Tertullian de Anima 46 and the 'Dreaming Saturn': A Hidden Testimony to the Myth of Zalmoxis in Aristotle's Lost 'Eudemus'

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Abstract: *In this paper, I reconstruct a narrative by Tertullian about a dreaming Saturn attributed to a lost dialogue of Aristotle (on my view, the* ***Eudemus****). I argue that it is crucial to place this narrative into its proper geographical and cultural context, namely, Macedonia and Macedonian religion. Indeed, I show that Aristotle draws upon a myth in circulation in Macedonia which blended Greek Kronos with Thracian Zalmoxis. This is not surprising given that Aristotle spent not only his childood in Macedonia, but also ten years of his adulthood teaching in Mieza, in close proximity to Thracian tribes in Macedonia.*

Keywords: Fragment, Macedonian Religion, Thracian Religion, Dreams
Ключови думи: фрагмент, македонска религия, тракийска религия, сънища

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The present paper aims to reexamine a passage of Tertullian's *de Anima*, which has long been taken to refer to a narrative contained in a lost dialogue of Aristotle – on my view, the *Eudemus*. We know from a variety of other sources that Aristotle's *Eudemus* discussed the nature of the soul, specifically in the state of dreams or sleep and the life of the soul after death. In his own treatise on the nature of the soul, Tertullian references a story which Aristotle tells about a Saturn, or Kronos, who dreams.

While this story has usually been understood within the context of a more generic Greek theology, I think it is crucial to consider the likelihood that Aristotle composed this dialogue while living in Macedonia, and that Macedonian politics and religion were central to the dramatic frame that Aristotle put around the philosophical positions he developed in the dialogue. More precisely, I will establish that Aristotle was exposed to some blending of Macedonian and Thracian stories, which mixed narratives of a Greek Kronos with the Thracian Zalmoxis, and which gave rise to the narrative about a "sleeping Kronos" which Aristotle would have included in the dialogue. Inasmuch

as these stories were a source for Aristotle, he, in turn, reveals himself to be a source for modern efforts in discerning the religious landscape during this early period of the Hellenic reception of Thracian religious practices.

I.

I begin with a peculiar reference to Aristotle in Tertullian's *de Anima*, which is presented by Ross 1952 as Frag. 20 of the *Protrepticus*, while Gigon 1950 includes it as Frag. 979 in the *Fragmente ohne Buchangabe*.

"How many have commentated on and affirmed this! Artemon, Antiphon, Strato, Philochorus, Epicharmus, Serapion, Cratippus, Dionysius Rhodius, Hermippus, the entirety of the literature of this age! I will only laugh (if I laugh at all), at the person who believed himself able to persuade us that Saturn dreamt before anyone else; for he could only do so, if he were to have lived before everyone else. Aristotle, please forgive the laughing"[1]!

That this line of Tertullian's *de Anima* is indeed a fragment of some lost work by Aristotle was proposed originally by Waszink 1947. While Waszink and other scholars, such as Bos 2003, have quickly jumped to other Greek sources, such as Plutarch (*de Fac. Orb. Lun.* 27), to flesh out this vague reference in Tertullian, I think it wiser to look more closely at the context of Tertullian's report in and of itself[2].

Here, Tertullian is discussing the (wrong) belief that one can have visions in dreams. In the lines preceding (*de An.* 46.9), he simply lists instances of people thinking that they have predicted some event in a dream (e.g. Cicero's eminence is predicted by his nurse). If we look again to 46.10, we can see that reading only those few isolated lines, as they are printed in Ross and Gigon, is very misleading. Crucially, it removes the context for the narrative about Saturn, namely a list of *human beings* who dream. This gives us a first hint as to what Tertullian is referring: it seems plainly inappropriate for Tertullian to insert here a single instance of a deity dreaming.

The second hint which we have is the crux of Tertullian's criticism: Saturn dreams *before* everyone else, which is apparently laughable because he did not *live* before everyone else. However, this does not make sense as a critique of Saturn, the first god, because this Saturn would of course have "lived" before everyone else. The critique really should be: in order to have been the first to dream, Saturn would actually have to have existed, but he did not exist because paganism is nonsense. However, this is not what Tertullian targets.

Could there be some other way to make sense of this reference to Saturn? First of all, Tertullian makes another – indeed helpful – reference to Saturn in his *de Anima*, one which has been overlooked in the literature on *de An.* 46.10. While discussing Pythagoras' beliefs, and his descent into the cave and subsequent "ressurection," Tertullian mentions, almost as a non-sequitur, that Moses is more ancient than Saturn "by some nine hundred years or so" (*de An.* 28.12).

The peculiarity here is that Tertullian thinks Saturn lived some nine hundred years after Moses. Certainly, this places Saturn's life quite late – but, how late? In *Apolog.* 9.3, Tertullian considers Moses to have lived roughly 1000 years before the death of Priam. We have thus made Saturn and Priam contemporaries. Yet, this is nowhere near a normal time frame for Greco-Roman religion. The "birth" of Saturn should be *very* early, if it is to be assigned a date at all.

Thus far we have managed to ascertain a few relatively stable points. (1) Saturn is roughly a contemporary of Priam. (2) Saturn is someone who can be listed in a group of *people* and it not seem obviously wrong. (3) Saturn is *perhaps* associated with the Pythagoras cave myth, and here we should note parenthetically for the moment that Pythagoras' cave story is often attributed not to Pythagoras, but to Pythagoras' slave, Zalmoxis, who uses this event to "convert" the Thracians.

[1] Tert. *de An.* 46.10. Translated by the author.

[2] While Waszink considers this to be a fragment of the *Protrepticus*, for *Düring* 1956 and *Bos* 1989 the theme of dreaming is more appropriate to the *Eudemus*.

II.

Since we are assuming this idea of a dreaming Kronos is something Aristotle discussed in his *Eudemus*, we should give ourselves some context pertaining to the dialogue itself to interpret the myth further. The central theme, on my view, which unites the dramatic frame that Aristotle puts on the dialogue by way of narratives is political: the soul in its proper state is ruled by reason, which acts as a king, while the soul in a disordered state is ruled by the lower parts of the soul, which act as a tyrant. Taking up Gaiser's thesis that King Philip II was indeed an interlocutor in the *Eudemus* (or that the dialogue was dedicated to him)[3] I consider Aristotle to draw upon political practises in Macedonia.

Before I continue, we should mention Aristotle's close ties to the Macedonian royal family. Aristotle probably spent a portion of his youth in the court of the Macedonian royal family, as his father, Nicomachus, was court physician and friend to Amyntas III. Aristotle, then a teenager, was sent to Athens to study with Plato[4]. He leaves Athens in 347 or 348, after about 20 years, precisely because of anti-Macedonian sentiments, as Athens is in a formal war with Macedon after the captures of Amphipolis and Pydna in 357. After spending some time on Lesbos, Aristotle is brought to Macedonia by Philip II, where he stays for a little over ten years as head of the royal Academy of Macedon. Aristotle school is located just outside of modern day Naousa, at the foot of the highest peak of the Vermio mountains, or in ancient Greek, Bermion. This location will be relevant for our discussion later on.

Returning to the content of the dialogue itself, we see the political theme, as well as this geographical locus, referred to quite clearly in the well-known narrative of Eudemus' dream (Cic. *de Div.* 1.53). On the way to Macedonia, Eudemus comes to Pherae, which is ruled by the *tyrant*, Alexander; he becomes ill and sleeps. In a dream, he predicts his own recovery, the death of the tyrant, his return home after five years. However, instead of returning home, he dies in battle in Syracuse under the *tyranny* of either Dionysius or Callippus.

A second central narrative in the dialogue is the myth of Midas and Silenus, which I consider shows not only how Aristotle used Macedonian politics to frame his dialogue, but also to provide us with a methdology for interpreting Tertullian's reference to the dreaming Saturn.

The narrative of Midas and Silenus is preserved in a quotation of the text by Ps-Plutarch. I present below the most relevant lines:

"Such is said to have happened when the well-known Midas, having set a trap by which he captured Silenus, asked him what is best for human beings and what is most to be preferred of all things. Silenus at first would not speak, but remained silent. But finally when using every device, Midas forced him to speak, he said bursting out into laughter: 'Short-lived seed of a suffering spirit and of harsh fortune, why do force me to say what it is better for you not know? A life spent ignorant of one's own ills is the least painful. For human beings, it is impossible for them to have what is best, or to share in the nature of what is best (for the best thing would be for all men and women not to have been born). But after this, the next best thing, and the best thing which humans can attain, is after having been born to die as soon as possible.' It is clear that by this story, he meant to communicate that the existence after we have died is better than our existence in this life"[5].

While there are artistic representations before Aristotle that may be of a meeting of Midas and Silenus[6], the *Eudemus* is the first *written* record of the conversation[7]. Second to Aristotle, or roughly contemporary with him, is Theopompus, who composes his narrative – appropriately – in his *Philipica*. Certainly, some narrative of a capture of Silenus by Midas must

[3] *Gaiser* 1985.
[4] *Chroust* 1972 considers that this was politically motivated.
[5] Plut. *Consolat. ad Apoll.* 115B1-E9. Translated by the author.
[6] For an overview, see *Roller* 1983: 304-6; *Brown* 2002: 53-4.
[7] Aristotle references Midas at *Pol.* 1257b14-17, which only *Roller* 1983 and *Vassileva* 1997 mention.

have been in circulation generally in Greece at this time, yet it is probably no coincidence that both Aristotle and Theopompus are very much connected to Macedonia and that they are the first two to put a bit more meat on the bones of the narrative.

Indeed, the idea that the narrative about Midas and Silenus would have been inspired by Aristotle's sojourn in Macedonia seems even more likely when we consider the fact that there was a version of a story about a meeting and conversation between Midas and Silenus told specifically in Macedonia. We find the earliest reference to (not account of) the conversation between Midas and Silenus in Herodotus' narrative of the begining of the Argead Dynasty: "So the brothers, having come to another region of Macedonia, took up their dwelling near the so-called gardens of Midas the son of Gordias, where roses grow wild which have each one sixty petals and excel all others in perfume. In these gardens too Silenos was captured, as is reported by the Macedonians: and above the gardens is situated a mountain called Bermion…."[8] This point is crucial: not only does this narrative of Midas and Silenus have its origin in Macedonia, but it is also central to the founding of the political institution of Macedonia. And, where does this story occur? In Midas' gardens, at the base of Mount Bermion, where also Aristotle's school is located.

The pantheon of gods worshipped in Macedonia was substantially similar to that of Greece, albeit mixed with local cults as well as having a marked openness to incorporating foreign deities (e.g. Isis, or the Great Mother Goddess, Kybele). Christensen/Murray 2010 note the centrality of the cult of Dionysus in Macedonian religion, which was imported most likely from the east, either Thrace or Phrygia. Moreover, the cult of Dionysus was present in Macedonia well before it was in the rest of Greece – and Silenus is one of the key players in this myth, as he is the caretaker to the infant Dionysus.

However, a particularly notable feature of Macedonian religion is the religious aspect of kingship, as well as the aristocracy in general. Carol J. King connects this to Myceanean culture[9], while Maya Vassileva notes that this "aristocratic" aspect to religious practise is shared between Macedonia, Thrace, and Phyrgia[10]. Indeed, it seems all-important to the Macedonians to preserve this link to the Myceneans, which is evidenced not only in the fact that their religious and cultural practices emulate those of the Myceneans, but insofar as the Mycenean royal family claims a heredity link via Tumenus, King of Argos.

Material evidence as well substantiates the centrality of the aristocracy in Macedonian religion. Macedonians emphatically did not build temples as the southern/central Greeks did. Rather, the Macedonians built *tombs*. This is much more in line with Mycenean and Thracian practises. Even in smaller burial sites, which still would have been reserved for an aristocratic elite, there are striking similarities between Mycenean and Thracian burial practises, in distinction with the rest of Greece where burials were relatively modest[11]. These practises peculiar to the Macedonians all speak to a further peculiarity about Macedonian (and indeed Thracian) religion, which marks it in distinction from Greek religion: a firm commitment to the belief in a (positive) afterlife.

Clearly, Aristotle had access to this Midas and Silenus myth by way of his proximity to the religious practises and beliefs in Macedonia, which (already in the Midas and Silenus story) are a blending of Greek and non-Greek cultures. Given this fact, we may have a different perspective on our original question about the dreaming Saturn. Just as Aristotle knows of a version of the story of Midas different from Plato, so might he know of a Saturn different than his fellow Greeks. Thus, we should ask ourselves: is there some narrative of a non-Greek Kronos who sleeps or dreams? And the

[8] Herodot. *Hist.* 7.138.8-139.1 Transl. Macaulay.
[9] *King* 2010.
[10] *Vassileva* 1997.
[11] *Archibald* 2010: 331-3 compares two burials found at Archondiko in Lower Macedonia and the Mushovitsa Mogila near Plovdiv.

answer is yes – someone whom we already touched upon: Zalmoxis.

III.

Zalmoxis is an elusive figure. However, I will try to say a few things about him that are relatively certain[12]. Firstly, he was some kind of deity of the dead. Secondly, he is a chthonic deity, quite literally living underground and in a cave. Thirdly, there is some narrative about him having lived a life and become a God of the afterlife – and there must have been some similarity between this story and the story about Pythagoras which lent to a later association of the two[13]. Interestingly, we find the following statement about Zalmoxis attributed to Aristotle (via Sotion) by Diogenes Laertius:

"… among the Celts and Gauls there are the people called Druids or Holy Ones, for which they cite as authorities the Magicus of Aristotle and Sotion in the twenty-third book of his Succession of Philosophers. Also they say that Mochus was a Phoenician, Zamolxis a Thracian, and Atlas a Libyan"[14].

It is of particular note that Aristotle supposedly lists Zalmoxis with a number of figures who would rather be *more* ancient than Pythagoras – e.g. Atlas certainly, as well as Mochus whom Strabo dates on the authority of Posidonius as having lived before the Trojan War (Strabo, *Geographica* 16.24).

Aristotle indeed is dating Zalmoxis around the time of the Trojan War. It seems moreover that if Aristotle is aware that Zalmoxis did not live at the same time as Pythagoras[15], he is aware of some *other* narrative about Zalmoxis' life, one which would have caused Aristotle to attribute to Zalmoxis the origin of a wisdom tradition among the Thracians, as well as grouping him with figures who are simultaneously divine and human.

Most pertinent to our own topic here is that Zalmoxis serves a role in Thracian religion which Kronos does in Greek religion, such that many Greek sources *identify* him with Kronos, such Diogenes Laertius, as well as Mneseas of Patrae (Frag. 23 Müller = Suda Z.17) and the later Hesychius (Lex. 118). The parallel is clear: Zalmoxis rules over the "afterlife" just as Kronos rules over the Island of the Blessed.

Carpenter, relying on the etymology of "Zalmoxis" in Porphyry (*Vit. Pyth.* 14.4), as skin or bearskin (τὴν γὰρ δορὰν οἱ Θρᾷκες ζαλμὸν καλοῦσιν), concludes that the myth of Zalmoxis was a common one in folk-religion: a myth of a sleeping bear. The general theme in such stories should be vaguely that we have some kind of deity who lives in a cave and holds wisdom about the afterlife. In Eliade's well-known analysis of Zalmoxis, he associates the god with a number of stories in circulation in the Mediterranean regarding dreaming and the ability to discern the true nature of the soul, i.e. as immortal, in dreams.

At this point, such themes should sound familiar: sleep, descent into a cave, passage into death. Given that we do not have anything more of Tertullian' statement than the mere reference to Kronos' dream, the most prudent course of action is to assume a similarity between this narrative and the narratives which we have already seen about dreams and hibernating. This is all important simply for reconstructing the content of Aristotle's lost dialogue, but I think the implications of my study go beyond this.

Aristotle is not really a source who is mined for reports of religious beliefs, and the consensus is that he is not especially interested in any organized religion. This is a misconception which is due first of all to the fact that all of Aristotle's non-technical treatises (i.e. dialogues where the discussion of religious practices would have been more appropriate) have been lost to us. A second cause of this misconception is that Aristotle had access to a religious tradition quite different from that

[12] For an overview of the litertaure on Zalmoxis see *Popov* 1995; *Popov* 2010.

[13] *Dodds* 1951: 147 considers that Zalmoxis is a kind of reiteration of Orpheus. Plato mentions a Zalmoxis in *Charm.* 156d as a "Thracian King's physician." See *McPherran* 2004; *Brisson* 2000; *Murphy* 2000.

[14] Diog. Laert. *Vit. Phil.* I.I.1-8 = Arist. *Frag.* 35 Rose. Here, we should note that *Magicus* likely refers to a section of *de Philosophia*, not a separate work. See *Chroust* 1965.

[15] *Dana* 2007 concludes that after Herodotus what is transmitted in the literature is rather a botched narrative about Zalmoxis which blurs his narrative with that of Pythagoras.

of his fellow Hellenes. This makes it difficult to interpret the fragments of Aristotle's lost dialogues. However, if we are able to do so, it makes him an invaluable reporter of the religious practices in Northern Greece, and more crucially their interplay with Thracian and other non-Greek cultures. If I am right that the Saturn to whom Tertullian refers represents a blending of Thracian and Greek narratives, i.e. Kronos and Zalmoxis, we gain an all-important insight into how this elusive Zalmoxis or Thracian Kronos was perceived – indeed by one of the greatest minds in the history of western culture, who himself spent significant time living, working, and teaching in Macedonia.

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Тертулиан *de Anima 46* и „сънуващият Сатурн": Скрито свидетелство за мита за Залмоксис в изгубеното произведение на Аристотел „*Евдем*"

Франциска ван Бурен

Авторът анализира пасаж в *de Anima* на Тертулиан, който приписва на диалог на Аристотел (по негово мнение в загубеното произведение *Евдем*) разказ за Сатурн/Кронос, който сънува. Първо поставям тази история в собствения текст на Тертулиан и показвам, че споменаването на Сатурн не идва в разговор за богове, а за човешки същества, които сънуват. Тертулиан също посочва, че този Сатурн е роден приблизително по същото време като Приам. Така става ясно, че Аристотел е разказал някаква история за „Кронос", който е историческа личност, а не типичният Кронос в гръцката митология, и че тази история за Кронос е аналогична на други разкази в *Евдем* за сън, напр. Сънят на Евдем. Въз основа на включването от Аристотел на други разкази за македонската и тракийска/фригийска религия (най-вече Мидас и Силен), считам, че Аристотел е представил македонски разказ, който смесва тракийския Залмоксис с гръцкия Кронос.