planning a second
trip (December 2010), this one to the Institute for the Preservation of Medical Traditions in
Washington, D.C. Alain Touwaide, the director of this new research center, is the world’s leading
expert on Hippocratic and Galenic pharmacology, and since most of the plant, mineral, and animal
substances in my iatrosophia are drawn directly from that pharmacological tradition, I would like
to consult his computer databanks. Dr. Touwaide has kindly consented to this (I am writing a book
on a nineteenth-century Cretan iatrosophion for his series, Medicine in the Mediterranean). The
costs of these two trips—London and Washington, D.C.—will be covered by an equal match of
PESCA funds and my own research funds (College of Liberal Arts Faculty Cornerstone
Fellowship).