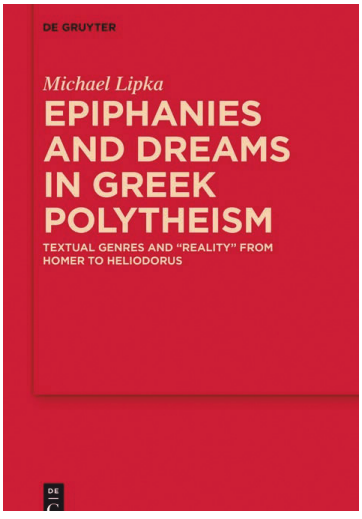
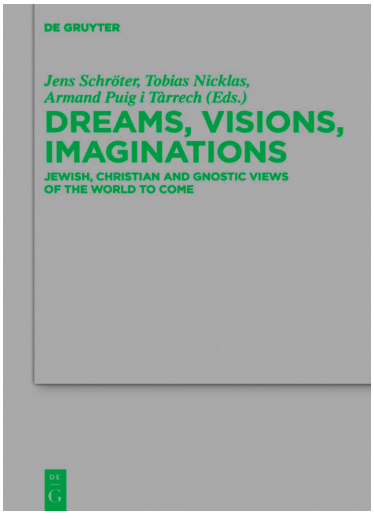
EPIPHANIES AND DREAMS IN GREEK POLYTHEISM / DREAMS, VISIONS, IMAGINATIONS



LIPKA, MICHAEL (2022). *Epiphanies and Dreams in Greek Polytheism. Textual Genres and "Reality" from Homer to Heliodorus.* Berlin: De Gruyter. 328 pp., 109,95 € [ISBN 978-3-11-063636-9].



SCHÖTER, JENS, NICKLAS, TOBIAS & PUIG I TÀRRECH, ARMAND (EDS.) (2021). *Dreams, Visions, Imaginations. Jewish, Christian and Gnostic Views of the World to Come.* Berlin: De Gruyter. 550 pp., 99,95 € [ISBN 978-3-11-071352-7].

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THE PUBLICATION OF TWO RECENT VOLUMES IN DE GRUYTER reflect the revival of interest in dreams and epiphanies in the ancient world, but also the very different approaches that it is possible to take to the subject. Michael Lipka, a classical philologist

and historian of Greek and Roman religion from the University of Patras, Greece, is the first to take an approach that foregrounds genre as the key to understanding differences in epiphanic representations in literature. *Epiphanies and Dreams in Greek Polytheism* is Lipka's fourth monograph and complements his previous work on Roman deities.[1] Lipka argues that previous scholars of ancient Greek polytheism have neglected generic boundaries in trying to understand epiphanies – visions of deities – and divinatory dreams, those which help the dreamer to understand his/her future.

By drawing attention to the genres of Greek texts in which dreams and visions occur, Lipka highlights those appearances of the divine in human form were rare phenomena in most Greek literature. On the other hand, divinatory dreams were common and a "real part of the ancient Greeks' lifeworld experience". He argues that ancient Greeks were not "epiphany-minded", as suggested by Christianising scholars of the nineteenth century, largely based on their reading of the *Iliad*, *Odyssey* and the *Homeric Hymns*. Lipka covers all the major textual genres from epic to erotic novels, from Homer to Heliodorus. In historical genres and even in novels, epiphanic revelations are always reported as hearsay rather than matters of fact (p. 204). Lipka notes that the magical papyri from Egypt, including the enigmatic Neo-Platonic *Mithras Liturgy*, are the closest that the Greeks came to "epiphany-mindedness", but argues that they were different from all other genres covered in his study because the epiphanies these texts sought to induce under controlled conditions were not of ordinary Greek deities but "magical" forms of Greek or foreign deities. They were a product of their Egyptian milieu (pp. 244-245).

While there are a few Germanic phrases and spellings in the English text (*e.g.*, "lifeworld", "occasion-boundedness", "Whitmarsch"), it is beautifully written and clearly presented. The bibliography goes up to 2020 and contains some omissions, as the author admits, but covers many secondary sources engaging with arguments over anthropomorphism in epiphanies and dreams in ancient Greek literature. He responds to recent studies of Greek epiphanic and divinatory dreams, including Verity Platt and Georgia Petridou, but not the collected essays in Lindsay Driediger-Murphy and Esther Eidinow, which also amplify our understanding of how the Greeks thought the divine world interacted with the human sphere through dreams and visions.[2]

In *Dreams, Visions, Imaginations*, Jens Schröter, Tobia Nicklas and Armand Puig i Tàrrech have lined up some of the foremost scholars in the area of eschatological revelation about the *Eschaton* or world to come. This volume is comparative,

1. Lipka, 2009.
2. Platt, 2011; Petridou, 2015; Driediger-Murphy & Eidinow, 2019.

as the title suggests, and focuses on prophetic dreams and visions from Jewish, Christian and Gnostic traditions. It is a welcome addition to other recent comparative works that have sought to delineate the common roots of the dreaming and divinatory traditions of Judaism, Christianity and Islam.[3] The volume is the proceedings of a conference on the same topic held in Barcelona in May 2019. In a brief introduction, the editors outline the questions posed by the conference organisers, which are addressed in the eighteen chapters that follow (p. 2). These include the purpose of apocalyptic writings, their authors' views on history, a common worldview across religions of the relationship between the heavenly and earthly realms, and the enduring appeal of their predictions of the often violent punishments and destruction awaiting those who oppose God's will.

The contributors take a broad understanding of apocalyptic that extends beyond the genre of "apocalypse" *per se*. Some have focused on gnostic texts from Manichean communities, Nag Hammadi, and Qumran, others on Jewish apocalyptic (*e.g.*, *Daniel, Baruch II*, *Enoch*). Other chapters on Jewish-Christian texts (*Visio Pauli*, *Sibylline Oracles*), apocryphal books whose canonicity was debated by Christians (*e.g.*, 1 and 4 *Ezra*, *Shepherd of Hermas*, *Book of Revelation*), show the breadth and flexibility of the apocalyptic genre and its lasting popularity, through the medieval tours of heaven and hell (*e.g.*, *The Greek Apocalypse of Ezra*) and up to the current day.

The editors helpfully identify eight common themes which bind the chapters into a cohesive entity (pp. 2-3). These include the observation that the understandings of time and history that we find in ancient apocalyptic writings are radically different to those of our day. A second *caveat* is that confessional categories (Jewish, Christian, Islamic, etc.) are largely useless for distinguishing between groups of apocalyptic writings – rather, the recurrence of certain motifs or figures that cross religious boundaries may be considered their defining features. Rather than go through each chapter individually, I have singled out three below for special mention.

John J. Collins, a specialist in ancient Jewish and early Christian apocalypticism, treats questions of periodisation, such as the Four Kingdoms framework of the *Book of Daniel*, and concludes that the roots of Jewish apocalypticism lie in the Hellenistic-Roman milieu. Elements that arose in the Seleucid era, such as apocalyptic periodization and popular belief in the resurrection or the judgement of the dead, were symptomatic of the changes of this period, rather than owed to Seleucid influence (pp. 19-21).

3. Neil, 2021, p. 10 adopted the term "ecumenic" for such an approach, following John Lamoreaux.

Building on the evidence presented at greater length elsewhere,[4] Stephen Shoemaker reveals the many common features of eschatological expectation that were shared by the religions of Judaism, late-antique Christianity and early Islam. He suggests that Muhammad was, like Jesus, an eschatological prophet and that he and his earliest followers were expecting the arrival of the *Eschaton* within their lifetime (p. 463). He shows that Qur'anic eschatological vocabulary of the late seventh to early eighth centuries borrows from the Jewish and Christian biblical matrix and some of it may well pre-date Muhammad. Two interesting divergences from the Christian scriptures' account of the Last Days are the roles played in the Last Judgement by Jesus and the beast in the Qur'an. Apart from these, the Qur'anic accounts of the arrival of the *Eschaton* seem to derive "almost entirely from the biblical tradition" (pp. 483-484).

In the final chapter, Lourdes García Ureña offers a reflection on the elements of visual culture that shaped the biblical *Book of Revelation*, with some interesting reflections on how visual culture, especially the symbolic language of colour, continues to shape the reception of the *Apocalypse* today in cinematic representations (pp. 496-500). Anyone who has enjoyed watching the apocalyptic Spanish series *Warrior Nun* will appreciate this chapter. García Ureña observes that in the new cinematic representation of the 21st century, apocalypse has changed meaning from "revelation" to "destruction" or "end of the world", a change which has in no way detracted from the genre's popular appeal. This is an interesting cultural shift and deserves further research.

Lipka, Schröter, Nicklas, and Puig i Tàrrech have made a significant contribution to the burgeoning field of research on dreams and visions in the ancient world and their religious connotations. They are to be congratulated on bringing a range of exciting new texts to light. Their focus on the literary genres of epiphanies, divinatory dream narratives, and "apocalypses", understood in a broad sense, will certainly provide scholars with many fruitful avenues for further exploration.

Bibliography

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4. Shoemaker, 2018.

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