

Asclepius and Narratologies of Healing

1) Charon (2006) pp. 3-4

“Doctors, nurses, and social workers began turning for help in these areas to people who know about narratives, which can be defined as stories with a teller, a listener, a time course, a plot, and a point. Teachers of literature, novelists, storytellers, and patients who have written about their illnesses have become collaborators at our medical centers in teaching health professionals the skills needed to listen to narratives of illness, to understand what they mean, to attain rich and accurate interpretations of these stories, and to grasp the plights of patients in all their complexity. These are narrative skills, for they enable one person to receive and understand the stories told by another. Only when the doctor understands to some extent what his or her patient goes through can medical care proceed with humility, trustworthiness, and respect. I use the term narrative medicine to mean medicine practiced with these narrative skills of recognizing, absorbing, interpreting, and being moved by the stories of illness. As a new frame for health care, narrative medicine offers the hope that our health care system, now broken in many ways, can become more effective than it has been in treating disease by recognizing and respecting those afflicted with it and in nourishing those who care for the sick.”

2) Edelstein 423.1 (Numbers 2-8 come from Inscriptiones Graecae, IV, 1, nos. 121-22)

[Κλ]εὺ πένθ' ἔτη ἐκύησε αὐτὰ πέντ' ἐνιαυτοὺς ἤδη κυοῦσα ποί τὸν [θε]ὸν ἰκέτις ἀφίκετο καὶ ἐνεκάθευδε ἐν τῷ ἀβάτωι· ὡς δὲ τάχιστα ἐξήλθε ἐξ αὐτοῦ καὶ ἐκ τοῦ ἱεροῦ ἐγένετο, κόρον ἔτεκε, ὃς εὐ[θ]ὺς γενόμενος αὐτὸς ἀπὸ τῆς κράνας ἐλοῦτο καὶ ἅμα τῇ μητρὶ [π]ερὶ ἤρπε. τυχοῦσα δὲ τούτων ἐπὶ τὸ ἄνθεμα ἐπεγράφατο· "ὄ μὲγε[θ]οῖς πίνακος θαυμαστέον, ἀλλὰ τὸ θεῖον, | πένθ' ἔτη ὡς ἐκύησε ἐγὼ γαστρὶ Κλεῦ βάρος, ἔστε | ἐγκατεκοιμάθη καὶ μιν ἔθηκε ὑγιῆ".¹

Cleo was with child for five years. After she had been pregnant for five years she came as a suppliant to the god and slept in the Abaton. As soon as she left it and got outside the temple precinct she bore a son who, immediately after birth, washed himself at the fountain and walked about with his mother. In return for this favor she inscribed on her offering; “Admirable is not the size of the tablet, but the Divinity, in that Cleo carried the burden in her womb for five years, until she slept in the Temple and He made her sound.”²

3) Edelstein 423.2

τριέτης [φο]ράν. Ἰθμονίκα Πελλανίς ἀφίκετο εἰς τὸ ἱερόν ὑπὲρ γενεᾶς. ἐγ[κατα][κοι]μαθεῖσα δὲ ὄψιν εἶδε· ἐδόκει αἰτεῖσθαι τὸν θεὸν κυῆσαι κό[ραν]. τὸν δ' Ἀσκληπιὸν φάμεν ἔγκυον ἐσσεῖσθαι νιν, καὶ εἴ τι ἄλλο α[ι]τιοῖτο, καὶ τοῦτο οἱ ἐπιτελεῖν, αὐτὰ δ' οὐθενὸς φάμεν ἔτι ποιθεῖσθαι. ἔγκυος δὲ γενομένη ἐγὼ γαστρὶ ἐφόρει τρία ἔτη, ἔστε παρέβαλε ποί τὸν θεὸν ἰκέτις ὑπὲρ τοῦ τόκου· ἐγκατακοιμαθεῖσα δὲ ὄψιν εἶδε· ἐδόκει ἐπερωτῆν νιν τὸν θεόν, εἰ οὐ γένοιτο αὐτῇ πάντα ὅσα αἰτήσαιο καὶ ἔγκυος εἴη· ὑπὲρ δὲ τόκου ποιθέμεν νιν οὐθέν, καὶ ταῦτα πυνθανομένου αὐτοῦ, εἴ τις καὶ ἄλλου δέοιτο λέγειν, ὡς ποησοῦντος καὶ τοῦτο. ἐπεὶ δὲ νῦν ὑπὲρ τούτου παρεῖη ποτ' αὐτὸν ἰκέτις, καὶ τοῦτο οἱ φάμεν ἐπιτελεῖν. μετὰ δὲ τοῦτο σπουδαί ἐκ τοῦ ἀβάτου ἐξεληθοῦσα, ὡς ἔζω τοῦ ἱεροῦ ἡς, ἔτεκε κόραν.

A three-years' pregnancy. Ithmonice of Pellene came to the Temple for offspring. When she had fallen asleep she saw a vision. It seemed to her that she beseeched the god that she might get pregnant with a daughter and that Asclepius said that she would be pregnant and that if she asked for something else he

¹ Greek texts from Packard Humanities Institute Searchable Greek Inscriptions

² All translations are from Edelstein with minor edits by the author (1998).

would grant her that too, but that she answered she did not need anything else. When she had become pregnant she carried in her womb for three years, until she approached the god as a suppliant concerning the birth. When she had fallen asleep she saw a vision. It seemed to her that the god asked her if she had not obtained all she had asked for and was pregnant; about the birth she had added nothing, and that, although he had asked if she needed anything else, she should say so and he would grant her this too. But since now she had come for this as a suppliant to him, he said he would accord even it to her. After that, she hastened to leave the Abaton, and when she was outside the sacred precincts she gave birth to a girl.

4) Edelstein 423.3

ἀνὴρ τοὺς τὰς χηρὸς δακτύλους ἀκρατεῖς ἔχων πλὴν ἑνὸς ἀφίκετο ποῖ τὸν θεὸν ἰκέτας· θεωρῶν δὲ τοὺς ἐν τῷ ἱερῷ πίνακας ἀπίσκει τοῖς ἰάμασιν καὶ ὑποδιέσυρε τὰ ἐπιγράμμα[τ]α. ἐγκαθεύδων δὲ ὄψιν εἶδε· ἐδόκει ὑπὸ τῷ ναῷ ἀστραγαλίζον[τ]ος αὐτοῦ καὶ μέλλοντος βάλλειν τῷ ἀστραγάλῳ, ἐπιφανέντα[τ]ὸν θεὸν ἐφαλέσθαι ἐπὶ τὰν χῆρα καὶ ἐκτεῖναι οὐ τοὺς δακτύλους· ὡς δ' ἀποβαίῃ, δοκεῖν συγκάμψας τὰν χῆρα καθ' ἓνα ἐκτεῖναι τῶν δακτύλων· ἐπεὶ δὲ πάντας ἐξευθῆναι, ἐπερωτῆν νιν τὸν θεόν, εἰ ἔτι ἀπιστησοῖ τοῖς ἐπιγράμμασι τοῖς ἐπὶ τῶν πινάκων τῶν κατὰ τὸ ἱερόν (!), αὐτὸς δ' οὐ φάμεν." ὅτι τοίνυν ἔμπροσθεν ἀπίσκει αὐτο[τ]ις οὐκ εὐδοσιν ἀπίστοις, τὸ λοιπὸν ἔστω τοι," φάμεν, "Ἄπιστος ὄγ[ομα]". ἀμέρας δὲ γενομένης ὑγιῆς ἐξῆλθε.

A man whose fingers, with the exception of one, were paralyzed, came as a suppliant to the god. While looking at the tablets in the temple he expressed incredulity regarding the cures and scoffed at the inscriptions. But in his sleep he saw a vision. It seemed to him that, as he was playing at dice below the Temple and was about to cast the dice, the god appeared, sprang upon his hand, and stretched out his [the patient's] fingers. When the god had stepped aside it seemed to him [the patient] that he [the patient] bent his hand and stretched out all his fingers one by one. When he had straightened them all, the god asked him if he would still be incredulous of the inscriptions on the tablets in the Temple. He answered that he would not. "Since, then, formerly you were incredulous of the cures, though they were not incredible, for the future," he said, "your name shall be 'Incredulous.'" When day dawned he walked out sound.

5) Edelstein 423.4

Ἀμβροσία ἐξ Ἀθανᾶν
[ἀτερό]πτ[ι]λλος. αὐτὰ ἰκέτις ἦλθε ποῖ τὸν θεόν· περιέρπουσα δὲ [κατὰ τ]ὸ ἱερόν τῶν ἰαμάτων τινὰ διεγέλα ὡς ἀπίθανα καὶ ἀδύνα- [τὰ ἐόν]τα, χωλοὺς καὶ τυφλοὺ[ς] ὑγιεῖς γίνεσθαι ἐνύπνιον ἰδόν- [τας μό]νον. ἐγκαθεύδουσα δὲ ὄψιν εἶδε· ἐδόκει οἱ ὁ θεὸς ἐπιστὰς [εἰπεῖν], ὅτι ὑγιῆ μὲν νιν ποιησοῖ, μισθὸν μάντοι νιν δεησοῖ ἀν- [θέμεν εἰς] τὸ ἱερόν ὕν ἀργύρεον ὑπόμαμα τὰς ἀμαθίας. εἶπαν- [τα δὲ ταῦτ]α ἀνσχίσσαι οὐ τὸν ὄπιλλον τὸν νοσοῦντα καὶ φάρμ[α]- [κόν τι ἐγγέ]αι· ἀμέρας δὲ γενομένης ὑγιῆς ἐξῆλθε.

Ambrosia of Athens, blind of one eye. She came as suppliant to the god. As she walked about in the Temple she laughed at some of the cures as incredible and impossible, that the lame and the blind should be healed by merely seeing a dream. In her sleep she had a vision. It seemed to her that the god stood by her and said that he would cure her, but that in payment he would ask her to dedicate to the Temple a silver pig as a memorial of her ignorance. After saying this, he cut the diseased eyeball and poured in some drug. When day came she walked out sound.

6) Edelstein 423.11

Αίσχίνας ἐγκεκομισμένων ἤδη τῶν ἱκετῶν ἐπὶ δένδρεόν τι ἀμβὰς ὑπερέκυπτε εἰς τὸ ἄβατον. καταπετῶν οὖν ἀπὸ τοῦ δένδρεος περὶ σκόλοπας τινὰς τοὺς ὀπίλλους ἀμφέπαισε· κακῶς δὲ διακείμενος καὶ τυφλὸς γεγενημένος καθικετεύσας τὸν θεὸν ἐνεκάθευδε καὶ ὑγίης ἐγένετο.

Aeschines, when the suppliants were already asleep, climbed up a tree and tried to see over into the Abaton. But he fell from the tree on to some fencing and his eyes were injured. In a pitiable state of blindness, he came as a suppliant to the god and slept in the Temple and was healed.

7) Edelstein 423.25

Σωστράτα Φεραία[α παρ]εκύθησε. α[ὔ]τα ἐμ παντὶ ἐοῦσα φοράδαν εἰς τὸ ἱερόν ἀφικομένα ἐνε[κά]θευδε. ὡς δὲ οὐθὲν ἐνόπνιον ἐναργ[έ]ς ἐώρη, πάλιν οἴκαδε ἀπεκομίζ[ε]το. μετὰ δὲ τοῦτο συμβολήσαι τις περὶ Κόρνους αὐτῆι καὶ τοῖς ἐ[πομέ]νοις ἔδοξε τὴν ὄψιν εὐπρεπῆς ἀνῆρ, ὃς ποθόμενος παρ' αὐτῶν τ[ῆ]ς δυσπρα]ξίας τὰς αὐτῶν ἐκελίσατο θέμεν τὴν κλῖναν, ἐφ' ἧς τὴν Σωστρ[ά]ταν ἔφε]ρον. ἔπειτα τὰ κοιλῖαν αὐτῆς ἀνσχίσας ἐξαιρεῖ πλήθος ζ[ω]ῦφιων π[ό]λυ, [δύ]ε ποδανιπτῆρας· συνράφας δὲ τὰ[ν γ]αστέρα καὶ ποιήσας ὑ[γι]ή τὴν γυναῖκα τὴν τε παρουσίαν τὴν αὐτο[ῦ π]αρευεφάνιζε ὁ Ἄσκληπιὸς καὶ ἴατρα ἐκέλετο ἀπ[ο]πέμπειν εἰς Ἐπί[δα]υρον.

Sostrata, a woman of Pherae, was pregnant with worms. Being in a very bad way, she was carried into the Temple and incubated there. But when she saw no distinct dream she let herself be carried back home. Then, however, near a place called Kornoî, a handsome man seemed to come upon her and her companions. When he had learned from them about their bad luck, he ordered them to set down on the ground the litter in which they were carrying Sostrata. Then he cut open her abdomen and took out a great quantity of worms - two wash basins full. After having stitched her belly up again and made the woman well, Asclepius revealed to her his presence and enjoined her to send thank-offerings for her treatment to Epidaurus.

8) Edelstein 423.38

Δίαυτος Κύρριος(?)· οὗτος ἀκρατῆς ἐὼν ἐτύχα]νε τῶν γονάτων· ἐγκαθεύδων δὲ ἐνό[πνιον εἶδε]· ἐδόκει οἱ ὁ θεὸς] τοὺς ὑπηρέτας κέλεσθαι ἀειραμέγ[ους νιν ἐξενεγκεῖν ἐκ τοῦ ἀ]δύτου καὶ καταθέμεν πρὸ τοῦ ναοῦ· ἐ[πεὶ δὲ αὐτὸν οὗτοι ἔξω ἤνεγ]καν, ἄρμα ζεύξαντα τὸν θεὸν ἵππων πε[ριελαύνειν τρίς περὶ νιν κύ]κλωι καὶ καταπατεῖν <ν>ιν τοῖς ἵπποις, [καὶ οὐ τὰ γόνατα ἰσχυρὰ γε]νέσθαι εὐθύς· ἀμέρας δὲ γενομένης ὑγίης ἐξῆλθε.

Diaetus of Cirrha. He happened to be paralyzed in his knees. While sleeping in the Temple he saw a dream. It seemed to him that the god ordered his servants to lift him up and to carry him outside the Adyton and to lay him down in front of the Temple. After they had carried him outside, the god yoked his horses to a chariot and drove three times around him in a circle and trampled on him with his horses and he his knees suddenly were not weak. When day came he walked out sound.

9) Edelstein 441 (Inscriptiones Creticae, I, xvii, no. 19)

[— — — — —] ασα [— — — — —]
[— — — — —] κεφαλὴν κα[ι — — — — —]
.. εὐ[χ]αριστεῖ Ἀσκληπιὸ[ν Σωτή]ρα λαβοῦσα]
ἐπὶ τοῦ μικροῦ δακτύλο[υ ἔλκωσίν τινα]
[ἀ]γρίαν καὶ θεραπευθεῖς[α, τοῦ θεοῦ ἐπιτά]-
ξαντος ἐπιθεῖναι ὅστ[ρέου τὸ ὄστρακον]
κατακαύσασαν καὶ λεο[τριβήσασαν μετὰ]
ρόδινου καὶ μολόχῃ μ[ετ' ἐλαίου χρίσασ]-
θαι· καὶ οὕτως ἐθεράπ[ευσεν. ἰδοῦσαν]
δέ με πλείονας ἀρετὰ[ς τοῦ θεοῦ καθ' ὕπν]-
ον [ἀν]αγράφειν ὁ θεὸς[ἐκέλευσε τὰς]
[ᾠ]φ]εις ρ...σι ταῖς .[— — — — —]
..περ... δακτυ[λο — — — — — καθ' ὅ]-
[πν]ον ἐπιτάξαντο[ς τοῦ θεοῦ — — — — —]
.....ρον ἀπὸ δυο[— — — — —]

...(a certain woman)...at the head and...gives thanks to Asclepius the Savior; having suffered from a malignant sore on her little finger she was healed by the god who ordered her to apply the shell of an oyster, burnt and ground down by her with rose-ointment, and to anoint [her finger] with mallow, mixed with olive oil. And thus he cured her. After I had seen many more glorious deeds of the god in my sleep the god ordered me to inscribe my visions...

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