

That said, the work is a highly useful and valuable contribution both to the field of early Christian studies and to ancient philosophy in general, particularly the latter. K. provides an excellent introduction to a corner of the intellectual milieu in the ancient world that is often unrecognised or even dismissed, when in fact the rise of Christian thought would play a role in the development of non-Christian philosophy.

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ANCIENT VIEWS ON DREAMS

NEIL (B.), COSTACHE (D.), WAGNER (K.) *Dreams, Virtue and Divine Knowledge in Early Christian Egypt*. Pp. x+214, fig. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2019. Cased, £83.99, US\$108. ISBN: 978-1-108-48118-2.

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In few areas are ancient and contemporary thought more unlike than on theories of sleep and the production of dreams. And yet we still seek meaning in the images that flow through our minds in sleep, whether insight into past events or, for some, predictions of future ones. One does not need Freudian or Jungian scaffolding to think that, despite sleep scientists' vociferous arguments to the contrary, dreams *mean* something. In this respect early Christian ideas on dreams can still speak to us today, and Neil, Costache and Wagner have made a valuable contribution to that conversation with this book.

The first thing one notes about the book is that it is a rarity in humanities publishing: a jointly authored monograph. It consists, at least in part, of reworked material from previous publications, united around the central theme of dreams. The authors are focused primarily on the interpretation of dreams, as the content of these was thought to impede, aid or express virtue. Admittedly, ancient oneirology is a well-trodden path, but the authors argue that there has not been sufficient study of 'Alexandrian literary sources' (p. 1), in which subjects' commitments to forms of Neoplatonism are less important than the genre and context in which they wrote (p. 2). To understand attitudes towards dreams and visions, which were not clearly differentiated in antiquity, the authors define dreams as 'any representation appearing to the mind during sleep' (p. 3), allowing them to take a broad survey of philosophical and theological assessments of dream interpretation.

The introduction moves quickly through a whole range of dream theories from Homer to Artemidorus before pivoting – a bit abruptly – to virtue in the main ancient philosophical schools. The authors argue that Platonic theories of virtue informed Christian dream theories more than Aristotelian or Stoic ones (pp. 20–3), and claim that it is striking how much more dreams mattered to late antique Platonists than to Peripatetics or Stoics (p. 23) – though one might just as well point out that by the third century there are no Peripatetics or Stoics to speak of; so this apparently outsized interest may simply reflect the changing school landscape.

Neil contributes the first chapter, which surveys a host of Alexandrian and non-Alexandrian thinkers on dreams. Philo, Origen, Plotinus and Evagrius receive the most attention, though Neil also discusses the New Testament, Clement of Alexandria,

Athanasius and Synesius (whom later chapters treat in greater depth) and, for comparison, several North African writers. Each of these could be the subject of a full article or monograph, so it is necessarily a whistle-stop tour; but Neil brings immense learning and careful selection to this task, giving a concise synopsis of how each subject considers the possibility of divine revelation or intellectual ascent within dreams and visions. Admittedly, in this chapter, it is not clear that some of the phenomena being explored fit the definition of dreams set out in the introduction, as Origen, for example, discusses ecstatic visions on analogy with, but not *as* sleeping dreams. That said, Neil makes the case that for these Platonist authors, more than their North African counterparts, dreams are vehicles of intellectual knowledge as well as modes of divine revelation. Dreams are, potentially, meeting points between the soul and the divine. Evagrius is something of an exception, in that, as Neil shows, he worries a good deal more about demonically inspired dreams and those that signify disorder in the soul. Nevertheless, even these dreams offer some diagnostic assistance to monks seeking to understand themselves better.

Chapter 3, by Costache, focuses on Athanasius of Alexandria. Costache gathers a wealth of material from the Athanasian corpus to show that this Alexandrian bishop thinks of dreams as incidental to pastoral care and, of course, the acquisition of virtue, but that his understanding reflects his Christian anthropology and psychology. Costache begins with a fascinating study of Athanasian ‘sleep theory’, and through examination of two texts in particular, *Life of Antony* and *On Sickness*, shows that Athanasius considered sleep a natural phenomenon, part of created human nature and, therefore, good. However, for the Christian ascetic, it was desirable to remain awake as much as possible, both to reduce possibilities of demonic attacks and to spend time in prayer. Yet, as *On Sickness* shows, Athanasius does not think sleeplessness inherently good, but, like all ascetic endeavours, something in need of moderation and care. Despite impairing rational capacities, Athanasius makes sleep a site of attentiveness and action through preparatory activities and habituation in virtue. When it comes to dreams, Athanasius participates in wider anxiety among Christians and, of course, condemns divination. However, Costache shows, for those who have attained a degree of holiness, the soul, being purified, sees more clearly – the same mechanisms that impede reason for others may open it up for saints – and, not just that, but through these perceptions the soul could be said to ‘travel’ in sleep, to meet saints and angels alike. Costache brilliantly holds together seemingly opposite appraisals in the Athanasian corpus of sleep and dreams alike, showing that these cohere within Athanasius’ pastoral and ascetic framework.

Wagner, in Chapter 4, takes for his subject that most daunting oneirologist, Synesius of Cyrene. Wagner uses the *Chaldean Oracles* as background to move quickly through Synesius’ Neoplatonic cosmology and his curious doctrine of the soul’s ‘vehicle’, which is central to his treatise on dreams. Wagner concludes that for Synesius the vehicle, which he develops from passages in the *Oracles*, explains the constant challenge of Neoplatonists – the interaction between immaterial soul and material world; it is a mediating body the substance of which (*pneuma*) converts into the impressions made on it from the material world such that the intellect can perceive them. Wagner then takes his own whistle-stop tour through Neoplatonism – Plotinus, Iamblichus and Porphyry – before coming to Synesius’ oneiric account. Wagner helpfully untangles Synesius’ complex psychology of dream production to explain how intellect, sense, vehicle and soul interact in that process. This allows Synesius to make more of dream divination than other early Christian writers would have, though this is almost certainly because, at least in his work *On Dreams*, Synesius is hardly touched by Christian theology. Indeed, Wagner shows, for Synesius, dreams link the intellect with the gods and, through them, the Platonic forms. Of greater importance, though, is Wagner’s account of virtue acquisition, in which

Synesius emphasises an activity hardly touched by Athanasius: education. In Neoplatonic tradition, education itself reshapes the soul for virtue and, through the purification of virtues, contemplation.

Though Wagner touches briefly on Synesius' episcopacy, the chapter highlights one of two difficulties I have with the book. Although it purports to discuss 'early Christian Egypt', we are really dealing with literary Alexandria. The chapters do not touch on Pachomian or Shenoutan monastic literature, papyri from the Egyptian countryside or any other sources that might help fill out this account of dreams and virtue. It is simultaneously too broad – witness the multiple whistle-stop tours – and too narrow. Although I praise the authors' erudition, an edited collection might have served their purpose better, allowing greater attention to a wider range of literature, both elite and non-elite. The second difficulty comes with the link between dreams and virtue. In some cases this seems clear, and Costache's analysis of Athanasius is particularly excellent, but in others it seems that two concepts (not to mention divine knowledge as a third) have been shoehorned together. Nevertheless, despite these criticisms, the book is a valuable and accessible contribution to several fields – early Christian studies, ancient oneirology and late ancient philosophy – for which both scholars and students alike will be grateful.

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SPIRITUALITY AND MEDICINE

ZECHER (J. L.) *Spiritual Direction as a Medical Art in Early Christian Monasticism*. Pp. xxii + 371, figs. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2022.

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This monograph contributes to the growing body of research into the relation between late antique Christian asceticism and Graeco-Roman medicine by exploring how medical paradigms and practices were pressed into the service of monastic spiritual direction by Basil of Caesarea, Evagrius of Pontus, John Cassian and John Climacus.

A comprehensive introduction explains the book's rationale and plan, situates it in relation to contemporary scholarship, outlines the nature of spiritual direction in early Christian monasticism, and introduces its protagonists: Galen of Pergamon (the physician who exerted the greatest influence on Christian writers), Basil, Evagrius, Cassian and Climacus. It then divides into two parts, the first and longer of which, 'Logics of Practice', focuses on how Evagrius, Cassian and Climacus incorporate medical themes into their instructions for spiritual directors. Z. begins by introducing the hermeneutical framework through which he reads the sources, that of biopsychosocial (BPS) models of health and illness. Like Graeco-Roman medicine, but in contrast to modern Western biomedicine, BPS perspectives situate health and sickness at the convergence of physical, psychological and social or ecological dimensions. Chapter 1 then comprises an introductory overview of Galenic medical theory and practice.

In Chapter 2 we meet the first of Z.'s four monastic authorities, Evagrius, to see how he uses dreams to diagnose the state of the soul. Z. shows how, while Evagrius' interest in