A DREAM ON A ΚΑΙΡΟΣ OF HISTORY
AN ANALYSIS OF HERODOTOS HIST. VII 12-19; 47

BY

R. G. A. VAN LIESHOUT

The present essay 1) deals with the dream which, in Herodotos’ version, appears twice to Xerxes and once, on invocation, to Artabanos, at the eve of the final confrontation of East and West. Our comments will focus successively on the terminology of the story, the contents of the dream, the dream-apparition, the interpretation of the dream, the magic ritual, Artabanos’ criticism, the origin of the dream, the literary situation and the question of Persian or Greek (Herodotean) origin of the story; finally some notes are made on ethico-religious implications of the story. “Die Rätselhaftigkeit und Wichtigkeit der Geschichte für das Ganze rechtfertigen sicherlich die vielen Versuche einer Analyse”, notes P. Frisch in his recent commentary on the passage 2).

a. Terminology

The dream-story offers a great variety in terminology in the wording of the dream-experience: ἐν τῇ νυκτὶ εἶδε δρ̣ν (τοιχόν), followed almost immediately by the personal: ἔδωκε ὁ Σ. ἀνδρα οἱ ἐπιστάται εἰπεῖν (12,1) — ὄνειρον τῷ Σ. ἐπιστάται (14,1) — ἐπιφωτισμένον ὄνειρον γανάίτεται μοι (15,2) — ἐπιπτήστει σοι τὸῦ ὄνειρον (15,3) — τοι ἐπιφωτισμένον ὄνειρον οὐκ ἔσχατα (16 β 1) — ἐνούτως ἐς ἄνθρωπος πεπλακανυμένα (16 β 2) — πεπλακανυσθαι ... ὄψεις (τοῦ) ὄνειρότων) 16 β 2) — φανήτω ἐμοὶ διασκελευόμενον (16 γ 1) — φανῆναι μοι ... φανῆναι (16 γ 1) — τὸ ἐπιφωτισμένον τοι εἰς τὸ ὑπωρ (16 γ 2) — ἐπιφωτισμέναι (16 γ 2) — σὲ ἐπιφωτήσει (16 γ 2) — ἐπιφωτήσει συνεχῶς (16 γ 2) — φανήτω καὶ

1) This piece of work is part of a study on Greek views on the phenomenon of dreaming as recorded in literature of the classical period. The work will be presented as a dissertation to the faculty of Classics in the University of Cambridge.—I wish to thank Dr. A. A. C. Sier and Mr. W. H. F. Wolke for their kind assistance in shaping the text of this article.

2) Die Träume bei Herodot (Meisenheim am Glan 1968), 12.
Striking details in this terminology are:

1. that ἵδειν appears only once;
2. that the coming, staying and going of the dream-apparition is more or less locally indicated with verbs such as: ἐπιφοιτάω, ἐπιπέτομαι, τελανόμαι, ἔρχομαι, φοιτάω, ἐφισταμαι, ὑπερίσταμαι, στέθομαι, ἐπιπέτομαι;
3. that the dream—as is more often the case—is introduced as personal and speaking, so that the distinction between dream and dream-apparition no longer exists (cf. εἰπεῖν, ἀπειλεῖν, οὐκ ἦδοντα, διακελευόμενον);
4. that more abstract verbs such as (ἐπι)φαίνεσθαι (especially) and πεπλανήθηκα occur only between c. 16 β 2, from where Artabanos gives his enlightened view of dreams (β 1 is a quotation), and 17, where the dream takes Artabanos himself by surprise. In c. 47—an after-consideration of the dream—the term φαίνεσθαι appears again. It can also be observed that only in this enlightened reflection are the terms for dream general and vague too: ἐνυπνία, ὑπερίστατων. The word ὑπερίστατων is explicitly and always replaced either by critical expressions like: ὅ τι δὴ κοτέ ἐστι τὸ ἐπιφανειόμενον τοῦ ἐν τῷ ὑπνώ—as if the word itself were too defining—or it is only indicated by ‘it’. Only when by way of introduction Artabanos repeats parts of Xerxes’ account, does he use ὑπερίστατο. But, again, here it is remarkable that only in his mouth is the word used in the masculine. Could it be that Artabanos thinks the traditional terminology misleading? 1)