

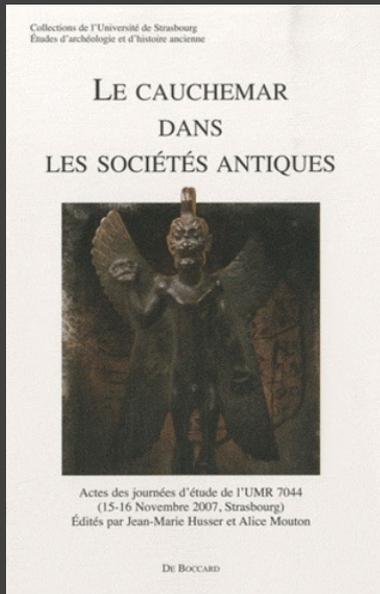
Nightmares during Six Centuries:

A Source Pluralist Approach to Finnish
Bad Dreams 1400-2020

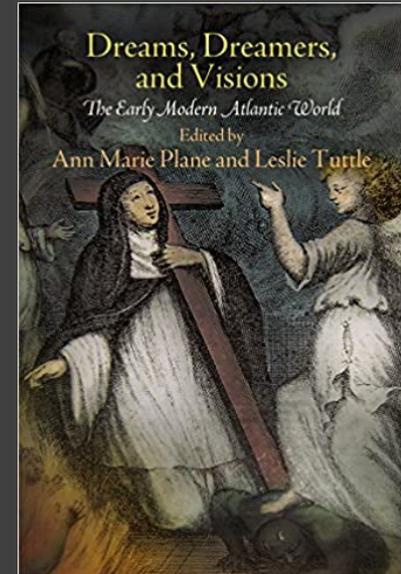
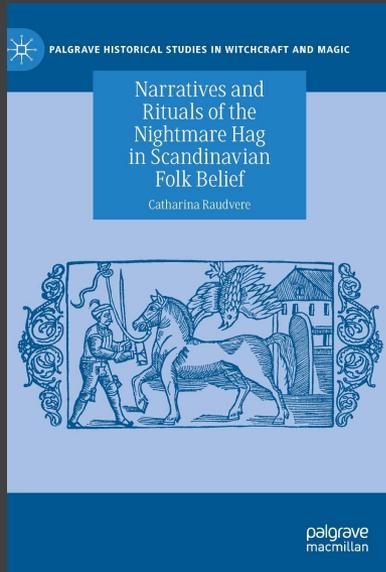
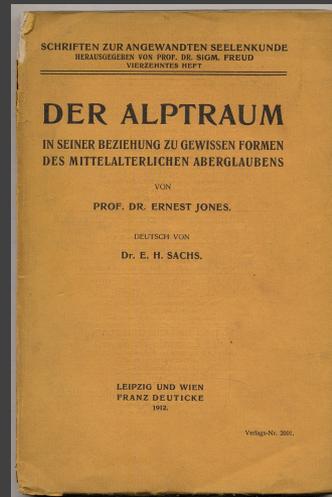
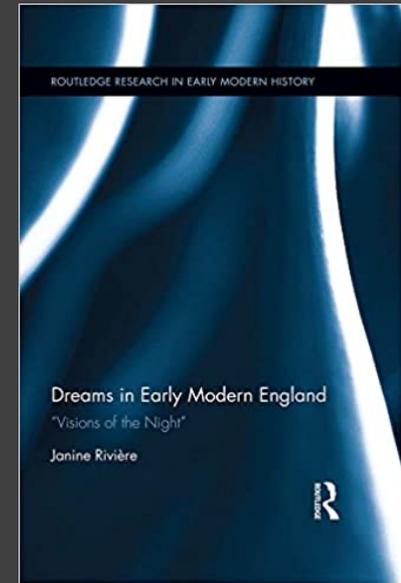
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Starting point: nightmares among present-day populations in Finland

- Research is mainly carried out by researchers of **psychology**, among others Antti Revonsuo, Katja Valli and Nils Sandman
- What we know by so far?
 - bad dreams and other sleep disorders have become **more common** in Finland
 - **women** have nightmares more often than men
 - **elderly people** have nightmare more often than younger people
 - generations who have experienced **war** suffer at least occasionally from war-related bad dreams
- How do we know?
 - research is based on interviews, sleep diaries and dream laboratory tests
- What do we not know?
 - **what kind of nightmare experiences did our ancestors have?**



Examples of historical nightmare studies abroad





Our project

NORTHERN NIGHTMARES 1400–2020

Pohjoiset painajaiset 1400–2020

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LIGHTS OUT!

RESEARCH PROJECT ON THE HISTORY OF NIGHTMARES

We humans sleep about one third of our lives. Dreams and nightmares are an integral part of our sleeping experience. We are here to examine what nightmares and bad dreams have meant and how they have been narrated in Finland from ca. 1400 to 2020.

Sweet dreams, but welcome to study the bad ones with us!

<https://blogs.helsinki.fi/northernnightmares/>

Our goals

- **Long-term analysis**
- **Contexts**
- **Themes**
- **Changes and continuities**

What we cannot really reach:

- **Frequency of the nightmares in the past**
- **The total cultural diversity of the population(s) of Finland**

Source critical problems

- **very fragmented and heterogeneous source base: almost no personal accounts available**
- **dreams are usually narrated by other people than those who have experienced them**
- **there are also fictitious and fabricated dreams among the material**

Our solution: Source pluralism

- conceptualised by Janken Myrdal, e.g.

**“Source Pluralism and a Package of Methods”,
in Marko Lamberg, Jesse Keskiaho, Elina Räsänen, Olga
Timofeeva and Leena Virtanen (ed.), *Methods and the
Medievalist: Current Approaches in Medieval Studies*.
Newcastle upon Tyne: Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2008.**

https://www.academia.edu/9960099/Source_Pluralism_and_a_Package_of_Methods_2008

Our main sources

- **15th century: religious literature**
- **16th century: "a lacuna"**
- **17th–18th centuries: court records; religious literature; occasional diaries and memoirs**
- **19th–20th centuries: collected oral tradition; occasional diaries and memoirs**
- **21st century: collected nightmare descriptions**

Comparative material:

- **Scandinavian saga literature and folklore**
- **international research**

**Example from a court
record written in 1687**

- **Abluna Pärttylintytär, a peasant woman living in Eastern Finland, has two nightmares:**
 - **black rams rise from a pile of turnips and some men drive them towards Abluna**
 - **a black haired woman in a black dress attacks Abluna and folds her cloths around Abluna**

Our findings by so far

- **continuities, e.g. sleep paralysis and bad dreams were launched by stressful situations; dreams where familiar surroundings suddenly become threatening**
- **changes: the disappearance of the witches (but not the supernatural)**
- **certain contemporary societal dimensions can be found in dreams, e.g. threat of war, unfair administration, shortage of food**