



TWO ATTITUDES TO DIVINATION IN EUNAPIUS

ABSTRACT

A passage in Eunapius (476–7, pp. 440–2 Loeb) draws an interesting contrast between the attitudes to divination of the two sophists Maximus and Chrysanthius: Maximus, who manipulates the omens until they say what he wants, and Chrysanthius, who scrupulously obeys their apparent meaning. But a passage a little later (500–1, pp. 542–4 Loeb) apparently ascribes to Chrysanthius the opposite attitude. This article suggests a transposition to restore coherence to the text. Even if the transposition is wrong, the contrast drawn in the first passage between two attitudes to divination, one rigorous and literalist, one manipulative, is important.

Keywords: divination; Maximus; Chrysanthius; forcing omens

Two passages in Eunapius treat the attitude of the same two eminent philosophers/sophists, Maximus and Chrysanthius, to divination. In the first (476–7, pp. 440–2 Loeb), the two find themselves summoned to attend on Julian, now sole emperor. They turn to divination, and meet (unspecified) hostile omens. Chrysanthius, appalled, wants to hide away, but Maximus tells him that it belongs to true Hellenes not to yield to the first obstacle but ‘to press the divine nature until you sway it towards its worshipper’ (ἐκβιάζεσθαι τὴν τοῦ θεοῦ φύσιν ἄχρις ἂν ἐπικλίνεις πρὸς τὸν θεραπεύοντα). ‘You may be clever and bold enough to do this, but I won’t fight these signs’, says Chrysanthius, and goes away (whither we are not told; but clearly not to the emperor); Maximus stays, trying every expedient (ἅπαντα πρᾶπτων) until he gets what he wants (positive divinatory signs, presumably). Maximus then sets off and travels in great pomp to meet the emperor; Chrysanthius is rewarded by a comforting dream in which a god appears and quotes Homer (*Il.* 1. 218) ‘Anyone who obeys the gods, they listen to his prayers indeed.’

The second passage (500–1, pp. 542–4 Loeb) refers back to the same situation. It begins with generalizations¹ about the two men’s attitudes to divination.

ὁ μὲν γὰρ (Maximus) ἔχων τι φιλόνεικον ἐν τῇ φύσει καὶ δυσεκβίαστον, τοῖς φανθεῖσιν σημείοις παρὰ τῶν θεῶν ἀντιβαίων, ἕτερα ἤπει καὶ προσηγνάγκαζεν. ὁ δὲ Χρυσάνθιος τοῖς πρώτοις θεομμένοις <ἠκολούθει καὶ οὐδὲ>² κατὰ μικρὸν ἐκ παραγωγῆς ἐπὶ τὴν κίνησιν τῶν δοθέντων ἐβάδιζεν. εἶτα τυχὸν μὲν ἐνίκαι, διαμαρτῶν δέ, τῷ φαινομένῳ τὸ παρὰ τῆς ἀνθρωπίνης βουλῆς ἐφήρμοζεν.

Maximus, being competitive and hard to sway by nature, used to resist signs revealed by the gods and ask for and procure new ones forcibly.

I leave the characterization of Chrysanthius untranslated for the moment. After the generalizations Eunapius returns to the particular case of the summons to Julian.

¹ That they are this is shown by the following οὕτω γοῦν introducing the particular case. I use the text of G. Giangrande (Rome, 1956), with the divergences that I indicate, and the renderings in W.C. Wright’s Loeb of 1921; the slight changes to relevant passages in the welcome new Loeb of G. Miles and H. Baltussen (2023) do not affect my argument.

² This addition was suggested by *CQ*’s reader. Giangrande had read <χρόμενος οὐδὲ>.

Maximus, we are told, refused to be deterred by results of the divination that even an amateur could see were negative, and kept on begging the gods to give him different signs and to change fate (!). He long resisted Chrysanthius' exegesis of the signs, and 'his wishes finally passed judgement on what appeared, and what he believed appeared in the sacrifice, instead of what appeared becoming what he believed (τὸ δοκοῦν ἐν τοῖς ἱεροῖς ἐφαίνετο, οὐ τὸ φανθὲν ἐδοξάζετο)'. And so he set out on the ill-fated journey that led to his death. Chrysanthius by contrast stood firm, and even resisted, again on the basis of 'referral to the divine (πρὸς τὸ θεῖον ἀναφορά)', a further appeal by the emperor (reinforced by an appeal to his wife) (501, pp. 544–6 Loeb).

The difficulty in the passage lies in the sentence about Chrysanthius' attitude left untranslated above (ὁ δὲ Χρυσάνθιος, τοῖς πρώτοις θεομένους κτλ). It is rendered in the Loeb 'Chrysanthius, on the contrary, would use the first omens that appeared, then, by gradual divergence from these, would proceed to alter the signs that had been vouchsafed; then, if he got the omens he wanted, he had the best of it, but if he failed he adapted his human counsel to fit whatever came to light.' But, linguistic difficulties aside, this flatly contradicts what we were told about Chrysanthius' inflexible attitude on the same occasion in the earlier passage, an inflexibility confirmed in what follows. In some desperation I suggest repositioning the sentence highlighted below in bold and adjusting an addition already suggested by Giangrande to give:

ὁ μὲν γὰρ (Maximus) ἔχων τι φιλόνεικον ἐν τῇ φύσει καὶ δυσεκβίαστον, τοῖς φανθεῖσιν σημείοις παρὰ τῶν θεῶν ἀντιβαίνων, ἕτερα ἤτει καὶ προσηνάγκαζεν· **εἶτα τυχὸν μὲν ἐνίκᾳ, διαμαρτῶν δὲ, τῷ φαινόμενῳ τὸ παρὰ τῆς ἀνθρωπίνης βουλῆς ἐφήρμοζεν.** ὁ δὲ Χρυσάνθιος, τοῖς πρώτοις θεομένους <ἠκολούθει καὶ οὐδὲ> κατὰ μικρὸν ἐκ παραγωγῆς ἐπὶ τὴν κίνησιν τῶν δοθέντων ἐβάδιζεν· οὕτω γοῦν κτλ

For Maximus, who had something competitive and stubborn in his nature, resisting the signs revealed by the gods, asked for others and forced them to come. Then perhaps he would succeed [in getting better omens]; but if he failed he fitted what human logic suggested to the sign that appeared (*by creative interpretation of an ambiguous sign, no doubt*). But Chrysanthius followed the signs seen first and not even a little bit would he go over to tamper by way of distortion with what had been presented.

A reader for *CQ* argues that it is incoherent to speak of the same man as 'procuring new signs forcibly' yet sometimes failing; whence s/he suggests varying the solution here offered to give ὁ μὲν γὰρ ἔχων τι φιλόνεικον ἐν τῇ φύσει καὶ δυσεκβίαστον, τοῖς φανθεῖσιν σημείοις παρὰ τῶν θεῶν ἀντιβαίνων, ἕτερα ἤτει καὶ [προσηνάγκαζεν· εἶτα] τυχὸν μὲν ἐνίκᾳ, διαμαρτῶν δὲ τῷ φαινόμενῳ τὸ παρὰ τῆς ἀνθρωπίνης βουλῆς ἐφήρμοζεν. 'For Maximus, who had something competitive and stubborn in his nature, resisting the signs revealed by the gods, asked for others, and if he got them he prevailed; but if he failed he fitted', etc. No doubt most readers will resist either of these violent rearrangements of the text; I recoil somewhat myself. But something must be done to allow Eunapius in this second passage to make sense. Both solutions make the passage consistent: Maximus is a wangler, Chrysanthius a literalist.

On any view, the contrast drawn in the first passage between two attitudes to divination, one rigorous and literalist, one manipulative, is of interest: the individuals in question are late antique intellectuals, but attitudes no doubt diverged in the same way at all social levels throughout antiquity.

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