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Viscera and the Divine: Dreams at the Divinatory Bridge between the Corporeal and the Incorporeal

Abstract

Dreams are perhaps the ancient world's most-traveled bridge between the heavens and the individual. As a form of divination, dreams play a pivotal role from Homer through the late Neoplatonist Synesius (ca. 370-413 C.E.). The dream serves as a conduit for a message from the world beyond. According to the traditional view, on which there are a hundred variations, the source is an authority figure or a god who either appears in person at the head of the sleeper or generates a phantom drama with a hidden message. In the medical corpus, dreams also produce ties between the individual and the larger cosmos. In incubation rites that were widely practiced in Greek and Roman times, the dream served as a vehicle for the god Asclepius to make his visitation to the patient. In the Hippocratic corpus also, as I discuss shortly, dreams remain a linking agent between the individual and the larger cosmos. When these traditions of divination, incubation, and medicine are placed alongside one another, a somewhat counterintuitive fact emerges. While it is perhaps no surprise that dreams reach outward toward the furthest reaches of the stars and the gods—as is customary with divinatory systems—it is somewhat of a surprise to see that ancient dreams also consistently reach inward, inside the human body, toward the extreme reaches of the internal organs. In fact, many testimonia on dreams from the ancient world display a certain fixation on internal organs. One cannot but recall the sad tales from the Roman period of Aelius Aristides (117-89), who writes page after page on absinthe-induced dreams and diseases, documenting divine intrusions into nearly all his bodily organs. In this movement, dreams do not stand outside the rather common Mediterranean tendency, exhibited in extispicies of all kinds, to see the divine in the viscera.¹ But I will take a closer look at three of our earliest detailed attestations of this double movement from the self, outward toward the gods and inward toward the organs. After a brief look at the famous stela from the Asclepian temple at Epidaurus (second half of the fourth century B.C.E.), I will examine more closely the Hippocratic treatise *On Regimen* (likely early fourth century B.C.E.) and Plato's *Timaeus* (first half of the fourth century B.C.E.).

Disciplines

Ancient History, Greek and Roman through Late Antiquity | Anthropology | Arts and Humanities | Classical Literature and Philology | Classics

VISCERA AND THE DIVINE

DREAMS AS THE DIVINATORY BRIDGE BETWEEN THE CORPOREAL AND THE INCORPOREAL

Peter Struck

Dreams are perhaps the ancient world's most-traveled bridge between the heavens and the individual. As a form of divination, dreams play a pivotal role from Homer through the late Neoplatonist Synesius (ca. 370–413 C.E.). The dream serves as a conduit for a message from the world beyond. According to the traditional view, on which there are a hundred variations, the source is an authority figure or a god who either appears in person at the head of the sleeper or generates a phantom drama with a hidden message. In the medical corpus, dreams also produce ties between the individual and the larger cosmos. In incubation rites that were widely practiced in Greek and Roman times, the dream served as a vehicle for the god Asclepius to make his visitation to the patient. In the Hippocratic corpus also, as I discuss shortly, dreams remain a linking agent between the individual and the larger cosmos. When these traditions of divination, incubation, and medicine are placed alongside one another, a somewhat counterintuitive fact emerges. While it is perhaps no surprise that dreams reach outward toward the furthest reaches of the stars and the gods—as is customary with divinatory systems—it *is* somewhat of a surprise to see that ancient dreams also consistently reach inward, inside the human body, toward the extreme reaches of the internal organs. In fact, many testimonia on dreams from the ancient world display a certain fixation on internal organs. One cannot but recall the sad tales from the Roman period of Aelius Aristides (117–89), who writes page after page on absinthe-induced dreams and diseases, documenting divine intrusions into nearly all his bodily organs. In this movement, dreams do not stand outside the rather common Mediterranean tendency, exhibited in extispicies of all kinds, to see the divine in the viscera.¹ But I will take a closer look

1. See Walter Burkert, *The Orientalizing Revolution: Near Eastern Influence on Greek Culture in the Early Archaic Age* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1992), 49–51.

at three of our earliest detailed attestations of this double movement from the self, outward toward the gods and inward toward the organs. After a brief look at the famous stela from the Asclepian temple at Epidaurus (second half of the fourth century B.C.E.), I will examine more closely the Hippocratic treatise *On Regimen* (likely early fourth century B.C.E.) and Plato's *Timaeus* (first half of the fourth century B.C.E.).

INCUBATION

Since practices of incubation have been so well known for so long, they may have become somewhat domesticated in the range of evidence on ancient dreaming. I begin by recalling the obvious: taken as a whole, the phenomenon of incubation makes the point that dreams are intimately connected with the corporeal. The evidence from Epidaurus adds a few details to this general picture. One sees in the physical evidence a stark reminder that devotees went to Epidaurus with their flesh in mind as much as the divine: the holy site is literally littered with body parts, small effigies of various limbs and organs, which presumably stood in need of relief.² Once asleep in Asclepius's temple, a patient received his or her cure not through fairy dust or a divine nod. The preserved textual records leave no room for doubt on the subject. The dream served primarily as a vehicle for the god to perform an invasive procedure and manipulate the patient's body parts. The extant stelae include harrowing accounts of sliced eyeballs, severed heads, cleaved chests, as well as the extraction of a spearhead from a jawbone, an eye socket, or a lung and the removal of bucketsful of worms or pus. One fuller example will suffice:

Aristagora of Troezen. She had a tapeworm in her belly, and she slept in the Temple of Asclepius at Troezen and saw a dream. It seemed to her that the sons of the god, while he was not present but away in Epidaurus, cut off her head, but, being unable to put it back again, they sent a messenger to Asclepius asking him to come. Meanwhile day breaks and the priest clearly sees her head cut off from the body. When night approached, Aristagora saw a vision. It seemed to her the god had come from Epidau-

2. See Lynn R. LiDonnici, introduction to *The Epidaurian Miracle Inscriptions* (Atlanta, Ga.: Scholars Press, 1995); for images of such evidence, see E. D. Phillips, *Greek Medicine* (London: Thames & Hudson, 1973), pl. 7, between pp. 72 and 73.

rus and fastened her head on to her neck. Then he cut open her belly, took the tapeworm out and stitched her up again. And after that she became well.³

When put in context with other Greek dream testimonia, the incubation texts, predicated on connections between the divine and body parts by means of a dream, is not so exotic as it may first appear.

HIPPOCRATIC MEDICINE

The scientific approach to dreaming in the Hippocratic corpus also presents evidence of dreams as a conduit between the bodily organs and the heavens. Here the mechanisms are more complicated, but equally remarkable. The author of the Hippocratic treatise *On Regimen* claims that the dreamer is a supersensitive instrument for diagnosing bodily pathologies.⁴ Diseases, in this author's opinion, result from an imbalance between the two basic elements in the human body, fire and water. These imbalances set in stealthily (I.2) and are hard to discern before they have gotten out of hand. But when the body is asleep, the soul can detect more subtle somatic conditions. Bodily conditions induce the soul to produce a dream that acts as an aperture into the viscera and provides an early warning from which to judge how a patient should adjust his or her level of heat and moisture in order to bring the body back into equilibrium. The medical advancement of dream reading allows a doctor to take heretofore impossible preventive measures and to begin treatment even before the disease manifests itself visibly.

The observation that dreams reveal irregularities in the body's physical condition is sound science and is the first attestation of a view upheld by Aristotle and even surviving through Freud to our own time. This satisfies the visceral, bodily side of the two poles that I am claiming for ancient thinking on dreams. But what of the outward movement toward the stars? After all, the author explicitly dissociates himself from diviners and those who spend their time only asking the god

3. For the text, see Emma J. Edelstein and Ludwig Edelstein, *Asclepius: Collection and Interpretation of the Testimonies* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1998), 225; for the translation, see 234.

4. Werner Jaeger discusses the tract in *Paideia*, vol. 3 (New York: Oxford University Press, 1945), 33–40. Recent commentary by Robert Joly and Simon Byl, eds., Hippocrate[s], *Du régime*, *Corpus medicorum Graecorum* 1 2,4 (Berlin: Akademie-Verlag, 1984); see also Robert Joly, *Recherches sur le traité pseudo-hippocratique "Du régime"* (Paris: Les Belles Lettres, 1960), and Wesley D. Smith, *The Hippocratic Tradition* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1979), 44–60.

for help,⁵ and casts a skeptical eye on supposed divine dreams that predict the future (iv.86). The author, however, expects our dreams to speak in a peculiar language. Dreams manifest bodily conditions, the *On Regimen* author claims, by showing us images of large cosmological phenomena. For example, disease of the belly is signified by a dream about a star plunging into the sea. A star falling into the earth is a symptom of nascent tumors in the flesh. Dreaming of a rough surface of the earth indicates impure flesh; dreaming of high or low rivers indicates high or low blood levels.⁶ So dreams once again bring the larger cosmos to bear on the viscera. The situation has obvious differences with incubation. The dream here is a symptom and not a cure. This cosmos is not a proper divinity, as Asclepius is in the incubation texts, although it still carries some trace of the divine. In the incubation accounts, the connection between body and divine is spelled out in gruesome detail, whereas in the Hippocratic text it is more subtle.

The Hippocratic author lays a foundation for his views on dreams in a detailed anatomy and cosmology, for which he draws heavily on the thought of the Pythagoreans and Heraclitus (ca. 500 B.C.E.). Book I of the *On Regimen* generates, in quite striking detail, a theory of the human body as a mirror of the cosmos. Similar microcosm-macrocosm models appear elsewhere in the Hippocratic corpus.⁷ The great principle of fire, the author tells us, constructs each individual as an imitation (Gr. ἀπομίμησις) of the cosmos. Heavenly circuits (Gr. περίοδοι) and revolutions are mirrored by circuits (περίοδοι) and movements in the body. The belly is an imitation of the sea, the flesh an imitation of the earth; the body's inner circuit imitates the circuit of the moon; its outer circuit mirrors that of the stars. The diagnostic dreams that are this author's interest speak in a language that matches these correspondences.⁸ This microcosm-macrocosm theory provides part of an explanation for how dreams connect viscera and stars, but not a complete one. The theory that the universe and the human body relate to one another as model and copy is not quite the same as a theory that they interact as signifier and signified. The first position suggests only a theory of production, where a human is molded according to structures that can be found throughout the cosmos as a whole. The second suggests an ongoing communication between the two. The question remains why the soul produces dreams using the cosmos as a language. Just because the soul is itself an imitation of the cosmos does not mean that it

5. "Prayer is good," he says in good Hippocratic fashion, "but a person should call upon the gods while lending himself a hand" (*On Reg.* 4.87).

6. The author tells us that his basic principle is that anything that accords with a situation in nature (Gr. κατὰ φύσιν) is good, whereas anything that is contrary to the way it appears in nature is bad.

7. See Jaap Mansfeld, *The Pseudo-Hippocratic Tract περί ἐβδομάδων Ch. 1-11 and Greek Philosophy* (Assen: Van Gorcum, 1971), 103-7.

8. As already noted, a star plunging into the sea means disease of the belly; a star falling earthward is a symptom of nascent tumors in the flesh.

should imitate the cosmos in return during its dreams. Something slightly more elaborate is at work.

The author gives us a few clues for understanding what supports this semantic system. First, he envisions the cosmos and the individual not just as model and copy but also as a pair of coinciding and interconnecting opposites, such as Heraclitus used to put forward. Section 4 of book I relates the coincidence of several pairs of opposites. Humans customarily consider coming to be and passing away opposites—as they do other pairs like mixture and separation, increase and diminution. But on this point, custom and nature are at odds. The author suggests that a closer look at the universe reveals that nothing perishes or comes to be, but that there is only change. Many pairs of opposites, he goes on to say, are in actuality “the same,” including becoming and perishing, mixture and separation, increase and diminution. Oddly enough, the author considers a similar relation to hold between the individual and the wider cosmos. While they appear to lie at opposite poles, the individual (Gr. ἕκαστον) and everything else (Gr. πάντα) are actually “the same” when one considers their relations with one another: “Coming to be and passing away are the same thing, mixing and separating are the same thing, growth and diminution are the same thing . . . the individual in relation to the universe and the universe in relation to the individual is the same thing.”⁹

The author elaborates with the example of two men sawing a log. Although one pushes and the other pulls, they are both doing the same thing. In fact, both of the opposite motions are required for the outcome of sawing to take place (I.7). Similarly, day completes and depends on night, as does winter summer and, provocatively, the individual the whole. Like Heraclitus’s views, this is suggestive, but hardly lucid. But the Hippocratic author gives a further clue. Near the beginning of book I, he lays down perhaps his most general theoretical principle: “Everything, both divine and human, goes up and down, exchanging places. . . . The things of the other world come here, the things of this world go there, always and everywhere those things fulfill (Gr. διαπρησόμενα) things here, and these things in turn fulfill things there.¹⁰ . . . As the things of the other world come to this and these go to that and they combine with one another, each fulfills its allotted destiny.”¹¹

9. Gr. γενέσθαι καὶ ἀπολέσθαι τωυτό· συμμιγῆναι καὶ διακριθῆναι τωυτό· αὐξήθῆναι καὶ μειωθῆναι τωυτό . . . ἕκαστον πρὸς πάντα καὶ πάντα πρὸς ἕκαστον τωυτό (Hippocrates, *On Reg.* I.4). All texts are taken from Hippocrate[s], *Du régime*.

10. Among the modern translators, W. H. S. Jones in the Loeb series renders “the things of the other world do the work of this, and those of this world do the work of that”; Joly opts for the more elegant, but less exact, “jouent le rôle.”

11. Gr. Χωρεῖ δὲ πάντα καὶ θεῖα καὶ ἀνθρώπινα ἄνω καὶ κάτω ἀμειβόμενα. . . . φοιτᾷ κείνα ὧδε, καὶ τὰδε κείσε, πᾶσαν ὥρην, πᾶσαν χῶρην διαπρησόμενα κείνα τε τὰ τῶνδε, τὰδε τ’ αὖ τὰ κείων. . . .

The author lines up the pair “divine things” and “human things” along the axis between what is “out there” and what is “in here,” recapitulating in the opposition of κείνα and τάδε the kind of pair he was discussing in ἕκαστον and πάντα in the earlier section. His positioning of θεῖα and ἀνθρώπινα makes the strong suggestion that, as noted earlier, the dream at the least brings the viscera into some contact with the divine. While the dream speaks the language of cosmology, the vocabulary of this language is made up of θεῖα. Of course, the divine plays a more attenuated role than that seen in the Asclepius texts. Nevertheless, the divine is once again present, and once again it is particularly the dream through which the divine interacts with human flesh.

In the citation above, the middle form διαπρησόμενα is worth pausing over for a moment, since, within the Hippocratic corpus, it is idiosyncratic to this treatise, appears in several significant contexts, and lies at the very heart of our author’s theory of links between the body and the cosmos. The verb appears only a handful of times in the entire rest of the Hippocratic corpus—it appears twenty times in the *On Regimen*.¹² In book I, forms of διαπρήσσομαι are used to indicate a human art insofar as it is related to some other analogous process in the larger cosmos (I.14, 23, 24). Various τέχναι—such as writing, physical training, and carding wool—accomplish (Gr. διαπρήσσονται) “the same thing” as some other process in the cosmos as a whole. All of human activity, in fact, is said to mirror unselfconsciously the great processes of the cosmos. In book II, the verb most often indicates the medicinal effects of particular foods or forms of exercise on the body. Here a food or activity is said to produce particular results (διαπρήσσειται) for the patient (II.40, 45, 54). The term appears with near equal frequency in these two contexts. The same verb, then, that lies at the heart of his understanding of the connection between microcosm and macrocosm also links human τέχναι to cosmological activity and links human diet and exercise to human health. The author’s use of the term suggests a large interconnected cosmos of which the patient is very much a part—in keeping with the basic premise of such an important treatise as *Airs, Waters, Places*. The term διαπρήσσομαι appears in a third context also—it regulates the connection between body and soul during a dream. Just before his treatise moves into a consideration of specific examples of dreams and the maladies they indicate, the author says twice that during dreams the soul herself διαπρήσσειται all the functions of the body during the night.

Φοιτώντων δὲ κείνων ὡδε, τῶν δὲ τε κείσε, συμμασγομένων πρὸς ἄλληλα, τὴν πεπρωμένην μοῖραν ἕκαστον ἐκπληροῖ (*On Reg.* 1.5).

12. *LSJ* cites several possibilities for the term: In Homer it is “pass over” (*Il.* 2.785) or “finish” (*Od.* 2.213); in Herodotus, “bring about” or “accomplish” (9.94); and “make an end of” or “destroy” in Aeschylus (*Pers.* 260).

As many as are the functions of the body or the soul, the soul accomplishes all these effects in sleep.¹³

Whenever the body is at rest, the soul, set in motion and awake, manages its own household and itself completes all the activities of the body.¹⁴

Given the other contexts in which the term appears, the author's use of διαπρήσσεται in discussing dreams carries several further suggestions. First, the author treats the soul and the body as behaving like a Heraclitean pair of distant cousins that complete each other's work. The soul brings the whole cosmos to bear on an individual's bodily condition, using the larger cosmological processes as a system of signs that carry meaningful connections to processes in the bodily organs. Interestingly enough, this means that the author places the production of dreams along a precise parallel with the physiological development of the human body. Whereas the great cosmological principle of fire produces individuals by copying the cosmos as a whole, the soul "produces" a cosmos within the dream by imitating the body's internal corporeal condition. The two processes, then, physiological production of the human individual and the dream production of a cosmos, are put into the Heraclitean relationship of opposites that complete each other and are in some sense "the same." Dreaming recapitulates ontogenesis.

Second, the effect of the dream on the body is likened to the effect of a drug on the body. Both dreams and drugs (as well as particular forms of exercise) διαπρήσσονται their effects on the human being. While this runs counter to the author's implicit claim that the dream is related to the disease as a symptom and not a cure, he nonetheless suggests, since he uses identical terminology, that the dream has some sort of direct efficacy in healing. A further suggestion in this direction appears in the opening line of book IV. As he begins his consideration of dreams, he tells us: "Whoever has a correct understanding concerning the signs that appear in sleep will find that they have a great effect upon everything."¹⁵

The term "effect" (Gr. δύναμις) is also a favorite of this author. It appears thirty-eight times in the treatise, and in the vast majority of cases it refers specifically to the medicinal properties of particular foods, exercises, and climates on the health of an individuals (see II.39, where the general programmatic statement is made). So dreams behave, from the point of view of vocabulary at least, a good deal like

13. Gr. ὁκόσαι τοῦ σώματος ὑπηρεσίαι ἢ τῆς ψυχῆς, πάντα ταῦτα ἡ ψυχὴ ἐν τῷ ὕπνῳ διαπρήσσεται (*On Reg.* 4.86).

14. Gr. Ὅκοταν δὲ τὸ σῶμα ἡσυχάσῃ, ἡ ψυχὴ κινεωμένη καὶ ἐπεξέρπουσα τὰ μέρη τοῦ σώματος διοικεῖ τὸν ἐσωτῆς οἶκον, καὶ τὰς τοῦ σώματος πρῆξις ἀπάσας αὐτῇ διαπρήσσεται (*On Reg.* 4.86).

15. Gr. Περί δὲ τῶν τεκμηρίων τῶν ἐν τοῖσιν ὕπνοισιν ὅστις ὀρθῶς ἐγνώκε, μεγάλην ἔχοντα δύναμιν εὐρήσει πρὸς ἅπαντα (*On Reg.* 4.86).

various other factors that have real effects on a person's health. Such a language of efficaciousness is telling in that it is consonant with the theory of dreams operative in the Asclepian texts. In those texts, as noted above, the dream is not an opportunity for interpretive activity but a divine visitation that produces its own result. The Hippocratic author of course disavows this notion, but it lingers in his language. He may simply be groping imperfectly for a new language, but another possibility is worth considering as well. In book I, as already noted, the author places the individual and the cosmos in the relationship of opposites. In the dream the individual makes use of the cosmos (the individual's opposite) as a pivotal part of the healing process. Such a use of opposites in healing would have dovetailed nicely with traditional allopathic medical practices. Treatment of a disease with its antithesis approached Hippocratic common sense. By this principle, it is a short step to suggest that what lies opposite to the viscera, that is, the cosmos according to this author's grand vision, might have a role to play in producing a cure. In these respects dreams behave like foods and exercises in the bodily regimen of the patient. They have an important and, in a sense, efficacious role to play in generating a cure. Despite the appearance that dreams are only a symptom, then, these considerations suggest a capacity to bring the body back into balance.

The mechanisms by which this whole practice proceeds remain somewhat vague. Perhaps they are an example of how basic ontological structures continually manifest themselves at many different levels throughout the universe, without any particular agency needed on the part of those places where they are manifested. A parallel from the *On Regimen* supports this reading. When the author discusses how human crafts mirror larger celestial and terrestrial processes, he says specifically that humans do this unawares: "For though humans employ arts that resemble human nature, they are unaware. For the mind of the gods taught them to imitate their own functions—while they know what they are doing, even still they do not know what they are imitating."¹⁶

Maybe, then, the soul simply performs its allotted functions in the larger cosmos and unconsciously reproduces universal structures in a sort of natural language of microcosm-macrocosm. On this reading, it would be the divine intention (Gr. νόος θεῶν), and not the soul, that is the real agent behind the dreams, since it is the underlying force that turns the world of models and copies into a world of signifiers and signifieds—in other words, it is the divine that speaks through dreams. If this is true, and this is my best estimate of what Hippocrates has in mind, the author is only a stone's throw from divination. In fact, although the Hippocratic system differs in its sophistication, compared to early theories of

16. Gr. τέχνησι γὰρ χρεόμενοι ὁμοίησιν ἀνθρωπίνη φύσει οὐ γινώσκουσιν: θεῶν γὰρ νόος ἐδίδαξε μιμέσθαι τὰ ἑωτῶν, γινώσκοντας ἃ ποίεουσιν, καὶ οὐ γινώσκοντας ἃ μιμούνται (*On Reg.* 1.11).

divination, it is a noteworthy precursor to later Stoic ideas on the subject, such as those Cicero makes out in the *De divinatione*. And while the author is careful to distinguish his own art from divination, divination takes first place in a list of the human arts, which mirror the functioning of the cosmos, and no hint of skepticism inhabits his accounting of it (I.13).

PLATO'S *TIMAEUS*

Plato's *Timaeus* strikes several common chords with the Hippocratic text. They share the same Pythagorean influences. They share a very similar notion of the body as a microcosm that imitates the universe as a whole (e.g., 44d). They even describe the same mysterious bodily circuits (Gr. περίοδοι) that are said to mirror circuits in the larger cosmos (44a–d). Plato also has a few words to say about dreams, though his thoughts in this direction are less developed than those of the Hippocratic author. Absent is the theory that the large forces of the cosmos somehow intervene to make the cosmos and body, as model and copy, interact in the dreaming process. But Plato does consider seriously the role of both the human viscera and the divine in dreaming. In Plato's version, the gods communicate with us in dreams by reaching into the very center of the body cavity.

He situates his consideration of dreaming inside a discussion of human physiology. The divine creators, Plato says, make people by wrapping a material body around a dual soul made up of immortal and mortal components. The immortal soul partakes of reason and dwells in the head; the mortal one contains the passions and is quartered in the chest (Gr. ἐν τοῖς στήθεσι, 69e). Plato further subdivides this chest-bound soul, placing courage and spiritedness above the midriff and the lower urges below it. The lowest region is dominated by the appetites for food and drink and all other wants that are due to the nature of the body. It is chained down, Plato goes on, like a wild beast (Gr. ὡς θρέμμα ἄγριον, 70e). In order that this part of the soul not run riot, the gods inserted an organ that could keep it under guard. The liver, Plato says, is created as a mirror that picks up and reflects stern threats from the reasoning center in the head. It changes its shape, manipulates its natural bitterness, sweetness, and shininess, and thereby sends a warning sign to the chained passion center. Now, this lowest part of the soul, dominated by appetites, together with the liver, also makes up the complex of organs that govern divine messages through divination. Plato's physiology, though its vantage point is different from Hippocrates', is once again clear testimony to the curious Greek involution of the corporeal and the divine through the dream.

The liver takes a prominent position in Plato's scheme, though the precise meaning of the *Timaeus* is somewhat opaque. The liver plays an indirect role in dream

divination by facilitating the soul's reception of divine messages. When the lower part of the soul becomes inflamed with passions, it is the liver's job to frighten it into submission. It can soothe it with calming images or bear down on it with threats. Plato says (71d) that when the liver produces calmness and serenity, the hunger-driven part of the soul spends its time during the night performing divination through dreams. He goes to noteworthy lengths to explain the effect of the stern threats on the liver. The warnings and threats cause the liver to change color, to contract, and to take on a wrinkled appearance. Plato goes on: "And with respect to the lobe and passages and gates of the liver, the first of these it bends back from the straight and compresses, while it blocks the others and closes them up, and thus it produces pains and nausea."¹⁷

As is known from Euripides (ca. 485–406 B.C.E.), this discussion of lobes, passages, and gates is distinctive of the science of divinatory liver reading, where the disposition of these elements, along with the liver's overall appearance, make clear the divine will (*El.* 826–29).¹⁸ Plato here transforms the language of hepatoscopy—perhaps the quintessential expression of a general Mediterranean tendency to find the gods in the viscera—into an underlying physiological component of dream divination. But one can also find a stronger position in Plato, which seems to go beyond simply suggesting the liver as a kind of mirror to regulate the lower soul. Plato's language also suggests that the dreamer's liver itself receives divinatory signs and does not just facilitate their reception by the soul. In his summary of the liver, he says that it was created for the sake of divination (Gr. χάριν μαντικῆς, 72b) and that, when the individual creature is alive, this organ "has/sustains" signs that are rather clear (Gr. τὸ [ἥπαρ] τοιοῦτον σημεῖα ἐναργέστερα ἔχει, 72b), but, when stripped of life, it becomes blind and the omens it presents are too obscure to indicate something clear (Gr. τὰ μαντεῖα ἀμυδρότερα ἔσχε τοῦ τι σαφὲς σημαίνειν, 72b). Here the verb ἔχω, "to have, hold," is ambiguous. It could mean something like the facilitating role that is spelled out in 71d, but it could also be read as saying that the liver itself holds the signs that are significant divine omens. This ambiguity invites comparison of the liver to another image-producing thing, the mirror. The liver is like a mirror that receives impressions and furnishes phantoms (Gr. εἶδωλα) for the eye to see (Gr. οἶον ἐν κατόπτρῳ δεχομένῳ τύπους καὶ κατιδεῖν εἶδωλα παρέχοντι, 71b). Since dream images are typically called εἶδωλα, this text suggests that the liver is the stage upon which the gods perform the dream's

17. Gr. λοβὸν δὲ καὶ δοχὰς πύλας τε τὰ μὲν ἐξ ὀρθοῦ κατακάμπτουσα καὶ συσπῶσα, τὰ δὲ ἐμφράπτουσα συγκλείουσα τε, λύπας καὶ ἄσας παρέχει (Plato, *Tim.* 71c).

18. The connection with Euripides is noted by both A. E. Taylor, *A Commentary on Plato's "Timaeus"* (New York: Clarendon Press, 1928), and R. D. Archer-Hind, *The Timaeus of Plato* (repr., New York: Arno Press, 1973).

portentous shadow play. This stronger theory is even more provocative, but both of Plato's views on the liver borrow well-established, traditional thought structures from the field of sacrificial divination and resituate them in the service of a newly theorized dream divination.

CONCLUSIONS

By this early evidence, then, dreams consistently blend the individual's corporeal world with traces from the furthest regions of the cosmos and the divine. Evidence on dreams from the later periods introduces more nuance into this picture. Neither Cicero's *De divinatione* nor Artemidorus's *Interpretation of Dreams* exhibits quite this level of interest in the viscera. And yet Aelius Aristides' tales are simply transfixed on the divine and body parts—remaking a divinatory approach in the image of an incubatory one. In addition, Aristotle's *On Divination Through Dreams* and the *On Dreams* of the late Neoplatonist Synesius show that Plato's search for the organ of divination was carried forward in later centuries. At this point, we are safe in saying that in many of the ancient testimonia the dream stands as a durable link between the human viscera and human aspirations for the divine—the very bookends of imagined human identity.

Two avenues seem open for investigation at this point. First, from the standpoint of the history of religions, divination in itself is a transgressive business. It is made to regulate and control human and divine interaction. It may well be that divinatory thinking precipitates a kind of extremism in the binaries that it necessarily places under threat. The wide popularity of extispicies of all kinds is also most suggestive in this direction. The bodily and the divine assert themselves all the more vehemently for being placed in proximity. If one is going to find divine messages in this world, asserting that one will find them by foraging around in the viscera perhaps reinforces, in a graphically negative way, the divinity's utter transcendence. Second, from a semiotic perspective, some of the authors mentioned here read “inside out.” The methods of Plato and the diviners tend to move from the viscera outward to some larger truth. The *On Regimen* reverses this movement. Here the larger cosmological or divine appearances are the “signifiers,” and somatic conditions are the “signifieds.” The Hippocratic authors tend to read “outside in.” The Asclepian texts, to the extent that they make semiotic claims, would also have to be placed within the category of the “outside-in” processes. But this difference also highlights a similarity. The two poles of the semantic system remain constant. The medical theorist, the philosopher, and the diviner all generate knowledge by crossing the boundary between “inside” and “outside.” Whichever

pole is the goal of knowledge, all these thinkers agree that *translation* between them is the means, and that the dream is a uniquely potent vehicle, to facilitate these movements from one language to the other. If translation makes meanings, then translations between realms farthest apart will stand the best chance of making the greatest meaning, since the vast distance between signifier and signified stands the best chance of keeping tautology at bay.