

Sebastian GERTZ    Dreams and the shadows of dreams in Synesius of Cyrene's *De Insomniis*

Synesius of Cyrene, in his complex and obscure treatise *De Insomniis*, deals, among other things, with the question of the nature and origin of divinatory dreams. In this paper, I will argue that it is possible to distinguish at least two different theories of divinatory dreams at work in Synesius' exposition, basing my reading on the central passage XIV.37-XV.15 Terzaghi<sup>1</sup>/149a1-c1 Migne. One class of dreams is the product of the soul's own activity, when it is in a purified state and receives forms from the Intellect (*nous*). A second class of dreams is produced by the interaction between the soul's material envelope (*pneuma*) and atomic images (*eidôla*) streamed off by future events. The dreams that fall under the latter class are the most common, and vary in lucidity depending on the temporal distance of the future event on the one hand, and the purity of the receiving pneumatic envelope on the other. Parallel to this fundamental division between two different origins for divinatory dreams, Synesius appears to assign two functions to the imagination (*phantasia*) and its material locus, the *pneuma*. While the soul projects (*proballei*) forms onto the imagination in the case of dreams belonging to the first class, the *pneuma* acts as a receptacle of unclear, material images (*eidôla*) in the case of dreams belonging to the second.

We thus arrive at the following question: if Synesius exhorts the readers of his dream treatise to make a spiritual ascent, as a number of passages would indicate, does this ascent take place within the second class of 'ordinary' dreamers, or is it an ascent from the second class of dreams up to the first class, towards an entirely different activity of the imagination altogether? A candid assessment of this question will be important for determining the extent to which Synesius can be said to replace the practice of theurgical elevation with the less suspicious, and more universal, art of dream divination.

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<sup>1</sup> TLG line numbering (continuous); see p.176.10-p.177.10 in the printed edition.