

On Prophecy, Dreams and Human Imagination

Synesius, *De insomniis*

Scripta Antiquitatis Posterioris
ad Ethicam RELigionemque pertinentia
XXIV

Mohr Siebeck

SAPERE

Scripta Antiquitatis Posterioris
ad Ethicam Religionemque pertinentia

Schriften der späteren Antike
zu ethischen und religiösen Fragen

Herausgegeben von
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Band XXIV



On Prophecy, Dreams and Human Imagination

Synesius, *De insomniis*

Introduction, Text, Translation and
Interpretative Essays by

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SAPERE

Greek and Latin texts of Later Antiquity (1st–4th centuries AD) have for a long time been overshadowed by those dating back to so-called ‘classical’ times. The first four centuries of our era have, however, produced a cornucopia of works in Greek and Latin dealing with questions of philosophy, ethics, and religion that continue to be relevant even today. The series SAPERE (Scripta Antiquitatis Posterioris ad Ethicam Religionemque pertinentia, ‘Writings of Later Antiquity with Ethical and Religious Themes’), now funded by the German Union of Academies, undertakes the task of making these texts accessible through an innovative combination of edition, translation, and commentary in the form of interpretative essays.

The acronym ‘SAPERE’ deliberately evokes the various connotations of *sapere*, the Latin verb. In addition to the intellectual dimension – which Kant made the motto of the Enlightenment by translating ‘*sapere aude*’ with ‘dare to use thy reason’ – the notion of ‘tasting’ should come into play as well. On the one hand, SAPERE makes important source texts available for discussion within various disciplines such as theology and religious studies, philology, philosophy, history, archaeology, and so on; on the other, it also seeks to whet the readers’ appetite to ‘taste’ these texts. Consequently, a thorough scholarly analysis of the texts, which are investigated from the vantage points of different disciplines, complements the presentation of the sources both in the original and in translation. In this way, the importance of these ancient authors for the history of ideas and their relevance to modern debates come clearly into focus, thereby fostering an active engagement with the classical past.

Preface to this Volume

When in September 2010 Donald Russell asked me what was the topic of the then latest volume of the SAPERE series and I answered that it dealt with select letters by Synesius of Cyrene (SAPERE 17), he remarked that he himself would like to produce a similar volume on Synesius' essay *De insomniis*. I was only too glad to take him up on this, and so work on this project started. Twenty months later we had assembled a team of knowledgeable contributors, most of whom presented drafts of their papers during a little conference in Oxford in July 2012. Well before that date, Donald – in his customary reliable fashion (undiminished by his age of more than ninety years) – had produced an introduction, a revised Greek text, an English translation (both accurate and readable) and a first set of explanatory notes. It took the next two years (too long a time really – for which I apologize to Donald, because much of the delay is my responsibility, as I was at times preoccupied with other things) to revise the essays, to supplement the notes and to produce a suitable layout for it all. Now, however (at last), the work is done.

Although this volume is not one of those originally planned for the SAPERE "Akademie-Projekt", it fits very well within the series, the aim of which is to make texts of the first four centuries AD that deal with still relevant ethical and religious questions accessible (again) to a modern readership. Synesius' essay *De insomniis* ('On Dreams') – written in the first years of the 5th century AD by a man who was not only an intellectual well versed in Neo-Platonic philosophy but also (in the last years of his life) a Christian bishop of the city of Ptolemais in the Libyan Pentapolis – inquires into the ways and means by which a human being, while sleeping and dreaming, may be able to make contact with higher (divine or celestial) spheres, and it considers this question in the light of a clearly recognizable Neo-Platonic concept of the soul and its salvation. Synesius' thoughts are thus an important contribution by a Greek intellectual of Later Antiquity on topics – the place of man within a spiritual universe and his means of communication with higher powers – that not only were of high concern for his contemporaries, but still are today for religiously- and philosophically-minded people.

To fully explore the content of Synesius' text, a number of essays investigate the various dimensions that can be found in it. Ursula Bittrich (Classical Philology, University of Gießen) provides a survey of opinions about dreams and their cognitive potential by Greek thinkers from the 5th

century well into Imperial times and shows how Synesius' thinking on this matter fits in. Anne Sheppard (Ancient Philosophy, Royal Holloway, University of London) considers the role and importance of the concept of *phantasia* ('imagination') – and its connection with dreams – in Synesius' text as well as its sources in earlier philosophical thought and literature. Sebastian Gertz (Ancient Philosophy, St. John's College, Oxford) inquires into the ways in which in Synesius' thinking dream divination is connected with – and perhaps important for – the Neo-Platonists' central ideal and goal, i.e. the (re-)ascent of the human soul into divine spheres. Another important feature of Synesius' conceptions in this context – namely the role and characteristics of the 'Vehicle (*ochēma*) of the Soul', which plays an essential part in the soul's downward and upward movements through the spheres – is looked into by Ilinca Tanaseanu-Döbler (Religious Studies, University of Göttingen), who investigates how Synesius draws on earlier Neo-Platonic thinkers and produces his own synthesis of their thoughts. That *De insomniis*, however, is not only an exercise ground for philosophical ideas but also characterized by a considerable amount of rhetoric, is brought out by Donald Russell's (Classical Literature, St. John's College, Oxford) essay. Finally, Börje Bydén (Classical and Byzantine Studies, University of Göteborg) shows that Synesius' text was still held in considerable esteem and deemed worthy of detailed commentary in the intellectual circles of 14th century Byzantium. All in all, these essays well illustrate the numerous interesting aspects of Synesius' text, which can provide stimulating food for thought on humans' abiding fascination with dreams even today.

Oxford / Göttingen, September 2014

Heinz-Günther Nesselrath

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A. Introduction

Introduction

Donald A. Russell

1.

Dreams are an important, and very puzzling, part of our lives. All societies and cultures speculate about their nature, cause and relation to the reality of our waking hours. Are they a way of access to an unseen world, a divine revelation, or merely a distorted reflexion of waking experiences or an unplanned exposure of our innermost thoughts? These questions were well known in classical antiquity. Dreams play a large part in religious contexts, in oracles and miraculous cures. They are a prominent theme in literature from Homer onwards: Agamemnon's dream (*Il.* 2.28–9) still features in Synesius' discussion (147D), and was much discussed. Every philosophical school offered its own theories: Plato, Aristotle, the Stoics, the Epicureans, Philo all have discussions of dreams. Guides to dream-interpretation of a less philosophical and more popular kind proliferated from the fifth century BC down to Synesius' own time.¹

2.

Synesius (born c. 370, died after, but perhaps not long after, 413) came from a distinguished family in the ancient Greek colony of Cyrene in Libya, and claimed Spartan descent.² Although his works – *Hymns*, *Letters* and a number of speeches and short essays – all full of personal details, there remains much uncertainty about his development. It is unclear whether he had a Christian upbringing or was a late convert. What is certain is that he had a Christian marriage and that he became bishop of the Pentapolis (a group of cities including Ptolemais and Cyrene) in 412. His public career goes back well before this. He had led an embassy to the emperor Arcadius in Constantinople, which took three years of his life (397–400 or 399–402; the date is disputed).³

¹ See S. R. F. PRICE in *OCD*³, s.v. Dreams, for a survey and basic bibliography. U. BRITRICH surveys much of this field below, pp. 71–96.

² See e.g. *Ep.* 113, "I am a Laconian by descent".

³ On all this, see LUCHNER 2010, 6f.

Given his Christian office, it is surprising how little there is in his work which reflects any kind of Christian orthodoxy. It would seem that he wrote for a highly educated, and largely pagan, readership. The major intellectual influence in his own life was the Neoplatonist philosopher and mathematician Hypatia, who was torn to pieces by the Christian mob in Alexandria in 415.⁴

3.

It is to Hypatia that, in 404 or 405, Synesius sent *De insomniis*, together with its companion piece *Dion*, a study of Dio of Prusa (c. 40 – c. 110), the orator and popular philosopher whose literary career served Synesius as a model for his own. In the accompanying letter (*Ep.* 154) he speaks of *De insomniis* as follows:

“This second book God both ordered and approved.⁵ It is offered as a thanksgiving to our imaginative nature. In it the whole ‘phantom soul’ is discussed,⁶ and certain other doctrines are advanced which have not before been the subject of Hellenic philosophy. Why say more? It was all completed in a single night – or rather, in what was left of the night that brought the vision ordering it to be written. There are two or three places in its argument where I felt I was another person and was joining the company as part of my audience. Even now, whenever I revisit this book, I have an extraordinary feeling, and a sort of ‘voice divine surrounds me’, as the poem says.⁷ Whether this is not just my private experience, but might happen to another, is for you to say. For you, after me, are the first Hellene to read it.”⁸

In this, “Hellenic philosophy” and “you are the first Hellene” are to be noted. A common connotation of ‘Hellene’ in this period is ‘pagan’, and so Synesius’ remark that he is the first ‘Hellene’ to discuss certain subjects suggests that he may be approaching themes previously only discussed in Christian writing. One such theme would be bodily resurrection; and it is arguable that in his account of the ascent of the *pneuma* with the soul

⁴ She is the heroine of Charles Kingsley’s novel *Hypatia* (1853), in which Synesius also appears, sympathetically drawn. For a recent evaluation, see Maria DZIELSKA, *Hypatia of Alexandria*, transl. F. LYNE (Cambridge Mass. 1995).

⁵ Reading ἐνέκρινεν: some MSS have ἀνέκρινεν, ‘examined’.

⁶ ‘Phantom soul’, εἰδωλική ψυχή; cf. *De ins.* 140D.

⁷ He quotes Hom. *Il.* 2.41, θεῖη δέ μιν ἀμφέχυντ’ ὀμφή.

⁸ *Ep.* 154 p. 276 GARZIA: Θάτερον δὲ θεὸς καὶ ἐπέταξε καὶ ἐνέκρινεν, ὃ τῆ φανταστικῆ φύσει χαριστήριον ἀνατέθειται. ἔσκεπται δ’ ἐν αὐτῷ περὶ τῆς εἰδωλικῆς ἀπάσης ψυχῆς, καὶ ἕτερα ἅττα προκεχρίσται δόγματα τῶν οὐπῶ φιλοσοφηθέντων Ἑλλήσι. καὶ τί ἂν τις ἀπομηκύνῃ περὶ αὐτοῦ; ἀλλ’ ἐξείργασται μὲν ἐπὶ μιᾶς ἅπαν νυκτός, μᾶλλον δὲ λειψάνου νυκτός, ἢ καὶ τὴν ὄψιν ἤνεγκε τὴν περὶ τοῦ δεῖν αὐτὸ συγγεγράφθαι. ἔστι δὲ οὗ τῶν λόγων δὶς που καὶ τρίς, ὥσπερ τις ἕτερος ὢν, ἑμαυτοῦ γέγονα μετὰ τῶν παρόντων ἀκροατῆς· καὶ νῦν ὁσάκις ἂν ἐπιῶ τὸ σύγγραμμα, θαυμαστὴ τις περὶ ἐμῆ διάθεσις γίνεται, καὶ τις ὀμφή με θεία περιχέεται κατὰ τὴν ποιήσιν. εἰ δὲ μὴ μόνον τὸ πάθος ἐμοῦ καὶ περὶ ἕτερον δ’ ἂν ταῦτα γένοιτο, σὺ καὶ τοῦτο μὴνύσεις. σὺ γὰρ δὴ μετ’ ἐμὲ πρώτη τῶν Ἑλλήνων ἐντεύξῃ.

he is seeking some way of accommodating such beliefs within a system acceptable to himself as a philosopher.⁹

We are of course not bound to accept his statement that the book was written in one night. This may be true; but it is safer to say that it is written in such a way as to make us believe it a hasty, almost improvised, composition. The signs of this are the fluidity of the argument (which makes any kind of ‘table of contents’ quite difficult to draw up) and the occurrence of figures of self-correction or statements like “I nearly forgot to say” (144C, 147A). Nevertheless, we must attempt a summary.

4.

The Preface (*protheoria*) should be considered in the light of the letter to Hypatia. It makes two claims. The first is that it is written in the high classical style (εις τὸν ἀρχαῖον τρόπον ἐξήσκηται). This is justified so far as syntax and vocabulary are concerned, so long as Plutarch and Dio are accepted as classics. In prose rhythm, however, Synesius is of his own time: he has accentual clausulae, with a preference for leaving an even number of unaccented syllables between the last two accents of a sentence or colon-unit. His second claim is that the book exemplifies the treatment (attributed to Plato) of a serious subject in the guise of something more trivial. This is more difficult to validate. Dreams are a serious subject; philosophers of all schools paid them much attention. But there is undoubtedly a wide gap in ‘seriousness’ between Synesius’ account of the practical use of dreams to himself, as writer or as hunter, and the elaborate metaphysical themes involved in his account of φαντασία and of the soul’s ‘spiritual’ vehicle. Thus the real weight of the book may be said to lie outside its ostensible subject.

5.

A ‘table of contents’.¹⁰

(i) 130C–133C (ch. 1–3): an introductory section.

Dreams are of course difficult to interpret. All knowledge of the future is hard to get, as are all valuable things. Only a few can achieve it. Zeus’ superiority is due to his wisdom and knowledge, not to brute strength: and it is in knowledge that the wise man can become akin to god.

Prophecy is therefore a great good. It depends on the connection between all parts of the kosmos, which is a living being. To read the signs is like reading a special kind of writing: astrology, augury, extispicy are

⁹ See GERTZ below, p. 114 and n. 13.

¹⁰ The divisions here suggested are also indicated in the translation.

all ways of knowing the future. If birds had reason, they would study our movements as we study theirs. All things are linked together, and if any one part of the universe is affected, other parts, not necessarily close at hand, are affected in sympathy – like the strings of a lyre which vibrate when one is struck. The kosmos is a unity made of many things: and both the unity and the multiplicity contribute to the possibility of prophecy, and also to that of magic. Both these depend on “using the kosmos against itself”; what is outside the kosmos, pure Intelligence, is immune. Magic (*teletai*) is a theme proscribed by law; but prophecy is a proper topic to discuss.

(ii) 133C–D. A transitional passage: having completed the ‘encomium’ of prophecy in general, we turn to dreams in particular. They are of course obscure: but so are oracles; this is not a special fault of dreams.

(iii) 134A–142D (ch. 4–10): the main theoretical discussion of *phantasia*.

(a) Starting from the proposition (of which he gives a formal proof) that Soul holds forms of “things that come to be”, just as *nous* holds those of “things that are”, Synesius proceeds to assert that Soul “projects” only those forms that are “relevant” (προσήκοντα),¹¹ and causes them to be reflected in *phantasia*,¹² which is the faculty by which we apprehend what is present in the soul. This produces a kind of parallel life of sensation (we seem to see, hear, and touch in our dreams) which is perhaps a specially privileged kind of sense, which may bring us into contact with gods, and bring us many practical advantages in life, though these are insignificant compared with the possibility of a vision that takes us beyond Nature and unites us with the Intellegible. That this is indeed possible is shown by a text of the *Chaldaean Oracles* which distinguishes teaching from revelation in sleep as a means of providing for the soul’s “ascent” (135B).

(b) This argument refutes those who deny any value to the life of *phantasia*: they are people who neglect the *Oracles*’ prohibition of sacrifice and extispicy, and despise dream-divination because it is available to all. In fact, *phantasia* is superior to the senses; it is an activity of the *phantastikon pneuma*, the first “vehicle” of the soul, and the immediate perception it provides is more “divine” than what the senses give us (136B).

(c) However, just as the senses are sometimes defective, so the *pneuma* also may become bleary or dim and require purification: the “secret philosophy” teaches this. It may however be kept pure by “life according to nature”, because (unlike the body) it varies in quality according to the goodness or badness of the soul. It is a sort of ‘no-man’s-land’ (μεταίχμιον) between the bodily and the incorporeal, and forms a link between the two (137B).

¹¹ See below, p. 62 n. 39 and SHEPPARD, p. 103.

¹² Reading τῆ φαντασίᾳ at 134B = 150,6 TERZAGHI.

(d) This *phantastikon pneuma* is not confined to humans: it exists in animals, where it functions as reason (*logos*), and it is the substance of whole classes of *daimones*, while in humanity it generally operates in cooperation with *nous* (137C). It can actually become a *daimon* or a god, and it is with the soul after death. It may be light and so rise, or dense and damp and so sink into darkness. The soul acquires it in her descent through the spheres, and it is her “vehicle” (*ochēma*). Indeed, they are almost indissolubly joined, and it may either drag the soul down or itself be raised by her (138D).

(e) The conjunction of body and soul means that even *nous* may be corrupted by the pleasures of the body. Purification needs Will, for without this no rituals can be effective. What are regarded as misfortunes may also be part of our purification, while good fortune may be a trap set by the rulers of the world below. What is certain is that the sweetness of this life is the “draught of forgetfulness” which leads the soul not only to fulfil her due obligation of earthly life but to fall in love with it and make a contract with Nature (or Matter) which Nature will try to enforce. The fate of the soul that does not make a successful effort to “return” is error and misery (140B).

(f) To return to the *pneuma* (140C): It has an immense range, extending from the darkness of the material world to the neighbourhood of the outermost circle of the heaven. The *Oracles* appear to say that the soul takes with her on her return ascent not only the *pneuma* itself but the particles of fire and air which were attracted to it in the descent (141B).

(g) Whether this is a correct interpretation or not, the *pneuma*, the “bodily substance” which came with the soul from on high, surely does return with her also. But between the “darkness” and the “light” there are many intermediate states, where the *pneuma* will be cloudy and the soul no true prophetess. How can we ensure that our own visions are true? By living as far as possible an ‘intellectual’ life, since this refines and lightens the *pneuma* and ensures that it occupies the bodily space (in the brain) intended for it: if it did not fill this, a worse *pneuma* might enter (142D).

(iv) Synesius now returns to the usefulness of dreams: the whole study of *phantasia* was in aid of this main theme. In fact, the practical use of our prophetic *phantasia* is far less than its power to raise the soul to higher things. A pure and simple life helps. The cultivation of this capacity does not make the soul less attentive to ordinary concerns, but more so. And the preparation is not elaborate: wash your hands, keep reverent silence, and go to sleep. No special expense, no elaborate apparatus, no class distinctions, no time taken from other occupations. It is very different from the elaborate magic, which is against the law, and which it is impossible to practice without a lot of equipment. Your private oracle, your dreams, is immune from the tyrant’s ban (145D).

(v) So let us all practice this way of telling the future. It is akin to hope, but it is hope guaranteed by God. It is of course possible to misunderstand a dream, as Penelope and Agamemnon did. The *dream* was not to blame.

So ends the 'encomium' (147D).

(vi) Dreams have helped me personally – in philosophy, in writing, and in hunting, and even when I was threatened by magicians in the time of my embassy to the emperor (148D).

(vii) When she is free of the distractions of the senses, the soul presents to us the Forms she holds and brings us messages from the divine. Such dreams are plain, but generally they come only to those who live virtuously (149B).

(viii) Another type of dream, the enigmatic, needs skilled interpretation. It is produced by the images (*eidōla*) emitted from all things (past and future as well as present), when these find rest in a soul's *pneuma*. The *pneuma* must be made ready to receive them, by philosophy and sober living. There is an art to be learned, a matter of observation and memory, like the skills of navigation or foretelling the weather (151B).

(ix) Books that collect and generalize such observations are ridiculous. One *pneuma* differs from another in its celestial origin, and it is impossible to state general rules about the significance of any particular appearance (152C).

(x) Consequently, each individual should study his own dreams and their sequels, and keep records of them. Indeed, this would be a very challenging literary task, because dreams are so inconsequential and not fettered by time or place. They contain all kinds of wonders. The animal fable perhaps developed from recollection of dreams. Making a record is not only useful in stimulating our power of prophecy, it could be the supreme exercise of the rhetorician's art – much better than declaiming imaginary cases! It would bring true literary fame.

6.

The text of Synesius has been well studied, and the editions of Terzaghi (1944), Garzya (1999), Susanetti (1992) and Lamoureaux-Aujoulat (2004) give ample information. The present text differs from Terzaghi's in a few places, usually from conjecture; these are listed in the textual notes, and the more important of them are discussed in the main notes. We have also followed Terzaghi's chapter-divisions, which other recent editions also use. The fluidity of the argument, however, makes any division somewhat arbitrary. Fitzgerald's translation (the only previous English version) followed Petavius' scheme, as does much earlier work, while Krabinger (1850) chose yet another way of dividing the text up. The safest way to refer to Syne-

sus is not by chapters but by the pages of Petavius' second edition (1633) which are marked in the margin of most modern editions, including ours.

7.

Sigla:

A:	cod. Laur. LV. 6, saec. XI
C:	cod. Laur. LXXX. 19, saec. XII
o:	cod. Par. gr. 1039, saec. XII – XIV
s:	cod. Par. Coislinianus 249, saec. XII – XIII
B:	cod. Vat. graec. 91, saec. XI – XIII
recc.:	later mss or early editions
Pet. I:	Petavius 1612
Krab.:	Krabinger 1850

Conjectures not assigned have been made independently. We record here all significant divergences from the text of Terzaghi and Garzya: we use Terzaghi's symbols.

131D	μαντείαν Krabinger
132C	ὄλου μέρη C ὡσπερ γὰρ A C o
133D	ὅτι <γὰρ> τὸ ξύλινον Lang
134A	μαντειῶν
134B	ἐνοπτρίζει τῇ φαντασίᾳ s
136B	{ή} θειοτέρα
136C	μείζω ταῦτὰ C ² {αὐτὸ τὸ ὄμμα}
136D	πρὸς αὐτήν C
137B	ὁ πολλά
137C	ἄνθρωποι δὲ τὰ πολλά κατ' αὐτήν ἤ
138A	ἀμφίβιος
139C	ἐθελοντήν cf. 145B
140A	φθάνουσιν recc.
140D	σκύβαλον κρημνῶ Krab. (Psellus)
141A	ἐν γειτόνων
141D	ἐνάργειαν ο C
142A	ἐμπαθῆ recc. σίραιον] συρρέον Pet. I (see note ad loc.)
142B	ὀχήματι Sorabji (cf. the opposite corruption in 137A)

- 143A ἀντὶ φλεγμαινούσης
 144A πραγματευσαμένοις
 144B συλλέγεται ... ὑπὸ τῶν τεχνιτευόντων recc. (see note ad loc.)
 145B ὡς <δ'> ἔγωγε
 146B ἀπαγορεύειν γὰρ <ἄν>
 147C περὶ τῆς ὄψεως C
 147D ταῦτα μικρὸν recc., edd.
 148B ἐμπεφυκότας τῇ γλώττῃ
 150A ἐπὶ τὸ μέλλον recc., edd.
 150C ταῦτά τῶν αὐτῶν C
 152B τις Μελάμπους ο, Krab.
 ὅπως ποτε ἔχοντι
 152C τὸ προεκθορὸν τοῦ πράγματος
 ἐλεῖν <ἐν> ἐν
 ἐν ἐκάστῳ τόπῳ A C ο
 153A οὕτως ἂν εἰς
 153D οὔτε σὺν χρόνῳ recc., edd.
 154A {αἰ} συχναῖ
 155C ἔφασαν codd. (see note)
 156C τὴν παραινουμένην (see note)

Each of these textual variants is marked by an asterisk in the Greek text.

B. Text, Translation and Notes

ΠΕΡΙ ΕΝΥΠΝΙΩΝ

ΠΡΟΘΕΩΡΙΑ

Ἀρχαῖον οἶμαι καὶ λίαν Πλατωνικὸν ὑπὸ προσχήματι 130A
φαιλοτέρας ὑποθέσεως κρύπτειν τὰ ἐν φιλοσοφίᾳ σπουδαῖα,
τοῦ μήτε τὰ μόλις εὐρεθέντα πάλιν ἐξ ἀνθρώπων ἀπόλλυσθαι, B
μήτε μολύνεσθαι δήμοις βεβήλοις ἐκκειμένα. τοῦτο τοίνυν ἐξη-
λώθη μὲν ὅτι μάλιστα τῷ παρόντι συγγράμματι· εἰ δὲ καὶ τού-
του τυγχάνει καὶ τὰ ἄλλα περιττῶς εἰς τὸν ἀρχαῖον τρόπον
ἐξήσκηται, ἐπιγνοῖεν ἂν οἱ μετὰ φιλοσόφου φύσεως αὐτῷ συνε- C
σόμενοι.

ΠΕΡΙ ΕΝΥΠΝΙΩΝ

(1) Εἰ δὲ εἰσιν ὕπνοι προφήται, καὶ τὰ ὄναρ θεάματα τοῖς
ἀνθρώποις ὀρέγουσι τῶν ὕπαρ ἐσομένων αἰνίγματα, σοφοὶ μὲν
ἂν εἶεν, σαφεῖς δὲ οὐκ ἂν εἶεν, ἢ σοφὸν αὐτῶν καὶ τὸ μὴ σαφές-
κρύψαντες γὰρ ἔχουσι θεοὶ βίον ἀνθρώποισιν. ἀπόνως μὲν γε 131A
τῶν μεγίστων τυγχάνειν θεῖόν ἐστιν ἀγαθόν· ἀνθρώποις δὲ οὐκ
ἄρα ἀρετῆς μόνον, ἀλλὰ καὶ πάντων καλῶν ἰδρῶτα θεοὶ προ-
πάροιθεν ἔθηκαν. μαντεία δὲ ἀγαθῶν ἂν εἴη τὸ μέγιστον· τῷ
μὲν γὰρ εἰδέναι, καὶ ὅλως τῷ γνωστικῷ τῆς δυνάμεως, θεὸς τε
ἀνθρώπου καὶ ἀνθρώπος διαφέρει θηρίου.

Ἀλλὰ θεῶ μὲν εἰς τὸ γινώσκειν ἢ φύσις ἀρκεῖ· ἀπὸ δὲ μαν- B
τείας ἀνθρώπῳ πολλαπλάσιον παραγίνεται τοῦ τῆ κοινῆ φύσει
προσηκόντος. ὁ γὰρ πολὺς τὸ παρὸν μόνον οἶδε, περὶ δὲ τοῦ
μήπω γενομένου στοχάζεται· ὁ δὲ Κάλχας εἰς ἄρα ἐν ἐκκλησίᾳ
τῶν Πανελλήνων μόνος ἠπίστατο τὰ τ' ἐόντα, τὰ τ' ἐσόμενα,
πρὸ τ' ἐόντα.

Καὶ Ὀμήρῳ δὲ ἄρα διὰ τοῦτο τῆς τοῦ Διὸς γνώμης ἐξήπται
τὰ τῶν θεῶν πράγματα, ὅτι πρότερος γέγονει καὶ πλείονα οἶδεν,
αὐτῷ δήπου τῷ πρεσβύτερος εἶναι. καὶ γὰρ τὴν ἡλικίαν εἰς
τοῦτο οἶμαι συντείνειν τοῖς ἔπεσιν, ὅτι συμβαίνει διὰ τὸν χρό- C
νον πλείω γινώσκειν, ἐπεὶ τὸ γινώσκειν ἦν ἄρα τὸ τιμιώτατον.
εἰ δὲ τις ὑφ' ἐτέρων ἐπῶν ἀναπειθεται τὴν ἡγεμονίαν τοῦ Διὸς
χειρῶν ἰσχὺν εἶναι λογίζεσθαι, ὅτι, φησί, βίη δ' ὄγε φέρτερος
ἦεν, οὗτος φορτικῶς ὠμίλησε τῆ ποιήσει, καὶ ἀνήκοός ἐστι τῆς
κατ' αὐτὴν φιλοσοφίας, τοὺς θεοὺς οὐδὲν ἄλλο ἢ νοὺς λεγού-
σης. ταῦτη τοι προσπερονᾷ πάλιν τῷ κατ' ἀλήκην περιεῖναι τὸ
καὶ γενεῆ πρότερος, τὸν Δία νοῦν λέγων ἀρχεγονώτερον· νοῦ
δὲ ἰσχὺς τί ἂν ἄλλο ἢ φρόνησις εἴη; καὶ ὅστις οὖν θεὸς ὦν ἀρ- D

On Dreams

Preface¹

[130A] It is, I believe, an ancient practice, and a truly Platonic one, to conceal serious philosophical matters under cover of some more trivial theme,² so that hard-won discoveries [B] may not again be lost to humanity, but yet not be defiled by exposure to the profane vulgar.³ This has been very much my aim in the present work. Whether it achieves this object and is moreover well crafted in the ancient style, is for readers of a philosophical [C] cast of mind to judge.

(i)⁴

1. If the experiences of sleep have prophetic power, and dream⁵ visions offer humans enigmatic hints of what is to come in their waking lives, they may indeed be wise, but they would not be clear;⁶ or perhaps their obscurity is itself wisdom; [131A] 'for the gods have hidden life from men.'⁷ To win the greatest things without effort is a divine privilege;⁸ for humans, 'the gods have set sweat' not only before 'virtue'⁹ but before all good things. And divination is perhaps the greatest of goods. It is by knowing and in general by cognitive capacity that God is superior to man, and man to beast.

But whereas, for God, nature suffices for knowledge, [B] man acquires from divination knowledge many times greater than what is appropriate to his common nature. The ordinary man knows only the present; he can only guess about what has not yet come to pass. Thus Calchas¹⁰ was the only man in the assembly of all the Greeks who understood 'what is, what will be, and what was before'.¹¹

So for Homer too the affairs of the gods depend on the will of Zeus because 'he was born first and knew more'¹² – 'knew more' just because he was older, of course. For I think that the reference to age in these lines alludes to the fact that [C] knowing more things comes in the course of time; for knowledge, after all, is the thing that is most honoured. If, however, anyone is persuaded, on the strength of other passages, to regard the hegemony of Zeus as the strength of his hands – because 'in force he was stronger'¹³ –, then he has been a very bad student of the poem, and has no understanding of the philosophy in it, which tells us that the gods are simply Minds.¹⁴ Similarly, in another passage,¹⁵ he tacks the phrase 'earlier born' on to Zeus' superiority in strength, meaning by 'Zeus' a more primordial Mind.¹⁶ And what can strength of Mind be but

χειν ἀξιοῦται θεῶν, νοῦς ὧν, σοφίας περιουσία κρατεῖ, ὥστε καὶ τὸ βίη δ' ὄγε φέρτερος εἰς ταῦτ' ἡμῖν τῷ πλείονα οἶδεν ἀνακάμπτει καὶ περιόσεται. διὰ τοῦτο καὶ ὁ σοφὸς οἰκείος θεῶ, ὅτι πειροᾶται σύνεγγυς εἶναι τῇ γνώσει, καὶ πραγματεύεται περὶ νόησιν, ἢ τὸ θεῖον οὐσίωται.

(2) Αὐταὶ μὲν ἀποδείξεις ἔστων τοῦ μαντεῖαν* ἐν τοῖς ἀρίστοις εἶναι τῶν ἐπιτηδευομένων ἀνθρώποις. εἰ δὲ σημαίνει μὲν διὰ πάντων πάντα, ἅτε ἀδελφῶν ὄντων τῶν ἐν ἐνὶ ζῳῷ, τῷ κόσμῳ, καὶ ἔστι ταῦτα γράμματα παντοδαπά, καθάπερ ἐν βιβλίῳ τοῖς οὔσι, τὰ μὲν Φοινίκια, τὰ δὲ Αἰγύπτια, καὶ ἄλλα Ἀσσύρια, ἀναγινώσκει δὲ ὁ σοφὸς (σοφὸς δὲ ὁ φύσει μαθὼν) καὶ ἄλλος ἄλλα, καὶ ὁ μὲν μᾶλλον, ὁ δὲ ἥττον, ὥσπερ ὁ μὲν κατὰ συλλαβὰς, ὁ δὲ ἀθρόαν τὴν λέξιν, ὁ δὲ τὸν λόγον ὁμοῦ, οὕτως ὁρῶσι σοφοὶ τὸ μέλλον, οἱ μὲν ἄστρα εἰδότες (ἄλλος τὰ μένοντα, καὶ ἄλλος τὰ πυρσὰ τὰ διαττοντα), οἱ δὲ ἐν σπλάγχχοις αὐτὰ ἀναγνόντες, οἱ δὲ ἐν ὀρνίθων κλαγγαῖς καὶ καθέδραις καὶ πτήσεσι τοῖς δὲ καὶ τὰ καλούμενα σύμβολα τῶν ἐσομένων ἐστὶν ἀριδηλὰ γράμματα, φωναὶ τε καὶ συγκυρήσεις ἐπ' ἄλλω γενόμεναι, σημαντικῶν ὄντων ἅπασιν πάντων, ὥστ' εἰ σοφία παρ' ὀρνισιν ἦν, τέχνην ἂν ἐξ ἀνθρώπων, ὥσπερ ἡμεῖς ἐξ αὐτῶν, ἐπὶ τὸ ἐσόμενον συνεστήσαντο. καὶ γὰρ ἡμεῖς ἐκεῖνοις, ὥσπερ ἡμῖν ἐκεῖνοι, πάννιοι καὶ προπάλαιοι καὶ πανδέξιοι.

Ἔδει γὰρ, οἶμαι, τοῦ παντὸς τούτου συμπαθοῦς τε ὄντος καὶ σύμπνου τὰ μέλη προσήκειν ἀλλήλοις, ἅτε ἐνὸς ὄλου μέρη* τυγχάνοντα. καὶ μὴ ποτε αἱ μάγων ἰυγγες αὐταὶ· καὶ γὰρ θέλγεται παρ' ἀλλήλων ὥσπερ σημαίνεται· καὶ σοφὸς ὁ εἰδὼς τὴν τῶν μερῶν τοῦ κόσμου συγγένειαν. ἔλκει γὰρ ἄλλο δι' ἄλλου, ἔχων ἐνέχυρα παρ' ὄντα τῶν πλείστον ἀπόντων, καὶ φωνὰς καὶ ὕλας καὶ σχήματα· ὥσπερ γὰρ* ἐν ἡμῖν σπλάγχχνου παθόντος ἄλλο συμπέπονθε καὶ τὸ τοῦ δακτύλου κακὸν εἰς τὸν βουβῶνα ἀπερείδεται, πολλῶν τῶν μεταξὺ μὴ παθόντων (ἐνὸς γὰρ ἦν ἀμφω ζῶου, καὶ ἔστιν αὐτοῖς τι μᾶλλον ἐτέρων πρὸς ἄλληλα) καὶ δὴ καὶ θεῶ τινι τῶν εἴσω τοῦ κόσμου λίθος ἐνθένδε καὶ βοτάνη προσήκει, οἷς ὁμοιοπαθῶν εἴκει τῇ φύσει καὶ γοητεύεται, ὥσπερ ὁ τὴν ὑπάτην ψήλας οὐ τὴν παρ' αὐτὴν, τὴν ἐπόγδοον, ἀλλὰ τὴν ἐπιτρίτην καὶ τὴν νήτην ἐκίνησεν.

wisdom? So whatever [D] god is judged fit to rule over gods, being a Mind, prevails by the superiority of his wisdom, so that the phrase ‘in force he was stronger’ turns out for us to be equivalent to ‘he knows more things’. For this reason also, the wise man is akin to god, because he tries to be near him in knowledge, and devotes himself to thought (*noēsis*), in which the divine has its existence.

2. Let these arguments stand as proofs that prophecy is among the best of human pursuits. But if it gives signs of all things through the medium of all [132A] things (because all things which are within that single living thing which is the kosmos¹⁷ are akin), and if these signs are, as it were, different kinds of writings in the book of existence – Phoenician, Egyptian or Assyrian¹⁸ –, and if moreover a wise man reads them (and the wise man is he who understands by nature¹⁹), and one <wise man> learns one sort of writing and another another, and one better and one less well (just as some read syllable by syllable, some word by word, some taking in the whole context) – then, in the same way, wise men see the future, some by knowing the stars (fixed stars or shooting fires²⁰), [B] some by reading signs in entrails, others in the cries, perches or flight of birds. To some again, what are called ‘symbols’ are clear writings of the future – voices and encounters which had quite other intentions. All things have significance for all: if birds had wisdom, they would have constructed an art for knowing the future based on observing humans, as we do by observing them. We would have been to them, as they are to us, wholly young, wholly old, and wholly competent.²¹

It was necessary, I believe, that the limbs of this universe (*kosmos*), which feels and breathes as one, should belong to one another as parts of a [C] single whole. This may explain the bird-charms (*iynges*)²² of the magicians. For <such parts> are attracted as well as signalled, by one another, and the man who knows the kinship of the parts of the kosmos is wise, for he can attract one by means of another, having what is at hand as a pledge of what is far away, be it voice or matter or form. For,²³ just as in us, when our bowels are affected, other organs are affected too, and a pain in the finger extends to the groin, though all the parts between are unaffected²⁴ [D] (because both belong to the same living being and there is a special relationship between them), so likewise a stone or a herb in our world may belong to some one of the gods in the kosmos,²⁵ who, in sympathy with it, yields to its nature and is charmed. Similarly, one who strikes the lowest string (*hyapatē*) <of the lyre>, sets in motion not the string next to it, the *epogdoos*, but the *epitritē* and the *nētē*.²⁶