The CONSTRAINTS of Desire

THE ANTHROPOLOGY OF SEX AND GENDER IN ANCIENT GREECE

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See how they grow. Woman waters phalloi. *Attic red-figure pelike in the British Museum, 1819. (Courtesy of the British Museum.)*
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Unnatural Acts:
Erotic Protocols in
Artemidoros’ Dream Analysis

For “Nature,” Read “Culture.”

If sex were simply a natural fact, we could never write its history. We would have then to abandon what has become one of our favorite modern projects—describing the sex/gender systems of the varied societies we know, their development and periodization and dialectical interaction.¹ But sex is not, except in a trivial and uninteresting sense, a natural fact. Anthropologists, historians, and other students of culture (rather than of nature) are sharply aware that almost any imaginable configuration of pleasure can be institutionalized as conventional and perceived by its participants as natural. Indeed what “natural” means in many such contexts is precisely “conventional and proper.” The word “unnatural” in contexts of human behavior quite regularly means “seriously unconventional” and is used like a Thin Ice sign to mark off territory where it is dangerous to venture. Such warnings may be couched in absolute terms, but all such claims have been eroded by time: like the geological changes over millennia the earth’s surface the moral land-masses and “natural” boundaries can be shown to have undergone radical shifts.

There certainly was a time when the contrast of nature and convention, of physis and nomos, as applied to sexual activity and to everything else, was not exploited, a time before that particular contrast was developed as a linguistic or ideological turn. In our records the contrast of nature vs. culture seems to be a product of the sophistic enterprise of the fifth century B.C.E.² Before that time there were no doubt other ways of condoning and con-

¹ “A Manchu mother, for instance, would routinely suck her small son’s penis in public but would never kiss his cheek. For, among the Manchus, fellatio is a form of sexual behavior except in the context of mother and small son, whereas kissing of any kind is always sexual. We are perplexed because, in our culture, fellatio is always sexual, whereas cheek-kissing among
² never is” (Henderson 1988: 1251).
denying sexual behavior, but the use of “nature” appears not to have been among them. It is important to underline that the contrast of phusis and nomos, of nature and culture (if you will), is itself a cultural item, a format of thought once newly discovered, which thereafter spread and eventually was enlisted as a weapon in a historically specific cultural struggle (now called the Enlightenment). Over time it has become an automatic cliché, a deeply imbedded habit of the sort that is almost (as we say) a second nature, such that we can hardly imagine not thinking in those terms. This is to say that although it seems natural to us to discuss sex in terms of nature and “unnature,” the “naturalness” of these categories is itself a sort of cultural illusion. Like sexuality, “nature” (as applied to sex) has a history.

History of Ideas/History of Practices

But how should we write such a history? It certainly will not do (though it is often done) to latch onto isolated bits of moralizing texts, snap them from the page and pin them to a drawing board so that they form a “systematic” narrative—Plato to Philo to Paul to Plotinos. Above all it is a methodological mistake to invest such clippings with a cultural authority derived only from projections into their future.

Consider the example of cultural attitudes to paederasty, and the implications of one famous text that seems to inaugurate a condemnation of the practice. Plato’s spokesman in the Laws (835B–842A) toys with the idea of inventing a social order that would conform to “nature” as Greek society supposed it was before Oidipous’ father Laios invented paederasty. To do so would require a massive restructuring of common belief and practice, placing paederasty on a par with incest so that everyone acquired a horror of it. Plato’s legislator confesses his idea to be a pipe-dream. Yet even though that dream, or rather nightmare, came true—and did so in the very terms employed in the Laws, with paederasty coming to be stigmatized as “unnatural”—what should stand out about Plato’s text is the despair there felt about the impossibility, almost the inconceivability, of the project. It was clearly a thought-experiment on the same order as censoring traditional poetry in the Republic, one that went utterly against the grain of the values, practices, and debates of Plato’s society. These speculations of Plato are unrepresentative—not the opening move in a new game of moralizing sex—and hence only obliquely useful for writing the history of a society’s sexual mores and practices.

But our critique must go further. Aside from the issue of treating philosophical or theoretical texts as if they possessed prophetic weight, we err in a more general way when we reconstruct cultural history simply or primarily in terms of ideas, no matter whose, rather than in terms of the competing variety of social practices. Philosophers and moralists offer primary material for the history of ideas, only inadvertently for the history of practices. This is particularly true in the case of classical Greece. We know what kinds of person possessed cultural authority in a typical assembly of Athenian citizens in Plato’s day because we know who is constantly appealed to by those delivering political speeches and courtroom arguments: Homer, Hesiod, Tyrtaios, Solon, Sophokes, and Euripides have such authority, along with various culture-heroes from history. Sokrates, Plato, Aristotele and the like count for nothing—in this context. Athens was a society in which philosophers were often ignored and when noticed were easily represented not as authority figures but as cranks and buffoons. If we focus our attention not on that eccentric coterie but on the citizen body (in its own way an elite in the population of Athens), we get quite a different picture, one in which the debates of philosophers have no discernible impact.

After denoting philosophers from the privileged position sometimes assigned to them in reconstructing a picture of ancient society, we must go on and apply a similar critique to other texts. It cannot be said too strongly or too frequently that the selection of book-texts now available to us does not represent Greek society as a whole. The social and editorial conventions within which most public speaking and published writing took place tended to give voice to a select group of adult male citizens and to mute the others—female, adolescent, demotic (working persons with a minimum of leisure), metic (non-citizen). Further, as we shall see in Chapter Two, the public proprieties could also misrepresent the interests and feelings of even the adult male citizens who sponsored them. Those conventions of male prominence and competition between households are well known and roughly correspond to proprieties still broadly observable in the family of cultures around the Mediterranean basin. But inasmuch as our current intellectual interest is not to pay allegiance to the values or pretensions of that hegemonic group (and thus indirectly to support its equivalent in our own society), we must not allow these conventions to represent “everyone.”

1 Peisistratos had sex with Megakles’ daughter eu kata noman, "not in the conventional way," Herodotos 1.61.1. Pindar calls Ixion’s intercourse with a cloud who was not his wife “an uncustomary bedding” (enai paratrophi, Pythian 2.35) and advises that one should both lust and concede to another’s lust “in due season” (kata kairo; frag. 112 Bovra = Athenaios 13.601C).

2 For an example of high-level ignorance concerning the history of sexuality, one may cite the U. S. Supreme Court decision in the case of Bowers v. Hardwick (the Georgia sodomy law): 478 U.S. 186 (1986). See Gedwick 102–4.

* "But in order to understand Aristophanes’ Clouds we must make an imaginative effort to adopt an entirely different position, the position of someone to whom all philosophical and scientific speculation, all disinterested intellectual curiosity, is boring and silly" (Dover 1968: lii).
More than that, we are not simply trying to "map" a culture and find its system or complex of competing systems. As Bourdieu has shown for the conflicting genealogies, calendars, and other sorting systems of the Algerian Kabyle, the very act of drawing a map, insofar as it implies an established and unarguable regularity and system, falsifies important uncertainties, smooths out the wrinkles, and regularizes all matters that are still to be negotiated between actors in the social conglomerate (Bourdieu 1977: 2, 37, 105). Rather we would like to make some statements about that social conglomerate which manage both to characterize the fundamental conventions or protocols and to show the limits of their application to real lives. The first part of this goal is the subject of the present chapter, in which Artemidoros' Dream Analysis is used to reveal the basic principles of meaning employed by Greek-speaking men around the Mediterranean basin in ancient times to interpret sexual acts. The second part, the estimation of how strongly or lightly those principles weighed on individual lives, is the subject of the next chapter. This approach or interest, which may be designated anthropological, is one way of reading ancient texts and it does not, of course, preclude other uses of the same texts. One may still decide to study the history of ideas: what one should not do is misrepresent those ideas as having a weight, a power, a dominance which they did not possess.

What Was "Unnatural"?

If it is indeed the case that the nature/culture contrast, as it applies to sex, was not exploited before the sophistic movement of the fifth century B.C.E., it is also the case that, when it was exploited, it did not possess the same valence that it does today. The terms "natural" and "unnatural," in other words, did not function (as they have since the Enlightenment) as equivalents of "normal" and "abnormal," "healthy" and "diseased," "ordinary" and "monstrous." A glance at some of the contexts in which the contrast between nature and culture was applied to sex clearly reveals that the content assigned to "natural" behavior in the ancient world is surprisingly different from that assigned to it today, and further that its mode and range of application (that is, who comes under its restrictions) are far from universal. Thus, in Thukydides' description of open class warfare in Korkyra (Corfu), the wives support their husbands' struggle by throwing tiles from the roof onto the heads of the oligarchs: their endurance of the din of battle is "unnatural," para phusin (3.74). In this case "unnatural" is a term of praise, as the wives transcend their socialized reticence and engage in open violence in support of their families' interests. What we can call Greek women's "socialized reticence," Thukydides terms their "nature," meaning a conventional or expected limitation which they can heroically rise above. He does not mean that the Korkyran democratic women are perverts, acting in violation of the universal laws discovered by science or theology.

If we juxtapose the passage from the Laws, quoted earlier, which seems an anticipation of later condemnations of unnatural sex, to some passages from other texts (less favored by historians of ideas), a new picture starts to emerge. Seneca, for example, inveighing against luxury in Epistle 122.7-8, declares the following items to be contra naturam: hot baths, potted plants, and banquet after sunset (requiring wakefulness at night and sleep in the daytime, both unnatural acts). When he goes on to treat sex between men in the same passage, he makes it clear that what he condemns is either men dressing in clothing appropriate to women or men making themselves look youthful—both of which suggest to Seneca the wish to serve as the sexual object of other men. *Contrary to nature* means to Seneca not "outside the order of the cosmos" but "unwilling to conform to the simplicity of unadorned life" and, in the case of sex, "going AWOL from one's assigned place in the social hierarchy." This Stoic view, thought articulated as universal, is obviously directed at a very small and wealthy elite—those who can afford the sort of luxuries Seneca wants "all mankind" to do without.

The world view that frames Seneca's diatribe against luxury is nicely drawn by the Greek orator Dio Chrysostom in his idealized depiction of Euboian hillbillies (Oration 7), two families who live directly from their own farming and hunting, pay no taxes, buy no goods, and are unfamiliar with the normal amenities of urban life. It would be better if barber shops and house paint were forbidden altogether, Dio argues (117-8), so that people would not have their minds turned from a simple life in accordance with nature (103). Dio contrasts this simple life in the mountain wilds with city life, where brothels flourish, adultery is tolerated, the wealthy seduce one another in private, and men tired of their easy conquests of women corrupt boys contrary to nature (134-6, 149). The content given to this use of "nature" has more to do with the general thematic of expenditure and loss, of thrifty and prudent behavior in a scarcity society, than it does with modern conceptions of universal law based on the paradigms of natural science. Dio wants to argue in favor of simplicity and against lavishness: the life of the poor can, believe it or not, be "cognizant and natural" (81). Farmers, hunters, and shepherds are induced by their poverty to lead lives that are "better and more useful and more natural" (mallon kata phusin) than those of the urban wealthy.

Dio's "nature" has also laid down moral rules about sex: the non-reproductive is unnatural (134-36, 149). But again if we look closely at the...

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*That is not what Plato was calling unnatural in the Laws. What is exceptional, indeed unparalleled, about that passage is its condemnation of the desire of the typical adult ertelis or "active lover" as unnatural.*
argument it appears that "unnatural" refers not so much to behavior which contravenes the necessary order of the world but to behavior which is self-indulgent, luxurious, and exceedingly appealing. His principal target is urban prostitution, since it provides a luxury market of boys and women for sale, and encourages the sexual desire of male consumers to wax wanton, reaching out to ever more exquisite and refined forms of satisfaction. When human appetite is restricted to basic needs, as it is for the simple mountainers, life is stable—and this is Dio's image of human good. But when markets are introduced, stimulating but never satisfying desire, the consumer becomes restless, acquisitive, never at peace with himself. Using a slippery slope argument, Dio describes how "the man who is never satiated with such desires" (151) progresses from buying the services of prostitutes to seducing honorable women by offering them money, and finding that there is no challenge there, "no scarcity, no resistance," moves on to rarer game still, namely, the young men of good family who will soon be holding city offices. Nature, in this world view, has set a "sufficient and clear boundary" to masculine lust, declaring that males are off limits (149). But this "nature" is not a cosmic principle of physical and generational order, it is a voice crying in the wilderness—or rather in the cities—a preacher's diatribe against self-indulgence brought on by wealth. The ultimate crime against nature, according to this argument, is to treat the city's future leaders as if they were slaves available in a common brothel. It is really an offense against class, an upsetting of the social hierarchy. "Nature" turns out to mean "culture."

There were many moral authorities like Seneca and Dio in the first and second centuries C.E. recommending one program or another, and none of them is very useful for reconstructing a rounded picture of sexual life in the ancient world. Let me offer just one more example, before turning to the uniquely valuable information of Artemidoros. In depicting their vision of the simple, "natural" life, such moralists often turned to animals for examples. Claudius Aelianus (c. 170–230 C.E.) composed seventeen books On the Characteristics of Animals in Attic Greek. The elephant, he reports, is extremely sensitive to the sanctity of marriage. On one occasion in the reign of the emperor Titus an elephant noticed that its trainer's wife was having an affair with another man, so it ran them through as they lay together in bed, one on each tusk, and then covered them with a cloak. What this fantasy tells us is that men could attribute their anxiety over their wives' adultery to a sort of higher and unarguable authority, the simple and unsullied instinct of nature. It does not tell us about the countervailing attitudes, the temptations to commit and admire adultery—such as the comments of Artemidoros, Participant-Observer.

There is one ancient text, however, that deals significantly with basic issues of sex and gender and yet largely escapes the limitations of a Plato, Dio, or Philo. It is the Oeirokritika (Dream Analysis) by Artemidoros of Daldis, a studious and practicing dream analyst who traveled through the major Greek cities of the Roman Empire in the second century C.E.: "in Greece, both in the cities and at festival assemblies, and in Asia and Italy and the largest and most populous islands I patiently listened to old dreams and

Apollo and Hermes when they see Ares and Aphrodite caught in flagrante delito in Hephaistos' net—that to enjoy Aphrodite in bed it might be worth the embarrassment of getting caught (Odyssey 8.335–43).

The most succinct and terrifying script that I know for this morality play is given by Philo, an Alexandrian Jew of the first century C.E.

Not only among animals domesticated and reared by us but also among the other species there are those which appear to have self-restraint. When the Egyptian crocodile . . . is inclined to copulate, he diverts the female to the bank and turns her over, it being natural to approach her [when she is] lying on her back. After copulating, he turns her over with his forearms. But when she senses the copulation and the impregnation, she becomes malicious in purpose and pretends to desire copulation once more, displaying a harlot-like affection and assuming the usual position for copulation. So he immediately comes to ascertain, either by scent or by other means, whether the invitation is genuine or merely pretense. By nature he is alert to hidden things. When the intent of the action is truly established by their looking into each other's eyes, he claws her guts and consumes them, for they are tender. And then unhindered by armored skin or hard and pointed spines, he tears her flesh apart. But enough about self-restraint. (Terian 89–90)

There is a lot of culture packed into this one exemplum from nature: male initiative ("when he is inclined to copulate") and control ("he turns her over"), one natural position for intercourse (did the crocodile learn it from missionaries or vice versa?), wanton female desire for repeated intercourse even after she has conceived (the whole point of the operation as far as her legitimate interests are concerned), her seductive activity ("harlot-like affection") in the service of her essential passivity ("assuming the usual position for copulation"), patriarchal suspicion and condign punishment meted out on the spot. The crocodile does not tolerate female self-indulgence in his own wife, much less in himself, and in this he is a lesson to all men. Philo does not go so far as to maintain that human adultery or a wife's desire for intercourse is against nature, but his projection of a patriarchal image onto the screen of the animal world illustrates the same moral gambit as Seneca's or Dio's use of "nature" to authorize one facet of culture.
their outcomes" (1.proem: 2.17). "Artemidoros' Dream Analysis continually puts on exhibit common social assumptions, shows the operation of androcentric and other sex-gender protocols, and yet itself stands outside them.

To justify the claim that Artemidoros escapes the usual biases of moralistic or elite texts and is of enormous value in reconstituting the parameters of ancient sexual practice, I shall first show how his interpretative methods put him in a unique position for recording other people's rules, both general and individual, without endorsing them himself (Foucault 1986: 9, 16). Once that foundation has been carefully laid, I will be able to assert with some confidence that Artemidoros' categorization of sexual acts corresponds to widespread and long-enduring social norms—that is, to the public perception of the meaning of sexual behavior.

A close scrutiny of the five books of Artemidoros' text shows that both his theory and practice are remarkable—one may even say uniquely—free of those pre-judgments and biases that normally are brought to bear by any ancient author who reports and evaluates social information. The singularity of his perspective is a rigorous consequence of his theory of what dreams are and how they have meaning. There are two Greek words for "a dream"—enumpion (literally, "something in one's sleep") and onepio. Though they may be used interchangeably in ordinary speech, Artemidoros uses them to distinguish two types of sleep event. Many things seen while sleeping are merely expressions of present physical states, such as satiety or lack of food, or emotions, particularly desire or fear, and hence are not informative about the future. Such dreams he calls enumpia: "a lover necessarily sees himself with his beloved in his dreams and a frightened man sees what he is afraid of, the hungry man eats, the thirsty man drinks" (1.1). These dreams are significant, but only in a very limited sense: they signify the present state of the soul or body.

A small class of dreams, however, does contain true information about the dreamer's future, and these are referred to as onepioi. The information in such predictive dreams is not just any old future fact but items that will more or less seriously affect the dreamer's health, wealth, status, or livelihood. For instance, "a man dreamed that he was feeding bread and cheese to his penis as if it were an animal; he died miserably; for the nourishment that should have gone to his mouth went instead to his penis, hinting at the absence of a face and mouth" (5.62). "A man dreamed that he overheard someone say that his staff had cracked; he became sick and was paralyzed; the support of his body, that is, its strength and good condition, was indicated by the staff. The same man, distressed and depressed by his long paralysis, dreamed that his staff was broken; he immediately recovered, for he no longer needed a support" (5.51). "A man dreamed that he had three penises; he was liberated from slavery and acquired two more names from his former master, so that he had three names instead of one" (5.91). "All-night vigils and nocturnal festivals and joyous occasions of staying up late are good dreams for a marriage or a partnership; they signify wealth and increase of property for poor men" (3.61).

Ancient belief in the significance of dreams was not only nearly universal—dream interpretation being already an art, if not a profession, in Homer (Iliad 1.62–3, 5.149–50)—but also quite varied (Dodds 102–34; Kessels), and by Artemidoros' time there was a very extensive literature on the subject, now almost entirely lost (Corno 1969). Medical literature took some dreams quite seriously, understanding them to be the soul's intuition of what diet or therapy would be good for its sick body. It is clear from Artemidoros' own references to the thongs of diviners in the marketplace (1.proem, cf. Cicero de div. 1.132) and from the criticism that his own book received (4.proem) that the subject was a very contentious one, torn by professional rivalry, by competition between different kinds of prognostic systems (astrology, palm-reading, incubation [e.g., Strabo 14.1.44]), liver inspection, augury, physiognomy, necromancy, and the reading of sieves, cheese, or dice (2.69), and challenged by skeptics who doubted or despised the whole enterprise.

In this welter of conflicting claims and appeals to the authority of various gods and systems, Artemidoros' dream theory is pointedly empirical and naturalistic. He repeatedly insists that significant connections are only knowable after the fact, from observation (érësis) or experience (peina), though a practiced interpreter will accumulate a fund of observed cases that will enable him to make shrewd diagnoses of the likely meaning of people's dreams.1

Not only is this an empirical theory, it is a naturalistic one. The agent who constructs the dream and sends it as a useful message is the dreamer's own soul, psuché (1.2). Artemidoros' language varies between "the dream says" and "the soul says": "This dream warns a slave to obey his master" (2.33); "the soul brings a story to our attention whenever it wishes to

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1 Kessels 414–24. Physicians were concerned to exclude two types of dreams that were not significant for their purposes—the mere reflections of bodily or mental states (Artemidoros' enumpia) and dreams from the gods or from the precognitive nature of the soul itself.

1 Artemidoros frequently contrasts general opinion, whether from books or other professionals, with his personal observations (érësis de erësis): 1.32; 2.12, 18, 58, 65, 66. After describing the correspondence between gladiatorial weapons and the type of wife a man will marry, he remarks: "These are not conjectures or mere probabilities; I have often observed (érësia) these actual outcomes in my experience (peina)" (2.32).
announce beforehand that something resembling the story in its content is about to take place (2.66)." Without discussing the nature of the soul or mind and its kinds of conscious or unconscious knowledge, Artemidoros assumes that the psuché of its own nature is prophetic: it is directly aware of important future events that will affect the dreamer. The point of the communication is to arouse (ορείνει, 1.1, a pun on the root oneir-) the dreamer and make him alert to the prospect of benefit or danger. 4

These elements of his theory can be put into an interesting mirror relationship with Freud's (Price). Both divide the mind into a waking or conscious sector and an unconscious element that contains much more than the waking mind is aware of. For both, dreaming is a natural activity of the psyche and consists in veiling significant events or feelings by condensation (1.4) and displacement into a symbolic language whose elements are drawn from the dreamer's immediate associations. The difference is that Artemidoros' soul is looking to the immediate future, Freud's to the distant past. 3 The mental operations, apart from the future- or past-directedness, are much the same in both systems. What distinguishes them is not so much their theories of the soul's structure or operation, nor their practices of interviewing clients, but the culturally determined value assigned to sex.

The significant messages from the Artemidoran soul concern external matters of fact, not internal feelings, whereas the Freudian soul is trying to talk about suppressed wishes. Freud focuses on repression and the censorship of intimate feelings, for Artemidoros the discovery that the real content of a particular dream is the client's desires or fears serves to disqualify it as a signifier of a hidden signified. There are times, Artemidoros says (in a remark that will remind us of cigars), when a dream having an erection simply means an erection and times when it means something else (4.1: 241.17). How the dreamer felt during the dream may be very important to determining its meaning (1.12), as it was for Freud, but the goal of the transaction is not to explore character or reveal childhood trauma or allay hysterical anxieties but to determine whether or not the dream contains notable information about imminent changes in the dreamer's social or physical circumstances.

That is, for Artemidoros sexual acts are not a matter of real concern, either on the manifest or latent level of dream content. He assumes that people engage in sexual activities of all sorts just as they eat and exercise and bathe once a day. Sex, like food and clothing, provides material with which the soul can talk to us about the truly important things in life, such as whether we will come into money, whether my son will recover from an illness, whether my wife will be faithful and hard-working, whether I will win or lose a lawsuit. These are issues that matter. 5 It may take some effort of the imagination to think ourselves into this world view, and I have found that a good way to begin is to read the ethnographies of contemporary rural societies around the Mediterranean. The paramount concerns are generated within a framework of scarcity, competition, and intense mutual inspection. This is a primary sense of the "constraints" in my title. Sexual behavior is, indeed, extremely important for what it says (is taken to say) about the stability and integrity of households. Instead of repressing a knowledge of sex, Mediterranean cultures tend to employ it freely and even centrally as a way of structuring community relations. But sex in itself is not regarded as an elusive key to the personality or as an arrow of personal confusion or exceptional tension. Because sex is (and was) a matter so public, it is not invested with the same aura of mystery and concern that we tend to bring to it.

We shall return to this topic later. Now we must lay out some other basic features of Artemidoros' system. If the portended event is imminent, the soul communicates its warning directly and literally. Since there is no time to lose, the soul in effect shouts out an unmistakable message, showing what will happen (1.2). 12 A man at sea dreamed that he was in a shipwreck; after he woke up the ship actually sank (1.2). But if there is time for the waking mind to ponder a dream and no urgency about the outcome, the soul reckons that it is a beneficial exercise for us to contemplate the dream and figure out

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*Freud (n.d.: 385–6) detected the reason why a young man dreamed he attended a performance of Faust: certain lines from the libretto could be understood as referring to his suppressed love for his opera companion.

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*One man dreamed he was riding on the back of a ram and fell off in front of it; he was engaged and about to celebrate his wedding; the interpreter advised him that the dream foretold his wife would be unfaithful (παρανευέω) and would place the proverbial horns on him. And so it happened: because of the dream's forewarning he broke his engagement, but his friends eventually prevailed upon him to marry the woman; in fear of the dream he guarded his wife and she remained perfectly secure; after a year she died blameless; then he married another woman, thinking he had isolated the determinate meaning of the dream, and fell into the predicted misfortune, for she turned out to be the ultimate in wantonness (2.12: 120.11–25).

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*At times one may wonder which is the stranger supposition—that the unconscious mind is aware of momentous changes in the offering or that it is obsessed with the remote events of one's childhood; Plutarch argues from the strangeness of our powers of memory to the reasonableness of precognition, deis. orac. 432B.

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*A measure of the anxiety attached to such affairs is the following comparison to crucifixion: "Alexander the philosopher dreamed that he was condemned to death and that he barely escaped crucifixion through his entreaties. But he was living an ascetic life and was not involved in any of the things that are signified by crucifixion—marriage, business partnerships, wealth. On the following day he got into an argument with a Cynic, who hit him over the head with his wooden club. This is what his mind was prophesying to him—that he would come close to dying as a result of a wooden object" (4.33).
its possible meanings for ourselves. Such dreams come to us in coded symbols, and most of the Dream Analysis is devoted to explaining how those symbols work, alone and in combination, for different dreamers and in different circumstances.

The most important feature of Artemidoros' interpretive system is his working principle that the symbols and associations of a coded dream are drawn by the soul from the individual dreamer's own cultural experience, not from a universal Book of Meanings or from the language of the gods. Of course, the commonalities of experience are such that many people have the same obvious associations, a fact which generates the misleading appearance for long stretches of Artemidoros' text (as it does for Freud's Traumdeutung) that he is transcribing from a cosmic and impersonal decoding manual. As with many such points, the more detailed theoretical statements and examples occur in Book Four. Seven different pregnant women each reported dreaming that they gave birth to a serpent; the observed outcome of each dream was different, according to the associations each one had with a serpent (4.67). One man had the same dream—that he lost his nose—at three different times in his life: when he was a perfumer, it meant that his business would fail; when in desperation he forged a signature, he was disgraced and exiled, "for anything missing from a face disfigures and degrades it;" when he fell ill and had the same dream, he shortly died, "for the skull of a dead man has no nose" (4.27).

The principal statement of this interpretative axiom is at 1.8-9 (cf. 4.4), where Artemidoros distinguishes between conventions (ekei) that are universal and those that are specific to a local culture. Thracians who dream of tattooing are telling themselves something different from Getai who dream of tattooing, since among Thracians tattooing is a sign of noble birth, whereas among the Getai it is a sign of slavery. The well-qualified dream-interpreter must therefore know the customs of different lands if he travels or if his clientele is drawn from more than a single city (which in most large cities of the Eastern Mediterranean and at festivals, such as the Olympic games, would have been normal).

He must also know what is specific to the identity of each individual dreamer—wealth, social and marital status, occupation, health, age, and so forth. As Ephesians dream in the cultural language of Ephesus, so fishermen dream in the language of tackle and bait. "Marshlands are a good dream only for shepherds; for everyone else they signify unemployment and for travelers they mean obstacles" (2.28). "Someone dreamed that he became a bridge: he became a river ferryman, serving the same function as a bridge. . . . However, a rich man dreamed he became a bridge: he was despised by many and thus was (as it were) trampled on. If ever a woman or a handsome lad sees this dream they will become prostitutes and receive many onto themselves. A man involved in a lawsuit who sees this dream will rise above his adversaries and the judge himself, for the river is like a judge in that it does what it wants with impunity, but a bridge is above a river" (4.66). Hemp is a bad dream for most people, but not for hemp-makers (2.59), and cumulignus and fellatio between husband and wife are terribly ominous dream-acts—but not for two particular men of Artemidoros' acquaintance who merely liked that sort of thing. "They simply saw what excited them" (4.59: 283.9–17).

This last example clearly illustrates the axiom that dream-images are determined in principle by the individual's own contingent experiences and associations, rather than by universal or divine connections laid down ahead of time, and it also exemplifies Artemidoros' non-judgmental stance. For him to be able to give accurate readings of dream-meanings, he must know the relevant facts and practices of the client, even if they are intimate, embarrassing, or peculiar. Thus at 4.2 (243.4–12) he distinguishes publicly shared conventions from private idiosyncrasies: "but each person decides for himself what way of life (enstasis) he will adopt, and similarly what clothing and footwear and food and haircut and other bodily ornament and practices and personal choice (prohairesis)—whatever an individual most approves: 'different people have different rules, and each one approves his own way as right,' as Pindar says."

Freud misunderstood this crucial point about Artemidoros, criticizing him for treating dreams "as a kind of cryptography in which each sign can be translated into another sign having a known meaning, in accordance with a fixed key." The status of the individual dreamer is already important in

* "It is a favorite device of the powers above to whisper at night what the future holds—not that we may contrive a defense to forestall it (for no one can rise above fate) but that we may bear it more lightly when it comes. The swift descent of unforeseen events, coming on us all at once and suddenly, stirs the soul and overwhelms it; but when the disaster is expected, that very anticipation, by small increments of concern, dulls the sharp edge of suffering" (Achilles Tatius 1.3).

1 The fact that philologically sophisticated dreams only occur to educated persons is one more proof that "souls are the work of the soul and do not come from anything outside" (4.59: 284.6).

2 A type of dream handbook familiar from many ages, the oldest being from the early second millennium in Egypt (Gardner 9–23). Its format consists in listing dreamed acts, followed by "good" or "bad" plus a short reason; for instance, "if a man sees himself in a dream running fast his own legs—good; it means sitting among his townsfolk" (4.14) and "if a man sees himself in a dream copulating with a pig—bad; being deprived of his possessions" (9.16).

*Freud (n.d. 97, beginning of Chapter II). "The essence of the decoding procedure [in Artemidoros] . . . lies in the fact that the work of interpretation is not brought to bear on the dream as a whole but on each portion of the dream's content independently, as though the
the earliest texts known to Artemidoros, but he carries the principle much farther and justifies it by a theory of the dream's origin in the language and experience of the individual soul.

To be sure, Artemidoros does not anticipate that such individual traits will often interfere with the process of interpretation, much less that they are the object of the inquiry. The goal of decoding the soul's premonitory messages about the future is largely directed at external changes of wealth, health, and social status, not at understanding or addressing interior emotional states. But it is crucial for the success of Artemidoros' project, on his understanding of it, that he identify the appropriate tool-kit of meanings, which may be quite individual, and that he not impose his evaluations or associations on those of the client.

Some dreams are virtually impossible to interpret because their symbolism is so particular that no general theorem can be laid down ahead of time which would cover it. For instance, a military commander dreamed that the letters iota, kappa, and theta were inscribed on his sword (4.24). The outcome of the dream was that he performed brilliantly in the campaign to suppress the Jewish revolt at Kyrene. The letters stood for "death (thanatos) to the Jews (lousiaioi) at Kyrene." Artemidoros offers this example with a degree of self-congratulation because he succeeded in guessing this outcome, but he admits that such happy strokes must be chalked up to luck (epiniches, 259.16), which explains a similar story recorded of the famous prophet Aristandros, who told Alexander the Great that his dream of a satyr (satiros) playing on top of a shield was a coded sentence, "Tyre will be yours," (sa Turos, 4.24). This too was a lucky interpretation (260.6). The practical advice in the face of such very particular dreams which do not fall under the theorems of dream analysis is "Don't lose heart" (259.15).

Artemidoros is therefore in the business of translating people's messages to themselves, not of influencing the content of those messages, but alone "correcting" that content. In most cases, apart from unique and individual dreams, he naturally finds himself dealing with the whole range of common, public associations and evaluations, which makes him an excellent source for information about daily life in the ancient world (Riess; Laukamm). But he always does so with a shrewd eye for the differences of status, morality, and behavior (ethos) that may characterize individuals. It is methodologically unthinkable for Artemidoros to impose any significance on the dream and still maintain the naturalistic and objective premises of his work.

This amounts to saying that Artemidoros stands in relation to Greek society in the role of a participant-observer. Like an anthropologist he shares the life of the people he studies, trying at once to get inside people's feelings and behaviors and also to stand outside them. Though Artemidoros did not try to write an ethnography, virtually any material or social fact in his clients' world might turn out to be relevant information, and he must, for his own professional success, have a capacious knowledge of cultural facts and a shrewd awareness of individual and regional peculiarities.

But should we rely on his mere protestations of theoretical objectivity, or should we not rather suspect that there must have been the normal gaps between his theory and his practice? As it happens, we have a control on what he really thinks about his practice in Eoek Four. Books One to Three, dedicated to Cassius Maximus, were written for general circulation; Book Four and the collection of dream outcomes assembled in Book Five were written for Artemidoros' son, also called Artemidoros, to help him become an unchallenged master of the craft, and contained the initial warning "to keep it for your own use and not to share copies of it with many people" (4.prem: 238.1). In that fourth book Artemidoros reveals many trade secrets, giving a sort of insider's view on the practical difficulties a working dream-analyst may encounter.

One of the realities of the business is that, though the dream-analyst is an ordinary, non-visionary person like the rest of us, he must deal with clients in whom credulity and wariness are mixed. At one and the same time they expect some supernatural display and distrust it when it happens. Without ever doubting the fundamental validity of his professional knowledge, Artemidoros admits that certain forms of quasi-fraudulence are sometimes appropriate. Clients like a display of scientific knowledge and technical learning: when you are sure of a dream's meaning on empirical grounds, you may satisfy the client's desire to be impressed by adding some specious causal explanation:

Try in every case to come up with an explanation (aittologuein) of why the dream content points to a certain outcome and add on to each interpretation some rationale and some plausible arguments. For even though you say about the outcome may be perfectly true, if it is given out as a bare, unadorned conclusion,

"The credulous is emphasized by Theophrastos, describing the type of man who "when he has a dream, goes to the dream-analysts, to the prophets, to the bird-watchers, to ask them which god or goddess he should pray to" (Charites 16.11)."
you will be thought of as rather inexperienced. But do not fool yourself that the explanation you give really determines the outcome (4.20).

There were several mumbo-jumbo techniques that could be employed to give an air of authority to the analyst’s pronouncements, such as anagrammatism* or isopsephism.†

In Book Four Artemidoros’ commitment to an empirical and objective theory of dream decipherment is still strong and unequivocal. The correspondences between dreams and outcomes are for him an empirical fact; supplying the reasons why individual souls make the associations they do is a more challenging task, always reasonable and never wholly secure. “Many dream outcomes regularly occur as discrete patterns and we know from their apparent regularity that they are true according to some rational rule (logos), but to discover the causal explanation (aitia) of that pattern is beyond our powers. Therefore we maintain that the patterns of outcome have been discovered by experience but the rationales come from ourselves and vary according to each interpreter’s ability” (4.20). This admission of his own limitations, which provides a justification for improvising false explanations, also strengthens our confidence in the fairness and accuracy of his practice.

So, too, does his observation that not all clients have predictive dreams. By far the majority of dreamers who come to him, he believes, report simple enhupnia, not predictive onerloi (4 proem: 240.25), though here too the art of decoding associations can be useful, since the soul of a person who knows something about dream analysis uses allegorical associations in enhupnia as well as in onerloi. “A man who can discern such connections, whether he has read them in dream books or learned them by associating with dream analysts or knows them because he simply has a talent for figuring such things out—such a man, when he is in love with a woman, will not see her but a mare or a mirror or a ship or the sea or a female animal or women’s clothing or some other thing that signifies a woman” (4 proem: 239.20).

* Anagrammatism refers to rearranging or supplementing the letters in the name of an object in a dream; the technique is mentioned as normal at 1.11 but criticized in the private writing at 4.25: “I mention anagrammatism at the beginning of my treatise, and now I recommend to you that you use it whenever you want to generate the impression that you are wiser than another interpreter, but on no account should you use it in arriving at interpretations for yourself, since you will only be misled.”

† Isopsephism refers to the substitution of one word for another when the sum of their letters’ numerical values is equal. “Use isopsephism when the meaning of the dream itself, apart from the numerical equivalence, already shows you what the isopsephism points to. For instance, when sick persons dream of a gnoia ["old woman"] it is a symbol of death. The words gnoia and hé ekphora ["funeral"] both have the value of 704. But (you would know this) even apart from the isopsephism: an old woman is indicative of burial as much as she is not far from death” (4.24). On isopsephism, see Dornseiff 98–104, 181–2, Skeat.

Presumably many of Artemidoros’ regular clients were of this type, and the bulk of the allegorical dreams they brought to him had no significance for the future but only restated in symbolic form the dreamer’s current anxieties. At the other end of the social scale, perhaps as an ideal type, some few persons of perfect virtue are said to have mainly or only predictive dreams. Since enhupnia are the product of emotional or physical turmoil, people who maintain perfect control over their emotions and their diet tend to have only onerloi: “for their soul is not clouded with fears or hopes, and they control their body’s pleasures.” * Note in both these cases that it is the individual soul which is responsible for the nature and quality of the dream; people who know how to see analogies in dreams have dreams which use such analogies, people unfamiliar with symbolism do not have symbolic dreams; men whose souls are unclouded by unsatisfied desires do not have wish-fulfillment dreams.

Behind the scenes, therefore, Artemidoros is very alert to the different classes to which dreamers belong and the different orders of psychology that are likely to be manifested in their dreams. Like the participant-observer he both enters as deeply as possible into the mind and behavior of his informant and at the same time interprets his informant’s words and deeds in terms not necessarily shared by or even accessible to the informant. Artemidoros’ interpretation in effect fits the informant into a larger behavioral pattern. This lengthy discussion of Artemidoros’ methods and principles has been necessary to lay the groundwork for my reading of his pronouncements about sexual events in dreams. The value of his text for us depends on our confident realization that it represents not just one man’s opinion about the sexual protocols of ancient societies but an invaluable collection of evidence—a kind of ancient Kinsey report—based on interviews with thousands of clients.

The Social Meaning of Erotic Dreams

Turning to the subject of erotic dreams, it might be useful first to note the frequency with which, throughout the ancient world, people did dream of their sexual desires. Herophilus has a category for instinctive dreams, “whenever we see what we want, as occurs in the case of those who see their girlfriends (erōmenas) in their sleep” (Aetios Placita 5.2.3). Many dreams obviously reproduce daily cares, which include sexual anxieties, such as “The prostitute writes a note to her lover; the adulterous woman yields

* 4 proem: 239.18. Plato advises sober meals and temperate behavior to promote the more rational dreaming of the soul’s highest faculty (Republic 571D). He shares the belief that a small class of men can either entirely or virtually eliminate the wayward desires that are manifested in sleep (571B).
herself." Plato's Sokrates observes that every soul contains both respectable desires and shockingly unconventional (paranemotai) desires, which like satyric selves prance about when the ruling part of our soul is asleep. These fantastic escapades include a man having sex with his mother, or with any and every human being, god, or beast; murder; and eating shameful foods.

But so far from being an object of interest to any ancient dream theoretician, sexual desires, when detected, serve to disqualify a dream as significant. "If a man dreams that he has intercourse with a woman who is familiar to him, and he is in a sexual mood and is attracted to the woman, the dream foretells nothing: the tension of his own desires exhausts its meaning," says Artemidoros (1.78: 88.12). Popular language actually referred to genitals as "nature," indicating that their needs and activities are to some extent just the unproblematic way of things (see Appendix Two).

Some dreams whose outcomes were observed by Artemidoros refer to hidden sexual events. "A man dreamed of shitting into a bushel basket. He was caught having sex with his own sister. The bushel is a measure, and a measure is like a convention (nomos), so in a sense he was breaking the conventions" (5.24). But the events disclosed are in the proximate future, not the remote past, and they are contingent facts, not deeply embedded formations of the personality. Thus, one woman's dream of wheat stalks emerging from her chest and entering into her vagina referred to the fact that she would unknowingly, "by a turn of events" (kata peristasisi), have sex with her own son (5.63), and one man's dream of bed-bugs in his clothing came true the following day when he learned that his wife was committing adultery (5.64).

Though genital organs and social-sexual behavior occur on both sides of the Artemidoran equation, both as signifier and as signified, as dream and as outcome (or as both), the real meaning of dreams for the future has little to do with the dreamer's psychology, with his or her personal or sexual
dream.

In all the cases just mentioned what the dreamer is concerned about is the shame that will accrue to the family and the consequent lowering of its fortunes when a sexual misdemeanor becomes publicly known.

In interpreting the probable meaning of predictive dreams, Artemidoros relies on six basic elements (stoicheia) or categories of analysis—nature, convention, habit, occupation, name, and time (1.3, 4.2)—and two modal qualifiers in each category—"in accordance with" (leia) or "against" (para). These categories, he proudly claims, exhaust the types of meaning generated in dreams, in contrast to some other interpreters who listed dozens or even hundreds of such categories (1.3).

The two principal elements are nature and convention, phusis and nomos: "of all things that exist, some are by nature, some are by convention [neonistai]; these are the first and ruling categories" (4.2: 242.19–21). Things conventional are further divided into the unwritten social rules (ethos) and written laws (nomos): "of things conventional some have been established by general agreement among humans and imposed as rules on themselves; ethos is the name for such, and it is—as Phenomenes says—an unwritten nomos. But the rules people have written down out of fear that they might be transgressed are known as nomoi." The unwritten social principles (as opposed both to written rules and natural laws) are spelled out twice: "People have reached common agreement on mystery rites and initiations and all-night festivals and competitions and warfare and farming and the settlement of cities and marriage and the raising of children and everything else like this" (4.2: 243.4). "The common ethē are these: to respect and honor the gods . . . , to raise children, to be attracted to (literally, "to be defeated by") women and intercourse with them, to be awake in the daytime, to sleep at night, to eat, to rest when tired, to live under a roof rather than under the open air" (1.8).

Although, as a general rule, things which are out of place, unconventional (whether explicitly or implicitly), or unnatural tend to signify bad outcomes for a dreamer, there are many exceptions. A man who dreamed of beating his mother, which would have been an extremely grave offense against convention (paranemotai), came into a profit since he was a potter and beat clay (mother earth) for a living (4.2: 245.9). A man dreamed that he took pleasure in sexually penetrating his sick son, again an extremely grave offense against convention, but the dream signified the son's recovery since the man took pleasure in "having" his son. Artemidoros contrasts this outcome with that of a man who dreamed that he had intercourse with his sick son and

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1 An iron penis signified patricide (5.15); a man having intercourse with himself signified desperate need (5.31); bearing and nursing a child signified for an athlete that he would give up competing with others (5.45); also in Book 5: 62, 65, 68, 87, 91, 94, 95.

2 A man who dreamed that he butchered and sold his wife later turned her to prostitution (5.2); a horse sent by a friend to a man's bedroom signified that the man would lose access to his friend's daughter, who was his mistress (4.46); many items may signify a wife, a prostitute or a mistress: balls (1.55), horses (1.56), apples (1.73), bedrooms (2.10), acanthus (2.17), tree (2.25), etc., marriage is indicated by gladiatorial fights (2.32); adultery is signified by falling off a ram (2.12: 120.15); a serpent in one's bosom (2.13), a river flowing from the house (2.27: 149.7), etc.

3 A man who dreamed that his penis became extremely hairy all the way to the tip became an open kinaidai [see my discussion of this term below, pp. 45–54], "who enjoyed every unregulated pleasure and stopped using his penis in the way conventional for men; that part was so unused, from not being rubbed against another body, that it could grow hair" (5.65); also 1.79: 95.11.

4 "Snow and frost seen at the proper season signify nothing, for the soul is mindful of the day's cold even when the body is sleeping; when seen out of season it is a good dream only for farmers, for the rest it foretells that their undertakings and imminent projects will turn cold, and it hinders travel" (2.8: 109.7).
did not like it; the son died because being the object of a sexual act (perainesthai, literally "to be penetrated") is, like death, called "corruption." The discrimination between these two clearly indicates how attentive Artemidoros is to the whole texture of a dream experience and how non-judgmental he is about what is represented in it.

Books One and Two are arranged according to the human span of life from birth to death, with intercourse (symposia) at the center (1.78-80). ² "The best set of categories for the analysis of intercourse is, first, intercourse which is according to nature and convention and habit, then intercourse against convention, and third, intercourse against nature" (1.78). It is an amusing game at parties to ask people what acts they think Artemidoros might have placed in each category, given that he is not legislating the matter but recording common perceptions in the Mediterranean world of the second century C.E.

"Natural and conventional" acts are all those in which a man penetrates a social inferior (wife, mistress, prostitutes in brothels, streetwalkers, vending women in the marketplace, female or male slaves, other men's wives), is penetrated by another man, or masturbates. Though the acts are natural and conventional, the outcomes of the dream are sometimes good and sometimes bad. Having and enjoying one of these sexual acts tends to indicate a future profit, since, as Artemidoros charmingly puts it, "people enjoy sex and they enjoy making a profit."³ Penetration usually indicates that the penetrator will receive a future good (or ill) since he is (or is not) receiving pleasure, but from the point of view of the penetrated person penetration means receiving something good (or bad) from the penetrator.⁴

It will raise some eyebrows to note that the sameness or difference of the anatomical sexes of the persons engaged in a sexual act is not a factor in the analysis of dreams. "Having intercourse with one's female or male slave is good, for slaves are the dreamer's possessions and therefore signify that he will take pleasure in his own possessions as they increase in number and value" (1.78: 88.5). The congruence of social status and sexual hierarchy is a good sign; gender does not factor into the equation, except insofar as women are all social subordinates to men. For the dreamer to imagine himself penetrated by another man may be good or bad, depending on whether the penetrator is older or richer than the dreamer (which signifies that the dreamer will receive something good) or poorer. For a man to be penetrated by his household slave is inauspicious, not because of the slave's gender or the sexual act itself but because a social inferior is represented as a sexual superior, and so the soul of the dreamer regards such a sexual contact with repugnance.

The relations of pleasure are never perceived as mutual—or, rather, the significance of such relations is always interpreted asymmetrically in terms of a calculus of profit—in terms of who is giving pleasure/money and who is taking it from others. The significance of dreamed sexual acts rests on a perception or interpretation of them as forms of invasion, injury, profit-taking, superiority, and command. These relations of domination are regarded as "natural and conventional," meaning that the actors represented in them, when taken in pairs, can be ranked in both the social and the sexual realms. The very fact of considering social and sexual relations together provokes the question, "Who's on top?"

"Unconventional" acts fall into two broad categories—incest and oral-genital contact. The variants of each are listed in some detail, again according to a calculus of profit determined mainly by the relative status of the parties involved and the relative degrees of pleasure accruing to them. "It is good for a poor man to have sexual intercourse with a rich daughter, for he will receive great assistance from his daughter and, in this way, take pleasure in her" (1.78: 90.22). Gender, as in the previous category, is not a signifier (though sexual relations are in a different sense deeply gendered, insofar as they are constructed for and around men's bodies, not women's—Halperin 1989: 35). Thus, incest with son or daughter has the same general meaning. The age and wealth of the child affects the outcome, not his or her anatomical sex. "To have sex with one's grown son is good for a man who who penetrates a male friend will develop an enmity with him after inflicting some prior injury" (1.78: 91.5).

Profit-taking: "If a poor man who lacks the essentials has a rich mother [and has intercourse with her in a dream], he will receive what he wants from her, or else he will inherit it from her when she dies not long after, and thus he will take pleasure in his mother" (1.78: 92.9).

Superiority: "To penetrate one's brother, whether older or younger, is good for the dreamer, for he will be above his brother and will look down on him" (1.78: 90.29).

Command: "To have sex with one's own wife when she is willing and desirous and not resistant to it is good, equally for all who dream it. For the woman is either the dreamer's professional skill or business which he uses to provide himself with pleasures, or it is that which he manages and controls as he would a wife" (1.78: 86.21). "(A dream of intercourse with one's mother) is good for all office-holders and politicians, for the mother signifies the fatherland; so just as he who has sex according to the conventions of Aphrodite (kata nomon Aphroditi) controls the entire body of the woman who is obedient and willing, so too the dreamer will have authority over all the business of the city" (1.79: 91.21).

¹ Injury: "He who penetrates a male friend will develop an enmity with him after inflicting some prior injury" (1.78: 91.5).

² Profit-taking: "If a poor man who lacks the essentials has a rich mother [and has intercourse with her in a dream], he will receive what he wants from her, or else he will inherit it from her when she dies not long after, and thus he will take pleasure in his mother" (1.78: 92.9).

³ Superiority: "To penetrate one's brother, whether older or younger, is good for the dreamer, for he will be above his brother and will look down on him" (1.78: 90.29).

⁴ Command: "To have sex with one's own wife when she is willing and desirous and not resistant to it is good, equally for all who dream it. For the woman is either the dreamer's professional skill or business which he uses to provide himself with pleasures, or it is that which he manages and controls as he would a wife" (1.78: 86.21). "(A dream of intercourse with one's mother) is good for all office-holders and politicians, for the mother signifies the fatherland; so just as he who has sex according to the conventions of Aphrodite (kata nomon Aphroditi) controls the entire body of the woman who is obedient and willing, so too the dreamer will have authority over all the business of the city" (1.79: 91.21).
sojournung abroad; the dream signifies coming together (sunélthen) and returning home because of the name ‘intercourse’ (sunousia); but if they are both at home and living together, it is bad; they are bound to separate since the intercourse of men usually takes place with one turning his back on the other” (1.78: 89,29).

Dreams of a man having sex with his mother are treated in great detail according to the position assumed and other variables. This speaks perhaps to the mother’s central symbolic role in the household and to the ambiguities of a grown son’s control over her. (More on this in the next section.)

One of the side effects of having established Artemidorus’ non-judgmental stance as a recorder of common beliefs is that it enables us to affirm, on the basis of his testimony, that there was evidently in his world a very deep apprehension about fellatio and cunnilingus, which were treated somehow on a par with incest as forbidden, shocking, unspeakable. “To do the unspeakable” (anóthētopoíein) is precisely the word for oral-genital activity. There are, of course, many stray references to fellatio and cunnilingus in classical literature and they tend overwhelmingly to be pejorative.29 But we could not properly assess the weight or representativeness of such comments without the framework supplied by Artemidorus. For instance, claiming that Manichaeans ceremonially eat a fig dipped in semen, Cyril of Jerusalem exclaims, “Who would accept instruction from such lips? Who would, under any circumstances, kiss him on meeting? Quite apart from the sin against religion that that would involve, will you not shun such defilement and men worse than mere profligates and more abominable than any prostitute?” (Catecheses 6.33). Artemidorus’ evidence suggests that Cyril was mobilizing a widely shared disgust for the purpose of slandering his religious enemies.

“Unnatural” acts are an apparently heterogeneous assortment: necrophilia, sex with a god, sex with an animal, self-penetration and self-fellatio, and a woman penetrating a woman. Some of these signify good things to come: “To have sex with Selene (the moon) is very favorable for sea-captains and navigators and importers and astronomers and men who love to travel abroad and vagrants; for the rest it signifies dropsy” (1.80: 97,25). But as usual it depends on who does what to whom: “If someone dreams that he mounts an animal, he will receive a benefit from that species, whatever it is. . . . If he is mounted, he will have some violent and awful experience” (1.80: 98,12).

What idea or ideas of nature generate this heterogeneous list of things para phusin? Not reproductive potential, since both the natural-conventional and the unconventional categories contain acts that are not reproductive (anal intercourse is conventional, fellatio is unconventional). The basic idea seems to be that unnatural acts do not involve any representation of human social hierarchy. Relations with sheep and gods, though they are interpreted (like the rest) in terms of the dreamer’s positioning of himself in an anthropomor-

This hierarchy, do not involve two human beings, but cross over species boundaries. Bestiality is not “unnatural” in the sense of being what modern psychology calls a perversion; rather it is outside the conventional field of social signification. If a man gains advantage over a sheep, so what? Nor do transitive activities conducted without a partner (anal intercourse with oneself—signifying “serious illness or incredible torture, for a man could not have sex with himself without great torture”—or auto-fellatio), or with a corpse (necrophilia), fit into a system of hierarchical social meanings. The soul may use an image of such acts to say something, but the acts themselves are not ones that carry social signification in their own right.

The most revealing item on the list is “if a woman penetrates a woman.” The phrase must not be domesticated by a soft-focus translation, such as “lesbianism,” for that would be to gloss over the very point where ancient Mediterranean sexual significations diverge from our own, hence the point where they are most revealing. Sex between women is here viewed as not intrinsically equipped to display the hierarchy of its participants. The act should be interpreted along the same lines as the others in the section as containing a socially anomalous image. To formulate a more exact statement of what that means, let us specify two further protocols operative in these chapters.

In addition to its androcentric focus, its orientation around male agency and concerns, sexual significance is both phallocentric and invasive. The privileged terms for sexual activity in the Oneirikēkrita are paraímein and peramešhai, to penetrate and to be penetrated. “If she does not know the woman she penetrates, she will undertake useless projects. If a woman is penetrated by a woman, she will be separated from her husband or will be widowed; however, she will nonetheless learn the secrets of the other woman” (1.80: 97,9). Sexual relations between women can only be articulated here in the significant terms of the system, penetrator vs. penetrated, not as what we would call lesbianism. Sexual relations between women are here classed as “unnatural” because “nature” assumes that what are significant in sexual activity are (i) men, (ii) penises that penetrate, and (iii) the articulation thereby of relative statuses through relations of dominance. These three protocols determine the field of significance. Woman–woman intercourse is “unnatural” only and exactly insofar as it lies outside that

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29 Artemidoros reports dreams of women, as he does of slaves, and the changes of social status or health he looks for in them are the same as for men’s dreams. Women’s dreams: 1.16, 26, 28, 30, 41, 44, 56, 58, 76, 77, 2.3, 5, 6, 7, 18, 20, 30, 65; 3.16, 23, 32, 65, 4.59, 5.63, 80, 86. One should leave open the possibility that a female analyst would see things differently, such as the Isis devotee at Athens who was both a lamp-lighter and an anētēkēritis (IG III.162, dated to 1278 or 1289 C.E.).

3 This awkward, unnatural phrase is meant to keep alive the non-translatability of Artemidoros’ category.
The determinate field of meaning. The “unnatural” is the meaningless; “nature” once more turns out to stand for “culture.”

The third protocol bears special watching since it sums up the other two and gives them a very anti-romantic twist. Many of us may like to think that sexual activities involving two people will be mutually pleasurable, but erōs in Artemidoros’ cities more often traveled along one-way streets. Artemidoros in his programmatic opening chapters has a list of activities that do not affect one’s neighbor and concern only the agent, and he includes sexual penetration among them: speaking, singing, dancing, boxing, competing (agonizesthai), hanging oneself, dying, being crucified, diving, finding a treasure, sexual activity (aphroditaizein), vomiting, defecating, sleeping, laughing, crying, speaking nicely to the gods. It is not that second parties are not present at some of these events (speaking, boxing, competing, having sex, being crucified, flattering one’s favorite divinity), but that their successful achievement does not depend on the cooperation, much less the benefit, of a second party. The invasive protocol restates the principle that sex (like competition) makes reference chiefly to the self by treating it as a way of expressing hierarchical movement, up or down the ladder whose rungs are marked by levels of wealth and prestige. To penetrate is not all of sex, but it is that aspect of sexual activity which was apt for expressing social relations of honor and shame, aggrandizement and loss, command and obedience, and so it is that aspect which figured most prominently in ancient schemes of sexual classification and moral judgment.

It would of course be wrong to read this interpretative system as a phenomenon of actual desire and behavior. There are traces even in Artemidoros that mutuality was sometimes a perceived feature of intercourse, albeit a muted feature. “To have sex with a son already grown is good for a man who is out of the country, for the dream signifies coming together and

sliding together, by the name ‘sexual union’ (suneunia)” (1.7e: 89.29). The limits of the meaning-system revealed by Artemidoros are that it does not take us very far into the domestic sphere, in which husbands and wives and lovers negotiated their relationships (like the two men who enjoyed fellatio and cunnilingus respectively), nor into the sphere of luxury living, in which passive and sometimes mutual sensuousness found cultural expression (lyric poetry, romantic novels). But it is an excellent description of the public meanings attached to sexual relationships. Artemidoros’ testimony thereby helps to explain the shame of adultery and the corresponding pride in successfully controlling a substantial family and appearing to others as a man of power. And as such it provides a ground plan for most men’s (and presumably many women’s) behavior whenever that behavior was regarded as possibly coming under public scrutiny.

We might refer to this set of protocols as “what will the neighbors think.” They are not moral rules determining one’s own conduct, except insofar as that conduct will be available to and assessed by the community. Knowing them gives us a firm idea of community values, but not necessarily an account of individual or private behavior.

Artemidoros, Ventriloquist

One final section of these chapters, in which Artemidoros suddenly and strangely sounds like a fundamentalist preacher, requires a closer look in order for us to draw some lessons concerning Artemidoros’ systematic use of physis. His writing often slips into a ventriloquial mode, when he supplies the voice of the dreaming soul itself explaining why it symbolized x by y. “Dogs often indicate a fever because of the star Scirios, which is a cause of fever and is called by some the Dog” (1.11 end). “Bed bugs symbolize depression and anxieties, since like anxieties they keep us awake; they also indicate displeasure and disgruntlement on the part of some members of the household, as a rule among the women” (3.8). Walking on the sea is a good dream for a man who wishes to go abroad, particularly if he is going to sail: the dream foretells a high degree of safety; it is also a good dream for a slave and for a man who has decided to marry: the slave will control his master and the man will control his wife, since the sea is like a master because of its power and like a woman because of its wetness” (3.16).

Such supplied connections belong to the realm of attiología, which as we have seen is always a difficult and relatively uncertain operation. Without necessarily endorsing the associations and evaluations behind the connection,

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*And it is sometimes brought into that sphere of intelligibility by medical discourse, which postulated enlarged, penis-like discharges on some women (Philomenous ap. Aetios 16.103, Paul of Aegina 6.70), or by fictional accounts, such as the fifth of Lucian’s Dialogues of the Courtesans, in which one shaven-headed prostitute strips on a dido to mount another woman.

1For the general tendency, see Halperin 1989: 29–36.

2Competition was so deep-seated a cultural reflex that Galen recommends a program of self-control in these terms: when we practice moderation in food, drink, and sex, “we should not compare ourselves to the uncivilized; it is not enough to surpass them in self-control and moderation; rather we should first of all strive competitively to outdo people committed to the same moderation—for such competition is an excellent thing—and next we strive to surpass ourselves” (de proprietatibus animi causaque effectuum cognitio et curatio, vol. 5, pp. 32–3 Kühn). Also revealing on the connection between pleasure and dominance is Aristotle’s remark: “Winning (nikēn) is sweet—for everyone, not just for those ambitious to win (philomaios); it produces a feeling of superiority, for which all people have a desire (philothumian), either moderately or more so” (Rhet. 1.11: 1370a32, cf. 1371b28 on the pleasure of criticizing one’s neighbors).

* A distinguished prophet in Rome had amassed wealth and prestige but it did him no good, for the outcome of a dream was that his wife stopped loving him and betrayed him with another man, so that he left the city in shame (5.69).
Artemidoros frequently reports some common belief available for the psyche to play with. It is this feature which makes Artemidoros such an invaluable window onto popular lore and perceptions. The multiple associations available for the penis are a case in point, and it is worth quoting in full:

The penis is like a man’s parents since it contains the generative code (spermatikos logos), but also like his children since it is their cause. It is like his wife and girlfriend since it is useful for sex. It is like his brothers and all blood relations since the meaning of the entire household depends on the penis. It signifies strength and the body’s manhood, since it actually causes these; for this reason some people call it their “manhood” (andrea). It resembles reason and education since, like reason (logos), it is the most generative thing of all. . . . It further suggests surplus and possession since it sometimes opens out and sometimes is relaxed and it can produce and eject. It is like hidden plans since both plans and the penis are called mēde; and it is analogous to poverty, slavery, and imprisonment since it is called “necessity” and is a symbol of constraint. It is like the respect of being held in honor, since it is called “reverence” (aidēs) and “respect.” (1.45)

In his long analysis of mother-son incest he distinguishes the various positions and modes of copulation—face to face, from the rear, both standing upright, mother on her knees, mother on top “riding cavalry,” many different positions in succession, not omitting fellatio. In evaluating the sense of these he remarks that “some say the frontal position is according to nature (kata phusin)” (1.79: 91.12).

That overheard legislative voice, dictating proper sexual activity, speaks again at greater length in the discussion of the “many and various positions,” which essentially means treating one’s mother like a prostitute. “That the other positions are human inventions prompted by insolence, dissipation, and debauchery and that the frontal position alone is taught by nature is clear from the other animals. For all species employ some regular position and do not alter it, because they follow the rationale (logos) which is according to nature,” etc. (1.79: 94.13). This is not Artemidoros speaking in his own person but rather his reading of some common values and attitudes that must be supplied to support his empirical observation that when sons dream of whoring around with their mothers no good follows. When he calls the use of any other position than the frontal unnatural, he is making use of a “found” piece of thought, an item circulating in the discourse of his day. He may also happen to have believed it himself when thinking about his own practices, but this is not something we can know; and the significant fact is that his interpretive system is not based on this use of “nature,” but rather on an understanding of “nature” to mean the conventionally bounded field of human hierarchy. Once again, “nature” stands for “culture.”

There are three conclusions to be drawn from the study of Artemidoros’ Oneirokritika in regards to things erotic in the second century C.E. First, it is uniquely informative about the perceived public meanings of sexual activity. Artemidoros’ empirical stance allows us to grasp a general semantics of sex in the ancient world usually obscured by the tendentious treatment of the moralists. The protocols are that sexual contact is understood in public contexts as male-initiated, phallos-centered, and structured around the act of penetration; all acts that conform to these protocols are relatively non-problematic (kata nonon); the only acts for which a general horror could be assumed are incest and oral-genital contact, and, lastly, there is an implicit presumption that sexual identity does not organize the person but is peripheral to the central goals and worries which are focused on survival, public status, jockeying for place in social hierarchies at the expense of fellow competitors, the stability and prospering of patriarchal families in a hostile environment.

Second, Artemidoros uses the word “nature” not as a value judgment but as a category term to mark an important boundary in this field of social signification. By “unnatural” he simply means that certain acts are either impossible or irrelevant, that is, they are insignificant within the terms of the social meaning of sex. Thus, Artemidoros in his own way illustrates once more the theme that “nature” means culture, but with the interesting twist that culture (his “nature”) includes both the conventional (kata nonon) and the unconventional (para nonon), for both those categories fall under the “natural” (kata phusin). But at the same time that Artemidoros’ “nature” is used to organize fundamental social values and disvalues in the public domain, his quotation of a sermon on nature’s law concerning the only proper position for human sexual intercourse reminds us that his contemporaries could draw the noose with varying degrees of strictness. Moralists intending to legislate proper behavior regularly and easily appeal to “nature” when they want to mark one of their recommendations as fundamental and unarguable.

Finally, it may be suggested that Artemidoros’ survey escapes not only the usual charges we bring against moralistic writers but also the elite and intellectualist biases which typify so much ancient writing. Artemidoros’ Dream Analysis “lets us see certain generally accepted schemas of evaluation. And one can affirm these are very near to the general principles which already in the classical period organized the moral experience of aphrodisia. Artemidoros’ book is therefore a landmark. It testifies to a scheme of thinking that was long-enduring and current in his day” (Foucault 1986: 15). Over against these perennial evaluations we may plot the degrees of deviance contained in the arguments, critiques, and utopias of various philosophers and moral historians.

Along the same lines, the impression is worth recording that our modern impetus to locate changes, to write all kinds of history as a story of development and transition, has probably led to deep falsifications at least in the study of Mediterranean cultural patterns. The fourth century B.C.E. and
the second century C.E. are two periods from which numerous written documents are extant, and this contingent fact offers an almost irresistible temptation to scholars of those periods to manufacture stories about social changes supposedly brought on by sophists and christians, respectively. We should at least keep in mind the possibility that the debates of philosophers and the soap-box oratory of moralists, while they may tell us much about the formation of a class of intellectuals and about competition for ideological hegemony, are of little consequence in describing the beliefs and practices of the population at large.

2

Laying Down the Law:
The Oversight of Men’s Sexual Behavior in Classical Athens

Simply knowing the protocols does not tell us how people behaved. We must attempt to see through and beyond social prescriptions, however widely held and publicly unquestioned, to that usually unspoken fund of knowledge about their application, their bending, their observance “in the breach,” and the hidden agenda they sometimes concealed.

There is a relatively dense record of literary and social data for the Athenian polis in the years 430–330 B.C.E., and its sexual prescriptions have been read to good effect against the honor/shame system of morality in a scarcity economy by Alvin Gouldner, though he is not good on things sexual, by K. J. Dover in his Greek Popular Morality, and by Michel Foucault in The Use of Pleasure. I propose to take a closer look at the social operations by which deviance was articulated, inspected, and managed in that community during the period when the nomos/plousis contrast was supposedly well established, paying attention not to the statements of its intellectuals but to the everyday functioning of the community and in particular to its practices of “self-control” (or control of selves).

The exposition is in three sections. I begin with the cultural images of right and wrong manhood, and try to illustrate how they are at times loose-fitting hand-me-downs that do not reveal the shape of individual behavior. The fundamental protocols are personified, positively, in the figure of the hoplite (citizen soldier, wealthy enough to provide himself with a set of armor) and, negatively, in the kinaidos. The latter constitutes a powerful image—whether for serious reproach or humor—of a socially and sexually deviant male. The meaning of the term will be explored below. It is important, however, to note at once that the meaning of kinaidos is distinct from that of “homosexual” in modern parlance. Scholars of recent sex–gender history have asserted that pre-modern systems classified not persons but acts and that “the” homosexual as a person-category is a recent invention. The kinaidos, to be sure, is not a “homosexual” but neither is he just an ordinary guy who now and then decided to commit a kinaidic act. The conception of a kinaidos was of a man socially deviant in his entire being, principally