



MASTERARBEIT | MASTER'S THESIS

Titel | Title

Silencing Spiritual Agency The Disenchantment of Dreams at the Dawn of the Early Modern Period

verfasst von | submitted by
Lorenz Vollmann BA

angestrebter akademischer Grad | in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of
Master of Arts (MA)

Wien | Vienna, 2024

Studienkennzahl lt. Studienblatt | Degree
programme code as it appears on the
student record sheet:

UA 066 803

Studienrichtung lt. Studienblatt | Degree
programme as it appears on the student
record sheet:

Masterstudium Geschichte

Betreut von | Supervisor:

Univ.-Prof. Dr. Philippe Buc

Abstract

English:

Throughout most of history, dreams were believed to hold spiritual meanings or divine communications, which is no longer the case today. Max Weber described a decline of spiritual beliefs in his theory of disenchantment, but the specifics behind the disappearance of spiritual dreaming remain unclear. Teleological histories orientated towards the Enlightenment and dogmatic secularism, as well as historical periodizations and Eurocentrism all prevent dreams from being adequately studied in the *longue durée*. In this thesis, I therefore formulate a concept called “spiritual agency” to measure spiritual empowerment across time and regions. I primarily analyse sources from the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries that discuss the phenomenon of dreaming within Europe before crosschecking the findings with two global case studies. I conclude that the disenchantment of dreams was an unintentional result of European humanism during a period of religious unease, which was exported within colonialism. This thesis intends to contribute to a better handling of spiritual elements in history (as urged on by some postcolonial scholars) and proposes a new tool by which to make abstract spirituality feasible for historical study, even outside of a European sphere of influence.

Deutsch:

Träume bekamen in der Geschichte meist eine spirituelle Bedeutung oder göttliche Mitteilung eingeschrieben, was heute nicht mehr der Fall ist. Max Webers Theorie der Entzauberung beschrieb einen Rückgang spiritueller Glaubensformen, wobei es aber kaum Details zum Verschwinden spiritueller Träume gibt. Teleologische Geschichtsschreibung, die sich auf die Aufklärung oder eine säkulare Weltordnung stützt, sowie historische Periodisierungen und Eurozentrismus verhindern eine adäquate Einordnung von Träumen in die *longue durée*. In dieser Arbeit möchte ich zeigen, dass spirituelle Ermächtigung durch mein Konzept der „spirituellen Agency“ über Zeit und Regionen hinweg messbar wird. Dazu analysiere ich vor allem Quellen über spirituelles Träumen aus dem fünfzehnten und sechzehnten Jahrhundert bevor ich den Ergebnissen zwei globale Fallstudien gegenüberstelle. Es stellt sich heraus, dass die Entzauberung von Träumen ein unerwartetes Resultat des europäischen Humanismus in einer Phase religiöser Unsicherheit war, was im Kolonialismus exportiert wurde. Diese Arbeit möchte zu einer besseren Handhabung von spirituellen Elementen in der Geschichte beitragen (wie von einigen Postkolonialisten postuliert) und stellt ein neues Werkzeug vor, mit dem sich abstrakte Spiritualität für die Geschichtswissenschaft erschließen lässt, selbst außerhalb des Europäischen Raumes.

Acknowledgments

I would like to thank Prof. Philippe Buc for his excellent supervision of my thesis and for being one of the few people to believe in a project of this scope at its outset. His advice often pointed me in the right direction, not just during the writing process, but throughout preceding studies as well.

I also give thanks to Prof. Juliane Schiel and Prof. Erich Landsteiner for their help in defining the topic and to Dr. Simon Farley for introducing me to the Unbelieved.

I thank my dear parents for their never-ending support throughout my studies, as well as my friends and peers for always having my back.

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1 Introduction

Many historical events cannot be properly explained without the aid of narratives that contain spiritual elements. Entire periods rely on the actions of gods, devils, saints, demons, angels, spirits, and other supernatural beings. Sometimes they descended unto earth themselves to perform miracles. Sometimes they chose to communicate their will through intermediaries via dreams and visions. We will never be able to determine the truth of these manifold claims. Still, it is a fact that humanity has, for most of its existence, accepted spiritual influences on its world. Yet when historians of the post Enlightenment age write about the prophets, dreamers, seers, visionaries, clerics or believers of old, they cannot help but feel a sense of superiority. For many of the phenomena that these actors believed in, natural sciences have provided empirical answers. Spiritual beliefs remain in a realm of unworthy obscurity.¹ Why entertain outdated systematics that no longer comply with our scientific understanding of the world?

In order to write history, we simply must do so. To put it into a blunt metaphor, one cannot analyse ancient warfare without writing about chariots or phalanxes. We are not able to hand the Spartan an automatic rifle for the sake of it being a more efficient weapon. So why is it that anachronisms are readily committed in the study of religions? Instead of concerning ourselves with what people believed, we assume them to be either misled or acting according to a more relatable underlying motive. One example of this is the scholarship surrounding Joan of Arc, the peasant girl that fought for France in the fifteenth century. There is an ongoing debate as to whether the voices of saints and angels, which she claimed to have heard, have any credibility. Elaborate theories describe psychological illness or political ploy as potential causes. Joan's legacy is also the subject of nationalist agenda setting, but what benefit would lie in disproving the majority of sources? Diagnosing Joan as schizophrenic is an interesting experiment, but meaningless in a contextual world that understood her simply as either divine or demonic.²

Alas, the issue of anachronism has already developed a global dimension. The assumption of superiority has proceeded to alter the world for over five hundred years. In perceiving foreign cultures as inferior when compared against a European benchmark, subaltern peoples, perfectly

¹ Sofie *Lachapelle*, *Investigating the Supernatural: From Spiritism and Occultism to Psychical Research and Metapsychics in France 1853-1931* (Baltimore 2011) 144–148.

² Gerd *Krumeich*, *Jeanne d'Arc: Seherin-Kriegerin-Heilige Eine Biographie* (München 2021) 10f and 44f.

adapt to their surroundings, living conditions and cultural needs, were subordinated. Colonialism destroyed what had existed for tens of thousands of years, often replacing it through means of forced assimilation. Spirituality, that is so plentifully involved in the history of the European continent, was denied its rightful place and whitewashed off the earth.

The overarching scientific term to describe this phenomenon is Max Weber's disenchantment. Criticizing our supposed superiority of knowing more than our ancestors did, he argued that we only chose to place faith in different things. As he put it, we believe in the tramway's movement when we ride it yet do not understand how it functions. However, owing to "progress", we have come to think that we could understand it at any moment if we wanted to, slowly leading our lives to become meaningless. Radical in his words, Weber was correct to describe a world that no longer has space for what escapes our observation. Weber considered the beginning of disenchantment to lie in the Renaissance's newfound attempts to find God.³

Having therefore been pointed to the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries, this thesis intends to analyse the origins of disenchantment. It is a somewhat contradictory task, considering this period being a time of witch trials, religious wars, heresy persecutions and missionaries. In fact, no paradigm shift occurred until the Enlightenment, which is rightfully the centre of many books concerned with the rise of secularism.⁴ Renaissance humanism or the Reformation did erode the established position of the Catholic Church, though. This thesis deliberately puts the focus on these earlier centuries in order to uncover initial sparks of what later developed into mainstream thought. Even more so, findings from the Enlightenment and beyond will be omitted from the analysis to abolish teleological thinking. I view the shifts as what they began as: nonconformist views in a medieval system. I do not intend to deny psychoanalysis or neuroscience their manifold achievements, but one cannot employ these backwards through time. With this being the guiding principle, this thesis aims for a better understanding of early disenchantment. To narrow the scope on such a broad and universal phenomenon, this thesis targets sources that discuss dreams during the switch from medieval to modern.

Divinatory and spiritually charged dreams were among the most commonly believed supernatural occurrences, prompting the following question: How did spiritual dreaming become disenchanted in fifteenth- and sixteenth-century Europe?

³ Max Weber, *Wissenschaft als Beruf*, 11th ed. (Berlin 2011) 16–20.

⁴ Eberhard T. Haas, *Das Verstummen der Götter und die Erfindung des Europäischen Denkens: Entwurf einer psychoanalytischen Mentalitätsgeschichte*, Bibliothek der Psychoanalyse (Gießen 2020) 21.

Due to the global nature of disenchantment, conclusions from this part will then be employed for two sub-questions: Did disenchantment influence attitudes towards foreign spirituality during colonial expansion? Is disenchantment exclusively a European creation?

Geographically, this is a two-part analysis. I embark by comparing a wide range of scholarly tractates of European origins. In this thesis' timeframe, different sets of authors have written extensively on dreams. Dreaming was a matter of ambiguity, given its supposed external origins, before being subjected to a gradual internalization into the body, later finalized by Sigmund Freud.⁵ Regarding structure, the thesis is chronological but conjoins similarly minded authors such as humanists or Protestants. Spiritual explanations of divine or demonic dreaming continuously made way for rational and physiological thinking. One should not expect Kant or Voltaire. Theories on melancholy or bodily vapours did not yet escape the dominant religious frame. There is also no prevalent consensus among the tractates. However, dreams are exemplary for major disenchanting shifts going on. Using them as a window, we can study characteristics of a spiritual society across time. For example, we can observe a tendency to consistently constrain dreams in their ability to empower.

The second and smaller part of the paper crosschecks the analysis of largely elite European writing with two case studies from overseas. This serves to show the practical applications of spiritual agency and makes arguments regarding the export of disenchantment. Our first destination will be the Inca Empire. Missionaries and other colonists wrote about Peruvian spirituality. Despite their Christian roots, they were agents of disenchantment in terms of critically analysing foreign faiths and constructing strategies to disprove them. In contrast, no humanist of that time can truly be called secular either. To switch away from a purely European perspective, a popular Chinese work on dreams from the same period marks the last chapter. To answer the global dimension of this thesis, these two case studies portray European attitudes abroad on one side, and whether disenchanting tendencies can be found elsewhere on the other. The duality of colonial entanglements rebounding back to Europe should be visible.⁶ Furthermore, the Chinese source allows us to highlight the particularity of the European case. In total, these sources will demonstrate how the world began, or was led, to expel the gods.

⁵ Stéphane Moses, *The Cultural Index of Freud's Interpretation of Dreams*, In: *Dream Cultures: Explorations in the Comparative History of Dreaming*, David Shulman, Guy G. Stroumsa Ed. (New York / Oxford 1999) 303.

⁶ Walter D. Mignolo, *The Darker Side of the Renaissance: Literacy Territoriality and Colonization* (Ann Arbor 1995) 325.

1.1 Historiography

As the timeframe is both late medieval and early modern, the thesis falls outside of Cellarius' division of historical periods. The narratives of Johan Huizinga and Reinhart Koselleck are instrumental in bridging a gap between epochs usually divided by turning points such as 1492 or 1517. Huizinga's *The Autumn of the Middle Ages* must be mentioned as one of the first books to read medieval sources as contemporary attitudes. He does not see humanists as precursors to the Enlightenment, but as results of medieval eschatology. Gradually changing mentalities cannot be understood by unidirectional movement.⁷ I believe Huizinga's study of medieval times can be supplemented by Koselleck, who proposed the category of experience, including a horizon of expectations that emerges from it. In a time where religion was the highest principle for interpreting the world, the future necessarily had to be religious too. We will have to see what "critical mass of historical agents"⁸ broke with this assumption. Koselleck considered the achievement of the modern period to be its break with a religious glass ceiling and replacing heavenly promises with earthly advancement. Whilst Koselleck's (and Weber's) insistence on "progress" may be taken with a grain of salt, he too diagnosed a disenchanting turn.⁹

Since then, the history of disenchantment has been shaped by Marcel Gauchet. His discussion of Christianity opens with him calling it the "religion for departing from religion."¹⁰ Destabilization and the pluralization of Christian confessions ultimately led people to stray from the stable dogmas that had characterized the medieval West.

"We were previously in an instituted system of the unchallengeable, where the embodied union of the invisible and the living prevailed, and beings were linked in a unique hierarchical chain joining humans to the Supernatural. This gap between terrestrial powers and the divine principle underpinning their superior status, broadens inexorably and cannot be completely controlled by any power. Through it, we enter into the age of potentially unlimited, even if unrecognized, questioning."¹¹

⁷ Johan Huizinga, Kurt Köster Ed., *Herbst des Mittelalters: Studien über Lebens- und Geistesformen des 14. und 15. Jahrhunderts in Frankreich und den Niederlanden* (Stuttgart 2015) 509–512.

⁸ Philippe Buc, *Holy War Martyrdom and Terror: Christianity Violence and the West*, Haney Foundation Series (Philadelphia 2015) 9.

⁹ Reinhart Koselleck, *Vergangene Zukunft: Zur Semantik geschichtlicher Zeiten*, 3rd ed. (Frankfurt am Main 1995) 360–362.

¹⁰ Marcel Gauchet, Oscar Burge Trans., *The Disenchantment of the World: A Political History of Religion*, 2nd ed., New French Thought (Princeton 1999) 4.

¹¹ *Ibid.*, 50.

Gauchet views monotheism to be inherently disenchanting. Whilst he carried on the torch of Weber and concludes with powerless religions, his limitation on supernaturalism has been subject to debate. Religions do not rise or fall based on supernatural powers of persuasion alone. To prove this, other religions of the world should be looked upon.¹²

Perhaps for this reason, scholarship in the twenty-first century shifted towards the colonies, most likely prompted by Dipesh Chakrabarty's impactful *Provincializing Europe*.¹³ Brad Gregory and Alan Strathern have made strides to amend the shortcomings of earlier disenchantment theory. Gregory lifted the mutual exclusivity of religion and science. He describes modernity to be a "hyperpluralism of truth claims" of which even the most atheist scholars are guilty of.¹⁴ One should not exclusively follow a singular path. Strathern belongs to the tradition of Gauchet with his insistence on monotheism, but he bases his analysis on the more comprehensible categories of immanentism and transcendentalism.

The first of these key terms, immanentism, is the common denominator of, initially, all of humanity's religions, as faith relies on the immanence of supernatural beings being invisibly present around us. These "metapersons" are to be found all over the earth, including "ghosts, spirits, demons, ancestors, gods, and the indwelling inhabitants of totems, masks, fetishes, and features of the landscape."¹⁵ Strathern argues that there is no religion without supernatural parts. Transcendentalism however is a predominantly Christian and Muslim export. The word encompasses promises of an afterlife or spiritual salvation. Both of Strathern's terms will be very applicable to this thesis. He primarily used them as cultural comparatives. In the case of immanentism, I believe we can go even further in fashioning it into a unit of measurement. Higher levels of immanentism likely coincide with a higher quantity of spiritual dreams. Fewer of such occurrences would instead signify that religious interpretations of human life have taken a backseat at this place in time. By contrasting different levels of immanentism over a specific time period, we can study European disenchantment and other shifts in spirituality. Additionally, Strathern already defined transcendentalism as a segment of colonialism. It supposedly marketed a higher quality of belief to colonized regions:

¹² Patrick Giddy, *Is the Essence of Christianity a Disenchanted World? A Critical Discussion of Marcel Gauchet*, South African Journal of Philosophy 38, no. 3 (2019) 316.

¹³ Dipesh Chakrabarty, *Provincializing Europe: Postcolonial Thought and Historical Difference*, 2nd ed., Princeton Studies in Culture Power History (Princeton / Oxford 2008).

¹⁴ Brad S. Gregory, *The Unintended Reformation: How a Religious Revolution Secularized Society* (Cambridge / London 2012) 26–29 and 369.

¹⁵ Alan Strathern, *Unearthly Powers: Religious and Political Change in World History* (Cambridge 2019) 4.

“Transcendentalism allowed the emergence, for the first time in history, of a governing ideology that did not have as its telos the observable conditions of existence. A higher purpose was conceived in the realm of the unobservable and almost inconceivable kind of existence that would follow the death and liberation of the individual.”¹⁶

I agree with the claim that Christianity played the most significant role in catalysing global disenchantment. It is key to this thesis. But postcolonial scholarship has shown that interdependencies with other types of spirituality must be considered when writing global history. Starting from this conceptual basis, the thesis aims to be cross-period, focused on Christianity as primary instigator but understanding colonial encounters as double-tracked.

In recent scholarship on the history of dreams, Claire Gantet deserves major credit for producing a complex work on early modern dreaming in 2010. Starting in the year 1500, she takes the reader up into the Enlightenment through all kinds of scholarship discussing dreams, a discourse she ends up calling “psychologization”. Her plea guides the field: writing a history about how dreams were understood/interpreted, rather than writing a history of dreams (and impossibly becoming the therapist of the medieval peasant).¹⁷ This has been put into practice by a number of volumes over the past twenty years, rethinking historical dream analysis. Interdisciplinarity became quite popular, with books including scholars from other faculties in the humanities and beyond.¹⁸ In addition to this, some feverishly debate the reintroduction of Sigmund Freud into historiography.¹⁹ With regards to the twentieth century for example, there is hope for psychological analysis to play a part in reframing politics.²⁰

This thesis remains sceptical and uses a different approach, sharing similarities with *Dreams Dreamers and Visions* by Ann-Marie Plane and Leslie Tuttle.²¹ The anthology seeks to study European concepts of dreaming by comparing them against their native North American

¹⁶ Ibid., 7–18 and 318.

¹⁷ Claire Gantet, *Der Traum in der Frühen Neuzeit: Ansätze zu einer kulturellen Wissenschaftsgeschichte, Frühe Neuzeit* 143 (Berlin / New York 2010) 3.

¹⁸ Giorgia Morgese, Giovanni P. Lombardo, Hendrika Vande Kemp eds., *Histories of Dreams and Dreaming: An Interdisciplinary Perspective*, Palgrave Studies in the History of Science and Technology (Cham 2019).

¹⁹ Lilli Gast, *Freuds Flaschenpost: Einige Anmerkungen zur Eigenheit psychoanalytischen Denkens*, In: *Geschichte und Psychoanalyse*, Moshe Zuckermann Ed., *Tel Aviver Jahrbuch für deutsche Geschichte* 32 (Göttingen 2004) 15–28.

²⁰ Thomas Walach, *Das Unbewusste und die Geschichtsarbeit: Theorie und Methode einer öffentlichen Geschichte* (Wiesbaden 2019).

²¹ Ann-Marie Plane, Leslie Tuttle eds., *Dreams Dreamers and Visions: The Early Modern Atlantic World* (Philadelphia 2013).

counterparts, including how they clashed in various Atlantic theatres. Despite this, no definitive argument is made about whether disenchantment was effectively spread. German scholars have attempted to summarize the entirety of written history on the topic of dreams, an approach also found with some theologians.²² In periodic approaches, Maria Wittmer-Butsch²³ and Peter-André Alt²⁴ have produced good accounts of their respective periods. But specifically the jump from medieval religious monopoly to modern self-referential humanity remains somewhat unexplained. By prioritising this gap, I aspire to write on what I perceive to be a missing link in the disenchantment of dreams. A cross-period analysis of 200 years with a global extension is ambitious, but writing about the *longue durée* is attractive for it is the path less travelled by.

1.2 Definitions

Analysing cultural systematics of the past creates necessity to define more firmly some potentially unclear terminology. First of all, dreams have to be differentiated from visions. This paper views dreams as the results of a sleeping state, whereas visions are all kinds of potentially supernatural images one can perceive, even in a waking state. All divinatory dreams are, by that definition, visions, but not all visions are dreams. Other types of visions will not be part of this analysis. It has to be mentioned that both terms are intermixed in various ways in the sources.

Naturalism and secularism are two more terms that often get confused. Originating from a background of natural sciences and philosophy respectively, both essentially imply a denial of supernatural explanations. To the naturalist, spirituality cannot exist due to it not being observable. The secularist on the other hand makes the conscious choice to omit spirituality (usually in the search of a political consensus). I view these two terms as an antithesis to a spiritual worldview/paradigm and use them interchangeably depending on the context. Still, I would like to add that I perceive secular as a slight increment of natural, as naturalism had a spiritual connotation during the timeframe of this thesis (namely nature being God's creation).

Now, one might conclude that dreams are this thesis' subject. As has been pointed out by a multitude of scholars however, a historian cannot analyse the contents of dreams. For once, this would prompt us to commit the aforementioned dangers of anachronism. On another hand,

²² Helmut *Feld*, *Das Ende des Seelenglaubens: Vom antiken Orient bis zur Spätmoderne* (Berlin 2013).

²³ Maria E. *Wittmer-Butsch*, *Zur Bedeutung von Schlaf und Traum im Mittelalter*, *Medium Aevum Quotidianum* 1 (Krems 1990).

²⁴ Peter-André *Alt*, *Der Schlaf der Vernunft: Literatur und Traum in der Kulturgeschichte der Neuzeit* (München 2002).

dreams also do not make for good scientific sources. There are three essential reasons for this: They are unexplainable as they are the abstract result of a dead person's cognition; they lack heavy contextual information which would warrant the use of psychoanalysis; they can easily be misremembered, framed or forged due to their high degree of subjectivism.

To be precise, this thesis targets dream interpretation. Instead of asking what someone has dreamt, I ask what cultural or scientific backgrounds have led people to attribute dreams to certain origins and associate them with meaning. Such an undertaking is historically feasible. The discourse surrounding dreams does not suffer from the dangers mentioned above. One can study contemporary tractates claiming scientific or spiritual validity. Dreambooks, a popular genre of literature at the time, will not feature as much. These were handbooks that enabled amateurs to analyse the contents of their dreams. They contain verbalizations and emotional guidance through which images in dreams could be understood by a broad public. Whilst this reflects societal values and ought to be studied, these books seldomly concern themselves with the functionality behind dreams. Dreambooks explain contents, which is informative but not useful in a scientific discourse of origins. Still, it goes to show that dream interpretation and, by extension, divination are “conscious poetic manipulations” of experience.²⁵

Last but not least, I would like to touch upon my definition of spiritual agency. This is, in short, regular agency that gains substance from socially accepted beliefs in spiritual matters. Joan of Arc once again serves as a fitting example. If not for her claims of visions and virginity, a peasant girl would not have possessed the charisma to rise through the social strata. She employed cultural symbolisms to seemingly draw on extraordinary powers.²⁶ Her spiritual agency enabled her to ride with knights and stand next to the king. There does not yet seem to be a consistent enough term in recent scholarship that describes this empowering phenomenon.²⁷ My usage of spiritual agency is described in the next chapter.

²⁵ Steven R. Fischer, *The Complete Medieval Dreambook: A Multilingual Alphabetical Somnia Danielis Collation* (Bern 1982) 9f.

²⁶ Wolfgang Schluchter, *Die Entzauberung der Welt: Sechs Studien zu Max Weber* (Tübingen 2009) 3f.

²⁷ The only usage of the term was in a 2023 self-help book called *Holding the Hope* by Linda Aspey et al.

1.3 Methodology

The Unbelieved and Historians by Luke Clossey et al. is an article series from 2016 that showed significant concern with the disregard for spirituality. By discussing the Santal rebellion of 1855, the authors argue that the general doubting of all knowledge has lately turned into the impossibility of some knowledge. Even Chakrabarty does not escape criticism of what is called ‘dogmatic secularism’.²⁸ To counter this, the authors have developed research guidelines for studying religious themes. The solution they offer is one of possibilities, in which the divine reoccupies its spot in history. This is strictly not an agnostic position, as the question is put to the sources rather than being ignored. Reading the divine as part of the story can reintroduce causality. “If we only accept the modern aspects of the past, the past necessarily looks more modern than it actually was.”²⁹ This attitude of ‘belief until disproven’ of Clossey et al. is what inspired this thesis. I encountered the Unbelieved research group through coursework on Australian Aboriginal Studies. Here, Indigenous scholars wage similar battles against the exclusivity of Western scholarship. For over two hundred years, they have found it impossible to bring their science into a Western system of academia. A need for augmentation arises, keeping the tried and tested principles but allowing for more inclusivity. Obviously, this is a difficult balancing act between dogmatic secularism and the reinstatement of all things supernatural. I figured that the same ought to be pursued for the premodern mentalities of Europe, given that they also stray from the secular worldviews governing today.

One cannot attempt to analyse spiritual dreams directly. Subjectivity and inexplicability block off any attempts that want to go beyond philosophy. Therefore, I would like to use a reroute found in Bourdieusian theory, which has been fleshed out well by Philip Gorski.³⁰ Disenchantment is by definition a kind of sociohistorical shift. Pierre Bourdieu proposed the usage of fields to signify these changes by how different elites and ideologies contest over shared space, also describing social hierarchy and capital within each of these playing fields. Like spheres, these fields can emerge, grow, shrink or disappear in various ways, all whilst being in interdependence with those around. The genesis and organisation of a field is tied to

²⁸ Luke Clossey, Kyle Jackson, Brandon Marriott, Andrew Redden, et al., *The Unbelieved and Historians Part I: A Challenge*, *History Compass* 14, no. 12 (2016) 594–597.

²⁹ Luke Clossey, Kyle Jackson, Brandon Marriott, Andrew Redden, et al., *The Unbelieved and Historians Part II: Proposals and Solutions*, *History Compass* 15, no. 1 (2017) 6f.

³⁰ Philip S. Gorski, *Bourdieuian Theory and Historical Analysis: Maps Mechanisms and Methods*, In: *Bourdieu and Historical Analysis*, Philip S. Gorski Ed., *Politics History and Culture* (Durham / London 2013) 327–366.

what Bourdieu called “ultimate values”. Being that this is a thesis centred between the totalities of religion and science, working with fields is beneficial to display how a shift from one to the other occurred. On a secondary note, Gorski notes that epistemological distance is the hardest quality to achieve with this. However, there is a way to circumvent it: “Bourdieu is not a materialist, as has often been claimed. If he frequently strikes up a materialistic stance, it is because he often studies cultural objects.”³¹ Apparently, if one wishes to study a vague symbolical construct, one should look at its effects in other more graspable realms. In terms of disenchantment, we cannot analyse the origins of dreams or the actors experiencing them, much less the contents. But with the use of spiritual agency, we can see how spiritual discourse enabled real-world utility.

Spiritual agency will be roughly measurable by how much ‘truth’ is attributed to dreams within the sources and how much the actual ‘dreamers’ are involved in the process of interpretation. One side of the spectrum would consist of Joan of Arc-esque visionaries who rise through social hierarchy based on their personal claims of divinity. The other end would be the medical patient who is lead ad absurdum by the images of his or her bodily subconscious. It then depends upon the contemporary cultural context as to whether people favoured one or the other, enabling agency or denying it.

Sita Steckel has already employed Bourdieusian theory for the historicization of religion. With respect to the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries, she proposes some adjustments. Steckel argues that Bourdieu, falling victim to the spirit of his time, overbearingly focuses on the fight of the laity against religious elites. To mark historical change however, it pays to look at the dynamics between fields, in this case for example Catholics and humanists. Steckel’s paper is also a manifesto for historiography that does not just entertain the micro level but attempts to sensibly make the *longue durée* feasible.³² With a broad timeframe and a focus on sources about dreams, this thesis intends to find shifts on a global scale that are otherwise obscured by more concentrated approaches.

³¹ Ibid., 355.

³² Sita Steckel, *Historicizing the Religious Field: Adapting Theories of the Religious Field for the Study of Medieval and Early Modern Europe*, *Church History and Religious Culture* 99, no. 3 (2019) 348–353 and 366–370.

1.4 Sources

The catalogue of sources predominantly consists of theological, philosophical and medical tractates. All featured texts discuss dreams and their origins to some degree. However, it must be stated that almost none of these sources feature dreams as their main topic:

“More often, this topic is seen as an opportunity to clarify basic theoretical and practical questions. What the world is, what knowledge is, what the soul is, what the relationship to the gods or the afterlife is, how the state should be organised or how life should be led: such questions have been dealt with on the basis of the phenomenon that is the dream.”³³

Dreams function as symptoms or examples of other more significant circumstances. Although being in this intermediate position, dreams remained integral to the findings of the tractates. For this thesis, the sources’ usage of dreams holds two particularities. The individual tractates are thematically interconnected with assumptions about the universe or the human soul and body. To understand a specific author’s theory on dreaming, it will be necessary to also write about the author’s philosophical approach. Regarding structure, the thesis is a survey of works with heterogenous weight for its research question. Some authors chose to write about dreams in multiple chapters whilst others only mentioned them in passing. The different roles of dreams leave us with an ambivalent catalogue. This thesis aims to present each tractate’s main findings on dreams, whilst giving enough contextual information about the overall work so that these findings shall be interpreted correctly.

Aside from the fact that this survey works with, in some parts, entire books, chapters or singular pages, the contexts in which dreams were mentioned also differed. As an example, one author might comment from a confessional standpoint, pursuing a theological agenda. Others felt the need to add to the debate on dreams due to different motives. For example, they would discuss a recent case of spiritual agency, present medical observations or take a stance on witch hunts. In all of the cases though, academical correspondence is not a form of mass media. The target audience for these books were learned (almost exclusively male) scholars around Europe,

³³ Beat Näf, *Traum und Traumdeutung im Altertum* (Darmstadt 2004) 7 and 15 [German original: "Wissenschaftliche – vor allem philosophische – Texte versuchen in einigen Fällen zu erläutern, wie Traum und Traumdeutung funktionieren. Häufiger nehmen sie diese Thematik zum Anlass, theoretische und praktische Grundfragen zu klären. Was die Welt sei, was Erkenntnis, Seele, wie das Verhältnis zu den Göttern oder zum Jenseits aussehe, der Staat einzurichten oder die Lebensführung zu gestalten sei: Solche Fragen sind ausgehend vom Phänomen Traum behandelt worden."].

sparkling debate over the state of the art. Their style is advanced and makes use of prerequisite knowledge, such as an understanding of humoral theory. Their intentions set the tractates apart, but they all together form a corpus by which to study the European disenchantment of dreams.

Practicing disenchantment abroad was a different matter. Colonial sources were not as concerned with sophistication, but instead more descriptive of the specific geographical regions they were targeting. In the context of colonialism, European agents, both clergy and laity, gave accounts of foreign cultures. They wrote towards the authorities back home, providing ethnographical information and personal observations, instructing future colonizers in a country's customs and particularities. In doing so they designed hand-tailored methods of assimilation for their region. As this thesis deals with the case of Peru, most sources stem from Spanish officials that had visited America. These will show us whether and how disenchantment played a role in the colonial endeavour. Luckily, two accounts of Peruvian mestizos will complement this one-sided picture.

In the second case study, this thesis will perform a close reading of a singular source. I have chosen a book by sixteenth-century Chinese scholar Chen Shiyuan for this matter, as his work coincides with this thesis' timeframe and deals exclusively with dreams. Although definitely an adjustment of scope given the plethora of preceding sources, I believe this case study too holds insights on global disenchantment. On one hand, a look towards China can help reflect on the particularities of the European case. On the other, it might hint at foreign conceptualizations of disenchantment.

Overall, this selection appears quite vast for a thesis of this length. However, given the focus on spiritual agency and dreams, the analysis attempts to be coherent.

2 The Medieval Situation

2.1 Spiritual Agency in the Bible

Given that this thesis deals with dreams as a form of spirituality, an analysis of the trope within the Bible itself is inevitable. Not only do few other books compare in their impact on pre-modern Europe, but dreams are an essential component in many of the stories that the Bible tells. The Bible is also widely cited in the tractates, making it the sensible starting point.

Most well known are probably the divinations of Joseph in the Old Testament. He interpreted a number of dreams in Egypt after having been sold off and arrested. Joseph only refers to his position through direct speech in two instances. Neither of which paint a coherent picture of his own attitudes or methods:

“Then Joseph said to them: »Do not interpretations belong to God?«”³⁴

“»Don’t you know that a man like me can find things out by divination?«”³⁵

It appears that dream interpretation and divination signify separate things. Whereas one is subject to God, the other is in the hands of Joseph. Some scholarship surrounding the first passage has debated whether the original Hebrew depicts dream interpretation as an activity that is locked away from humanity. However, given that Joseph is able to interpret well would suggest otherwise. It is most likely just a reference to dreams being potential carriers of divine wisdom, which cannot be gathered elsewhere.³⁶ In that sense, his “man like me” would also support this theory in which only certain individuals can be granted soothsaying powers.

Sticking to our theme of spiritual agency, the story of Joseph may be even more impressive for the real-world consequences of his power. In the matter of what seems like a single day, thanks to his ability of interpreting dreams in a believable manner, Joseph is released from the royal dungeon. He is shaven and clothed, is allowed to speak to the pharaoh and, after some deliberation, receives the position of commissioner at court, being surpassed only by the pharaoh himself.³⁷ His promotion is finalized there and then as his speech had satisfied the

³⁴ Genesis 40:8, The Bible: New International Version (NIV).

³⁵ Genesis 44:15, The Bible: New International Version (NIV).

³⁶ Jörg Lanckau, *Der Herr der Träume: Eine Studie zur Funktion des Traumes in der Josefsgeschichte der Hebräischen Bibel*, *Abhandlungen zur Theologie des Alten und Neuen Testaments* 85 (Zürich 2006) 207.

³⁷ Genesis 41:14-40, The Bible: New International Version (NIV).

court. Despite being of a different faith, the pharaoh does not hesitate or wait around for the prophecy to become true. He chooses to believe and initiates countermeasures.³⁸ The story of Joseph therefore shows two fundamental statutes of biblical dreaming. Dreams are proven to hold divine wisdom. Because of this, they shall be interpreted by certain experts that are qualified in the eyes of God. This supernatural qualification makes the interpreter indispensable at court, often leading to great rewards or social standing.

Hierarchy seems to be a theme when it comes to divinatory communication, not just in earthly terms. A passage from the Book of Numbers, in which God speaks about Moses, suggests that there are certain ‘champions’ of God that potentially go beyond the dream interpreter:

“Listen to my words: »When there is a prophet among you, I, the Lord, reveal myself to them in visions, I speak to them in dreams. But this is not true of my servant Moses; he is faithful in all my house. With him I speak face to face, clearly and not in riddles; he sees the form of the Lord.«”³⁹

Divine communication can take two forms. Joseph is a specialist in deciphering the dreams and riddles that God hands out. He never directly receives a divine voice, but instead observes and interprets the symbols that make up the dream’s narrative. Seven well-fed and seven malnourished cows indicate the arrival of seven bountiful and seven famished years respectively. The character of Moses on the other hand is allowed to skip this step and receives commands directly. We can only speculate about what part of Moses’ story or virtues set him apart, but we should take note of the different levels of intermediaries God utilizes. When it comes to people encountering dreams, we therefore deal with a type of ‘second-class’ prophets.

The only dream interpreter to transcend these boundaries comes in the form of Daniel, the other prominent dream interpreter of the Bible. When he is ordered to divine for king Nebuchadnezzar, Daniel is unable to interpret until the mystery is solved for him during a divinatory dream of his own. Revelation, Daniel then argues, can only come directly from God.⁴⁰ Therefore Daniel is both an interpreter of dreams, as well as a prophet of the first order, given that he receives answers through his own nightly experiences and possesses a more direct line to the Above.

³⁸ *Lanckau*, Herr der Träume, 269f.

³⁹ Numbers 12:6-8, The Bible: New International Version (NIV).

⁴⁰ Daniel 2, The Bible: New International Version (NIV).

The stories paint a positive, yet misleading picture of divinatory dreaming. Given the right interpreter, they are supposedly reliable ways of divine communication. But why would God feel the need to intervene at all? To correct and guide those who threaten to stray from a pious path, the Book of Job argues.⁴¹ Dreams for the average believer, the third-class prophet if you will, are nothing but prevention and warning. When it comes to divination as a whole, the Bible overwhelmingly issues harsh warnings against the practice itself:

“Ye shall not make vain divining, neither ye shall keep mind of dreams, nor shall ye remember, or think upon, dreams.”⁴²

“I have heard what the prophets say who prophesy lies in my name. They say »I had a dream! I had a dream!« How long will this continue in the hearts of these lying prophets, who prophesy the delusions of their own minds?”⁴³

“Empty and false are the hopes of the senseless, and dreams give wings to fools. Like one grasping at shadows or chasing the wind, so anyone who believes in dreams. What is seen in dreams is a reflection, the likeness of a face looking at itself. How can the unclean produce what is clean? How can the false produce what is true? Divination, omens, and dreams are unreal; what you already expect, the mind fantasizes. Unless they are specially sent by the Most High, do not fix your heart on them.”⁴⁴

It appears that believers should not entertain dreams. They should be understood as reminders towards piety. One should not search for any other meanings in them. Here, the Bible shows some surprising shades of what is to come, describing dreams as images that often originate inside of us. Receiving supernatural messages from an outside power is not the norm. What appears to be the main concern in all of this, however, are the dangers posed by false prophets. These are shunned as foolish and heretical in many books of the Old Testament. Such exclusions reinforce hierarchy. Only certain individuals are granted the chance to actually receive and interpret divine will, elevating their voice.⁴⁵

⁴¹ Job 33:14-18, The Bible: New International Version (NIV).

⁴² Leviticus 19:26, The Bible: Wycliffe Bible [NIV reductively translates this as “Do not practice divination or seek omens”].

⁴³ Jeremiah 23:25-28, The Bible: New International Version (NIV).

⁴⁴ Sirach 34:1-6, The Bible: New American Bible (revised) [Book of Sirach not included in NIV].

⁴⁵ Alt, *Schlaf der Vernunft*, 35 and 51.

I suggest that the Bible seeks to preserve an exclusive circle in the minds of its readers. Speaking with the words of God potentially has the power to not only change the course of events but uproot the Christian religion as a whole. This main takeaway is disguised as a warning of fools and fakers. It tries to keep to a minimum the number of people that have the influence to speak on what is accepted revelation. By celebrating instances of divinatory dreams in the past, but narrowing their credibility in the future, the Bible establishes balance.⁴⁶ In said balance, the book tells of prophets and dream interpreters in its core stories to create the necessary immanentism of its faith. But when it comes to the secondary ambition of lecturing subjects on rules of conduct, a discouraging perspective prevails. In the Gospel, such a lack of standardization was predestined to become a point of debate.⁴⁷ All of this ultimately leaves us with dreams being proven possibilities, which hold destructive potential if attended to by unqualified or evil-doing people. Besides recommending piety, the Bible does give no hint on how to actually reach this qualification.

Despite these discouraging statements, one passage of the New Testament opens the door for dreams, referencing the last days of eschatology.

“In the last days, God says, I will pour out my Spirit on all people. Your sons and daughters will prophesy, your young men will see visions, your old men will dream dreams.”⁴⁸

In the later middle ages, many clerics believed that this time of prophecy had been reached. This might explain why, at the turn of the fifteenth century, the issue of dreams turned into a growing and accelerating debate. Whilst a stable balance led early Christianity for over a thousand years, scholars and clerics finally reached a point of renegotiation. The fear of false prophets, witchcraft or other occult practices skyrocketed but when the apocalypse did not arrive, a new approach to dreams had to be found regardless.⁴⁹

⁴⁶ Thomas *Ricklin*, *Der Traum der Philosophie im 12. Jahrhundert: Traumtheorien zwischen Constantinus Africanus und Aristoteles*, *Mittellateinische Studien und Texte* 24 (Leiden / Boston / Köln 1998) 6f.

⁴⁷ Steven M. *Oberhelman*, *Dreambooks in Byzantium: Six Oneirocritica* (London / New York 2016) 24 and 45.

⁴⁸ Acts 2:17, *The Bible: New International Version* (NIV).

⁴⁹ Nancy *Caciola*, *Discerning Spirits: Divine and Demonic Possession in the Middle Ages*, *Conjunctions of Religion & Power in the Medieval Past* (Ithaca 2003) 3–5 and 14.

2.2 Medieval Dreaming

To achieve a pre-modern benchmark, it is important to turn to some key medieval texts. The Bible does give a first taste of Christian dream interpretation. But dreams were also a topic for multiple authors in the twelfth century, a period coined to be a “cultural take-off” by Jacques Le Goff.⁵⁰ Leading thinkers of this time, such as William of Conches, Hildegard of Bingen or John of Salisbury, tackled questions in which the natural and spiritual intertwine. Explorative inquiries into the marvels and mysteries of faith began to form.⁵¹

William of Conches’ [c. 1090-1160] *De philosophia mundi* [c. 1125] testifies to a wary and cautious philosopher. He apologizes for his own incapacabilities, owing to the general imperfection of man, as well as for writing about things outside of the faith, as it is not his intention to promote heresy. Rather, he offers an analysis of “invisible elements” that may participate in the creation of dreams. William hints at supernatural influences that we cannot perceive. For this he again apologizes, stating that no human shall comprehend those things which come from the “Creator”. This overbearing humility was clearly expected of him. For that reason, it is interesting that he is able to package humoral theory on the same page:

“Seeing as though the world was made from antagonizing elements (the warm, cold, wet and dry ones), they were either conjoined through the powers of nature or by coincidence from an artist during the creation of the world. Nature however has the peculiarity to flee its opposites and search for what is related; therefore, it was not nature that conjoined the elements.”⁵²

But William does not submit to this idea of an omnipotent divine creator at that stage. Throughout this observation, he does describe divine influences in earth’s creation. These would then certainly also play a role in producing dreams. But by speaking about “conjoined” elements, he is able to discuss questions of nature too. William probes the established order of the Gospel without deconstructing it. He wonders why so many parts of the world are made up of opposing elements, especially the human body, the contrariness of which reminds him of

⁵⁰ Jacques Le Goff, Arthur Goldhammer Trans., *Time Work & Culture in the Middle Ages* (Chicago / London 1980) 202.

⁵¹ Jacques Le Goff, Rita Höner Trans., *Phantasie und Realität des Mittelalters* (Stuttgart 1990) 42f.

⁵² William of Conches, Gregor Maurach Trans., *De philosophia mundi* (Pretoria 1974) 39–43 [German original: “Da nämlich die Welt aus widerstreitenden Elementen gemacht ist (den warmen, kalten, feuchten, trockenen), sind sie entweder durch Naturwirken oder durch Zufall von einem Künstler bei der Erschaffung der Welt zusammengefügt worden. Nun ist es aber der Natur eigentümlich, das Gegenteil zu fliehen und das Verwandte zu suchen; also hat nicht die Natur die Elemente zusammengefügt.”].

chaotic dreams.⁵³ Through his arguments, William draws parallels between dreams and bodily complexion, the former being a way to gain insight into the latter. Overall, he ultimately returns to an apologetic style and admits to not knowing anything for certain.

The title of William's work is ambitious. A philosophy of everything would by definition tiptoe towards the boundaries of a religious framework, the medieval worldview of his time. William was well aware that he had to be defensive. The Church followed the outlook of the Bible when it came to a matter of control.⁵⁴ It had institutionalized assumptions about the origin and meaning of dreams, constructing a solid claim to truth. Although there were some ways to circumnavigate this censorship, religious subjects remained mostly untouchable.⁵⁵ Dissidence in or outside the Church usually led to accusations of heresy, as the contemporary case of Peter Abelard proved. He faced excommunication in 1141 for applying logic to various topics, slightly infringing on the omnipotence of God.⁵⁶ Seeing as though nonconforming theology could be met with life-threatening consequences, William did not dare to do so.⁵⁷

The popular Hildegard of Bingen [1098-1179] also balances safely between humoral theory and divine attribution. In her eyes, black bile, melancholy, is an artefact from the seed of Adam, which had been tainted by the snake's breath. What also became corrupted through this was Adam's gift of being a divine seer, as this was his first sin.⁵⁸ Mirroring the tale of how menstruation became Eve's punishment for the original sin, the male side apparently lost its clear vision of God. Hildegard alludes to a narrative of eternal struggle that was ever present in medieval theology.⁵⁹ The difficult nature of visions and dreams, already being a trademark of people of higher piety, is supplemented by the idea of sins eroding the individual's initial predisposition towards heaven. Even more so, tracing this sin back towards Adam leaves

⁵³ Ibid., 44–52.

⁵⁴ Wittmer-Butsch, *Bedeutung von Schlaf und Traum*, 115.

⁵⁵ Sita Steckel, *Kulturen des Lehrens im Früh- und Hochmittelalter: Autorität Wissenskonzepte und Netzwerke von Gelehrten, Norm und Struktur* 39 (Köln / Weimar / Wien 2011) 1200 and 1206–1209.

⁵⁶ Constant J. Mews, Bernard of Clairvaux and Peter Abelard, In: *A Companion to Bernard of Clairvaux*, Brian P. McGuire Ed., vol. 25, Brill's Companions to the Christian Tradition (Leiden / Boston 2011) 162–168.

⁵⁷ Peter Dinzelbacher, *Unglaube im Zeitalter des Glaubens: Atheismus und Skeptizismus im Mittelalter* (Badenweiler 2009) 2.

⁵⁸ Hildegard of Bingen, Manfred Pawlik Ed. and trans., *Causae et curae: Liber compositae medicinae* [Heilwissen] (Augsburg 1989) 47–55.

⁵⁹ Jacques Le Goff, Nicolas Truong, Renate Warttmann Trans., *Die Geschichte Des Körpers Im Mittelalter* (Stuttgart 2007) 55–59.

humanity with no conceivable way of reattaining this quality. The ambivalence of divination in the Bible gains another explanation through this narrative of a spiritual decline.

Hildegard's work *Causae et curae* [c. 1160] does not drift into lament over us sinning. This book is much more practical in describing ailments and their cures. Hildegard writes that it is only "sometimes" that our mind is able to see things that are "true or futuristic", owing to our soul's divine provenance. Instead, the vices of the devil infiltrating our minds or other mental issues "often" prevent good sleep. Our sleep becomes uneven and distracted. Hildegard views sleep as the phase of life in which the soul alone has to keep track of breathing. Any diversion to this must be eliminated. Most often, lust and other temptations of the flesh are at fault. The devil also taunts us with his own fabrications of the future. Therefore, the key to good Christian sleeping is to have a positive outlook and an "honest" attitude, free from sin.⁶⁰

This book introduces a level of human morality into the mix that so far has not been as salient. Whilst her perspective would also recommend one to disregard dreams, Hildegard can be read as a democratization of dreams as well, given how every honourable Christian may find a way to reach that which "sometimes" occurs.⁶¹ Also, in observing our sleep, we gain an indication of our moral disposition. Hildegard's mysticism is indicative of an individual stance towards uncertain theology. She herself was a visionary and likely did not want to take away from her reputation.⁶² Dreams are not her main concern, as truth rarely occurs in them. Instead, she offers straightforward clues towards avoiding the darkness within bad sleep. In this, we can clearly make out the pervasive medieval mentality that surrounds Hildegard's work, as she prescribes spiritual methods against physical symptoms.⁶³ In that sense, she makes analogies that follow her world view. Her work is theological as causal connections could not yet be determined.⁶⁴

Morality is one principle by which to approach dreams, hierarchy is another. Whereas the Bible viewed some to be more eligible than others, there is also earthly hierarchy to consider. In England, theologian John of Salisbury [c. 1115-1180] mentions dreams in his political magnum opus, the *Policraticus* [1159]. He begins to diversify the so-far 'black and white' of real and

⁶⁰ Hildegard of Bingen, *Causae et curae*, 94–96 and 161.

⁶¹ Le Goff, *Truong*, *Geschichte Des Körpers*, 94.

⁶² Bernhard Maier, *Die Ordnung des Himmels: Eine Geschichte der Religionen von der Steinzeit bis heute* (München 2018) 272.

⁶³ Wittmer-Butsch, *Bedeutung von Schlaf und Traum*, 52.

⁶⁴ Ortrun Riha, *Weil der Maulwurf sich manchmal zeigt: Argumentationsstrukturen in Hildegards von Bingen Causae et curae*, *Sudhoffs Archiv* 95, no. 2 (2011) 224.

fake dreams by defining five types: troubled, hallucinatory, ordinary, prophetic and visionary dreams. All of them are in need of interpretation, for which he has the following to say:

“In all cases, however, careful attention is to be given to the condition of the actors, to the facts, and to the circumstances, for as Nestor says, with regard to the public interests credence should be given to a king’s dream or for that matter to that of any chief magistrate, be he a magistrate in fact or by virtue of a prediction soon to be fulfilled.”⁶⁵

The first question arising from this is why dreams are included in a political tractate in the first place. Even more so, John is often counted amongst the sceptics. But given their biblical foundations, he is unable to reject dreams. Therefore, he ties them to the worldly authority that he knows and understands, uniting God and the ruler *Dei Gratia* in a singular entity. We are urged to believe in this representative.⁶⁶ John later adds that technically all humans are capable of reverence in their dreams. This includes even those with a lack of honour and the accursed. The possibility of which has already been proven by the heathen Aeneas receiving divination to establish the Roman Empire. In cases of oracular dreams, God employs the agency of someone else, speaking and acting through them.⁶⁷

Being overall somewhat dismissive of dreams, John gives a rather generous outlook on spiritual agency. This and his focus on the “condition of the actors” turns John into a progressive dream theorist of his time. He obeys the leading consensus in that he discourages dreams as something only worthy people should dabble in. In the same vein however, he expands the horizon by paying attention to the individuum.⁶⁸ Dream interpretation turns into a calculation of probability, rather than fixed hierarchy. Even someone unworthy on the outside could have unspecified contextual criteria that make him or her eligible for oracular dreams. Anyone could become a new Aeneas. John’s conclusion in this ambiguous theory is that one should not put hopes in dreams and their meaningless deceptions. Yet we are urged not to block the “path of divine grace” if it chooses to act on whatever obedient soul it falls upon.⁶⁹

⁶⁵ *John of Salisbury*, Joseph B. Pike Ed., *Policraticus* [Frivolities of Courtiers and Footprints of Philosophers] (Minneapolis 1938) 75–77.

⁶⁶ Susanne Kurz, Stefan Seit, Die Einschätzung von Träumen und Traumdeutung im lateinisch-christlichen Mittelalter und im sunnitischen Islam, In: Traum und Vision in der Vormoderne: Traditionen Diskussionen Perspektiven, Annette Gerok-Reiter, Christine Walde Ed. (Berlin 2012) 105f.

⁶⁷ *John of Salisbury*, *Policraticus*, 79f.

⁶⁸ Wittmer-Butsch, Bedeutung von Schlaf und Traum, 134–137.

⁶⁹ *John of Salisbury*, *Policraticus*, 84.

This work, almost accidentally, displays how the Bible's balancing act of dreams was as much an enabler for spiritual agency, as it was a dismissal of it. John aims to end at a similar point to his predecessors: Giving a possibility of dreams and shrinking them down to an ambiguous elite. However, he stumbles over the fact that dreams are central to the Bible yet dismissed in his reality. The result of this is a probability that favours the odds of devilish deception but also leaves the door open for spiritual agency. The discrediting of most dreams implicitly holds the possibility of some. Whereas the Church may have wished to do so, it could never expel supernatural and unpredictable elements since they are a key component of faith.⁷⁰ John reluctantly has to admit that divinatory dreams must be possible, unlikely but possible. Nevertheless, this did not break out of a religious framework. The twelfth century reflects the biblical outlook of hierarchy, morality and overall discouragement.⁷¹

In the middle ages, Christianity had a methodical approach to dreams, although it could never fully control divination. We can see this in the example of the autobiographical reflections of Hermann-Judah of Cologne [ca. 1107-1181], who converted from Judaism to Christianity due to a dream experience. After first getting an interpretation by a rabbi, he finds his dreams coming true according to a later Christian interpretation. What fascinated him about the latter was that the Christians seemed to act according to a "general rationale" with grounds in the Old Testament.⁷² In comparison, the Jewish interpretation is framed to be arbitrary.

Through Hermann we can see that dreams were a universal issue across religions, necessitating an interpretation. Another takeaway is the aforementioned individualization, where Hermann works through his own experiences, subsequently claiming to have had a guiding dream after ascertaining its fulfilment.⁷³ He reflects the systematics of Christian dream interpretation by being the odd exception of an outsider coming in. In doing so, he adapts to the Christian dogma but manages to tell his individual account. Acceptance of his personal spiritual agency was low

⁷⁰ Christoph Galle, *Zum Umgang Mit Zauberern Im Rahmen Frühmittelalterlicher Missionsanstrengungen*, In: *Magic and Magicians in the Middle Ages and the Early Modern Time: The Occult in Pre-Modern Sciences Medicine Literature Religion and Astrology*, Albrecht Classen, Marilyn Sandridge Ed. (Berlin / Boston 2017) 252–256.

⁷¹ Jean-Claude Schmitt, *The Liminality and Centrality of Dreams in the Medieval West*, In: *Dream Cultures: Explorations in the Comparative History of Dreaming*, David Shulman, Guy G. Stroumsa Ed. (New York / Oxford 1999) 279.

⁷² *Hermann of Cologne/Scheda*, *De Conversione Sua Opusculum*, In: *Conversion and Text: The Cases of Augustine of Hippo Herman-Judah and Constantine Tsatsos*, Karl F. Morrison Ed. (Charlottesville / London 1992) 83.

⁷³ Schmitt, *Liminality and Centrality*, 283f.

however, as he used it to unsuccessfully promote further conversions among his Jewish family and friends. His account remains as a prime example for both sides of Christianity's general rationale on dreams: a potential of dream divination controlled by a theological calculation of probability. I consider this general rationale to be synonymous to a procedure called *Discretio spirituum*.

2.3 *Discretio Spirituum*

Almost all sources did not concern themselves with differentiating between divine and natural, but rather between good and evil origins, mainly what a dreams' content signified about them. It was common to view natural or vain dreams as negative, which, owing to the small probability of divination, made up the majority of dreams.

The state of the art in discerning between good and evil can be seen by the debate of the *Discretio spirituum*. Resembling an artform, the *Discretio spirituum* was a learnable procedure by which claims of divine communication could be evaluated in a common framework. Most importantly, this analysis was only intended for scholarly men and authority figures of the Church. Third-party dreambooks were not viewed favourably, probably because they were out of the Church's realm of control. All the tractates agreed that no verdict could ever be fully accurate due to the fleeting nature of its material.⁷⁴ In spite of this, the *Discretio spirituum* recommends several sources that enable one to study the origin of one's dream. Most of these sources were scales by which to decide whether someone was worthy of receiving divine messages. These included the ten commandments, canon law and catalogues of virtues and vices. In an evaluation of trustworthiness, those representing a more Christian lifestyle and exemplifying the ideals of a prophet were more likely to succeed and be granted the chance to voice what they had heard.⁷⁵ Additionally, as the only verifiable account of divination, the stories of the Bible could also be called upon. Besides studying dreams and visions, the *Discretio spirituum* saw plenty of other applications, often in exorcisms, canonizations and witch trials.⁷⁶

⁷⁴ Herbert *Madinger*, *Die Discretio Spirituum gegen Ende des Mittelalters* (Wien 1957) 61.

⁷⁵ Cornelius *Roth*, *Discretio Spirituum: Kriterien geistlicher Unterscheidung bei Johannes Gerson*, *Studien zur systematischen und spirituellen Theologie* 33 (Würzburg 2001) 143–157.

⁷⁶ Fernando *Vidal*, *Ghosts of the European Enlightenment*, In: *Rethinking Ghosts in World Religions*, Mu-chou *Poo* Ed., *Numen Studies in the History of Religions* 123 (Leiden / Boston 2009) 176.

The Discretio spirituum was the highest authority by which dreams could be studied. Naturally, dreambooks represented the more commonly accessible format. We can easily deduce this from the *Somnia Danielis* [presumably written in the fifth century] being not only the most famous dreambook of its kind, but also one of the most widespread medieval books in general.⁷⁷ It lists a large variety of different scenarios and their potential meanings, following main axes of determinism (connecting the future to the now) and latent content (interpreting codified information).⁷⁸ For example, seeing Christ in a dream usually signifies great joy, unless one imagines him hanging on the cross. Imagining God on the other hand is almost always a sign of impending doom for the dreamer.⁷⁹

For a confused audience, dreambooks offered vague explanations to an otherwise unclarified phenomenon. They were also not bound by class, meaning the *Somnia Danielis* was used both at royal courts as well as among literate peasants.⁸⁰ Ludger Grenzmann writes that dreambooks often featured wordings that would assume the perspective of the socially disadvantaged. The complete lack of criticism over class society likely refutes such theories though.⁸¹

2.4 Albertus Magnus

Around the year 1260, Albertus Magnus [ca. 1200-1280] would establish that no scholar had given and can presently give a “satisfactory answer” on the topic of divination. This capitulation by one of the middle ages’ most prolific theologians fittingly reinforces this thesis’ timeframe. But his tractate *De divinatione* [c. 1260] takes a more progressive position, which rounds out this medieval overlook on dream interpretation. Instead of falling back on the Bible or examples of spiritual dreaming, Albertus leads the charge for an Aristotelian turn by using experience as the centrepiece.

“That dreams have significance for future events and other hidden phenomena is proven by the fact, that many or even most people are convinced of this. Therefore, we are not

⁷⁷ Wittmer-Butsch, Bedeutung von Schlaf und Traum, 172–175.

⁷⁸ Christine Walde, Antike Traumdeutung und moderne Traumforschung (Düsseldorf / Zürich 2001) 151–159.

⁷⁹ n.a., Artemidorus [in part allegedly], Steven R. Fischer Ed., *Somnia Danielis* [Das Somnarium: Ein mittelalterliches Traumbuch] (Bern 1989) 20f and 40.

⁸⁰ Peter Thonemann, *An Ancient Dream Manual: Artemidorus’ the Interpretation of Dreams* (Oxford / New York 2020) 20 and 31.

⁸¹ Ludger Grenzmann, *Traumbuch Artemidori: Zur Tradition der ersten Übersetzung ins Deutsche durch WH Ryff, Saecula Spiritualia 2* (Baden-Baden 1980) 63.

dealing with some empty rumour, but with a testimony rooted in experience, for I believe it to be impossible to find someone who has not been warned of many future events by their own dreams.”⁸²

In the following pages, Albertus states that all sciences can only claim to be such if their findings are grounded within nature. But to deny divination a place as a form of science would be counterintuitive, given that we would contradict the majority of human experience. Albertus diagnoses a paradox. As dreams have no definitive natural explanations, we would have to claim the existence of a science of which we effectively have no understanding.⁸³ Albertus opts to search for an observable origin that would solve this conundrum. On the lookout for experience, he recounts an oracular dream he himself had had. He dreamt that he was standing on the banks of a river when he saw a boy fall into the water and, drifting into a millwheel, witnessed the boy’s death. Whilst recounting the story to his peers the next morning, they were interrupted by a woman who told them that precisely the same thing had just occurred.⁸⁴

His own experience reaffirmed Albertus. From this point on, he was sure about the existence of dream divination. It also complied with his faith.⁸⁵ Certain of the possibility, he turns to the majority of oracular dreamers, namely people whom he terms “melancholics and lunatics”. These people, Albertus writes, are often the ones performing accurate divinations simply by the fact that they dream much more than others (and are comparatively more often misled). Albertus sets up an equation of sorts, where divination results from the variables of dream-quantity times the individual’s predisposition. The dreaming individuum is highly important for calculating whether a dream had worthwhile meaning.⁸⁶ Albertus puts dreams into numbers, an approach that fits well with the basis of probabilities that seemed to explain dreams up to this point. Because of one’s individual probability, calculated from personal criteria, one might

⁸² *Albertus Magnus*, Silvia Donati Ed. and trans., *De divinatione: liber tertius de somno et vigilia*, Herders Bibliothek der Philosophie des Mittelalters 48 (Freiburg im Breisgau 2020) 67 and 73f [German original: "Denn dass Träume Bedeutung für zukünftige Ereignisse und andere verborgene Phänomene haben, bestätigt die Tatsache, dass viele oder sogar alle Leute davon überzeugt sind. Es handelt sich nämlich nicht um ein leeres Gerücht, sondern um ein aus Erfahrung entstandenes Zeugnis, denn ich glaube, es ist kaum möglich, jemanden zu finden, der nicht vor vielen zukünftigen Ereignissen durch seine eigenen Träume vorgewarnt worden ist."].

⁸³ *Ibid.*, 77–79.

⁸⁴ *Ibid.*, 121.

⁸⁵ Notger Slenczka, *Träume zwischen Gott und Teufel*, In: *Traum und Vision in der Vormoderne: Traditionen Diskussionen Perspektiven*, Annette Gerok-Reiter, Christine Walde Ed. (Berlin 2012) 154.

⁸⁶ Gregor Weber, *Träume und ihre Deutung: Kontinuitäten und Rezeptionen von der Antike zur Renaissance*, In: *Traum und res publica: Traumkulturen und Deutungen sozialer Wirklichkeiten im Europa von Renaissance und Barock*, Peer Schmidt, Gregor Weber Ed., *Colloquia Augustana* 26 (Berlin 2008) 45f.

be worthy of receiving divination. The probability decided whether a dream would be more likely judged to be spiritual or natural/nonsensical. But even lunatics can at times predict the future with their comparatively low probability. Albertus assumption is akin to the English proverb: 'Even a broken clock is right twice a day'.

With this equation, Albertus states to have found proof of dreams being of predominantly natural origins, for if God were to create all of them, he would not target melancholics and lunatics as his emissaries.⁸⁷ What appears to hint at an impending theory of natural dreaming then turns into a parable of faith, once again reminding us of living a pious life:

“Outstanding among humans is the one who does not care in whose hands the world sits. Outstanding and raised from other humans is the one who has reached heights of intellect and imagination through nature. And he will reach the act of prophecy, if he casts away his sorrow and wholly ignores earthly matters including joys, afflictions, anxieties or hopes. For in truth this one does not care in whose hands the world sits.”⁸⁸

Albertus and others before him did not bring fundamental change into the medieval understanding of dreams. As seen in this passage, he chose not to rule dreams as either spiritual or natural. Instead, he attempted to link ruling celestial truths with contemporary attitudes.⁸⁹ Albertus continued to rely on the interpretation of signs, rather than addressing the body. This switch would have to wait for the Renaissance.⁹⁰ What Albertus and his contemporaries achieved was not a grand escape from Koselleck's religious glass ceiling. They rather reached a new level of descriptiveness for the phenomenon of dreaming, including terms such as melancholy, a prerequisite for studying new origins by which dreams could come to be.⁹¹ Dreams being the result of one's thoughts or melancholic humours were seen within a religious context. Still, this viewpoint was groundwork for the humanists of the fifteenth and sixteenth

⁸⁷ *Albertus Magnus*, *De divinatione*, 155–157.

⁸⁸ *Ibid.*, 139 [German original: "Hervorragend unter den Menschen ist nämlich derjenige, der sich nicht darum kümmert, in wessen Hand die Welt liegt. Hervorragend und erhaben unter den Menschen ist nämlich derjenige, der eine solche Höhe des Intellekts und der Vorstellungskraft durch die Natur erlangt hat. Und er wird zum Akt der Prophetie gelangen, wenn er die Sorgen verwirft und überhaupt nicht an das Weltliche mit seinen Freuden, Betrübnissen, Ängsten oder Hoffnungen denkt. Denn tatsächlich kümmert sich dieser nicht, in wessen Hand die Welt liegt."].

⁸⁹ Steven *Kruger*, *Medical and Moral Authority in the Late Medieval Dream*, In: *Reading Dreams: The Interpretation of Dreams from Chaucer to Shakespeare*, Peter *Brown* Ed. (Oxford / New York 1999) 60f.

⁹⁰ Petra *Gehring*, *Traum und Wirklichkeit: Zur Geschichte einer Unterscheidung* (Frankfurt am Main / New York 2008) 55f.

⁹¹ *Ricklin*, *Traum der Philosophie*, 411.

centuries. Much of what Albertus hinted at with his comments on human imagination will resurface later in this thesis. In accord, with his almost mathematical deliberations on dream interpretation, he contributed to the ongoing democratization of dreams. The accessibility of agency became a game of numbers and was not set in stone at all. Albertus did not diminish supernatural ambiguity, he rather confirmed that there was no certainty to be achieved. In the end, for as long as discrepancies could be contained, dreams did not threaten the medieval framework.⁹² But where no certainty can be found, anything is possible.

We now turn towards the long transitionary period between periods. The slow nature of this transition makes these boundaries between eras lose much of their meaning. My intention so far has been to show a medieval field of dream interpretation as the contemporary situation that would come to be altered in the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries. Despite Albertus' deliberations, I believe dream interpretation remained somewhat consistently unchanged throughout the period. Philosophical debates on origins never left an overarching religious framework. Biblical ideas of hierarchy and simultaneous discouragement of dreams were obeyed, showing an iconography of good and evil.⁹³ Still, everyone unanimously confirmed the possibility of divinatory dreams. This means that, potentially, anyone could gain this form of spiritual agency under the right individual circumstances and with a supporting authority figure.

⁹² Carl S. *Watkins*, *History and the Supernatural in Medieval England* (Cambridge 2007) 224.

⁹³ *Haas*, *Verstummen der Götter*, 114.

3 European Disenchantment of Spiritual Agency **15th-16th Centuries**

This chapter is divided into various groups of authors. To bring structure into the long timeframe of this analysis, I have conjoined individuals of similar backgrounds in basic social spheres. The terms represented here are broad categories such as Catholics, humanists, doctors, Protestants and poets. The category of “Catholics” has been split into two, as it makes sense to separate fifteenth-century Catholicism from the revivalism of the sixteenth century. The latter should be seen as the Church’s response to challenges of other spheres. Renaissance humanism and the Reformation forced the Catholics to rethink parts of its theology, leading to doctrinal novelties that distinguished a later Catholicism from the former. Through smaller histories of different perspectives, I hope to achieve a comprehensive ‘dreamscape’ of the time period.⁹⁴ No two dreamers are alike, but they all paint a contemporary dreamscape of the past.⁹⁵

The subchapters are forward orientated, starting off at the turn of the fifteenth century with a few later ones leaning into the eve of the seventeenth century. Two aspects complicate this approach. First, these groups do not represent an ideal way of sorting individual authors. Many of them could easily be counted elsewhere as well. For example, doctors often built on and continued humanist thought. The chapters only depict what these specialists, writing on dreams, were most commonly associated with. Whilst not optimal, I believe this to be sufficient in the pursuit of spiritual agency, searching for how it was perceived under different kinds of motives. Another struggle comes from the concurrency of many of the groups, seeing as though humanism and Reformation happened at roughly the same time. A group-centred approach makes some jumping back and forth necessary. However, renouncing traditional periodization and teleology prompts us to tread new paths. Working across established dividers of time (and, in chapter 5, culture) can still lead to valuable findings.⁹⁶ I pursue a bigger picture of parallels and differences in this chapter’s summary.

⁹⁴ For a definition of the term dreamscape from Robert Campany see page 124.

⁹⁵ Jacqueline Carroy, *A History of Dreams and the Science of Dreams: Historiographical Questions*, In: *Histories of Dreams and Dreaming: An Interdisciplinary Perspective*, Giorgia Morgese, Giovanni P. Lombardo, Hendrika Vande Kemp Ed., Palgrave Studies in the History of Science and Technology (Cham 2019) 27.

⁹⁶ David Aers, *Interpreting Dreams: Reflections on Freud Milton and Chaucer*, In: *Reading Dreams: The Interpretation of Dreams from Chaucer to Shakespeare*, Peter Brown Ed. (Oxford / New York 1999) 93f.

3.1 15th-Century Catholics

Coming from the stable medieval situation, we begin with a Catholic framework once more. The following authors continued where Albertus Magnus had left off. These clerics inquired into dreams without leaving established baselines. It was not yet the time to question Catholic dream interpretation. Still, they did more than just copy their twelfth-century predecessors.

The bishop of Lisieux Nicolas Oresme [ca. 1320-1382] already is more than just a ‘Catholic’. Judging from the wide range of topics he wrote about, he was more of a polymath. Blending this background with his primary occupation, he wrote about the origins of miracles in *De causis mirabilium* [1382]. As dreams are counted amongst them, we can safely say that Oresme has not yet departed from a spiritual understanding of dreams.

Revisiting Aristotle, Oresme begins by stating that all human observations rely on the collaboration of our external and internal senses. Yet this collaboration is often a point of error. Our cognition, for example, is misled into imagining and dreaming impossible scenarios, when it cannot differentiate between dream and waking.⁹⁷ Oresme writes about a bodily affliction, a miscommunication of the senses, that is at fault. He prefers to first discern dreams according to the dreamer’s individual condition, employing Christian virtues and vices on a secondary level. Oresme does later follow suit with Hildegard of Bingen’s thesis, in which moral characteristics ultimately decide one’s sleep. But to him, the simple result of a physiological error is not a signifier for a lack of devotion:

“Rarely however do such things befall people prudent and of good complexion, rather those who are melancholic, impassioned, and of strong imagination, as fearful people or etc. [...] People marvel at such things only because they rarely happen, but the causes for these are as apparent as for others [...]. For example, at night a fearful man who sees a wolf in the fields, or a cat in his room, will immediately assert and judge that it is an enemy or a devil or etc. because he fixes his imagination on these and fears them. And a person devout and rapt will judge that it is an angel or etc.”⁹⁸

The same symbolism, in this case an animal, can be interpreted differently on both ends of the piety spectrum. Dreaming of an angel does not automatically equal truth, given the dreamer’s

⁹⁷ Nicolas Oresme, *De Causis Mirabilium*, In: Nicole Oresme and the Marvels of Nature, Bert Hansen Ed., Studies and Texts 68 (Toronto 1985) 147 and 155–157.

⁹⁸ Ibid., 161.

higher disposition. It could just be faulty imagination.⁹⁹ Negative interpretations of dreams are therefore not just punishment for a less devout life, but rather a natural occurrence that regularly strikes everyone. Oresme closes with an invocation of naturalism. From this and other examples, he argues that dreams and miracles often consist of natural causes. We should rather not seek “recourse” to the heavens and supernatural origins when natural explanations are usually “much more probable”. With his tractate, Oresme claims to have demonstrated “that effects just as marvellous (or nearly so) are found here below.”¹⁰⁰ His work continues the medieval tradition of confirming the possibility of divinatory dreaming yet describing this to be a rare occurrence. *De causis mirabilium* makes one key adjustment when compared to its predecessors, namely showing appreciation of the ‘Below’ and comparing it to the ‘Above’.¹⁰¹ Heaven is no longer the be-all and end-all, but must concede that dreams, miraculous as they may be, are not always laden with meaning. Mysteries are not just of supernatural origins.

Other Catholics did not necessarily share this sentiment. Some authors instead issued harsh reprobation. We ought not to debate but fear those things which our minds do not comprehend. This is what *De imitatione Christi* [c. 1420] by priest Thomas of Kempen [c. 1380-1471] reprimands us to do. Being a guidebook towards a good Christian life, the target audience may have been less scientific than that of Oresme. However, his various defamations of scientists and their thirst for knowledge show that there is more at stake. Thomas describes those as smart, who sort their thoughts according to internal faith. We should only put them into words after having done so. In short, faith must precede science. We should study dreams through one before the other. Whoever does not put matters of faith first, is subject to temptations.¹⁰² This more conservative Catholicism is directly reliant on the Bible’s guidelines.

The two perspectives of Oresme and Thomas are no less authentic than the other. They both build on the underlying rationale that is the equation of probabilities. Spiritual agency in the form of dreams is allowed to have an important place in the world. But the phenomenon is also discouraged as it breaks with submissive silence as a criterium of piety. The rationale leaves space for both Albertus Magnus and Oresme to wonder at the machinations behind the illusions

⁹⁹ Wittmer-Butsch, *Bedeutung von Schlaf und Traum*, 162.

¹⁰⁰ Oresme, *De Causis Mirabilium*, 361.

¹⁰¹ Hans-Jürgen Bachorski, Pamela E. Selwyn Trans., *Dreams That Have Never Been Dreamt at All: Interpreting Dreams in Medieval Literature*, *History Workshop Journal* 49 (2000) 96.

¹⁰² Thomas of Kempen, Guido Görres Trans., *De imitatione Christi [Von der Nachfolge Christi]* (St. Pölten 1839) 16f and 295f.

and for preachers such as Thomas to choose to focus on the implementation of life lessons instead. Just like how Oresme deduced that different humans interpret the same symbol differently, the subject of dreams caters to the individual ambitions of the authors. Through dreams it was possible to both solve theological problems and voice new themes.¹⁰³

This shows the heterogeneity that can exist within one group of authors. In the Bourdieusian theory of fields, power struggles do not just occur when two fields clash with each other. There is also the infighting amongst elites inside of a specific field. In this case, albeit without open conflict, the Catholics varied in their interpretations of dreams. They had to choose whether dreams deserved attention or not. Thomas chose to rephrase the biblical points. Futuristic dreams are mere temptations, but in cases of clarity they can be messages of divine will, more or less obscured depending on the receiving class of prophet.¹⁰⁴ At this point, the Catholic perspective was the ruling paradigm. Under this umbrella, Oresme and Thomas could produce different accounts. It will be interesting to investigate whether a more standardised attitude set in amongst the Catholics once their field came in danger of losing its monopoly on dream interpretation. For now, dreams are either vaguely natural or devoutly dismissed.

Spiritual agency profited from such doctrinal ambiguity. Under the right circumstances, it was possible for one to become invested with knowledge or power through dreams. This possibility was also manifest in theology, leading to a wide range of visionaries. The *Discretio spirituum* regularly legitimized certain people's claims of divination, empowering the dreamers in the process. One can refer to the tractates of Jean Gerson [1363-1429], who concerned himself both with Bridget of Sweden and Joan of Arc. Being a leading figure of contemporary French theology, he was in pursuit of guidelines by which to judge supernatural phenomena, including dreams. The result of which were widely read tractates called *De distinctione* [1401] and *De probatione spirituum* [1415].¹⁰⁵

Gerson was a leading figure in matters concerning the *Discretio spirituum* before the growing corpus on witches would accelerate the debate. As was the case with some medieval scholars, he puts the individual dreamer in the centre of the analysis. The tractates summarized religious characteristics, categorizing them and then applying them to the dreamer, judging one's

¹⁰³ Michael E. Goodich, *Miracles and Wonders: The Development of the Concept of Miracle 1150-1350*, Church Faith and Culture in the Medieval West (Aldershot / Burlington 2007) 100.

¹⁰⁴ *Thomas of Kempen*, *De imitatione Christi*, 211 and 243f.

¹⁰⁵ *Wittmer-Butsch*, *Bedeutung von Schlaf und Traum*, 163f.

character to be more or less trustworthy.¹⁰⁶ A democratization of dreams becomes standardized. Worldly hierarchy is not a defining factor in Gerson's *Discretio spirituum*, unlike with John of Salisbury, who favoured the dreams of the elite. The only hurdle towards using spiritual agency was exemplifying an exceptionally pious life (and potentially the charisma needed to win over the deciding authorities).

Not surprisingly perhaps, Gerson writes in support of the visionaries. Towards the end of his life, *De mirabili victoria* [1429] likely being his very last tractate, he chose to defend Joan of Arc. He grounds his approving verdict on three vital conditions for visionaries: being an incitement of piety and devotion, having a credible source (meaning Scripture or a pious human) and, subject to the investigation of learnt men, including “no falsity or error that manifestly leads to the detriment of the faith”:

“It is concluded at last from these premises that it could be pious and salutary [...] to approve of the case of this Pucelle [often translated as virgin], considering the circumstances with their good outcome, looking at the final goal which is evidently very just, the re-establishment of the [French] King in his kingdom and the very just expulsion and defeat of his most stubborn [English] enemies. Moreover, it is also added that under observation, this Pucelle does not appear to have used spells prohibited by the Church, proscribed superstitions, or the deceits of fraudulent people in an open way; she is not seeking her own interest with any guile, since she exposes her own body to the supreme peril.”¹⁰⁷

We see Gerson's conditions in action. On one hand, he judges Joan's actions as divinely justified (although possessing a clear political motive). On the other, he establishes the girl's credibility by observations of her living an unselfish life. Condition three, the approval of a religious specialist against possible dangers to the dogma, is reached through his own person. Gerson's writings depict a simple process of gaining spiritual agency. Still, the political nature of such agency will have to be considered. Would his verdict have been the same if Joan had been born in Britain, yet objectively appeared to lead a pious life?

The strong documentation of Joan's case and her dreams/visions is both a blessing and a curse to the concept of spiritual agency. For once we can see how a peasant girl breaks through social

¹⁰⁶ Roth, *Discretio Spirituum*, 169–179.

¹⁰⁷ Jean Gerson, *De Mirabili Victoria*, In: Joan of Arc: La Pucelle, Craig Taylor Ed. and trans., Manchester Medieval Sources (Manchester 2016) 80f.

hierarchy and gender stereotypes. But spiritual agency seems to follow what is just in the eyes of the affirming political or religious elites, giving an illusion of free choice. We must accept that spiritual agency is tied to the wishes of the field that grants it in the first place. Joan may have been deliberately raised and dropped at certain points. There was also a notion of taking responsibility for one's prophecy.¹⁰⁸ Perhaps preparing for this, Gerson ends on the sentence: "For even if God does not change His advice, He does change His opinion according to what people deserve."¹⁰⁹ Spiritual agency was about strict compliance.¹¹⁰ Yet politics do not necessarily make this system incoherent. Since Joan had, for some time, partial authority in a military campaign, had her own correspondence (or at least in her name) and achieved wealth and ennoblement for her family, spiritual agency keeps its empowering status. The sources also tell of her being rather hot-tempered, deciding the course of action by herself instead of relying on her advisors.¹¹¹ Joan is a reminder for both the freedoms and restrictions that come with dream-based empowerment.

Others were less fortunate. As a quick excursus, the story of the Spanish peasant Pere Porter from the sixteenth century is no less spectacular. Porter allegedly dreamt of having gone to hell. There he saw corrupt officials that had kept him indebted. He would then awake and miraculously find missing paperwork in the official's house, proving his righteousness. This peasant too dreamt of supernatural things, performed a miracle, and formulated a political claim. Yet compared to Joan, Porter is quite unknown today. This is likely due to none of the elites ever taking him under their wing and empowering his spiritual agency.¹¹² Porter's supernatural experience was too radical, showing the need for conformity.

As long as new discourses on its edges could be integrated, a medieval religious framework kept subsistence. Exegesis of Scripture did not hinder occasional natural observations.¹¹³ The

¹⁰⁸ Péter Bálint, Dialogues of Judgement and Dream Interpretation in Folk Tales: Royal Advisers and Dream Interpreters, *Boletín de Literatura Oral* 11 (2021) 126.

¹⁰⁹ Gerson, *De Mirabili Victoria*, 83.

¹¹⁰ Euan Cameron, *Enchanted Europe: Superstition Reason and Religion 1250-1750* (Oxford / New York 2010) 136.

¹¹¹ *Buc*, Holy War, 189–194.

¹¹² Luís R. Corteguera, The Peasant Who Went to Hell: Dreams and Visions in Early Modern Spain, In: *Dreams Dreamers and Visions: The Early Modern Atlantic World*, Ann-Marie Plane, Leslie Tuttle Ed. (Philadelphia 2013) 95–100.

¹¹³ Ursula Link-Heer, Weltbilder Epistemai Epochenschwellen: Mediävistische Überlegungen im Anschluss an Foucault, In: *Weltbildwandel: Selbstdeutung und Fremderfahrung im Epochenübergang vom Spätmittelalter zur Frühen Neuzeit*, Hans-Jürgen Bachorski, Werner Röcke Ed., *Literatur Imagination Realität* 10 (Trier 1995) 19 and 33f.

concept of the dream was, in the context of the Catholic Church, an umbrella that allowed for various views. This assumption can be supported by the very head of the Church, Enea Silvio Piccolomini [1405-1464], better known as Pope Pius II. Partaking in early humanist philosophy, Piccolomini left an impressive textual legacy, tackling both contemporary scientific debates as well as writing an autobiography.

“Despite the majority of humans judging that we should not put our faith in dreams and that the interpretations of Daniel and the rules of Macrobius are void, dreams still occasionally take us towards the truth.”¹¹⁴

The future Pope reflects a situation in which dreams are commonly disregarded, yet possibilities acknowledged. This extract from his history of emperor Friedrich III [1453], who had dreams of his own coronation, was written five years before Piccolomini’s pontification. He decides not to trust one view over the other. The canon did not mandate him to do so. Having the majority be wary of dreams could likely be a desirable state of affairs from a papal perspective. But despite his standing, Piccolomini does not take up the role of instructor like Thomas of Kempen did.

Rather, in affirming the immanent possibility of dreams (in the example of Friedrich III) and mentioning Christian Scripture that support this, Piccolomini becomes a type of wishful dream enthusiast. He builds on experience as an engine of discovery and seems to lament the majority’s disdain. Ten years later in the *Commentarii* [1463], the Pope’s attitude is still one of indecisive wonder. Here he revisits dreams in the context of Joan of Arc, which continued to be a captivating case to the fifteenth century. Giving a summary of her story, he recounts how both the outer appearance and attitude of the girl were flawless. The *Discretio spirituum*, which was carried out, seemed to confirm this as well. Unlike Gerson, Piccolomini thinks outside the box of French patriotism, as he sees it in the realm of possibilities that Joan’s ascension may have been a hoax to begin with:

“And so it happened that the conduct of the war and the high command were entrusted to a girl. Nor would this have been difficult to manage for the French, who believe

¹¹⁴ Enea Silvio Piccolomini [*Pius II*], Theodor Ilgen Trans., *Die Geschichte Kaiser Friedrichs III., Die Geschichtschreiber der deutschen Vorzeit 89/2* (Leipzig 1890) 86f [German original: "Denn obgleich die meisten Menschen urteilen, dass man auf Träume nichts geben solle und die Auslegungen Daniels und des Macrobius Regeln für nichtig ausgeben, bisweilen gelangen wir doch durch Träume zur Wahrheit."].

everything that they hear. [...] It is a matter that should be recorded, although future generations are likely to regard it with more wonder than credulity.”¹¹⁵

He does not give a verdict on the case. Instead, he keeps a balance between recognizing the spiritual agency at play but being wary of misleading stories. Especially interesting is the last section. It is unclear whether this is supposed to be a slight on his gullible contemporaries or a hopeful foreshadowing of scientific advancement. Maybe, it is both.

Other Catholics took a stricter approach to this question of faith. Heralding the growing anxieties about witches and dark magic, Heinrich Kramer [c. 1430-1505] would write a manifesto by which to investigate, prosecute and eliminate such sorcery. Obviously, this includes multiple passages dedicated to the possibly evil nature of dreams. Kramer is replicating the New Testament’s prophecy, in which imaginations, demons and heresy would occur more often in the end of days. As this time spells the devil’s impending doom, the *Malleus maleficarum* [1486] states that he would bother humanity more than ever before, sending a plethora of false dreams. In spite of this, many people believe that these influences are merely constricted to imagination and phantasy, Kramer laments. But where real physical damage is caused, only the penalty of death can reestablish social order.¹¹⁶

Kramer brands women as the culprits for manifesting devilish plots in our world. They are charged with living in the spirit of the snake that had already deceived Eve. Whereas many remarkable virtues can come from women (here he lists Judith, Deborah and Esther of the Bible), their sins weigh just as heavily. After all, according to Kramer, the empires of Troy and Rome were supposedly brought down by Helena and Cleopatra. He writes that owing to their melancholic complexion, women are more receptive towards spiritual errors.¹¹⁷

Historical scholarship is divided as to what the motive behind targeting women could have been. Kramer’s work, popularly called “*Witches’ hammer*”, is regularly presented as a core source for everlasting misogyny. Other historians argue that its style reaches beyond femininity. Stuart Clark classifies gender as just another signifier of late medieval models of duality (good/evil, male/female, etc.). Kramer also grounds his representation of female inferiority in

¹¹⁵ Enea Silvio Piccolomini [*Pius II*], Margaret Meserve Ed., Commentaries Volume 3: Books V-VII, The I Tatti Renaissance Library 83 (Cambridge / London 2018) 253–259.

¹¹⁶ Heinrich I. Kramer, Günter Jerouschek, Wolfgang Behringer Ed., Werner Tschacher Trans., *Malleus maleficarum* [Der Hexenhammer] (München 2000) 117 and 139–143.

¹¹⁷ Ibid., 224–235 and 536.

the story of Eve, melancholy only afflicting women due to this singular mistake. With the presence of such polarity in mind, Clark views the targeting of women as a “cliché” and “presupposition” of the time, something that all authors relied on.¹¹⁸ Being seen as opposite to the male was not an entirely negative stigma. As seen by Joan of Arc’s virginity or the more recent *Sponsa Christi*, womanhood had a kind of “claim on both the abstract and the concrete”, Dyan Elliott writes. As mystic things were deemed possible, some women were able to turn these latent powers into agency. Despite this, witchcraft was a weapon by which to punish these very occurrences, especially if women went against religious ideals of submissive silence.¹¹⁹

Kramer issues witches with harsher penalties than other heretics. He sees them as having not just renounced the good faith, but consciously worshipping the devil. In first instance from this unholy pact, many wrong types of divination have spawned. Alongside dream interpretation, those are for example necromancy, geomancy or pyromancy. Kramer uncovers them to be void. More dangerous to him are “witches’ dreams” where they specifically seek out demons at night and receive their commands, often performing sexual acts in their sleep. What is interesting about this is that Kramer delegates a big part of his analysis of devilish dreaming to nature. Nature has provided us with great imaginative power and our soul uses it to perform necessary procedures, like warning us of coming illness, he writes. Yet this means we are also regularly subject to bodily dreams in which our humours produce images. From this medical standpoint, Kramer deducts, it is an easy feat for the devil to do the same by simply controlling our humours. Women are more affected, given the lacklustre balance of their complexion.

“It does not come as a surprise that demons are able to do this, for even inadequate nature has the same effects, as can be seen by the mentally ill, the melancholics, the crazy and the drunk, who cannot discern. And the mentally ill think they have seen miracles and beasts and other terrible things, while in reality nothing is happening.”¹²⁰

Kramer represents another side of the multifaceted Catholic perspective on dreams. Whereas Thomas of Kempen simply chose to adhere to the Bible’s discouragement of dreams, this book

¹¹⁸ Stuart Clark, *Thinking with Demons: The Idea of Witchcraft in Early Modern Europe* (Oxford / New York 1997) 34–40 and 114–118.

¹¹⁹ Dyan Elliott, *The Bride of Christ Goes to Hell: Metaphor and Embodiment in the Lives of Pious Women 200–1500*, *The Middle Ages Series* (Philadelphia 2012) 2–4 and 280.

¹²⁰ Kramer, *Malleus maleficarum*, 423 [German original: “Und es soll nicht wunderbar erscheinen, dass die Dämonen [dies] können, da auch eine mangelhafte Natur dies verrichten kann, wie sich an den Gehirnkranken, den Melancholikern, Verrückten und Trunkenen zeigt, die nicht unterscheiden können. Und die Gehirnkranken meinen, sie hätten Wunderdinge gesehen und sähen Bestien und andere furchtbare Dinge, während sich jedoch in Wahrheit nichts tut.”].

interprets it as a call to action. Dreams are not just vain and pointless. They are seen as a type of diabolical weapon by which the devil enacts his influence on the world. The weapon is nature itself.¹²¹ In the cosmos of dreams, the *Witches' hammer* describes the other side of the range of possibilities. If God can act through dreams, so can the devil, the difference being God controlling dreams directly and the devil only moving the humours. Kramer represents the medieval polarity of good and evil, although polemically exaggerating it for a judicial purpose. Even in the writings of Kramer however, medical knowledge is present, given that nature afflicts the body and not everything is subject to the deities' fight for supremacy.

3.2 Humanists

Humanist philosophers were a new type of group that emerged in the later fifteenth century. They preoccupied themselves with constructing human-centred philosophy, which would represent a reorientation away from purely salvific beliefs. Propelled by the simultaneous Renaissance, ancient classics would be recirculated and read as a contrast to medieval thought. In spite of this, it was not a humanist ambition to exclude God from scientific discourse.

Marsilio Ficino [1433-1499] makes plenty of references to a divine ruler in his magnum opus, the *Theologia Platonica* [1482]. His intention is first of all religious, as he wants to find a way towards God. By reprocessing the works of Plato, he is confident to finally break with "stoic" and "cynic" traditions and invent a philosophy that goes beyond the human body. To achieve this, we first must study the latter to its completion, leading Ficino to the premise of having to 'know thyself'.¹²² His ambition is deeply spiritual, as it is his central conviction that the soul is trapped within the body. Multiple instances of where it is released for a short term are mentioned: sleep, syncope, melancholy, solitude, wonder, chastity and others. Only through them are we able to reach truth, light and higher reason. The images we see instead are often just reflections of past thoughts, as well as present unrest of our humours.¹²³ Ficino therefore is one of the first to approach dreams in a psychological manner. Instead of repeating the pallet of divinatory, demonic and void, he brings a sense of causality with him. Even that which is

¹²¹ Cameron, *Enchanted Europe*, 113.

¹²² Marsilio Ficino, James Hankins Ed., Michael J. B. Allen Trans., *Theologia Platonica de Immortalitate Animorum* [Platonic Theology], The I Tatti Renaissance Library, 6 Volumes (Cambridge / London 2001) Volume 1/1, 9 and 29.

¹²³ Ibid., Volume 4/13, 151.

void ultimately has a rational origin, be it whatever troubles the mind. Although he is yet to replace humoral theory, Ficino is exemplary for a new level of bodily descriptiveness:

“Not just daily but almost every hour, whenever a wisp of vapor that is somewhat denser and more humid wafts up from the lower parts of the body, seeks out the head, and chokes up the passages of the brain, we experience in ourselves the sensation of being instantly weighed down by sleep and as instantly deceived by dreams and images. Often too, if some vapor of black bile, which the Greeks call melancholy, besieges and then storms the body’s citadel, we immediately experience the sensation of our queen, the reason, being dethroned as it were, and of subjects being gripped by manifest insanity. If a wispy vapor has such power over us, if such a delicate motion moves us so violently, then how much more, one must suppose, does our celestial and immortal rational soul depart from its state of rest, as the Platonists believe, at the moment when it falls away from the original purity of its creation – that is, when it is imprisoned in the lightless dungeon of the earthly and mortal body.”¹²⁴

Ficino masterfully crafts a theory that focuses on movements inside the body yet can still be evaluated in a churchly framework. Crowning reason as his celestial queen imprisoned within the flesh, he adheres to a churchly narrative of penance and humility. Yet his terminology is depicting a clear switch towards medicine. Instead of picturing an internal struggle of virtue versus sin, bodily vapours are the reasons behind our imaginations. Ficino externalizes the spiritual fight for righteousness to the bodily prison, meaning that we must first escape the latter. Ficino performs semantic groundwork by writing that internal physical affects are in charge.¹²⁵ In the case of dreams, Ficino finds it important to distinguish between prophets and dream interpreters. Prophecy is contemplative, whereas Ficino describes the interpreter as a hunter that traces back the path of causality.¹²⁶

His recommendation, it appears, is to strive for a balance of both. We should be in part spiritually inclined so as to recognize divinity when it acts upon us, but also should employ methods of reason to discern the origins of our images. The Christian model of the *Exercitatio mentis* already knew of contemplation, but humanist dreaming is significant for constructing a

¹²⁴ *Ibid.*, Volume 4/14, 277.

¹²⁵ *Alt*, *Schlaf der Vernunft*, 28.

¹²⁶ *Ficino*, *Theologia Platonica*, Volume 4/13, 153-159.

two-lane street.¹²⁷ Reason (or rationality), often depicted as a vague praiseworthy deity or abstract ideal, suddenly finds itself venerated equally to God. Ficino spiritualized Plato.¹²⁸ Whilst we cannot raise our minds on our own and will never understand God due to our corporeal limitations, our intellect is able to give us a certain “readiness” for when it does happen.¹²⁹ Ficino couples science onto the narrative of divine salvation by turning the former into a religious goal. He concludes his thesis by describing Platonic contemplation as the mind’s journey towards God and back. The so far more prevalent tradition of Aristotle did not balance body and soul as the Neoplatonists now did.¹³⁰ Transcending the body via “contemplative thought and ethical behaviour” ultimately helps us see much more of the supernatural world than what little we can gaze from inside our bodily prison.¹³¹

Overall, dreams still carry spiritual agency in the *Theologia Platonica*. Ficino goes to great lengths in describing them as an ideal state in which we are temporarily freed from constraints. He confirms that it is then that a divine light is able to enter and give us messages. The body is both detested and yet an object that is worthy of observation, as it is the key to everything. In the study of nature lies a high degree of spiritual ambition, yet also a reduction of rationality to target the flesh.¹³² It is difficult to judge the impacts of these arguments on spiritual agency. In medical language (Ficino was also a practitioner), dreams are nothing more than the results of vapours and psychological afflictions. Regardless, the main emphasis lies on God and us being able to see him.

Two worlds, once conjoined, are slowly being separated. Ours is the world of corporeal nature that is subject to empiricism. Above that is the supernatural world, which we are able to perceive under certain conditions, yet is otherwise closed off. Our divine soul is restricted by our body. Immanentism is weakened. Ficino did not intend so, but he definitively departed from a religious framework. This frame has not yet stopped functioning, but instead of passive prayer,

¹²⁷ Willemien Otten, Religion as Exercitatio Mentis: A Case for Theology as a Humanist Discipline, In: Christian Humanism: Essays in Honour of Arjo Vanderjagt, Alasdair A. MacDonald, Zweder R. von Martels, Jan R. Veenstra Ed., Studies in Medieval and Reformation Traditions 142 (Leiden / Boston 2009) 64.

¹²⁸ Thomas Willard, How Magical Was Renaissance Magic?, In: Magic and Magicians in the Middle Ages and the Early Modern Time: The Occult in Pre-Modern Sciences Medicine Literature Religion and Astrology, Albrecht Classen Ed. (Berlin / Boston 2017) 640f.

¹²⁹ Ficino, *Theologia Platonica*, Volume 6/18, 145-149.

¹³⁰ Feld, Ende des Seelenglaubens, 385–402.

¹³¹ Ficino, *Theologia Platonica*, Volume 6/Appendix, 221, 255 and 267.

¹³² Ken Wilber, *Eye to Eye: The Quest for the New Paradigm*, 3rd ed. (Boston 2001) 8–11.

the Italian decides to actively study the body rather than Scripture. He understands spiritual influences to be present in terms of a *pneuma*, meaning an outlet of our soul that can be easily disturbed.¹³³ The humanists study dreams from a physical perspective. Can this be a desirable *modus operandi* for visiting God or will dreams be deconstructed along with the bodies?

The leading humanist thinkers of the period started to employ this newfound holistic theorem. Rational and spiritual grounds seemed to legitimize corporeal research. The goal was divine and the methods empirical. Although to a degree a work of satire, Erasmus of Rotterdam's [1469-1536] *Moriae encomium* [1511] straight out announces itself to be a departure from common belief. In the matter of dreams, Erasmus rejects the "wise men" of his time and wants to establish a science that no longer simply produces "fearful images" for children or falls back on female hysteria.¹³⁴ For him it can be observed that humans seem to enjoy myths and legends more than other stories. It seems peculiar that certain fabled saints (he names Saint George, Saint Christopher and Saint Barbara) receive more veneration than others, possibly even more than Christ himself.

Here, the Greek influence shines bright, as Erasmus discusses Plato's allegory of the cave. To him it appears that we seem to be happier if we take things for granted. When we dream dreams, we are not diverting our eyes to other places of joy.¹³⁵ These pages give a peculiar account of the medieval religious framework. As long as we believe to see truth in our dreams, we will not search for it elsewhere. Erasmus describes dreams as signs of complacency. They have no further credibility and are mostly performative.¹³⁶ Although he does not blame most people for the way things are, Erasmus hints that there are better truths to be found in dreams. If we can shake off our apathy, dreams can effectively become cataphatic.¹³⁷

Later in the tractate, dreams return as proof for the ability to break free, picking up the trail of Marsilio Ficino. Through dreams, we are enabled to catch a glimpse of true divine bliss:

"Once they [the dreamers] come to their senses, they do not know where they were, be it inside or outside their bodies or asleep. They only remember hazily what they heard,

¹³³ Gantet, Traum in der Frühen Neuzeit, 14–21.

¹³⁴ Erasmus of Rotterdam, Stefan Zathammer Ed., Anton J. Gail Trans., *Moriae encomium* [Lob der Torheit] (Ditzingen 2021) 17.

¹³⁵ Ibid., 129–133.

¹³⁶ Cameron, Enchanted Europe, 152–154.

¹³⁷ Peter Kügler, *Übernatürlich und Unbegreifbar: Religiöse Transzendenz aus philosophischer Sicht*, Philosophische Plädoyers 5 (Wien / Münster 2006) 92f.

saw, said and did, just like after a dream, and they only know so much that they were in deepest bliss whilst they were raptured.”¹³⁸

Erasmus describes a dream's fleeting feeling of happiness to be true divine joy. He hopes to reach this by the same means as Ficino: the balance of body and spirit. In his times, he writes, many people choose to concentrate on either one or the other. However, the state of dreamy bliss may only be enjoyed if we understand the body and exercise the mind accordingly. Mirroring Ficino's contemplation, Erasmus states that we cannot help that our soul is imprisoned, but that we can reach a type of metamorphosis in which we rule over the body and prepare ourselves by cleansing it.¹³⁹ Even more so than Ficino does in the *Theologia Platonica*, Erasmus writes in excited anticipation of an upcoming breakthrough. By understanding the body and being able to filter out its limiting factors, he believes that humanity can reach a state of spiritual control. Doing so should ultimately bring us closer to God.

At the eve of the sixteenth century, humanists edged towards a paradigm shift. It was most likely the call to study the body that prompted many to engage in medicine. As the century moved on, the corporeal started to take precedence as a model of explaining dreams. In his *Essays* [1580], the multifaceted Michel de Montaigne [1533-1592] writes down his views on various philosophical topics.

Despite his religious convictions, Montaigne studies the mind through a psychological approach, understanding it as something not different, but similar to the body. Why else would it be that we concern ourselves chiefly with those things which are beyond our lives or that seem mysterious to us? Even when we seem idle, our minds are desperately on the prowl for something to concern themselves with, he writes. If there is nothing, the mind will make up some fantasy for itself. As the body afflicts the mind, the reverse happens just as intensely. Montaigne confirms this in both the negative and the positive. In cases of imagination and magic, he reminds us of how convincingly the mind can fake impressions to our senses. This he also observed in medicine, where certain patients recover just by believing that they are, essentially describing the placebo effect.¹⁴⁰

¹³⁸ Erasmus of Rotterdam, *Moriae encomium*, 253 [German original: "Wenn sie wieder zu sich kommen, wollen sie nicht wissen, wo sie gewesen sind, ob im Körper, außerhalb des Körpers oder im Schlaf. Sie erinnern sich nur nebelhaft und wie nach einem Traum, was sie gehört, gesehen, gesagt und getan haben, und wissen nur so viel, dass sie in tiefster Seligkeit waren, als sie so entrückt wurden."].

¹³⁹ Ibid., 245–251.

¹⁴⁰ Michel de Montaigne, William C. Hazlitt Ed., Charles Cotton Trans., *Essays* (Auckland 2009) 129 and 263.

From here, Montaigne is visibly torn between the naturalization of the mind and his own beliefs. Is all our imagination just the result of misleading thoughts? He shies away from giving a tentative answer. After all, we still do not understand these things and therefore should not give a verdict on where the limits of truth lie. Especially with something potentially divine, we cannot paint black and white what are likely incomprehensible motives to us. He explicitly remarks that it is folly not to believe in God and that it is dangerous to condemn things that we do not know. Our only guide for the time being should be heightened recognition of nature:

“The novelty, rather than the greatness of things, tempts us to inquire into their causes. We are to judge with more reverence, and with greater acknowledgment of our own ignorance and infirmity, of the infinite power of nature. How many unlikely things are there testified by people worthy of faith, which, if we cannot persuade ourselves absolutely to believe, we ought at least to leave them in suspense; for, to condemn them as impossible, is by a temerarious presumption to pretend to know the utmost bounds of possibility.”¹⁴¹

Montaigne’s account is that of a pious Catholic. Yet, as a scholar, he also engages the investigative zeitgeist of his era. This lets him spiral into both a growing appreciation of nature and the caution against scientific arrogance (as something that readily moves away from God). He struggles to discern where the main reason for the unclear epistemological value of dreams sits. Taking a scientific stance on issues of Scripture did not end all doubts.¹⁴² Is this question subject to in- or externalization? As his attempt to pacify contemporary science with faith enters this struggle, Montaigne ends up calling his *Essays* “dreams”.¹⁴³

Citing the humanist calls for spiritual-scientific balance, Montaigne calls such a concept “pleasant thought” but realistically impossible as our minds strive towards one of the extremes. He describes these extremes to have no cause, yet they fill us with passion. Imagination helps us escape our bodies.¹⁴⁴ Montaigne is exemplary for a scholar at the high time of clashing philosophical views. He witnessed the main Catholic, Protestant and humanist narratives

¹⁴¹ Ibid., 427–432 and 503.

¹⁴² Peter Mack, Montaigne and Christian Humanism, In: Christian Humanism: Essays in Honour of Arjo Vanderjagt, Alasdair A. MacDonald, Zweder R. von Martels, Jan R. Veenstra Ed., Studies in Medieval and Reformation Traditions 142 (Leiden / Boston 2009) 199–204.

¹⁴³ Claire Gantet, Zwischen Wunder Aberglaube und Fiktion: Der Traum als politisches Medium in Frankreich 1560-1620, In: Traum und res publica: Traumkulturen und Deutungen sozialer Wirklichkeiten im Europa von Renaissance und Barock, Peer Schmidt, Gregor Weber Ed., Colloquia Augustana 26 (Berlin 2008) 321–323.

¹⁴⁴ Michel de Montaigne, *Essays*, 985 and 1430–1435.

marketing their worldviews. Perhaps for this reason, he decides to remain undecided and sceptical.¹⁴⁵ In any sense today this makes him look rather advanced, as his engagement of possibilities reads like the modern historiography that the Unbelieved article series seeks to promote (see chapter 1.3). Its authors also entertain spiritual elements in sources, given the persistent lack of certainty within the topic. Once again for this reason, an early modern humanist scholar capitulates and refers to the future in the quest for answers:

“I dream but seldom, and then of chimaeras and fantastic things, commonly produced from pleasant thoughts, and rather ridiculous than sad; and I believe it to be true that dreams are faithful interpreters of our inclinations; but there is art required to sort and understand them.”¹⁴⁶

In the search for an art that would make dreams comprehensible, European scholars called on various clusters of sources. The conflicting philosophies of the sixteenth century were not solely based on excavations of antiquity. European academies also showed affinity for Arabic and Muslim dream interpretation. Due to the exclusivity of the Church, theology was suspended from participating, but an exchange of mathematics, medicine or astronomy took place.¹⁴⁷ Muslim descriptions of dreams tended to be more physiological than their European counterparts. Sixteenth-century scholars found significant theses that went beyond the symbolic analyses of the dreambooks.¹⁴⁸ Additionally, the works of Muslims and ancient Greeks freed authors from dogmatic constraints. A religious framework had limited the kinds of innovations that could be found in the corporeal.¹⁴⁹ By citing foreign findings, the humanists managed to avoid lengthy apologies, moving forward from medieval authors such as William of Conches.

One such book, that was presumably written in the eighth century yet distributed in Renaissance Europe, was the *Dreambook Apomasaris* by Muḥammad Ibn-Sīrīn [c. 653-729]. As one of the great Arabic dream interpreters, his compilatory writings were already popular in the Muslim world. Once they were translated and printed in the occident, his study of “Indian, Persian, Egyptian and Arabian” oneiromancy added to the European debate. Whilst being a dreambook and therefore more interpretative than questioning, Ibn-Sīrīn’s work enabled a first comparison

¹⁴⁵ Peter *Holland*, The Interpretation of Dreams in the Renaissance, In: Reading Dreams: The Interpretation of Dreams from Chaucer to Shakespeare, Peter *Brown* Ed. (Oxford / New York 1999) 133.

¹⁴⁶ Michel de Montaigne, *Essays*, 1956f.

¹⁴⁷ Maier, *Ordnung des Himmels*, 250f.

¹⁴⁸ Goodich, *Miracles and Wonders*, 104.

¹⁴⁹ Le Goff, *Truong*, *Geschichte Des Körpers*, 126f.

with Catholic styles of interpretation. Such supplementary information contributed to the ongoing developments in European thought. For example, scholars now paid attention to the time of night during which a dream occurs (those in the morning usually being depicted as clearer). Other conventions were the same, for example there being need to discern differently for a king or a poor person.¹⁵⁰ Given that religious dislike of the Muslims was omnipresent, it was to be expected that these books were released without any information on the original authors. They instead received subheadings such as “dreams, how to conduct oneself in them and what we can learn from them” which shows more than just ethnological interest in foreign literature.¹⁵¹ These books started to contribute to an already diverse field of study.

Philosopher Wilhelm Scribonius [c. 1550-1600] provides another addition to the humanist perception of dreams. Although best known for his defence of the water ordeal and other methods of witch persecution, his *Rerum naturalium doctrina methodica* [1585] heavily features melancholy as a cause for disease. Scribonius was, as a scholar, indoctrinated by the humanism of Petrus Ramus, but invested himself in the witch hunts just like Heinrich Kramer.¹⁵²

As was custom, he first laid out his perception of nature. He writes that it is God’s task to “create and govern”, whereas nature is everything that “is numbered by time, measured by place and subject unto motion.” Motion only comes from God, he adds, or the things created by him. This delineation builds on the common belief that nature is God’s creation. Interestingly enough, there exists a distribution of agency. Humans, having been created by God, are also enabled to bring forth motions. Scribonius does not divide between a spiritual soul and the natural body. Instead, we are put into a type of intermediary position beneath God but above nature. That we can move our natural bodies should be proof of that, he argues. We control nature when we seek out food for our body.¹⁵³

This somewhat carnal explanation does also tackle the fact that humans are subject to natural needs. These are brought on by the humours. Still, Scribonius theorizes that sleep and dreams

¹⁵⁰ Muḥammad *Ibn-Sīrīn*, Johann Lewenklaue Trans., Traumbuch Apomazaris (Frankfurt am Main 1645) 59.

¹⁵¹ Ulman Weiß, Traumglaube und Traumkritik im älteren deutschen Luthertum: Eine Skizze, In: Traum und res publica: Traumkulturen und Deutungen sozialer Wirklichkeiten im Europa von Renaissance und Barock, Peer Schmidt, Gregor Weber Ed., Colloquia Augustana 26 (Berlin 2008) 240f.

¹⁵² Otto Liebmann, Scribonius Wilhelm Adolf, Allgemeine Deutsche Biographie (München 1891) 488.

¹⁵³ Wilhelm A. Scribonius, *Rerum Naturalium Doctrina Methodica* [Natural Philosophy], 2nd ed. (London 1631) 1f and 54.

must also serve such a function. This, he writes, must be because of our inner senses that can perceive many things that are otherwise absent. Our memory and imagination conceive things with “common sense” and even produce information about the constitution of the body.

“A dream is an inward act of the mind, the body sleeping and the quieter that sleep is, the easier be dreams, but if sleep be unquiet, then the mind is troubled.”¹⁵⁴

All of this may be gathered from dreams. In the end, Scribonius’ tractate urges us to purge melancholy from our bodies and perceive dreams as a type of interface by which to read corporeal things. This is a medical outlook; Scribonius does not mention any spiritual dreams. It shows that the humanist cause of seeking natural explanations continued, despite not all authors taking up the narrative of imprisonment.

3.3 Doctors

Owing to the humanist focus on the body, doctors began to write more extensively about dreams and their medical functions in the later sixteenth century. These authors defined themselves as medical practitioners first, rather than philosophers. They represent both a subgenre of humanism and an independent field. In the year 1563, Johannes Weyer [c. 1515-1588] and Gerolamo Cardano [1501-1576] both wrote their own contributions to dream theory. We will begin with Weyer, given the fact that his tractate *De praestigiis daemonum* [1563] more directly tackles the spiritual implications of traditional dream interpretation. Cardano on the other hand seeks to establish new guidelines entirely.

Weyer bridges religion and physicality in saying that we can study demons through science. He describes this as a necessary and divine task, given that the Bible is only able to offer examples, but no congruent theory. With this connection of his, the tractate legitimizes naturalism for religion’s sake, suggesting to the reader that corporeal studies were able to extend the realm of possibilities whilst staying inside societal norms. Understanding the body became a way to get closer to God and, in this case, to accentuate that which the Bible showcases. Weyer defines religion as the “orderly power, force and potential of all creatures, which was given through God’s creation”.¹⁵⁵

¹⁵⁴ Ibid., 51f.

¹⁵⁵ Johannes Weyer, Johannes Fuglino Trans., *De praestigiis daemonum*, unchanged reprint from 1586 (Darmstadt 1969) 59 and 72.

At this point it is safe to assume that humanist and naturalist analyses did not deconstruct medieval spirituality from the outside. Instead, they stemmed from within it, as this kind of science was deemed to be of spiritual value. Outsiders, heterodox witches or Protestants for example, faced severe persecutions. Naturalist research did not see opposition to that extent, suggesting that it must have evaded repercussions by siding with the ruling consensus. Studying the body originated as a pious endeavour. In truth neither the newer naturalism nor religious transcendentalism were absolute values, enabling them to enter a symbiosis in which one certified the other.¹⁵⁶

To Weyer, the unresolved debate of dream interpretation has gained importance due to its use in judicial processes, specifically the witch trials. Unsatisfied with the recently produced anxieties, he calls out Kramer's *Witches' hammer* and denounces it for having introduced many "lies" into the world. This he does in defence of the many women that were severely accused due to their supposedly melancholic and sinful complexion. Weyer does not deny the claims made against femininity, in fact he agrees that their bodies and minds may be more easily swayed between good and evil. He is not writing from a feminist point of view. However, given that it is their nature, women should not face punishments that go as far as torture and death, as it is rarely their deliberate fault. And even if so, to Weyer it is not a "knightly deed" to execute a woman, introducing an ethical dimension into his argument.¹⁵⁷ Inquisitory rule was anything but undisputed. Weyer argues against Kramer's thesis of the woman making devilish pacts. He furthermore disarms the devil by denying that imagination is punishable spiritual decay of the individuum. Rather, this occult debate should now be led by factual science.¹⁵⁸

Weyer does still confirm a latent possibility of the human soul engaging in spiritual dreaming. Semantically, these statements are interesting, as they are highly comparable throughout the sources. Many authors, including Weyer, instead of simply confirming that spiritual dreaming exists, chose to write that the possibility "cannot be denied". This is a parallel stretching back to Albertus Magnus. These phrasings pay tribute to Albertus' usage of majority experience, but it seems peculiar to always go for the inconvenient circumscription. I assume that this is due to these scholars not having complete certainty on the topics that they wrote about. This might

¹⁵⁶ K^ügler, *Übernatürlich und Unbegreifbar*, 101.

¹⁵⁷ Weyer, *De praestigiis daemonum*, 157, 213 and 448.

¹⁵⁸ Gantet, *Traum in der Frühen Neuzeit*, 139–142.

also be why some authors such as Albertus and Cardano (which we will see shortly) included cases in which they themselves witnessed divinatory dreams. Evidence was rare to come by.

Weyer writes about dreams that originate from our current carnal composition. Yet dreams also form in conjunction with spiritual influences, which explains why we sometimes see images that we have not seen before. Even a man of great piety may encounter a woman in his dreams, Weyer writes, bringing him to the point of ejaculation. All is possible, which is precisely why Weyer omits questions about guilt. The tractate concludes that dreams “ought to be categorized and judged by nature’s management and power”.¹⁵⁹ Given that Weyer established nature as something given by God, this pleading appears less secularly groundbreaking as one might assume. It is very much to the benefit of his case though. Weyer’s aim is to portray dreams as random, invalidating them for judicial usage.¹⁶⁰ He is not an atheist but concerned over false convictions. Significantly intruding on formerly spiritual grounds, he assembles dreams by connecting them to humours and other affects of the body without outright denying them.

The *Somnium synesiorum* [1563] of Gerolamo Cardano was published in the same year. The tractate elaborates further on dream interpretation as a natural endeavour. Cardano’s main ambition is the recognition of interpreting as an accepted artform. Up until then, this had been prevented, keeping dreams in the realm of superstition, only to be attended to by clerics.¹⁶¹ Yet dreaming is something that is deeply “human” in its nature, he argues. The only danger that is posed by dreams is bad interpretation, as it can be equally beneficial and disastrous. However, this does not make it any worse than other sciences: “What would art be without such dangers? Even the doctor may kill the patient, if he wishes [...]”.¹⁶² Cardano takes notice of the biblical reservations towards dream interpretation but chooses to stand against them. Like Weyer, he believes that we cannot help having dreams and should therefore rather seek scientific understanding instead of condemnation.

Cardano depicts the state of contemporary dream knowledge as follows. He repeats that dreams are both an integral component of the Bible and are counted amongst forbidden divinations. Yet due to the “devastating potential” of dream interpretation, Cardano calls out the Church’s

¹⁵⁹ Weyer, *De praestigiis daemonum*, 509f and 538f.

¹⁶⁰ Check chapter 3.5 for Jean Bodin, Weyer’s counterpart in the debate, and a comparison between the two.

¹⁶¹ Alt, *Schlaf der Vernunft*, 68.

¹⁶² Gerolamo Cardano, *Somnium Synesiorum* [Traumbuch Cardani] (Basel 1563) 25f [German original: “Lieber was ist für ein Kunst, die solcher Gefahr ohne sei. Denn der Arzt möchte auch, so er wolle, den Kranken töten [...]”].

attempts to delimit the usage of such spiritual agency (and its dangers to the canon). This, he writes, stands in contrast to the preaching of Biblical dreams. This tractate confirms the Bible's attitudes towards dreams as being somewhat paradoxical and potentially possessing a hidden agenda. Cardano alludes to the theology of dreams as being a type of control mechanism for contemporary immanentism, allowing and disallowing spiritual agency. He dares to formulate this criticism, a feat which effectively got him 'cancelled' in his time.¹⁶³ To him, the origins of dreams are either bodily or spiritual, showing us things that we either know or that are new to us. Cardano recalls dreaming about chimeras, whose parts are known animals combined into something new and fictitious. Our memory becomes visible through what parts we recognize. Interpretation is necessary to discern whether there are signs of the future among them.¹⁶⁴

After setting down the baselines, Cardano moves on with divination. Dreams exist as images, being either more or less distorted depending on the severity of the influence creating them. Generally, Cardano affirms that souls are easier moved whenever they give in to faith. In addition, this makes the individual the centrepiece of interpretation once again:

“Therefore, it is clear that this art is natural, and that the soothsayer is necessary. There is none better than the dreamer himself, given he knows the art, for he himself had the images and descriptions before his eyes. He also knows to accommodate and organise all parts of the figure he saw in conjunction with the things he knows, namely humans, causes and acts. Therefore, he can easily and without difficulty interpret and match many things, which none other can see, even if he is a proficient dream interpreter and diviner.”¹⁶⁵

“Given he knows the art” being the only caveat, Cardano holds spiritual agency in high esteem. By creating and teaching the art that is dream interpretation, we can strive towards clear results. This is what naturalism is all about at that point. Given that dreams can only be either corporeal or spiritual, if the former is eliminated through medical deconstruction, the latter stands isolated.

¹⁶³ Mary B. *Campbell*, *The Inner Eye: Early Modern Dreaming and Disembodied Sight*, In: *Dreams Dreamers and Visions: The Early Modern Atlantic World*, Ann-Marie *Plane*, Leslie *Tuttle* Ed. (Philadelphia 2013) 39.

¹⁶⁴ *Cardano*, *Somnium Synesiorum*, 102–108.

¹⁶⁵ *Ibid.*, 117 [German original: "Darum ist offenbar, wie natürlich diese Kunst ist, und wie für ein notwendiges Ding der Weissager sei. Es mag auch kein besserer sein, denn der Träumende selbst, so er die Kunst weiß, denn eben derselbige hat die Bildnisse und Beschreibung sein vor den Augen gemalt, und weiß auch alle Teile der gesehenen Figur zu akkommodieren und zu ordnen, dass sie sich zu allen Dingen, die er jetzt weiß, als zu den Menschen, Ursachen und Handeln schicket. Darum kann er leichtlich und ohne alle Müh viel auslegen und überein bringen, welche kein anderer, ob er gleich ein geschwinder Traumausleger und Wahrsager, ersehen mag."].

The goal would be to explain away bodily dreams, which gives us the power to distinctly observe divination. Cardano tries this and defines nature: Everything that is not divine is natural. Furthermore, nature is the result of either perfection or necessity. Having therefore allegedly exhausted all the ramifications on that side, he turns towards divinatory dreams, be they truthful or false. His three main points by which an individual should be evaluated are: age and social standing, the time of day during which the dream happened, and whether the person had recently eaten. Overall, dreams should be interpreted by those who truly grasp their size and value. Cardano adds his own experiences once more here. During the purchasing of an estate, he had a variety of obscure dreams, sometimes helping him and sometimes not.¹⁶⁶

Cardano pursues an elevation of dream interpretation. This artform, he argues, is of higher value than many others, including astrological theories. Anyway, it would be wrong to describe his work as revolutionary. Using dreams, Cardano does question the Church's dogmatic authority, but he is far from renouncing his faith.¹⁶⁷ This tractate is an example of how humanist analysis was not just pursued for spiritual goals. Cardano's medical interest guides him as he hopes to find some sort of diagnosis in dreams, making them useful for medical treatment. It makes sense that a study of the corporeal realm would benefit this objective.

Once more we should keep in mind that the tractates originate from different debates. Weyer's work was prompted by the policies against witches. Cardano was inspired by his own translations of Synesius of Cyrene. None of these approaches constituted an outright secular philosophy, dreams were more of a plaything for contemporary uncertainties.¹⁶⁸ Most authors pursued their individually important agendas. In these varying contexts, one element unites the humanist sources: No longer is good versus evil the principal point of debate, but rather the materiality and existence of the dream itself. With Jean Gerson, we saw the art of the *Discretio spirituum* become professionalized. However, as a morally charged concept, the *Discretio spirituum* distracted from the more existential questions of dream origins.¹⁶⁹ Whilst still technically adhering to the religious framework, attention now shifted towards gaining empirical usage out of an unclear phenomenon. In doing so for religion's sake, dream

¹⁶⁶ Ibid., 118–127 and 136.

¹⁶⁷ *Gantet*, Traum in der Frühen Neuzeit, 360–369.

¹⁶⁸ *Gehring*, Traum und Wirklichkeit, 56–59.

¹⁶⁹ Peer Schmidt, Gregor Weber, Traumkulturen in den frühneuzeitlichen Gesellschaften: Eine Einführung, In: Traum und res publica: Traumkulturen und Deutungen sozialer Wirklichkeiten im Europa von Renaissance und Barock, Peer Schmidt, Gregor Weber Ed., Colloquia Augustana 26 (Berlin 2008) 12.

interpretation unintentionally returned to a more fundamental level. Freed from moral and dogmatic limitations, scholars no longer searched for the meaning of dreams in their contents, but rather in their essence, meaning their causes.

Juan Huarte de San Juan [1529-1588] from Spain shows a similar attitude in the introduction to his *Examination of Men's Wits* [1575] with the following story:

“One day, a natural scientist and a linguist were conversing when a curious gardener joined them to ask: why is it that the earth does not bring forth any plants from the seeds he entrusts it with, no matter how much of an effort he makes, no matter how often he ploughs, fertilizes and waters, but instead happily sprouts weeds, which were not sown? The linguist answered: this was because it was God's will and that it must contribute to earth's preservation. The natural scientist laughed and saw that the linguist was seeking refuge with God, since he did not know about the natural causes and the way by which they work.”¹⁷⁰

The Spanish doctor represents a state in which God no longer is the ‘be all and end all’ to every question, much less when it comes to dreams. Huarte's anecdote is a taunt, looking down on those who cling to religious explanations in the face of naturalist evidence. The *Examination* is a guidebook that advises one on how to raise one's son to become a wise man. Wisdom, he argues, is given to the male by nature. He apparently follows Aristotle in describing nature as the given order for earth's preservation, yet it not being the same as God.¹⁷¹ We have seen nature being explained as given by God plenty of times, but it is unclear to which extent Huarte now claims it to be separate. He even speaks of “earth's preservation”, yet lets the natural scientist laugh about it.

Just as with the anecdote, the attribution of a cause depends on the particular case. Huarte too stands in a vacuum between spiritual and natural, choosing to follow the humanist postulate.

¹⁷⁰ Juan Huarte de San Juan, Gotthold E. Lessing Trans., *Examen de ingenios para las ciencias* [Prüfung der Köpfe zu den Wissenschaften] (Zerbst 1752) 18 [German original: "Ein Naturforscher besprach sich einst mit einem Sprachgelehrten, als ein neugieriger Gärtner dazu kam und sie fragte: woher es doch komme, dass das Erdreich, so vielen Fleiß er auch daran wende, oft er es auch durchackere, dünge und begieße, dennoch keine Gartengewächse deren Samen er ihm anvertraue so leicht und so glücklich hervor brächte, als sie das Unkraut, ohne dass man es säen darf, hervor bringt? Der Sprachgelehrte antwortete: dieses käme daher, weil es Gott so haben wollte, und weil es zur Erhaltung der Welt so sein müsse. Allein der Naturforscher lachte, sah wohl dass jener bloß deswegen seine Zuflucht zu Gott genommen, weil er die natürlichen Ursachen und die Art wie dieselben wirken nicht wisse."].

¹⁷¹ Ibid., 5, 17 and 23.

We should only take recourse to God if all conceivable natural explanations are exhausted.¹⁷² In the case of the earlier anecdote, the natural scientist was aware of natural causes that would explain the gardener's confusion. Huarte writes that the "common mob" should not be judged, for piety is a high virtue. However, it has been proven that not everything is the result of divine influences, including dreams. In their case, Huarte paints it as common knowledge that thinking and digesting are opposites and therefore disrupt each other, resulting in dreams. We should heed the call to science and study nature.

We are urged to study the images of our imagination by the order of nature and not via "creative exegesis of the Bible". Even more so, Huarte writes, because God now no longer produces miracles and does not communicate himself like he did in the dreams of the past. It is obscure as to how this fits the purpose of the *Examination*. But Huarte pioneers a new age. He unmasks the human brain as medicine's last frontier, the intricacies of which allegedly even dumbfounded Galen: "Let us now open the head and study the human brain!"¹⁷³ This exclamation is evidently a breath of fresh air. Huarte is not an atheist. In this speech, we simply see a humanist wave gaining momentum. The establishment of nature being 'God's order' by Ficino and others was the new framework. But instead of being secular, this frame spiritualized nature and its causality, legitimizing unprecedented possibilities of research. Humanists proclaimed that an excellent scholar should balance himself between spiritual and scientific affairs. But studying the body to that degree ended up tipping the scales. Huarte notes that by first illuminating all conceivable natural explanations, spiritual influences would afterwards stand isolated. It means that by understanding more of what we do know, we also understand more of what we do not know. But in doing so, only the corporeal side was actively analysed. Although the intentions of Huarte were as spiritual as ever, his work is a clear indication for a disenchanting trend.

I would argue that humanism itself was not anti-spiritual but has provided the means for such a trend to appear. The new adaptive framework allowed for this to happen without societal and churchly damnation. But disenchantment was not achieved through philosophy. Erasmus of Rotterdam and Michel de Montaigne had left it to the future to discern between natural and spiritual dreams. It appears that medicine discovered results for this shift more quickly.

¹⁷² Martin Franzbach, Lessings Huarte-Übersetzung 1752: Rezeption und Wirkungsgeschichte in Deutschland, vol. 29, Hamburger Romanistische Studien, B (Hamburg 1965) 21–25.

¹⁷³ Ibid., 21f, 68f and 189.

The spirit of Huarte can also be found in *The Discovery of Witchcraft* [1584] by Reginald Scot [c. 1538-1599]. In England as well, Scot rejects the teachings of the *Witches' hammer* as ignorant and widespread “delusions”. If witches were truly able to do what is said about them, they would overthrow governments or entire armies, not lie around and dream. Instead, many phenomena, for example changes in the weather, are completely explainable in terms of nature. Scot forms a hammer of naturalism and brings it down on witchcraft and other superstitions, turning into a buster of myths:

“But I say, both with the divines, and philosophers, that that which is imagined of witchcraft, hath no truth of action, or being, besides their imagination; the witch (for the most part) is occupied in false causes. [...] The will of a sound mind is the desire of a possible thing.”¹⁷⁴

In the eyes of Scot, irregular psychological imaginations are possible. Especially since witches are usually older women, they easily become corrupted in their minds. The melancholic humour, naturalism's necessary evil, lets their imaginations run wild. Therefore, they give impossible sounding confessions and also “think they know an art, which they neither have learned nor yet understand.” Scot drags witchcraft into the realm of impossibility and denies any outright effects. The *Witches' hammer* argued that the devil moved the melancholic humour, yet naturalism seems to rob even Satan himself of his corporeal powers.

Melancholy, which used to be a victimizing and devilish affliction, is now a sort of placeholder for mental illnesses. Scot severs the cord of supernatural input when it comes to dreams, making fun of such beliefs in the process.¹⁷⁵ He adds that the devil still travels day and night “to seduce man”, but diabolical dreams are not his creation. This statement is neither vague apology nor euphemism, it is deterministic. Although this work dabbles in the witch debate, Scot and Huarte complement each other. Scot even discusses the “noble physician” Johannes Weyer, whose sentiments on melancholy he picks up, mentions Niels Hemmingsen (chapter 3.4) and disregards Jean Bodin, Weyer's adversary (chapter 3.5).¹⁷⁶

In his tractate, Scot further elaborates on dreams: Just like Huarte, he describes a type of new age with lessened divine influences. All dreams and prophecies of the past, he argues, have already been fulfilled with the coming of Christ. No longer should we therefore expect

¹⁷⁴ Reginald Scot, *The Discovery of Witchcraft* (London 1665) 32.

¹⁷⁵ Cameron, *Enchanted Europe*, 179f.

¹⁷⁶ Scot, *Discovery of Witchcraft*, 31–34 and 101.

revelations in our dreams. He places a turning point onto the year 1400. Until that point, the devil supposedly ravished women against their will, but nowadays this has become rare. To Scot, this is in line with the Gospel and its advice against divination, which seemingly has worked, ending credulity.¹⁷⁷ It is interesting that, to substantiate their naturalist findings, multiple doctors propose a ‘miracle-less’ age without supernatural dreams.

This point deserves special attention as it is a contrary notion to how the last days were described in the Bible’s Book of Acts, where dreams and visions were said to skyrocket. An age of dreams and a ‘miracle-less’ age contradict each other. The late medieval period was a time of anticipated eschatology, a mentality of autumn, as Huizinga put it. But the end failed to materialise. “Jesus was supposed to return ... until he did not.”¹⁷⁸ Christianity’s transcendentalism stagnated and came in need of renovation, something it had already been since the twelfth century. New messianic or millenarian beliefs were needed to build anticipation for a better future.¹⁷⁹ An end of supernaturality neither fits with revelations of salvation nor the apocalypse. In contrast, the anxieties over witchcraft kept the notion of a spiritual decline relevant.¹⁸⁰ Radical sects such as the “Dreamers” [in German: Uttenreuther/Fränkische Träumersekte] in Germany are noteworthy for also hanging onto divination.¹⁸¹ But for most scholars, the anomaly, irrationality and randomness of late medieval Catholicism was starting to be an apparent flaw. Supernatural dangers were allegedly all around us yet never truly observable. It seemed pointless to wait and contemplate. Similar to Martin Luther, these individuals searched for their own understanding of faith and salvation in order to solve their unease with the current state of affairs.¹⁸²

We return to Scot’s ‘miracle-less’ age in which the concept of the miracle had been fading for a long time. He mentions Joseph and Daniel of the Bible as proof for divinatory dreams, yet their deeds have long passed. Nowadays it appears sensible to Scot, as a qualified physician, to refer to natural causes in the interpretation of dreams. These reflect our daily experiences more

¹⁷⁷ Ibid., 41 and 104.

¹⁷⁸ *Strathern*, *Unearthly Powers*, 254 and 318.

¹⁷⁹ Luís F. S. *Lima*, Ana P. *Torres Megiani*, Introduction, In: *Visions Prophecies and Divinations: Early Modern Messianism and Millenarianism in Iberian America Spain and Portugal*, Luís F. S. *Lima*, Ana P. *Torres Megiani* Ed., *Iberian Religious World 3* (Leiden / Boston 2016) 7f.

¹⁸⁰ *Clark*, *Thinking with Demons*, 315–337.

¹⁸¹ Ann-Marie *Plane*, Leslie *Tuttle*, Introduction: The Literatures of Dreaming, In: *Dreams Dreamers and Visions: The Early Modern Atlantic World*, Ann-Marie *Plane*, Leslie *Tuttle* Ed. (Philadelphia 2013) 12f.

¹⁸² Bernd *Krolop*, *Magie Mystik und Moderne: Religionstheorie nach Max Weber* (Düsseldorf 2003) 131–149.

accurately and originate from the physical state of the body. Scot advises not to put faith in those that call themselves “expositors of dreams”, since they work solely from a perspective of “business”. This accusation against the profession of dream interpreters attests to the existence of such a spiritually inclined group. It appears there was money to be made in divination and Scot retrospectively determines that much of it was likely void deception. He closes the tractate in an apologetic form, saying that divine influences still exist but that it is assured that they are not present within dreams:

“Regard no Dreams, for why? the minde // Of that in sleep a view doth take, // Which it doth wish and hope to finde, // At such time as it is awake.”¹⁸³

From quotes such as this, we can gather that the ‘miracle-less’ age (and the disenchanted dream) that multiple doctors were acquiescing was partially a result of their own work. Even the meaning of the word magic was reconfigured, as the title of Giambattista della Porta’s [1535-1615] work *Magia naturalis* [1589] shows. There are supposedly two types of magic. One has to do with evil spirits, the other one is “commendable” and concerns the analysis of natural wonders. Della Porta calls the latter “insight of nature”, meaning to understand all its causes and procedures. To him, we are all servants of nature, not its masters. When a herbalist prescribes a mixture, it is due to his understanding of plants’ effects, not due to him bending nature to his will. With two types of magic, Della Porta essentially describes human agency and creates a second world in which the knowledge of nature rules, not an ambiguous deity.¹⁸⁴

“We wonder about things, of which no cause has been determined. But whoever knows about the cause, does not regard a thing as highly.”¹⁸⁵

This passage from his introduction fits well with the ambitions of the doctors for an empirical turn. The comment on “regard” is key here. It is quite evidently a jab at overbearing faith. If there was one thing that was not easily understood but sat on a high pedestal, it was religion. Della Porta shows general disregard for credulity and writes that those who never question anything are “day and night governed by dreams”. He too completely disenchant dreams. In almost categorical fashion, Della Porta lists different kinds of foods and their effects on us. All foods are digested into vapour which ascends up to the brain, he writes. Lemon balm and poplar

¹⁸³ Scot, *Discovery of Witchcraft*, 96–100.

¹⁸⁴ Alt, *Schlaf der Vernunft*, 70f.

¹⁸⁵ Giambattista *della Porta*, *Magia Naturalis* (Nürnberg 1715) 3-8 [German original: "Denn man verwundert sich nur über das, davon man keine Ursache geben kann. Wer aber die Ursache weiß, achtet eine Sache nicht so hoch."].

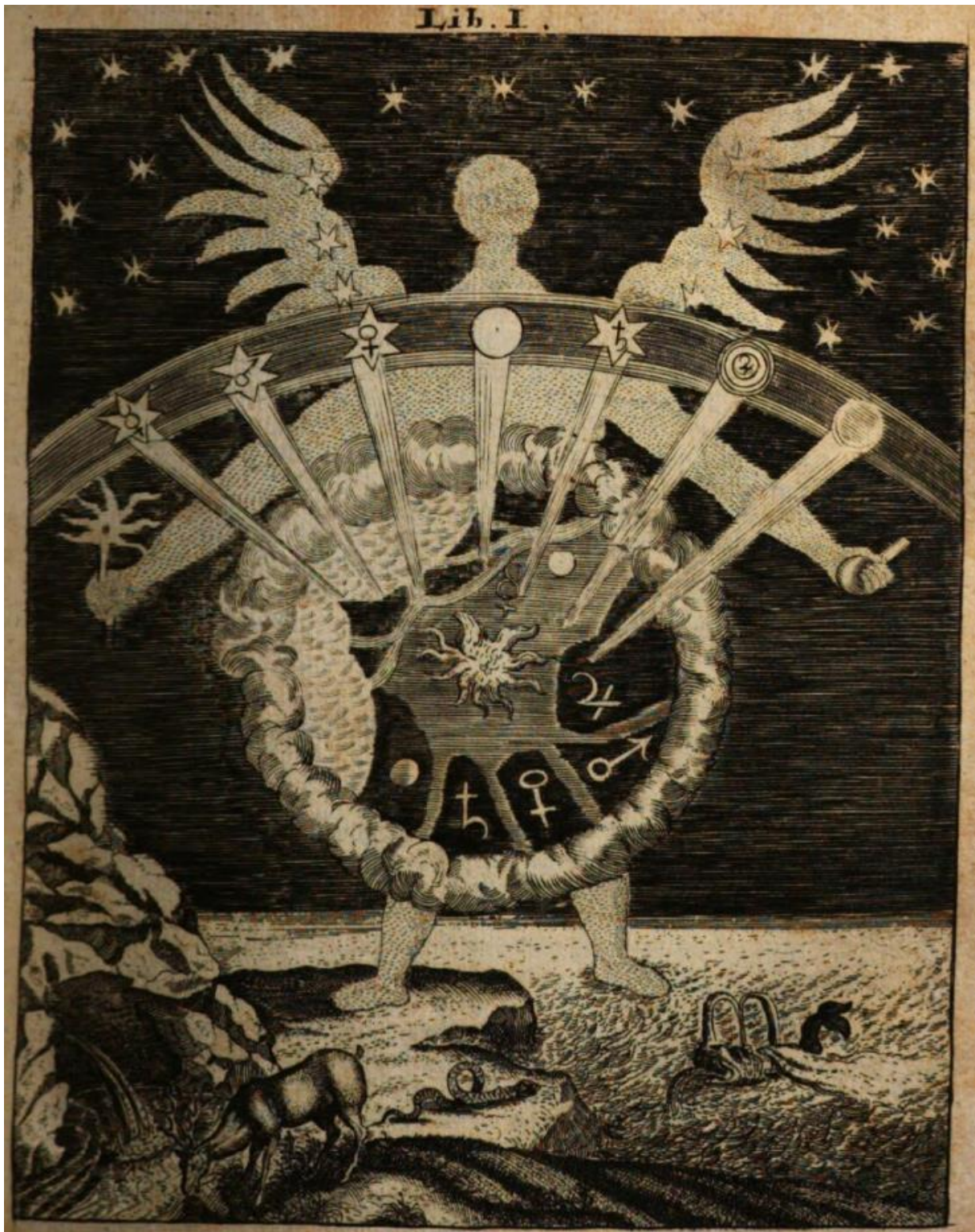


Figure 1: Giambattista della Porta's tractate features some rather old school artwork accompanying its natural findings. It pictures a grand celestial being with wings and an arch of different divine influences shining down into the human world (inside the circle). This is a very spiritual and abstract format of how dreams might be formed. Image taken from: Giambattista *della Porta*, *Magia Naturalis* (Nürnberg 1715) 2 [this copy at the Bayerische Staatsbibliothek München].

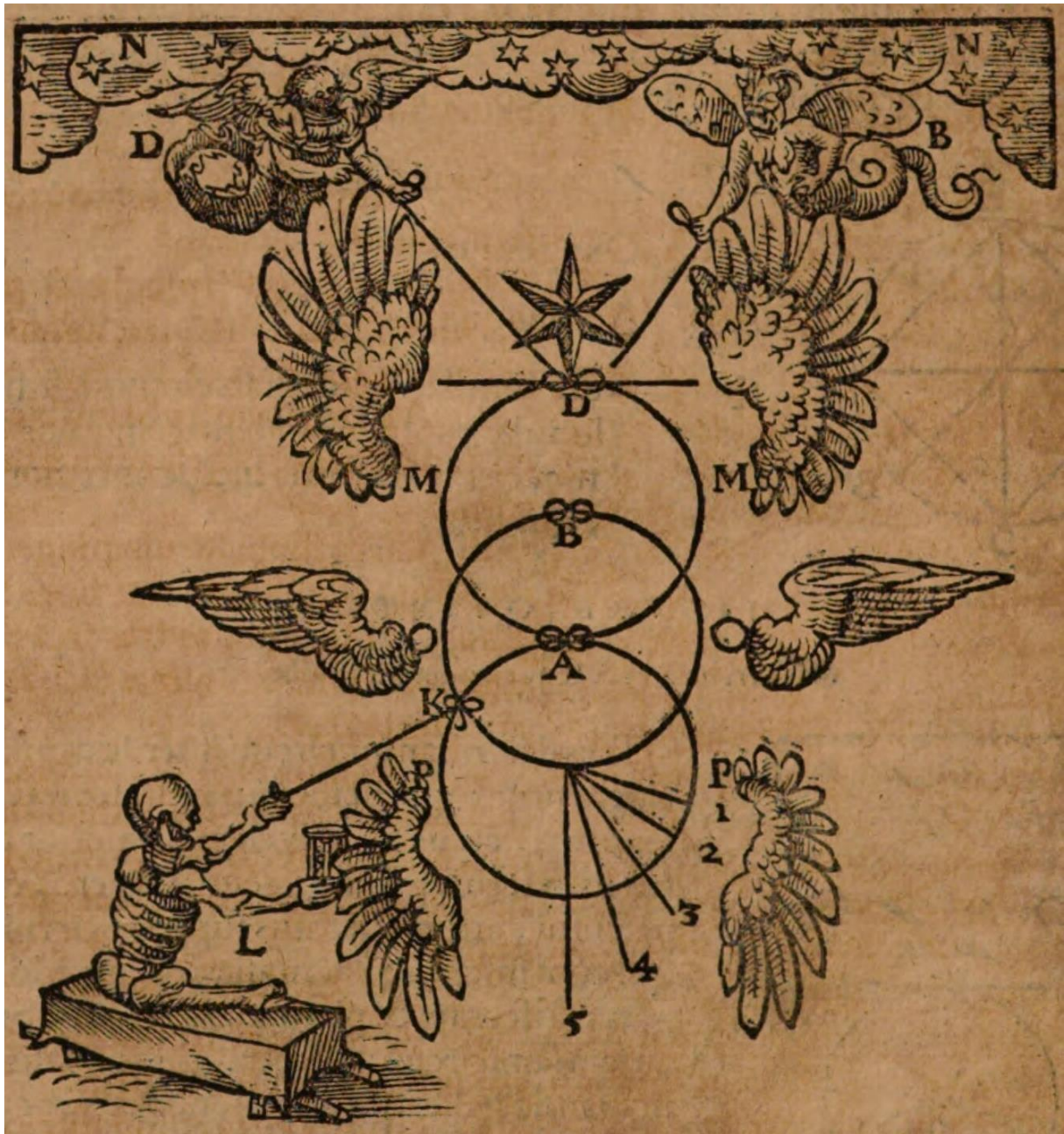


Figure 2: Conrad Gessner, a Swiss doctor, shows a similarly abstract process of divine influences but does so through an annotated scheme. It depicts, amongst other things, how supernatural beings such as angels and demons (D and B just below heaven N) influence circles of human intellect and fantasy (central A, B and D) to steer our senses (1 to 5) and the human body (L). Image taken from: Conrad Gessner, *Physicarum meditationum annotationum & scholiorum lib. V* (Zürich 1586) 188 [this copy at the Österreichische Nationalbibliothek].

bud produce happy dreams when consumed. Dark and uncomfortable dreams originate from beans, lentils, onions, garlic or cabbage, basically anything that creates flatulence. Della Porta's excursion into dreams serves to show how something formerly accepted as magic is ultimately just nature. Epistemological evolution is visualized.

But what about the other kind of magic? The evil spirits Della Porta mentioned are not the subject of his book. They are likely a modernized insurance against potential accusations of heresy. He acknowledges a spiritual realm that is ever present. But like Huarte and Scot, the doctors have fathomed that nature is graspable and predictable, unlike the works of supernatural beings. He recommends that we should not follow the Egyptians, who supposedly attributed everything to the stars because they were too lazy for proper research.¹⁸⁶ Work should and can be done within the corporeal realm of nature.

Doctors had completed a disenchantment of dreams. They managed to strengthen the idea of the natural dream and positioned it outside of a spiritual sphere. I want to stress that this can only be said about dreams. Broader disenchantment has never been completed and spirituality never disappeared.¹⁸⁷ Other groups also did not uniformly adopt this outcome.

3.4 Protestants

Dreams and possible disenchantment were matters of science, but they were also subject to theology. A new type of which would gain popularity in the sixteenth century due to the Protestant Reformation. The Reformation is comparable to humanism in that it sprung from spiritual unease. Due to multiple inconsistencies between Scripture and reality, the Catholic Church struggled to continue representing a sole correct way of living. The aforementioned observations that a 'miracle-less' and decaying age needed a new strategy added to this. Without miracles, sacraments and rituals appeared empty.¹⁸⁸ Yet it was their function to regulate and convey religious experience.¹⁸⁹ Reformers began to look for meaningful alternatives. In doing so, the established guidelines of the *Discretio spirituum* also had to be replaced with a Protestant explanation of dreams.

¹⁸⁶ Ibid., 45 and 576–579.

¹⁸⁷ Steven Grosby, Max Weber Religion and the Disenchantment of the World, *Society* 50, no. 3 (2013) 301–304.

¹⁸⁸ Cameron, *Enchanted Europe*, 206–208.

¹⁸⁹ Verena Kast, *Träume: Die geheimnisvolle Sprach des Unbewussten* (Düsseldorf 2006) 10.

Philipp Melanchthon [1497-1560], Luther's right-hand man, wrote about dreams in multiple instances. His stance shifts a number of times throughout. The first mention of dreams is in *Loci communes rerum theologicarum* [1521]. Without giving much of an in-depth theory, Melanchthon views dreams as a synonym for sin. Calling on Scripture, he displays a type of conformist piety in equalling them to lies. No attention ought to be paid to them for that reason alone.¹⁹⁰ Twenty years later, this aversion had remarkably ended. Although still unsure with how much can actually be learnt from dreams as corporeal phenomena, in his *Commentarius de anima* [1540], he calls this knowledge "very necessary for life". Clear traces of humanist thought entered his writing:

"Some elements and first principles are handed down in order that they stir up minds to ponder nature in some way. And we advance as far as we can, for God, too, has commanded us to contemplate His work, and He assists our study, for He has repeatedly disclosed many things that are useful for life. At the same time we notice the traces of God pressed upon nature, by which He wants to be known, and we learn the origins of worthy actions, and discover much help for life."¹⁹¹

Melanchthon legitimizes studying the body (and dreams with it) as an exploration of spiritual interconnections. Marsilio Ficino would have approved of such a stance. We will have to see whether Protestantism was as open to this progressiveness as the doctors were, given that Melanchthon mentions opposition on the next page. Other scholars supposedly scorned him for writing on imaginative things. Just like others before Melanchthon, heterodox religious dissidents faced severe backlash for their nonconformism.¹⁹² All of this, Melanchthon writes, is the result of the same overarching problem. As with Ficino, he views the soul as a symbol of divine light that came to be imprisoned in the body. There would be no need for "learned men" if the soul would have kept its ability to "examine its nature by its own sharpness of vision". Melanchthon argues that it is our responsibility to regain the light of truth. He remarks that in

¹⁹⁰ Philipp Melanchthon, Horst G. Pöhlmann Ed. and trans., *Loci communes rerum theologicarum*, 2nd ed. (Gütersloh 1997) 47 and 149.

¹⁹¹ Philipp Melanchthon, *Commentarius de Anima* [Preface to the Commentary on the Soul], In: Philipp Melanchthon: *Orations on Philosophy and Education*, Sachiko Kusakawa, Christine F. Salazar Ed. (Cambridge / New York 1999) 144.

¹⁹² The Waldensians, Cathars or Huguenots are just some examples of violent persecutions. In the case of spiritual agency, the institution of the beguinage also deserves attention. These houses for women were also under inquisitorial surveillance, showing how individualistic faith (without male clerical guidance) was perceived to be dangerous. Backlash also took theological forms. See: Gary K. Waite, *Heresy Magic and Witchcraft in Early Modern Europe*, *European Culture and Society* (New York 2003) 26 and 229.

comparison to his “ancestors”, there is now already a better understanding of dreams. Research has already elaborated on many wondrous contents of the Bible and continuing with the body should yield similar results. Melanchthon clearly read humanist books. He also manages to package a political endnote, saying that “some rulers” oppose this scholarship, which is nothing else than the correct teaching of the Gospel.¹⁹³

Melanchthon used to dismiss dreams. Now he responds to the call of studying the corporeal realm. In the 1550s, he would write extensively on dreams but winds up with a less disenchanted thesis than the doctors. A part of this is the *Liber de anima* [1553], an unrelated sequel to the *Commentarius*. Relying on Galen, Melanchthon describes “internal senses” that are invisible. Yet they are the bridge between what our external senses perceive and what we choose to do in response. An internal power orders and restructures these things. According to him, this shows that nature and its creator are rational. About dreams he writes:

“The nature of men is thus ordained by God, that thoughts may be created inside of us, and that we may know how images are formed and ordered. How it is done, we do not see in the darkness.”¹⁹⁴

Melanchthon leaves the origin of mental images up to nature. But due to the neoplatonic darkness of the body, he is unable to give a verdict on the process. Images are created, formed and ordered, but by what system? It is peculiar that Melanchthon makes no mention of melancholy or humoral theory, considering how well known these terms had become, instead keeping a possibility of divine influences. He is either unable or unwilling to shut the door on the supernatural realm.

This brings us to Melanchthon’s guest appearance in the *Troumbüchlein* (‘dreambook’) of Hermann Ryff, which is mainly just a rerelease of Artemidorus. As a contribution to this Christianization of ancient thought, he wrote an introduction entitled *The genres of dreams and their meaning: A short reminder* [1555].¹⁹⁵ Right away Melanchthon exudes confidence, likely addressing a scientific audience and establishing the following as self-evident by “reminding” us of it. There are presumably four types/genres of dreams: natural, divinatory, divine/Godly and devilish/Satanic. Melanchthon deems only the natural dreams to be devoid of meaning.

¹⁹³ Melanchthon, *Commentarius de Anima*, 145–150.

¹⁹⁴ Philipp Melanchthon, *Liber de anima*, In: *Humanistische Schriften*, Robert Stupperich, Richard Nürnberger Ed., *Melanchthons Werke in Auswahl* 3 (Gütersloh 1961) 307–309.

¹⁹⁵ German original: “Von mancherley Geschlechten der Troeum sampt irer bedeutung: Eine kurze Erinnerung”.

Examples of this genre are given in dreams about one's daily life or business, as well as internal dreams that stem from bodily fluids.¹⁹⁶

Why do categorizations like this reappear with Melanchthon? We had classified taxonomies as a defining feature of the *Discretio spirituum*. Medieval scholars discerned between good and evil using such categories. In the humanist endeavour, these were abolished in favour of the natural dream or, at most, a dichotomy between natural origins and (rare) divination. Melanchthon returns to the earlier model in spite of his previous tractates showing support for a humanist departure. The usage of devilish dreams in particular makes Melanchthon's scholarship stand out from the humanist corpus. His chapter is supposed to be a "reminder". Perhaps Melanchthon simply recounts the positions of the *Discretio spirituum* in the pursuit of completion? However, reusing a deeply Catholic system seems unlikely given his confessional background. I suppose that personal reasons might be beneficial in explaining why Melanchthon classifies dreams.

As a political personality, Melanchthon profited from divination.¹⁹⁷ He himself was a keen dream interpreter, often believing in his own dreams to prophesize the future of the Protestant movement. Multiple dreams of his were recorded and distributed amongst his companions. His modern understanding of corporeal dreams was therefore tied to God-given divination in a major way.¹⁹⁸ According to historian Ulman Weiß, Melanchthon had a talent for dream interpretation. Contemporaries sometimes even called him "Danielis noster". He supposedly enjoyed this position a lot, which led to him being more concerned with interpreting than theorizing about the origins.¹⁹⁹

Melanchthon likely understood that a naturalized dream would mean a downsized possibility for divination. Adopting the "Danielis noster" persona made Melanchthon a profiteer of spiritual agency. In an effort to maximize his agency, it made sense for him to return to the empowering and democratizing ways of the *Discretio spirituum*. Melanchthon did know of and entertain the disenchanting findings of the humanists and doctors. Yet he was against their deterministic naturalising of the field of dreams. The uncertainty of probability calculation was

¹⁹⁶ Philipp *Melanchthon*, *Von mancherley Geschlechten der Troeum sampt irer bedeutung: Eine kurze Erinnerung*, In: Troumbüchlein, Walther H. Ryff Ed. (Strasbourg 1555) 33f.

¹⁹⁷ Alt, *Schlaf der Vernunft*, 57–60.

¹⁹⁸ Helmut *Hark*, *Der Traum-Glaube Melanchthons: Tiefenpsychologische Symboldeutung der Träume des Humanisten*, In: *Melanchthon neu entdeckt*, Stefan *Rhein*, Johannes *Weiß* Ed. (Stuttgart 1997) 129–134.

¹⁹⁹ *Weiß*, *Traumglaube und Traumkritik*, 230f.

more enabling to him. Dreamers can thrive best in a climate where the potential of divine influences is intact, meaning that dreams cannot easily be explained away. In the space of thirty years, Melanchthon jumps from pious ignorance to humanist ally, only to end up with the, by that point, outdated *Discretio spirituum*. This is, from a naturalist point of view, two steps forward and one back. It would be congruent with his rise to fame though. By the end, he positively describes spiritual dreaming as a latent power:

“Other dreams are called meaningful or divinatory dreams, for their origin is not the four fluids or complexion of the human body, but they rather have special power and influence of the stars, as well as heavenly influences, through which the innate and natural divinatory power, hidden inside the human, is awoken and brought to proclaim the future.”²⁰⁰

Melanchthon takes celestial influences very seriously, interweaving them with natural terminology. He describes a type of divination that is both traceable in the stars but also elusive when it comes to “heaven”. Possibility is the name of the game, giving Melanchthon strong spiritual agency. To divine, he writes, one must only possess intuition, as one also needs for fine arts such as music. Once this is achieved, spiritual dreams become the opposite of doubtful, hidden and dark. In their compliance with Scripture, dreams of God are “easily” recognizable. This is Melanchthon patting himself on the shoulder. Through various past examples of God and Satan showing images of the future, he advises us to be cautious as well though. Citing the Book of Deuteronomy, Melanchthon warns of false prophets and that the devil likes to send dreams, the false or unclear interpretation of which can be devastating.²⁰¹ His fear of the devil, yet extremely encouraging attitude towards spiritual agency is reminiscent of late medieval dreaming. Due to his diverse textual legacy, we cannot place Melanchthon with any one train of thought.

Even though they were not a core component of their religious program, Protestants dabbled in dreams. Thomas Müntzer [1489-1525] was enamoured of the biblical tale of Daniel, just like Melanchthon later would be. They both were Protestant theologians, but Müntzer ended up taking a different path by leading a violent revolutionary movement against both the Church

²⁰⁰ *Melanchthon*, *Geschlechten der Troeum*, 36 [German original: "Die anderen Träume werden genannt Bedeutende oder Weissagende Träume, so ihr Ursprung nicht von den vier Feuchtigkeiten oder sonst von der Komplexion des menschlichen Körpers, sondern aus besonderer Kraft und Einwirkung des Gestirns, auch der himmlischen Einflüsse, haben, durch welche die angeborene und natürliche weissagende Kraft, im Menschen verborgen, erweckt und getrieben wird, dermaßen Zukünftiges zu melden."].

²⁰¹ *Ibid.*, 36–42.

and the lay aristocracy. His textual legacy ought to be read with that in mind, despite it resembling other theologians of his time. The *Interpretation of the Second Chapter of Daniel* [1524] is first and foremost a political pamphlet, formulating reformatory ideas. But Müntzer concludes it with the wish for a “new Daniel” that would “interpret revelations” and “lead us like Moses”. He intends to correct the ruling clergymen, who resemble the incompetent attendants of king Nebuchadnezzar in the story. The context for this is that Müntzer sees himself living in Daniel’s fourth kingdom. This kingdom, which the Bible calls “divided”, is, according to Müntzer, “tainted with faeces” and needs biblical instruction. After all, prophecy predicted the imminent arrival of the kingdom of God to follow. Müntzer adds a call for violence, saying that the sword must be brought against those that have corrupted the Church. The culprits are branded as “false dreamers”.²⁰² With the end of the apostolic age, Christianity is said to have “lost its virginity”.

“What is there to say? It is an unspeakable, even unusual and abominable thing to talk about human dreams, which are the cause for the whole world to have become deceived by dreamers from the beginning until now, as it is written.”²⁰³

Müntzer views dreams as the root of all evil yet calls for a new prophet, embodying the ideals of spiritual guidance found in Daniel. It is likely that he referred to himself with this formulation. Like other scholars of his time, he too felt discomfort when it came to the state of the Catholic Church.²⁰⁴ His answer was not a humanist change of perspective, but a revolutionary reformation constructed around a cult of personality. Müntzer is unprecise in his goals, but the path is violent, drastic and sees him as exalted.

The only clear stance of Müntzer is a rejection of Catholicism. He addresses other scholars for their shortcomings, either putting themselves or the devil in front of everything. Müntzer accuses the Church of permitting dreams and fantastic stories, especially through the delusion that is the *Discretio spirituum*. As a critic, he is not content with how the Catholic church had recently managed spiritual agency. He instead embraces biblical dreaming as an ideal state. To

²⁰² Thomas Müntzer, *Auslegung des anderen Unterschieds Daniels*, In: *Schriften und Briefe: Kritische Gesamtausgabe*, Günther Franz Ed., *Quellen und Forschungen zur Reformationsgeschichte* 33 (Gütersloh 1968) 255–261.

²⁰³ *Ibid.*, 242–248 [German original: “Was sollen wir hierzu sagen? Es ist eine unaussprechliche, ja ungewöhnliche und hassenswerte Sache von Träumen der Menschen zu reden, der Ursache, dass die ganze Welt vom Anfang bis anher durch die Träumer betrogen ist, wie geschrieben steht.”].

²⁰⁴ *Krolop*, *Magie*, 129–131.

a Bible hardliner such as himself, only the revival of this supposedly more appropriate and true method of dream interpretation matters.

Müntzer's position in the surrounding discourses of dreams is difficult to determine. He despises dreams for their dangers but adores spiritual agency in the case of Daniel. With regards to humanism, Müntzer remains indifferent. He diagnoses a need for discernment between spiritual and natural but quickly adds that such an endeavour is impossible. Also, his peers are supposedly not doing a good job of it:

“[...] we must know and not believe in wind alone, what is given to us by God or by the devil or nature. [...] Whoever wants to fathom God's glory will be crushed by its price. Because the more nature reaches out towards God, the more the Holy Spirit's effect is alienated from it. [...] They [other scholars] entangle nature with grace without all distinction.”²⁰⁵

It appears Müntzer does not view the ongoing naturalization as the ideal path. In matters of discernment, he favours a different approach. According to historian Michael Baylor, Müntzer took up the persona of “a new Daniel”, like Melanchthon. However, Müntzer's understanding of dream interpretation exists in between the educated “scribes” and the clerical enablers of spiritual agency.²⁰⁶ He wrote of a coexistence of natural and divinatory dreams but did not propose a way of discernment, a qualitative deficiency when compared with other authors. With his extremist cult of personality, he likely did not think he would need actual criteria of dreams as he would do the discerning himself. He presents only Scripture as an eligible guide towards deeper spirituality. Müntzer values the Bible above all else, describing the book to possess a level of knowledge that goes beyond all scholarship.²⁰⁷

The tractate of Müntzer is the most polemic source on the topic of dreams. Based on the story of Daniel alone, he formulates political claims. As concepts of power and government were

²⁰⁵ Müntzer, *Auslegung Daniels*, 249-251 [German original: “[...] wir müssen wissen und nicht allein in Wind glauben, was uns von Gott gegeben sei oder vom Teufel oder Natur. [...] Wer da will ausforschen Gottes Herrlichkeit, der wird von seinem Preis erdrückt. Denn je mehr die Natur nach Gott greift, je weiter entfremdet sich die Wirkung des Heiligen Geistes von ihr. [...] [Die Gelehrten] verwickeln die Natur mit der Gnade ohne alle Unterscheidung.”].

²⁰⁶ Michael G. Baylor, *The Abyss Detachment and Dreams: Thomas Müntzer's Reception of Medieval German Mysticism*, *Medieval Mystic Theology* 29, no. 2 (2020) 103–106.

²⁰⁷ Müntzer, *Auslegung Daniels*, 251f.

being renegotiated in the early phases of the modern state (think of the imperial diet of the HRE), it made sense for Müntzer to chip in.²⁰⁸

Perhaps fearing such extremists, Martin Luther himself remarked that the paradoxical state of biblical dream interpretation did not correspond to the contemporary reality of Church doctrine and a ‘miracle-less’ age. For that reason, he chose to actually omit the fourth Book of Ezra (2 Esdras) from his famous translation for it was “full of dreams”.²⁰⁹ Melanchthon, who profited from dreams, managed to do so by embracing existing theories from both the spiritual and naturalist side. Müntzer too had understood that the ambiguous state of dreams could be weaponized in a vacuum of power. But in elevating himself above the empowering systems, he had gone too far. His self-exaltation ended up being his downfall.

Let us now look at what other Protestants wrote after Melanchthon and Müntzer had clearly been enthusiasts of spiritual agency. Theologian Niels Hemmingsen [1513-1600] from Denmark wrote his *Admonitio de superstitionibus magicis vitandis* in 1575. Inside he packages both ideas of the Reformation and a more classic reprobation of witchcraft. Catholics and early Protestants did not have clearly separated dogmatic approaches towards the latter. In the case of Christian heterogeneity, theological differences such as the stances on indulgence or penance were more striking.

Hemmingsen assumes magic to be real, for Scripture would otherwise not have prohibited it. Thinking outside the box, he finds evidence in the usage of magic amongst foreign nations outside of Europe. These supposedly regularly perform superstitious rituals, including dream divination. In the late sixteenth century, Hemmingsen had to position his statements within the growing consensus of natural causes, which he does. He writes that he values causality, which is more usually found in nature. But if humans can grasp natural procedures, he writes, the devil and evil spirits can do so too. Nature could play a supporting role in their deception.²¹⁰

Although it at first does not seem all too disenchanting given Hemmingsen’s fear of magic, he too contributes to disenchantment. He breaks up the bipolarity of God and devil from the *Discretio spirituum*. Instead of describing dreams to be a contest between good and evil

²⁰⁸ Hans Joas, *Die Macht Des Heiligen: Eine Alternative Zur Geschichte von Der Entzauberung* (Berlin 2017) 466–470.

²⁰⁹ Gantet, *Traum in der Frühen Neuzeit*, 61–68.

²¹⁰ Niels Hemmingsen, *Admonitio de superstitionibus magicis vitandis* [Vermahnung von den schwarzkünstlerischen Aberglauben] (Wittenberg 1586) 41–43 and 119f.

influences, it is rather just the devil that controls natural dreams. God remains supernatural, as his prophecy does not pertain to natural causes. As creator of the universe, he must exist on a higher level than his creation.²¹¹ On the other hand, the devil is made to cross the cultural border from supernatural to natural and acts accordingly.²¹² This explains why there are significantly more mentions of the devil in tractates on dreams during the humanist naturalization than there are of God. In his corporeal magic, the devil is disenchanting and made to rule dreams, whilst God remains untouchable and mysterious.

Hemmingsen does not intend to quit divination, as it remains necessary to interpret one fourth of dream categories: divine dreams. For those rare instances of prophecy, dream interpretation should still be eligible. It is only magical and superstitious to find meaning in the other types of natural, harmless and devilish dreams. The only really harmful one being the devilish dream. As explained earlier, these are also natural to Hemmingsen, but against Christian values either in their premise or outcome.²¹³ Unlike Melanchthon and Müntzer however, Hemmingsen does not idealize the divine dream for its powers but focuses on the backdrop of the majority of natural dreams.

Natural dreams, he writes, are produced by humours and vapours affecting the brain. In contrast, the category of “harmless” dreams is studied alongside its contents. Hemmingsen describes them as those dreams grounded in the experiences of our daily business:

“What man's mind desires very much / for he hopes whilst he is awake / and always comes to him in his sleep.”²¹⁴

Desires, Hemmingsen extrapolates, often become awakened by “secrets”. Our search for knowledge is not limited to when we are awake. Reorganised as forms and images, certain mental components appear in our sleep. Many of our dreams are just the results of our imagination desperately trying to solve “secrets”. Counting examples for this, Hemmingsen aims for a collision with the Catholic camp. He accuses Bridget of Sweden of having fallen into superstition due to her dreams, voicing critique at her canonization. (An unfortunately unspecified) “Pope John” is slandered for introducing sacrificial offerings due to a dream of

²¹¹ *Gregory*, *Unintended Reformation*, 30–32.

²¹² *Clark*, *Thinking with Demons*, 152 and 163.

²¹³ *Cameron*, *Enchanted Europe*, 192–194.

²¹⁴ *Hemmingsen*, *Admonitio de superstitionibus magicis vitandis*, 126–135 [German original: “Was Menschen Sinn gewünscht sehr / weil er wachet das hoffet er / und kommt ihm für im Schlaf immer.”].

his.²¹⁵ Hemmingsen employs dreams in the Protestant cause by scrutinizing their role in hagiography. He describes Bridget, a galleon figure for Catholic spiritual agency just like Joan of Arc, to be a woman misled by corporeal dreams. This greatly reduces her standing as it takes away the spiritual agency. Hemmingsen promoted the natural dream by applying it wherever he considered it useful. The potential of divination may exist in his theology, but it does not take precedence.

The divine dream would not disappear during the shift of naturalization. From a different branch of Protestantism, the Puritan William Perkins [1558-1602] wrote *A Discourse of the Damned Art of Witchcraft* [1608]. Once more, the debate on witches enables a discourse of dreams. Perhaps responding to a naturalist advance, Perkins chooses to subordinate nature against the superior and controlling level of divine influence:

“A true wonder is a rare work, done by the power of God simply, either above, or against the power of nature, and it is properly called a miracle.”²¹⁶

Despite this, Perkins naturalizes the devil in his powers. The devil is able to foresee, but only due to his “complete knowledge” of natural things. If our understanding of natural processes grows, we will be able to look through his ploys. God on the other hand can see within himself and does not need such a vessel. In Protestant tractates, it becomes obvious that the disenchantment of the devil was a secondary accomplishment of corporeal studies. Humanism attempted to get closer to heaven, but the magic of the devil was exposed along the way. Perkins warns against all interpretation that does not have divine roots. For something to qualify as an art, it must possess definitive rules, which types of divination such as astrology do not possess.²¹⁷ We do not know whether dream interpretation qualifies. He only defines three types of dreams: divine, natural and diabolical.

Like the other Protestants, Perkins venerates divinatory dreams despite failing to explain them. In his and Hemmingsen’s perception, dreams of the divine sphere represent the last frontier. We should not condemn heavenly divination, he writes. It is the (and this is where his reformatory affiliation shines through) Catholic Church’s past treatment of divination that is faulty. Perkins declares past decisions of the *Discretio spirituum* as potentially unlawful. He does not base this verdict on melancholy or other bodily conditions. Instead, Perkins grounds it

²¹⁵ Ibid., 136–140.

²¹⁶ William Perkins, *A Discourse of the Damned Art of Witchcraft* (Cambridge 1608) 13.

²¹⁷ Ibid., 59–65 and 78f.

in his reading of God being forgiving of sinners. For far too long, he writes, God has been understood to be antagonistic.²¹⁸ Foretelling is only superstitious in the case of natural dreams. Divinatory dreams hold pre-eminence, which is apparent by their contents. Perkins observes that spiritual dreams usually concern themselves with weighted matters. They reveal things about the world, the Church, changes in kingdoms or even announce the Messiah. Such dreams are also very plain, meaning that the correct interpretation is obvious, not obscure.²¹⁹

In four examples, Protestant dreaming is inquisitive but also spiritually charged. Its reasoning and line of argumentation lack the quality of humanist or medical writing. It was Melancthon's goal to reinstate and perfect dream interpretation. Albertus Magnus also hoped for scientific findings to coincide with faith. If we judge Protestant dream theory by that standard, just like the Catholic model, it has failed to provide a consistent theory.²²⁰

Protestants had varying approaches by which to incorporate dreams either for spiritual agency (even powerplay) or their general spiritual significance, allowing to criticize the Catholic Church's treatment in the past. The model of Hemmingsen is coherent in defining categories, but it lacks the definitive disenchantment of the body and with that its closure against heavenly influences. Some Protestants saw naturalization as a pious endeavour but ultimately defended divination. These efforts were interconnected but also separate from the Catholic and humanist strands of interpretation. Protestantism was no reinvention from the outset, as it initially aimed at reclaiming a formerly left ideal state.²²¹ Dependence on religious renewal meant that naturalist ideas could only support Protestant dreaming so far. No Protestant theory gained traction comparable to the *Discretio spirituum*.

3.5 16th-Century Catholics

The story of fifteenth- and sixteenth-century dream interpretation has so far been one of steady naturalization, being somewhat intentional. The field of dreams came to be understood in principally corporeal terms. However, widespread secularization did not materialize. As the Catholic Church represented the initial situation, its reaction towards this trend will now be laid out. This response coincides with the broader Counter-Reformation.

²¹⁸ Joel R. Beeke, Randall J. Pederson, *Meet the Puritans* (Grand Rapids 2006) 473f.

²¹⁹ Perkins, *Discourse of the Damned Art*, 93–101.

²²⁰ Gregory, *Unintended Reformation*, 365f.

²²¹ Maier, *Ordnung des Himmels*, 290.

Polymath Heinrich Agrippa of Nettesheim [1486-1535] produced a range of scholarship that was conservative yet nonconformist in its own ways. *De occulta philosophia* [c. 1510-1530] was, according to him, one of his earliest works. Yet he chose to publish it in the 1530s, the reason for which is debated among historians. Some believe it to be a fake prequel or correction to his *De incertitudine et vanitate scientiarum* published in 1527.²²² Agrippa himself argues that he released *De occulta philosophia* for reasons of transparency, describing it to possess a sort of juvenile style that he has become ashamed of. This should also prevent heretic readings of his text, something which Agrippa is anxious of. Despite being a faithful Catholic, he begins with a bold opening in declaring the existence of a “magical science” that allows to investigate hidden things. He clarifies:

“No, I am a magician, and a magician, as every scholar knows, does not mean a sorcerer, a superstitious person or someone who is allied with evil spirits, but a wise man, a priest, a prophet.”²²³

A daring and ‘young’ Agrippa shines forth from this outlook. Due to influences from other philosophers, history and daily experiences, Agrippa sees validity in dream interpretation. Nevertheless, he calls attention to the fact that dream interpretation does not meet the standards of science, treading in the footprints of Albertus Magnus. Upon reaching this point, contemporary humanists would abandon the position, limit themselves to an analysis of the body and continue from there. Agrippa instead argues that if our mind has the ability to see abstract supernatural images, they can be studied.²²⁴ He uses human experience and recounts natural dreaming in terms of us being victims of bodily affects. But Agrippa, and this is where he diverges, understands divinity to be subject to causality, enabling us to study it; nature, which his contemporaries usually viewed as causal, cannot represent God for it is random.

Attributing causality to God means that Agrippa took a turn. Still, he is a Catholic humanist, exemplifying qualities of humanism and faith. His “Neoplatonic mysticism” and “rationalistic scepticism” stand in unresolved tension.²²⁵ Whilst dreams have prompted others to elevate the

²²² Gantet, Traum in der Frühen Neuzeit, 35.

²²³ Heinrich C. Agrippa of Nettesheim, *De occulta philosophia libri tres* [Die magischen Werke], 2nd ed. (Wiesbaden 1985) 2f and 13 [German original: "Nein, ich bin ein Magier, und ein Magier bedeutet, wie jeder Gelehrte weiß, keinen Zauberer, keinen Abergläubischen, keinen, der mit bösen Geistern im Bunde steht, sondern einen Weisen, einen Priester, einen Propheten."].

²²⁴ Ibid., 140–148.

²²⁵ Waite, Heresy, 119f.

body in their search for God, Agrippa immerses himself in the divine influences themselves. Instead of naturalizing dreams, he spearheads a ‘science of God’, describing it:

“Whoever you may be who seeks to learn this science, keep such a sacred teaching in the depths of your breast with diligent silence and draw a veil of unbreakable secrecy over it. For, as Hermes says, it would be an irreligious act to confide in many others what is essentially a teaching so full of divine majesty.”²²⁶

In total, *De occulta philosophia* is a collection of all sorts of supernatural/occult knowledge. Agrippa insists on secrecy for the sake of the general public yet laments broad unawareness just as much. The disciples of Christ supposedly knew of deeper secrets whereas we only read the Bible in parables. Agrippa lectures his readers on what is generally understood about the divine realm. For example, he presents nine types of demons, one of which is responsible for false oracles and divination. The body is important in the ways of how its complexion influences our soul as a receiver of divine grace.

Searching for an ideal type of prophet, Agrippa first eliminates “boys, wenches and low people from lower classes”. Our soul is an “ethereal vessel”, receiving divine light in the form of images through its reasonable mind. If a higher soul descends into ours, divination of the future occurs. Agrippa writes that our soul can act like a prophetic mirror if the following applies. First, reminiscent of the *Discretio spirituum*, we should show piety, inner purity and calmness. Second, applying naturalism, we should keep our bodies healthy, free of heavy foods and drinks, as well as of emotions like anger and lust. A combination of piety and understanding of the body is clearly humanist. If one sticks to these characteristics, Agrippa writes, one can expect divine aid. Thus, God becomes predictable.²²⁷ Agrippa is disenchanting, as to him only unpredictability is marvellous.²²⁸ In this text, Agrippa rushes ahead in the humanist cause by discarding the body after having described its involvement with spirituality.

De incertitudine et vanitate scientiarum [1527] is Agrippa’s second tractate where dreams make a recurring appearance. Here, the polymath displays his abilities in all kinds of fields. The titular

²²⁶ Agrippa of Nettesheim, *De occulta philosophia*, 336 and 345-352 [German original: “Wer du auch immer sein magst, der du diese Wissenschaft zu erlernen trachtest, bewahre eine so heilige Lehre mit gewissenhaftem Stillschweigen im Innersten deiner Brust und ziehe den Schleier einer unverbrüchlichen Verschwiegenheit darüber. Denn es wäre, wie Hermes sagt, eine irreligiöse Handlung bei einer von der göttlichen Majestät so sehr erfüllten Lehre, viele zu Mitwissern zu machen.”].

²²⁷ Ibid., 401, 452 and 494–517.

²²⁸ Le Goff, *Phantasie und Realität*, 45.

goal is less potentially heretical but not less provocative. Agrippa attacks all contemporary sciences. He deplores the state of the world, where more attention is paid to philosophers than to Scripture. The sciences remove themselves further and further from divinity and produce their own claims of reaching God. Agrippa challenges the efforts of the humanists. Science, he writes, hides behind the illusion of man-made authority that could never reach divine prowess:

“Does my action not seem honourable, foolhardy, indeed worthy of a Hercules to you, dear reader, when I take up the fight against the gigantic superiority of all the sciences and arts, when I put the mighty hunters that are the sciences and arts in their place?”²²⁹

From the outset, this tractate can be given the label of the Counter-Reformation. Standing against progress in a time of evolving science seems conservative enough. In the attack on all sciences, even historiography takes a hit. Agrippa discourages it as something where no two historians write alike, and everything is tainted by party interests. Regarding the stars, similarly no astronomer has ever descended down from the heavens.

Agrippa continues his all-round attack with a chapter on dream interpreters. They supposedly add details to their predictions only after the event has already happened. It is their art to make use of ambiguity, Agrippa writes (a very true assessment indeed). Other forms of divination, especially astrology, he describes as outright evil. To ascribe “fate” to things of nature is to “protect one’s vices” as unavoidable. Divination is nothing but coincidence, he argues. Why else would we ascribe the lunatics with the ability to foresee?²³⁰ This is a reference to Albertus Magnus. Agrippa shows discontent over the medieval method of probability calculation. Rather than having multiple sciences work half-heartedly like this, divinatory dream interpretation should be an art itself.²³¹ Even if the chronology of Agrippa’s works is subject to debate, this line of argumentation surprisingly fits with *De occulta philosophia*: A non-ambiguous canon must be achieved, a science of God, albeit he stopped using that label. Agrippa propagates change without using the body as an outlet, a struggle similar to the Protestants.

²²⁹ Heinrich C. Agrippa of Nettesheim, Siegfried Wollgast Ed., Gerhard Güpner Trans., *De incertitudine et vanitate scientiarum* [Über die Fragwürdigkeit ja Nichtigkeit der Wissenschaften Künste und Gewerbe] (Berlin 1993) 10-19 [German original: "Scheint meine Tat Dir, geneigter Leser, nicht ehrenwert, tollkühn, ja geradezu eines Herkules würdig, wenn ich gegen die gigantische Übermacht aller Wissenschaften und Künste den Kampf aufnehme, ich die gewaltigen Jäger Wissenschaften und Künste in die Schranken fordere?"].

²³⁰ Ibid., 32–34 and 70–84.

²³¹ Gantet, *Traum in der Frühen Neuzeit*, 56f.

Just like them, Agrippa finds blame in the Church itself. He writes that the Pope in Rome is “the worst” and “unmatched in pomp and pride by all tyrants”. He portrays the inquisition as “heretical” since they have long since given up on the Bible and rather seek convictions. Like Weyer, who studied under Agrippa, he judges the harsh treatment of harmless peasant girls who do not know any better.²³²

Having dealt an all-round attack against religious institutions, the book closes on questions of theology. Agrippa expresses his dissatisfaction by imagining a rational religion, reconciling supposed opposites.²³³ He maps out a switch from the dominant “theology of interpretations” to a better “theology of prophecy”, likely in conjunction with his earlier ‘occult’ suppositions. An exegesis of Scripture should only be done by worthy minds, for this practice could otherwise invite fantasy and errors into the faith. Agrippa assures that the Bible is never ambiguous. He is devoted to prophecy, continuing medieval beliefs into the sixteenth century. Agrippa reveals shades of humanism in his writing, yet he does not commit to them. He chose to spiritualize where others naturalized. Agrippa believed that both the *Discretio spirituum* and naturalism could be ended right now. His supposedly more truthful science of God already has answers. In his confidence, he urges us not to refer to the future:

“Prophecy takes place in the way of the spirit, when the soul is seized and taken by the divine, separated from the physical and filled with knowledge and realisation beyond any earthly measure.”²³⁴

We, as God’s image, should turn inside and not reduce ourselves by looking at external nature.²³⁵ Unlike others, Agrippa discards the body after determining its mitigated involvement. The later canonized Ignatius of Loyola [1491-1556] managed to tread the uncertainties of the sixteenth century more carefully. In his *Exercitia spiritualia* [c. 1522], Ignatius preaches about a truer type of faith that ought to be preserved in the current time of “quarrelling churches”. Compared to Agrippa, he also idealizes instances of spiritual divination, naming dreams, but chooses to downplay their everyday importance:

²³² Agrippa of Nettesheim, *De incertitudine et vanitate scientiarum*, 131 and 236f.

²³³ Willard, *How Magical Was Renaissance Magic?*, 652f.

²³⁴ Agrippa of Nettesheim, *De incertitudine et vanitate scientiarum*, 243-252 [German original: “Prophetie vollzieht sich auf dem Wege des Geistes, wenn die Seele vom Göttlichen ergriffen und eingenommen, vom Leiblichen getrennt und mit Wissen und Erkenntnis über jedes irdische Maß hinaus gefüllt wird.”].

²³⁵ Kurz, *Seit*, *Einschätzung von Träumen*, 103.

“We must not habitually speak much of predestination. But if we speak of it in any way from time to time, let us speak in such a way that the common people do not fall into any error, as sometimes happens [...].”²³⁶

Ignatius intends to recommend a good Christian lifestyle. In his compassion, he thinks of other peoples’ false beliefs and that they ought to be saved rather than condemned. Throughout the book, he advises the reader to avoid dreams. The night is a time of danger, which is why exercises and prayers should be done at midnight and in the morning. In times of unrest, our soul is brought closer to earth, prompting us to dream. Ignatius seemingly addresses Marsilio Ficino’s theory of imprisonment. He even states that God has left humanity inside of “natural possibilities”. Divine influences or “consolation” instead happens “without cause”. Our mind will not be able to comprehend it.²³⁷ This is contrary to Agrippa who thought that to be possible.

In the case of dreams, it is interesting to perceive that scholars were faced with a decision regarding the demarcation of spirituality and nature. By this time, nature had become an established category. Ignatius attributes nature with causal predictability and diffuses divine influences. Although most tractates viewed nature as God’s creation and a call for a pious life, it augmented spiritual agency by being the observable stage for such agency. Even though Ignatius writes about mystical things, he draws lines within which divination is contained, viewing dreams as particularly bothersome.²³⁸ God remains unfathomable, but it appears his radius of impact is shrinking as nature gains control, moving things out of its own accord and not as part of divine predetermination. This alone does not make Ignatius a humanist. He does not mention the human body once, not even in the expedient ways of Agrippa. As Ignatius experienced divinatory dreams before and after writing, his acceptance of nature is remarkable. The bond of science and faith became a staple of the Jesuit order, which he founded.²³⁹

Catholics exercised caution when writing about dreams, but nature had established itself as a strong contender. French lawyer Jean Bodin’s [c. 1529-1596] religious affiliations are not completely known for he dabbled in humanist and Protestant thought. His position on dreams

²³⁶ *Ignatius of Loyola*, *Exercitia spiritualia*, In: *Geistliche Übungen und erläuternde Texte*, Peter Knauer Trans. (Graz / Wien 1978) 149-154 [German original: "Wir dürfen nicht gewohnheitsmäßig viel von der Vorherbestimmung reden. Aber wenn man in irgendeiner Weise und zuweilen davon spricht, dann spreche man so, dass das einfache Volk nicht in irgendeinen Irrtum fällt, wie es manchmal zu geschehen pflegt [...]."]

²³⁷ *Ibid.*, 23, 67 and 134–139.

²³⁸ Leslie Tuttle, *French Jesuits and Indian Dreams in Seventeenth-Century New France*, In: *Dreams Dreamers and Visions: The Early Modern Atlantic World*, Ann-Marie Plane, Leslie Tuttle Ed. (Philadelphia 2013) 173–175.

²³⁹ *Feld*, *Ende des Seelenglaubens*, 439f.

is highly traditional however, which is why it shall be included here. Once more fearing claims of heresy, he published his book *De magorum daemonomania* [1580] with an advisory on how its contents ought to be read.

Bodin primarily joined the debate on witches because he was appalled by Johannes Weyer's work. This is evident from the very title of *Daemonomania*, which he deliberately exaggerates. Bodin is fed up with doctors using all means to "protect witches and wizards". Weyer's thesis of melancholy alone prompts Bodin to write an entire chapter in an attempt to disprove it. Breaking with all previous tractates on the topic, he praises women's physique and bodily complexion. Their humours supposedly counter melancholy and other ailments, even producing many positive attributes such as prudence, modesty or contemplation. Arguing for his compliancy with Scripture, Bodin asks for the revocation of Weyer's work. In the case of witches, what are we supposed to believe in if our senses, witnesses and even confessions do not apply due to misled distortion?

"But I would like to ask Weyer one thing: what kind of illness is this in the fiends, by which they think they have killed these or those children, and the same children are found dead afterwards [...]"²⁴⁰

Bodin is driven by a fear of the devil. Therefore, he is against dream concepts that rely on natural causes such as melancholy, since they diminish the devil's involvement. In doing so he even stops villainizing women. Bodin follows the anxious perspective of the *Witches' hammer* in proposing a large demonic and magical threat scenario. Much more so than prior authors, his idea of *Daemonomania* extends into a global concept. For once, he finds fault with the many new translations of ancient and Arabic literature. These, as we know, had a crucial impact on Renaissance humanism. Bodin picks out the Toledo School of Translators here, which he finds responsible for much of the foreign heretical ideas coming to Europe. The age of demons is also observable in the "new occidental islands", meaning America. Bodin is sure that the veneration of demons and idols outweighs Christianity on a global scale. Peculiarly, sacraments seem to be present universally, yet God is not.²⁴¹

²⁴⁰ Jean Bodin, Johann Fischart Trans., *De magorum daemonomania* (Strasbourg 1586) 6f and 683-699 [German original: "Aber eins möchte ich den Weyer wohl fragen, was dies für eine Krankheit an den Unholden sei, durch welche sie meinen, sie haben diese oder jene Kinder umgebracht, und man findet eben dieselben Kinder danach tot [...]"].

²⁴¹ Ibid., 8 and 81f.

Having declared this eschatological premise, Bodin lays out his own thoughts on the major topics of soul, dreaming and divination. If there are two schools of causality, due to the humanists' predictable nature and Agrippa's predictable God, Bodin belongs to neither of them. Unlike Agrippa, he fears the arbitrary actions of supernatural beings. But Bodin's relationship with nature is even more complicated, as he despises naturalization and speaks of humours. "Spirits and heaven" make up a "fifth essence", he argues. He does make sure to explain that this does not necessarily connect them to the other common four essences/humours/elements.

Yet his wording alone is somewhat of a juxtaposition. Bodin is novel in a lack of demarcation. According to him, finding interrelations in nature or in the aforementioned elements is an impossibility and error in itself. Bodin therefore is an anti-naturalist. He takes it literally when the Bible orders us to pay no attention to dreams. In his book, he references Galen, Artemidorus and Gerolamo Cardano, not even disputing their findings. But he judges their research into something vain to be pointless from the start.²⁴² Doctrine did not mandate it, so Bodin does not discern between spiritual and natural, which is actually very beneficial for spiritual agency.

Regarding dreams, he describes prophecy as an "honour" that is given. To demonstrate, he tells of a pious man that would regularly receive divinations. The intervals of which became more stable the more he prayed. However, it was only when he himself started asking questions in return, that the Holy Spirit reprimanded him. Bodin mirrors Jean Gerson, leaving it to God to stop his assistance should his favour change. Also, if dreams and visions are to occur in the last days, they are an indicator for us having reached that point. This very simple deduction stands behind Bodin's dismissal. He shortly acknowledges that there are types of dreams, but only divinatory ones are important. Bodin writes that even Aristotle did not define other types, as they are pointless. All in all, to Bodin, the spiritual canon is sufficient and inextensible:

"And although we have received so many accounts of the truth and will of God since the revelation of the divine law and after so many prophecies, visions and judgements of God, as recorded in the sacred histories and writings, that we no longer need the prophets today. However, it is certain that God still does not fail to send people visions, dreams and his good angels, through which he reveals his will to them to guide and govern themselves and others well."²⁴³

²⁴² Ibid., 11, 56 and 122.

²⁴³ Ibid., 69–76 and 105–120 [German original: "Und wiewohl wir seit der Offenbarung des göttlichen Gesetzes und nach so vielen Prophezeiungen, Gesichtern und Gerichten Gottes, so in den heiligen Historien und Schriften aufgezeichnet zu finden, viele Berichte von der Wahrheit und dem Willen Gottes empfangen, dass wir heute zumal

Bodin and Weyer argued within the context of the witch hunts. In their judicial dispute, they are two opponents that do not quite fit into the boxes of confessions or disenchantment.²⁴⁴ Many authors chose to delineate between dreams that were observable nature and dreams that were divine influence, each adding a model by which one or the other could be more thoroughly studied. Bodin and Weyer however produce a different dualism. In response to Weyer's enlargement of melancholy, which technically disenchanters all dreams, Bodin counters with dreams that are solely spiritual, either as divine influence or empty call to piety.²⁴⁵ Due to their motives, they chose to write in absolutes instead of entertaining an equation of probabilities.

In a fitting way to end on, in 1613 Abraham Hossmann [1561-1617] took it upon himself to summarize all past instances of divine dreams that he could find. He has the comparatively simple goal to educate us about dreams as they can often be confusing. The *Utilis nocturnorum somniorum consideratio* is a compilation of many stories. It is far from complete, but it is an encyclopaedic display of dreams being recorded. Hossmann is not as heated as Agrippa or Bodin. All dreams, he argues, are a gift of God. Even natural dreams, although philosophically empty, are an indicator for calm and blissful sleep. This gift is a worldwide phenomenon:

“As far as natural dreams are concerned, all humans have them in common, young and old, pious and wicked, learned and unlearned, men and women, even little children [...], hence one sees how they are often frightened in their sleep, indeed all peoples, Jews, Turks, Muscovites, Tartars and all rough barbarian peoples who live in India or the New World, and before this time knew nothing of any God, have had many and strange dreams [...].”²⁴⁶

This tractate tackles the universal occurrence of dreaming, a notion that we will tackle in chapter 5. It is likely that Hossmann only grants natural dreams to foreign nations. But their peculiar strangeness could also have been divinations in disguise. Just like with the *Discretio spirituum*,

der Propheten nicht mehr bedürfen. Jedoch ist es gewiss, Gott noch nicht unterlässt, den Menschen Gesichter, Träume und seine guten Engel zu senden, durch welche er ihnen seinen Willen zu erkennen gibt, sich und andere wohl zu führen und zu regieren.”].

²⁴⁴ Waite, *Heresy*, 128.

²⁴⁵ Gantet, *Traum in der Frühen Neuzeit*, 149.

²⁴⁶ Abraham Hossmann, *Utilis nocturnorum somniorum consideratio* (Leipzig 1613) 2, 7 and 11f [German original: "Zwar was natürliche Träume anlangt, die haben alle Menschen im gemein, jung und alt, fromm und böse, gelehrt und ungelehrt, Mann und Weibesgeschlecht, ja auch die kleinen Kinder [...], daher man sieht, wie sie oft im Schlaf erschrecken, ja Träume haben alle Völker, Juden, Türken, Moskowiter, Tataren und alle groben barbarischen Völker, so in Indien oder der neuen Welt wohnen, und vor dieser Zeit, von keinem Gott nichts gewusst haben, die haben viele und seltsame Träume gehabt [...]."].

one can never be certain. Hossmann recalls that divinatory dreams only occur to a limited class. According to the Bible, dreamers are usually elders. This makes sense to Hossmann given that they are often officials or civil servants due to their wisdom. His collected examples, he writes, show a tendency for dreams to occur to "patriarchs, prophets, kings and others", as well as "elders and nobles in ecclesiastical and secular government". In the eve of the seventeenth century, the Catholic Hossmann revisits the biblical idea of prophetic classes. He cleverly grounds this upon his many cases, making it essentially empirical. He conforms with other tractates in saying that divinatory dreams usually concern "high and important things", which further substantiates the need for a person in power.²⁴⁷

Hossmann views dreams as retrospectively deterministic. If a dream leads to evil, it must have come from the devil and so forth. Thomas Müntzer is named as an example of dreams being one's downfall. Some people, Hossmann writes, think too highly of themselves and their dreams. In terms of humours, a problematic complexion must have brought on Müntzer's dreams. Supposedly, doctors are now able to study natural dreams and help cure whatever they indicate.²⁴⁸ Hossmann reflects various ideas of the previous tractates, seeing both divinatory and medical purposes in dreams. He tilts between faith and rejection.

Admirably, Hossmann himself is self-reflective enough to catch on to the difficulty of navigating the battlefield that is dream theory. Hossmann concedes that there are many inconsistencies and contradictions in the history of dreams. For once, it is problematic that divinatory dreams should only occur for the upper class when heathens such as the pharaoh and Nebuchadnezzar also had them. He also includes the critics' opinion, stating that the biblical discouragement of dreams is problematic since divinatory dreams are a big exception from this rule. Hossmann hits the bullseye with his summary, but he is not done yet. Without blaming anyone specific, he gives the impression that dreams were heavily inflated over the past century. Unclear formulations have made dreams more meaningful than they should have ever been. The debate may have also been less about discernment and more about control.²⁴⁹ After coming to that conclusion, Hossmann dares to make two arguments: that dreambooks are superstitious and that divinatory dreams must exist. Just like the medieval authors, he writes that better analysis of dreams is needed. More than the following cannot be gathered from his compilation:

²⁴⁷ Ibid., 20 and 31.

²⁴⁸ Ibid., 25–29.

²⁴⁹ *Gantet*, *Traum in der Frühen Neuzeit*, 109.

“So these are three signs by which one can recognise divine dreams: 1st intense imagination. 2nd correct interpretation. 3rd certain fulfilment.”²⁵⁰

Sixteenth-century Catholicism has not produced a collective response to the ongoing renegotiations of dreams in natural and Protestant scholarship. Conservative (see Bodin) and reformed (see Agrippa) responses only contributed to the deconstruction of the formerly established *Discretio spirituum*. The unresolved state of the spiritual dream prompted some to even fall back on biblical, medieval and ascetic narratives. Other authors picked up a humanist mindset or wrote criticisms of the Church, all in an attempt at reclaiming a former status quo.

3.6 Writers and Poets

The significance of dreams extended into the realm of popular literature and poetry. Keeping the thesis’ premise in mind, we will not dive into analysing contents of dreams. Still, due to the lasting popularity of authors such as Chaucer and Shakespeare, literature certainly partook in shaping the image of dreams.²⁵¹ Vice versa, we can expect literary dreams reflect the contemporary understanding of the topic. By extension, we can also analyse how dreams were employed as a plot device and for what reasons.

English poet Geoffrey Chaucer [c. 1340-1400] is best known for the *Canterbury Tales* [c. 1390s], one of the most significant late medieval pieces of English literature. In one of the stories, *The Nun's Priest's Tale*, talking animals discuss a dream experience. A rooster/cock is awoken by a nightmare. In this dream, the cock was snatched away in his sleep by a prowling fox. Fearing the worst and showing enormous respect in the face of possible dream divination, he awakens one of his hens to say:

“»By God, me mette [I dreamed] I was in such mischief, right now, that yet mine heart is sore affright. Now God,« quoth he, »my sweven [dream] read aright and keep my body out of foul prison.«”²⁵²

The hen hears him out and reprimands him for his cowardice:

²⁵⁰ *Hossmann*, *Utilis nocturnorum somniorum consideratio*, 37–57 and 104 [German original: "Dies sind also drei Merkzeichen, dabei man die Göttlichen Träume erkennen kann: 1. Die heftige Einbildung. 2. Richtige Auslegung. 3. Gewisse Erfüllung."].

²⁵¹ *Walde*, *Antike Traumdeutung*, 26.

²⁵² *Geoffrey Chaucer*, *The Nun's Priest's Tale*, In: *The Canterbury Tales* (ePublication 2018) 341.

“Alas! And can ye be aghast of swevenes [dreams]? Nothing but vanity, God wot, in sweven is, swevens engender of repletions [are caused by over-eating], and oft of fume [drunkenness], and of complexions, when humours be too abundant in a wight.”²⁵³

Furthermore, the hen mentions melancholy as something that can turn even the strongest of men fearful. No attention should be given to whatever is seen in dreams. The hen goes on to cite Cato as proof for why the nightmare should best be dismissed. One should only take some herbs and laxatives against the effects of troubled sleep.

The cock follows this advice and returns back to sleep, but the poem still enters a discussion on a meta level about whether to interpret dreams. Acting as a defendant of dream divination, the cock recalls that “many a man more of authority than ever Cato was” have written the reverse. Furthermore, the cock wonders about what would have happened to Daniel and Joseph in the Bible had they not paid attention to their dreams. Dream divination has also occurred for acquaintances of the cock, which he proves by providing two exemplary anecdotes. Chaucer lets him have the final word, reaffirming his masculinity.²⁵⁴ The cock concludes that “no man shoulde be too reckeless of dreames”. If not more than that, dreams are at least “significations” of whether our lives are full of joy or tribulation.²⁵⁵

The Nun's Priest's Tale is an excellent illustration of the outset of fifteenth-century dream interpretation. Chaucer deliberately puts an unresolved debate into a surreal setting. Both the cock and the hen could very well be scientific authors of that period. On one hand, the cock is a believer in divination and recounts past and present observations in the style of Albertus Magnus. Due to the omnipresence of spiritual agency, the cock aches for correct interpretation. The hen on the other side shows early naturalist and religious attitudes in disregarding them. From her perspective, dreams are natural occurrences and ought to be ignored in the quest for piety. Both disputants ultimately call on God to proclaim the righteousness of their views. This is, to a degree, a fitting summary of the wider debate. These arguments agree with what we have analysed earlier, medieval dreams having uncertain but always religious implications.

At this point however, literature can go further. Despite valiant efforts in the real world, no author managed to close the debate on dreams, winning it for their side. Chaucer does just that in his story. The next day, although not entirely in the way the cock dreamt it up, he is misled

²⁵³ Ibid., 342.

²⁵⁴ Aers, *Interpreting Dreams*, 95f.

²⁵⁵ Chaucer, *Nun's Priest's Tale*, 341–346.

by a fox and ultimately snatched away. Therefore, the cock is proven right. His dream did have significance and he should have heeded the warning. Chaucer then, before concluding with a happy ending of the cock's escape, lectures the reader on this outcome. Just like with the history of humanity, he writes, it is "women's counsel" that brought doom upon us. He puts the blame onto the hen.²⁵⁶ I speculate that Chaucer leans towards a religious framework here in which spiritual agency is immanent. The end is a sign of it being the leading dogma of his time. For that reason, he declares the natural outlook of the hen to be wrong and dangerous. The question is whether such attitudes changed towards the sixteenth century.

Dream interpretation features in *Gargantua and Pantagruel* [third book 1546] by François Rabelais [c. 1494-1553]. In the third book, the predominant theme is a dialogue with various kinds of advice. At some point, after finding no luck in the divination of Virgilian lots, Pantagruel turns to dream interpretation. This type of divination is "of a good ancient and authentic fashion", as it comes from the Greeks. Yet dream interpretation is not flawless, Pantagruel adds. For once, one should consult an expert interpreter instead of exercising it themselves. Another reason is that dreams obscure our "prosperous or unlucky fortune". We can only see them more clearly if we cleanse ourselves of human passions:

"Nevertheless, the truth is, that the soul is seldom able to report those things in such sincerity as it hath seen them, by reason of the imperfection and frailty of the corporeal senses, which obstruct the effectuating of that office; even as the moon doth not communicate unto this earth of ours that light which she receiveth from the sun with so much splendour, heat, vigour, purity, and liveliness as it was given her."²⁵⁷

Rabelais resembles the dream theory of Marsilio Ficino. The problem clearly lies in the human body, as it is the filter by which things of higher origin are diminished. Spiritual agency is still prominent. In Rabelais' book, the character of Pantagruel fully believes in the expounding of dreams for answers on the future. Just like Ficino, we would only have to do away with our bodily prison as best as we can. Then a clearer image and communication of the divine should be possible. We can already see the progress made over the previous century, albeit much of this book is written to be satirical.

²⁵⁶ Ibid., 348–350.

²⁵⁷ François Rabelais, Thomas Urquhart, Peter Motteux Trans., *La Vie de Gargantua et de Pantagruel*, Great Books of the Western World 24 (Chicago / Toronto 1952) 150f.

Over the next few pages, the story tells of the commonly known ways by which to have a stable complexion for dreams. Pantagruel urges us to not indulge in supper, as our stomach is our mind's biggest distraction. We should especially avoid "windy victuals" such as beans or cabbage, like Giambattista della Porta also suggested. Adding to one's diet, Pantagruel speaks of some kind of "somniatory exercitations". It is not explained what they consist of, but they are reminiscent of Ignatius of Loyola. Perhaps they represent some kind of contemplative exercise, helping to achieve the humanist balance of science and faith. Still, Pantagruel includes that some procedures have been disproven as superstition. For example, he also states that putting a branch of laurel beneath one's pillow is nothing but folk belief.

Finally, the two protagonists come to the point of interpreting a dream. Yet their uncertainties quickly show, as they reach opposite outcomes. The same element within the dream makes it both positive and negative. This is quite ironic given the protagonists' proficient knowledge of overcoming faulty complexion. They agree that even the wisest men can be led astray by obscurity. Interestingly, Pantagruel then adds that one can also seek help from "dumb men", as they, in their "nativity", may come to clearer results as they are sometimes closer to nature. As a consequence of this, we should only expect the negative implications of a dream to be on the safe side.²⁵⁸

Rabelais' work also reflects an in-depth understanding of contemporary dream interpretation. His figures do not elaborate on natural dreams as a concept, but multiple tips for healthy digestion hint at a present naturalization. The impact of Ficino is also visible, given that the understanding of the body shifted towards it being a prison. Dreams were collateral in that regard. It would probably be a stretch to say that natural dreams were popular. Yet references such as that of the laurel branch indicate that certain beliefs floated around. As the protagonists cannot find a prevalent interpretation, the passage reads like a satirical potpourri of dream theories. This excursion does not yield any tentative answers, showing the chaotic state of the field.²⁵⁹ In comparison to Chaucer, spiritual agency is still present as dreams are a certified form of divination. The advice to seek counsel with an "expert" appears more cautious though.

Towards the end of the century, nature would develop a hold on dreams, both in academic and popular literature. Blending one with the other, poet Thomas Nashe [c. 1567-1601] would write

²⁵⁸ Ibid., 152–164.

²⁵⁹ Bernd Renner, From Satura to Satyre: François Rabelais and the Renaissance Appropriation of a Genre, *Renaissance Quarterly* 67, no. 2 (2014) 408.

a literary piece against the practice of finding meaning in dreams. He called this tirade of his *The Terrors of the Night* [1594]. Nashe writes about the night as a state of danger for humans, taking quick note of all the tales of the devil. The real culprit however is melancholy, as it fogs up our brain according to our humours. How else would the absence of reason be explainable?

“A dream is nothing else but a bubbling scum or froth of the fancy, which the day hath left undigested; or an after feast made of the fragments of idle imaginations. How many sorts there be of them no man can rightly set down, since it scarce hath been heard, there were ever two men that dreamed alike.”²⁶⁰

Refreshingly, Nashe uses the argument of majority experience against the concept of divinatory dreams. Rather than taking from past examples, he questions the (more or less) established categories found in other tractates. Certainly, he is right in stating that there is barely any consensual knowledge.

Nashe then writes on two origins: digestion and imagination. The “echo of our concepts in the day”, remaining memories so to say, mix with the “imperfect” humours of our bodies to create abstract things. Almost anachronistically, it seems, Nashe then describes melancholy to be an indicator of human morality. The bigger our guilt, the worse our melancholic dreams become. What started out as a physical/psychological treatise takes a religious twist. Nashe expands that Artemidorus and Gerolamo Cardano are examples for those “entranced” by dreams.²⁶¹

Here, the literary genre of this text starts to become apparent. It is a satire. What Nashe attempts is, deliberate or not, a reversal of the dream discourse. The treatise starts off with an early modern attitude to then sprout a religious reading. In his youth, Nashe writes, many superstitions about the divination of dreams were present. But now “what heed then is there to be had of dreams”? The only thing we know is that dreams result from an inundation of humours. Many learnt men, starting with Socrates, have failed to properly acknowledge this and succumbed to “foolery”. Nashe’s Christian moral compass switches rapidly between meaningful and void dreams. Just as quickly, he approaches the end. He reminds the reader that the terrors of the night outweigh the day and that Judas betrayed Christ at night. He closes with:

²⁶⁰ Thomas Nashe, John Danter Ed., *The Terrors of the Night or: A Discourse of Apparitions* (London 1594) 22–24.

²⁶¹ *Ibid.*, 25–30.

“Thus I shut up my treatise abruptly, that he who in the day doth not good work enough to answer the objections of the night, will hardly answer at the day of judgement.”²⁶²

Nashe’s text leaves the text devoid of a conclusion. It could be an attempt at a scientific tractate, an abstract artform or simply an unfinished manuscript. His style of writing obscures many of his ideas.²⁶³ Yet I believe that Nashe develops a narrative. The only contextual point of orientation comes in the form of a ridiculing reference to Cardano. Just before that, Nashe has clearly demonstrated naturalist tendencies of which the doctor would have approved of. Dreams are meaningless to Nashe, yet he finds morality in the dismissal of them. I propose two explanations by which to read Nashe’s satire: It could either be a struggling attempt to reconcile natural progress with a religious worldview. However, relying on the last sentence cited above, it could also be a commentary on the irregular debate on dreams. As no satisfying solution is found, Nashe returns to a medieval anticipation of dreams signifying the end of days.

For the last author in this chapter, we tackle a more story-driven yet no less abstract text. The motive of a dream is the setting for almost the entirety of William Shakespeare’s [c. 1564-1616] *A Midsummer Night's Dream* [1600]. Multiple times, the protagonists of the play remark on the strangeness of the phenomenon. From the beginning on however, there is no mention of God. Rather, it is said to “turn melancholy forth to funerals; The pale companion is not for our pomp”.²⁶⁴ This quickly villainizes melancholy and associates it with dreaming.

Over the next acts, Shakespeare neglects to define the origin of the dreams. They serve solely as an element of mystery. His language is neither affirmative nor dismissive. Throughout the various phases of sleeping and waking, the protagonists only wonder whether they had seen a dream or reality. This is central to the story and Shakespeare writes how much dreams are to be detested for their confusion. Yet towards the end, he expresses his fascination:

“Or in the night, imagining some fear, how easy is a bush supposed a bear! - But all the story of the night told over, and all their minds transfigured so together, more witnesseth than fancy’s images and grows to something of great constancy; but, howsoever, strange and admirable.”²⁶⁵

²⁶² Ibid., 39–42 and 60f.

²⁶³ Holland, Interpretation of Dreams, 145f.

²⁶⁴ William Shakespeare, *A Midsummer Night’s Dream* (ePublication 2022) Act 1 Scene 1.

²⁶⁵ Ibid., Act 5 Scene 1.

The play ends with the protagonists remaining curious about the reality of their dreams. However, they never search for a higher meaning in these images. Shakespeare even breaks the fourth wall and puts it to the audience as to whether we had truly perceived the play or not. The dream poem becomes self-aware.²⁶⁶

A Midsummer Night's Dream is interesting for its unique setup. The author and his protagonists display great marvel over dreams, as they can feel like real experiences. Omitted in all of this is the search for an origin. Shakespeare writes neither about a *Discretio spirituum* nor corporeal analysis nor that one ought to disregard dreams. Unlike other literates, he does not champion his own understanding either. He mentions melancholy, but without the usual connections to humours or devils. In Shakespeare's work, dreams are nothing more than just disturbing. He probably takes a certain view of dreams for granted. Anyhow, his main ambition is to diffuse dream and reality for the audience.

Shakespeare's play does not conform to any established categories. It does not define origins of dreams like the many tractates that came before. But the absence of origins could be an intentional statement of the author as well. Literary scholar Kathryn Lynch views fifteenth- and sixteenth-century dreaming as a "project of demonstrating the continuity of nature and grace." Yet Shakespeare prompts us to laugh at dreamers and the ways by which they are unsettled. In doing so, the humans (and Shakespeare himself) become the origin. The deception of dreams does not come from the outside but is instead produced inside of us. Shakespeare does not omit the question; he intends to present the audience with a mirror of how it may have been a useless debate in the first place. This internalization is a significant switch from the Chaucerian dream, in which the medievalist relied on dreams having divine purpose.²⁶⁷ Much has been written about influences and afflictions, but our illusions are ultimately self-made. And just like that, Shakespeare's fantasy is freed from a religious worldview. There is no higher meaning to be found within our body. Therefore, his work might be persuading us to perform an "inner iconoclasm", which would cultivate a more modern understanding of dreams after we discard our spiritual beliefs.²⁶⁸

²⁶⁶ Anthony C. *Spearing*, *Medieval Dream-Poetry* (Cambridge 1976) 2–5.

²⁶⁷ Kathryn *Lynch*, *Baring Bottom: Shakespeare and the Chaucerian Dream Vision*, In: *Reading Dreams: The Interpretation of Dreams from Chaucer to Shakespeare*, Peter *Brown* Ed. (Oxford / New York 1999) 100 and 123.

²⁶⁸ Jürgen *Schlaeger*, *Der Diskurs der Exploration und die Reise nach Innen*, In: *Weltbildwandel: Selbstdeutung und Fremderfahrung im Epochenübergang vom Spätmittelalter zur Frühen Neuzeit*, Hans-Jürgen *Bachorski*, Werner *Röcke* Ed., *Literatur Imagination Realität* 10 (Trier 1995) 144.

3.7 Summary

Summarizing the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries shows first and foremost that the general rationale for divinatory dreaming, namely a combination of biblical examples, reprobation and probability calculation of the *Discretio spirituum*, had become strongly disputed. The *Discretio spirituum* itself was a medieval attempt by the Church to classify, judge and control dreams. Such efforts were necessary to preserve the ecclesiastical capabilities of the Church, which was faced with an otherwise “uncontrolled arcana”²⁶⁹, owing to the ambiguity of the phenomenon. In this framework, clerics negatively connotated sleep as a time of being at the devil’s mercy. Dreams that did not adhere to churchly values were prosecuted. However, given that dreams remained a core component of Scripture, there was uncertainty in how to approach the phenomenon. Popular interpretations usually dealt with ambiguous symbolisms too.²⁷⁰ Late medieval authors introduced natural dreams and empirical observations into the debate. Building on these, more deterministic solutions were put forward in the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries, clearly delineating dream experiences as either spiritual or natural/corporeal.

Fifteenth-century Catholics were ambivalent on the topic of spiritual agency. But as they unanimously believed in supernatural origins of dreams, be they divine or devilish, it was possible to balance between granting them as pious rewards and policing them as signs of heresy.

Humanists searched for a more scientifically grounded understanding. Born from a spiritual idea of a bodily prison, physicality and spirituality became linked. The humanists also reached new levels of semantics and causality, partly through the inclusion of ancient and Arabic literature. In a balanced approach, they freed science from the repercussions of heresy due to the alleged piety of its cause. It should be mentioned though, that since it resulted from religious motivation, Max Weber opposed naturalism as an agent of disenchantment.²⁷¹

This philosophy was put into practice by the doctors. They studied natural dreams through the human body, debunking them as signifiers of morality. Thanks to this, they could employ dreams for use in medical diagnosis and the judicial defence of witches (denying responsibility).

²⁶⁹ *Schmitt*, *Liminality and Centrality*, 27f.

²⁷⁰ *Wittmer-Butsch*, *Bedeutung von Schlaf und Traum*, 366–369.

²⁷¹ Hartmut *Lehmann*, *Die Entzauberung der Welt: Studien zu Themen von Max Weber, Bausteine zu einer europäischen Religionsgeschichte im Zeitalter der Säkularisierung 2* (Göttingen 2009) 23.

In such endeavours, doctors counteracted a perceived ‘miracle-less’ age by ascribing newfound importance to dreams.

Protestants walked down a different path. Combining *Discretio spirituum* and humanism, they defended spiritual agency and used it for criticizing the contemporary state of the Church. This theorem would lack the qualities of naturalist disenchantment but contribute to some aspects of it, such as the naturalizing and reduction of the devil.

The Catholic answer of the sixteenth century was partly inquisitional and counter-reformatory, but only some authors were conservative. Demarcation replaced the *Discretio spirituum*, as theology was enveloped by newfound naturalist foundations. The belief in spiritual dreaming persisted throughout. Clerics either pushed for research or neglect of the occult.

A gradual corporeal internalization of dreams is visible in poetic literature. Whereas Chaucer gave supremacy to divinatory dreams, the body then became more and more afflicted, leading to Shakespeare’s satire of self-made imagination.

Most of the early modern understanding of dreams was by that point disenchanted, with some voices denying spiritual dreams in their entirety. To speak of a secular world would be wrong though, as all authors still had recourse to God. Even divination persisted, but the probabilities shifted drastically away from potential spiritual agency and towards corporeal melancholic delusion. An ontologically closed world with an overarching religious system of absolute laws opened up as these laws proved to be porous. Humanist research studied that which had been excluded from being questioned, deconstructing a religious framework from within.²⁷²

Spiritual agency reached its peak as a cultural concept in the fifteenth century. Even though the *Discretio spirituum* oversaw the process of empowerment and Jacques Le Goff’s observation of “privileged dreaming”²⁷³ never ceased to exist, such agency became highly democratized. Some authors even reduced the requirements down to simple individual characteristics of piety and conformity with Scripture. Judging from the analysed tractates, this was then strongly diminished as dreams lost their ambiguous and supernatural status. I refrain from commenting on the broader acceptance of spiritual agency, as the sources were entirely from the elite. However, at the end of the sixteenth century, dreams were definitely a subject for medicine and not so much subject for an interpretation of signs.

²⁷² *Gauchet*, *Disenchantment of the World*, 7–11 and 167–169.

²⁷³ See: *Schmidt, Weber*, *Traumkulturen*, 10.

4 Dreams in the 17th Century

This analysis of early disenchantment has achieved its aim of giving an overview of a cross-epochal shift between the late medieval period and the Enlightenment. To now close this gap in its entirety, I will take this thesis up to the works of René Descartes. This chapter represents an attempt at an epilogue, demonstrating how the state of affairs in Europe had changed from the medieval outset.

4.1 General Overview

Seventeenth-century theories about dreams were the result of a naturalization process initiated by Renaissance humanism. Its new paradigm permitted an analysis of dreams, disenchanting them. Still, authors continued to ascribe many phenomena to God. In an apologetic format, they uniformly argued for their cause to be a righteous and divine one, no matter whether it was disenchanting or not. Whenever scholars were unable to achieve certainty on a phenomenon, they invoked a divine creator, but the boundaries of the unknown had begun to shrink.

The English scholar and cleric Robert Burton [1577-1640] employs many of the terms that we have come to identify with dream discourse, including melancholy, humours, imagination, spirits and superstitions. He also mentions the works of Albertus Magnus and Galen but opts to quote Gerolamo Cardano and Jean Bodin instead. Sixteenth-century literature appears to have become the corpus of reference, even despite these authors having no consensus on the topic. Similarly, although Burton's book *Anatomy of Melancholy* [1621] is classified as a medical text, the author remarks that "the rational remaineth, a pleasant, but a doubtful subject."²⁷⁴ He nevertheless takes a disenchanting stance, deeming dreams to be entirely non-spiritual:

"The dreams which mock the mind with fluttering shadows aren't sent from the temples of the gods, nor by the heavenly powers, but everyone makes them for themselves. [...] If you will know how to interpret them, read Artemidorus, Sambucus, and Cardan; but how to help them, I must refer you to a more convenient place [meaning his book]."²⁷⁵

²⁷⁴ Robert Burton, Angus Gowland Ed., *Anatomy of Melancholy* (London 2021) 163f and 183.

²⁷⁵ Ibid., 518.

Burton's thesis on melancholy is a medical one. In a manner like that of a humanist, he examines a multitude of potential causes and symptoms associated with it. But the more Burton studies melancholy, the more disillusioned he seems to become with the confusing and contradictory narratives found in Scripture. In a tome of over a thousand pages, the only answers that he is able to find are strictly medical.²⁷⁶ Clearly, the spiritual aspirations of humanism continue to unfold as an unplanned and organic naturalization. Towards the end, on page 988 of his work, Burton scrutinizes the Church's legitimacy to guide:

“That which remains, is the Western church with us in Europe, but so eclipsed with several schisms, heresies and superstitions, that one knows not where to find it. [...] What, I beg you my dear Dorpius [an early humanist, Protestant and close friend of Erasmus of Rotterdam] ... shall we do with these theologians; or what should you pray for, except perhaps for a trustworthy doctor who can heal the brain?”²⁷⁷

Interpretation has become stale. No longer do dreams have symbolic messages that must be deciphered.²⁷⁸ They are of no interest to Burton, who is in the process of producing tentative answers about the inner workings of the brain. Dreams have evolved from being a topic of theological interest to becoming a topic for medical inquiry. Burton's line of thinking is self-referential and does not rely on a predetermined prophetic truth. This is only the beginning though. Burton is able to remark on the “talking devil” and superstitions in the Indies and China. He also describes atheism as the new mortal sin of his time. His work is clearly not an attempt at abolishing religion.²⁷⁹ Rather, Burton should be likened to a reformer of sorts. But throughout his analysis, he expresses a clear and unwavering certainty regarding the nature of dreams.

Jean-Baptiste Van Helmont's [1580-1644] *Opuscula medica inaudita* [1642] continues where Burton had left off. He too fears atheists and wishes for them to be persecuted. In contrast, dreamers, which had been targeted in the late medieval period, are now declared to be innocent and vindicated. The reason for this is that Van Helmont is on the verge of performing the next step in corporeal analysis. He severs the spiritual connection that was previously believed to have linked the human mind with God:

²⁷⁶ Alt, *Schlaf der Vernunft*, 69.

²⁷⁷ Burton, *Anatomy of Melancholy*, 987f.

²⁷⁸ In the broad scope of things, this is quite surprising, given that some historians have described the early modern period to be more laden with symbolic cultural codes than ever before. See: *Plane, Tuttle*, Introduction, 30.

²⁷⁹ Karlheinz *Ruhstorfer*, Wilhelm Metz eds., *Christlichkeit der Neuzeit - Neuzeitlichkeit des Christentums: Zum Verhältnis von freiheitlichem Denken und christlichem Glauben* (Paderborn 2008) 9.

“[...] the mind, although by reason of its beginning, it be above the laws of nature, yet by what foot it hath once entered into the threshold of nature, and is incorporated and joined unto another, it is afterwards also restrained by its own law.”²⁸⁰

The process of disenchanting the human body and its mental manifestations is ongoing. Van Helmont acknowledges God, yet does not believe in spiritual influences that affect the body and mind. As humans exemplify their own free will and can sin, he is certain to have proven his point, for if we were connected to a divine sphere, the will of God would prevail in us.²⁸¹ His point is reminiscent of old Catholic attitudes. To put it crudely, Van Helmont explains the absence of positive divinity through the existence of negative humanity. This Flemish doctor pursued a different line of argumentation than Burton's. But with both, the disenchanted dream has prevailed. Van Helmont does not pay any attention to them, given that they are illusions of the mind.

At the turn of the eighteenth century, the universal encyclopaedia of Johann Zedler [1706-1751] became one of the most detailed summaries of knowledge of its time. Its passage on “dream interpretation” is devoid of divination. This practice had become a thing of the past:

“Since God used to send truthful dreams, the question remains whether he still does so today? After all, prophecy has ceased and the same can be said of dreams, because they are a form of prophecy. The divine works of miracles came to an end a long time ago.”²⁸²

4.2 Descartes' *De Homine*

René Descartes [1596-1650] deserves special recognition. Some have dubbed the French philosopher to be the “beginning of modern rationality”. Especially in the domain of natural sciences, he became an important precursor to the Enlightenment. Descartes exemplified humanist qualities by looking inwards of himself for causes of dreams, rather than searching for them on the outside. By building on these premises, even he could not anticipate the impact of his philosophy, essentially becoming the starting point of Enlightenment. Descartes wrote

²⁸⁰ Jean-Baptiste van Helmont, *Opuscula Medica Inaudita* [Oriatrike or Physics Refined] (London 1662) 266.

²⁸¹ *Ibid.*, 267–270.

²⁸² Johann H. Zedler ed., *Traum / Traumbuch / Traum-Deuterey*, *Grosses Universal-Lexicon Aller Wissenschaften Und Künste Welche Bisher Durch Menschlichen Verstand Und Witz Erfunden Worden*, 45 (Halle / Leipzig 1754/1731) 187 [German original: "Da nun Gott ehemals wahrhafte Träume zugesickt, so fragt sich, ob er solches auch noch heutigen Tages tue? Die Weissagungen haben ja aufgehört und von den Träumen kann man ein Gleiches sagen, weil sie eine Art der Weissagung sind. Die göttlichen Wunder-Werke haben schon vor langer Zeit ein Ende genommen."].

out of humanist and, at times, almost medieval assumptions. His introspection was an attempt to demonstrate the existence of God, a practice discouraged by contemporary theologians.²⁸³

In his most significant work *De homine* [1635], Descartes does not take stock in supernatural beliefs. Unlike many other authors for whom spiritual influences “cannot be denied”, Descartes aims to describe his findings without having to integrate them in a religious framework.²⁸⁴ In his book, he begins by building on the findings of humoral theory. But regarding dreams, a new model of explanation then takes the place of melancholic vapours: the brain.

Descartes likens the human body to a machine, in which the brain becomes the steering engineer, moving the nerves and controlling its movement. This perspective allows for unprecedented levels of human agency. For Hildegard of Bingen or Johannes Weyer, the human body was only a vessel, subjected to either spiritual agency or the complexion of one’s humours. Descartes’ remarks on dreams are rather simplistic. To him, dreams are the result of the brain’s attempt to compensate for its lack of external perception during sleep by creating more “vivid and lively” imaginations. Just as the brain produces ideas, it produces dreams from the same faculty. Descartes posits that nature always acts according to the “simplest and easiest means” and that it is pointless to search for more complex solutions than those.²⁸⁵

Descartes is a top-tier humanist. In his search for God, he naturalizes the human body. However, there is more to his philosophy. Other tractates of his build on this idea of nature. This leads him to run into a roadblock when comparing experience and Scripture:

“But if it were inconsistent with his [God’s] goodness to have created me such that I am deceived all the time, it would seem equally foreign to his goodness to allow me to be deceived even occasionally; yet this last assertion cannot be made.”²⁸⁶

As Descartes is unable to explain the imperfections of the human body in spiritual terms, he attempts to make sense of them in another way. Dreams may be nothing more than “an exaggeration of reason”.²⁸⁷ Descartes honestly recalls how he often experienced his own senses

²⁸³ Feld, *Ende des Seelenglaubens*, 467–473.

²⁸⁴ Schmitt, *Liminality and Centrality*, 281.

²⁸⁵ René Descartes, *De Homine* [Treatise on Man], In: *The World and Other Writings*, Stephen Gaukroger Ed. and trans., Cambridge Texts in the History of Philosophy (Cambridge / New York 1998) 99–107 and 146–169.

²⁸⁶ René Descartes, *Meditationes de Prima Philosophia* [Meditations of First Philosophy], In: *Meditations of First Philosophy: A Latin-English Edition*, John Cottingham Ed. and trans. (Cambridge / New York 2013) 27.

²⁸⁷ Gehring, *Traum und Wirklichkeit*, 60–68.

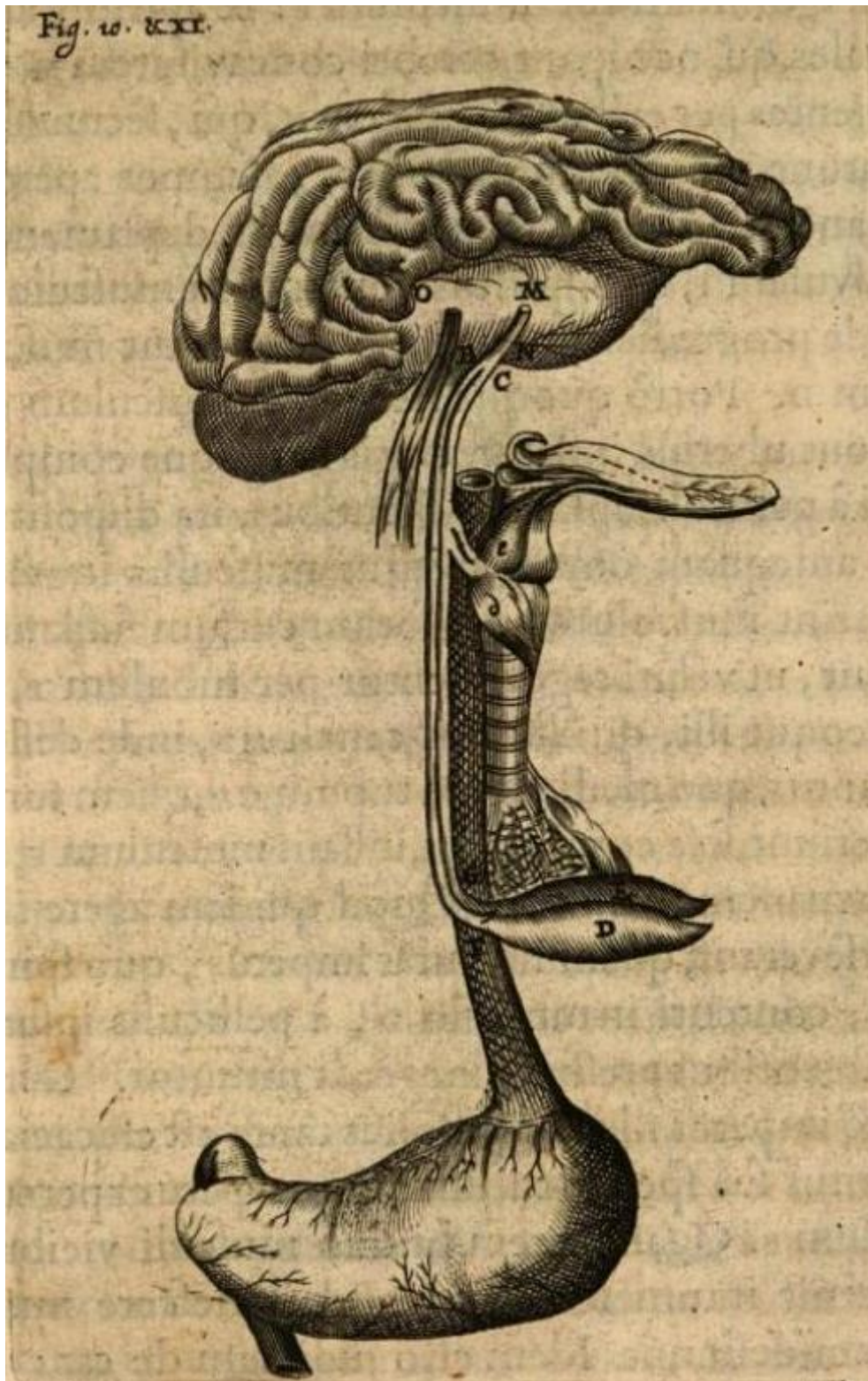


Figure 3: René Descartes illustrates his work with detailed anatomical studies of the human brain and its connections to other essential organs (here the stomach). Image taken from: René Descartes, Ed. Florent Schuyt, *De homine* (Leiden 1662) 27 [this copy at the Bibliothèque cantonale et universitaire de Lausanne].

misleading him. But he is unable to reconcile such imperfections with the concept of a divine ruler pulling the threads. So, deception must instead have a logical function in certain situations, helping to maintain a sustainable life. This function has just not been discovered so far.

Descartes' dream argument further builds on the inability of discerning between sleeping and being awake (like many authors that struggled with the same question before him). Even delusion might be an indicator of something. When we see a person suddenly appear in front of us, we might judge it to be a ghost, but we may as well just be dreaming. When awake, we can instead clearly see where people have come from and where they are going.²⁸⁸ Delusion can therefore communicate to us when we are in fact dreaming. Ultimately, Descartes is unable to do more than accept his victimhood. He eagerly awaited some kind of revelation that would solve this trauma, something deeply personal to him for he too recalled a series of impactful dreams.²⁸⁹ In the end, he found his solution in a boost of individualization:

“Thus, because our senses sometimes deceive us, I decided to suppose that nothing was such as they led us to imagine. And since there are people who make mistakes in reasoning, committing logical fallacies concerning the simplest questions in geometry, and because I judged that I was as prone to error as anyone else, I rejected as unsound all the arguments I had previously taken as demonstrative proofs. Lastly, considering that the very thoughts we have while awake may also occur while we sleep without any of them being at that time true, I resolved to pretend that all the things that had ever entered my mind were no more true than the illusions of my dreams. But immediately I noticed that even while I was endeavouring in this way to think that everything was false, it was necessary that I, who was thinking this, was something. And observing that this truth »I am thinking, therefore I exist« was so firm and sure that all the most extravagant suppositions of the sceptics were incapable of shaking it, I decided that I could accept it without scruple as the first principle of the philosophy I was seeking.”²⁹⁰

Descartes relied solely on his own reasoning. The two-hundred-year humanist search for God led to the philosopher discovering himself. This is a remarkable step, even though one individual's considerations do not reflect broad change. Medieval dream interpretation did

²⁸⁸ *Descartes*, *Meditationes*, 124f.

²⁸⁹ *Holland*, *Interpretation of Dreams*, 125–127.

²⁹⁰ René *Descartes*, *Discourse on the Method Part IV*, In: *The Philosophical Writings of Descartes Volume 1*, John Cottingham, Robert Stoothoff, Dugald Murdoch Trans. (Cambridge / New York 1985) 127.

sometimes consider a dreamer's individual circumstances under the guidance of the *Discretio spirituum*. But never before had agency been so firmly rooted in the humans themselves.

I end the European part of this thesis with a paraphrase of Peter-André Alt's book on early modern dreaming. The idea of a divinatory and prophetic dream was discarded during the Enlightenment for it impeded the "self-referential and reasonable human". The emerging worldview was one in which humans themselves took centre stage as an explanatory model for dreams and other corporeal phenomena. To achieve this, our psychological apparatus needed to be closed-off to external supernatural powers. Spiritual agency, no matter what form it took, was no longer feasible from this point onwards.²⁹¹ Whilst it had been beneficial in the past, it subjected humans to another being's will, one that was neither distinct nor observable. The connection between dreams and the supernatural sphere was therefore broken off.

²⁹¹ Alt, *Schlaf der Vernunft*, 131.

5 Disenchantment of Dreams in a Global Context

While it is possible to trace a continuous process of disenchantment for Christian Europe on the basis of the previous sources, the thesis of disenchantment usually extends to a global scale. The standard narrative goes like this: As Europe colonized the world, disenchantment was weaponized against the world's religions. This then supposedly led into the largely secularized world that Weber eventually described. Historian Hans Joas summarized the results as follows:

“There is more to disenchantment than just a melancholic diagnosis of the times, according to which disenchantment has led to a shattering crisis of meaning, for it essentially contains the idea of a culturally determined superiority of the West that has developed over a long period of time. While disenchantment does lead to a crisis of meaning, it is also a prerequisite and part of a rationalisation process that, with modern capitalism and the modern bureaucratic power state, has produced a dynamic order that other religious or cultural traditions cannot match.”²⁹²

It seems as though the West and its rejection of religion has become the trend-setting benchmark. Although the battle between religion and science continues and some scholars have diagnosed the coming of a “spiritual turn”, it is true that most countries today call themselves secular by name.²⁹³ This rejection of spiritual agency transformed religion into the “great equaliser” of humanity, as David Graeber and David Wengrow put it. Everyone is the same in that everyone is spiritually powerless.²⁹⁴

Returning to the timeframe of this thesis, two questions arise. Two case studies are necessary to answer them. First (chapter 5.1), did colonialism involve aspects of European disenchantment and if so, how was it imposed on other cultures' dreaming? I study the example

²⁹² Joas, *Die Macht Des Heiligen*, 261 [German original: "In der Geschichte von der Entzauberung steckt aber auch neben der melancholischen Zeitdiagnose, der zufolge die Entzauberung in eine erschütternde Sinnkrise geführt habe, ganz wesentlich die Idee einer sich über einen langen Zeitraum herausbildenden, kulturell bedingten Überlegenheit des Westens. Die Entzauberung führt zwar in die Sinnkrise, sie ist aber auch Voraussetzung und Teil eines Rationalisierungsprozesses, der mit dem modernen Kapitalismus und dem modernen bürokratischen Machtstaat eine dynamische Ordnung hervorgebracht hat, andere religiöse oder kulturelle Traditionen nicht Vergleichbares entgegensetzen haben."].

²⁹³ Galen Watts, Dick Houtman, *The Spiritual Turn and the Disenchantment of the World: Max Weber Peter Berger and the Religion–Science Conflict*, *Sociological Review* 71, no. 1 (2023) 262f.

²⁹⁴ David Graeber, David Wengrow, Henning Dedekind, Helmut Dierlamm, Andreas Thomsen Trans., *Anfänge: Eine neue Geschichte der Menschheit* (Stuttgart 2022) 93.

of colonial Peru through the eyes of sixteenth-century Spanish colonizers and two Peruvian mestizos in search for answers. In doing so, I will show how the subjugation and intended conversion away from alleged idolatry was approached and whether Europe truly did export its “spiritual anxieties” elsewhere.²⁹⁵ Did the disenchanted dream play a role in this endeavour?

The second question (chapter 5.2) asks whether the disenchantment of dreams was a uniquely European phenomenon, or whether it could be found amongst other cultures as well. Chen Shiyuan’s encyclopaedic *Lofty principles of dream interpretation* provides a brief but insightful look into sixteenth-century Chinese dream interpretation. My aim here is to identify similarities and differences to European dream interpretation, for example regarding taxonomy.²⁹⁶ It should become apparent whether disenchanting discourses also occurred in China.

5.1 Applied Disenchantment: Chroniclers in Peru

Peru was rigorously colonized by the Spanish, leading to an immense loss of Indigenous culture. The oldest archaeological findings in the region date back to about 11000 B.C. and stem from the Norte Chico (sometimes called Caral-Supe) civilization.²⁹⁷ The name Inca refers to the main ruler of the roughly last four hundred years before the Spanish occupation started in 1532. The Incas were a type of “capstone culture”, meaning that they were able to integrate foreign cultures into their own when expanding their realm, leading to, for example, a diverse cast of deities. Most of what we know of that time and, by extension, Incan culture, customs and history, was written in the sixteenth or seventeenth centuries by native and foreign chroniclers. Prior to colonial times, the Incas did not possess a form of written language.²⁹⁸

For the early decades of colonization, cultural interests took a backseat in favour of economic exploitation. Diseases, droughts, cultural genocide, forced migration and a system of forced labour/tributes led to immense demographic decline. The Incas did wage war against Pizarro and his successors, the Taki Onqoy rebellion being a famous insurrection in the sixteenth century.²⁹⁹ But the colonizers suppressed such opposition and in turn enabled missionaries to

²⁹⁵ Catherine Ballériaux, *Missionary Strategies in the New World 1610-1690: An Intellectual History*, Religious Cultures in the Early Modern World 21 (Abingdon / New York 2016) 1f.

²⁹⁶ David Shulman, Guy G. Stroumsa, Introduction, In: *Dream Cultures: Explorations in the Comparative History of Dreaming*, David Shulman, Guy G. Stroumsa Ed. (New York / Oxford 1999) 5.

²⁹⁷ Daniel M. Masterson, *The History of Peru* (Westport / New York 2009) 23.

²⁹⁸ Christine Hunefeldt, *A Brief History of Peru*, 2nd ed. (New York 2010) 12 and 40.

²⁹⁹ Masterson, *History of Peru*, 34–50.

study Indigenous peoples for the sake of converting them to Christianity. The spreading of monotheism posed an especially significant challenge to Peruvian beliefs (giving credence to Marcel Gauchet's thesis on disenchantment). Dreaming on the other hand was universal, so it might have been common ground to build on. Missionary methods normally included incarceration, accommodation of Indigenous myths, indoctrination, confessions and redefinitions of Indigenous morals.³⁰⁰

Dreams did not play a role in the beginning, but preliminary topics of the mission can be seen in the first anthropological account from the Andes, which was written by Pedro Cieza de León [1520-1554] as the *Chronicle of Peru* [c. 1540-1550]. The conquistador was part of secondary expeditions about a decade after Francisco Pizarro had first arrived in Peru. Cieza de León witnessed the violent subjugation of the Inca Empire first hand and commented on its brutality. Unlike later critics however, he saw the atrocities of the colonizers as simply "divine punishment" and that they served to multiply the Catholic faith. The latter, he writes, is the "principal aim" of the entire enterprise.³⁰¹ Although not a clergyman, Cieza de León proceeded to recount basic observations about Incan religion, serving this very cause.

Two themes in the chronicle will be familiar to us, given the sources from the preceding chapters. Cieza de León writes that many "miraculous" occurrences happened in the New World, which seemed to benefit the Christian cause. Even the natives allegedly believed that a higher power was assisting the Europeans.³⁰² Compared to the 'miracle-less' Europe from before, Cieza de León therefore recounts quite a contrasting first impression of America.

On the other hand, "heresy", "divination" and "devil" are common in the chronicle. Just like in Europe, the Spaniard portrays the devil to be the great schemer behind the Indigenous peoples' delusions. He tells stories of oracles in which the Incas had regular conversations with the devil. In fact, the devil was a constant presence. He was even seen walking the temple grounds at night and talked directly to the Peruvians. A direct mode of communication likely signified to Cieza de León that the influencing of humours was not necessary to mislead the Incas. The conquistador described these meetings like so:

³⁰⁰ Claudia Brosseder, *The Power of Huacas: Change and Resistance in the Andean World of Colonial Peru* (Austin 2014) 30 and 72.

³⁰¹ Pedro Cieza de León, Clements R. Markham Ed., *Crónica Del Perú 1* [Travels of Pedro de Cieza de León], Cambridge Travel and Exploration (Cambridge 2010) 12f.

³⁰² Pedro Cieza de León, Clements R. Markham Ed., *Crónica Del Perú 2* [The Second Part of the Chronicle of Peru], Cambridge Travel and Exploration (Cambridge 2010) 87–90.

“The devil came to the place where they had their oracles, with whom it is publicly known that they held converse. Now these things have come to an end, their idols are destroyed, and a cross has been raised in their stead, to strike terror and dismay into our adversary the devil. [...] Some of them [the Incas] were much given to omens, and were great sorcerers, pretending to predict what would happen in the future, on which occasions they talked nonsense, as all must do who try to foretell what no creature can know; for God alone can tell what is about to happen.”³⁰³

The chronicle lists many instances of spiritual agency, both from God and the devil, yet also demonstrates qualities such as the naturalization of devilish powers. To understand how these events corresponded to the broader phenomenon of overall disenchantment, we will have to consult further sources. The devil may mislead and steer natural things, but never performs miracles. Christians believed these to be done against nature, which also occurred in Peru. The introduction of Christianity into South America in general, as well as the peculiar conversion stories that accompanied it, were perceived as miracles.³⁰⁴

Diving deeper into the intricacies of the Incan state and its religion, Polo de Ondegardo [c. 1510-1575] wrote about the royal family in his *Report of the lineage* [c. 1561-1570]. To uphold the sacrifices that were made to the devil, the Incas supposedly developed “imperialistic” systems along the way. Although the work of the devil, Ondegardo is startled to acknowledge that, in comparison to other peoples in the area, the Incas showed shades of “society”. He takes special note of their systems of irrigation, as well as their morality. The city of Cuzco was known as the “home of the gods” prior to the Spanish arrival. This was because the gods had always been present here, appearing by day and by night, both in physical form and through dreams/visions.³⁰⁵ Ondegardo proceeded to create extensive lists about religious sites in the land in hopes of getting a grip on these vast forms of Indigenous immanentism.

Most importantly, he noted down all of the huacas he encountered, along with their geographical locations. Incan religion was tied to concepts of space. Huacas were places, objects, bodies or stones of significance. Most often, these huacas were believed to be

³⁰³ Cieza de León, *Crónica Del Perú* 1, 289 and 311f.

³⁰⁴ Sabine MacCormack, *Religion in the Andes: Vision and Imagination in Early Colonial Peru* (Princeton 1991) 87.

³⁰⁵ Polo de Ondegardo, *Report of the Lineage of the Incas and How They Extended Their Conquests*, In: *Narratives of the Rites and Laws of the Yncas*, Clements R. Markham Ed. (Farnham 2010) 153–164.

embodiments of certain deities. Many additional meanings of the word have been lost, which is why we deal with a reductive translation of “idols” in Spanish sources.³⁰⁶

The locations noted by Ondegardo have recently allowed Reiner Zuidema to uncover the ceque system, a series of religious sites with Cuzco at its centre. For spiritual agency, Zuidema writes that transformations between people, mummies and stones/huacas were key. These transformations allowed for ecstatic possessions in which huaca deities employed humans as vessels. Dreams were part of these experiences. Ondegardo’s description of the “home of the gods” may therefore be a literal reference to how the Catholics believed in the practice of cleansing one’s soul, turning it into a suitable recipient of divine light. However, given the paucity of archaeological evidence on huacas and the reliance on Spanish mythology, such a comparison is inherently hypothetical.³⁰⁷ In any case, the Incas had cultivated a comprehensive understanding of spirituality. Ondegardo’s investigative account appreciates this to be more than heretical nonsense.

The *Inca Account of the Conquest of Peru* [1570] speaks of dreams, but also represents a rare instance for an early colonial switch of perspective. This is the title given to a letter from Inca king Titu Cusi Yupanqui [birthday unknown, died 1571] to his Spanish counterpart, in which he objected to the already extensive colonization of Peru. Titu Cusi had grown up during the Spanish conquest and had been educated in the customs of both sides. In his later years, he even converted to Christianity. He permitted missionaries to work freely under his dominion and even let them construct infrastructure in the form of churches.

Nevertheless, when reflecting on his early days, Titu Cusi recalls the bewilderment of his people at the Christian faith. Catholic priests presented the Incas with a white book, which they proclaimed to be the word of God. This was most peculiar to the illiterate Incas.³⁰⁸ The Christians would only respond after consulting said book. As we have seen, the Incas were accustomed to more direct forms of divine proclamation. Their huacas and deities conversed with them directly or made themselves known through dreams and other modes of spiritual

³⁰⁶ Miguel I. Aristondo, *Untranslatable Huacas: The Languages of Cultural Appropriation in Early Modern Spanish Chronicles in Peru (1550-1615)*, *Sixteenth Century Journal* 52, no. 3 (2021) 630–645.

³⁰⁷ Reiner T. Zuidema, *Inka Dynasty and Irrigation: Another Look at Andean Concepts of History*, In: *Anthropological History of Andean Politics*, John V. Murra, Nathan Wachtel, Jacques Revel Ed. (Cambridge 1986) 188–197.

³⁰⁸ The quipu is a noteworthy exception to this. In the weaving of strings and knots, the Inca did have a way to record and transmit certain types of messages.

communication. This, it seems, happened on an almost nightly basis. A religion with extremely immanent and present deities had no need for scriptural guidance.

Viracocha was the supreme Incan deity. The Spaniards, in an attempt to establish common ground, argued for Viracocha to be a perverted image of the true Christian God.³⁰⁹ This only confused the Indigenous peoples further. How could self-proclaimed emissaries of God have more limited knowledge than they themselves? After all, the Incas saw and dreamt of their deities. Titu Cusi writes that it was difficult to believe the Spaniards, also because of the vices they exhibited. He ultimately excuses them. At the time of writing the text, he had already been baptised and posited that the Spaniards had just been deceived by the devil.³¹⁰ It is unfortunate that Titu Cusi does not explain what led to his conversion, especially after these initial doubts.

Titu Cusi pursued reconciliation between the traditions of his people and Christian beliefs. He praised missionary institutions for their efforts. However, in his memories of early intercultural exchange, he uses direct speech to display fundamentally different approaches to religion:

“Further, they [the Spaniards] may order you to worship what they themselves worship, namely some sort of painted rags that they claim to be Viracocha. Even though they are just mere rags, they will demand that you pray to these rags as you would pray to our huacas. Don’t do it but keep with what we have, for, as you can see, the villcas [deities; huacas] speak to us; we can see the sun and the moon with our own eyes, but we can’t see whatever it is that they are talking about.”³¹¹

The account suggests that Incan religion was considerably more performative, contemporarily present and lively. Due to regular communication with and dreaming of a divine sphere, it exhibited overwhelming immanentism. Objectively, Catholic dream interpretation consisted of more work for more obscure messages. The past stories and promises of salvation that Christianity offered appeared to be comparatively weak.

Those missionaries and chroniclers who travelled to the New World continued to search for connecting elements besides Viracocha. The Jesuits applied their theorem of accommodation, intending to sow Christian beliefs into existent Indigenous culture. They also straight up

³⁰⁹ Mariano *Delgado*, Katholizismus in Spanien Portugal und ihren Weltreichen, In: *Geschichte des globalen Christentums: Frühe Neuzeit*, Katharina *Kunter* Ed., Religionen der Menschheit 32 (Stuttgart 2017) 57f.

³¹⁰ *Titu Cusi Yupanqui*, An Inca Account of the Conquest of Peru, Ralph *Bauer* Trans. (Boulder 2005) 60–81, 87 and 102.

³¹¹ *Ibid.*, 116.

appropriated certain beliefs. This was a walk on a tightrope, as such a procedure risked compromising theological accuracy, especially if the translation was subpar.³¹²

Furthermore, Spanish sources reimagined Incan history. The Spanish governor of the American Pacific coast, Pedro Sarmiento de Gamboa [c. 1532-1592], is exemplary for this in his *History of the Incas* [1571]. To bring Indigenous peoples into a universal Christian origin story, he explained the population of the New World through the tale of Atlantis. After its supposed submersion, Atlantians, as well as some Greeks and Hebrews, settled in America. Due to the separation from the European Christian world, the natives of America then became susceptible to devilish illusions and dreams. Their lack of scripture contributed to a lack of awareness. Sarmiento de Gamboa finds more similes in Incan tales of a great flood from which their ancestors were the only survivors. He views this myth as irrefutable evidence for the flood narrative of Book Genesis. The plurality of Indigenous languages is likened to the confusion of the tongues when God separated the people after the construction of the Tower of Babel.³¹³

As much as Sarmiento de Gamboa paints a Biblical picture of Incan history, in contrast to Titu Cusi he stays undecided on the question of the chatty and dream-sending Viracocha. As a creator deity, Viracocha could be appropriated. But as the rest of the Incan faith was deemed devilish and heretical, Sarmiento de Gamboa probably abstained before drifting into theologically uncertain territory. Nevertheless, he confirms that the huacas and Viracocha conversed with the Incas. The eighth Inca king, Viracocha Inca, even changed his name after having been visited by Viracocha in a dream. Sarmiento de Gamboa writes that it was said that the king never forgot that occurrence and received promises of fortitude.³¹⁴

The Spaniards did not question the validity of these tales. Spiritual agency was not new to them. It was clear that the Incas did converse with and received instructions from something. But in order to brand spiritual messages as either good or evil, these traditionally had to undergo the Catholic interpretation that was the *Discretio spirituum*. Therefore, before Indigenous peoples could be converted, their beliefs had to be deconstructed and disproven according to doctrine.³¹⁵

³¹² Fabián A. *Campagne*, Witches Idolaters and Franciscans: An American Translation of European Radical Demonology (Logroño 1529-Hueytlalpan 1553), *History of Religions* 44, no. 1 (2004) 7.

³¹³ Pedro *Sarmiento de Gamboa*, Clements R. *Markham* Ed., *Historia de Los Incas* [History of the Incas and the Execution of the Inca Tupac Amaru], Hakluyt Society 2 22 (Farnham 2010) 23–35.

³¹⁴ *Ibid.*, 81f.

³¹⁵ Marisol *de la Cadena*, Earth-Beings: Andean Indigenous Religion but Not Only, In: *The World Multiple: The Quotidian Politics of Knowing and Generating Entangled Worlds*, Keiichi *Omura*, Grant J. *Otsuki*, Shiho *Satsuka*, Atsuro *Morita* Ed., Routledge Advances in Sociology (Abingdon 2019) 22–25.

This is a notion of disenchantment. By bringing a Christian benchmark to Peruvian religion, the latter will undoubtedly not be able to meet the criteria of ‘permissible’ spiritual agency. In that way, one religion can disenchant the other.

Cristóbal de Molina [c. 1529-1585] spent much of his life preaching in Peru. He was an eyewitness to multiple possessions in which huacas took control of human vessels, speaking through them in persona or through dreams. In his *Account of the Fables and Rites of the Incas* [c. 1575], he described how these phenomena left an impression on him:

“During this time, there were different types of apostasies in different provinces. Some [Indians] danced, suggesting that the huaca was in their body. Others trembled for the same reason, suggesting that it was in them too. Others shut themselves up in their houses and shrieked. Others mutilated themselves, had fits, and killed [themselves]. Others jumped into rivers, offering themselves to the huacas. [This happened] until Our Lord was moved by his mercy to enlighten these miserable people.”³¹⁶

Molina presents a disparaging view of possessions. He depicts ecstatic states of trance with the mediums having wild and self-harming reactions. From the Taki Onqoy rebellion, historians recorded that the Indigenous peoples claimed high amounts of agency by saying that they themselves represented the huacas during such episodes.³¹⁷ Perhaps because he himself had witnessed these possessions, Molina is more critical about the Peruvians themselves. He does not promote the benevolent conversions of Cieza de León and Titu Cusi. Instead, Molina drags Incan spiritual agency into the context of Counter-Reformation and witch hunts, emphasising the devilish divination it supposedly entails.³¹⁸

Molina suggests the idea of the Incas consciously venerating the devil by three observations. Firstly, he asserts that Indigenous peoples adhere to polytheistic beliefs, even worshipping the lesser huacas more than Viracocha, their primary creator. The latter manifests by taking on the form of a “splendid man” or by showing his “reflection” in a spring. Molina is suspicious of such clear-cut representations as they are starkly contrasted with the Christian God of whom no image exists. Secondly, as with European witchcraft, the devil only gains significant powers if

³¹⁶ Cristóbal de Molina, Brian S. Bauer Ed., Vania Smith-Oka, Gabriel E. Cantarutti Trans., *Relación de Las Fábulas y Ritos de Los Incas* [Account of the Fables and Rites of the Incas], William & Bettye Nowlin Series (Austin 2011) 88.

³¹⁷ Brosse, *Power of Huacas*, 77f.

³¹⁸ Claudia Brosse, *Cultural Dialogue and Its Premises in Colonial Peru: The Case of Worshipping Sacred Objects*, *Journal of the Economic and Social History of the Orient* 55 (2012) 384.

one makes a deliberate pact with him. The Incan shamans, Molina writes, would call on the huacas during times of fear and danger, making sacrifices to them in order to gain knowledge of the future. To do so, thirdly, the Inca youths would sleep in the temple grounds, hoping to dream of the huacas.³¹⁹

The conquistador depicts Indigenous dreaming as a highly sinful practice. By 1575, hoping for dreams to occur and believing in them was discouraged by European Catholics. Just like witches, Indigenous peoples seek out dreams to gain supernatural insights. Molina therefore goes on to propose punishments against the Peruvians like the ones issued to witches in Europe. His arguments fit well with sources like the *Witches' hammer*. He does not state whether the Incan dreams are natural or devilish. Celebrating either is already a fundamental error. Molina's observations are supposed to underline the superstition of Peruvian dreaming.

Fifteen years later, José de Acosta [1540-1600] would attempt a discernment of Peruvian dreams in his remarkable *Natural and Moral History of the Indies* [1590]. He posits that idolatry originates from either "natural things or human imagination." Given that the huacas are stones, Peru is guilty of the former, he writes, ignoring the transformative forms of spirituality by which huacas were understood.³²⁰ In other chapters, Acosta blames the condition of the New World, that being naturally induced idolatry, on the devil:

"The method used by the heathen sorcerers and priests to consult the gods was in the manner that the devil had taught them: usually it was at night, and they entered turned away from the idol, walking backward. And, bending low and bowing their heads, they assumed an ugly posture and thus consulted with him. Usually the reply was a sort of horrible whistle, or a scream, which struck them with horror, and everything that they were told and commanded was intended for their deception and perdition."³²¹

Acosta views the huacas to be of natural origins. Ascribing divinity to them is therefore a misunderstanding, making them the same genre as natural dreams. As he also writes about communications with the devil, we can safely assume that he shares the sixteenth-century sentiment of a naturalized Satan. In his naturalization, Acosta seeks rational explanations. As

³¹⁹ *de Molina*, *Relación de Las Fábulas*, 5f, 17–20 and 51.

³²⁰ Sergio Botta, *Zemi Teotl Huaca: Reconsidering Materiality through Three Emic Concepts in the New World*, *Religion* 52, no. 2 (2022) 60f.

³²¹ José de Acosta, Jane E. Mangan Ed., Frances Lopez-Morillas Trans., *Historia Natural y Moral de Las Indias* [Natural and Moral History of the Indies] (Durham / London 2002) 255f and 277.

the replies were “whistles” or “screams”, one would be wise to doubt these apparitions. They could have just come from human imposters. Some of the sorcerers, he writes, have been converted and upon receiving the sacraments, confessed to having used errors and tricks to deceive their peers.³²² Nature can give false impressions. The devil makes use of this.

This is somewhat reminiscent of pope Pius II’s comments on Joan of Arc. Piety did not make people from medieval times any more gullible. Just as Joan could have been a French charade, the heathens could have done the same thing. It was likely simpler for Acosta to disenchant foreign spirituality in this way, than to question spiritual agency in his own faith. Instead of discerning between good and bad spiritual agency, he discerns between divine and natural. Therefore, Acosta became a naturalizing agent of disenchantment.

Acosta mentions that he drew information from Polo de Ondegardo, “whom I chiefly follow in things pertaining to Peru.”³²³ Acosta’s objective is to compile a complete record of the New World, which he believes can be achieved through the application of reason. He recounts how other chroniclers, perhaps addressing Sarmiento de Gamboa, write of mythological origins of America, calling it the “antiworld” or the “golden country of Ophir”. Acosta discourages these theories. There is no evidence to suggest that the natives had once travelled to America. No signs of a compass or lodestone are to be found. About Incan origin stories, he writes:

“It is not very important to know what the Indians themselves are wont to tell of their beginnings and origin, for what they relate resembles dreams rather than history.”³²⁴

In their vain naturality, dreams are unreliable sources and a metaphor for delusional thoughts. Searching for easier answers, the Jesuit chooses to place faith in the concept of reason:

“Certainly we are not to think that there was a second Noah’s Ark in which men were brought to the Indies, nor much less that some angel brought the first inhabitants of this world holding them by the hair, as did an angel with the prophet Habakkuk. For it is not a question of what God could do but of what conforms to reason and the order and style of human affairs.”³²⁵

³²² Ibid., 311.

³²³ Ibid., 330.

³²⁴ Ibid., 42–45 and 72.

³²⁵ Ibid., 51.

Acosta was a Catholic clergyman. Yet he is most definitely also a naturalist.³²⁶ In the case of the Incan origin story, Acosta simply views them as having landed in America due to some kind of “storm” or other mishap. An equally straightforward explanation must be behind Incan dreaming. Like many European humanists, Acosta refrains from viewing all things as divine providence. He scientifically commits himself to gathering data, finding causality within it and being able to empirically attribute certain things to nature. Scholars did so with dreams in Europe and America, but the advancements of European naturalism allowed missionaries to disprove all kinds of Indigenous beliefs.³²⁷

Acosta was not alone with his rationalism. In Mexico, Bernardino de Sahagún [c. 1499-1590] argued for a similar perception of Aztec religion. The primary distinction between their faith and ours, he writes, is that the Indigenous peoples “worshipped as gods the fire, the water, the wind, the sun, the moon, the stars.” Instead of an abstract concept of salvation, they venerated visible things.³²⁸ Regarding dreams, Sahagún remarks that “at night walked demons – perchance wizards and sorcerers”.³²⁹ With “perchance”, he too suggests that human sorcerers might be responsible for what others have attributed to demons. The dreams that the Aztecs were speaking of could have been the results of their actions. The writings of Sahagún and Acosta contain a naturalist counternarrative to the damnations of Satanism that were present, for instance, in Molina.

There is some additional context to this benevolent but also disenchanting narrative. It should be studied in connection with the debate that happened in Spain as to whether excessive violence against the Indigenous peoples was justified. Bartolomé de las Casas [1484-1566], a Dominican engaged in missionary work in Central America, is still well known today for his actions to condemn the atrocities of the Conquista.³³⁰ It was the Spaniards, he argued, that established “satanic tyranny” in the New World. How could such unchristian and greedy criminals turn into teachers that would bring the Indigenous peoples into the faith?

³²⁶ *Strathern*, *Unearthly Powers*, 240.

³²⁷ *Brosseder*, *Power of Huacas*, 20.

³²⁸ *Ballériaux*, *Missionary Strategies*, 25.

³²⁹ Bernardino de Sahagún, Arthur J. O. Anderson, Charles E. Dibble Trans., *Códice Florentino* [General History of the Things of New Spain Volume 2-6], 2nd ed., vol. 2 and 5, Monographs of the School of American Research 14 (Santa Fe 2012) Book 1: 56 and Book 5: 192f.

³³⁰ Daniel Castro, Walter D. Mignolo, Sonia Saldivar-Hull, Irene Silverblatt Ed., *Another Face of Empire: Bartolomé de Las Casas Indigenous Rights and Ecclesiastical Imperialism*, Latin America Otherwise: Languages Empires Nations (Durham / London 2007) 183.

His defence remarkably argued that the Indigenous peoples were entitled to a “natural, divine and human right” to cast out the Spanish oppressors.³³¹ Las Casas formulation of these rights was groundbreaking in its time. Acosta sided with him. The naturalization of Indigenous beliefs can therefore be read as an attempt to vindicate them. Being misled by the elements would be far less severe than having made actual pacts with the devil. On these grounds, Las Casas advanced the proposition that Indigenous peoples were capable of reason.³³² Another missionary, Jerónimo Planes, even wrote of melancholy in a colonial context.³³³ One might remember Johannes Weyer, who did the same by defending witches on the basis of melancholy. Nature became a common denominator with which to comparatively study religions. Las Casas used this to advocate for the Indigenous peoples. Still, he did not dare to balance Christianity fairly with Peruvian beliefs on a scale, always making the former look better.³³⁴

It is difficult to ascertain the full impact of Acosta’s and Las Casas’ writings. While some early seventeenth century sources are belittling towards the huacas, others are uninterested in punishing the natives. Francisco de Ávila frequently uses the words “lies” and “superstition”, but any actual condemnation of the Indigenous peoples is notably absent. He simply dismisses the tales of huaca and dream communication as a thing of the past. The huacas, he writes, walked on earth, performed visible acts and appeared in dreams, but this was all part of “ancient times”. The same goes for the many fables of “talking animals such as birds, lamas or foxes.”³³⁵ Ávila at length recounts the various origin myths that he found with the Incas and praises the Spanish arrival, yet he does not pass judgement on the natives. It appears, discerning between natural and devilish origins was not as critical to missionizing as it was to persecuting heresy.³³⁶ Ávila manages fine without discernment. The Incas had already stopped dreaming and sinning. Even less polarising missionaries such as Ávila claimed moral authority though, as one can gather from the title of his *Narrative of the Errors* [1608].

³³¹ Bartolomé de Las Casas, Hans M. Enzensberger Ed., *Brevísima Relación de la Destrucción de las Indias Occidentales* [Kurzgefaßter Bericht von der Verwüstung der Westindischen Länder], Insel-Taschenbuch 553 (Frankfurt am Main 1981) 13, 23 and 61.

³³² Gantet, *Traum in der Frühen Neuzeit*, 131.

³³³ Brosseeder, *Power of Huacas*, 38.

³³⁴ MacCormack, *Religion in the Andes*, 239–244.

³³⁵ Francisco de Ávila, *A Narrative of the Errors False Gods and Other Superstitions and Diabolical Rites in Which the Indians of the Province of Huarochiri Lived in Ancient Times*, In: *Narratives of the Rites and Laws of the Yncas*, Clements R. Markham Ed. (Farnham 2010) 123–136.

³³⁶ Andrew Redden, *Dream Visions and Divine Truth in Early Modern Hispanic America*, In: *Dreams Dreamers and Visions: The Early Modern Atlantic World*, Ann-Marie Plane, Leslie Tuttle Ed. (Philadelphia 2013) 164.

By that time, a third perspective had emerged in Peru: that of the mestizos. The most significant of whom was Inca Garcilaso de la Vega [1539-1616] from the Inca royal lineage. Like Titu Cusi, Garcilaso sought to reconcile the two cultures that he had grown up with. To do this, he composed a revisionist narrative, elevating Incan culture out of the slump of heretical nonsense. Garcilaso divided idolatry in Peru in a time before and during the rule of the Incas. In describing the “beasts” that inhabited America before Incan rule, he copies the pitying but stern rhetoric of the colonizers. Once again, we can observe how the juxtaposition of visible and invisible objects of veneration (dreams being visible, as they appear before our very eyes) was used to distinguish between two religions:

“And as they [the natives] did not understand, like the gentile Romans, how to make ideal gods, as Hope, Victory, Peace, and such like, because they did not raise their thoughts to invisible things, they adored what they saw. The one desired to have a god different from the other, without thinking whether the objects of adoration were worthy or not, and without self-respect in considering whether the things they adored were not inferior to themselves.”³³⁷

In the *Royal Commentaries of the Incas* [1609], Garcilaso expresses disdain for these ancient times. Sorcerers, predominantly women, allegedly lied about hearing the devil’s voice in order to gain reputation as great priestesses. Thanks to their lies about spiritual agency, pre-Incan natives remained in a natural and barbaric state. To Garcilaso, these uncertainties make the fables feel more like “dreams” than history.³³⁸

Garcilaso had received a formal education in Spain, where he travelled at the age of twenty-one and remained for the rest of his life. He was eighty when writing the *Commentaries*, affording him plenty of time to be socialized in the “invisible” Christian beliefs. His disdain for venerating nature and spiritually inclined women suggests that he adopted staples of European dream discourse. Obviously, this assertion is a hypothesis, but Garcilaso casually using dreams as a synonym for nonsense shows how the word’s meaning had shifted.

Garcilaso then proceeds to argue that the Incas brought order into this animalistic and dreamy chaos, establishing a prototype of Christianity. Their progressiveness showed in them worshipping both visible and invisible deities with the latter being Viracocha, a placeholder for

³³⁷ Inca Garcilaso de la Vega, Clements R. Markham Ed., *Comentarios Reales de Los Incas* [First Part of the Royal Commentaries of the Yncas] (London / New York 2016) 47.

³³⁸ *Ibid.*, 60–71.

the Christian God. The Incas also introduced many elements of the Gospel. Garcilaso lists incarnation, holy trinity, the washing of feet, fasting and martyrdom. Still, the Spaniards “commonly confuse”³³⁹ the ancient and barbaric pre-Incan age with the actual rule of the Incas. This confusion led to much of the suffering that Peruvians had to endure.³⁴⁰ Garcilaso likens Incan religion to Christianity in a manner similar to the Jesuits. However, in one notable aspect, this does not work. He is unable to describe Indigenous dreaming as anything but heretical:

“They [the natives] asserted that the soul could not sleep, and that the things we dream are what the soul sees in the world while the body sleeps. Owing to this vain belief, they paid much attention to dreams, and their interpretation, saying that they were signs and omens which presaged either much evil or much good. [...] It is a fearful thing to hear what they prognosticated from dreams; but, in order to avoid scandal, I shall not relate what I could say upon this subject.”³⁴¹

It is a somewhat peculiar question as to why Garcilaso deemed dreams to be scandalous. I am inclined to believe that they were either too dangerous of a topic (due to the claims of heresy) or that he was unable to coherently integrate Incan dreaming into a Christian framework. In any case, Garcilaso omits spiritual agency in dreams from the *Commentaries*, although admitting that dream divination had been practised in Peru.

To get some closure on this question, it is essential to consult the most descriptive work on Incan dreaming. Pablo José de Arriaga’s [1564-1622] *Extirpation of Idolatry in Peru* [1621] gives a detailed account of the Incan dream interpreter: the móscoc.

“The móscoc is an interpreter of dreams. Someone goes to him to ask him whether he will get well or die, or whether a horse he has lost will come back, etc. If it is a man who comes to him for advice, he asks him for the huaraca he wears around his head, or for the chuspa or the blanket or another part of his clothing. If it is a woman, he asks her for the chumbi, which is the belt, or something similar. He takes these things home and sleeps on them. In accordance with what he dreams, he answers.”³⁴²

³³⁹ This was not the only supposed “confusion” that the Spaniards exhibited with regard to the New World. Garcilaso gives rise to the myth of Alonso Sánchez de Huelva having preceded Christopher Columbus by a few decades. See: *Ibid.*, 24.

³⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, 114–124.

³⁴¹ *Ibid.*, 129 and 183.

³⁴² Pablo José de Arriaga, Karl A. Wipf Trans., *Extirpación de la Idolatría del Pirú* [Eure Götter werden getötet: Ausrottung des Götzendienstes in Peru] (Darmstadt 1992) 32f [German original: “Der Móscoc ist ein Traumdeuter. Jemand begibt sich zu ihm, um ihn zu fragen, ob er gesund oder sterben werde oder ob ein Pferd, das ihm

Arriaga adds that only the Indigenous priests were allowed to converse with the huacas on behalf of their village. One could be initiated in a variety of ways. Some became priests due to hereditary succession, some through election and others were simply delusional lunatics. Arriaga claims spiritual agency to be a conscious ruse, stating that the huacas were mere fabrications, designed to instil fear and gather coin from the lay population. The system of móscoc priests was part of this. As it went on for centuries, they supposedly could not differentiate between what they were making up and what the devil commanded them to do.³⁴³

It is advisable to read Arriaga's account for the colonialist manifesto that it is. For example, the Jesuit suggests that the gold of the New World is the Spaniards' salary for converting the natives, that physical violence is a colonizer's duty of delivering punishment and that Incan idolatry was planted there by the Jews millennia ago.³⁴⁴

However, if his description of the móscoc is to be believed, then Incan dream divination shows a unique quality: being intentional. If faced with trouble, people would consult with an interpreter before the dreaming even took place. The móscoc actively pursued dreams, tying into the frequent communications we have seen at the start of this chapter. This is a major, if not the biggest difference to how spiritual agency of dreams worked in Europe. The Christian dreamer would always be the passive experiencer. Discerning only ever took place once a dream had already manifested itself. In Peru, a preceding step of consulting the móscoc was taken. The interpreter then also did the dreaming. This immensely expanded the possibilities for agency, as the dreamer was no longer limited to interpreting images; they could go so far as to influence the experience by anticipating it.

The Indigenous peoples were perceived to lack "supernatural insights", as missionary Bernabé Cobo put it.³⁴⁵ Yet in reality he could not have been more wrong in his assessment. Compared to Christian Europe, Incan religion was charged with an even more visible kind of spiritual agency and immanent supernaturality. "Summoning" the huacas and maintaining regular direct

verlorengeht, wieder kommen werde etc. Ist es ein Mann, der bei ihm Rat sucht, bittet er ihn um die Huaraca, die er um den Kopf trägt, oder um die Chuspa oder die Decke oder um einen anderen Bestandteil seiner Kleidung. Ist es eine Frau, bittet er sie um den Chumbi, das ist der Gürtel, oder eine ähnliche Sache. Diese Dinge nimmt er nach Hause und schläft auf ihnen. In Übereinstimmung mit dem, was er träumt, antwortet er."].

³⁴³ Ibid., 31 and 34–36.

³⁴⁴ Ibid., 3–9 and 103f.

³⁴⁵ Bernabé Cobo, Roland Hamilton Ed., *Historia Del Nuevo Mundo [Inca Religion and Customs]* (Austin 1994) 3.



Figure 4: The dream interpreter móscoc can be seen at the top of this illustration by Guaman Poma de Ayala, being taken over by the devil whilst asleep. He also depicts other types of devil communication such as one through the medium of fire (left). Image taken from: Felipe Guaman Poma de Ayala, *El primer nueva Corónica y buen Gobierno* [New Chronicle and Good Government Book 1] (Origin unknown 1615) 281 [this copy at the Det Kongelige Bibliotek København].

were not accustomed with.³⁴⁶ Furthermore, possessions and transformations³⁴⁷ not only enabled the Inca to receive divination, but also to acquire superhuman powers. This happened within a system of reciprocal favour and obligation, linking the Peruvians to their deities.³⁴⁸

The European perspective did not understand Peruvian spiritual agency to be supernatural. Their assumption of Incan dreaming and Incan religion overall was that it either happened out of a human-devil symbiosis or misread nature. Naturalism, which was practiced in theology and science alike, is recognizable in the colonial sources. The clerics could only approach Peruvian dreaming as something “preternatural”, meaning that it was somewhat mystical but still a part of nature. At best, they wrote that the devil controlled said nature, which mirrors the European discourse. The Europeans applied their terminology of magic, heresy, witchcraft and disenchantment abroad.³⁴⁹ The export of spiritual concepts birthed many misunderstandings.

The syncretism of European and Incan culture that emerged in Peru was never going to be fairly balanced. Military and economic control was more important to the colonizers.³⁵⁰ Nevertheless, during the process of accommodation, missionaries and Incan elites commented on how certain aspects of Incan religion (most remarkably dreams) could not be integrated into this syncretism. This led to the establishment of a “semiosis of low and high cultures”, as outlined by Walter Mignolo.³⁵¹ Disenchanting methods described Indigenous peoples as less informed, be that in the context of the Gospel or in nature. Disenchantment legitimized Europe’s proclaimed role of being the advanced colonizer. Whether it was eradicating ‘falsified’ beliefs, appropriating others or helping lesser developed peoples catch up, the Europeans had the upper hand.

³⁴⁶ *Brosseder*, Cultural Dialogue, 399.

³⁴⁷ The Europeans’ disdain for transformations is especially interesting, given that the notion is found in Christian beliefs as well. One must only think about the symbolical transformation of the eucharistic bread. See: *MacCormack*, Religion in the Andes, 28.

³⁴⁸ *Ibid.*, 58f.

³⁴⁹ *Brosseder*, Power of Huacas, 85 and 254.

³⁵⁰ Catherine *Ballériaux*, Damien *Tricoire*, Restorers of the Divine Law: Native American Revolts in the New World Christianity and the Quest for Purity in the Age of Revolution, In: *Apocalypse Now: Connected Histories of Eschatological Movements from Moscow to Cusco*, Damien *Tricoire*, Lionel *Laborie* Ed., Routledge Studies in Early Modern Religious Dissents and Radicalism (Abingdon / New York 2023) 262f.

³⁵¹ *Mignolo*, Darker Side of the Renaissance, 7–10 and 316f.

5.2 Chinese Dreaming: Chen Shiyuan

Dreaming is a universal human experience. So far, we have predominantly studied it through the perspective of Europe and its colonial enterprises. Other cultures developed their own comprehensive categorizations of dreams.³⁵² To give an example, I will analyse a Chinese book about dreams from the sixteenth century. In the case of Peru, even native accounts presented native beliefs through a European lens. China was more resilient against colonizing efforts. It is one of the few cases with an intact native corpus on dreaming. Intact means that the authors were able to write without an outside power's ethnological interest or pressure of assimilation bearing down on them. Christian missionaries acknowledged China as a culture of higher worth (rather than declaring them to be barbarians and creating a *tabula rasa*).³⁵³

During the Ming dynasty [c. 1368-1644], the philosophy of neo-Confucianism became the leading doctrine. It relied on individualism and introspection, as well as on metaphysical/supernatural speculations, which scholars scrutinized as the Ming dynasty disintegrated in the seventeenth century. This declining spiritual component of neo-Confucianism led some experts to compare it to early modern philosophy in the West, an assumption I do not outright support.³⁵⁴ Chinese scholars supposedly saw the “self-evident principle of heaven” in Confucianism as something that suppressed the “mind of humanity”, leading to a rise of natural sciences (supported by European missionaries such as Matteo Ricci) and an “awakening of the self”.³⁵⁵ This narrative reads very similar to the history of the European Renaissance and is supposed to have taken place at the exact same time.

The concept of disenchantment will have to undergo a thorough screening, potentially even adaptation, before we can apply it to China. Just because the outcome might be similar does not mean that the initial situation was similar too. Still, it is true that Confucianism relied on an interconnected cosmos, in which humanity lived in concord with both nature and spirituality.

³⁵² Lilith *Apostel*, *The Dead Sleep Below: The Universal Embodied Experience of Sleep and Dreaming and Its Relation to Concepts of Death and the Netherworld before 1500 BC*, *Universitätsforschungen Zur Prähistorischen Archäologie* 372 (Bonn 2022) 210.

³⁵³ Ronnie P. *Hsia*, *Das Christentum in Asien zwischen ca. 1500 und 1789*, In: *Geschichte des globalen Christentums: Frühe Neuzeit*, Katharina *Kunter* Ed., *Religionen der Menschheit* 32 (Stuttgart 2017) 337 and 356–360.

³⁵⁴ Dawid *Rogacz*, *Chinese Philosophy of History: From Ancient Confucianism to the End of the Eighteenth Century* (London / New York 2020) 141–149.

³⁵⁵ Jie Fu *Xiao* ed., *The Enlightenment of Anti-Neo-Confucian Thought during the Ming-Qing Dynasties*, *Journal of Chinese Philosophy* 16, no. 2 (1989) 209, 215–220 and 230.

Essential for this (and our analysis) is the idea of qi-energy. It originated from the beliefs of Daoism, which, alongside of Confucianism and Buddhism, makes up the three semi-religious teachings that are central to Chinese philosophy. This flow of energy connects all parts of the cosmos and balances them, quite like the image of yin and yang. Scholars believed that one could cultivate one's body to feel this flow of energy and, in doing so, gain a connection to the Above, making it useful for fortune-telling and the interpretation of omens, which brings us to dreams.³⁵⁶

Chen Shiyuan [1516-1595] was born into a family of good standing. Yet a dream and other strange omens led him to abandon his official career as a Ming-dynasty magistrate at only thirty-one years of age. Even as a retired independent scholar though, Shiyuan was well published and praised for his exemplary Confucian and traditionalist writing.³⁵⁷ He would go on to write the *Lofty Principles of Dream Interpretation* (夢占逸旨) in 1562. The book is an encyclopaedic attempt at summarizing the contemporary knowledge about dreaming. Its premise makes the source highly relevant for this analysis, yet it lies outside of already established discourses. Shiyuan splits his analysis into two parts, the inner and outer chapters. The inner ones contain theory, whereas the outer ones compile dozens of exemplary stories to reinforce the inner chapters. This is another reason for the eligibility of the source, as many European works on dream interpretation had similar approaches.

The beginning itself is a bit mystical. Shiyuan embarks by recalling a particular dream of his. In it, he had been unaware whether he was dreaming or not. A vision of an old man supposedly asked him “»What encounter isn't a dream, and what dream isn't real?«”, prompting Shiyuan to seek out an interpreter the following morning. This episode clearly left an impression on him, as he had already placed great value on dreams in the past. He then proceeded to begin his project of writing a book on dream interpretation. Apparently, this venture was not without opposition. Shiyuan remarks that others might ridicule him for writing a book about dreams based on a personal dream of his.

In spite of this, he believes in fortune-telling and dream divination. The traditional concept of qi-energy, Shiyuan elaborates, allows us to foresee things. This flow of energy connects the earthly to the ethereal/divine realm. In dreams, our spirit is able to freely traverse this connection. It is then that we can gain divine knowledge:

³⁵⁶ Chun-chieh Huang, *Humanism in East Asian Confucian Contexts*, Being Human 9 (Bielefeld 2014) 67–74.

³⁵⁷ Richard E. Strassberg ed., *Wandering Spirits* (Berkeley / London 2008) 27–37.

“Dreaming is spirit-wandering and a mirror for knowing the future.”³⁵⁸

Very early on then, Shiyuan enters the process of demarcation. He portrays the connection to a higher sphere as definitely existent, even if not yet thoroughly understood. The terminology of “spirit-wandering” shows that dreams are real experiences one has whilst asleep. Shiyuan does not mention imagination as a possible cause. Still, his fear of the mockery of his peers shows that in China as well dreams were subject to discourse. One could either believe in dreams (as Shiyuan chooses to do) or be sceptical about the phenomenon.

Shiyuan introduces a taxonomy of dreams found in “older beliefs”. The three kinds of dreams are apparently: dreams of arrival, dreams of obtaining things and dreams of obtaining everything. According to editor Richard Strassberg, these categories are essentially motifs by which the dream plays out. For example, one might arrive at a certain place (dream of arrival), indicating upcoming change. One might receive things (dreams of obtaining things), indicating either loss or gain. Unfortunately, Strassberg does not explain what “obtaining everything” entails. In any case, this categorization is different from the Western one with dreams that are natural, vain or diabolical. Shiyuan mentions a more modern taxonomy a few chapters later. Here he writes of six types of dreams: normal dreams, nightmares, dreams about waking thoughts, dreams about waking statements, happy dreams and fearful dreams. This taxonomy suddenly introduces the concept of good and bad, as well as dreams that are related to waking experiences. We can only make assumptions as to what prompted this development, but Shiyuan explains that states of dreaming are bound to states of waking consciousness. He also writes of the “auspicious day and inauspicious night”, further depicting a crucial dependency between dreams and real life. Ultimately, given the plurality of Shiyuan’s categorizations, I suppose that they are not as important as the taxonomies present in European sources. The author himself calls attempts at categorizing futile, given that the spirit could encounter all sorts of experiences whilst “wandering”.³⁵⁹

What remains from this is that dreams can be either positive/auspicious or negative/inauspicious. Shiyuan does not so much question the origins of dreams, but their interpretation within this dichotomy. How would one go about doing this? Shiyuan insists that interpretation can come from a trinity of practices: dream divination, the tracing of cracks in a

³⁵⁸ *Chen Shiyuan*, Richard E. *Strassberg* Ed. and trans., *Lofty Principles of Dream Interpretation* [Wandering Spirits: Encyclopedia of Dreams] (Berkeley / London 2008) 52–55.

³⁵⁹ *Ibid.*, 58–61 and 80.

tortoise's shell and hexagram divination. To him, they are seen as characteristics of the three dynasties of Xia, Shang and Zhou. What he means by this is unclear to me, but it shows the way in which Chinese spirituality and the state were interconnected. Using these divinatory practices, one must "unravel the threads of silk" to receive an answer. Chinese dream interpretation is therefore both corroborative (multiple methods reinforcing each other) and associative (interpreting symbolisms).³⁶⁰ But after describing these methods, Shiyuan remarks that it is impossible to carry them out. The ancient techniques have supposedly been lost. Since then, all dreams must be interpreted through the dreamer and his character. Even with this though, confirmation is impossible to reach.³⁶¹

The loss of a dominant method of dream interpretation is quite a striking narrative of decline. Shiyuan implies that these things used to be better in the past. How can we interpret these circumstances appropriately? Theologian Hu Baozhu likens the neo-Confucianism of Zhu Xi in the twelfth century to Western humanism and rationalism, which might imply that spiritual methods had then been discarded in favour of scientific ones.³⁶² One could also make a loose comparison with the notion of a 'miracle-less' age in Europe, where scholars also complained about a decline in spirituality. However, I do not think such approaches are the answer. Only a comparison with the Catholic group of authors might be a vague fit, as they too felt anxiety over humanism taking away from the spiritual value of dreams. Shiyuan too alleges that other scholars described dreams as vain and useless. Although now denounced as "empty delusions", to him, the many traditional stories of antiquity, that he includes, show that dreams were actually "credible events". Shiyuan furiously responds to his peers:

"You are still following the narrow knowledge of your own mind, which is impending complete spiritual understanding! [...] How can one entirely dismiss these sources without discrimination as if they just contained mumblings while asleep?"³⁶³

Clearly, many of Shiyuan's peers do not believe in the accuracy of dream interpretation. Due to its decline, he himself must find a way to reinvigorate it. His work may therefore be more of an attempt to salvage what is left, rather than a display and celebration of an established

³⁶⁰ Roberto K. Ong, *The Interpretation of Dreams in Ancient China*, *Chinathemen* 23 (Bochum 1985) 146–150.

³⁶¹ Chen Shiyuan, *Lofty Principles*, 63 and 84.

³⁶² Zhu Xi [c. 1130-1200] was an impactful figure of Chinese philosophy, setting up much of the Chinese worldview of the following centuries. See: Hu Baozhu, *Believing in Ghosts and Spirits: The Concept of Gui in Ancient China*, *Monumenta Serica Monograph Series* 71 (Sankt Augustin 2021) 210.

³⁶³ Chen Shiyuan, *Lofty Principles*, 66f.

artform.³⁶⁴ Continuing to rely on history, he calls upon the role model of Confucius, saying that this “sage” dreamt as well, but never described dreams to be strange phenomena. Confucius simply “entrusted” his spirit to the qi-energy, meaning he had a cultivated mind and understanding of divination.³⁶⁵ This statement is consistent with what modern scholarship states about Confucius. Whereas his texts are often read as agnostic, the legendary philosopher did remark that one ought to venerate spirits and perform rituals. Acting “as if they [the spirits] were there” would supposedly only have benefits.³⁶⁶ In summary: It is better to perform religious acts in vain, than to not do them and suffer divine punishment.

Overcoming all these setbacks, Shiyuan moves on to explain some principles of dream interpretation. One would assume that he compiled them from whatever was left of this otherwise “lost” or, perhaps, ‘forgotten’ knowledge. To understand dreams, the interpreter must first go through what Shiyuan calls a “great awakening”. With this comes the ability to properly distinguish between dreaming and being awake. Only then will one be able to see distinctions in the “greater cosmos”, enabling one to comprehend and follow the principles of heaven, earth and nature. Examples from the past further show that one must live in harmony with these principles.³⁶⁷ One should cultivate one’s virtues accordingly. Auspicious dreams can signify the state of the heavenly mandate, which was China’s version of a divine legitimization to rule, and prompt one’s accession to the throne.³⁶⁸ A nobleman’s dreams can even forecast the momentous transition from one dynasty to the next. In these dreams, one sees fabulous creatures. These could be gods and goddesses known by name or other supernatural beings disguised as an old white-haired man.³⁶⁹

We can gather a few things from these observations. Firstly, it appears that dreams result from the interplay of heaven, earth and nature. The first two are regularly used in Chinese philosophy to separate and order the world by. Nature represents a non-traditional addition and had also been absent from his earlier taxonomies. Unfortunately, the role of nature within this otherwise dual system remains unexplained. Shiyuan writes that dreams can be influenced by many

³⁶⁴ Ze Hong, *Dream Interpretation from a Cognitive and Cultural Evolutionary Perspective: The Case of Oneiromancy in Traditional China*, *Cognitive Science* 46 (2022) 15–19.

³⁶⁵ Chen Shiyuan, *Lofty Principles*, 78.

³⁶⁶ Thomas D. DuBois, *Religion and the Making of Modern East Asia*, *New Approaches to Asian History* (Cambridge 2011) 21.

³⁶⁷ Wilhelm Hünermann, *Feuersturm über Asien*, *Geschichte der Weltmission* 2 (Luzern / München 1960) 186.

³⁶⁸ Baozhu, *Believing in Ghosts*, 179.

³⁶⁹ Chen Shiyuan, *Lofty Principles*, 85–88, 103f and 191.

things. Whilst some are subject to energy levels and demonic activity, some dreams correspond with “overflowing emotions” or afflicted body parts. I believe it is the latter that Shiyuan is referring to with his concept of nature. However, the concept of a natural dream, if one remembers the European model, is not found in Shiyuan’s book. How should we interpret this?

From a perspective of European dream interpretation, the existence of nature and simultaneous absence of natural dreams in Shiyuan’s book poses an inconsistency. Due to the European sources, we would lean towards assuming that nature signifies a separate type of dream. But as I theorized earlier, taxonomies clearly did not have the same meaning in China as they did in Europe. Shiyuan primarily described dreams as flows of energy. Therefore, I believe the solution to be as follows: Rather than labelling dreams as either divine, diabolical or natural, all of those apply at the same time in Shiyuan’s book. The mystery is part of the dream’s meaning.³⁷⁰ Christianity has a distinctly ‘good’ God and a distinctly ‘negative’ devil. But here, the origins did not matter as much, because the same ancestral spirit could have both productive and destructive tendencies.³⁷¹ Interpretation is not about identifying the singular origin of a dream, but about untangling the multiple divinatory “threads of silk” from the other influences that have created the finished product.

Another noteworthy point is that of the nobleman’s dreams. In the Bible, hierarchy played a role in both the importance and clarity of the message. Here it appears that Chinese dreams were somewhat alike. Shiyuan also differentiates between “direct and symbolic correspondence”. The latter is vague and more difficult to interpret. Vagueness also comes from the confusion of one’s own unsettled qi-energy. Demons and ghosts can sense this disturbance of balance, Shiyuan writes, and can then attach themselves to said dreams, manipulating this perceived weakness.³⁷² Aside from hierarchy, the notion of demonic influence is also similar to the European case. It was believed that an imbalance of humours, be it caused by melancholy or something else, made one more vulnerable for delusions. For this comparison to work however, we would have to regard humoral theory and qi-energy as interchangeable concepts. Due to the loose nature of this analogy, I will not commit myself to this argument.

³⁷⁰ *Ong*, *Interpretation of Dreams*, 175.

³⁷¹ Paul S. *Sangren*, *Chinese Ghosts: Reconciling Psychoanalytic Structuralist and Marxian Perspectives*, In: *Rethinking Ghosts in World Religions*, Mu-chou *Poo* Ed., *Numen Studies in the History of Religions* 123 (Leiden / Boston 2009) 305.

³⁷² *Chen Shiyuan*, *Lofty Principles*, 93f.

So, what about disenchantment in the case of China? It is true that one can make loose comparisons between Europe and China, but the two regions are still fundamentally different. Just as we cannot apply European periodization to China, we also cannot outright use the historical term of disenchantment to analyse Shiyuan's theory of dreams. However, given that disenchantment has been presented by Weber as a notion of global significance, it begs the question as to whether Chinese dreaming also transitioned from spiritual to natural.

This task is complicated by the Chinese approach to religion. China did not see religion, science or government as dogmatically explicit, meaning they were tied together more strongly than in Europe. To describe disenchantment in China, we must incorporate ideas of "civil religion"³⁷³ or "moral governance".³⁷⁴ Shiyuan's book shows a similar uniformity in Chinese dreaming, where one dream can have multiple influences combined in its "threads of silk" (good and bad). European dreams, on the other hand, were built on a worldview of opposites (good or bad). Later, secularism further manifested the separation of spiritual ideas. Chinese disenchantment would not play out as a rejection of spiritual origins, because they are much more interconnected to other aspects of Chinese culture.

This, I believe, is where spiritual agency has the potential to help reach an answer. Involving supernatural empowerment, it offers a way of measuring the value associated with spirituality without getting hung up on cultural specifics. The initial situation may be totally different and dreaming itself was done in a unique way. But if the sources can tell us about the agency of spiritual dreams at given times, we can still figure out whether there had been changes in how they were perceived. Obviously, this does not solve the issue of accurately describing Chinese disenchantment, but it can help in ascertaining whether something resembling disenchantment took place. The end of Shiyuan's book lends itself perfectly to attempt this:

"Ever since a favourite of the ruler of the state of Wei slandered Taishu Wei and forced him into exile, the practice of interpreting dreams became unreliable. Ever since the rebel An Lushan used a dream to deceive the emperor about An's establishment of temples, and the wife of Yang Guozhong cited a dream to deceive her husband when she gave birth to a son, some dreams have been impossible to interpret correctly. How lamentable! Is this because dreams are no longer efficacious? I have transcribed these lofty principles,

³⁷³ Jordan *Paper*, *The Spirits Are Drunk: Comparative Approaches to Chinese Religion*, Suny Series in Chinese Philosophy and Culture (New York 1995) 269f.

³⁷⁴ *DuBois*, *Religion*, 18.

but am I dreaming, or am I awake? As I do not possess complete consciousness of myself, this may all very well be a dream. Gentlemen in later generations might try perusing these lofty principles and lend an ear to these earlier dreams of mine.”³⁷⁵

These final few sentences are very telling with regards to dreams. Firstly, Shiyuan describes a shift to have taken place in the eighth century, marking the decline of dream interpretation. Now, here one might conclude that the loss of knowledge does not automatically equate to an end of spiritual dreaming and that would be correct.³⁷⁶ However, the key word in this passage is “efficacious”, a synonym for effective, powerful or potent. Shiyuan asks himself whether dreams have lost effectiveness in sixteenth-century China. His “lamentable” suggests that they did, probably not by accident either.³⁷⁷ The use of “efficacious” also puts his earlier descriptions of a loss of knowledge in question. Did the methods of dream interpretation truly become lost, or did they simply lose their effectiveness due to shrinking belief in them? Whatever the cultural implications may have been and whether An Lushan was to blame or not, spiritual dreams in China did not have the same standing in Shiyuan’s times as they once did. Spiritual agency enables us to confidently state this.

If we are to say that a decline of spiritual agency is a sign of disenchantment, then disenchantment may not just be a Eurocentric export. To properly contextualize the decline of spiritual agency in China will require a study comparable to chapter 3 of this thesis.³⁷⁸ Then, the cultural specifications would come to light, and we would be able to describe the hypothetical notion of Chinese disenchantment. However, this would require a deeper insight into Chinese spirituality, which is beyond the scope of the present thesis and my expertise.

Thanks to spiritual agency, I can at least recommend and validate such an undertaking. A singular source has still provided us with two points of measurement from which we can expect a decline of spiritual agency. It falls under roughly the same timeframe as well, although this is entirely coincidental. Spiritual dreaming and divination were once a useful/efficacious

³⁷⁵ *Chen Shiyuan*, *Lofty Principles*, 252.

³⁷⁶ Quite on the contrary, belief in dreams was still found in sixteenth-century China. European missionaries for example remarked on dream divination happening regularly. So, by European standards, China was still well and truly spiritual/heretical. See: Michele *Ruggieri*, Daniel *Canaris* Ed. and trans., *Tianzhu Shilu: The True Record of the Lord of Heaven*, *Studies in the History of Christianity in East Asia* 5 (Leiden / Boston 2023) 251.

³⁷⁷ *Ong*, *Interpretation of Dreams*, 176.

³⁷⁸ As an example, there is already a great article on the disenchantment of Japanese art. See: Hiroshi *Araki*, *Reviewing Japanese Dream Culture and Its History: Where Ancient Medieval and Modern Times Meet*, *Latvijas Universitātes Raksti Orientālistika* 819 (2020) 12–29.

experience in China but have since lost importance. The specifics that brought different cultures to end up with this result remain to be studied. In his grief, Shiyuan would certainly find like-minded European authors. He seems to undergo an almost Shakespearian transformation as he is led to question himself whether a dream had led him astray.

6 Conclusion

This thesis comprised two distinct components. Firstly, it examined Max Weber's disenchantment by using the concept of spiritual agency. The main focus was on scientific sources from the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries that were tackling spiritual dreams and their interpretation. In doing so, the thesis was able to prove significant shifts before the period of Enlightenment. Secondly, the thesis conducted two case studies with the objective of determining whether disenchantment was a uniquely European export or a global phenomenon. I will now present the specific findings chronologically before giving more general conclusions on disenchantment and spiritual agency.

In late medieval times, dreams were evaluated according to a general Christian rationale. Using Biblical examples, canon law and individual criteria of piety, one could calculate a probability for whether a dream was more likely to be divine guidance or devilish deception. This process was institutionalized under the name *Discretio spirituum*. For many centuries, it continued to be the Church's primary method of dream interpretation, being maintained and developed well into the early modern period. Authors of alternative conceptualizations, in which dreams and the human body might be connected, also orientated their theories so as to not offend the ruling religious framework. One can observe that authors sought to determine how dreams ought to be decoded, not whether they should be decoded in the first place.³⁷⁹ As all dreams were believed to possess latent spiritual meaning, dream interpretation was of great importance. Anxieties concerning witches, the ongoing Reformation or eschatology contributed to a conservative attitude in the Catholic field. This technique of dream interpretation came under scrutiny from the challenges of other fields in the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries.

Even earlier than that, Albertus Magnus had established some scientific guidelines according to which a humanist school would then begin to write extensively on nature and natural dreams. If one were to identify a pivotal moment, it would likely be Marsilio Ficino's *Theologia Platonica*. From this point onwards, leading philosophers began to ponder the involvement of the human body in the creation of dreams. This departure was not a deliberate act.³⁸⁰ The study

³⁷⁹ Hong, Dream Interpretation, 2–5.

³⁸⁰ Rudolf Vierhaus, Vom Nutzen und Nachteil des Begriffs Frühe Neuzeit: Fragen und Thesen, In: Frühe Neuzeit Frühe Moderne? Forschungen zur Vielschichtigkeit von Übergangsprozessen, Rudolf Vierhaus Ed., Veröffentlichungen des Max-Planck-Instituts für Geschichte 104 (Göttingen 1992) 16–19.

of the human body was merely a means to an end, namely the attainment of greater insight into a divine sphere by breaking with the filter that is the bodily prison. As a result of this inherently spiritual ambition, humanism did not face strong levels of inquisitorial persecution. A natural outlook was readily adopted by doctors and Protestants, who carried on the almost accidental deconstruction of Catholic dream interpretation. Already in the sixteenth century, certain authors observed that dreams could be explained through medical observations alone. This view gained traction in the following decades. Dreams were no longer messages or images that were sent by an external supernatural being, but rather the abstract manifestations of an internalized human imagination. Such a switch can also be seen in literary works. Whereas Geoffrey Chaucer mirrored medieval dream interpretation as a battle between good and evil, William Shakespeare depicted dreams as delusional and devoid of meaning. Contemporary book illustrations of abstract supernatural beings became replaced by medical sketches of the brain (see pages 54 and 89). A new disenchanted perspective prevailed in which René Descartes would champion the brain as the origin of dreams. This contributed to the creation of a self-referential human being that was no longer subject to divine will.

Spiritual agency declined accordingly. Despite its near extinction, it had been a cultural code for millennia and deserves to be treated as such. Medieval society commonly understood that a dream could, under the right circumstances, provide one with otherwise unreachable authority.³⁸¹ The contents of dreams do not make for reliable sources; however, dreams become tangible through their real-world applications. The ways by which spiritual beliefs empowered certain individuals offer an opportunity to historically measure the standing of spirituality, which is otherwise extremely hard to grasp. Alan Strathern originated the concept of immanentism to describe the presence of supernatural beings, for example by means of divinatory dreaming. I hope to answer his call of building on immanentism as a historical category.³⁸² To do so, I have attempted to visualize my findings with a scatter chart, ranking the sources from this thesis by the ways in which spiritual empowerment is immanent in them.

Spiritual agency can be studied over an extended period of time or between different cultures, both of which I have endeavoured to demonstrate. In Europe, spiritual agency reached its peak in the late medieval period. The *Discretio spirituum* was practised and there was an abundance

³⁸¹ Dieter Sturma, *Humanism and Intercultural Dialogue*, In: *The Concept of Humanity in an Age of Globalization*, Zhang Longxi Ed., *Reflections on (In)Humanity 1* (Göttingen / Taipei 2012) 108.

³⁸² Strathern, *Unearthly Powers*, 24–27 and 86.

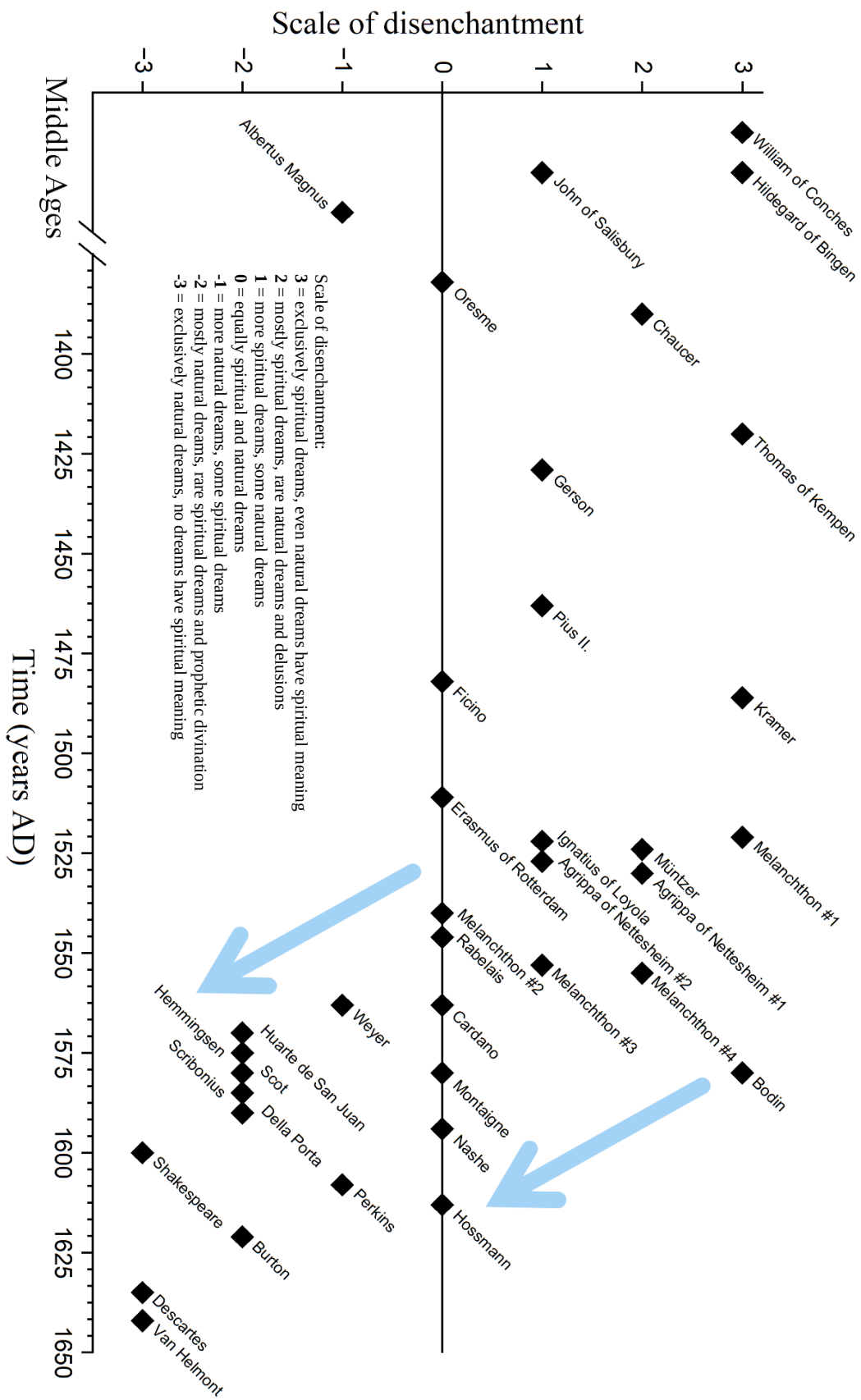


Figure 5: The European sources were graded by a scale of disenchantment and put into a scatter chart. This visualizes a turn from a dominance of spiritual dreams to one of natural dreams. A 'sweet spot' of spiritual agency lies in the 0 to 2 range, as dreams were ambiguous but mainly spiritual. From the spread of sources, we can observe that the discourse surrounding dreams intensified in the sixteenth century. Some dates have been minorly adjusted for presentability. Image: Lorenz Vollmann.

of cases building on it. After that, the duality of origins that were ‘God and devil’ was superseded by a third way of natural dreams, which is signified by words such as melancholy, rationalism and imagination. Remarkably, the devil was disenchanted at a faster rate than his divine counterpart. This was because the devil’s influences were thought to be within the realm of nature, making them more predictable. God was believed to act through ways unbeknownst to humans. The fear of the devil persisted throughout all of this. In the realm of witch hunts, we can even see instances of negative spiritual agency. Just like one could claim to have received heavenly divination, one could be denounced by someone else to have made a pact with the devil. This kind of agency could go either way. Medical analysis helped defend witches by arguing that they had been deceived by their bodies, rather than by a demon. In the seventeenth century, scientific authors no longer delved in spiritual dreams.

Disenchantment appears to have been a double-edged sword. On one hand, it challenged the Church’s monopoly of interpretation, on the other, it contributed to the subjugation of marginalised groups and Indigenous peoples in the colonies. In particular lower classes and women were able to change their life for the better thanks to employing spiritual agency. Although this is a correct assessment, some historians have overstated the societal impact of dreams, calling them “a small man’s weapon”, allowing for the “powerless” to articulate their worldviews.³⁸³ There are some caveats to this idealization. First and foremost, people of higher standing usually had easier access to this kind of agency. Even the Bible recognizes hierarchy when it comes to dream interpretation. Also, wherever spiritual agency was legitimized, the ruling elites were involved in the process. The dreamers could not elevate themselves. Their ascension usually depended on whether it was granted via the *Discretio spirituum*, an evaluation process monopolized by members of the clergy. Furthermore, instances of spiritual agency were not always met with unquestioning belief. Contemporaries were aware of the possibility of someone feigning spiritual agency for personal gain. Still, dreams were a valuable resource and whilst their importance should not be exaggerated, they did allow for women to break into male-dominated fields.³⁸⁴ The example of Joan of Arc is most notable for this. Even though spiritual

³⁸³ Ernst-Dieter Hehl, *Politische Träume und Visionen im Mittelalter*, In: *Traum und Vision in der Vormoderne: Traditionen Diskussionen Perspektiven*, Annette Gerok-Reiter, Christine Walde Ed. (Berlin 2012) 215.

³⁸⁴ Patricia Crawford, *Women’s Dreams in Early Modern England*, In: *Dreams and History: The Interpretation of Dreams from Ancient Greece to Modern Psychoanalysis*, Daniel Pick, Lyndal Roper Ed. (London / New York 2004) 101.

agency depended on elitist control, dreams allowed for “children, women, peasants” to gain a voice they otherwise likely would not have gotten.³⁸⁵

The concept of spiritual agency allows for intercultural comparison as well. In descriptions of Peru, the Indigenous faith possessed more immanent forms of spiritual agency than Christianity. European and Indigenous writers alike remarked on the difference between visible (meaning materialistic) and abstract beliefs. An elaborate system of transformations allowed for the supernatural to intermingle with nature in Peru. Indigenous priests could seek out and converse with the huacas, mainly in the temples at night and through dreams. These religious specialists were called *móscoc*. Divine communication and divination occurred on a regular basis and were actively practiced by the *móscoc*. In Europe, spiritual dreams were typically one-sided experiences with subsequent interpretations. For the Christian mission, such differences made it impossible to accommodate Peruvian beliefs. Discourses of disenchantment also made their way across the Atlantic, showing multifaceted applications. Differentiations between natural and supernatural, even preternatural, were used to discredit Indigenous beliefs. Such ideas had been completely foreign to the region. Ironically enough, this ended up being advantageous to the Indigenous peoples. Being misled by nature was a less severe charge than the devilish pacts that many colonizers sought to punish them for. Still, the disenchanting rhetoric nevertheless attacked the Indigenous faith in an effort to disprove and eradicate it.

In China, Chen Shiyuan’s book exhibits parallels to the ways in which dream interpretation was debated in Europe. Whilst there are major doctrinal differences complicating this comparison, he too remarks that dreams used to be more “efficacious” and that China had been hit by a decline in spirituality. In his opinion, this tendency had allegedly begun in the eighth century. In contrast to European authors, Shiyuan asserts that people had a more comprehensive understanding of dreams in the past and that this knowledge had been lost. Nowadays, dreams had to be interpreted and were not understood as clearly as before. Other contemporary scholars supposedly paid no attention to them anymore. Whether this constitutes a type of Chinese disenchantment remains an open question. But waning spiritual agency, as described by Shiyuan, suggests a decline of divinatory dreams and their interpretation.

Finally, the disenchantment of dreams did not just impact history, but historiography as well. As spiritually charged dreams got taken over by natural dreams, a Western culture of ‘knowing

³⁸⁵ *Goodich*, *Miracles and Wonders*, 1–4.

better' emerged with it. Colonized peoples were urged to abandon their spiritual beliefs in favour of dogmatic secularism³⁸⁶:

“[The eye of the flesh] came to say, what it can't see does not exist; whereas what it should have said was, what it can't see it can't see.”³⁸⁷

Disenchantment is sometimes viewed teleologically. But the naturalization of dreams was not an intentional goal and should be read in the religious systematics of the past. To do this, it might be beneficial to imagine a “dreamscape” as proposed by Robert Campany, meaning:

“a sort of imaginaire of dreams, the total array of what dreams were thought to be, whether and how they carried significance, what was made of them, what they were used for, how they were responded to.”³⁸⁸

This thesis has, amongst other aspects, shown that humanism had primarily spiritual ambitions. If judged by this outset, the ensuing naturalist takeover was more of an accident and a failure, rather than progress and a success.

³⁸⁶ Check chapter 1.3 for a definition of dogmatic secularism and the call of the Unbelieved research group.

³⁸⁷ Wilber, *Eye to Eye*, 22f.

³⁸⁸ Robert F. *Campany*, *The Chinese Dreamscape*, Harvard-Yenching Institute Monographs 122 (Cambridge / London 2020) 4.

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