

In his "Sacred Tales," (*Orations* 47-52) Aelius Aristides presents an account of therapeutic experience that is without parallel in the ancient evidence. While the author's rhetorical agenda makes this material notoriously difficult to assess as a historical source, the text has consistently attracted the interest of scholars seeking to understand how secular and sacred medical practices interacted in the healing sanctuaries of the Imperial era. Generally speaking, medical practitioners – divine and human – have figured prominently in the investigation of therapeutic approaches. I propose to turn attention to the role of the patient in this encounter, arguing that one of the most important features of the "Sacred Tales" is Aristides' claim to an active role in the therapeutic dynamic.

I will focus on an episode in the fifth Sacred Tale that contains a reference to Hippocratic therapy: a (spurious) Hippocratic prescription is cited by physicians who appear to Aristides within the dream world that constitutes his accustomed line of communication with Asklepios (*Or.* 51.49 ff.). The passage neatly subordinates the prescriptive voice of secular medicine to the authority of the god. More intriguing, however, is the fact that by giving considerable narrative space to his exegesis of the dream and to the arrangements he makes for carrying out the prescription, Aristides highlights the role he assumes in his own therapy. Rather than adopting the posture of the submissive patient, Aristides takes on many of the functions of the physician.

In his treatise "On Examinations by Which the Best Physicians are Recognized," Galen criticizes people who attend healing sanctuaries and there abdicate responsibility for the course of their own medical therapy (I.1-4). On the surface, Aristides might appear guilty of this charge, for in narrative situations that oppose the god's therapy to that offered by human physicians, Aristides claims perfect obedience to his divine patron. He makes this clear to the doctor Satyros in the third Tale: "I said that I did not have charge of my blood, to do one thing or the other, but as long as the God commanded bloodletting, I would obey . . ." (*Or.* 49.9). In many cases, however, Aristides places greater emphasis on his own role. The preoccupation of modern scholarship with how the human doctors in this text function as foils for Asklepios' more perfect, divine therapy has led to a simplified view of Aristides as a supremely passive patient.

If, as scholars have suggested, the nature of Asklepiadic healing shifted between the fourth century BCE and the second century CE – away from astonishing interventions of a surgical type and towards prescriptions based more on principles of diet and exercise – we can trace a shift too in the role of those who came to receive healing. Examined more closely, Aristides' presentation of his therapeutic experience shares common ground with other texts of the period that emphasize the individual's responsibility for informed management of his own health. Plutarch's "De Tuenda Sanitate Praecepta," and the Galenic treatise mentioned above show that educated individuals were expected to be closely engaged in the therapeutic process. In the "Sacred Tales" we can see these expectations at work even in the context of temple healing.