

Philo of Alexandria's Philosophy of Dreams
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Philo of Alexandria is truly a protean figure who has aroused the interest of scholars from a variety of disciplines and evaded attempts to assign him any one label. Not only was he an Hellenistic Jew who practiced Greek philosophy and biblical exegesis, but the matter is further complicated by his eclectic brand of philosophy and the uncertainty regarding his orthodoxy as a Jew. In the course of this paper, I will examine yet another aspect of Philo which has received considerably less attention than the ones mentioned above--namely, Philo's approach to dream interpretation.

Philo's *De Somniis* I and II are all that remain of his treatises on dreams which, according to Eusebius of Caesarea, originally totaled five. However, on the basis of internal evidence, one can only be sure of three treatises, each of which dealt specifically with one of Philo's three classes of god-sent dreams: dreams sent directly from God, dreams which occur when the soul of the individual moves with the soul of the universe, and dreams which emerge from the soul itself. The extant treatises correspond to the second and third categories and deal primarily with the dreams of Jacob, Joseph, the Pharaoh, the cup-bearer, and the cook, as recorded in Genesis. Scholars have long since noticed the striking similarity between Philo's tripartite system and the system attributed to Posidonius in a fragment preserved by Cicero (*De Div.* I.64), but there are some inconsistencies and many questions with regard to Philo's relationship to other traditions of dream interpretation, such as the five-fold system employed by Macrobius and Artemidorus. Attempts to explain Philo's relationship to these traditions range from Robert Berchman's uncanny assertion that Philo actually espouses five categories to Derek S. Dodson's claim that although Philo is indebted to Posidonius, his system is more closely related functionally to that of Artemidorus.

The primary characteristics of Philo's system of dream classification include prediction, the soul, and the clarity or obscurity of the dream to the dreamer. Although Philo's system is most closely related to the system attributed to Posidonius, the latter does not take into consideration the clarity or obscurity of the dream. Past attempts by scholars to locate Philo's tripartite system in the context of other three and five-fold systems have not fully taken into account the significance of this point and thus have been unable to explain the significance of Philo's classification system in relation to his philosophy of dreaming. An important point of departure will be A.H.M. Kessels' distinction between dream classifications which are philosophical in nature and those which are practical and interpretive. Like that of Posidonius, Philo's system is primarily concerned with the mechanics and psychology of dreaming. On the other hand, Philo's emphasis on the relative obscurity or clarity of the dream has been mistakenly attributed by scholars to Philo's own allegorical interpretation of the biblical text, but, in fact, this element regards the experience of the dreamer within the literal narrative of the bible. Philo's system of classification reflects his own philosophy of dreaming in which the eyes of the soul are able to catch a glimpse of the future and the clarity of this vision depends upon the virtue of the soul of the dreamer. Comments Philo makes outside of *De Somniis* I and II are consistent with regard to the chief characteristics he associates with the process of dreaming and further emphasize that his primary interest is in the psychological mechanics of dreaming and not with a practical method of interpretation.