

TREES, INTESTINES AND WILLIAM THE CONQUEROR*

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Before modern times, a ruler needed more than election in order to get public approval. It was supposed to be proved that ruling was a certain destiny for the ruler by blood or divine approval. The Normans, especially after they conquered and began to rule England in 1066, needed legitimacy as well. Some Norman chronicles used dreams and prophecy, as did many other dynasties' chronicles.¹ The current study will focus on the dream of Herleva, mother of William the Conqueror; its content, and its meaning. The accounts of William of Malmesbury, Wace, and Benoît de Saint-Maure will be the sources for the dream. I will argue that the dream of Herleva itself and its content are not related randomly. They have a function and a meaning affected by historical background of Europe.

According to the chronicle sources, Herleva or Arlette, was a daughter of a burgess² and a *pollincter*, who prepared corpses for burial, named Fulbert.³ She was living at Falaise where William was born in 1027-1028.⁴ She immediately attracted Robert, William's father; as soon as they met. Robert took her to his bed. One of these occasions was special because Herleva had an exceptional dream. This dream was about their future son, William the Conqueror.

The dream of Herleva is transmitted to us through three different versions

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¹ The writer works on a comparative history of founding dreams and this paper is a part of this work.

² Wace, *The History of the Norman People: Wace's Roman de Rou*, The Boydell Press, Woodbridge 2004, p. 122.

³ Van Houts and others, 'The Origins of Herleva, Mother of William the Conqueror' *The English Historical Review*, 101, Oxford 1986, p. 399-404.

⁴ David C. Douglas, *William the Conqueror: The Norman Impact upon England*, Eyre and Spottiswoode, London 1964, p. 15.

in three different sources. The earliest source of the dream is William of Malmesbury's *Gesta Regum Anglorum*. Taking *Gesta Regum Anglorum* as their source, the other two sources are Wace's *Roman de Rou* and Benoît de Saint-Maure. These latter two works both are in Old French and records the dream somewhat differently.

The earliest record refer to dream is William the Malmesbury whose work is dated to 1125:

“The boy, he had by her, was called William after his great-great-grandfather, whose great future was foretold to his mother in her dream in which she saw her own intestines extend and spread through all Normandy and England. The child himself, newly born, as well adventured to the ground where he filled his both hand with the rushes covering the floor and tightly struggled with what he had seized. This scene was happily witnessed by the nurses and the midwife too declared a precursory omen that the boy was to be a king.”

“Puer ex ea editus Willelmus a nomine abau dictus, cuius magnitudinem futuram matris somnium portendebat, quo intestina sua per totam Normanniam et Angliam extendi et dilatari iuderat. Ipso quoque momento quo, partu laxato, in uitam effesus pusio humum attingit, ambas manus iunco quo pauimentū puluis cauebatur implueit, stricte quod corripuerat compugnans. Ostentum uisum mulierculis laeto plausu gannientibus; obsterix quoque fausto omine acclamat puerum regem futurum.”⁵

The second mention is recorded in around 1160's or 1170's by Wace whose patron was King Henry:

“... the maiden fell asleep. She slept beside the count and the noble baron lay there patiently. When she had slept for a short while, she let out a lament because of a dream she had had and started in such a way that the count felt it. He asked her why it was that she lamented so and started. ‘My lord’, she said, ‘I do not know, unless it is because I dreamt that a tree, which was growing upwards towards the sky, was emerging from my body. The whole of Normandy was covered by its shadow.

‘All will be well’, he said, ‘if God pleases.’ He comforted her and drew her towards him.”⁶

⁵ William of Malmesbury, *Gesta Regum Anglorum: The History of the English Kings* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1998), p. 426.

⁶ Wace, *History of the Norman*, p. 123. ‘Quant ele ont dormi un petit, D'une auision k'ele vit, Geta

As in William of Malmesbury, the account does not end here. It continues to emphasize the destiny of the infant:

“From this Arlette a son was born who was called William; when he was born and emerged from his mother’s womb, he was placed in a litter of straw and left alone in the straw. The woman who first picked him up – I do not know how it happened or what was meant by it – laid him in a bed of straw while she went somewhere else. The child tossed and turned until he was covered by the straw; he had his arms full of straw, pulled it towards him and placed it over himself. The old lady came and took the child, whose arms were full of straw.

‘Come on now’, she said, ‘what a man you are going to be! You will conquer so much and have so much! You have soon got hold of your rightful property with your hands and your arms full of it.’⁷

The latest primary source that speaks of the Herleva’s dream is Benoît de Saint-Maure’s opus, *Chronique des Ducs de Normandie*, which is dated to 1180-1200: “Now I saw in my sleep that a tree issued from me, so large, so tall, so straight and so wonderful that its shadow reached the sky here above us, which startled me. It overshadowed the whole of Normandy and the sea and the great English land.”⁸

Those who read these statements can easily see some common figures and paths in the dreams and after the dreams. First of all, the dreamer and leading role is Herleva, the mother of William. Second, she dreams something coming out of her body and rising over a certain land, Normandy and England. After the dream, in Malmesbury and in Wace, an omen part comes. The omen part cannot be viewed separately and must be taken into account as an explanation of the dre-

un plaint è tressailli, Si ke li Quens bien le senti, Demanda li ceo ke desveit, ' Re si pleigneit è tressailleit. Sir, dist-ele, jo ne sai Se n'est pur ceo ke songiè ai K'un arbre de mun cors isseit, Ri vers li ciels amint creisseit; Del umbre ki entour aloiit, Tute Normendie aumbrouit. ÇO iert bien, dist-i, se dex plaist; Cunforta la, vers sei la traist. D'icele Arlot fu un filz né/ Ki Willealme fu apelé. Quant Willealme prismes naski, Re del ventre sa mère issi; En viez estramier fu muciez, Et en l'estrain fu seul lessiez. Li enfenz taill eschancierá, Ke en l'estrain s'envelopa; De Testrain aJ plain li bras pris, A sei l'a traisi ' è sur sei mis. La vieille vint è prist l'enfant Od l'estrain plain sez bras portant: Kel Ber, dist-ele, tu seras. Tant cunquerras è tant auras; Tost as eu de tun purchaz Pleines les mains è pleins tes bras!.' Robert Wace, vol I of *Le Roman de Rou et Des Dux de Normandie*, ed. Edouard Frere, Rouen 1827, p. 397-399.

⁷ Wace, *History of the Norman*, p. 123.

⁸ Benoît, *Chronique des Ducs de Normandie*, Universitatis Regiae Upsaliensis, Uppsala 1954, p. 335. I am grateful to Dr. Robert Bartlett for the translation of the given part of *Chronique des Ducs de Normandie*.

“C'un arbre eisseit de mai si grant. Si long, si dreit, si merveillos/ Qu'au ciel ataigneit ci sor nos. Son umbre, dunt sui effreie, Aumbrouit tote Normendie E mer e la grant terre Engleise.”

am. The leading role in these parts is taken by midwives and their common points come from these midwives, who say that the infant is not someone else but a true deserver of his achievements. The midwives prophesize this because, in both sources, the infant immediately struggles and grasps something around and his arms become full of it. These are the mutual elements of the after dream in the sources.

On the other hand, the three sources have some differences in their statements as well. Firstly, William of Malmesbury says that it is the intestines coming out of Herleva's body while Wace and Benoît de Saint-Maure say that a tree rises from her. Second, William of Malmesbury and Benoît say the thing emerging from Herleva's body extends over both Normandy and England while in Wace it overshadows only Normandy.

Evaluation of Different Narrations of Herleva's Dream

The mother of William the Conqueror, Herleva or Arlette, sleeps with Duke Robert I and dreams a dream full of symbols. This dream is recorded by three different sources. The sources cited above have similar and different figures and paths while depicting this dream. In order to understand these dreams and their features, we must look at dream interpretations of that time, historical context, and the cultural environment that the dreams emerge.

Intestines

It is better to start with the most remarkable difference. William of Malmesbury, the earliest source, says it is Herleva's intestines⁹ coming out of her body while other two sources claim that it is a tree growing from her body. In a world like Middle Ages, symbols are extremely important; both intestines and trees, unquestionably, are symbols. Based on the context, dream interpretation would be the first place to look in order to understand the purpose and the meaning of these symbols.

Not only today but also in medieval times, intestines would be a strange thing to dream of, especially if these intestines extend over geographical regions. Why does William of Malmesbury uses intestines in the dream in order to explain his sentence about William the Conqueror, *William, whose future glory was portended to his*

⁹ Malmesbury uses the latin word *intestina* that exactly indicates to intestines, according to *Dictionary of Medieval Latin*. R. E. Latham, D. R. Howlett, and R. K. Ashdowne, eds., *Dictionary of Medieval Latin*, Brepols Publishers, Belgium accessed March 22, 2016, <http://clt.brepolis.net.ezproxy.st-andrews.ac.uk/dmlbs/pages/QuickSearch.aspx>.

mother by a dream' Obviously, the intestines symbolise William, her future child, and their moving out of Herleva's stretched body and extending over Normandy and England is for William's duchy and his achievement in England.

The logical inference revealed above cannot explain everything in this case. After identifying the intestines as the symbol of William the Conqueror, it is impossible to escape from the question whether it is a random choice or if there is a relation between intestines and William. When a dream is the case, dream interpretations and the dream books in the Middle Ages would be the perfect area to apply. So, we can see if intestines as a symbol are chosen randomly or by purpose.

In the middle ages three types of dream interpretation manual are widespread. They are the 'dream alphabet' or 'chancebook,' the 'dreamlunar,' and the 'dreambook proper.' To show their extensity numerically based on the surviving manuscripts, there are thirteen manuscripts of the dream alphabet and their translation from Latin into English, German, French, Romanian and Welsh. According to the list of Max Förster, Lynn Thorndike, and Pearl Kibre, more than twenty dreamlunar are extant today, as well as vernacular translations. Claiming its author as Daniel, copies of the *Somniale Danielis* are much more popular,¹⁰ with copies numbering over seventy and the innumerable translations into vernacular languages.¹¹ Obviously, medieval people were very attracted by dream interpretation.

Before looking at these sources, the question that needs to be answered is whether all these three kind of dreambooks related and useful to the current study. The 'dream alphabet' and 'chancebook', hence the name, is nothing to do with the content of the dream. 'It consists of a list of potential dream significations keyed to the letters of alphabet.' It is a process of randomness so the dream content is not their concern. The 'dreamlunar' is similar. Putting dream content on one side, the dreamlunars derive meaning from the phase of the moon while a person has a dream. For instance, regardless of a dream's content, dreaming at the first moon means joy.¹² Consequently, the dream alphabets and the dreamlunars are not related to this study because they are not concerned with the dreams' content.

¹⁰ Lawrance Thomas Martin, *The Somniale Daniels, An Edition of a Medieval Latin Dream Interpretation Handbook*, PhD thesis, University of Wisconsin-Madison 1977, p. 1.

¹¹ Steven F. Kruger, *Dreaming in the Middle Ages*, Antony Rowe Ltd, Wiltshire 1992, p. 8-11.

¹² Kruger, *Dreaming*, 8; Lynn Thorndike, *A History of Magic and Experimental Science During the First Thirteen Centuries of Our Era*, Colombia University, New York 1923, p. 295.

On the other hand, the *Somniale Daniel*, as a ‘dreambook proper’, has a different outlook on dreams than the other two. Even though its method is almost as rigid as the others, it makes prophecies based on contents of dreams. Its first Latin manuscripts come from tenth century.¹³ Both as a common dreambook in the Middle Ages and as a dreambook focussing on content, the *Somniale Danielis* is a perfect candidate to understand if the intestines, as a symbol, comes from classical dream interpretation tradition.

In the fullest version of the *Somniale* and in its section for the letter ‘I’ there is an interpretation of seeing intestines in a dream: ‘*Intestina sua videre: secreta sua manifestari*’.¹⁴ The line can be translated as that seeing one’s own intestines means one’s own secret is to become known. Easily understandable, observing somebody’s own intestines in his own dream is neither something required to be in joy nor to be able to explain the relation between William and his mother’s intestines. According to the *Somniale Danielis*, intestines clearly symbolize the secrets of the dreamer.

When it comes to interpretation of dream content and complexity, no classical account can compete against the work of Artemidorus, which is the oldest Greek dream interpretation manual.¹⁵ *Oneirocritica*, *The Interpretation of Dreams*, by Artemidorus is a primary and a widely circulated work of the Middle Ages. Its earliest manuscripts come from 11th century, relatively late.¹⁶ Artemidorus is from Ephesus or Daldis (both in modern Turkey). He lived and wrote his dream interpretations in the second century AD, based on the rich dream interpretation tradition of Greece¹⁷ and the ancient near east¹⁸ and his own experiences. His dream book, *Oneirocritica*, consists of totally five parts.¹⁹ It was translated into Arabic in the ninth century. Moreover, Arabic and Christian dream interpretation

¹³ Martin, *Somniale Danielis*, p. 67.

¹⁴ Martin, *Somniale Danielis*, p. 285.

¹⁵ Anthony Grafton, Glenn Most, and Salvatore Settis, *The Classical Tradition*, Harvard Collage, USA 2010, p. 285.

¹⁶ S. R. F. Price, “The Future of Dreams: from Freud to Artemidorus,” in *Studies in Ancient Greek and Roman*, ed. Robin Osborne, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge 2004, p. 253. Also, for manuscripts and editions of Artemidorus look at Claes Blum, *Studies in the Dream-Book of Artemidorus*, Almqvist&Wiksell Boktryckeri-A.-B, Uppsala 1936.

¹⁷ Artemidorus, *The Interpretation of Dreams: Oneirocritica*, trans. Robert J. White, Noyes Press, New Jersey 1975, p. 6-7.

¹⁸ Martin, *Somniale Danielis*, p. 5.

¹⁹ “Artemidorus Daldianus,” Vol I of *The New Encyclopaedia Britannica*, ed. Robert McHenry, Encyclopaedia Britannica Inc., London 1993.

sources of the Middle Ages are inspired by Artemidorus' work and repeat it on several occasions.²⁰ As an important source of dream interpretation tradition of the Islamic and European worlds, *Oneirocritica of Artemidorus* is a reference guide in medieval times and able to explain the analogy between William and the intestines of his mother.

In his *Oneirocritica* Artemidorus refers to inward parts of body in one place and in another place specifically to intestines:

'If a man dreams that he has been cut open and that he sees his inward parts, each according to its nature and its proper place, it is auspicious for a childless man or for a poor man. For the former will see children of his own; the latter, possessions of his own. For children, like the inward parts of the body, are also called *σπλάγχνα* and, just as possessions lie in a house, so, too, the inward parts lie in the stomach.'²¹

'A man dreamt that an eagle had ripped out his intestines with its talons. It carried them through the city to the theatre, which was crowded, and displayed to the spectators. This man was childless. After the dream he had a child who later became illustrious and famous in the city. For the eagle signified the year within which his child would be born. The intestines signified the child himself (for it is customary to refer to a child by the same word.) The fact that the intestines were carried into the theatre signified the brilliant career and fame of the child.'²²

Could William of Malmesbury have been inspired by Artemidorus while writing the dream of Herleva? He is regarded 'as the best-read European of the century', that is, the twelfth century, when the ancient texts of paganism and Christianity were rediscovered and increasingly available.²³ Although William's main reading area was Latin Classics, mainly history,²⁴ Artemidorus and his study may have had an impact on him.

Nonetheless, this does not seem possible. Even though there was some Greek education in England such as the school in Cantenbury in seventh century, Greek

²⁰ Grafton, Most, and Settis, *Classical*, p. 285.

²¹ Artemidorus, *Interpretation of Dreams*, p. 38; Daniel E. Harris-MacCoy, *Artemidorus' Oneirocritica: Text, Translation, and Commentary*, Oxford University Press, Oxford 2012, p. 97.

²² Artemidorus, *Interpretation of Dreams*, p. 237; Harris-MacCoy, *Artemidorus' Oneirocritica*, 393.

²³ R. M. Thomson, *William of Malmesbury*, The Boydell Press, Woodbridge 2003, p. 40.

²⁴ Thomson, *William of Malmesbury*, p. 48.

sources are very limited even at that time.²⁵ When it comes to the age of William of Malmesbury, it is a known fact that Greek and Greek sources are much more alien to England scholarship than in the seventh century. Moreover, thanks to the books and records descended from him, we know that William of Malmesbury knows Greek characters, some vocabulary, can understand simple sentences in Greek but not further.²⁶ Also, there is no dream interpretation book attracting the attention among the books he has read.²⁷ Thus, Artemidorus is not the direct source of William. His source must be oral or Latin written dream interpretation tradition.

William of Malmesbury creates a new founding dream based on his readings of history and maybe a Latin dream interpretation book that we cannot trace today or oral sources. As a good history reader and historian, he is familiar with the founding myths and founding dreams which are a part of some of these myths. He puts together the concept of founding dream and the dream interpretation of Greek tradition. Artemidorus says intestines symbolise a child 'for it is customary to refer to a child by the same word'.²⁸ This is directly about the Greek language itself so that it is hardly possible that this symbol comes any other tradition. Indeed, Latin dream interpretation is based on Greek dream interpretation.

In order to understand this cultural exchange, a brief dream interpretation history needs to be borne in mind. The history of dream interpretation begins with the history itself. Today, we have Sumerians' and Babylonians' dream interpretation samples and a book of dream interpretation from Assyrians.²⁹ These are the first civilizations of human history and the next civilization, the Greek, becomes the next circle of the dream interpretation chain. As the earliest extended written work, Artemidorus' boook is the peak of this deep tradition. Other than occupational dream interpreters in market places, he also mentions some names such as Antiphon of Athens, Demetrius of Phalerum, Alexander of Myndus, Phoebus of Antioch, Artemon of Miletus as his sources.³⁰ Many of Artemidorus'

²⁵ Martin, *Somniale Danielis*, p. 68-69.

²⁶ Thomson, *William of Malmesbury*, p. 62.

²⁷ Thomson, *William of Malmesbury*, p. 40-69.

²⁸ Artemidorus, *Interpretation of dreams*, p. 237.

²⁹ A. Leo Oppenheim, "The Interpretation of Dreams in the Ancient Near East: With a Translation of an Assyrian Dream-Book," *Transactions Of The American Philosophical Society*, 1956, p.179-355.

³⁰ Artemidorus, *Interpretation of dreams*, p. 6-7.

sources are originally oriental.³¹ Thus, the dream interpretation tradition coming all the way down from Sumerians kept living in Greek tradition.

As explained above, this Greek tradition seems imperfectly transferred to Latin tradition. This is because Greek was a closed case through most of the middle ages. For medieval copyists, Greek is an 'unreadable' language. While Latin education has an unbroken tradition, Greek is a dead language in Western Europe in the middle age.³² Probably the *Somniale Danielis* is translated into Latin from Greek in seventh century England³³ and became the most common dream interpretation book for the Middle Ages, surviving in a striking number of Latin manuscripts. In fact, the oldest Latin *Somniale* manuscript comes from 9th century while the oldest Greek *Somniale* comes from 15th century.³⁴ Most of Latin *Somniale* copies are found in England, the homeland of William of Malmesbury.³⁵ This tradition may be how intestines arrive to William as a symbol of child.

Even though *Somniale Danielis* is the only example of a dream interpretation book sample for a possible connection between dream interpretation tradition and medieval England and William of Malmesbury, when it comes to dream theory, there are several samples. Steven F. Kruger shows us clear similarities of a fourteenth century English poem, Geoffrey Chaucer's *House of Fame* and a fourth century Latin poet and poem, Prudentius and his '*Hymnus ante Somnum*' and says: '*We see that specific bits of dream lore, and even whole theories, have been transmitted across the centuries*'³⁶. Another book that Kruger presents as a transmitter of dream theory into medieval Europe is Calcidius' *Commentary on the Timaeus*.³⁷ This is obviously on the reading list of William of Malmesbury.³⁸ One of the books Kruger mentions deserves a close attention because it contains more than dream theory. Macrobius' *Commentary* is not only a book of dream interpretation theory also it comments on dream of Scipio which is taken from Cicero's work. This dream has nothing common with Williams of Malmesbury's dream in content; however, it is a dream of

³¹ Martin, *Somniale Danielis*, p. 5; Arthur S. Osley, 'Notes on Artemidorus' "Oneirocritica", *The Classical Journal*, 59, 1963, p. 67.

³² Gilbert Highet, *The Classical Tradition: Greek and Roman Influences on Western Literature*, Oxford University Press, London 1951, p. 13.

³³ Martin, *Somniale Danielis*, p. 67-69.

³⁴ Steven Michael Oberhelman, *The Oneirocritic Literature of the Late Roman and Byzantine Eras of Greece*, PhD Thesis, The University of Minnesota 1981, p. 53.

³⁵ Martin, *Somniale Danielis*, p. 100-125.

³⁶ Kruger, *Dreaming*, p. 57-58.

³⁷ Kruger, *Dreaming*, p. 59.

³⁸ Thomson, *William of Malmesbury*, p. 53.

prophecy and future glory as well. This book is known in Wales, from the eleventh century at the latest.³⁹ Thus, there is a continuation of dream interpretation in Latin language in Europe even though it is limited. Probably these sources somehow impressed the mind of William of Malmesbury.

There are Greek dream interpretation sources, including a Greek version of Daniel's dreambook, whose numbers are not much more than the fingers of one hand. Based on the work of Steven Michael Oberhelman, *The Oneirocritic Literature of the Late Roman and Byzantine Eras of Greece*, there are six dreambooks written up to the twelfth century when the dream of Herleva recorded for the first time by William of Malmesbury. Some of them have some similar content with the variations of the dream of Herleva. However, besides being in Greek, the extant manuscripts of these books are dated between thirteenth and seventeenth centuries.⁴⁰ Using these manuscripts thus may not provide a useful guide.

Consequently, the only dream interpretation book completely overlaps with William of Malmesbury's narration is *Oneirocritica* of Artemidorus. However, the unavailability of Greek sources in medieval England, William's failing in Greek, and the fact that the earliest Latin translation of Artemidorus in the sixteenth century⁴¹ are the reasons why a direct influence of Artemidorus on William is unlikely. When it comes to indirect influence, it seems possible. That is because, even it is not as a whole, the Greek dream interpretation tradition translated into Latin and these translations were in use in medieval England. Being in the first place *Somniale Danielis*, there are books referring to dream interpretation theory as well. Thus, William could have learned the connection between intestines and a child through this tradition or there may have been a whole or partial Latin translation of Artemidorus at that time.⁴²

To make it clear, there are three possibilities for the appearance of the intestines in William of Malmesbury. Firstly, the weakest possibility is that a whole or a partial translation of Artemidorus that we do not know about today somehow reached William. Second, that intestines as a symbol of a child in dream interpre-

³⁹ Kruger, *Dreaming*; Alison Peden, "Science and Philosophy in Wales at the Time of the Norman Conquest: A Macrobius Manuscript from Llanbadan," *Cambridge Medieval Celtic Studies*, 2, Cambridge 1981.

⁴⁰ Oberhelman, *Oneirocritic Literature*.

⁴¹ Grafton, Most, and Settis, *Classical*, p. 285.

⁴² It seems there was some part of Artemidorus available in Latin in Byzantium. Roger A. Pack, "Pascalis Romanus and the Text of Artemidorus," *Transactions and Proceedings of the American Philological Association*, 96, Baltimore 1995, p. 291-295.

tation was already something known to the men educated through classical sources and Malmesbury uses this tradition. Third, that Malmesbury does not have to know about the dreamy allegory between a child and intestines because they are both settled in the womb of a woman, so thinking in that way he symbolizes Herleva's children with her intestines. After all, the second scenario is much more possible than the others.

Tree

How can one explain the symbol 'tree' used by Wace and Benoît instead of intestines? Although these sources tell about the dream, the symbol of intestines changes to a tree in their narrative. Both of the sources are dated later than *Gesta Regum Anglorum* and the earlier one is Wace's account. This situation presents two explanations on the origins of Harleva's dream as in Wace and Benoît.

The dream does not appear in any source earlier than William the Malmesbury's *Gesta Regum*. Moreover, since 'Wace and His Authorities' by J. H. Round⁴³ it is known that *Gesta Regum Anglorum* is one of the sources of Wace's *Roman de Rou*. Therefore, Wace takes the dream myth either through it or through oral tradition, which is also a source of Wace. The former option is more possible than the latter because The Normans, at that time, needs to legitimize their hegemony on England. Thus, William of Malmesbury may be assumed to be the source of the dream myth which legitimates Norman hegemony in England.

Either intestines were turned into a tree by Wace and Benoît or oral tradition told the story with a tree. There may be an explanation of why they chose a tree as a symbol instead of intestines. Artemidorus, as a unique source of the tradition, would be the first source to look at for the tree symbol as it is still a dream. Indeed, there are two sections about growing a plant or tree out of the body in *The Interpretation of Dreams* of Artemidorus:

"If a man dreams that a plant has sprung up from his body, it signifies, according to some people, that he will die... There is, moreover, a difference in the plants themselves, so that sometimes they do not indicate death but rather incisions and surgical operations."⁴⁴

⁴³ Jean Blacker, *Wace: a Critical Bibliography*, Société Jersiaise, St Héliier 2008; J. H. Round, 'Wace and His Authorities', 1893, accessed March 23, 2016, <http://chr.oxfordjournals.org/content/VIII/XXXII/677.full.pdf>.

⁴⁴ Artemidorus, *Interpretation of dreams*, p. 169; Harris-Maccooy, *Artemidorus' Oneirocritica*, p. 283.

“A man dreamt that an olive tree was growing out of his head. He devoted himself zealously to the study of philosophy, both to the teachings and the way of life that it entails. For the olive tree is evergreen, firm, and sacred to Athena. And the goddess is thought to be the embodiment of wisdom.”⁴⁵

These are the only records of Artemidorus on a plant or tree growing out of a human body. Obviously, it is not even a close meaning of a child and his future sovereignty. In the former example a plant symbolises a death or surgical operation while in the latter example olive tree symbolises wisdom as it symbolises Athena. Both interpretations are irrelevant to the image and to the function of the dream and the tree in the dream.

Because it is Latin and much more available for medieval England, the *Somnialae Danielis* may be more helpful on the explanation of the tree image. While there is none of a tree image growing from a human body, *Somniale's* fullest manuscript has an explanation for fruitful tree: *Arbores fructuosas videre: lucrum*.⁴⁶ It means that fruitful trees indicate to a profit.

Certainly, dreaming a growing tree is something good for the future of the dreamer according to the *Somniale Danielis*. However, in the dream of Herleva, the story and the tree image is much more complicated than this. Therefore, to find the origin of a tree symbolizing a child and emerging from body requires a broader looking of twelfth century European cultural life.

On the other hand, coming from another ancient Greek source Herodotus' Histories information about the Median King Astyages may give a better footprint to trace the dream:

“He dreamt that there grew from his daughter a vine,⁴⁷ which covered the whole of all Asia. having seen this vision, and imparted it to the interpreters of dreams, he sent to the Persians for his daughter, then near her time, and when she came kept her guarded, desiring to kill whatever child she might bear: for the interpreters declared that his daughter's offspring should rule in his place.”⁴⁸

⁴⁵ Artemidorus, *Interpretation of dreams*, p. 231; Harris-Maccooy, *Artemidorus' Oneirocritica*, p. 379.

⁴⁶ Martin, *Somniale Danielis*, p. 265.

⁴⁷ The reader should know that vine is also an Ackhemenid royal symbol (Sec: Christopher Pelling, 'The Urine and the Vine: Astyages' Dreams art Heredotus' *The Classical Quarterly*, Vol. 46, No. 1. Cambridge 1996, p. 68-77). Also thanks to Pelling's article I noticed the dream in Electra of Sophocles. However, I could not evaluate it here because thir article was in the process of publication.

⁴⁸ *Herodotus*, Trans. A. D. Godley, William Heinemann Ltd, London 1946, p. 139.

Herodotus is translated into Latin by Valla and printed in 1474 for the first time. However, earlier there may be found piece by piece translation in monasteries throughout Europe. All we know is that obviously Wace knows a plant/tree coming out of a body means sovereignty. It is quite possible he has heard or read the story of Herodotus. So, there is another connection between Greek dream tradition and Herleva's dream. Nonetheless, one can find more in order to explain Herleva's dream with tree in the twelfth century.

Wace and Benoît lived in France and wrote in Old French. One assumes there is an image to inspire them to recount the dream of Herleva with a different element, which is a tree. Clearly, the cultural environment and inspiration are different for Wace and Benoît than for William of Malmesbury. So, the source of an image of that a tree coming out of a body is probably a figure known in France, just as intestines were known to William of Malmesbury.

Indeed, there is an image in the twelfth century France, which may have inspired Wace and Benoît. This image is the Tree of Jesse. In its conventional form, the Tree of Jesse is a depiction of Jesse of Bethlehem, the father of King David, and his lineage. The depiction consists of a tree emerging from the genitals of a recumbent and sleeping Jesse and the branches symbolizing descendants of Jesse until Mary and Jesus. The image of the Tree of Jesse began to be very popular at the beginning of the twelfth century, especially in France, the home of Wace and Benoît.

And there shall come forth a rod out of the stem of Jesse, and a branch shall grow out of his roots.' This passage is from the Book of Isaiah (11:1) and is recognized as the inspiration of the Tree of Jesse. Christians in the Middle Ages took this passage as Isaiah's information about the future holy kings descending from Jesse through David. Then, they embody this passage in the Tree of Jesse image. The earliest dated Tree of Jesse image, that is extant today, is in *Výsehrad Codex* of Bohemia dated to 1086. As the earliest image, it is admitted to reflect the common features of traditional copies.⁴⁹

The first Tree of Jesse does not have any other different aim than Herleva's tree. It is a part of 'a thematic grouping.' It is a legitimization and celebration of Vratislav II of Bohemia whose title changed from duke to king in 1086. 'The

⁴⁹ Jean Anne Hayes Williams, 'The Earliest Dated Tree of Jesse Image: Thematically Reconsidered', *Athanas* XVIII, 2000, p. 17.

uniqueness of this image lies in its function within a set of images, which are symbols of salvific leadership, divine election and medieval Christian kingship as a continuation of Old Testament kingship'.⁵⁰ Moreover, divine election and medieval Christian kingship are not the only reasons behind the deployment of the image.

In France the Cistercians had a significant role to play in the spread and development of the Tree of Jesse. Their aim was to emphasize Mary, the mother, and his son, Christ, who are descendants of Jesse. This is because they are fighting the Cathar belief that Christ is neither born to a woman nor from human flesh since the flesh pertained to the devil. This heretical belief grew stronger from the eleventh century. In order to fight against these heretics, the Cistercians, led by St Bernard, concentrated on the production of the Tree of Jesse images centralized around Mary and Jesus.⁵¹ So, from fifty years earlier than Wace's work, the Tree of Jesse image began to be a popular element in France. Originating from Bohemian religious art, the Tree of Jesse became very popular not only France but also the whole Europe and the British Isles. This propagation occurred within sixty years. In these years, the concept stayed the same but the composition expands.⁵² Especially, it becomes a frequent scene for the windows of cathedrals and abbeys in France and England during next decades. Even today, more than fifty examples of the Tree of Jesse still survive in the windows of the French churches.⁵³

Beyond all that, the twelfth and early thirteenth century witness an increased number of visual concepts that describes complex information. There is also a growing interest in biblical stories and their manifestation. The arboreal schemata are very common in the twelfth and the thirteenth century either to structure knowledge or to reveal the historical understanding '*as an ordered and teleological entity*'.⁵⁴ The emergence of the Tree of Jesse may be influenced by this stream as well.

⁵⁰ Williams, 'Earliest Dated', p. 20.

⁵¹ G. R. Dodwell, *The Pictorial Arts of the West 800-1200*, Yale University Press, New Haven and London 1993, p. 214-215.

⁵² Williams, 'Earliest Dated', p. 17.

⁵³ Marie-Pierre Gelin, "Stirps Jesse in Capite Ecclesiae: Iconographic and Liturgical Readings of the Tree of Jesse in Stained-Glass Windows," in *The Tree: Symbol, Allegory, and Mnemonic Device in Medieval Art and Thought*, ed. Pippa Saloni and Andrea Worm, Brepols, Belgium 2014, p. 13.

⁵⁴ Andrea Worm, "Arbor Autem Humanum Genus Significat: Trees of Genealogy and Sacred History in the Twelfth Century," in *The Tree: Symbol, Allegory, and Mnemonic Device in Medieval Art and Thought*, ed. Pippa Saloni and Andrea Worm, Brepols, Belgium 2014, p. 35-36.

Clearly, the image of the Tree of Jesse, beginning from the first half of the twelfth century, symbolizes both Mary's role in the birth of Christ and royal genealogy of Christian kingship from King David or his father Jesse of Bethlehem. In the twelfth century, the Monk Hervaas witnesses the overlapping dual meaning of the image: '*The Patriarch Jesse belonged to the royal family, that is why the root of Jesse signifies the lineage of kings. As to the rod, it symbolizes Mary as the flower symbolizes Jesus Christ*'.⁵⁵

This genealogy is, of course, such a lineage which all medieval Christian kings want to be part of.⁵⁶ Moreover, the Tree of Jesse is a popular image of being a legitimate king. Wace and Benoît, like the French and other continental Europeans, are familiar with this image. When Wace reads the expressions of William of Malmesbury, he understands that the dream is to legitimize the kingship of William the Conqueror. However, intestines, as a symbol, are too far away from him and his audience. Thus, he uses a much more meaningful symbol, inspired by the Tree of Jesse, much more efficacious to indicate that William is the true king of England.

William of Malmesbury was a highly educated writer, writing in Latin. Unlike William of Malmesbury, Wace and Benoît wrote in Old French which was a language of popular culture and the public. They almost certainly did not know Greek and about Greek sources such as *Oneirocritica* of Artemidorus and maybe knew about some piece of Herodotus' works.

Consequently, in the case of intestines turning into tree, there must be two scenarios. The first scenario is that Wace, the first source of the dream with the tree, reads William of Malmesbury's account while he writes *Roman de Rou*. He wants to take the dream of Herleva into his work; however, he cannot understand the function of the intestines in the dream. More likely, the intestines strikes him odd as a symbol of a child. Therefore, he saves the structure of the dream and only changes the intestines by being inspired by a similar but much more popular figure, the Tree of Jesse or maybe by Herodotus.

The second scenario is not much different than the first one. It is that even though Wace understands the intestines as a symbol of a child and does not regard

⁵⁵ Emile Male, *Religious Art in France in the Thirteenth Century*, trans. Dora Nussey, J. M. Dent and Sons Ltd, London 1913, p. 165.

⁵⁶ Williams, 'Earliest Dated', p. 18-20.

it as odd, he knows that it sounds strange for his readers and audiences. That is because he writes in Old French so his intended audience is lay people. In order to give the message of this dream to lay people, he thinks, he should find a more understandable symbol. At that time, there is already a popular image of something emerging from the body and it means lineage and sovereignty; and that is Jesse Tree. So, he converts the intestines to the tree. Then the message becomes more familiar and more understandable for the target group.

Briefly, the first recorder of Herleva's dream, William of Malmesbury, uses intestines as a symbol of a child, likely influenced by the dream interpretation tradition coming from Greek civilization. Following writers, Wace and Benoît, uses the tree as a symbol of lineage or a child while they tell about the dream of Herleva. The intestines turn into the tree in the hand of the French writers in the later twelfth century. This may be because of the Tree of Jesse which is very popular throughout Europe and especially in France. It has almost the same concept as the dream and a meaning of both genealogy of the Old Testament kings and Mary and Jesus as descendants of Jesse of Bethlehem. That is why a tree is a better symbol than intestines or a wine like in Herodotus for people in France to indicate that William the Conqueror and the Normans are the true Kings of England.

Tree's Extension

When it comes to the difference in the tree's extension, while the other sources assume Normandy and England, Wace's tree extends only over Normandy. Nonetheless, it is not a restriction of William the Conqueror's sovereignty in the future. Wace, as well, in the omen part clearly indicates, in the expressions of *'the old lady'*, that what William conquers in the future is what he already deserves. Therefore, other than tree and intestines, the last difference is just two different expressions of the same meaning. This makes them not a real difference.

The Prophecy

Although this paper focuses on the images in the dreams, the prophecy parts coming after the dreams should not be ignored. These prophecies are in the accounts of William of Malmesbury and Wace. Apart from an indication to the omen before the dream in Malmesbury's account, both accounts give the prophecy right after the dreams but not as a part of the dreams. Apparently, they are apart from the dreams; however, clearly, they are there in order to explain and interpret the meaning of the dream and emphasize it so they don't allow any doubt

in the message of the dream. They are the interpretations of the dream under the cover of prophecy.

Also, in classical civilizations, symbolic dreams come consecutively with their interpretation. Dream and its interpretation cannot be separated. That is because ‘*a dream without interpretation is likened to an unopened letter*’, according to the Babylonian Talmud. More importantly, classic dream interpretation tradition does not accept the dreams based on individual psychological experiences as a dream worthy of interpretation. Thus, a dream without interpretation may indicate that it is not a faithful dream but an evil one.⁵⁷

Moreover, in the prophecy part, three subjects are particularly worth concentrating on. The first one is that the dreams are not interpreted by anyone; however, the interpretation is presented as a prophecy after the delivery. The second subject is that a woman, the midwife, declares the prophecy. Here, so to speak, clearly there is a woman figure who has words to say on the destiny of a man, a king. There would be interesting outcomes, based on this point, if a comparative study emerges between the founding dream traditions.⁵⁸ The third subject is the timing of the prophecy. The midwife witnessing a child struggling and taking by handfuls something from the ground makes the prophecy. Thus, a new born child whose hand is full by grasping something indicates that he is to be a king or at least to be a great man. This must be a worldwide belief in medieval times because Genghiz Khan is born in a similar way, with a handful of blood too.⁵⁹ These are all noteworthy points in the prophecy part of the dream.

Conclusion

Symbols were important in the middle ages. In such a period, kings had to be a king by destiny more than by agreement, or at least it was supposed to seem that way. Thus, dreams and their interpretations were inevitable at that time.

Briefly, William of Malmesbury knew legitimizing power of the dream when he was recording it. He used his historical background and the elements of dream

⁵⁷ Patricia Cox Miller, *Dreams in Late Antiquity*, Princeton University Press, Princeton 1998, p. 74; Oppenheim, ‘Interpretation of Dreams’, p. 206.

⁵⁸ As I said earlier, the writer works on an extended comparative history of founding dreams including gender emphasis as well.

⁵⁹ Mangol Hun Niuça Topça’an, *Moğollarn Gizli Tarihi*, trans. Ahmet Temir, Türk Tarih Kurumu Basımevi, Ankara 1986, p. 54.

interpretation tradition that came through Latin translations of Greek or oral tradition, in order to create a myth for Kingdom of William the Conqueror and the Normans in England. In this dream intestines symbolized a child. This child was William the Conqueror. When the dream arrived in continental Europe, it had to be changed because of the cultural environment. Wace and Benoît were historians in France and writing in French. Presumably, Wace thought the tree symbol, which was widespread in Europe thanks to the Tree of Jesse, was much more meaningful for his audiences. Then, he changed the intestines into tree and Benoît followed him.

This is a possible scenario for the development of Herleva's dream in the accounts of William, Wace, and Benoît. In any case, these dreams are not random and should not be ignored. As I try to explain above, they have a deep historical background and can give us the connections, otherwise we hardly know, between civilizations, peoples, and cultures.

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