Un análisis del sueño de Alcmena en el epílio de Mosco titulado Mégara demuestra que el poeta lo ha construido siguiendo con exactitud las antiguas teorías onirocríticas.

An analysis of Alcmena's dream, in Moschus' Megara, demonstrates that the poet constructed it in accurate adherence to ancient onirocritical theories.

Although a great number of recent publications is devoted to the study of the dream in Greek literature and philosophy, less attention has been paid to the

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dreams appearing in Hellenistic poetry. Dreams attested in Hellenistic poets are mostly examined as literary motifs, while no attempt has been made so far to interpret them in the light of the ancient oneirocritic theories. Our purpose in this paper is to examine Alcmena’s dream in Moschus’ *Megara* according to the ancient *Óvnp09Kplo-La*.

It is well-known that, as Wetzel has demonstrated, there is a fundamental difference between Homeric and Hellenistic dreams, although it is impossible to draw a clear borderline between the two types. In Homer dreams are, as a rule, messages from the gods, i.e. messages which come from outside into the mind of the sleeper (A 63 ὅναρ ἐκ Διὸς ἔστι, ξ 495 θείος μοι ἐνύπνιον ἥλθεν δειμαρος). Their purpose is usually to urge the dreamer towards a particular course of action or to deceive him.

Later on, however, the great advances made in psychology by Aristotle and his successors led the Greeks to realise that dreams were the product of the sleeper’s psyche. It is well-known that, as Wetzel has demonstrated, there is a fundamental difference between Homeric and Hellenistic dreams, although it is impossible to draw a clear borderline between the two types. In Homer dreams are, as a rule, messages from the gods, i.e. messages which come from outside into the mind of the sleeper (A 63 ὅναρ ἐκ Διὸς ἔστι, ξ 495 θείος μοι ἐνύπνιον ἥλθεν δειμαρος). Their purpose is usually to urge the dreamer towards a particular course of action or to deceive him.

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Six dreams in all appear in Hellenistic poetry. Namely: one in Theocritus (*Idyll 21.39ff.*), three in Apollonius Rhodius (*Arg. 3.617ff.; 4.662ff.; 1732ff.*), and two in Moschus (*Europa 1ff.; Megara 91ff.*).


According to Wetzel in Homer there is a contradiction between the fact that “Homerus auctor est illius aetatis in qua somnia a deo mittentur” (p. 20: “Homerus”, therefore, describes “somnia extrinseca venientia”: p. 8, n. 4) and the fact that “Homerus” was “non ignarus somnia cogitatione animi non dormientis effici” (p. 9), wherefore certain, though not all, Homeric dreams reflect the “statum ... qui est in animo dormientis” (p. 10 and 14). In Hellenistic times, however, as Wetzel has demonstrated, such a contradiction disappears, because owing to the progress of psychology from Aristotle onwards, it was clearly recognized that dreams were produced by the *ψυχή* of the sleeper. Wetzel’s theory has been in part opposed by Kessels (*Studies on the dream in Greek Literature*, 17 ff.), but Kessels’ arguments are not cogent, resting as they do on the notion that “Homeric epics” show “a primitive way of thinking” (p.21, n. 13). According to Kessels, Homer did not have a clear view of the *ψυχή* (p. 6) and Homer “clearly was not aware of any relation between dream and psyche” (p. 13). (On the accurate notion that Homer had of *ψυχή*, cf. e.g. C. Capelle-C. Risch *Vollstandiges Worterbuch uber die Gedichte des Homeros und den Homeriden* [Leipzig 1889, Darmstadt 1968] s.v. *ψυχή* article based on Nagelsbach). In reality, the examples used by Wetzel prove him right, so that we shall conclude with A. Grillone, *Il sogno nell’ epica latina Tecnica e poesia* (Palermo 1967) 9 that “l’ influenza della disposizione psicologica e della partecipazione del dormiente alla visione omirica” is “rara nei poeti omerici, sempre presente nei sogni del poema di Apollonio Rhodio” (italics mine).


The notion of Homeric origin according to which dreams were messages sent to the humans by the gods was a subject of discussion between philosophers and others. Despite several efforts at rational explanation by e.g. Heraclitus, Democritus, Plato and Hippocrates, the belief that dreams had a divine origin did not die out. Writers cast in a religious mode such as Philo and Iamblichus consider the dreams as sent by the gods (cf. D. Del Corno, *Graecorum de re onirocritica scriptorum reliquia* [Varese, Milano, 1969] 89; 112).

sleeper’s mind (ψυχή), and reflected the feelings and worries of the dreamer. The key passage is Arist. *On Dreams* 458 b1 ff.; 30 ff. Already before Aristotle, of course, it was realised that dreams were the product of the human ψυχή. The first appearance of this belief seems to be a well-known Pindaric fragment10 (fr. 116 Bowra, cf. A. H. M. Kessels, Studies, 162). It is equally well-known that Democritus11 also believed dreams to be produced by the human mind, and Wetzel (op. cit. 26, n. 58) has demonstrated that this belief was also held by Herodotus12.

However, the notion that dreams were the product of the human mind (ψυχή) was fully accepted by Hellenistic writers such as Apollonius Rhodius (cf. especially Wetzel, op. cit. 25 ff.; Kessels, *Dreams in Apollonius*, 155). The dream in *Theocritus’ Idyll* 21 has been shown by Giangrande13 to be a case in point: a fisherman went to bed without having dinner, and consequently dreamed about food. In the same way, the dreams which the characters in the *Argonautica* have, are often conditioned by the state of mind of the sleeper.

The human ψυχή sent messages of one or the other of two kinds to the sleeper. The first, simpler, kind of dreams was conditioned by the physiological state14 in which the sleeper was: if, for instance, he had gone to bed hungry, he dreamed of food. The second kind of dreams was much more complex: the human ψυχή, either because it was believed to be in communion with gods15, or because it was held to acquire special powers of concentration during the sleep16 of the person concerned was able to thoroughly analyse the situation in which the person concerned found himself. The ψυχή could therefore foresee future developments which would affect this person and warned the sleeper accordingly by producing dreams, which were coded messages, i.e. messages which the δυειροκρίται could decode17.

As regards Alcmena’s dream, the following observations are necessary. Perrotta18 maintains that, since the events which occurred in the dream never repeated themselves subsequently, in real life, Alcmena’s dream was not “un vero sogno”. According to Perrotta, Moschus intended his readers to consider the dream not as one which Alcmena actually had, but as an overt artifice, invented by the poet in order to intimate to his readers that Heracles would die. Perrotta’s

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10 ἀτὰρ εἰθοντέσσαι ἐν πολλῶϊς δύνασις / δείκνυσι τερπνῶν ἐφέρτοισαν χαλεπῶν τε κρέαν.
11 Cf. Lieshout, op. cit. 86.
13 “Textual Problems in Theocritus’ Idyll XXI”, *Ant. Class. 46* (1977) 514ff. (SMA I, 184ff.).
14 Cf. Del Commo, op. cit. 68; 148.
15 Cf. Del Commo, op. cit. 137; 162; 182-3.
16 Cf. Del Commo, op. cit. 94; 146; 150; 182; 184; 186.
17 Cf. Del Commo, op. cit. 174; 194 “decifrazione”.
hypothesis is rightly rejected by Breitenstein\textsuperscript{19}; the events which were seen in dreams were not expected, by the ancients, to subsequently repeat themselves in real life. What occurred in dreams was, in the belief of the ancients, only a symbolic intimation of future events which were going to occur in real life\textsuperscript{20} - an intimation the constituent symbols of which had to be correctly interpreted according to the rules of oneirocritic science.

Other critics\textsuperscript{21}, whilst correctly understanding that Alcmena’s dream was meant by Moschus to be a real one, composed by the poet so as to indicate to her and to his readers Heracles’ impending doom, have nevertheless not interpreted the dream according to ancient oneirocritic beliefs.

The teachings of oneirocritic writers were originally transmitted orally -from mouth to mouth\textsuperscript{22}. In the Hellenistic and later period\textsuperscript{23} such teachings were made known to the general public by handbooks\textsuperscript{24}, of which Artemidorus’ work\textsuperscript{25} constitutes a late and exhaustive summa.

Xenophon for instance, was, as explained in more detail below\textsuperscript{26}, perfectly capable of interpreting his own dreams in the light of ancient oneirocritic beliefs, and many personages in the Greek novel were able to decipher the messages which dreams sent to the sleeper\textsuperscript{27}. For instance, we know that seeing fire in a dream was regarded as intimation of future dangers, and accordingly, in Xen. Eph. 1.12.4 Habrokomes, having dreamed of a fire, expected τι δεινόν ἐκ τοῦ ὀνείρατος. At 2.8.2 Habrokomes dreams of himself and his beloved as being a horse and a mare: on the whole, a horse was a sign of good omen\textsuperscript{28}, and therefore Habrokomes becomes εὐελπιστός.

\textsuperscript{19} Recherches sur le poème Mégara (Copenhague 1966) 67.
\textsuperscript{20} Cf. Artemid. 1.2 (Her. p. 4.27) δινείρος ἐστι κύριος ἢ πλάσις ψυχῆς πολυσχήμων σημαντικὴ τῶν ἐσομένων ἄγαθῶν ἢ κακῶν.
\textsuperscript{21} Breitenstein, op. cit. 67.
\textsuperscript{22} “Von Mund zu Mund” (RE s.v. Traumdeutung 2235).
\textsuperscript{23} RE s.v. Traumdeutung 2234-2235.
\textsuperscript{24} Der Kleine Pauly s.v. Traumdeutung 931 “eine umfangreiche Fachlit.”, cf. also Del Como, op. cit. 123 “manuale oniromantico pratico”; 127 “trattato oniromantico”; 104 “trattato ... descrittivo”.
\textsuperscript{25} The Oneirocritica is the only extant ancient dream-book. The author collected dreams and their outcomes and classified what had been taught by many earlier oneirocritic writers. At the beginning of the first book of the Oneirocritica (Her. p. 2, 11-17) Artemidorus asserts that besides consorting with the common and presumably illiterate diviners, who practised their trade in the market places, he had taken special pains to procure every book written on the interpretation of dreams (ἔτους ἀπὸ τότε μὲν οὖν ἐτέλευτα διδασκαλίαν αὐτοποίησεν τὰς ὑπομνήμασις τῶν καὶ ἀποκαλούσαν οἱ συμμετρισμοῦσιν καὶ τὰς ὑφής ἀνεπακόσμους, καταφρονήσεως τῆς διάβολος ἔτεσι πολλᾶς ὑμελήματα, καὶ ἐν Ἑλλάδα κατὰ πόλεις καὶ πανηγύρισις, καὶ ἐν ᾿Αθη καὶ ᾿Ελλάδα καὶ τῶν ὑψίστων ἐν ταῖς μεγάλαις καὶ πολυανθρωπόσεσι υπομνήμασις αἰσχρῶς πολαίσις ὀνείρως καὶ τούτως τὰς ἀποβάσεις).
\textsuperscript{26} Cf. below, 6-7.
\textsuperscript{28} Cf. Artem. 1.36 (Her. p. 54,7).
In the light of our previous observations, we believe that the dream composed by Moschus was constructed according to ancient oneirocritic teachings, and it, therefore, contains precise details which the poet’s readers were expected by him to be able to interpret in the light of ancient ὄνειροκρίσις, as signifying Heracles’ impending doom.

We shall try, therefore, to analyse the dream within the framework of ancient oneirocritic thinking. The dream will be studied in the light of the evidence imparted in Artemidorus’ Oneirocritica29 and the ancient Scriptores onirocritici collected by Del Corno, in his most valuable edition. In particular, the dream of Alcmena belongs to one of the dream-types classified by Artemidorus, namely to the kind of dream which refers to a “Verwandter des Traumenden” (RE s.v.: “Traumdeutung”, 2243; cf. also Breitenstein, op. cit. 61).

We shall begin with a short precis of the dream. Alcmena sees Heracles undressed from the waist up, digging a trench along the edge of a vine-field. When he has finished, and was to put his clothes on again, suddenly a big fire appears above the trench: the fire encircles him. Heracles retreats using his spade as a shield against the flames. Iphicles, Heracles’ brother appears in the dream, intending to be of assistance, but trips up and is thereafter unable to help.

The dream begins thus:

εἰσατο γὰρ μοι ἡ μακέλην εὐεργετὰ χερὶ παῖς ἐμὸς ἀμφοτέρησθι βῆ Ἡρακλῆειν.

(Lines 94-95)

Although the name of Heracles is mentioned at the end of line 95, the first noun mentioned in the dream, and hence the first object that we see, is the word μακέλην (“mattock”, a digging implement). This immediately conjures up the image of agricultural work. Heracles, using this mattock, is digging a trench (97 τάφρον) at the boundary of a field (97 τῆλθαντος ἑτερατή τινος ἄγροι), which happens to be a vineyard (100 οίνοφοροι... ἀλῳς). Perrotta30 thinks that Heracles is, in the dream, digging his own grave (“si scava la fossa”) and Legrand31 thinks that the dream means that Heracles “ne jouira jamais du repos en ce monde; la fosse représente l’ensemble de ses travaux, les flammes annoncent celles du bucher de Trachis”.

In reality, Heracles is in the dream a delver (φυτοσκάφος)32. Delvers were casual labourers hired (96 ἐπὶ μιθηθοῖ) by land-owners. So Heracles is doing a

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29 For the purpose of our investigation we have used R. A. Pack’s edition, Artemidori Daldiani Onirocriticon Libri V (Leipzig 1963) and of course Hercher’s Index rerum at the end of his edition (Artemidori Daldiani Onirocriticon libri V [Lipsiae 1864]).
31 Bucoliques Grecs, II (Paris 1927) 174 f., n. 4.
32 Cf. Theocr. Id. 25.27 and Id. 24.138 where see G. Cryssafis’ and H. White’s commentaries ad locc.
peasant’s work (cf. Del Corno 28, for a similar background: ἐν ἄμπελῳ δὲ γεωργὸς εἰργάζετο τάφροιν). The fact that Heracles is a “journalier” has already been understood by Breitenstein\(^\text{33}\). What is crucial, however, and previously overlooked, is that, as we learn from Artemidorus, μακέλη has in itself no special significance from the point of view of “Traumdeutung”: neither Artemidorus, nor the fragments collected by Del Corno mention such an instrument. The μακέλη, therefore, is mentioned by Alcmena only in order to underline that Heracles was working as a delver (φυτοσκάφος)\(^\text{35}\) who needs this digging implement (μακέλη). The placing of the spade upon the upraised ridge of earth (101-102 ἦτοι ὁ λίστρον ἐμελλὲν ἐπὶ προώχοντος ἐφέσας / ἀνδὴροι) is, likewise, of no significance from the point of view of dream interpretation: it simply adds a realistic detail, since workers were in the habit of putting their tools on the top of any heap which their work had produced, such as the winnowers, who put their fan on top of the corn heap in Theoc. *Id.* 7.155-156.

In line 98 Heracles, while at his work, is pictured half naked (γυμνὸς ἀτερ χαλίνης: τε καὶ εὐμίτρολο χιτῶνος). It seems, at first sight, quite normal that someone should be naked from the waist up in order to perform physical labour in the open air, but, although this is normal, we must wonder for what purpose this detail was included in the poem. Again, Artemidorus\(^\text{36}\) gives us the answer: οὐτε γυμνούσθαι οὔτε τὰ ἱμάτια ἀπολλύειν ἁγάθων.

The temporary relaxation that comes, when Heracles completes his work and is ready to get dressed again, serves to augment the contrast with the following lines. No explanation is given for the start of the fire (103-104 ἔξαπινης δ ἀνέλαμψεν... / πῦρ). The fire is vehement (104 ἄμοτον) and comes from above (103 ἵππο καπέτοιο). We know from Artemidorus\(^\text{37}\) that πῦρ ὀφάνιον καὶ θεόν and πολὺ denotes πολεμίων ἔφοδον: there is no need, therefore, to imagine that the fire signifies the “bûcher de Trachis”\(^\text{38}\): it is, as Breitenstein\(^\text{39}\) notes (without, however, being aware of Artemidorus’ testimony) an indication of the “lutte” between Heracles and his enemies (not necessarily Eurystheus, as Breitenstein thinks: Heracles had many enemies, for example Hera).

The fire encircles Heracles (104 περὶ δ ’αὐτὸν ἄθεσφατος εἰλείτο φίλοξ). Breitenstein\(^\text{40}\) has shown that this part of Alcmena’s dream, where a πῦρ ἄμοτον


\(^{34}\) 1.51 (Her. p. 49.2).


\(^{36}\) 2.3 (Her. p. 88.18).

\(^{37}\) 2.9 (Her. p. 92.18); cf also 2.9 (Her. p. 96.7) πῦρ... πολὺ δὲ καὶ ἄμετρον πουπρόν.

\(^{38}\) Cf. Legrand, *op. cit.* 174 f., n. 4.

\(^{39}\) *Op. cit.* 64.

\(^{40}\) *Op. cit.* 66, n. 47.
coming from above creates a fire surrounding Heracles, is paralleled by the dream which Xenophon mentions he had in An. 3.11 ff.: a thunderbolt (σκηνττός) falls from the sky onto Xenophon’s house and sets it on fire: the flames surrounded Xenophon (κύκλω δ’ ἐδεικε λάμπεσθαι τὸ πῦρ). However, Breitenstein does not analyse Xenophon’s dream from the point of view of ancient oneirocriticism, whereas Xenophon himself does just that. Xenophon wondered what kind of dream he had had (ὅποιόν τι μὲν δὴ τὸ τολοῦτον ὄναρ ἱδείν). He wondered whether his dream was either positive or negative41, i.e. positive insofar as he had seen φῶς μέγα ἐκ Δίας 42, or negative, because the fact that the fire surrounded him might indicate that he would not be able to escape from the difficult situation (ἐξργοίτο πάντωθεν). However, as Xenophon points out, events (τὰ συμβάντα) proved the dream to be positive, insofar as he was able to escape.

Alcmena’s dream was negative, as subsequent events demonstrated: Heracles succumbed to his difficulties. We may conclude that the fire from above was a warning, given to Alcmena by her troubled ψυχή, of the kind mentioned by Artemidorus43 (ποιηρότατον δ’ ἄν εἶτα καταφερόμενον εἰς γῆν τὸ πῦρ ἱδείν): this indicates that a danger hangs over the head of the person concerned.

Lastly, the appearance of Iphicles44 in the dream puzzles interpreters. At first sight one might be tempted to imagine that Iphicles appears in the dream, because Alcmena was full of concern for both her sons as she says in lines 119-120 (αὐτὰρ ἐγὼ κλαίεισον ἀμηχανέοντας ὀρῶσα / παῖδας ἐμοῖς) and already in lines 92-93 (δειμαίνω δὲ παλύκοτον ὄψιν ἱδοῦσα / ἐκπάγλωσ, μὴ μοί τὸ τέκνον ἀποθύμου ἔρπη). This explanation, however, is refuted by the subsequent course of events, which Moschus’ readers are expected to know: the only person who came to grief was Heracles, not Iphicles. It follows, therefore, that the message which Alcmena’s ψυχή sent to her and which Alcmena did not correctly decipher was, according to ancient oneirocritic theories, the fact that ἀδελφὸς signifies an enemy (cf. Artem. 4.70 [Her. p. 244.27] ἦτε καὶ οἱ ἀδελφοὶ τοῖς ἄφθοροις τὸν αὐτὸν ἔχουσι λόγον πρὸς τὰ ἀποτελέσματα [καὶ οἱ ἐχθροὶ τοῖς ἀδελφοῖς]. οὐ γὰρ ἔπει ὁφελεῖα γίνονται ἄλλ’ ἔπι βλάβη).

Alcmena only understands in a vague way that her dream is ποιηρόν (91 αἰνῶς ὀνείρος, 92 παλύκοτον ὄψιν), whereas we have been able, thanks to Artemidorus, to interpret the messages of her ψυχή accurately. To conclude: as regards the presence of Iphicles, Alcmena would seem to have made an error45, in

42 For Zeus appearing in dreams as a benign deity, cf. Del Conso, op. cit. 35-6 Τὰ ἱδεῖν αὐτῶν... ἄγαθον.
43 2.9 (Her. p. 92.22).
44 Cf. Breitenstein, op. cit. 64-5.
45 Cf. Del Conso, op. cit. 190, n. 69; even professional ὀνειροκρίται could make interpretative mistakes.
that she is worried about both her sons: in reality, subsequent events and Artemidorus' teachings show to us that Iphicles appears in Alcmena's dream only as a negative omen, or signal.

In conclusion: our analysis of Alcmena's dream, carried out on the basis of oneirocritic theories, has proved fruitful, in that it has shown that Moschus had carefully constructed the dream so as to convey to the reader through specific oneirocritic symbols an intimation of Heracles' pending doom - a reader, let it not be forgotten, conversant with the teachings of ancient oneirocritic writers. The signals sent by Alcmena's ψυχή to her, which we endeavoured to trace in Artemidorus are the following:

a) γεωργεῖν (digging a trench) appears as a sign of toil and misery,

b) being naked (γυμνὸς) signifies the loss of everything,

c) the appearance of a vehement fire coming from above (πῦρ ἀμοτον ὑπὲρ κατέτοιο) foretells the approach of enemies,

d) a fire encircling Heracles is the intimation of a danger, as we learn from Xenophon, from which the person concerned may not be able to escape, and finally

e) the appearance of a brother symbolizes the presence of enemies and dangers.