

SPHS Report

Event: *Oneirata*: Workshop on Sleep, Dreams, and Divination in Aristotle and his Predecessors

Organisers: Maria Cristina Mennuti (PhD, Durham University),
Marco Picciafuochi (PhD, Roma Tre University)

Report

'*Oneirata*. Workshop on Sleep, Dreams, and Divination in Aristotle and his Predecessors' was held at the Department of Classics and Ancient History at Durham University, Durham (UK), from the 21st to the 23rd of May 2024. On the 21st, James Allen gave a welcome lecture entitled 'Aristotle, Dialectic and Philosophy', as part of the DCAMP series talks. The workshop comprised four sessions, with a total of seven talks (45 minutes presentation + 15 minutes respondent + 30 minutes Q&A session). *Oneirata* was a free hybrid event, with both in-person and online participants.

In order to provide a multidisciplinary approach to these issues, the workshop saw the participation of Edith Hall, who engaged with predictive dreams and visions in Greek tragedy, and Klaus Corcilius, who presented a detailed account of the notion of phantasia in dreams in Aristotle's *Parva Naturalia*. Next, moving to the 5th century BC, Phillip Horky provided an overview of the concept of sleep as presented by Antiphon in a newly discovered papyrus. By taking a step further into the contemporary scientific debates, Jennifer Windt proceeded to challenge Aristotle's scientific method of investigating dreams by describing the blurred opposition between the states of sleep and wakefulness. Sam Wilkson then investigated the hallucinatory experiences as a product of encultured minds. In conclusion, at the final session of the workshop, Stephanie Holton further elucidated the nature of dreams and divination in the ancient Greek world by presenting the Hippocratic medical accounts pertaining to them. Finally, Maria Cristina Mennuti attempted to envisage the religious elements concealed behind Aristotle's scientific explanation of divinatory dreams.

The respondents and discussants played a crucial role in providing a conducive environment for discussion. Their contributions and questions served to elucidate the critical points of the papers under discussion, thereby facilitating a constructive exchange of ideas and feedback on the subjects presented.

The high intellectual value of the papers presented and their substantial contribution to the discipline persuaded the organisers to pursue forward the publication of a special issue or edited volume in order to collect all the contributions. This publication would represent an innovative approach to engaging with these topics by applying a multidisciplinary methodology. Indeed, this future work would represent the perfect outcome of this workshop, as it would draw the attention of a wider audience to these topics and contribute to the shaping of ongoing studies on sleep, dreams, and divination for both classical studies and contemporary scientific research.

Organising the Workshop has provided invaluable training in our academic, organisational, communicative, and social skills. In terms of academic skills, the first phase was to formulate the topic of the workshop according to the latest research results and trends in the field of ancient philosophical studies. Once we had agreed on the topic, we started selecting all possible sources of funding. Dealing with all the applications and requirements certainly improved our organisational skills. At the beginning it was challenging to design a programme with such a high level of financial uncertainty. In this sense, the funds awarded by the Society for the Promotion of Hellenic Studies (SPHS) have been of invaluable support for guaranteeing a high level of hospitality for our guests.

What we have definitely learnt is that good cooperation and constant communication within the organising team is the secret ingredient for a successful event. Therefore, if we were to give advice to other PhD students interested in organising an academic event, it would be to cooperate and patiently plan everything in advance.