



Dreaming in the Ancient World

Julia Chatterjee (COL, 2017)

Advisor: Deven Patel

Thanks to the College Alumni Research Grant, I began translating the earliest compilation of dream omens in Sanskrit literature. It is one chapter in a larger text that was compiled by an Indo-Greek king in the 4th century CE. Previously untranslated, this text is an intriguing challenge that will serve as a major section in my senior thesis on dream interpretation in the ancient world. I'm particularly interested in dreams because they are something that all humans have experienced, regardless of time period or region. The ancients, of both the subcontinent and the Near East, overwhelmingly believed that dreams had meaning and purpose. Upon translating a portion of the Sanskrit dream omens, I made some preliminary comparisons to a Neo-Assyrian dream-book, which has been previously translated and commented on by Leo Oppenheim. In my thesis, I hope to emphasize the commonalities between the two texts as well as contextualize their differences. With some luck and a lot of further research, I hope to draw larger conclusions regarding interpretative structures in the ancient world, larger traditions of divination, and possible cultural transmission.

In attempting to translate the Sanskrit text, I broke it down into its content (what is written), and its structure (the way in which it is written). While I have done much work on the latter, through the process of translation and philological discussion, the former is still largely esoteric. Before seriously comparing the distinct omen traditions I will need to uncover much more about the divinatory practices in the region from where the texts comes. Only then will I be able to produce an accurate translation of the text, which incorporates any implied or peripheral divinatory meaning.

One of the most important aspects of this project is its ability to emphasize the interconnections between the regions of the Near East and the subcontinent. As a double major in Near Eastern Languages and Civilizations and South Asian Studies, I am using this project to combine my

interests with the intent of exploring an overarching topic. In the future, I hope to continue studying philology in graduate school, focusing on ancient manuscripts and texts of the region connecting the Near East and the subcontinent. I am extremely grateful to have had the opportunity to begin such specific work as an undergraduate and I hope that this project will be the first in a series of interdisciplinary works that I produce throughout my career.