The Dreams of Plutarch's Lives

Though the use of dreams is one of the most striking phenomena of ancient literature and in particular Greek and Roman literature, little has been written about them by classical scholars (1). But there is increasing interest in the subject and a better understanding of the place of dreams in this literature. It is hoped that this study may contribute to illuminating one of the most interesting facets of the classical mind. One could hardly hope for a richer source of dreams than Plutarch, and at the same time his work has advantages over that of many other authors such as Aelius Aristides and Galen, who for very specific reasons of their own, are mainly interested in the healing dream. Concentration on such authors can lead to a misunderstanding and misplaced emphasis on the nature of classical dreams. The *Lives* especially cover an enormous chronological and cultural span of the classical world, and this is another factor very important in taking Plutarch as a source. The purpose of this study is to consider the meaning and use of

(1) Very helpful is the chapter "Dream Pattern and Culture Pattern" in E. R. DODDS, *The Greeks and the Irrational*, Berkeley, 1951, pp. 102-134. One can also consult pp. 40-46 of his *Pagan and Christian in an Age of Anxiety*, Cambridge, 1964, for useful insights into dreams. Worthwhile studies, primarily concerned with the healing dream are C. A. MEIER, *The Dream in Ancient Greece and its Use in Temple Cures*, in G. VON GRUNEBAUM, ed., *The Dream in Ancient Society*, Los Angeles, 1966, pp. 303-319, and A. BEHR, *Aelius Aristides and the Sacred Tales*, Amsterdam, 1968. Recently P. FRISCH has done an interesting study of Herodotus, *Die Träume bei Herodot*, Meisenheim, 1968, showing the dependence of Herodotus' dreams upon very ancient Near Eastern models. Other useful studies are : B. BUCHSENSCHUTZ, *Traum und Traumdeutung im Altertum*, Berlin, 1868 ; O. HEY, *Der Traumglauben in der Antike*, Munich, 1908 ; J. HUNDT, *Der Traumglaube bei Homer*, Griefswald, 1935 ; J. VOLTEN, *Demotischen Traumdeutung*, Copenhagen, 1942 ; H. STEINER, *Der Traum in der Aeneis* in *Noctes Romanae*, 5, Bern, 1952 ; A. L. OPPENHEIM, *The Interpretation of Dreams in the Ancient Near East* in *Trans. Am. Philos. Soc.*, 46, 1956, pp. 179-371 ; *Les Songes et leur Interprétations, Sources Orientales*, Paris, 1959 ; A. TAFFIN, *Comment on rêvait dans les temples d'Esculape* in *Bull. Budé*, 4, 1960, pp. 325-367 ; and R. VAN LIESHOUT, *A Dream on a Kairos of Herodotus, Hist., VII, 12-19 ; 47* in *Mnem.*, 23, 1970, pp. 225-249. A. BRELICH, *Le rôle des rêves dans la conception religieuse du monde en Grèce* in *Le Rêve et les sociétés humaines*, Paris, 1967, pp. 282-289 ; and G. MICHENAUD and J. DIERKENS, *Les Rêves dans les "Discours Sacrés" d'Aelius Aristide*, Bruxelles, 1972. I am indebted to Professor F. H. Sandbach of Trinity College, Cambridge, for reading this paper and making several helpful suggestions.

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these dreams in Plutarch's writings, in particular, his *Lives*, and specially how he made them an integral part of his biography.

Few scholars can avoid the temptation to oversimplified classification, but there is the added temptation to follow the ancient authorities over the symbolic, the *horama* or vision dream, and the oracular dream. In the second the coming event is said to be vividly enacted before the dreamer, second the coming event is said to be vividly enacted before the dreamer, whereas in the latter a divine figure, friend, or relative of the deceased indicates — often in oracular or enigmatic language — the future or what should be done by the dreamer (2). This division is followed by Dodds in *The Greeks and the Irrational*, where he finds especially significant the use of the oracular dream (3). Nonetheless, in the case of Plutarch's dreams there seems to be so much overlapping that one wonders whether such divisions do not represent Procrustean beds ; for the dreams constantly elude simple classification. Still the classification provides useful descriptions even if not necessarily exclusive.

A short survey of Plutarch's dreams will reveal the difficulty of classification. Besides some vague allusions to dreams which reportedly were experienced by some character, there are forty-five dreams in the *Lives* related in some detail. The most numerous are the symbolic, but this type of dream frequently is merged with the oracular ; for example, in eight dreams the oracular figures not only appear and speak, but also act out a symbolic part.

Another instance of difficulty with Artemidorus' classification is the meaning of the symbolic dream. Artemidorus stresses its ambiguity. Now it is true that this is a prominent feature of Herodotus' dreams, but it is not true of Plutarch's. The difference is probably both ideological and functional, representative of cultural differences in the evolution of classical civilization. Herodotus probably believed quite sincerely in the enigmatic revelations of the gods about the future course of events. One should not forget that it was only shortly before his time that Delphi and other shrines enjoyed their highest prestige. On the other hand, as Plutarch's own *De defectu oraculorum* and other Pythian dialogues reveal, there was little interest in his day in what some enigmatic statement about the future might

(2) See ARTEMIDORUS, 1, 2 (p. 5, Hercher), MACROBIUS, *In somnium Scipionis*, 1, 3, 2, and the discussion in DODDS, *op. cit.*, p. 102.

(3) DODDS, *op. cit.*, p. 106, sees the dream as closely related to myth : in Homer the dream usually contains a single figure, so closely identified with the dream that *oneiros* means the dream figure.

contain. His primary concern was the dramatic, the creation of mood, the revelation of character through dreams, for biographical purposes. Generally the reader only learns through later events what the intention of one of Herodotus' dreams was, but Plutarch almost always lets the reader know the immediate significance of a dream, either as a clarification of the future, or as a motivating force in the person's decision making process (4).

Another puzzle is the *horama* dream. Perhaps we should not take Artemidorus too literally when he speaks of it as a direct vision of the future. Still, if one looks at Plutarch's dreams, one does not get the impression that he ever intended the dreams to be a *direct* vision of the future ; always there are nuances to leave the dream in the realm of the imaginary. In connection with the clarity of vision in the *horama* dreams it should be noted that in Plutarch's essays *De defectu oraculorum* (431-433), the major spokesman in the dialogue, his brother Lamprias, discusses at some length his belief that dreaming is the highest form of divination and goes so far as to state that even for ordinary men dreams are quite accurate when the soul is about to be released from the body in order to pass to the next life (5). Behind this is the philosophical belief that contact with the supernatural is dependent upon some sort of release from the body ; presumably the soul is beginning its release at the approach of death. Such a theory may either consciously or unconsciously be responsible both for the fact that many dreams occur just before the death of a hero, and that the most perfect form of *horama* dream occurs at this time (6). Still none of these dreams is an exact vision of the future in the strict sense.

(4) Of the 15 dreams of Herodotus, one third are enigmatic or permit double interpretation. See FRISCH, *op. cit.*, p. 28.

(5) As does CICERO, *De divinatione*, i, 64, where Platonic lines of thought were probably reinforced by Stoic teaching. In an extravagant passage of the Amatorius (764f) Plutarch reverses the normal estimation of the dream and everyday world :

> *Ὥσπερ γὰρ εἰς φῶς πολὺ καὶ λαμπρὸν ἀνεγρομένων ἐξοίχεται πάντα τῆς ψυχῆς τὰ καθ' ὕπνους φανέντα καὶ διαπέφευγεν, οὕτω τῶν γενομένων ἐνταῦθα καὶ μεταβαλόντων*[4] *ἐκπλήττειν ἔοικε τὴν μνήμην καὶ φαρμάττειν τὴν διάνοιαν ὁ ἥλιος, ὑφ' ἡδονῆς καὶ θαύματος ἐκλανθανομένων ἐκείνων. καίτοι τό γ' ὕπαρ ὡς ἀληθῶς ἐκεῖ καὶ περὶ ἐκεῖνα τῆς ψυχῆς ἐστι, δευρὶ δ' ἐλθοῦσα διὰ*[5] *τῶν ἐνυπνίων ἀσπάζεται καὶ τέθηπε τὸ κάλλιστον καὶ θειότατον.*

> [4] *μεταβαλόντων* Stephanus : *μεταβαλλόντων*.
> [5] *ἐλθοῦσα διὰ* added by Post to fill a lacuna in the mss.

(6) Dreams before death : *Alc.*, 39. 2-3 : *Alex.*, 50. 6 : *Arist.*, 19. 2 ; *Cim.*, 18. 2 : *Demos.*, 29. 2 ; *Caes.*, 63, 9, 68. 3 ; *Brut.*, 20. 9 (*Caes.*, 68, 3) ; *Mar.*, 45, 6 ; *Sul.*, 37. 4. In *G. Gracch.*, 1. 7, *Sull.*, 37, 4, *Brut.* 20. 9 (*Caes.*, 68. 3), *Pomp.*, 73. 3, the recently dead

The nature of these dreams can be clarified by studying their use for two events which are similar in nature, the assassination of Caesar in *Caesar*, 63.9 and Alcibiades in *Alcibiades*, 39.2-3. In Caesar the dream comes not to the victim, but to his wife, Calpurnia, who sees herself holding her murdered husband in her arms. We have no evidence that Calpurnia ever did hold the murdered Caesar in her arms. In any case, it is not reported by Plutarch. Interest in a direct vision of the future, to establish a direct revelation of the details of the assassination through the dream was not his intention. His symbolic intention is further demonstrated by the alternate dream related in which the controversial pediment on Caesar's new house collapses.

The *Alcibiades* dream is similar but more interesting in its technique on several counts. Plutarch's principal intention in the Caesar passage was to construct an atmosphere of apprehension, suspense, and distress before the assassination, while underscoring the ironic hesitation which almost saved Caesar's life. At the same time the dreams illustrate the validity of oneiromancy, with the lurking suggestion that had Caesar been less sceptical and rationalistic he might have averted his doom. Though the *Alcibiades* is not one of Plutarch's most exciting or vivid lives and the death scene in particular is rather vague and imprecise, the dream experiences have a striking surrealistic and convincing quality. As in *Caesar* two dreams, perhaps from different sources, are related (7). There was no doubt about how Caesar died, but there were two versions of Alcibiades' assassination, both dreams, however, seem to go with the first version. Whether intended or not, the two dreams offer a complementary picture of the future. In the first dream the hero sees himself dressed in the clothes of his mistress Timandra — daughter of the famous Lais of Corinth — who holds his head in her arms «whitening and painting his face as though it were a woman's». In the other he sees the Persians cutting off his head and his body burning. What are we to make of all this? Much is clarified by the murder itself. The Persians sent to execute Alcibiades set fire to the house and Alcibiades ran out naked with sword in hand only to fall under a shower of spears, while Timandra later covered the corpse with her own clothes (*χιτωνίσκοις*) and

speak to the living. In *Alex.*, 50. 6 the dead-to-be sits with the recently dead. Dreams before great battles: *Ages.*, 6. 5, *Alex.*, 18. 6-8, 24. 5, *Arist.*, 11. 5, *Caes.*, 32. 9, 42. 1 (*Pomp.*, 68. 3), *Demet.*, 19. 2, *Eum.*, 6. 8, *Pel.*, 21. 1, *Pomp.*, 32. 8, 68. 3, *Pyr.*, 11. 3, 29. 2-4, *Sul.*, 9. 6, *Timol.*, 8. 1.

(7) The dreams are omitted in DIODORUS, xiv, 11, and NEPOS, x, 2.

gave it a splendid funeral. The part of the woman's clothes, cosmetics, and burning of the body is suggestive of the funeral preparation, but the connection is rather loose ; especially since decapitation is not mentioned, there seems to be no attempt to describe a direct vision of the future murder. The dream seems at least equally to symbolize the frustration, helplessness, and ignominy of Alcibiades. The horrible reversal of sexual roles is a brilliant stroke depicting the inglorious end of the swashbuckling but somewhat effeminate general. Thus the dream is an intriguing mixture of symbolism and literalism. Perhaps the omission or distortion of source material has contributed to this effect, but the result is fascinating and one might suspect that the author approved of the result.

The technique can be seen again in the dream ascribed to Alexander before his murder of Cleitus in a drunken brawl (*Alexander*, 50.6). Before the terrible event Alexander sees Cleitus «All in black and seated, with the sons of Parmenio, all of them dead». In the previous chapter Plutarch had described the machinations surrounding the arrest and cruel torture and execution of Parmenio's son, Philotas, with the side comment that the two other sons were already dead (49.11-13). Plutarch does not mention it, but the reader might have known that both died in Alexander's campaigns, one from sickness before leaving for Bactria, the other had died of exhaustion while swimming from a capsized ship on the Nile (Arrian, iii, 25 ; Curtius, vi, 6.18 ; 9.27). Therefore, a number of elements are combined, the dead reaching out toward the living as in some other dreams of the *Lives*, the linking of past and future crime or disaster, good rewarded with evil, and the suggestion of a macabre and brooding imagination of Alexander joined to a guilty conscience. The effect of a direct vision is broken by Cleitus sitting (*καθέζεσθαι*) in black, though the phrase «with all of them dead» (*τεθνηκότων ἁπάντων*) in its perhaps deliberate ambiguity, might refer to a dead Cleitus.

The oracular dream is also more complex than one might suspect from Artemidorus' description, largely because of the frequency of heavy visual symbolism, either simple or complex, and great variety in the spoken parts. In *Romulus*, 2.5, *Agesilaus*, 6.5, *Aristides*, 11.5, and *Gaius Gracchus*, 1.10, the message is clear and straightforward without much visual symbolism, though in *Aristides* Zeus appears as Zeus Soter, a symbol of victory at Plataea, and the appearance of Tiberius to Gaius suggests a similar ill end when he tells him to «accept his fate». In *Marius*, 45.6 the densest reader could see through a pseudo-enigmatic hexameter allusion to Sulla's return. However, in *Themistocles*, 30.2, where the dream warning involves a pun

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on the name of a town (Leontokephalon), the reader is forarmed (8) ; and in *Coriolanus*, 24.3 and *Lucullus*, 10.2 a speedy explanation is given. In other dreams the visual element is quite prominent. For example, at 10.3 in *Lucullus* — a life rich in dreams — Athena appears sweating and in a torn peplos to the people of Ilium (who commemorated the dream with a stele and inscription). In 23.3 the dream centers upon Autolycus, the mythical founder of Sinope who is said by an unknown dream personage to be coming to the aid of Lucullus, and whose statue by a famous artist is later found abandoned on the beach (23.4) (9). In *Pyrrhus*, 11.3 Alexander rises from his sickbed to lead Pyrrhus, mounting his Nisaean horse.

Two dreams involving human sacrifice involved Plutarch in theological difficulties since the very idea was exceedingly repugnant to him. Though the subject is the same, the two dreams in structure and effect are really quite different. In both cases the heroes reject the literal interpretation of the dream and offer substitute sacrifices, but with different immediate results and tone. In *Pelopidas*, 21. 1 (after a disquistion in the previous chapter on Leuctra, the Leuctridae who were raped by Spartans, and their father Scedasus' suicide on their tomb 20. 4), Pelopidas sees the girls lamenting by their tomb and cursing the Spartans while their father demands the sacrifice of a blond virgin to his daughters. In *Pelopidas* a debate follows in which one side repeats arguments rather obviously drawn from Plutarch's *De superstitione*, 171 d-e on the inhumanity of human sacrifice and the perverted notion of divinity which that implies (including the rejection of the influence of evil *daimones*). A filly is substituted for the girl and Pelopidas triumphs gloriously at Leuctra. In *Agesilaus*, 6. 4 on the hero's setting forth from Aulis for the conquest of Asia a mysterious voice commands him to sacrifice his daughter as Agamemnon had done. But his substitute sacrifices are crudely interrupted and he leaves with forboding and discouragement. This contrasts in structure as well with the *Pelopidas* dream which has such a strong visual element. The cross references suggest that *Pelopidas* is an earlier *Life*. If so, the closeness to the *De superstitione* passage and less realistic treatment of the effect of the dream show an im-

(8) THUCYDIDES, i, 137, does not mention the dream of *Them.*, 30. 2 but rather gives a letter of encouragement sent to Themistocles. In the dream Cybele had told the hero to avoid "the lion's head."

(9) G. DUMÉZIL, *Archaic Roman Religion*, Chicago, 1970, pp. 538-539, sees the Roman custom of *euocatio* entering into Sulla's appropriations at Delphi, which figure earlier in the life, and something similar may be at stake in the dream concerning Autolycus.

provement in the later *Life* in relating the dream to the psychological state of the hero.

Similar stress on the visual can be observed in other oracular dreams such as in *Sulla*, 9. 6, where Selene hands Sulla a lightning bolt with which to strike his enemies (10) ; *Cleomenes*, 7. 3-4, the dream of an ephor in the precinct of Pasiphäe involving a mysterious scene with the ephors' chairs at Sparta ; *Eumenes*, 13. 4, the claim of the hero that Alexander had set up a royal tent with a throne and told him to conduct his dealings with the Silver Shields there ; *Brutus*, 20. 9, where Cinna the poet is led by Caesar "into a dark and gaping place" where he follows unwilling and in terror (11) (perhaps improving *Caesar*, 68. 3 where he is simply led to supper against his will) ; and *Sulla*, 37. 4 and *Pompey*, 73. 3, where emphasis is put on the mean attire of the oracular personages, both of whom have just died (12). In some of the dreams which might be called symbolic but which are very similar to the oracular, typical oracular figures enact some sort of mute role. "Heracles" in *Alexander*, 24. 5, Demeter and Persephone in *Timoleon*, 8. 1, Jupiter in *Cicero*, 44. 3, and the temple servant of Amphiaraus in *Aristides*, 19. 2 (drawing on Herodotus, viii, 135) ; all convey a message through a symbolic gesture without actually speaking — if we can ignore the dream figure speaking to others in the dream in *Cicero* (13), and threatening before the symbolic actions in *Aristides*. In all but *Aristides* some propitious gesture is made. Here the temple servant, after ordering away Mardonius' servant who is sleeping in the precinct of Amphiaraus, picks up a large

(10) Dumézil is very much impressed with the credence the leaders in the Roman civil wars put in their dreams, reflected in the pages of Plutarch. He discusses *Sul.*, 6. (on the veracity of dreams as a source of divination), Sulla's dream on the way from Nola to Rome, *Sul.*, 9. 6, Caesar's "unlawful dream" at the Rubicon, *Caes.*, 32. 9, and Pompey's dream before Pharsalus, *Pomp.*, 68. 3 (*op. cit.*, pp. 536, 537, 542, 544).

(11) The Greek is similar to the apocalyptical language of Parmenides (B 1. 18), thus containing a hint of that love of eschatology found throughout Plutarch. For the history of the language *cf.* J. S. Morrison, *Parmenides and Er* in *JHS*, 75, 1955, pp. 59-68.

(12) The *Life* draws freely from Sulla's own *Memoirs*. This dream, in which Sulla's son appears and tells Sulla to join him and Metella, Sulla's wife, both of whom had recently died, was — according to Plutarch — recorded in the twenty-second, and presumably last, book of the *Memoirs*, just before Sulla's death. The *Memoirs* were, according to Plutarch in *Luc.*, 26. 3, dedicated to Lucullus, who claimed to have been singularly impressed by Sulla's advice on dreams, and whose *Life* is noteworthy for them.

(13) Suetonius, *Aug.*, 94. 9, and Cassius Dio, xlv, 2. 2, also report the dream, but with some minor differences of detail.

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(16) K. Ziegler, *Vit.*, II-2, p.

stone and crushes his head, thus indicating Mardonius' future death through a stone [14].

There seem to be some cultural differences in the use of oracular dreams by Greeks and Romans. At least the appearance of gods in Roman oracular dreams is quite rare. Hestia appears to Tarchetius in *Romulus*, 2. 5 to explain that he is not to execute his daughter, but Plutarch gives as his source Promathion, a Greek historian of early Italy [15]. We have seen some oracular dreams in the life of Lucullus but they are on Asiatic soil, one even in the precinct of Aphrodite at the Troad. Sulla's dream goddess is at least Greek in name, Selene, even though the dream takes place on the way to Rome. Exceptions are the appearance of Jupiter in Cicero's dream of Octavius' future destiny and the dream modified from Livy in which Jupiter protests the desecration of his procession (*Coriolanus*, 24. 3).

Particularly evident is the large role which anxiety plays in the dreams, especially at that moment of crisis when the decisive action must be chosen. Though this element of anxiety is grossly underestimated in studies of classical dreams, it is the distinguishing feature of Plutarch's dreams. At times the dreams relieve anxiety, such as in *Alexander*, 2. 4 where a lion seal placed on Olympias' womb predicts the birth of a noble son ; *Eumenes*, 6. 8 where the hero conjectures from a symbolic vision of two Alexanders fighting with different goddesses on their side that the place for battle is propitious and the enemy has chosen an ill-boding password ; *Themistocles*, 27. 3 where the vision of a serpent which turns into a eagle and after carrying the hero a long distance deposits him on a herald's gold staff assures Themistocles of a good reception at the Persian court ; and *Alexander*, 24. 9 where the vision of a satyr lured into Alexander's hands is seen to produce a propitious pun [16]. But even these reassuring dreams are set in an anxiety context which is easily exploited for the more sinister dreams.

All in all, it is fair to say that the majority of dreams in the *Lives* are anxiety dreams. Of the *horama* type dreams, most were of this type :

(14) Herodotus does not report the dream, though he reports the visit, and there are some differences on who slept in the shrine. Plutarch relates the dream also in *De defectu oraculorum*, 412a-b. He was interested in improving on Herodotus (cf. his *De Herodoti malignitate*). See also R. Flacelière, *Plutarque : sur la disparition des oracles*, Paris, 1947, p. 224, on this point.

(15) The dream seems to be significant for real Roman legend. *Cf.* R. M. Ogilvie's review of U. Scholz, *Studien zum Altitalischen Marskult und Marsmythos* in *CR*, 23, 1973, p. 74.

(16) K. Ziegler, *Vit.*, II-2, p. 184 (Teubner) reconstructs from Zonaras' τὰ Τύρος ἔσται.

Calpurnia's dream of the murdered Caesar in her arms, Alcibiades' of his own death, Alexander of the coming murder of Cleitus. The oracular dreams are also heavily tinged with anxiety : the mysterious voice in *Agesilaus*, the dream about the Leuctridae before the battle of Leuctra, Gaius' dream of his brother Tiberius, Marius' deathbed dream, Cinna's vision of the overcompelling Caesar, Sulla's dream of his son before his death, and the dream of Mardonius' servant. Clearly for biographical purposes the anxiety dream is a godsend for depicting the disturbed psychological state of a character, when one thinks of the incredible paucity of source material that the biographer might often be faced with. Invented speeches or dialogues put too much of a strain on verisimilitude, tend to be long and tedious, and are themselves somewhat limited to the prosaic. On the other hand no one is going to be too disturbed at a reported dream, or at least able to deny its occurrence. Such would be Plutarch's cup of tea. His nature is toward the baroque, the vivid, the surrealistic, the suggestive, the unusual, the disturbing (17). It is such touches which have made his *Lives* so interesting and such a worthy contribution and stimulus to the concept of the "baroque", in their imaginative flamboyancy. At the same time the dreams are skillfully chosen to carry forward the biographical thrust in a meaningful way.

This desire to illuminate character and offer motivation, to give that flash of insight into the perplexity of a troubled personality can be frequently observed as a part of Plutarchan biographical technique, a prominent, even if overlooked, element of his style. It is quite unlike Herodotus' style involving the puzzling out of a portentous dream not fully understood until the fates have rolled out their thread. For example in *Demetrius*, 4. 3 a dream in which mysterious voices tell Antigonus that Mithridates has just stolen a crop of gold which Antigonus had sown helps to explain an irrational dislike of Mithridates who escapes through the aid of Demetrius to become the founder of the Pontic line. Later in the life (19. 2) we encounter a running dream, but one adapted to the character of the dreamer. The aged Antigonus is running in the stadium, at first with great vigor, but as he rounds the turn his powers give out and he barely crosses the finish, thus symbolizing his failing powers and discouraging lack of success in his final naval battles. Similarly the aging Demosthenes (*Demosthenes*, 29. 2) is

(17) On Plutarch's style see the excellent chapter, *Language Style, and Form*, pp. 18-41 in D. A. Russell's *Plutarch*, New York, 1973 ; and the comments on Plutarch's baroque flair, p. 133.

competing in a tragic competition with his murderer-to-be Archias. He bravely wins over the spectators with his acting, but loses to Archias out of inability to provide proper scenery and chorus.

But perhaps the most brilliant of all Plutarch's dreams is that in *Pompey*, 32. 8 used to highlight and explain the dispirited defense of Mithridates against the Roman general at the Euphrates. It would be unfair not to offer it here:

> Next, however, Pompey caught up with him (Mithridates) near the River Euphrates and camped close by him. Fearing that he might give him the slip again by crossing the river first, he drew up his army and led it out at midnight. At this time Mithridates is said to have had a dream showing him what was going to happen. He dreamed that he was sailing on the Pontic Sea with the fair wind behind him, and he was already in sight of the Bosporus and was talking gaily with his fellow passengers, as one might be expected to do in one's pleasure in finding oneself really and certainly safe ; and then suddenly he seemed to see himself, with all his companions gone, being tossed about on the sea, clinging to a small piece of wreckage. While he was still dreaming and feeling the effects of his dream, his friends came to his bed and woke him with the news that Pompey was attacking. There was nothing to be done except to fight in defence of the camp, and so his generals led out their forces and put them in order to battle.
>
> (Rex Warner, *Plutarch, Fall of the Roman Republic*, p. 169)

One should notice the setting of time, mood, and geographical color, the suggestion of Mithridates' anxiety, the surrealistic and uncanny reversal from the expectation of a joyous homecoming to horror, loneliness, and despair, and the awakening from the dream in a paralyzing state of depression and the subtle suggestion that his defeat was the result of the dream possibly inspired by a divine force directing the course of history.

It is interesting to conjecture about the sources of these dreams. The dominant conclusion of recent source criticism in Plutarch is that he again and again impressed the force of his personality upon the material he obtained ([18]). One cannot help but believe that he did the same here. Can we

(18) *Cf.* P. STADTER, *Plutarch's Historical Methods, an Analysis of Mulierum Virtutes*, Harvard, 1965 ; the introductions to the Budé *Vies* by R. FLACELIÈRE ; H. MARTIN Jr., *Plutarch's Citation of Empedocles at "Amatorius" 756 D* in *Grk., Rom., and Byz. Stud.*, 10, 1969, p. 57-70, and *Amatorius 756 E-F : Plutarch's Citation of Parmenides and Hesiod* in *AJP*, 90, 1969, pp. 183-200 ; J. P. HERSHBELL, *Plutarch as a Source for Empedocles Reexamined* in *AJP*, 92, 1971, pp. 156-184 ; and the introduction by FLACELIÈRE to the *Actes du VIII^e Congrès de l'Association Guillaume Budé*, Paris, 1969, pp. 492-497.

really believe that Mithridates dreamed of his shipwreck just the very moment before he was wakened with the news that Pompey was ready to attack at the Euphrates? Where did the dream come from? From the book of dreams discovered by Pompey at Caenum after the capture of the fortress there (37. 1-2)? And where did it appear originally in the sources?

The most blatant manipulation of a dream for biographical purposes — so far as we can judge — is Caesar's dream of intercourse with his own mother (*Caesar*, 32. 9), treated in a strikingly original and effective manner. Plutarch transfers the dream from Caesar's quaestorship in Spain — where the authorities had put it (Suetonius, *Caesar*, 7. 2, Cassius Dio, xli, 24) — to the night before the crossing of the Rubicon (19). He dispenses with the sole, propitious interpretation given it by Suetonius and Dio — mastery over one's country, leaving this interpretation possible, but suggesting the ill-boding meaning it had for Hippias before Marathon in Herodotus, vi, 107 where Hippias took the dream to prophesy his success and death in his motherland at a rich old age, but died shortly after. The reader might think of Caesar's horrible murder to come before he had settled down to rule in his own country (69. 1), though five years and several chapters separate the event. Plutarch's description of the dream as "unlawful" is significant, and the immediate tone is one of anxiety, lawlessness and ruthlessness — a man who would not hesitate to rape his own mother if that meant supreme power, and there is the hint, as in the *Pompey* dream of Mithridates, that the gods were working through the dream to push forward the course of destiny, as the dream seems to motivate his fateful decision (20).

The use of dreams for psychological and motivating purposes is extremely common in Plutarch and can be illustrated by other examples which though less vivid are similar in spirit to Caesar's dream. In *Brutus*, 20. 8 (*Caesar*, 68. 3-6) where Cinna's ill-boding dream indicating how the innocent would be sucked into Caesar's calamity, followed by his murder, has

(19) The dream seems to have occasioned as much interest in ancient as in modern times, but the interest seems mainly in what it portended. See ARTEMIDORUS, *Oniroc.*, i, 79, who gives a vast number of interpretations, admitting that it is the most difficult of all dreams to handle, depending upon the sexual positions, relationship to one's father, circumstances etc. Noted is the common interpretation of rule over one's country. Hippias lost his tooth in the ground and later died. See Roger PACK, *Artemidorus and His Waking World* in *TAPS*, 86, 1955, p. 281.

(20) SUETONIUS, *Caes.*, 32, gives a favorable portent for the Rubicon crossing, in contrast to Plutarch who only relates the dream: the soldiers follow in elation the vision of a man of extraordinary size and beauty, who first crosses the river, at which Caesar declaring it a prodigy utters his *iacta alea est*. PLUTARCH: "Let the dice fly high" — ἀνεσρίφθω κύβος.

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the effect of explaining the hasty departure from Rome of Brutus and Cassius (*Brutus*, 21. 1, *Caesar*, 68. 7).

Antony's dream of lightning striking his hand occasions an otherwise inexplicable separation from Octavius and underscores his growing suspicions and uneasiness in the presence of the younger man Antony, 16. 5-6). Pompey's hesitancy at Pharsalus is psychologically explainable in terms of his dream of decorating the statue of Venus Victrix in his new theatre : at first elated, an unpropitious chill went through his spine when he realized he was decorating the patroness of the *gens Iulia* (*Pompey*, 68. 3)(21). The effect in psychological terms is similar to that of the actual vision of a demon to Brutus before the second battle at Philippi (*Brutus*, 48. 1, following upon 36. 6) (22). Similar demoralizing dreams which at first sight seem propitious and uplifting, but are quickly seen as ill-boding and crush the dreamer appear in other *Lives* : to Darius before the Cydnus (Alexander serving upon Darius, *Alexander*, 18. 6-8) ; to Cimon before his death (a bitch which tells Cimon he will be a friend to her and her pups, *Cimon*, 18. 2) ; and to Pyrrhus before a disastrous attack on Sparta (lightning striking the city, *Pyrrhus*, 29. 2-4).

Plutarch's attitude is to us rather ambivalent and hard to grasp, indicating the gulf between our culture and his — an implicit faith in the veracity of dreams along with the tendency to take great liberties when reporting them. His philosophical works show that he believed that if there was a power of divination the most appropriate form was dreaming, which rested upon the sound Platonic foundation of a growing communion with the divine as the soul becomes less attached to the body either in sleep or on the approach of death, and of the goodness of the divine which wishes to communicate the future to certain men. He is probably in sympathy with Sulla when he writes that Sulla in the dedication of his *Memoirs* to Lucullus told him that nothing could be so much relied upon as what was revealed in

(21) The place where the statue was decorated is not mentioned by APPIAN, *BC*, ii, 68. Perhaps the place was Plutarch's touch since he was intrigued by the theatre as a place of revenge later for Pompey's murder, when Caesar is assassinated there. The *Caesar* mss. only give the introduction to the dream and its setting in the theatre. Some editors supply the end of the dream from *Pomp.*, 68, 2-3 but ZIEGLER, Teubner, *Vit.* II-2, lets the text stand as it is.

(22) On this point, showing how Plutarch adapted, modified, and impressed his own ideas on matter he intended to use for his biographies see my *Le songe de Brutus* in *Actes du VIII^e Congrès de l'Association Guillaume Budé*, pp. 588-594, and *A Most Strange Doctrine : "Daimon" in Plutarch* in *Classical Journal*, 69, 1973, pp. 1-11.

dreams (*Lucullus*, 23. 6), and more explicitly in *Sulla*, 6. 6 — referring to the same dedication — as what *to daimonion* revealed in dreams. Thus the *Lives* closely reflect the spirit of the *Moralia*. The inclusion of so many dreams in the *Lives* is not just a coincidence. In contrast Plutarch seems reluctant to include many portents which occur in his sources. In spite of a certain freedom with the dreams it seems that he expected the reader to believe in them. For what other reason would he seem to gratuitously assert in relation to Capurnia's dream in *Caesar* and that of the Roman in *Coriolanus*, that the dreamer was not given to superstition ([23])?

On the other hand he wished to avoid the charge of superstition. On numerous occasions the covering "it was said" introduces the dream, in the same manner with which he introduces portents. Frequently the dream is described as being extraordinary (*ἀλλόκοτον*) or is given the covering label for true dreams (*ἐναργές*). Only on five occasions does he seem to treat dreams in a sceptical manner. In *Lysander*, 20. 6, on the authority of Ephorus, he questions Lysander's assertion that Zeus Ammon had appeared to him in a dream and ordered him to raise the siege at Aphytae. In *Agesilaus* and *Pelopidas* his sensitivities regarding human sacrifice were offended, though he may have been willing to accept the validity of the dream but the invalidity of a literal interpretation of it. In *Alexander*, 3. 2, basing himself on Eratosthenes, he expresses scepticism toward claims of Alexander's divine birth, and this may reflect adversely on the dreams of Olympias and Philip which he reports in the second chapter. Finally the books containing interpretations of dreams of Mithridates and his wives are mentioned within the context of despicable evidence of the king's private life (*Pompey*, 37. 2).

Hopefully some small illumination has been cast on this subject which itself belongs to night and darkness. One cannot help but be intrigued by elements which separate us so much from our classical ancestors. How could one put so much stress on the true power of dreams while with apparent unconcern manipulating them for dramatic effect? Perhaps Plutarch's major contribution — and a magnificent one at that — was the use of the dream in a period of individualism, to lay bare the recesses of a hero's soul when the lack of intimate details in his sources must have been a perplexing frustration. Then, with centuries separating him from Homer we

(23) Livy, ii. 36, Valerius Maximus, i. 7. 4, and Dionysius, vii. 68-69, do not add this touch.

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(24) *Cf.* A. Lesk

see him using, though in a more sophisticated fashion, many of the elements constitutive of dreams in that author, such as the appearance of the recently departed to the dreamer, (as old as the Gilgamesh epic) and above all the manipulation of history and furtherance of fate by the gods sending a dream, even a false dream. Here Plutarch reveals that fundamental trait which has impressed so many classical scholars, that fascination with the interaction between the human and the hidden divine, that dual motivation and dual causality affecting human affairs and divine destiny (24). The crude false objectived dreams of Homer become more clearly the reinforced reflection of the individual's psyche mistaking the divine intention when disastrous, or when good as the beneficent grace of the divine which is without trace of evil. But in a certain sense we can sympathize with the men of the past who might belatedly see reflected in the use of dreams by the two authors, so separated in time, that there truly is "nothing new under the sun", that is, the continuity of classical culture.

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U.S.A.

Frederick E. BRENK.

(24) *Cf.* A. LESKY, *A History of Greek Literature*, London, 1966, p. 249.

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