

SPQR

On Divination

MARCUS TULLIUS CICERO

Plain English Translation

MOUSEIA

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Translated by Michael Berardi

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THIS EDITION

Complete machine-assisted Plain English translation, made independently and directly from the Latin, never from the Musean edition. Both books and every numbered section; a separate Latin-source model review covered the entire text. No human specialist review is claimed.

TRANSLATOR

Michael Berardi

THE WORK

Written 44 BCE · Philosophical dialogue

SOURCE

Original text from the Perseus Digital Library.

GAPS AND UNCERTAINTIES

The edition's marked textual gaps and cruces are retained; some bird identifications and fragmentary quotations remain uncertain. Greek terms and ambiguous oracles are translated in context; model review is not human certification.

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Book 1, Chapter 1

- ¹ There is an old belief, going back to the age of heroes and supported by the agreement of the Roman people and every nation. It is that people have a power of divination, which the Greeks call *mantikē*: a feeling for, and knowledge of, things to come. If this power really exists, it is a wonderful and helpful thing. Through it, human nature can come closer to the power of the gods than in any other way. In this, as in many other cases, our people have done better than the Greeks. We named this outstanding power after the gods. The Greeks, as Plato explains, named it after madness.
- ² I can see no nation so civilized and educated, or so wild and uncivilized, that it does not believe future events give signs of themselves, and that some people can understand and predict them. To begin with the most ancient authorities, the Assyrians lived in vast, flat regions. With an open, clear view of the sky in every direction, they regularly watched the stars move across it. They recorded those movements and passed down what each sign meant for each person. One group within that nation was called the Chaldeans: this was a people's name, not the name of a profession. They are thought to have built up, by long observation of the stars, a body of knowledge that allowed them to predict what would happen to each person and the fate under which each was born. The Egyptians too are thought to have acquired this same skill over an almost countless number of centuries. The Cilicians, the Pisidians, and their neighbors in Pamphylia—peoples I myself governed—believe the flights and calls of birds are completely reliable signs of what will happen.

Book 1, Chapter 2

- ³ Whenever Greece sent colonists to Aeolis, Ionia, Asia, Sicily, or Italy, did it not consult an oracle—at Delphi or Dodona, or that of Ammon? What war did it start without asking the gods for advice? And there was not just one kind of divination practiced in public and private. To leave other peoples aside, how many kinds our own people adopted! The first example is Romulus, who founded this city: tradition credits him both with consulting the auspices for its foundation and with being an excellent augur himself. The other kings then used augurs too. Once the kings had been driven out, no public business, at home or in war, was done without taking the auspices. The methods of the haruspices also seemed very effective in obtaining and consulting signs, and in interpreting and dealing with supernatural warnings. So the Romans brought in this whole body of knowledge from Etruria. They did not want to seem to have neglected any kind of divination.
- ⁴ There are also two ways in which the mind, released from restraint and moving freely on its own, is stirred without reasoning or learned knowledge: madness and dreams. The Romans believed that divination through madness was found above all in the Sibylline verses. They therefore decided to choose ten citizens to interpret them. They often thought the frenzied predictions of fortune-tellers and inspired prophets deserved a hearing too. Cornelius Cilleolus' predictions in the war with Octavius were one such example. The senate likewise took serious dreams into account if these seemed relevant to public affairs. Indeed, within living memory the senate ordered Juno Sospita's temple restored after a dream of Balearicus' daughter Caecilia. The work was done by Lucius Julius, whose fellow consul was Publius Rutilius.

Book 1, Chapter 3

- ⁵ In my view, people in the past accepted these things more because events had taught them than because reasoning had persuaded them. Philosophers, however, have gathered some carefully worked-out arguments for the truth of divination. To speak of the earliest, Xenophanes of Colophon was the only one who accepted the existence of gods but rejected divination altogether. All the others accepted it, except Epicurus, who stammers out his account of the gods' nature. But they did not all accept it in the same way. Socrates, all his followers, Zeno, and Zeno's followers held to the view of the ancient philosophers. This was also the position taken by the Old Academy and the Peripatetics. Even earlier, Pythagoras had given divination great authority and wished to be an augur himself. Democritus, an important authority, also supported foreknowledge of the future in many passages. But Dicaearchus the Peripatetic rejected every form of divination except dreams and madness. The same two forms are accepted by our friend Cratippus; I consider him a match for the best Peripatetic thinkers. He rejects all the others.
- ⁶ The Stoics stood up for nearly every one of these forms. Zeno's writings had, so to speak, sown the seeds, and Cleanthes had made them grow a little more. Then came Chrysippus, a man of very sharp intelligence. He devoted two books to explaining the entire theory of divination, plus a separate book to oracles and one to dreams. After him came a single book by his student Diogenes of Babylon; Antipater wrote two, and our friend Posidonius five. But Panaetius broke with the Stoics on this point, though he was perhaps the leading member of that school, the teacher of Posidonius and the pupil of Antipater. Even he did not dare deny the power of divination. He said he was uncertain about it. If a Stoic was allowed to do that on one subject, however unwilling the other

Stoics were, will they not allow us to do it on other subjects too? Especially when the very thing Panaetius finds unclear seems clearer than sunlight to the rest of his school?

Book 1, Chapter 4

⁷ But such a distinguished philosopher's judgment and testimony support this point in the Academy's favor. We ourselves are asking what to think about divination. Carneades argued against the Stoics on this subject at length and with great insight, and we are afraid of rashly agreeing to something false or not properly understood. So it seems we must carefully compare the arguments on both sides, again and again. That was also our approach in my three books about the nature of the gods. Rash agreement and error are shameful in any subject. They are especially so in judging what authority auspices, sacred practices, and religion should have for us. If we neglect them, we risk becoming guilty of an offense against the gods. If we accept them, we risk becoming trapped in the superstitions of old women.

Book 1, Chapter 5

⁸ We have often discussed these matters, and did so in more detail recently when I was with my brother Quintus at my Tusculan villa. Our walk had brought us to the Lyceum, as we call the upper exercise ground. He said, "A little while ago I read through the third of your books about the nature of the gods. Cotta's argument shook my belief, but it did not destroy it." "That's very good," I said. "Cotta himself argues in a way meant to refute the Stoics' reasoning rather than to wipe out people's religion." Quintus replied, "Yes, Cotta says that—quite

often, in fact. I think he wants to avoid seeming to violate the rules everyone shares. Yet as I see it, his drive to challenge the Stoics ends up removing the gods entirely.

- ⁹ “I have no real trouble finding an answer to his reasoning. Lucilius defended religion well enough in the second book. You yourself say at the end of the third that his argument seemed to you closer to the truth. But those books left out divination. I suppose you thought it could be examined and discussed more conveniently on its own. Divination is the prediction and foreknowledge of things regarded as chance events. If you agree, let’s look at its power and character. My own view is this: if the kinds of divination we have inherited and practice are true, there are gods. And, conversely, if there are gods, there are people who can divine.”

Book 1, Chapter 6

- ¹⁰ “Quintus,” I said, “you are defending the Stoics’ stronghold, if the two claims really work both ways: if there is divination, there are gods, and if there are gods, there is divination. Neither claim is as easy to accept as you think. Nature may give signs of the future without a god. And gods may exist without giving the human race any power of divination.” He answered, “For me, the clear and unmistakable forms of divination are enough to prove both that gods exist and that they care about human affairs. If you like, I will explain my own views on them. But only if you can give this your full attention and see no other business as more important than our discussion.”
- ¹¹ “I always have time for philosophy, Quintus,” I said. “And now that there is nothing else I can gladly do, I am much more eager to hear your views on divination.”

“I have nothing new to offer,” he said, “and no special opinion of my own. I follow a very ancient belief, supported by the agreement of all peoples and nations. There are two kinds of divination. One depends on a learned skill; the other comes from nature.

Book 1, Chapter 7

- 12 “What nation or community is not influenced by predictions from people who examine sacrificial organs, interpret wonders or lightning, take auspices, study the stars, or draw lots? These methods mostly depend on learned skill. Or by predictions from dreams and inspired prophecy? Those two are regarded as natural. I think we should ask about the results of these things rather than their causes. A natural power lets us foresee events, at times from signs studied across many years, at times from a divine prompting and inspiration. So Carneades should stop pressing his question, as Panaetius also did: was it Jupiter who told the crow to make its cry to our left, and the raven to our right? These signs have been observed for an immense time. People have noticed and recorded the results. There is nothing that long ages cannot achieve and work out, when memory preserves the findings and records pass them on.

Book 1, Chapter 8

- 13 “We may wonder at the kinds of plants and roots doctors have discovered for animal bites, eye diseases, and wounds. Reason has never explained their natural power. But their usefulness has proved the worth of the skill and of its discoverer. Now let’s look at things which belong to another category but are more like divination:

“The swelling sea often gives advance warning of winds,
When it suddenly rises in a deep surge,
And rocks, white with salt and foaming with snowy spray,
Compete to send Neptune their sounds of sorrow;
Or a loud whistling starts high on a mountain peak
And grows as it echoes again and again from the cliffs.’

“Your Weather Signs is full of forecasts like these. Who can work out the causes of such foreknowledge? I know that Boëthus the Stoic tried. But he got only as far as explaining the causes of things that happen in the sea or sky.

14 “But who could give a likely explanation for the following?

“The gray coot too, fleeing the sea’s swirling depths,
Cries out to announce the approach of terrible storms,
Pouring loud calls from its trembling throat.
Often the *acredula* sings a very sad song from its breast
And keeps up its cries in the early morning,
Keeps up its cries, and pours endless complaints from its beak,
As soon as dawn releases the cold dew.
And sometimes a dark crow, running along the shore,
Dips its head and takes the waves over its neck.’

Book 1, Chapter 9

15 “We see that these signs almost never mislead us. Yet we do not see why this happens.

“You too, creatures raised in fresh water, recognize the signs,
As you get ready to pour out loud cries that mean nothing
And stir the springs and pools with your harsh noise.’

“Who could imagine that little frogs see this coming? Yet frogs have a certain natural power to give a sign. The power is quite reliable in itself, though rather hard for human beings to understand.

“And soft-footed cattle, looking toward the lights of the sky,
Have drawn wet moisture from the air through their nostrils.’
“I do not ask why, since I understand what will happen.
“Then the mastic tree, always green and always heavily laden,
Which normally grows large with a threefold crop,
Bears fruit three times and shows three times for plowing.’

Book 1, Chapter 10

- ¹⁶ “Why this tree alone blooms three times, and why it uses its flowers to mark the right plowing season, are questions I leave aside too. It is enough for me to know what happens, even if I do not know why each thing happens. So I will give the same answer in defense of every kind of divination as I gave about the things I have mentioned. I see what scammony root can do as a purgative, and what aristolochia, or birthwort, can do for snakebites. The latter got its name from its discoverer, who discovered the remedy itself through a dream. Seeing what they do is enough. I do not know why they can do it. Likewise, I do not fully understand the reason for the signs of wind and rain I mentioned. But I recognize, know, and accept their power and their results. In the same way, I accept what a cleft in a sacrificial organ or a lobe of the liver means. I do not know the cause. Life is full of such things. Almost everyone uses sacrificial organs for divination. And can we doubt the power of lightning? Among many other amazing cases, isn’t this one especially striking? When the terracotta statue of Summanus on the roof of the temple of Jupiter Best and Greatest was struck from the sky, its head could not be found anywhere. The haruspices said it had been knocked into the Tiber. It was found at the very place they pointed out.

Book 1, Chapter 11

17 “But what better authority or witness could I use than you? I even learned by heart—and gladly—the lines spoken by Urania the Muse in the second book of your *On My Consulship*:

“First Jupiter, blazing with heavenly fire,
Turns and lights up the whole universe,
And with his divine mind reaches through heaven and earth.
That mind holds human thoughts and lives deep within it,
While itself enclosed within the vaults of the eternal heavens.
And if you want to know the movements and wandering paths
Of stars occupying their places among the constellations,
Whose wandering exists only in the Greeks’ misleading language,
But really move along a fixed track and in a fixed orbit,
You will see that a divine mind has marked out everything.

18 “For first, during your consulship, the swift movements of stars
And the serious meetings of stars flashing with fire
Were seen by you too, when you visited the snow-covered heights
On the Alban Mount and celebrated the Latin Festival with rich milk;
You also saw the comets quivering with bright flames,
And thought much confusion was coming from destruction in the night.
For the Latin Festival fell at an ominous time,
When the moon hid its bright shape in darkened light
And suddenly vanished in a starry night.
And what of Phoebus’ torch, the grim messenger of war,
Which flew toward its great height in a blaze of fire,
Seeking the plunging regions of the sky and the setting sun?
Or when a citizen was hit by terrible lightning,
And the light of life left his eyes on a clear day?

Or when the earth shook its pregnant body?
Then terrible shapes of different kinds, seen at night,
Warned of war and unrest.
Across the land prophets, their hearts in a frenzy,
Poured out many oracles threatening grim disasters,

Book 1, Chapter 12

- 19 “And those things which at last came about with the passage of time,
The father of the gods himself repeatedly foretold
With constant, clear signs in heaven and on earth.
Now all those warnings which the Lydian haruspex
Of the Etruscan people gave when Torquatus and Cotta were consuls
Are being brought together and settled by your year in office.
For once the father who thunders on high, resting on starry Olympus,
Struck his own hills and temples
And hurled fire at his home on the Capitol.
Then the ancient, honored bronze statue of Natta
Fell, and the laws dropped down, their age-old sacred force gone,
And the blaze of lightning destroyed the images of the gods.
- 20 “In this place stood the forest nurse who raised the Roman people,
The wolf of Mars, feeding the small sons of Mars
From her full breasts with the nourishing dew of life.
Then she fell with the boys, struck by the blazing thunderbolt,
Torn away from the footprints her feet left behind.
Who then did not search the writings and records of the craft,
And draw words of sorrow from Etruscan books?
All warned against a huge disaster and destruction for the citizens,
Arising from a noble family.
Or they steadily declared that the laws would fall.
They ordered us to save the temples of the gods and the city itself

From the flames, and to fear terrible slaughter and bloodshed.
They said this was fixed and firmly rooted in a dreadful fate,
Unless first a sacred statue of Jupiter, beautifully made,
Was set on a high column, facing the bright sunrise.
Then the people and the revered senate would be able
To see the hidden plots, if, turned toward the rising sun,
The statue looked from there upon the home of the senate and people.

Book 1, Chapter 13

- 21 “After long delays and much postponement, this statue
Was finally set on its high base when you were consul.
And at one and the same hour of the fixed, appointed time,
Jupiter made his scepter shine from the tall column,
And the disaster planned for our country by fire and sword
Was exposed to senate and people by the statements of the Allobroges.
So those ancient men whose records you keep were right,
Those who ruled peoples and cities with moderation and courage.
Your own ancestors too were right, whose piety and loyalty
Were outstanding, whose wisdom far surpassed all others,
To give special worship to the gods in their active power.
These truths were seen deeply, with keen and careful thought,
By men who gladly spent their leisure in honorable studies,
- 22 “And in the shady Academy and the bright Lyceum
Poured out great teachings from their fertile minds.
As your youth first began to flower, your country took you from those men
And put you in the midst of a great task demanding courage.
Yet you ease your anxious concerns with rest,
And dedicate to study and to us whatever time your country leaves free.’

“Can you then bring yourself to argue against what I say about divination? You have done what you have done, and you wrote those lines I recited with such great care!

- 23 “Tell me, Carneades: is your question why this happens, or what method gives us a way to foresee it? I admit I do not know. But I say that you yourself see them happen. ‘By chance,’ you say. Really? Can something that has every feature of truth come about by chance? A throw of four knucklebones can give a Venus by chance. But if you threw four hundred knucklebones, do you think you could get a hundred Venuses by chance too? Paint splashed at random on a board can make the outline of a face. But could splashing paint by accident give us something as beautiful as the Venus of Cos? If a pig presses the letter A into the earth with its snout, could you therefore suspect that it might write out Ennius’ *Andromache*? Carneades invented an account of a rock that broke open in the Chios quarries and exposed a little Pan’s head. I can believe it was a shape with some resemblance to him. But certainly not one you would say Scopas had made. The fact is that chance never produces a perfect copy of the truth.

Book 1, Chapter 14

- 24 “But sometimes predictions fail to come true. What skill does not have that problem? I mean skills that depend on inference and judgment. Should medicine not count as a skill? Yet it makes many mistakes. What about ships’ pilots? Don’t they make mistakes? When the Greek army and the commanders of all those ships left Troy, weren’t they, as Pacuvius says, ‘happy to be leaving, watching the playful fish,’ and ‘unable to get enough of looking’?
“‘Meanwhile, as the sun is nearly setting, the sea grows rough;
Darkness doubles, and the blackness of night and storm clouds blinds them.’

“Did the shipwreck of so many famous leaders and kings do away with the skill of navigation? Or is there no such thing as military knowledge because a great commander recently lost his army and fled? Or is there no method or practical wisdom in governing a state because Gnaeus Pompey made many mistakes, Marcus Cato a few, and even you yourself some? The answers of the haruspices and all divination based on judgment are like this. They rest on inference and cannot go any further.

Book 1, Chapter 15

- 25 “This kind of divination may sometimes be mistaken, but it still points to the truth very often. It reaches back through all past time. During that time, the same events followed the same signs on almost countless occasions. A skill was built up by repeatedly noticing and recording the same things.
“And how reliable your auspices are! With your permission, I will say that Roman augurs no longer understand them. The Cilicians, Pamphylians, Pisidians, and Lycians do.
- 26 “Need I mention our friend and host, King Deiotarus, a very distinguished and excellent man? He never does anything without taking the auspices. He once abandoned a journey he had planned and firmly decided on, turning back because of a warning from an eagle’s flight. The room he would have stayed in if he had gone on collapsed the very next night.
- 27 “He told me himself that he had very often turned back from journeys after already traveling for many days. This is especially admirable about him. Caesar punished him by taking away his tetrarchy, kingdom, and money. Even so, he has no regrets, he says, about the favorable auspices he received before setting out to join Pompey. He had used his troops to defend the senate’s authority and the Roman people’s freedom, as well as the dignity of their empire. The birds on whose advice he had followed duty and loyalty had served him well.

His honor mattered more to him than his possessions. I would call his way of reading signs true augury. Our magistrates make their auspices happen by force. Give a chicken a lump of food: as it eats, a piece has to fall out of its beak;

Book 1, Chapter 16

28 “and your rules say that a tripudium occurs if any of it falls onto solid ground. You call even this forced sign that I have described a fully favorable tripudium. As Cato the Wise complains, many auguries and auspices have therefore been completely lost and abandoned through the college’s neglect.

“Once, hardly any important action, even in private life, was taken without auspices. The auspice-takers at weddings still show this today, although they keep only the name and have given up the practice. Just as we now usually seek signs about important matters from sacrificial organs—though even that happens rather less often than it used to—people then sought them from birds. So, by not looking for favorable signs on the left, we run into ominous and defective ones.

29 “When Publius Claudius, son of Appius the Blind, and his colleague Lucius Junius sailed under faulty auspices, they lost enormous fleets. Agamemnon suffered the same fate. When the Greeks began

““To grumble among themselves and openly trample on the skill of the organ-readers,

He orders the ships to sail, with cheers of approval but an unfavorable bird.’

“But why go back to ancient times? We see what happened to Marcus Crassus when he ignored the announcement of ominous signs. In dealing with this, Appius, your colleague, did not apply his knowledge properly, despite being a capable augur by your often-repeated account. As censor he marked down Gaius Ateius, a good man and an excellent citizen, stating that he had invented the auspices. Granted: that could be a censor’s business, if he judged them invented. But what was certainly not an augur’s business was his added state-

ment that this had caused the Roman people a very great disaster. If this was the cause of the disaster, the blame lies not with the man who announced the warning, but with the man who disobeyed it. The result confirmed that the warning was genuine, according to this very augur and censor. If it had been false, it could not have provided any cause of disaster. Ominous signs, like other auspices, spoken omens, and signs generally, do not cause events. They announce what will happen unless you take precautions.

Book 1, Chapter 17

- 30 “So Ateius’ announcement did not create a cause of disaster. The sign it presented told Crassus what to expect if he failed to take precautions. Either the announcement was powerless, or, if it had force as Appius thinks, its force places the fault on the man who disobeyed, not the man who gave the warning. “And where did you get that curved staff of yours, the most famous badge of the augur’s office? At the founding of the city, Romulus used it to divide the sky into regions, did he not? Romulus’ staff was a small stick, curved and slightly bent at the top. It took its name, *lituus*, from its resemblance to the trumpet of that name. The *Salii* had it in their council hall on the Palatine; after fire destroyed the hall, people found the staff intact.
- 31 “What ancient author fails to describe how Attus Navius used his staff to divide up regions long after Romulus, while Tarquinius Priscus was king? As a boy he was poor and kept pigs. He is said to have lost one and vowed that, if he recovered it, his gift to the god would be whichever bunch of grapes was biggest in the vineyard. After finding the pig, he is said to have stood in the middle of the vineyard facing south. He divided the vineyard into four parts. The birds ruled out three of them. He divided the remaining fourth into regions and, as we read in the record, found a bunch of grapes of amazing size. When this became known, all his neighbors consulted him about their affairs, and he became very famous and highly respected.

- ³² “As a result, King Priscus sent for him. The king tested his knowledge of augury by asking if an idea he had in mind was possible. After taking the auspices, Attus said yes. Tarquinius explained that his idea was to slice a whetstone in two with a razor. Attus told him to try it. So a whetstone was brought to the assembly ground and cut in two with a razor, while the king and people watched. After that, Attus Navius served as augur to Tarquinius, while people brought their own concerns to him for advice.
- ³³ “The account says they buried the whetstone together with the razor in the assembly ground and covered the spot with a wellhead. Let’s deny everything! Let’s burn the records and say these things are inventions! Anything at all, rather than admit that the gods care about human affairs! But doesn’t the story you yourself recorded about Tiberius Gracchus support the methods of both augurs and haruspices? He unknowingly chose a site for his augural tent incorrectly, because he had crossed the city’s sacred boundary without taking the auspices. He then held the assembly to elect consuls. The story is well known, and you yourself put it on record. Gracchus was himself an augur, and by admitting his mistake he confirmed the authority of the auspices. The methods of the haruspices also gained great authority. Brought before the senate just after the election, they declared that the man who had presided over it had not been properly qualified.

Book 1, Chapter 18

- ³⁴ “So I agree with those who say there are two kinds of divination: one that involves learned skill and one that does not. There is skill in those who use inference to investigate new cases, after learning about old ones by observation. But there is no learned skill in those who sense the future, not by reasoning or by drawing conclusions from signs they have observed and recorded, but through some excitement of the mind, or through its free and unrestrained movement. This often happens to people dreaming, and sometimes to people

prophesying in a frenzy, like Bacis of Boeotia, Epimenides of Crete, and the Sibyl of Erythrae. Oracles belong to this kind too: not those drawn by lots made alike, but those poured out through divine impulse and inspiration. Yet lots themselves should not be looked down on if they have the authority of age, like those we are told came out of the earth. I believe divine power can make the lots, when drawn, fit the case exactly. The interpreters of all these things seem to come close to the divining power of those they interpret, just as scholars do to the poets they explain.

- 35 “What sort of cleverness is it, then, to try to undermine things firmly established by age through quibbling? ‘I cannot find the cause.’ Perhaps it lies hidden, wrapped in nature’s darkness. The god did not want me to understand these things, only to use them. So I will use them. I will not be persuaded that all Etruria is crazy about sacrificial organs, or that this same people is mistaken about lightning, or interprets portents falsely. After all, rumblings, groanings, and movements of the earth have often truly predicted many serious events for our state and for other communities.

Book 1, Chapter 19

- 36 “What about this birth by a mule, which people laugh at? Because an animal naturally unable to breed had produced a young one, didn’t the haruspices predict an unbelievable crop of evils? And what about Tiberius Gracchus, the son of Publius, who was twice consul and also censor, an eminent augur, a wise man, and an outstanding citizen? His son Gaius Gracchus wrote that, when two snakes were caught in his house, he called in the haruspices. They replied that if he let the male go, his wife would soon die; if he let the female go, he would die himself. He thought it fairer that he should meet death in his mature years than that the young daughter of Publius Africanus should die. He let the female go and died himself a few days later. Let’s laugh at the haruspices and call them empty-headed frauds! Let’s despise men whose methods were sup-

ported both by a very wise man and by the actual outcome! Let's also condemn Babylon and the people who watch the signs in the sky from the Caucasus and follow the paths of the stars by calculation and measurement. Let's condemn them, I say, for stupidity, falsehood, or shamelessness. They say they have records covering four hundred seventy thousand years. Let's judge that they are lying and have no fear of what all future generations will think of them!

37 “Very well: foreigners are foolish and dishonest. But has Greek history lied too? To speak now of natural divination, who does not know the answers Apollo at Delphi gave to Croesus, the Athenians, the Spartans, the Tegeans, the Argives, and the Corinthians? Chrysippus collected countless oracles, each backed by a substantial authority and witness. I will leave them aside because you know them. I defend just this one point. The oracle at Delphi would never have been so famous and renowned, or filled with such great gifts from every people and king, unless every age had experienced the truth of its answers. ‘It has not done that for a long time now.’

38 “Well, just as it is less famous now because its answers are less outstandingly true, so it would not have been so famous then without the highest degree of truth. The power in the earth that stirred the Pythia's mind with divine inspiration may have faded with age. We see that some rivers have disappeared and dried up, or twisted and turned into another course. But let that have happened however you like. It is a large question. Just let this stand: that oracle spoke the truth for many centuries. We cannot deny it without overturning all history.

Book 1, Chapter 20

39 “But let's leave oracles aside and turn to dreams. In discussing them, Chrysippus collects a great many trivial dreams. Antipater does the same by searching out dreams explained through Antiphon's interpretations. These certainly show the interpreter's cleverness, but he should have used more impor-

tant examples. Philistus, an educated, careful writer who lived at the time, tells this story about the mother of Dionysius, the tyrant of Syracuse. While she was pregnant with this very Dionysius, she dreamed that she gave birth to a little satyr. The interpreters of portents, who were then called Galeotae in Sicily, answered that the child she bore would be the most famous man in Greece and enjoy lasting good fortune. That is Philistus' account.

40 “Am I taking you back to the stories of our poets or the Greek poets? That Vestal Virgin in Ennius tells a dream too:

“When the old woman, hurriedly roused, brought a lamp with trembling limbs,

The girl, terrified by her dream, spoke these words through tears:

“Daughter of Eurydice, loved by our father,

My body's life and strength are all draining away.

A handsome man seemed to drag me through pleasant willow groves,

Along riverbanks and through unfamiliar places. Then I seemed

To wander alone, my own sister,

Slowly to follow your tracks and search for you, yet could not

Find my way to you in my heart; no path gave my foot a firm hold.

41 ““Then my father seemed to speak to me

In these words: ‘Daughter, you must first endure

Hardships; afterward your fortune will rise again from the river.’

After saying this, sister, my father suddenly withdrew.

He did not show himself again, though my heart longed for him,

Though in tears I often stretched my hands toward the blue vaults

Of heaven, and called him in a pleading voice.

Only with difficulty did sleep leave me, with my heart in pain.”

Book 1, Chapter 21

42 “Even if a poet invented these things, they still fit the way dreams usually work.
Let’s also allow that the dream which disturbed Priam was made up, because
“Hecuba, the pregnant mother, seemed in her dreams
To give birth to a burning torch. At this the father,
King Priam himself, terrified at heart
By the dream, worn out with anxious sighs,
Offered up bleating animals in sacrifice.
Then, seeking peace with the god, he asked for an interpretation,
Begging Apollo to explain
What such great warnings in the dream were leading to.
Then from the oracle Apollo spoke with a divine voice:
The first boy born to Priam after this
Must not be allowed to be raised.
He would be the destruction of Troy, the ruin of Pergamum.’

Book 1, Chapter 22

43 “Let these be dreams from stories, as I said. Add to them the dream of Aeneas.
In the Greek history of our own Fabius Pictor it is described in such a way that
everything Aeneas did and everything that happened to him was what he had
seen in his sleep.
“But let’s look at things closer to home. How did Tarquinius the Proud
describe his own dream in Accius’ Brutus?
44 “When I gave my body over to sleep at night’s arrival,
Soothing my tired limbs with slumber,
I dreamed a shepherd drove up to me

A flock of woolly sheep of outstanding beauty.
Two rams, brothers, were chosen from them,
I killed the finer one as a sacrifice.
His brother then drove his horns against me,
And rammed me; the blow sent me falling to the ground.
Then, lying flat on the ground, badly wounded,
I looked up at an immense and amazing event
In the sky: the sun's flaming, radiant disk
Slipped away to the right on a new course.'

- 45 "Now let's see how the dream-interpreters explained this dream:
"King, when the things people use in life, think about, worry over, see,
And do and work at while awake come to someone in sleep,
It is less surprising. The gods do not suddenly send so great a warning without
a purpose.
So beware: a man you think as dull as a sheep
May have an exceptional mind, well armed with wisdom,
And drive you from your kingdom. For what was shown to you about the sun
Foretells a change in the people's affairs
Very soon. May this turn out well for the people! And because the mighty sign
Began its journey from the left toward the right, it gave a splendid
Augury that the Roman state would become supreme.'

Book 1, Chapter 23

- 46 "Now let's return to examples from other countries. Heraclides of Pontus, an
educated man who heard Plato teach and became his pupil, writes about
Phalaris' mother. In a dream she seemed to see the statues of the gods which she
herself had dedicated in her home. Of these gods, she saw Mercury pouring
blood out of the bowl in his right hand. On reaching the ground, it seemed to
bubble up until the whole house was overflowing with blood. Her son's mon-

strous cruelty confirmed his mother's dream. Need I quote from Dinon's Persian History the interpretation the Magi gave the famous King Cyrus? According to Dinon, Cyrus dreamed of the sun at his feet. He reached out with his hands three times to catch it, always in vain: the sun rolled away, slipping out of reach and disappearing. The Magi, who were regarded among the Persians as a class of wise and educated men, told him that his three attempts to seize the sun foretold a reign of thirty years. That is what happened. He reached seventy, having begun to reign at forty.

- 47 “Clearly even foreign nations have some power to foresee and divine. Calanus the Indian spoke as he went to his death, stepping onto a pyre already alight: ‘How splendid leaving life will be, once my mortal body is burned away and my soul has gone out into the light, as it was for Hercules!’ Alexander asked him to say if he wanted anything. ‘Very good,’ he said. ‘I will see you soon.’ That came true: Alexander died at Babylon a few days later. I am leaving dreams for a little while, but I will soon return to them. Everyone agrees that the fire which destroyed Diana’s temple at Ephesus occurred on the night Olympias gave birth to Alexander. At daybreak the Magi cried out that the plague and destroyer of Asia had been born during the night just past. So much for Indians and Magi.

Book 1, Chapter 24

- 48 “Back to dreams. In Coelius’ account, Hannibal wished to take away a golden column from Juno’s shrine at Lacinium. Unsure whether it was solid gold or merely gilded on the outside, he drilled into it. When he found it was solid, he decided to take it away. While he slept, he saw Juno telling him to leave it alone. She threatened that, if he took the column away, she would make sure he lost the eye he could still see well with. Being a clever man, he did not ignore the warning. So he had a small cow made from the gold drilled out of the column, and placed it on top of the column.

- 49 “This next story is also in the Greek history of Silenus, whom Coelius follows. Silenus gave a very careful account of Hannibal’s career. After taking Saguntum, Hannibal dreamed of a summons from Jupiter to join the gods in council. There he received Jupiter’s command to attack Italy. One member of the council was given him as a guide, and with this guide he began to advance with his army. The guide then told him not to look behind him. But he could not keep this up for long. Overcome by curiosity, he looked back. He saw a huge, monstrous beast wrapped in snakes. Wherever it went, it overturned every tree, bush, and house. In astonishment he asked the god to explain the monster. The god identified it as Italy’s devastation. He told him to keep going straight ahead and not worry about what was happening behind his back.
- 50 “Agathocles writes in his history that Hamilcar the Carthaginian, while attacking Syracuse, dreamed he heard a voice saying that he would dine in Syracuse the next day. At dawn that day, a major mutiny divided his camp’s Carthaginian and Sicilian soldiers. The Syracusans found out, broke into the camp by surprise, and took Hamilcar alive. The outcome thus bore out what he had dreamed. Such cases fill both the historical record and ordinary life.
- 51 “Take Publius Decius, the son of Quintus, the first of the Decii to become consul. He was a military tribune when Marcus Valerius and Aulus Cornelius were consuls and our army was under pressure from the Samnites. He took risks in battle rather boldly and was warned to be more careful. He said, as the histories record, that he had dreamed of dying with the greatest glory in the thick of the enemy. On that occasion he survived and freed the army from being trapped. But three years later, as consul, he formally vowed his own life to the gods and charged, fully armed, into the Latin battle line. By his action the Latins were defeated and wiped out. The glory of that death made his son wish to die in the same way.

Book 1, Chapter 25

52 “But now, if you agree, let’s turn to philosophers’ dreams.

“In Plato, Socrates, while held in the public prison, tells his friend Crito that he must die in three days. He has dreamed of an extraordinarily beautiful woman who called him by name and spoke a line of Homer something like this:

“‘The third day will bring you happily to Phthia.’

“The account says it happened just as predicted. Xenophon, the follower of Socrates—and what a great man he was!—writes about his own dreams during the campaign he served on with Cyrus the Younger. Their outcomes were amazing.

53 “Will we say Xenophon is lying or out of his mind? And Aristotle, a man of exceptional, almost divine intelligence—is he mistaken himself, or is he trying to make others mistaken? His account follows his friend Eudemus of Cyprus on a journey to Macedonia: he arrived at Pherae, then a very famous town in Thessaly, held under the cruel rule of the tyrant Alexander. In that town Eudemus became so seriously ill that all the doctors gave up hope. As he slept, a very handsome young man appeared and promised him a speedy recovery. Alexander the tyrant, he said, had only a few days left to live; Eudemus himself would be home again in five years. Aristotle says the first predictions were fulfilled immediately: Eudemus got well; the tyrant’s killers were his wife’s brothers. The fifth year was drawing to its close. On the strength of that dream, people expected him to go back to Cyprus from Sicily; instead, he died in battle at Syracuse. So the dream was interpreted to mean that when Eudemus’ soul left his body, it had returned home.

54 “To the philosophers let’s add Sophocles, a very learned man and a truly divine poet. A heavy golden bowl had been stolen from Hercules’ temple. In a dream he saw the god himself telling him who had done it. He ignored this the first and second time. When it happened several more times, he went up to the

Areopagus and reported it. The members of the court ordered the arrest of the man Sophocles named. Questioned under torture, the man confessed and brought back the bowl. Because of this, the shrine was named after Hercules the Informer.

Book 1, Chapter 26

- 55 “But why am I using Greek examples? Somehow I enjoy our own more. All the historians tell this story—the Fabii, the Gellii, and, most recently, Coelius. During the Latin War, the first celebration of the great games promised in a vow was interrupted by a sudden call to arms for the citizens. The games therefore had to be staged again. Before it began, when the people were already seated, a slave was led through the circus, carrying a forked yoke and being beaten with rods. A Roman man from the countryside later dreamed that someone came to him complaining that the games’ lead dancer had displeased him. The same figure ordered the man to tell the senate. He did not dare. A second command brought a warning: he must not make the speaker demonstrate his power. Even that did not give him courage to act. His son then died, and in a third dream the warning returned. Now disabled himself, he brought the matter to his friends; they recommended taking him by litter to the senate house, and this was done. After telling his dream to the senate, he returned home on his own feet, restored to health. The story handed down is that the senate accepted the dream as genuine, and those games were repeated once more.

Book 1, Chapter 27

- 56 “Gaius Gracchus told many people, as the same Coelius records, that when he was hesitating about running for quaestor, his brother Tiberius appeared in a dream. He said Gaius could delay as long as he liked, but he would still die the

same violent death that he himself had suffered. According to Coelius, he himself heard the story, and Gracchus shared it widely, before Gaius Gracchus ever became tribune of the people. What could be found more reliable than this dream?

“And who can really dismiss those two dreams the Stoics mention so often? One is about Simonides. He saw the dead body of a stranger lying abandoned and buried it. When he later intended to sail, he dreamed that the dead man he had buried was telling him to stay ashore: the voyage would end in his death by shipwreck. So Simonides turned back, and all the others who sailed then died.

- 57 “The second is a very famous dream, handed down like this. Two friends from Arcadia were traveling together and arrived at Megara. One stayed with an innkeeper; the other went to a friend’s house. After dinner they went to bed. Late in the night, the friend lodging in the house had a dream: his companion was pleading for help, saying the innkeeper meant to murder him. At first, frightened by the dream, he got up. Once he had calmed down, he dismissed the dream and returned to bed. In sleep he again saw his companion, now begging him to avenge his death, since he had given no help before the murder. The innkeeper had killed him and thrown him into a cart, then piled dung on top. He asked his friend to be at the gate in the morning, before the cart left the town. This dream really moved him. At the gate that morning, he was there to meet the man driving the oxen and questioned him about the cart’s contents. The driver fled in terror, the dead man was dug out, and the innkeeper’s crime was exposed and punished.

Book 1, Chapter 28

- 58 “Could any dream show divine power more clearly? Why search for further examples, or ones from long ago? You have repeatedly heard my dream from me, and I have heard yours from you just as often. As proconsul in charge of Asia, I dreamed of you riding to the edge of a great river. Suddenly you were

carried forward, slipped into the river, and disappeared. I shook with terror. Suddenly you reappeared, looking happy. Still on the same horse, you climbed the far bank; we hugged one another. This dream was easy to interpret. Experts in Asia predicted for me the very course of events that followed.

59 “Now I come to your dream. You told me about it yourself, though Sallustius, our friend, has repeated the account to me more often. During that flight of yours, which brought us honor but brought our country disaster, your lodging was a villa in Atina’s plain. After lying awake for much of the night, you finally fell into sound, deep sleep as daylight approached. So, although you had to resume your journey, Sallustius ordered silence and would not let you be woken. On waking at roughly the day’s second hour, you described your dream to him: you had seen yourself roaming in sadness through deserted places. Gaius Marius appeared with laurel-decorated rods of office and asked why you were sad. You said you had been driven from your country by force. He took your right hand, told you to be brave, and handed you over to the nearest lictor to take you to his monument. He said you would find safety there. Sallustius says he then cried out that a quick and glorious return was in store for you, and that you yourself seemed delighted by the dream. I myself soon received word of what you said when you heard about that splendid senate decree for your return. It had been passed at Marius’ monument, on the motion of the consul, a very good and distinguished man, and endorsed by an unbelievably loud outburst of cheers and applause in a packed theater. You said nothing could be more divine than that dream at Atina.

Book 1, Chapter 29

60 “‘But many dreams are false.’ Or perhaps they are obscure to us. Still, let some be false. What do we say, on the other side, about the true ones? We would have far more of these if we went to bed in a sound state. As it is, weighed down with food and wine, we see confused and jumbled things. Look at what Socrates says

in Plato's Republic. He says, 'When we are asleep, the part of the soul that shares in thought and reason grows numb and weak. But the part with a wild and savage fierceness, stupefied by too much drink and food, leaps up in sleep and throws itself about without restraint. Every sort of vision, empty of thought and reason, is put before it. It may dream of sex with its own mother, with any other human being or a god, often even with an animal. It may even slaughter someone and stain itself with sinful blood, or do many filthy and disgusting things, recklessly and shamelessly.

- 61 "But suppose someone goes to sleep after living and eating in a healthy, moderate way. He has roused and stirred up the part of his soul that thinks and plans, and has fed it with a feast of good thoughts. He has neither starved the part fed by pleasure nor filled it to overflowing. Either extreme tends to dull the mind's sharp vision, whether nature is deprived of something or has too much and overflows. He has also calmed and quenched that third part of the soul, where anger burns. Then, with the soul's two reckless parts held down, the remaining part, which thinks and reasons, will shine out and show itself lively and sharp for dreaming. The visions that come to him in sleep will then be calm and true.' I have translated Plato's own words.

Book 1, Chapter 30

- 62 "Are we to listen to Epicurus instead, then? Carneades says first one thing and then another because he enjoys debate. Epicurus says what he thinks, but he never thinks anything fine or worthy. Will you rank him above Plato and Socrates? Even if they gave no reasons, their authority would outweigh these small-time philosophers. Plato's advice, then, is to prepare the body for sleep so that the mind is not led into confusion or mistakes. The ban on beans among Pythagoreans is also explained this way. That food causes a great deal of gas, which works against the calm the mind needs when searching for truth.

- ⁶³ “So when sleep draws the soul away from partnership and contact with the body, it remembers the past, sees the present, and foresees the future. The sleeper’s body lies like a corpse, but the soul is active and alive. It will do this much more after death, when it has left the body altogether. That is why it has far greater powers of divination as death approaches. People suffering from a serious, fatal illness see this very thing: that death is near. So images of the dead generally appear to them. At that time they are especially eager for a good name, and those who have lived wrongly feel the deepest regret for their sins.
- ⁶⁴ “Posidonius also supports the claim that the dying can divine with this example. As he lay dying, a man from Rhodes listed six people as old as himself and predicted the sequence of their deaths, naming the first, the second, and each one after that. Posidonius thinks people dream under the influence of the gods in three ways. First, the soul foresees things by itself, because it is linked by kinship to the gods. Second, the air is full of immortal souls, in which signs of truth appear as if clearly stamped. Third, the gods themselves speak with people as they sleep. As I just said, the soul more easily foretells the future as death approaches.

Book 1, Chapter 31

- ⁶⁵ “So this explains the case of Calanus, whom I mentioned before. It also explains Homer’s Hector, who tells Achilles as he dies that Achilles’ own death is near. Common usage would never have accepted the following expression for no reason, if there were nothing at all behind it:
- “My mind sensed in advance, as I left home, that my trip would be wasted.’
- “The Latin verb *sagire* means to sense something sharply. That is why old women who are eager to know a great deal are called *sagae*, and dogs with a keen nose are called *sagaces*. So someone who senses a thing before it actually appears is said to *praesagire*: to sense future events beforehand.

- 66 “So our minds contain a power of foreseeing, put into them from outside and lodged there by a god. When it flares up more fiercely, it is called frenzy. The mind withdraws from the body and is stirred by a divine impulse.
 “Hecuba: But why have you suddenly gone wild, with your eyes blazing?
 Where is the sensible, modest girl you were a moment ago?
 Cassandra: Mother, even the finest women fall far short of you,
 I have been driven to superstitious prophecies.
 Apollo forces me, unwilling and out of my mind, to speak fate’s words.
 I am ashamed before girls my own age. I am ashamed before my father,
 That excellent man, of what I do. Mother, I pity you and hate my plight.
 You gave Priam the finest children, except for me. This hurts:
 Must I harm him while they help, obstruct him while they obey?’
 “What a tender, sensitive, gentle poem! But that is less to the point.
- 67 “What we are looking for is clearly stated: frenzy often makes true predictions.
 “Here it is, here it is, the torch wrapped in blood and fire!
 It lay hidden for many years. Citizens, help! Put it out!’
 “Now it is not Cassandra speaking, but the god lodged in a human body.
 “Already on the great sea a swift fleet
 Is being built. A swarm carries destruction.
 It will come: a savage force in ships speeding
 Under sail will fill the shores.’

Book 1, Chapter 32

- 68 “I seem to be talking about tragedies and stories. But I heard from you yourself about an actual event of the same kind, not an invention. Gaius Coponius came to you at Dyrrhachium. He commanded the Rhodian fleet with the authority of a praetor, and was an exceptionally sensible and learned man. He said that a rower from a Rhodian quinquereme had prophesied that in less than thirty days Greece would be soaked in blood. There would be looting at

Dyrrhachium, a rush to board the ships and escape, and a heartbreaking sight of fires as the fugitives looked back. But the Rhodian fleet was granted an early return and a journey home. You told me that you yourself were disturbed, while the two learned men present there, Marcus Varro and Marcus Cato, were terrified. Sure enough, a few days later Labienus arrived, fleeing from Pharsalus. He reported the army's destruction, and the rest of the prophecy soon came true.

69 “Grain looted and spilled from the storehouses covered every street and alley. You suddenly boarded the ships in panic. In the darkness you could see burning cargo ships as you looked back at the town; soldiers had burned them because the crews would not follow. Finally the Rhodian fleet deserted you, and you realized that the prophet had spoken the truth.

70 “I have described as briefly as I could the revelations that come through dreams and frenzy. As I said, these do not depend on a learned skill. Both kinds have a single explanation, which our friend Cratippus often uses. Some part of the human mind is drawn and taken from outside us. This implies that there is a divine mind outside us from which the human mind comes. The part of the human mind that has sensation, movement, and desire is not separate from the body's activity. But the mind's reasoning, understanding part is at its strongest when it is most distant from the body.

71 “So, after giving examples of true prophecies and dreams, Cratippus usually finishes his argument like this: ‘The eyes cannot perform their proper work and function without eyes existing. But eyes may sometimes fail to do their work. Anyone who has used his eyes even once to see things as they really are has the power of true sight. The same applies to divination. Its proper work and function cannot exist without divination existing. But someone who has the power of divination may sometimes make a mistake and fail to see the truth. So one prediction that comes true in a way that seems to rule out chance is enough to establish divination. There are countless cases of that kind. We must therefore admit that divination exists.’

Book 1, Chapter 33

⁷² “But the kinds of divination explained by interpretation, or observed and recorded from their results, are called artificial rather than natural, as I said above. This category covers the *haruspex*’s work, augury, and the interpretation of signs. The Stoics support it; the Peripatetics do not. Some depend on records and systematic teaching. The Etruscan books on inspecting entrails, on lightning, and on rituals show this, as do your own books on augury. Others involve an interpretation made on the spot. For example, Homer’s Calchas used the sparrow count to predict how many years the war at Troy would last. There is also an incident recorded in Sulla’s history which happened while you were watching. While he was sacrificing in the territory of Nola, in front of his headquarters, a snake suddenly came out from the bottom of the altar. The *haruspex* Gaius Postumius begged Sulla to take the army on campaign. Following this advice, Sulla captured the heavily manned Samnite camp outside the town of Nola.

⁷³ “An interpretation was also made in the case of Dionysius, shortly before he became ruler. On a journey across Leontini’s territory, he himself took his horse down into the river. The horse sank in the swirling water and did not come up. Despite his greatest efforts he could not pull it out. He went away distressed, as Philistus tells us. Some way farther on, a sudden neigh reached him. Turning around, he joyfully found the horse lively again; bees had gathered in a swarm on its mane. The sign meant that Dionysius would become ruler a few days later, as he did.

Book 1, Chapter 34

- ⁷⁴ “And what about the warning given to the Spartans shortly before the disaster at Leuctra? Weapons rattled in Hercules’ shrine, and his statue ran with sweat. Callisthenes reports that at this same time in Thebes, Hercules’ temple doors suddenly swung open by themselves despite their bars, and the weapons previously attached to its walls lay on the ground. Meanwhile at Lebadea a sacrifice was being offered to Trophonius when the local roosters started to crow without a pause. Then the Boeotian augurs said the Thebans would win, because that bird normally falls silent when beaten and crows when it wins.
- ⁷⁵ “At that time many signs warned the Spartans of their coming disaster in the battle at Leuctra. On the head of the statue of Lysander, their most famous man, which stood at Delphi, a crown of rough wild plants suddenly appeared. There were also the gold stars that the Spartans had set up at Delphi after Lysander’s naval victory, in which the Athenians were crushed. During that naval battle, people reportedly saw Castor and Pollux accompanying the Spartans’ fleet. So the gold stars I mentioned were set up at Delphi as emblems of those gods. No one could find them after they fell, shortly before the fighting at Leuctra.
- ⁷⁶ “But the greatest warning for those same Spartans was this. They had consulted Jupiter’s oracle at Dodona to ask about victory. Their envoys had set out the container holding the lots. The Molossian king’s pet monkey scattered not only the lots but all the equipment for drawing them, sending things in every direction. According to the account, the oracle’s presiding priestess then warned the Spartans that survival, rather than victory, should concern them.

Book 1, Chapter 35

⁷⁷ “And in the Second Punic War, didn’t Gaius Flaminius, consul for the second time, ignore signs of the future, with terrible losses for the state? He had purified his army and moved camp toward Arretium, leading his legions against Hannibal. In front of the image of Jupiter, who stops retreat, he and his horse suddenly fell for no apparent reason. He felt no religious concern about it, although the experts thought a sign had been put in his way to stop him from fighting. When he also took the auspices by observing the sacred chickens’ feeding, their keeper kept putting off the day for battle. Flaminius asked him what he thought they should do if the chickens still refused to eat later. The man answered that they should stay put. ‘Wonderful auspices!’ said Flaminius. ‘We can act if the chickens are hungry, but if they’re full we can do nothing!’ He therefore gave the order to uproot the standards and march behind him. But when the standard-bearer for the first company of spearmen tried to move his standard, it would not budge. Even when more men came to help, they made no progress. Flaminius was told of this, and ignored it as usual. Within those three hours his troops were slaughtered, and Flaminius was killed along with them.

Book 1, Chapter 36

⁷⁸ “There is another striking detail added by Coelius. At the very moment of this disastrous battle there were earthquakes in Liguria, Gaul, several islands, and throughout Italy. They were so strong that many towns collapsed. In many places there were landslides, the ground sank, rivers reversed their flow, and the sea poured into riverbeds.

“Experts make reliable predictions by interpreting signs. Ants heaped wheat grains into the mouth of the famous Phrygian Midas as he slept in childhood. He was predicted to become very rich, and he did. When Plato was a little baby asleep in his cradle, bees settled on his lips. The interpretation was that his speech would be uniquely sweet. So his future eloquence was foreseen when he was an infant.

- 79 “And what about Roscius, your darling and favorite? Are we to call him a liar, or accuse everyone in Lanuvium of lying for him? He was being raised in the Lanuvian territory, on the plain of Solonium, and was still in his cradle. One night the nurse awoke. In the light of a nearby lamp she noticed a snake coiled around the sleeping child, and cried out in fright. When his father took the matter to the haruspices, their answer was that the boy would surpass everyone in fame and distinction. Pasiteles worked this scene in silver; our friend Archias put it into verse. What more do we want—to have the immortal gods themselves join us in the forum, the streets, and our homes? They do not present themselves to us in person. But they spread their power far and wide, sometimes lodging it in caves in the earth, sometimes weaving it into human natures. The power of the earth inspired the Pythian priestess at Delphi; the power of her own nature inspired the Sibyl. Don’t we see how varied different lands are? Some places are deadly, like Ampsanctus in Hirpinian territory and the Plutonia in Asia, which we have seen. Some stretches of country cause disease, others promote health. Some produce sharp minds, others dull ones. All this comes from differences in climate and in the vapors that rise from the ground.

Book 1, Chapter 37

- 80 “Often a certain sight, often deep voices and songs, give the mind a powerful push. Often worry and fear do too, as in these lines:
“‘Her heart unsettled, like someone driven mad or stirred
By Bacchus’ rites, she remembers her Teucer among the tombs.’

“That excitement too shows that a divine power exists in our minds. Democritus says no one can be a great poet without frenzy. Plato says the same. Let him call it frenzy, if he likes, as long as it is praised as it is in Plato’s *Phaedrus*. And what about your speeches in court? Can the delivery itself be powerful, weighty, and fluent unless your mind is deeply stirred? I have often seen this in you. And, to turn to a less serious subject, I have seen such fire in the face and movements of your friend Aesopus that some force seemed to have carried him beyond conscious thought.

Book 1, Chapter 38

81 “People are also often confronted with shapes that do not really exist, but appear to them. Brennus and the Gallic army are said to have seen such appearances during his unholy assault on Apollo’s sanctuary at Delphi. They say that the Pythian priestess then declared from the oracle:

“‘The white maidens and I will take care of this.’

“As a result, maidens seemed to take up arms against the Gauls, and their army was buried in snow.

“Aristotle thought that even people who were mad through illness, and were called melancholics, had something prophetic and divine in their minds. But I am inclined to think we should attribute this neither to people with heart disease nor to the delirious. Divination belongs to a healthy mind, not to a sick body.

82 “The Stoics establish that it really exists by the following argument: ‘If there are gods and they do not tell people beforehand what will happen, then either they do not love people, or future events are unknown to them, or in their view people gain nothing by knowing what lies ahead, or they think it beneath their dignity to give people advance warning, or even the gods themselves cannot give these signs. But it is not true that they do not love us: they are generous and friendly to the human race. Nor are they ignorant of events they have them-

selves decided and arranged. Nor does it make no difference to us to know what will happen: knowing will make us more careful. Nor do they think it beneath their dignity: nothing is finer than doing good. Nor are they unable to know the future beforehand.

- 83 “‘So it cannot be that there are gods but they do not give signs of the future. There are gods. Therefore they give signs. And if they give signs, they must give us ways to understand them; otherwise their signs would be pointless. If they give us such ways, divination must exist. So divination exists.’

Book 1, Chapter 39

- 84 “Chrysippus, Diogenes, and Antipater all use this argument. Why, then, should we doubt the absolute truth of what I have argued? Reason supports me, and so do events, peoples, nations, Greeks, non-Greeks, and our own ancestors. This has always been the accepted view. The greatest philosophers support it, as do poets and those very wise men who established governments and founded cities. Or are we waiting for animals to speak? Isn’t the united testimony of humanity enough for us?
- 85 “The only reason offered for denying the kinds of divination I have described is that it seems hard to explain the process and cause behind each of them. How can a *haruspex* explain why a cleft in a lung stops a proceeding and postpones the day, even when the other entrails are favorable? What grounds does an augur have for treating a raven to the right or a crow to the left as making an omen valid? What explanation can an astrologer give for this: a birth under a conjunction of the moon with Jupiter or Venus is favorable, but with Saturn or Mars it is unfavorable? And why should warnings from a god come to us in sleep, while we get none when awake? And why does Cassandra in her frenzy foresee the future, while sensible Priam cannot do the same?

- ⁸⁶ “You ask why each thing happens. A perfectly proper question, but that is not our subject now. The question is whether it happens at all. Suppose I said there is a magnetic stone that draws iron toward itself and attracts it, but could not give the reason why. Would you deny that it happens at all? That is just what you do with divination. Yet we see it ourselves, hear about it, read about it, and have inherited it from our fathers. Before philosophy was made known—a fairly recent discovery—ordinary people had no doubts about it. And after philosophy developed, no philosopher of any standing held a different view.

Book 1, Chapter 40

- ⁸⁷ “I have spoken of Pythagoras, Democritus, and Socrates. Among the early thinkers, Xenophanes was the only exception I made. The Old Academy, along with the Peripatetics and Stoics, also figures in my account. Only Epicurus takes the other side. And isn’t it utterly shameful that he also denies virtue can be pursued without a reward?
“Who could fail to be moved by the distant past, attested and recorded in the most famous accounts? Homer writes that Calchas was by far the best augur and guided the fleets to Troy. I suppose this was through his knowledge of auspices, not geography.
- ⁸⁸ “The Argive kings Amphiloachus and Mopsus also practiced augury. They founded Greek cities on the coast of Cilicia. Even before them there were Amphiaraus and Tiresias, not lowly, obscure men, not like those people in Ennius
“Who stir up invented prophecies for their own profit,’
“but famous, outstanding men. Guided by birds and signs, they foretold the future. Homer says of one of them that even in the underworld ‘he alone has understanding; the others wander like shadows.’ As for Amphiaraus, Greek tradition honored him so highly that he was considered a god, and people sought oracles from the ground where he lay buried.

- ⁸⁹ “And didn’t Priam, king of Asia, have two children who practiced divination: his son Helenus through augury, and his daughter Cassandra through divine excitement and disturbance of the mind? We read that in our ancestors’ day there were brothers called Marcius, men of noble birth, who practiced the same kind. And doesn’t Homer mention that Polyidus of Corinth made many predictions for other people, and foretold his son’s death as the boy was leaving for Troy? In general, among the ancients the same men held political power and understood augury. They thought divination, like wisdom, belonged to a king. Our own state is evidence: our kings were augurs, and later private citizens who held the same priesthood guided the state through the authority of religion.

Book 1, Chapter 41

- ⁹⁰ “Even non-Greek nations have not neglected this method of divination. There are Druids in Gaul. I personally knew one of them, Divitiacus of the Aedui, your guest-friend and admirer. He professed to understand the workings of nature, what the Greeks call *φυσιολογίαν*, and predicted the future partly through augury and partly through interpretation. In Persia too, the Magi practice augury and divination. They meet in a shrine to discuss and compare ideas, just as you yourselves once used to do on the Nones.
- ⁹¹ “No one can become king of Persia without first learning the Magi’s teaching and knowledge. Some families, and even whole nations, visibly devote themselves to this field of knowledge. In the Carian city of Telmessus, the art of the haruspices is especially well developed. Elis in the Peloponnese also has two particular families, the Iamidae and the Clutidae, famous for their outstanding skill in inspecting entrails. In Syria the Chaldeans excel in their knowledge of the stars and the keenness of their minds.

⁹² “Etruria studies lightning strikes with great expertise, and also interprets what each strange occurrence and unnatural sign means. So our ancestors’ senate made a good decision, when our power was at its height. Ten sons of leading families from each Etruscan people were to be handed over for instruction. That would prevent so important an art from being turned, through the poverty of its practitioners, from an authoritative religious practice into a paid, money-making trade. The Phrygians, Pisidians, Cilicians, and the Arab nation pay very close attention to signs from birds. We are told that this was also a regular practice in Umbria.

Book 1, Chapter 42

⁹³ “I think the places where people lived also gave them their opportunities for divination. The Egyptians and Babylonians lived on broad, level plains. Nothing rose above the ground to obstruct their view of the sky, so they devoted all their attention to understanding the stars. The Etruscans were deeply religious and sacrificed animals more eagerly and more often. So they concentrated on understanding entrails. Their thick atmosphere also brought them many occurrences of lightning. For the same reason, many unusual things appeared, some from the sky, others from the earth, and some through the conception and birth of people or livestock. So they became highly experienced interpreters of strange signs. Our ancestors’ carefully chosen names tell us what these signs mean—you often make that point. They are called *ostenta*, *portenta*, *monstra*, and *prodigia* because they display, foreshadow, point out, and predict.

⁹⁴ “The Arabs, Phrygians, and Cilicians live mainly by grazing livestock. As they roam the plains and mountains in winter and summer, they have found it easier to observe birds’ calls and flights. This explains Pisidia’s practice too, and that of our own Umbria. As for Caria, people there have carefully studied unusual

signs; the inhabitants of Telmessus I mentioned earlier have been especially attentive. They live on very rich and fertile land, whose productivity allows many unusual forms to develop and be born.

Book 1, Chapter 43

- 95 “Who cannot see that auspices and the other kinds of divination have had enormous influence in every well-run state? Was there ever a king or a people who did not use divine predictions? They used them not only in peace, but even more in war, when the struggle and the danger to their survival were greater. I will pass over our own people, who do nothing in war without inspecting entrails, and nothing at home without taking auspices. Let us look abroad. Whenever Athens considered public policy, it called in prophetic priests known as μάντις, or seers. In Sparta an augur served as an adviser beside the kings, and an augur also had to attend the public council, which they call the Elders. For any major question, Sparta always consulted Delphi, Ammon, or Dodona for an oracular answer.
- 96 “Lycurgus, who organized the Spartan state, secured the authority of Apollo at Delphi for his laws. When Lysander wanted to change them, the same religious authority stopped him. The Spartan leaders were not satisfied with their efforts while awake. They would stay overnight to dream in the shrine of Pasiphae, outside the city in the surrounding countryside: they regarded oracles received in sleep as truthful.
- 97 “Now I return to our own people. How often the senate ordered the Board of Ten to consult the books! How often, and in what important matters, it obeyed the answers of the haruspices! There were sightings of two suns, three moons, and fiery torches; the sun was seen at night; a roar was heard from the sky; the heavens seemed to split open, with balls of fire visible inside. News also reached the senate that land in Privernum’s territory had collapsed, leaving the

ground sunken to an immense depth, and that enormous earthquakes had rocked Apulia. These signs warned the Roman people of major wars and destructive civil strife. In all these cases the answers of the haruspices agreed with the Sibyl's verses.

- ⁹⁸ “And what about the sweating of Apollo’s statue at Cumae, or Victory’s at Capua? Wasn’t the birth of a child with both sexes a sign of some fated event? What about the river Atratus flowing with blood? What about the frequent showers of stones, the occasional showers of blood or earth, and once even of milk? And what of the Centaur on the Capitol being hit by lightning? Gates and people on the Aventine were hit too, as were Castor and Pollux’s temple at Tusculum and Pietry’s at Rome. Didn’t the haruspices predict what actually happened? And weren’t the same predictions found in the Sibyl’s books?

Book 1, Chapter 44

- ⁹⁹ “Recently, during the Marsic War, the senate restored the temple of Juno Sospita, the Savior because of a dream of Caecilia, daughter of Quintus. Sisenna argued that the dream matched the event word for word in a remarkable way. Then, quite out of keeping with this, he argued that dreams should not be trusted. I suppose some Epicurean had persuaded him. Yet he offers no argument against strange signs. He describes how, at the start of the Marsic War, statues of the gods sweated, blood flowed, the sky split open, and voices from unseen sources announced the dangers of war. At Lanuvium mice gnawed the shields, which the haruspices considered a very grim sign.
- ¹⁰⁰ “Consider also what our annals record about the war against Veii: the water in Lake Alban had risen beyond its usual level. A nobleman from Veii deserted to us and said that, according to prophecies the people of Veii had in writing, Veii could not be captured while that lake overflowed. If the lake were drained so that its waters ran downhill along their course into the sea, it would mean disas-

ter for the Roman people. But if it were drained in such a way that its water could not reach the sea, it would mean safety for our people. That is why our ancestors built that remarkable drainage channel for Lake Alban. Later the people of Veii, worn out by war, sent envoys to the senate. One envoy reportedly said that the deserter had lacked the courage to give the senate the full account. The same written prophecies at Veii also said that Rome would soon be captured by the Gauls. As we know, that happened six years after the capture of Veii.

Book 1, Chapter 45

101 “Fauns are also said to have been heard often in battles, and truthful voices to have come from unseen sources in troubled times. Out of many examples, I will give two very important ones. Not long before Rome was captured, people heard a voice from Vesta’s grove. The grove runs downhill from the Palatine’s base to the New Street. The voice ordered repairs to the walls and gates. Without precautions, Rome would be captured. This warning was ignored when the danger could still have been prevented. After that terrible disaster, amends were made: an altar was dedicated to Aius Loquens, the Speaker opposite that spot. We can still see its enclosure. According to many written accounts, an earthquake was followed by a voice from the citadel’s temple of Juno: it ordered a ritual offering of a pregnant sow to atone for the earthquake. That Juno therefore received the name Moneta, the Warner. Should we dismiss these signs sent by the gods and accepted as such by our ancestors?

102 “The Pythagoreans paid close attention not only to the gods’ voices, but also to human utterances, which they call omens. Our ancestors thought these had force. So before any undertaking they said, ‘May it be good, favorable, happy, and fortunate.’ At public religious ceremonies people were ordered to ‘speak only favorable words.’ When holidays were proclaimed, they were told to ‘keep clear of lawsuits and quarrels.’ When the founder of a colony performed its

purification, or a commander purified his army, or a censor purified the people, men with lucky names were chosen to lead the sacrificial animals. The consuls observe the same rule when enrolling troops: the first soldier enrolled must have a lucky name.

Book 1, Chapter 46

103 “You know how scrupulously you yourself observed these practices, both as consul and as commander. Our ancestors also wanted the vote of the first voting unit to be an omen of a regular election. Here are some familiar cases of words taken as omens. During Lucius Paulus’ second consulship, the war with King Perseus fell to him. On that very day, when he returned home toward evening, he kissed his little daughter Tertia, who was very young then, and saw that she was a little unhappy. He asked, ‘My Tertia, what is wrong? Why so unhappy?’ ‘My father, Persa has died,’ she answered. He hugged the girl more tightly and said, ‘I accept the omen, my daughter.’ A puppy with that name had died.

104 “Lucius Flaccus, who served as priest of Mars, once told this story in my hearing. Caecilia, Metellus’ wife, wanted to arrange a marriage for her sister’s daughter. Following the old custom, she went out to a little shrine to look for an omen. The girl stood while Caecilia sat on a chair. A long time passed without a word being heard. Tired out, the girl asked her aunt to give up her place so she could rest a little in her chair. ‘My girl, of course: my place is yours,’ was her answer. What happened next bore out that omen. Caecilia herself died soon afterward, and the girl married the man Caecilia had been married to. I understand perfectly well that these things can be scorned or even laughed at. But scorning the signs the gods give is the same as denying that there are gods.

Book 1, Chapter 47

105 “Why should I speak about augurs? That is your role. It is you, I say, who ought to speak for the auspices. During your consulship you received a report from Appius Claudius the augur: the augury for the people’s safety had given a doubtful result, and that there would be a grim and turbulent conflict at home. It broke out a few months later, and you put it down in even fewer days. I strongly agree with that augur. He was the only man in many years who kept hold of the discipline of divination, instead of merely chanting the formulas of augury. Your colleagues mocked him, calling him sometimes a Pisidian, sometimes an augur from Sora. They thought augury contained no foreknowledge or understanding of the future. In their wisdom, they said religious practices had been invented to influence the beliefs of the ignorant. That is completely wrong. Neither the shepherds Romulus led nor Romulus himself could have been cunning enough to invent sham religious observances to deceive the crowd. But the difficulty and effort of learning have produced an eloquent defense of neglect. They prefer to declare the auspices worthless instead of doing the work of learning their meaning.

106 “Where could we find a more divine bird sign than the one in your Marius? I would rather use you yourself as my authority:

““Here suddenly the winged attendant of Jupiter, whose thunder sounds on

high,

Rises from a tree trunk, wounded by a snake’s bite,

Herself piercing the snake with her fierce claws.

Half alive, it moves its mottled neck with difficulty.

As it twists about, she tears it and bloodies it with her beak.

Now her anger is satisfied, now her bitter pain avenged.

She drops it as it breathes its last, hurling its torn body into the water,

And turns from the sunset toward the bright sunrise.

Seeing her flying on swift wings and gliding,
Marius, who read the will of heaven,
Recognized happy signs of his own glory and return.
The Father himself thundered from the left side of the sky.
So Jupiter confirmed the eagle's clear omen.'

Book 1, Chapter 48

107 “Romulus’ augury belonged to a shepherd’s world, not a sophisticated city. It was not invented to influence the beliefs of the ignorant. It was received from trustworthy people and handed down to later generations. So Romulus the augur and his brother, also an augur, as Ennius writes,
“Anxious with great concern, and eager

For kingship, both gave their attention to auspices and augury.
On the hill Remus devoted himself to the auspices, and alone
Watched for a favorable bird. But handsome Romulus, high
On the Aventine, looked out, watching the race of high-flying birds.
They competed over whether to call the city Rome or Remora.
Every man was anxious to know which would be ruler.
They waited. Just as, when the consul is about to give the signal,
Everyone eagerly watches the edges of the starting stalls,

108 “To see how soon he will send the chariots out through their painted
openings,

So the people waited, their faces showing fear,
To learn which man’s cause had won the prize of mighty kingship.
Meanwhile the pale sun had sunk into the depths of night.
Then bright light, struck by rays, broke out,
And at once, far on high, a supremely beautiful bird of the finest omen
Flew on the left. At the same time the golden sun rose.
Three times four sacred birds came down from the sky,

And settled in favorable, beautiful places.

Then Romulus saw that he had been given first place,

That the auspices had secured the throne and ground of his kingship.’

Book 1, Chapter 49

109 “But let my argument return to the point from which it wandered. Suppose I could offer no explanation of why any of these things happens, and could only show that the events I have mentioned do happen. Wouldn’t that be enough of an answer to Epicurus or Carneades? And what if there is an easy explanation for artificial foresight, though a somewhat less clear one for divinely inspired foresight? Long years of watching have established what entrails, lightning, unusual events, and stars foretell. In every field, centuries of such observation yield astonishing knowledge. Such knowledge can exist even without any action or impulse from the gods. Repeated observation has shown what follows from each thing and what gives a sign of each event.

110 “The second form, as I explained earlier, is natural divination. A careful discussion of natural philosophy must trace it back to the nature of the gods. As the most learned and wisest thinkers have held, our minds are small portions drawn from that nature. Everything is filled to overflowing with everlasting awareness and divine intelligence. So human minds must be stirred by their kinship with divine minds. But when we are awake, our minds serve life’s needs. Hampered by the body’s bonds, they cut themselves off from their connection with the divine.

111 “In rare cases people draw themselves away from bodily concerns, devoting all their energy and attention to understanding divine matters. Human reasoning, not divine inspiration, accounts for their forecasts. For example, their knowledge of nature lets them foresee floods and the eventual burning of the heavens and the earth. Political experience likewise enables others to predict a tyranny’s

rise far in advance. This is what we are told of Solon of Athens. We can call them prudent—that is, able to see ahead—but certainly not diviners. No more so than Thales of Miletus, who is said to have bought the whole olive crop in Milesian territory before it began to flower. He wanted to refute his critics and show that a philosopher too could make money if it suited him.

Book 1, Chapter 50

112 “He may have known enough to recognize in advance that a rich olive harvest was coming. We are also told that he was the first person to forecast a solar eclipse—the one during Astyages’ reign.

“Doctors foresee many things, and so do ship pilots and farmers. But I call none of this divination. Not even the warning that Anaximander, the natural philosopher, gave the Spartans: an earthquake was near, so they were to abandon both town and homes and keep an armed night watch in the open country. It was then that the whole city fell down, and the far end of Mount Taygetus broke off like a ship’s stern. Pherecydes, Pythagoras’ teacher, likewise belongs more among students of nature than among diviners: he announced an approaching earthquake after inspecting water drawn from a well that never ran dry.

113 “The human mind never practices natural divination unless it is so free and unoccupied that it has absolutely nothing to do with the body. This happens either to inspired prophets or to people asleep. These are the two forms Dicaearchus approves, along with our friend Cratippus, whom I mentioned earlier. If they consider them the highest forms because they arise from nature, by all means let them be the highest, as long as they are not the only ones. But if they think observation has no value, they remove much that keeps life running. Still, since they grant something, and something substantial—prophecies and dreams—we have no reason to fight hard against them, especially when some people reject divination entirely.

114 “So when people’s minds disregard their bodies, fly away, and range outside them, some kind of fire excites and stirs them. They really do see the things they announce in prophecy. Such minds, no longer attached to their bodies, are set on fire by many things. Some respond, for instance, to particular vocal sounds and Phrygian songs. Many are stirred by groves or forests; others by rivers or seas. Their frenzied minds see the future far in advance. These lines are of that kind:

““Oh, look!

Someone will judge a famous contest between three goddesses.

That decision will bring a woman from Sparta, one of the Furies.’

“In the same way, inspired prophets have often predicted many things, not only in ordinary words but also

““In verses which Fauns and prophets sang long ago.’

Book 1, Chapter 51

115 “Marcius and Publicius, too, reportedly gave their prophecies in verse. Apollo’s hidden messages were revealed in this form. I also believe there were certain vapors from the earth that filled people’s minds and made them pour out oracles.

“This is the explanation of inspired prophecy, and the explanation of dreams is not very different. What happens to waking prophets happens to us in sleep. The mind is active in dreams, free of the senses and all the interference of worries, while the body lies almost dead. The mind has lived from all eternity and has associated with countless other minds. So it sees everything in the natural world, provided that moderate food and drink have put it in a state to stay awake while the body sleeps. This is the divination of the dreamer.

116 “Here there arises an important method, not natural but artificial: Antiphon’s interpretation of dreams, and, in the same way, of oracles and inspired prophecies. These have interpreters, just as poets have scholars to explain them. Unless

divine nature had taught us how to reach the veins, its creation of gold, silver, bronze, and iron would have served no purpose. It would have given humanity no benefit from the earth's crops or the fruits of trees unless it had taught us how to grow and store them. Wood would be of no use unless we knew the craft of cutting it up. Every useful gift from the gods likewise comes with a skill that enables people to benefit from it. So interpreters' explanations have been applied to dreams, prophecies, and oracles, since much in them was obscure and much was ambiguous.

- 117 “A serious question remains: how can prophets and people dreaming see things when those things do not yet exist anywhere? If we settle the points that need to be considered first, our present questions will be easier. This whole inquiry depends on the account of the gods' nature, which you explained clearly in your second book. If we establish that, the principle underlying our present discussion will stand: there are gods; their foresight governs the world; and they care for human affairs, not only as a whole, but also in each individual case. If we maintain these principles, which seem to me impossible to overturn, then the gods must give people signs of the future.

Book 1, Chapter 52

- 118 “But the way this happens needs to be distinguished. For the Stoics, a god does not personally attend each separate split in a liver or each call of a bird. That would not be fitting or worthy of gods, and it is quite impossible. Rather, the world was set up from the beginning so that particular signs would come before particular events. They can be found in entrails and in birds, in lightning and in unusual events, in stars, in what sleepers see, and in what people cry out in a frenzy. Those who understand these well are not often wrong. When signs are wrongly explained and interpreted, the failure comes not from the things themselves but from the interpreters' ignorance. Once we have established and accepted that a divine power sustains human life, it is not hard to suggest how

the things we certainly see happening come about. A conscious power spread throughout the whole world can guide the choice of a sacrificial animal. And at the very moment you intend to sacrifice it, the entrails can change so that something is missing or something extra is there. In very brief moments nature adds, changes, or removes many things.

- 119 “What occurred not long before Caesar died gives us the strongest reason not to doubt this. On the day he first took his seat in a golden chair and went out wearing a purple robe, Caesar was offering a sacrifice. Among the entrails of the fat ox there was no heart. Can any creature that has blood, in your view, survive with no heart? This strange event shocked Caesar. Spurinna told him to fear that both his judgment and his life might fail, since both came from the heart. The next day the liver was missing the part called its head. The immortal gods gave him these warnings so that he would see his death coming, not escape it. So if the sacrificial animal’s entrails lack parts it needed in order to live, we must conclude that they vanished just as it was being sacrificed.

Book 1, Chapter 53

- 120 “The same divine mind acts on birds. It makes birds whose flight gives signs fly now here, now there, or hide on one side or another. It makes birds whose calls give signs sing now on the right, now on the left. Every animal moves its body as it wishes—bending forward, sideways, or backward. It bends, twists, stretches, and draws in its limbs wherever it wants, doing so almost before it thinks. How much easier this is for a god, whose will everything obeys!
- 121 “The god also sends signs of the kind recorded so often in history. For example, we find this prediction written down: if a lunar eclipse occurred in Leo just before sunrise, Alexander and the Macedonians would defeat Darius and the Persians in battle; Darius himself would die. The birth of a two-headed girl would mean civil unrest, with corruption and adultery within the home. If a

woman were seen to give birth to a lion, the state where this happened would be defeated by foreign nations. Another case of the same kind is Herodotus' account of Croesus' son, previously unable to speak, finding his voice. This omen meant utter ruin for his father's kingdom and household. Does any history leave out the story of Servius Tullius' head burning as he slept? Someone who goes to sleep with a prepared mind—with good thoughts and with circumstances suited to peace of mind—sees reliable and true things in dreams. In the same way, an innocent, pure mind is better prepared when awake to recognize the truth conveyed by stars, birds, other signs, and entrails.

Book 1, Chapter 54

- 122 “This is surely what we have heard about Socrates, and what he himself often says in his followers' books. There was something divine, which he called his *δαιμόνιον*, his divine sign. He always obeyed it. It never urged him on, but often held him back. Socrates—and what better authority could we want?—was consulted by Xenophon about whether he should follow Cyrus. After explaining his own views, he said, ‘My advice is only human. On matters that are obscure and uncertain, I think Apollo should be consulted.’ The Athenians too always consulted him officially about important matters.
- 123 “It is also recorded that he saw his close friend Crito with a bandage over his eye and asked what was wrong. Crito answered that, as he walked in the countryside, a twig that had been pulled back sprang loose and hit his eye. Socrates then said, ‘You did not obey me when I tried to call you back, using my usual divine foresight.’ This same Socrates was fleeing with Laches after the defeat at Delium, where Laches had been in command. When they reached a three-way junction, he refused to escape along the same road as the rest. When they asked why he would not go their way, he said the god was warning him off. Those

who fled by the other road ran into the enemy cavalry. Antipater has collected a great many remarkable predictions made by Socrates. I will pass them over: you know them, and I have no need to list them.

Book 1, Chapter 55

124 “But there is one splendid and almost divine statement by that philosopher. After the wicked votes that condemned him, he said he faced death with complete peace of mind. Neither when he left home nor when he mounted the platform on which he had defended himself had the god given him any of his usual signs to warn of some approaching evil.

“For my part, I think divination exists even if people who seem to practice it by learned skill or interpretation are often mistaken. People can make mistakes in this field just as in other arts. An ambiguous sign may have been taken as certain. A sign, or another sign contradicting it, may have gone unnoticed. But to prove my argument I only need to find some things foreseen and predicted by divination, whether there are many or only a few.

125 “I would go further without any doubt: suppose even a single event has been foreseen and predicted, then happens just as predicted, with nothing apparently due to chance or accident. That is enough to establish divination, and everybody has to acknowledge it.

“So I think we should follow Posidonius and trace the whole power and explanation of divination first to god, about whom enough has been said; next to fate; and then to nature. Reason leaves us no choice: fate governs every event. What I call fate—the Greeks’ *εἰμαρμένην*—is a chain of causes in a fixed order, with one cause joined to another and giving rise to an effect. Here is an eternal truth, running on from an infinite past. It follows that every past event was already going to happen. In the same way, nothing will happen unless nature contains the causes that will bring that very thing about.

126 “So fate, as understood not by superstition but by natural philosophy, is the everlasting cause of events: why past events happened, present events are happening, and future events will happen. This makes it possible to observe and record what effect generally follows each cause, even if it does not always do so—it is hard to claim that much. And it is likely that these same causes of future events are seen by people who see them either in frenzy or in sleep.

Book 1, Chapter 56

127 “Moreover, everything happens by fate, as will be shown elsewhere. So imagine a mortal able to take in mentally how every cause connects with every other: such a person could miss nothing. Knowing the causes behind what is to come would mean knowing every coming event. Since only a god can do that, what remains for human beings is to read the future from signs indicating what comes next. Future events do not spring up suddenly. Time moves forward like the unwinding of a rope: it brings nothing new into being, but unfolds each thing in its turn. Both those who have the gift of natural divination and those who have observed and recorded the course of events see this. Though they do not see the causes themselves, they see signs and indications of those causes. Applying memory, care, and the records of earlier generations to these signs produces what is called artificial divination: divination from entrails, lightning, strange occurrences, and heavenly signs.

128 “So we should not be surprised that diviners foresee things that do not yet exist anywhere. Everything does exist, but it is distant in time. Seeds contain the power to produce the things that grow from them. In the same way, future events are stored within their causes. A mind excited by frenzy or released in sleep sees that these events will happen, or reason or interpretation foresees them. Knowing how the sun, moon, and other stars rise, set, and move lets people announce far ahead the time of each coming event involving them. In the same way, people who have studied over a long time and recorded the course of

events and how one follows another understand what will happen. They do so always—or, if that is too much to claim, generally; or, if even that is not granted, certainly sometimes. These and some similar arguments for the existence of divination are drawn from fate.

Book 1, Chapter 57

- 129 “Nature supplies another line of argument. It shows how great the mind’s power is when separated from the body’s senses. This happens especially during sleep or in a state of mental excitement. The minds of the gods perceive what each other thinks without eyes, ears, or tongues. That is why people do not doubt that the gods hear them even when they make a wish or vow in silence. In the same way, human minds see things that minds mixed up with the body cannot see, when sleep releases them and frees them from the body, or when mental excitement lets them move freely, stirred into action on their own.
- 130 “It may be difficult to extend this explanation drawn from nature to artificial divination. Posidonius nevertheless investigates that connection to the best of his ability. In his view, the natural world provides signs of coming events. We are told that the people of Ceos carefully watch the rising of the Dog Star every year. As Heraclides of Pontus writes, they use it to judge whether the coming year will be healthy or full of disease. If the star appears rather dim and misty, the air is thick and dense, so that breathing it will be oppressive and cause disease. But if the star appears bright and clear, it means the air is thin and pure, and therefore healthy.
- 131 “Democritus thinks the ancients were wise to establish the practice of inspecting the entrails of sacrificed animals. Their condition and color give signs of health or disease, and sometimes also of whether the fields will be barren or fertile. If observation and experience have recognized that these signs come from

nature, time could have brought many more things to be observed and recorded. So the character whom Pacuvius presents as a natural philosopher in his Chryses seems to have understood very little about nature:

“[...] For those who understand the language of birds

And know more from another creature's liver than from their own—

I think we should hear them, rather than listen to them.’

“Why, I ask? A few lines later you yourself say quite clearly:

“‘Whatever this is, it gives everything life, shape, nourishment, growth, and birth.

It buries everything and takes it back into itself, and is also the father of all.

From it the same things all arise afresh, and to it they return in death.’

“Why, then, if there is one home shared by everything, and human minds have always existed and always will, should those minds be unable to see what follows from each thing, and which signs point to which events? That,” he said, “is all I have to offer on divination.”

Book 1, Chapter 58

132 “Now I will state this plainly. I do not accept people who cast lots or those who prophesy for money, or even the ceremonies for calling up the dead that your friend Appius used to practice. In short, to me a Marsian augur is worth nothing; neither are village haruspices, the Circus astrologers, Isis’ interpreters of signs, or people who interpret dreams. These people are not diviners through knowledge or skill,

“‘But superstitious prophets and shameless fortune-tellers,

Either lazy or mad or driven by poverty,

Who do not know their own path but show another person the way.

They promise people riches, then ask those same people for a drachma.

Let them take their drachma from those riches and give back the rest.’

“That is Ennius. A few lines before this, he acknowledges the gods’ existence while denying that humanity’s actions concern them. But I think they do care, and also warn us and predict many things. I support divination once frivolity, falsehood, and fraud have been excluded.” Quintus stopped there, and I replied, “You have certainly prepared your case well [...]”

Book 2, Chapter 1

- ¹ I spent a long time asking myself and thinking hard about how I could help as many people as possible, so that I would never stop serving the state. No greater service came to mind than to show my fellow citizens the paths to the best fields of learning. I think I have already done that in quite a few books. In the book called *Hortensius*, I urged people to study philosophy as forcefully as I could. In the four books of the *Academics*, I showed which way of doing philosophy I thought made the fewest claims for itself and was the most consistent and refined.
- ² The foundation of philosophy lies in the ultimate ends of good and evil. I examined that subject fully in five books, so readers could understand what each philosopher said and what arguments were made against each one. Five more books followed, the *Tusculan Disputations*. They explained the things most essential to a happy life. The first deals with disregarding death, the second with enduring pain, the third with easing grief, and the fourth with the other disturbances of the mind. The fifth covers the subject that sheds the most light on all philosophy. It teaches that goodness is enough, by itself, to make life happy.
- ³ Once those works were out, my next completed work was *On the Nature of the Gods*, in three books. They contain the whole discussion of that subject. To make that discussion full and complete, I began writing these books on divination. If I add a work on fate, as I intend, I will have done more than enough to

cover this entire question. These works should also include my six books *On the Republic*, written when I held the state's steering wheel. This is a great subject, properly belonging to philosophy. Plato, Aristotle, Theophrastus, and the whole Peripatetic school have treated it at great length. And what should I say about my *Consolation*? It certainly gives me some relief, and I think it will do others a great deal of good too. Recently I also fitted in the book *On Old Age* that I sent to our friend Atticus. Above all, since philosophy makes a man good and brave, my *Cato* belongs among these books.

Book 2, Chapter 2

- ⁴ Aristotle and Theophrastus, men outstanding for both their precise thought and their rich expression, joined rules for speaking to philosophy. So my books about speaking seem to belong in this same group. That gives us the three books *On the Orator*, a fourth, *Brutus*, and a fifth, *The Orator*.

That was what I had done so far. I was pressing eagerly on with the rest. I was ready, unless some more serious cause stopped me, to leave no area of philosophy without a clear treatment in Latin literature. What greater or better gift can I offer the state than to teach and educate the young? Especially with today's behavior and in these times, when young people have gone so far astray that everyone must use all their resources to check and restrain them.

- ⁵ I do not expect to achieve something we should not even ask for: that all young people turn to these studies. If only a few would! Their work could still have a far-reaching effect in public life. I also find a reward for my work in the older people who take comfort in my books. Their eagerness to read makes me more eager to write every day. I have found that there are more of them than I thought. Another great achievement, and a source of honor for Romans, would be to make them independent of Greek books on philosophy.

⁶ I will certainly achieve that if I finish what I have begun. It was our country's terrible misfortune that gave me a reason to explain philosophy. During the civil war, I could neither defend the state in my usual way nor remain idle. And I could find no other activity that better suited my standing. So my fellow citizens will forgive me—or rather thank me. When the state was under one man's control, I did not hide myself away, abandon myself, or give way to despair. I did not act as though I were angry with the man or with the times. Nor did I flatter or admire another man's good fortune so much that I regretted my own. I had learned this very lesson from Plato and philosophy: states go through certain natural changes, so that sometimes leading men control them, sometimes the people, and sometimes a single man.

⁷ When that happened to our state, and I had lost my former duties, I began these studies again. I hoped that this, more than anything else, would ease my troubles, and that I could help my fellow citizens in whatever way I could. My books served as my speeches in the senate and at public meetings. I thought philosophy had taken the place of managing public affairs for me. Now that people have begun to consult me about the state again, I must devote my efforts to it—or rather put all my thought and care into it. Only the time left free from public duties and responsibilities should go to this study. But I will say more about that another time. Let us now return to the discussion we began.

Book 2, Chapter 3

⁸ My brother Quintus had finished the discussion of divination recorded in the previous book. After what seemed a sufficient walk, we took seats in the Lyceum's library. I then said, "Quintus, you have defended the Stoic position carefully, and in true Stoic style. What pleases me most is that you have used so many examples from our own history, and famous, striking examples at that. Now I must answer what you have said. But I will assert nothing and question

everything, often uncertain and doubtful of my own judgment. If I had anything certain to say, I would be practicing divination myself, though I deny that divination exists.

- 9 “What troubles me is a question Carneades used to press above all: what things does divination deal with? Things we perceive through our senses? Yet sight, hearing, taste, smell, and touch already tell us about those things. Is there anything in this field that we perceive through foresight or mental excitement rather than through our natural senses? Could some supposed diviner, if he were blind like Tiresias, tell us what was white and what was black? Or, if he were deaf, could he recognize different voices or musical tunes? So divination has no use in anything we learn through our senses. Nor do we need it in things dealt with by trained skills. We normally bring doctors to the sick, not prophets or fortune-tellers. A musician, not a *haruspex*, teaches anyone wishing to play the pipes or a stringed instrument how to use it.

Book 2, Chapter 4

- 10 “The same applies to literature and other subjects that require study. Do you think the people said to practice divination can answer whether the sun is bigger than the earth or only as big as it looks? Whether the moon has its own light or uses the sun’s? How the sun and moon move? How the five stars called wandering stars move? These supposed diviners do not claim they can answer these questions, or say which propositions in geometry are true and which are false. These are matters for mathematicians, not fortune-tellers.
- “And what about the subjects philosophy deals with? Does any diviner normally give answers, or get consulted, about what is good, what is bad, and what is neither? These subjects belong to philosophers.

- ¹¹ “Does anyone consult a haruspex about duty: how to behave toward parents, brothers, or friends? How to use money, public office, or power? People normally take these questions to wise men, not diviners. And can anyone use divination on any subject studied by logicians or students of nature? Whether there is one universe or more than one, and what the basic elements are from which everything comes—knowledge of these things belongs to students of nature. How to solve the liar argument, which the Greeks call *pseudomenon*, or how to resist the sorites argument—these too will be explained by logicians, not diviners. We could call the sorites a ‘heap argument’ in Latin if we had to, but there is no need. Like ‘philosophy’ itself and many other Greek words, ‘sorites’ is familiar enough in Latin. And when the question is what form of government is best, or which laws and customs help and which harm, will we send for haruspices from Etruria? Or will leading men and chosen experts in public affairs decide?

Book 2, Chapter 5

- ¹² “If divination does not deal with things we sense, things covered by trained skills, things discussed in philosophy, or things involved in public affairs, I simply cannot understand what it does deal with. It must either cover everything or be given some subject of its own. But reasoning has shown that it does not cover everything. And no field or subject can be found to put under its control. So consider whether there may be no such thing as divination. A familiar Greek verse makes this point:
- “The one who guesses well is the best prophet, I say.”
- “Will a prophet guess an approaching storm better than a ship’s pilot? Will he make a sharper judgment about the nature of an illness than a doctor? Will he work out how to run a war more wisely than a general?

- 13 “Quintus, I did see the care you took to exclude two things from divination: judgments made with skill and knowledge, and matters grasped by sense or practical technique. You defined it this way: divination is the prediction and foreknowledge of things that happen by chance. First of all, that takes you back to the same point. A doctor, a pilot, and a general also foresee things that happen by chance. Can a haruspex, augur, prophet, or dreamer judge a sick person’s chances of recovery better than a doctor can? Can any of them judge a ship’s escape from danger better than its pilot, or an army’s escape from ambush better than its general?
- 14 “You even said it was not the diviner’s business to foresee approaching winds or rain from certain signs. In that connection you recited from memory some of my translation of Aratus. Yet these things too depend on chance: they usually happen, but not always. Then tell me what you mean by divination, this advance awareness of chance events. What does it cover? You think things that can be foreseen through skill, reasoning, experience, or inference should be credited to experts, not diviners. That leaves only chance events which no skill or wisdom can foresee as things that can be divined. For example, if someone had said many years ahead that the Marcus Marcellus who was consul three times would die in a shipwreck, he would certainly have practiced divination. No other skill or wisdom could have told him that. So divination is foreknowledge of events like these, which depend on chance.

Book 2, Chapter 6

- 15 “Can there be any foreknowledge of things that have no reason why they will happen? What else do we mean by chance, luck, accident, or happenstance, except that something has happened in a way in which it might have happened differently? How can anyone foresee and predict what happens at random through blind accident and shifting luck?

¹⁶ “A doctor uses reasoning to foresee an illness getting worse, a general to foresee an ambush, and a pilot to foresee storms. Yet even these people, who base every judgment on solid reasoning, often make mistakes. A farmer sees an olive tree in flower and expects to see olives on it too. He has a reason for thinking so, but sometimes he is wrong. If people who never speak without some reasonable inference and argument make mistakes, what should we think of the guesses of people who foresee the future through internal organs, birds, portents, oracles, or dreams? I am not yet discussing how worthless these signs are: a split in a liver, a raven’s cry, an eagle’s flight, a shooting star, the cries of people in a frenzy, lots, and dreams. I will discuss each in its place. For now I am discussing them all together.

¹⁷ “How can anyone foresee an event when it has no cause or sign to show why it will happen? People who calculate the movements of the stars predict eclipses of the sun and moon many years ahead. They predict things that nature is bound to bring about. From the moon’s completely regular movement they see when it will face the sun and enter the earth’s shadow, the cone of night, so that it must go dark. They see when that same moon will pass below and in front of the sun and hide its light from our eyes. They see which constellation each wandering star will occupy at any given time, and on which day a constellation will rise or set. You see the reasoning used by people who predict these things.

Book 2, Chapter 7

¹⁸ “What reasoning do people follow when they say that treasure will be found or an inheritance will arrive? What part of the natural world contains that future event? If these and similar things are governed by that kind of necessity, what is left that we can think of as happening by accident or sheer chance? Nothing is more opposed to reason and regularity than chance. So I think not even a god

can know what will happen accidentally and by chance. If he knows, the event is certain to happen. If it is certain to happen, there is no chance. But chance exists. So there is no foreknowledge of chance events.

- 19 “Or if you deny that chance exists, and say that everything that happens or will happen has been fixed by fate from all eternity, change your definition of divination. You said it was foreknowledge of chance events. If nothing can take place, occur, or happen unless it has been certain from all eternity to happen at a fixed time, how can there be chance? Once chance is removed, what room is there for divination, which you called foreknowledge of chance events? Yet you did say that everything that happens or will happen is governed by fate. The very word ‘fate’ belongs to old women’s tales and is full of superstition. Even so, this fate is a subject the Stoics discuss at length. I will discuss that another time. For now I will say what is needed.

Book 2, Chapter 8

- 20 “What benefit can I get from divination if fate determines everything? Whatever the diviner predicts really will happen. That leaves me unable to understand even our close friend Deiotarus’ case: an eagle’s warning made him turn around on a journey. Continuing would have meant sleeping in the very room that collapsed the following night. So he would have been crushed in the wreckage. Fate would have made escape impossible if it had marked him out for that end. If it had not, that disaster could not have befallen him. How, then, does divination help? Why should lots, internal organs, or any prediction give me a warning? If it was fated that the Roman people’s two fleets should be lost in the First Punic War, one in a shipwreck and the other sunk by the Carthaginians, they would still have been lost even if the chickens had given the full favorable sign by dropping food from their beaks in the consulship of

Lucius Junius and Publius Claudius. But if obeying the auspices would have saved the fleets, fate did not destroy them. You, however, hold fate responsible for every event. So there is no divination.

- 21 “If it was fated that the Roman people’s army should be destroyed at Lake Trasimene in the Second Punic War, would Flaminius, the consul, have prevented this by respecting the signs and auspices that told him not to fight? He certainly could have. So either the army was not destroyed by fate, or, if it was—and that is certainly what you must say—obedience to the auspices would still have led to just that outcome. No one can alter what fate has fixed. What is left of the Stoics’ divination, then? When fate controls every event, divination can give us no warning that helps us act more cautiously. No matter what course we take, the destined outcome will come about. But if the outcome can be changed, there is no fate. And then there is no divination either, since divination concerns future events. Nothing is certain to happen if some ritual action can prevent it from happening.

Book 2, Chapter 9

- 22 “Nor am I convinced that knowing what lies ahead does us any good. What kind of life would Priam have had if he had known from his youth what would happen to him in old age? Let us leave the myths and look at events nearer to us. In my *Consolation* I collected accounts of the terrible deaths of our country’s most famous men. Well then, to leave aside the earlier ones, do you think it would have helped Marcus Crassus, when he was at the height of his wealth and power, to know that his son Publius would be killed, his army destroyed, and he himself would die beyond the Euphrates in disgrace and dishonor? Or do you think Gnaeus Pompey would have enjoyed his three consulships, his three triumphs, and the fame of his great achievements, if he had known that

after losing his army he would be butchered in an Egyptian wilderness? And would he have enjoyed them knowing that what came after his death would be too painful for us to describe without crying?

23 “And what of Caesar? Suppose he had known in advance that leading citizens would murder him—some of them men he had given every kind of honor. This would happen in the senate he had mostly appointed himself, in Pompey’s senate house, in front of Pompey’s own statue, as so many of Caesar’s centurions watched. Suppose he had known that he would lie there and not one of his friends, not even one of his slaves, would come near his body. What agony of mind would he have lived in? Surely, then, not knowing future troubles is better than knowing them.

24 “For no one, especially no Stoic, can possibly say, ‘Pompey would have stayed out of the fighting; Crassus would have stopped short of crossing the Euphrates; Caesar would never have started the civil war.’ In that case their deaths were not fated. But you insist that everything happens by fate. So foreseeing the future would have done them no good. They would even have lost all enjoyment of their earlier lives. What could have made them happy while they thought about their deaths? Whichever way the Stoics turn, all their cleverness must come to nothing. If a future event can turn out one way or another, chance has enormous power. And chance events cannot be certain. But if it is certain what will happen in every matter at every time, how can haruspices help me? After they say that the most terrible things are foretold,

Book 2, Chapter 10

25 “they add at the end that everything will turn out less badly if the proper religious rites are performed. But if nothing happens outside fate, no religious rite can make anything less bad. Homer understands this when he has Jupiter com-

plain that he cannot save his son Sarpedon from death against fate. The same point is made in a Greek verse that means:

“What is destined to happen overpowers even highest Jupiter.’

“I think an Atellan farce verse was also quite right to make fun of the whole idea of fate. But such serious matters are no place for joking. So let us finish the argument. If no chance event can be foreseen, because chance events cannot be certain, there is no divination. Alternatively, suppose we can foresee events precisely because fate has made them certain. That still leaves no divination. You said it concerned chance events.

Book 2, Chapter 11

²⁶ “Let that be the first skirmish of my argument, like an attack by light-armed troops. Now we must move in for hand-to-hand fighting and try to unsettle the flanks of your argument.

“You said there were two kinds of divination, one artificial and the other natural. Artificial divination depends partly on inference and partly on long observation. Natural divination is something the mind seizes or receives from outside, from the divine source from which all our minds have been drawn, received, or poured out. You put roughly these practices under artificial divination: reading internal organs; making predictions from lightning and portents; then the work of augurs and of people who use signs or omens. You put practically every kind of divination based on inference into this category.

²⁷ “The natural kind, you thought, was either produced and, as it were, poured out through mental excitement, or involved the mind foreseeing things in sleep, when it is free from the senses and cares. You traced all divination to three sources: god, fate, and nature. Yet you could explain nothing, and fought your case with an astonishing supply of made-up examples. Here is the first thing I want to say about that. I do not think a philosopher should use witnesses

whose statements might be true by chance or false and invented through dishonesty. He should show why each thing is so by arguments and reasoning, not by stories of events—especially stories I am free to disbelieve.

Book 2, Chapter 12

- 28 “Let me begin with the practice of the haruspices. I think we should maintain it for the sake of the state and our common religion. But we are alone. We can search for the truth without causing offense, especially since I doubt most things. Let us look first at internal organs, if you agree. Can anyone be persuaded that the haruspices learned through long observation what these organs are said to signify? How long did that observation last? Across how many years could they have watched? How did they work together to establish which part stood for the enemy and which for themselves, or which split warned of danger and which promised a benefit? Did Etruscan, Elean, Egyptian, and Carthaginian haruspices compare their results? Not only could that not have happened; it cannot even be imagined. We see different peoples interpret internal organs differently. There is no single system shared by all.
- 29 “If these organs really can disclose future events, there are only two possibilities: nature is linked to that power, or the gods’ will and divine force somehow give it its shape. What can such a vast and splendid natural world, extending through every region and movement, have in common with a chicken’s gallbladder? Some people even say these organs give the clearest signs. But never mind a chicken: what natural quality does a fat bull’s liver, heart, or lung have that could reveal what will happen?

Book 2, Chapter 13

30 “Democritus, though, talks nonsense with some skill, as a student of nature would. No class of people makes greater claims for itself:

“No one looks at what is at their feet; they search the reaches of the sky.’

“Still, he thinks the condition and color of internal organs reveal only these things: the kind of pasture, and whether the earth’s produce is plentiful or scarce. He also thinks internal organs indicate healthy conditions or disease. What a happy man! I am sure he never ran out of amusement. Could he have enjoyed such nonsense so much that he failed to see the problem? His idea would be plausible only if the internal organs of all livestock changed to the same condition and color at the same time. But if, at the very same hour, one animal has a smooth, full liver and another a rough, shrunken one, what can the condition and color of their organs reveal?

31 “Does this belong with your account of Pherecydes? He saw water drawn from a well and said there would be an earthquake. It is not bold enough, I suppose, that they dare to explain what force caused an earthquake after it has happened. Must they even foresee a future one from the color of spring water? Many things like that are said in the schools. But consider whether you really have to believe them all.

32 “Still, let us grant that Democritus’ claims are true. When do we ask internal organs about these things? When have we ever heard anything of this kind from a haruspex who has inspected them? They warn of dangers from water or fire. They announce inheritances or losses. They discuss the split belonging to oneself and the one concerning life. They examine the head of the liver very carefully from every side. If it is missing, they think nothing worse could have happened.

Book 2, Chapter 14

³³ “As I showed above, these things certainly could not have been learned by observation. So they are inventions of a technique, not the product of long experience—if there can be a technique for things we know nothing about. But what connection do they have with the natural world? Suppose nature is joined in one continuous, harmonious whole. I see that students of nature have held this view, especially those who said that everything that exists is one. Even so, what connection can the universe have with finding treasure? If internal organs show that my money will increase, and that happens by nature, then first the organs are connected with the universe, and second my profit is contained in the natural order. Aren’t students of nature ashamed to say such things? Let us grant that there is some connection between things in nature. I admit that there is. The Stoics collect many examples. They say the little livers of mice grow at the winter solstice; dried pennyroyal flowers on the very day of the winter solstice; inflated bladders burst; and seeds enclosed in the centers of apples turn in opposite directions. Again, when some strings on an instrument are struck, other strings sound in response. Oysters and all shellfish grow and shrink along with the moon. And winter, when the moon is waning too, is thought the right time to cut trees, because they are then dry.

Book 2, Chapter 15

³⁴ “Why should I say more about sea channels or tides, whose rise and fall are governed by the moon’s movement? Six hundred things of the same kind could be brought forward to show the natural connection between things far apart. Let us grant all this. Nothing in that concession counts against the argument we are making. But does a split of a certain kind in a liver also indicate profit?

Through what natural connection, through what harmony and agreement—the Greeks call it *sympatheia*—can a split in a liver fit with my little profit? Or my small gain with the sky, the earth, and the natural world? I will grant even this if you like, though I will have badly damaged my case by admitting any natural agreement with internal organs.

- 35 “But even after that is granted, how does someone seeking favorable signs happen to sacrifice an animal that fits his situation? This was the problem I thought could not be solved. But how neatly it is solved! I feel ashamed, not of you—I even admire your memory—but of Chrysippus, Antipater, and Posidonius. In their account, which you repeated, the choice of sacrificial animal is directed by a conscious, divine force that pervades the universe. Even better is something else you used and they say too: when someone is about to sacrifice, the internal organs change, so that something is missing or there is something extra. Everything obeys the will of the gods.

Book 2, Chapter 16

- 36 “Believe me, not even old women think that. Do you think that if one person chooses a particular calf, he will find its liver without a head, but if someone else chooses the very same calf, he will find it with a head? Can the head vanish or appear in an instant, so that the organs adjust to the fortunes of the person making the sacrifice? Can’t you see that choosing sacrificial animals is a kind of gamble, especially when the facts themselves show it? When the dreadful organs have no head, which is thought the worst possible sign, the very next victim often gives wonderfully favorable signs. Where, then, are the threats from the first set of organs? What has suddenly made the gods so thoroughly pleased?
- “But you say that when Caesar sacrificed a fat bull, there was no heart among its organs. You reason that the heart must have disappeared during the killing, because the animal being sacrificed could not have stayed alive without one.

37 “How can you understand one point, that an ox could not live without a heart, and fail to see the other, that its heart could not suddenly fly off somewhere? I may not know how important the heart is to life. Or perhaps disease had so shrunk the ox’s heart that it was thin, very small, and withered, no longer looking like a heart at all. But what grounds do you have for thinking that if the fat bull had a heart a little earlier, it suddenly vanished during the sacrifice itself? Or did it lose its heart because it saw that brainless Caesar in purple robes, a man with no heart himself? Believe me, you are betraying the city of philosophy while defending its outlying forts. In trying to prove the practice of haruspices true, you turn the whole study of nature upside down. There is a head on the liver, a heart among the organs. Now it will disappear as soon as you sprinkle on the sacrificial meal and wine. Who will make it disappear? A god, by pulling it out; or some force, by destroying or eating it. So nature will not govern the birth and death of everything. Something will either come from nothing or suddenly vanish into nothing. What student of nature ever said that? Haruspices say it. Do you think we should believe them rather than students of nature?

Book 2, Chapter 17

38 “And when sacrifices are offered to several gods, how does it happen that the signs are favorable for some and not for others? How can the gods be so inconsistent that they threaten us through the first organs and promise good things through the second? Or how can there be such disagreement among them, often even among close relatives, that the organs offered to Apollo are good and those offered to Diana are not? What could be clearer? The victims are brought up by chance, and the organs each person gets depend on the animal that happens to fall to him. ‘But there is something divine in which victim falls to each

person, just as in which lot each person draws.’ We will discuss lots shortly. Though in fact, comparing victims to lots does not strengthen your case for victims. Comparing lots to victims weakens your case for lots.

- 39 “Suppose we send to the Aequimaesium for a lamb to sacrifice. Are we really brought an animal with organs suited to my circumstances? Does a god guide the slave to that particular lamb, rather than chance taking him there? If you say that chance in this case too is like a drawing of lots connected with the gods’ will, I am sorry our Stoic friends have given the Epicureans such a good opportunity to laugh at them. You know how they ridicule these things.
- 40 “And they can do it more easily. Epicurus introduced the gods themselves as a joke: transparent, with the wind blowing through them, living between two worlds as if between two groves, for fear the worlds might collapse. He thinks they have the same limbs as we do, but no use for those limbs. So this man, who does away with the gods in a roundabout way, is right not to hesitate about doing away with divination. But the Stoics are not as consistent as he is. His god, who has no business of his own or anyone else’s, cannot give people divination. Your god, however, could go on running the universe and looking after people even without giving them divination.
- 41 “Why, then, do you trap yourselves in arguments you can never escape? When they are in more of a hurry, they usually reason like this: ‘If gods exist, divination exists. But gods exist. Therefore divination exists.’ Much more plausible is: ‘But divination does not exist. Therefore gods do not exist.’ See how recklessly they risk this result: if there is no divination, there are no gods. For divination can clearly be disproved, while belief in the gods’ existence must be kept.

Book 2, Chapter 18

⁴² “Once this divination by reading organs is removed, the whole practice of the haruspices is removed. Portents and lightning come next. Long observation is supposed to count in the case of lightning; reasoning and inference are generally used for portents. What have people actually learned from watching lightning? It was the Etruscans who marked out sixteen regions in the sky. That was easy enough: double our four divisions, then do it again, so they could say which part a thunderbolt had come from. First, what difference does that make? Second, what does it signify? Isn’t it obvious how the belief began? People were amazed at first, and terrified by the thunder and the thunderbolts striking. They thought Jupiter, who rules over everything, was causing them. So our records contain this rule: ‘When Jupiter thunders or sends lightning, it is a religious offense to hold assemblies of the people.’

Book 2, Chapter 19

⁴³ “Perhaps this rule was established for political reasons. They wanted grounds for not holding assemblies. So a thunderbolt invalidates an assembly, but nothing else. In all other matters, a bolt on the left counts for us as the most favorable sign of all. But I will discuss auspices elsewhere. Now I am discussing lightning.

“What could be less appropriate for students of nature than to say that uncertain things indicate anything certain? I do not think you are someone who believes the Cyclopes made Jupiter’s thunderbolt in Etna.

⁴⁴ “With just one thunderbolt, how could Jupiter throw it so many times? Nor would thunderbolts really be his way of telling people what actions to take or what dangers to watch for. On the Stoic account, wind is cold vapor from the

earth that has begun to move. When they enter a cloud and begin to split and tear apart its thinnest parts, and do so more often and more violently, flashes and thunder result. But if heat squeezed out by the collision of clouds shoots out, that is a thunderbolt. We see this happen through natural forces, with no regularity and at no fixed time. Do we look to it for signs of what will follow? Of course, if Jupiter were using it to give signs, he would send out so many thunderbolts to no purpose!

Book 2, Chapter 20

⁴⁵ “What does he achieve by throwing a thunderbolt into the middle of the sea? Or onto the highest mountains, as he very often does? Or into empty wildernesses? Or onto the coasts of peoples who do not even watch for these signs?

“But the head was found in the Tiber.’ As if I were denying that these men have any skilled method! I reject the claim to predict the future. By dividing up the sky as I described and keeping records of particular facts, they can establish a thunderbolt’s starting point and destination. But no reasoning teaches what it means. You press me with my own verses:

“For the Father whose thunder sounds above, supported by star-filled
Olympus,

Once took aim himself at his own hills and temples
And hurled fire onto the buildings of the Capitol.’

“Then a thunderbolt struck with such force that down fell Natta’s statue, the gods’ images, and Romulus and Remus together with their animal nurse. And the haruspices’ predictions about these events proved completely true.

⁴⁶ “But the amazing thing is that the installation of Jupiter’s statue on the Capitol coincided exactly with the disclosure of the conspiracy to the senate; the contract had been awarded two years earlier. Can you really bring yourself—this is how you argued with me—‘to defend a case that goes against your own actions and writings?’ You are my brother, and that makes me hesitate.

But what is working against you here? The facts, which are what they are? Or me, because I want the truth explained? So I am not contradicting you. I am asking you for a reasoned account of the whole practice of the haruspices. But you have found an extraordinary hiding place. You knew you would be pressed hard when I asked you for the causes of each kind of divination. So you spoke at length about not asking for reasons and causes when you saw the facts: what happened mattered, not why it happened. As if I either agreed that it happened, or it were a philosopher's business not to ask the cause

Book 2, Chapter 21

⁴⁷ “of each event! On that point you recited my Weather Signs and mentioned kinds of plants, scammony and birthwort root. You said you did not know their causes but could see their power and effect. The cases are completely different. The weather signs have had their causes studied by the Stoic Boethus—you mentioned him—and also by our friend Posidonius. Even without discovering their causes, people could have watched and recorded those events. Where is the ancient record of observations to explain lightning hitting Natta's statue or the bronze tablets carrying the laws? ‘The Pinarii Nattae are nobles. So danger comes from the nobility.’ How cleverly Jupiter thought that out! ‘The infant Romulus was struck by lightning. So danger threatens the city he founded.’ How expertly Jupiter uses signs to inform us! ‘But Jupiter's statue was being set up at the same moment the conspiracy was being reported.’ And you would rather think, of course, that the gods' will did this, rather than chance. The contractor who had contracted with Cotta and Torquatus to make that column was not delayed by laziness or lack of money. The immortal gods kept him waiting for that very hour.

⁴⁸ “I do not entirely rule out the truth of these claims. But I do not know, and I want to learn from you. When I thought some things happened by chance just as diviners had predicted, you said a great deal about chance. You said that a

Venus throw could occur by chance when four knucklebones were thrown, but that with four hundred knucklebones, chance could not produce a hundred Venus throws. To begin with, why should that be impossible? I cannot see, but I will not argue. You have plenty of comparisons: splashes of paint, a pig's snout, and very many others. You also say Carneades made up his story about the little Pan's head. As if that could not have happened by chance, and as if even heads worthy of Praxiteles must not exist inside every block of marble! Those heads themselves are made by taking material away. Praxiteles adds nothing to the block. But when a great deal has been removed and the lines of a face have been reached, you realize that the finished piece was inside all along.

Book 2, Chapter 22

⁴⁹ “So something like that could have appeared all by itself in the quarries of Chios. But suppose the story is made up. Surely you have seen clouds shaped like lions or centaurs? So chance can imitate reality, something you were just denying.

“We have discussed internal organs and lightning enough. Portents remain, if we are to cover the whole practice of the haruspices. You brought up a mule giving birth. It is amazing because it does not happen often. But if it could not have happened, it would not have happened. Let that apply to all portents: nothing has ever happened that could not happen. If it could happen, it is no cause for amazement. When something new occurs, not knowing its cause makes us wonder. If we are equally ignorant about familiar things, we do not wonder. Someone who marvels at a mule's giving birth is ignorant of how birth works in mares, or, for that matter, of nature's way of producing young in any animal. But what he sees often does not amaze him, even if he does not know why it happens. If something he has not seen before occurs, he thinks it is a portent. So is it a portent when the mule conceives or when she gives birth?

Book 2, Chapter 23

50 “Conception may be against nature, but birth is almost inevitable.

“Enough talk: where did the haruspices’ practice begin? By examining that, we can most easily decide how much weight it deserves. They say that while land near Tarquinii was being plowed and a furrow had been cut deeper than usual, a certain Tages suddenly appeared and spoke to the plowman. According to the Etruscans’ books, this Tages looked like a child but had an old man’s wisdom. The ox driver was stunned at the sight and gave a loud cry of amazement. People came running, and before long all Etruria gathered at that spot. Then Tages spoke at length, with many people listening. They took down all his words and put them into writing. His whole speech contained the system of the haruspices. Later this system grew as new facts were learned and brought under the same original principles. This is what we have learned from the Etruscans themselves. They preserve it in writing. This is the source of their teaching.

Book 2, Chapter 24

51 “Must we call on Carneades to disprove such claims? Must we call on Epicurus? Who could be stupid enough to believe a plow dug up a being—whether god or human? If a god, why had he hidden himself in the earth against nature, to see the light when a plow uncovered him? Couldn’t the same god have taught people this system from somewhere above? But suppose Tages was human. How did he survive with earth piled over him? Where did his own knowledge come from, before he passed it on? But I am more foolish than the people who believe these things, since I spend so long arguing against them.

“Cato’s old remark is very clever. He said he was surprised that one haruspex did not laugh when he saw another.

52 “For how many of their predictions ever come true? And if something does happen, what reason can be given why it did not happen by chance? Hannibal, then living in exile at King Prusias’ court, wanted to fight a decisive battle. Prusias said he did not dare, because the internal organs forbade it. ‘Really?’ Hannibal said. ‘Would you rather trust a bit of calf’s flesh than an experienced general?’ And when a leading haruspex warned Caesar himself not to cross to Africa before the winter solstice, didn’t he cross anyway? Without that crossing, the enemy would have concentrated all their troops at one spot. What need is there to go through the haruspices’ forecasts—I could give countless examples—that either never came true or turned out the other way?

53 “Immortal gods! Think how often they made fools of us during this civil war! What predictions of haruspices were sent to us in Greece from Rome! What things they told Pompey! He was very much influenced by internal organs and portents. I do not care to recall them. Nor is it necessary: you in particular were present. You can see, though, that the outcome contradicted their predictions in almost every case. But enough of this. Now let us turn to portents.

Book 2, Chapter 25

54 “You recited many things from my own account of my consulship. You cited Sisenna’s many reports from the time before the Marsic War, as well as Callisthenes’ many accounts from before the Spartans’ defeat on the battlefield at Leuctra. I will discuss individual examples as far as seems worthwhile, but we must also discuss them as a whole. What is this supposed message from the gods, this warning, as it were, of disasters? What do the immortal gods mean by giving signs, first, that we cannot understand without interpreters, and second, that concern events we have no way of avoiding? Not even an honest person

would foretell disaster to friends who could do nothing to escape it. Doctors, for example, often know, but never tell their patients that they will die of their illness. A prediction of harm is welcome only when the prediction comes with a way to guard against it.

Book 2, Chapter 26

- 55 “How did portents or their interpreters help the Spartans long ago, or our people recently? Why such obscurity, if we must take these as divine signs? If the gods intended us to know the outcome, a clear statement was needed. If they meant to keep us ignorant, even a veiled disclosure was out of place. “Besides, all the inference that divination relies on is often pulled by people’s imaginations in many different, even opposite directions. In court cases, the prosecutor draws one inference and the defense another, yet both are believable. In the same way, two sides can be argued in all matters that seem to call for investigation by inference. Sometimes nature produces events, sometimes chance; sometimes resemblance even creates a mistaken impression. How foolish to stop searching for causes and attribute such events to the gods!
- 56 “Do you trust the prophets of Boeotia who, at Lebadea, took the roosters’ cries to mean victory for Thebes? Defeated roosters, they said, are usually silent, while victorious ones crow. Was Jupiter giving a sign to such a great state through chickens? Do these birds normally crow only after a victory? But on that occasion they were crowing without having won. ‘That is the portent,’ you will say. A great portent indeed! As if fish had crowed instead of roosters! What time of night or day is there when roosters do not crow? If victory makes them lively and, so to speak, happy enough to crow, some other happiness could also have occurred and prompted them to crow.

- 57 “For the roosters’ cries before daybreak, Democritus gives a beautifully worded explanation. Their food has left their chest, spread through their whole body, and softened. Refreshed by rest, they give their cries. In ‘the silence of the night,’ as Ennius says,
“[...] they give voice through their red throats
And beat their wings with crowing and clapping.’
“Since this animal is so noisy of its own accord, why did it occur to Callisthenes to claim a divine command made the roosters crow? Either nature or chance could have brought it about.

Book 2, Chapter 27

- 58 “Reports reached the senate of a rain of blood, of blood flowing down the River Atratus, and of divine statues sweating. Would Thales have accepted this? Would Anaxagoras, or any other investigator of nature? Blood and sweat can only come from a body. But discoloration caused by some mixture from the earth can look very much like blood. Moisture that comes from outside can also resemble sweat: look at plastered walls in a south wind. During war, frightened people see more of these things and think them more important. In peace they pay less attention to the same things. Besides, in times of fear and danger people believe them more easily, and invent them with less risk of being challenged.
- 59 “Are we so thoughtless and careless that we think it a monstrous sign if mice gnaw something, when that is their one occupation? As you said, before the Marsic War mice gnawed shields at Lanuvium, and the haruspices declared it a very great portent. As if it mattered whether mice, gnawing something day and night, had chewed shields or sieves! If we follow this reasoning, I should have been terrified for the state because mice recently gnawed my copy of Plato’s Republic. Or if they had gnawed Epicurus’ book On Pleasure, I should have thought food prices would rise in the market.

Book 2, Chapter 28

- ⁶⁰ “Should we really be frightened when we hear that some monstrous creature has been born to an animal or a human being? To avoid going on too long, there is one explanation for all such cases. Whatever comes into being, of whatever kind, must have a natural cause. So even if it is unusual, it cannot come into being outside nature. When you meet something new and amazing, investigate its cause if you can. If you find none, still be sure of this: it could not have happened without a cause. Use an understanding of nature to drive away the fear its strangeness has caused you. Then no rumbling of the earth, no splitting of the sky, no rain of stones or blood, no shooting star or sight of torchlike lights will frighten you.
- ⁶¹ “Suppose I ask what causes these events. Even Chrysippus, divination’s champion, will never answer that chance produced them. He will give a natural explanation for all of them. Nothing can happen without a cause. Nothing happens that cannot happen. And if something that could happen has happened, it should not be regarded as a portent. So there are no portents. If a rare event must be thought a portent, a wise man is a portent. I suspect there have been more births to mules than there have been wise men. So the argument ends like this: no event has ever occurred unless it was possible, and being possible rules it out as a portent. Therefore there is no such thing as a portent.

Book 2, Chapter 29

- ⁶² “A certain predictor and interpreter of portents is said to have made a clever reply on this point. Someone once reported to him, as a portent, that a bar in his house had a snake wrapped around it. His reply was, ‘For a portent, you

would need the bar to have wrapped itself around the snake.’ This reply made his meaning clear enough: nothing that can happen should be regarded as a portent.

“Gaius Gracchus wrote to Marcus Pomponius that his father called in the haruspices after two snakes were caught in his house. Why for snakes rather than lizards or mice? Because those are everyday things, and snakes are not. As if it mattered how often something happened, when it can happen! But here is what puzzles me. Why let either snake go, if letting the female go would kill Tiberius Gracchus and letting the male go would kill Cornelia? Gaius does not write that the haruspices gave any answer about what would happen if neither snake was released. ‘But Gracchus died afterward.’ From some serious illness, I suppose, not from releasing a snake. Haruspices are not so unlucky that what they predict never happens even by chance.

Book 2, Chapter 30

⁶³ “I would be amazed, if I believed it, by your account of Calchas in Homer, who counted the sparrows and so predicted how many years the Trojan War would last. Agamemnon speaks about his prediction in Homer like this, in a translation I made in my spare time:

“Endure, men, and bear the hard work in your hearts,
So that we may learn whether our prophet Calchas’ predictions
Rest on sound thoughts or empty ones.
For everyone remembers the portent well,
All whose eyes deadly fate has not closed.
When Aulis was first covered with the Argive ships
That carried ruin to Priam and destruction to Troy,
We stood around cool streams and smoking altars,
Seeking the gods’ favor with bulls whose horns were gilded,
Under a shady plane tree from which a spring flowed.

We saw a twisting snake of monstrous appearance,
Terrible, come out from the altar at Jupiter's prompting.
In the plane tree's branch, hidden by leaves,
It seized the chicks; as it ate the eight,
The mother, the ninth, flew above with trembling cries.
The savage creature tore her insides with its monstrous bite.

- 64 “After the snake destroyed the delicate young birds and their mother,
The same Father, Saturn's son, who had brought it to light,
Hid it away and shaped it in a hard covering of stone.
We stood frightened and saw the amazing monster
There, surrounded by the gods' altars.
Calchas then declared with assurance:
“Why have you Achaeans suddenly frozen in amazement?
The creator of the gods himself has given us these portents,
Slow and far too late to come true, but winning lasting praise and fame.
Count the birds you see slaughtered by those hideous teeth:
So many years of war we shall struggle through at Troy.
It will fall in the tenth and satisfy the Achaeans' demand for punishment.”
That was Calchas' prediction, which you now see coming to fulfillment.’

- 65 “What kind of divination is this, counting years from sparrows rather than months or days? Why does he draw an inference from the little sparrows, which were not monstrous at all, and leave out the snake? It supposedly became stone, which is impossible. And after all, how are sparrows anything like years? I recall two things about the snake Sulla saw during a sacrifice: Sulla sacrificed when he was about to lead out his army, and a snake appeared from the altar. And that day's great success came from the general's plan, not the haruspex's advice.

Book 2, Chapter 31

⁶⁶ “There is nothing amazing in these kinds of portents. After they happen, some interpretation turns them into a basis for prediction. So the grains of wheat piled into the child Midas’ mouth, or the bees you said settled on Plato’s lips when he was a child, are not so amazing in themselves as cleverly interpreted. Yet the stories themselves may be false, or the predicted events may have happened by chance. With Roscius himself, the story that a snake coiled around him may be false. But a snake in his cradle is not so amazing, especially at Solonium, where snakes regularly crowd around the hearth as if at a market. The haruspices declared he would surpass everyone in fame and distinction; I am surprised that the immortal gods foretold fame for a future actor but none for Africanus.

⁶⁷ “Your list also included Flaminius’ portents: a sudden fall for him and his horse. That is certainly not amazing! And the first company of spearmen had a standard that could not be lifted from the ground. Perhaps the standard-bearer pulled timidly at what he had planted firmly. And what was amazing about Dionysius’ horse coming out of the river and having bees in its mane? But because he became king shortly afterward, something that had happened by chance acquired the force of a portent. ‘But the Spartans’ weapons rattled in Hercules’ temple. At Thebes the closed doors of the same god’s temple suddenly opened, and shields that had been fastened high up were found on the ground.’ None of these things could have happened without some movement. Why should we say they happened by divine action rather than chance?

Book 2, Chapter 32

- ⁶⁸ “But a crown of rough weeds appeared on the head of Lysander’s statue at Delphi, and appeared suddenly.’ Really? Do you think the crown of plants appeared before any seed took root? I imagine the rough weeds came from something birds dropped, not from human planting. Besides, anything on a head can look like a crown. You said that at the same time the gold stars of Castor and Pollux at Delphi fell and could not be found anywhere. That looks more like the work of thieves than of gods.
- ⁶⁹ “I am amazed that the mischief of the monkey at Dodona was recorded in Greek histories. What could be less amazing than that very ugly beast overturning an urn and scattering lots? Yet historians say no more dreadful portent ever happened to the Spartans! Then there were the predictions of the people of Veii: if Lake Alban overflowed and ran into the sea, Rome would perish; if its waters were held back, Veii would [...] So the Alban water was drained to benefit the land near the city, not to preserve the citadel and the city. ‘But soon afterward they heard a voice telling them to guard against the Gauls’ capture of Rome. That was why they consecrated an altar to Aius Loquens on the New Street.’ Well then, this Aius Loquens, this ‘Sayer and Speaker,’ said and spoke when no one knew him, and got his name from it. Did getting his home, altar, and name leave him speechless? We could ask the same question about Moneta, the Warner: has she warned us of anything at all except the pregnant sow?

Book 2, Chapter 33

- ⁷⁰ “Enough about portents. We still have auspices and the drawing of lots to discuss—not the responses poured out in prophecy, which we more properly call oracles. I will discuss those when we come to natural divination. The

Chaldeans remain too. First, though, consider auspices. How can an augur easily speak against those? Perhaps for a Marsian augur, but very easy for a Roman one. We Roman augurs are not people who predict the future by watching birds and other signs. Still, I believe Romulus, who founded the city after taking the auspices, thought augury included knowledge of the future. Ancient people were mistaken about many things. We see that this belief has now changed through experience, learning, or the passage of time. But the custom, religious practice, teaching, and law of augury, and the authority of the college, are kept both out of regard for popular opinion and because they are very useful to the state.

Book 2, Chapter 34

- ⁷¹ “Still, the consuls Publius Claudius and Lucius Junius deserved every punishment for sailing against the auspices. They should have obeyed religious practice and not rejected ancestral custom so stubbornly. The people were therefore right to convict one; the other killed himself. Flaminius ignored the auspices and perished along with his army as a result. But the following year Paulus obeyed them. Yet he too died with his army at the battle of Cannae, didn’t he? Even if auspices existed—and they do not—our current signs, whether a chicken’s falling food or something in the sky, would still be mere copies, not genuine auspices. ‘Quintus Fabius, I want you to assist me in taking the auspices.’ He answers, ‘I hear you.’ Our ancestors employed an expert for this; now they use anyone at all. But the job requires skill: he needs to know the meaning of ‘silence.’ That is our augural term for the absence of any ritual defect.
- ⁷² “Understanding that takes a fully trained augur. But the person brought in to assist with the auspices does not look up or around when the man taking them gives this order: ‘Tell me if there appears to be silence.’ He immediately answers that there appears to be silence. Next comes the order: ‘Report whether they are eating.’ The reply: ‘Yes, they are.’ Which birds are these, and where are they?

‘The keeper brought chickens in a cage; that is why he is called a pullarius,’ he says. So these are Jupiter’s messenger birds! Does their eating or refusing to eat make any difference to the auspices? None at all. But when they feed, something is bound to fall from their beaks and strike the ground. This was first called terripavium, then terripudium, and is now called tripudium. So when a lump of food falls from a chicken’s beak, the person taking the auspices is told that there is a fully favorable feeding sign.

Book 2, Chapter 35

⁷³ “Can an auspice so forced and squeezed out have anything divine in it? We have evidence that the earliest augurs did not use it: an old decree of the college says that any bird can produce the food-dropping sign. It would then be an auspice if a bird showed itself—provided it was free to do so. Then that bird might seem Jupiter’s interpreter and attendant. But now, if a bird shut in a cage and half dead from hunger rushes at a lump of porridge, and something falls from its beak, do you think that is an auspice? Or that Romulus used to take auspices that way?

⁷⁴ “Surely in the past those seeking auspices kept their own watch on the sky? Today the chicken keeper gets the order, and they get his report. Except at assemblies, no sign ranks higher with us than lightning on the left. That exception was established for political reasons, so the leading men of the state could interpret the signs for assemblies, whether the people were acting as a court, passing laws, or choosing magistrates. ‘But after Tiberius Gracchus wrote to them and the augurs judged their election faulty, the consuls Scipio and Figulus resigned their offices.’ Who denies that augurs have a system of rules? I deny divination. ‘But haruspices are diviners. When the man announcing the first century’s vote suddenly collapsed and died, Tiberius Gracchus took the haruspices before the senate. They said the officer taking the vote had not been lawfully authorized.’

75 “First, consider whether they meant the officer who had taken the century’s vote. He was the man who had died. They could have inferred that without divination. Second, perhaps they spoke by chance, which must never be ruled out in this kind of case. What could Etruscan haruspices know about whether an augural tent had been properly placed, or about the law of the city’s sacred boundary? Of my two colleagues, Gaius Marcellus and Appius Claudius, it is Marcellus whose view I share. I think the law of the augurs, though originally established because people believed in divination, was later kept and maintained for the sake of the state.

Book 2, Chapter 36

76 “I have said more about this subject elsewhere. Enough for now. Let us look at foreign auguries, which involve less trained skill than superstition. Foreign augurs use almost all birds; we use very few. They and our augurs count different things as favorable, ‘left-hand’ signs. Deiotarus and I would question each other: he wanted to know our rules for augury, and I wanted to know his. Immortal gods, what a difference! Some practices were even opposite. He used them all the time. Apart from the period when we hold the right to take auspices received from the people, how much do we use them? Our ancestors would not allow a war to be conducted without first taking auspices. Yet proconsuls and propraeors have been running wars for years now, without holding the right to take auspices!

77 “So they neither cross rivers after taking auspices nor take auspices through the food-dropping sign. Where, then, is divination by birds? Since wars are conducted by men who have no right to take auspices, this divination seems to have been kept for city affairs and removed from warfare. As for signs from spearheads, an entirely military kind of auspice, the Marcus Marcellus who was consul five times abandoned them completely. He was both an excellent commander and an excellent augur. He used to say that whenever he wanted to take

action, he traveled in a covered litter so that auspices would not get in his way. This is like our instruction as augurs: to prevent an omen from yoked animals, order the draft animals to be unyoked.

Book 2, Chapter 37

⁷⁸ “What does refusing a warning from Jupiter mean, except making sure that an auspice either cannot occur or, if it does, cannot be seen?

“You say something quite laughable about Deiotarus. He does not regret the auspices he received when setting out to join Pompey, you say. He did his duty by staying loyal to his friendship with the Roman people. Praise and glory mattered more to him than his kingdom and property. I certainly believe that. That has no bearing on auspices: no crow’s call could have told him that he was right to prepare to defend the Roman people’s freedom. That was his own judgment, and it was right.

⁷⁹ “Birds indicate outcomes, either bad or good. I see that Deiotarus followed the auspices of courage and goodness. These tell us not to look at our luck, as long as we keep our word. But if the birds showed him a good outcome, they certainly lied. He fled the battlefield with Pompey—a terrible time! He left Pompey—a painful parting! He saw Caesar as both his enemy and his guest. What could be sadder? Caesar took away his rule as tetrarch over the Troceni and gave it to some follower of his from Pergamum. He also stripped him of the Armenia the senate had given him. Though Deiotarus had entertained him with the greatest generosity, Caesar left the man who was both his host and a king robbed of his possessions. But I am straying too far. Let me get back to my subject. Judged by results, which are what we seek from birds, Deiotarus did not fare well at all. If we ask about duties, he learned those from his own goodness, not from auspices.

Book 2, Chapter 38

⁸⁰ “So leave out Romulus’ curved augur’s staff, which you say could not be burned in a huge fire. Disregard Attus Navius’ whetstone. Philosophy has no room for invented tales. The more philosophical approach was to ask first what augury itself is, next how it began, and then whether it is consistent. So what natural force makes birds flying here and there at random indicate anything? How do their calls or flights sometimes forbid action and sometimes order it? Why were some birds assigned the power to confirm an auspice on the left, but others on the right? And what account can we give of who discovered these practices, at what time, and by what means? The Etruscans, at any rate, trace their teaching to a boy turned up by a plow. Whom do we have? Attus Navius? But Romulus and Remus lived quite a few years earlier, and both were augurs, as we have been told. Or shall we call these discoveries the work of Pisidians, Cilicians, or Phrygians? So we are happy to get our knowledge of the gods from people without civilized culture?

Book 2, Chapter 39

- ⁸¹ “‘Yet auspices are used by every king, people, and nation.’ Well, nothing is more common than a lack of sense! As if you yourself followed the crowd when forming a judgment! How few people deny that pleasure is a good thing! Most even call it the greatest good. Do their numbers make the Stoics abandon their position? Or does the crowd follow the Stoics’ authority on most questions? Then why be surprised if weak minds absorb these superstitions about auspices and every kind of divination, but cannot see the truth?
- ⁸² “And where is this shared, consistent agreement among augurs? Ennius followed our practice in augury when he said:

“Then, though the sky was clear, thunder on the left gave a good sign.’

“But Homer’s Ajax, complaining to Achilles about the ‘Trojans’ boldness, reports something like this:

“Jupiter gives them good signs with these lightning flashes on the right.’

“So we think the left is better, while Greeks and non-Greeks prefer the right. I know very well that we call favorable signs ‘left’ even when they are on the right. Still, our people chose the word ‘left’ and foreigners chose ‘right’ because that side usually seemed better.

Book 2, Chapter 40

83 “What a huge disagreement! And they use different birds and different signs, observe them differently, and give different answers. Mustn’t we admit that some of these practices arose from mistakes, some from superstition, and many from fraud?

“You did not hesitate to add spoken omens to these superstitions. Aemilia told Paullus that Persa was dead, and her father accepted that as an omen. Caecilia said she was handing her place over to her sister’s daughter. Then there are ‘Keep a respectful silence’ and the first voting unit, the omen of the election. This is exactly what it means to speak fully and eloquently against yourself. If you watch for these things, when will your mind ever be peaceful and free? When will reason, not superstition, guide your actions? Really! Suppose someone says something about his own business in his own conversation. If one of his words happens to fit something you are doing or thinking, will that make you afraid or hopeful?

Book 2, Chapter 41

- ⁸⁴ “When Marcus Crassus was putting his army aboard ship at Brundisium, a man at the harbor was selling dried figs imported from Caunus. He kept shouting ‘Cauneas!’—‘Caunian figs!’ This sounds like the Latin for ‘Don’t go!’ Let us say, if you like, that he warned Crassus not to go, and that Crassus would not have died if he had obeyed the omen. Accept that, and we must treat tripping, a snapped sandal strap, or a sneeze as things to watch for too. “Lots and the Chaldeans remain, before we get to inspired prophets and dreams.
- ⁸⁵ “Do lots really call for discussion? Drawing one amounts to little more than a finger-guessing game or a throw of knucklebones or dice. In these, random chance counts, not reason or planning. The whole practice was invented through fraud, for profit, superstition, or deception. As we did with the art of inspecting entrails, let us look at the story told about the discovery of the most famous lots. The records at Praeneste say that Numerius Suffustius, an honorable man of noble birth, repeatedly dreamed that he was ordered to break open a flint rock in a certain place. In the end the dreams even threatened him. Frightened by these visions, he began the work, while his fellow citizens laughed at him. When the rock broke open, lots carved from oak and inscribed in ancient letters burst out. That spot is now enclosed as sacred ground near the shrine of the infant Jupiter. Mothers worship him there with the deepest devotion, as he sits with Juno in Fortune’s lap, reaching for her breast to nurse.
- ⁸⁶ “The story also says that honey ran from an olive tree then, at the place now occupied by Fortune’s temple. The haruspices said those lots would become very famous. On their orders a chest was made from that olive tree. The lots were stored in it, and today they are drawn out at Fortune’s prompting. What certainty can there be in lots shuffled and drawn by a child’s hand at Fortune’s prompting? How were they put in that spot? Who cut down that oak, shaped

it, and carved the letters? ‘There is nothing a god cannot do,’ they say. If only he had given the Stoics some sense! Then they would not swallow everything in such anxious, wretched superstition! But ordinary life has already rejected this kind of divination. The beauty and age of the shrine still keep the lots of Praeneste famous, and even that is only among the common people.

Book 2, Chapter 42

⁸⁷ “What magistrate, or what man of any distinction, uses lots? In other places lots have fallen completely out of use. According to Clitomachus, Carneades often remarked, ‘Nowhere have I seen Fortune enjoy better fortune than at Praeneste.’ So let us leave this kind of divination aside.

“Let us turn to the monstrous claims of the Chaldeans. Eudoxus, a student of Plato and easily the leading astronomer in the judgment of the most learned men, left his view of them in writing. He thought we should put no trust at all in the Chaldeans when they predict and describe someone’s life from his date of birth.

⁸⁸ “Panaetius was the only Stoic to reject astrologers’ predictions. He also names Anchialus and Cassander, the foremost astronomers of his own time. Despite their distinction in other areas of astronomy, they made no predictions of this sort. Panaetius’ friend Scylax of Halicarnassus combined outstanding knowledge of astronomy with a leading role in governing his own city. He rejected this whole Chaldean method of prediction.

⁸⁹ “Enough of witnesses; let us reason it through. Here is the argument made in defense of the Chaldeans’ birth-based predictions. They say a certain force exists in the belt of constellations called the zodiac in Greek. Each part of this circle affects and changes the sky differently, depending on which stars are in that part and the neighboring parts at any given time. The stars called wandering stars affect this force in different ways. When they enter the very part of the

circle where the newborn's rising sign lies, or a part connected or in harmony with it, they call those positions triangles and squares. The approach and retreat of the stars cause such great changes and shifts in the sky over the year and its seasons. And the sun's force produces the effects we see. For these reasons, they think it not just likely but true that children receive their life and form at birth according to the condition of the air. This, they say, shapes each person's abilities, habits, mind, body, way of life, accidents, and outcomes.

Book 2, Chapter 43

- ⁹⁰ “What unbelievable madness! Not every mistake, after all, deserves to be called stupidity. Even Diogenes the Stoic allows them something. He says they can predict only what someone's natural character will be and what he will be best suited for. But he denies that the other things they claim can possibly be known. Twins look alike, he says, but usually have different lives and fortunes. Procles and Eurysthenes, the Spartan kings, were twin brothers.
- ⁹¹ “Yet even the lengths of their lives differed. Procles' life was a year shorter, and he far outshone his brother in the fame of his achievements. Diogenes is an excellent man, but I deny that we can know even what he allows the Chaldeans, as if he were betraying our case. They themselves say that the moon controls births. The Chaldeans watch and record as birth stars any stars that seem close to the moon. So they judge by sight, the most misleading of senses, what they should grasp with thought and reason. Mathematical reasoning, which they ought to know, teaches us how low the moon travels, almost touching the earth. We learn that even Mercury, the closest planet, lies far from the moon, and Venus farther still. The sun, believed to supply its light, is yet another distance away. After that come three immeasurably vast gaps: from the sun to Mars, from there to Jupiter, from Jupiter to Saturn, and from there to the sky itself, the farthest, outermost boundary of the universe.

Book 2, Chapter 44

⁹² “So what influence can reach the moon, or rather the earth, from a distance that is almost infinite?

“They say, as their theory forces them to, that everyone born at the same time anywhere on the inhabited earth has the same rising sign. Everyone born under the same arrangement of the sky and stars must have the same experiences. Doesn’t this show that these interpreters of the sky do not even understand how the sky works? What we can see is bounded by circles that, as it were, cut the sky in two; these vary enormously with location. The Greeks call them ‘horizons,’ and we could very properly call them ‘boundaries’ in Latin. With these boundaries changing from place to place, the stars must rise and set at different times for different observers.

⁹³ “If the stars’ force produces different conditions in the sky, how can that force have the same effect on newborns when their skies differ so much? Where we live, the Dog Star rises after the summer solstice, several days after it in fact. But among the Troglodytes, according to the accounts, it rises before the solstice. Even if we allow that the force of the heavens has some effect on creatures born on earth, the astrologers must admit that people born at the same time can receive different natures because of differences in the sky. That is just what they will not accept. They insist that everyone born at the same time is born under the same conditions, wherever the birth takes place.

Book 2, Chapter 45

⁹⁴ “But what madness it is to say that, amid the sky’s great movements and changes, the wind, rain, and weather in each place make no difference! These things often vary so much even between nearby places that the weather at

Tusculum is often different from the weather at Rome. Sailors notice this especially: as they round headlands they often feel huge changes in the wind. The sky is sometimes clear and sometimes stormy in this way. Is it sane to deny that this affects children at birth—which certainly it does not—yet say their births are affected by some vague, subtle thing we cannot sense at all and can hardly understand: the condition of the sky produced by the moon and the other stars? And is it a small mistake not to see that they completely wipe out the power of the seed, which is so important in conception and reproduction? Everyone can see that children take after their parents in appearance and character, and in most of the ways they hold themselves and move. If the moon's influence and the arrangement of the heavens controlled these things rather than the parents' own nature and power, no such resemblance would occur.

- 95 “And people born at exactly the same instant have different characters, lives, and experiences. Isn't that clear enough proof that the time of birth makes no difference to the course of a life? Unless perhaps we think no one was conceived and born at the very same times as Africanus. Was anyone else like him?

Book 2, Chapter 46

- 96 “Surely no one doubts that many people have had defects present at birth put right, either as nature restored itself or through skilled medical treatment. For example, some people's tongues were so tightly attached that they could not speak, but an incision with a scalpel freed them. Many have also overcome a natural defect through practice and exercise. Demetrius of Phalerum writes that Demosthenes could not pronounce the Greek letter rho, but practiced until he could say it perfectly clearly. If a star had implanted and imposed these defects, nothing could change them. And don't different places produce different kinds of people? We can easily describe how Indians differ from Persians, and Ethiopians from Syrians, in body and mind: the variety is astonishing.

Book 2, Chapter 47

- ⁹⁷ “This shows that geographical location matters more at birth than the moon’s touch. It is false to claim that for 470,000 years the Babylonians monitored and tested all children as they were born. If this had been a regular practice, it would not have stopped. Yet we have no witness who says it is being done or knows it was done. Do you see that I am not repeating Carneades’ arguments, but those of Panaetius, a leading Stoic? I also ask this: were all those killed in the battle of Cannae born under one star? Their end was certainly one and the same. And were people with exceptional talents and minds also born under a single star? At what time are countless people not being born? Yet certainly no one else is like Homer.
- ⁹⁸ “If the condition of the sky and the arrangement of the stars at a creature’s birth matter, this must apply not just to humans but to animals too. What could be more absurd? Our friend Lucius Tarutius of Firmum, who is especially learned in Chaldean calculations, even worked back to our city’s birthday. He began with the festival of the Parilia on which, we are told, Romulus founded it. He said Rome was born when the moon was in the Balance, and he did not hesitate to predict its fate.
- ⁹⁹ “What enormous power error has! Were the stars and the moon powerful even over the date a city was founded? Suppose it matters under what condition of the sky a child first takes a breath. Could that matter to the bricks or rubble from which the city was built? But why say more? They are disproved every day. I remember so many things the Chaldeans told Pompey, so many they told Crassus, and so many they told this very Caesar. They said all three would live to old age and die at home in glory! How can anyone still trust them when he sees actual events disprove their forecasts day after day?

Book 2, Chapter 48

100 “We still have inspired prophecy and dreams to consider,” I said. “These two forms of divination supposedly come naturally to us, rather than through training. Shall we talk about them, Quintus, if you agree?” “I would like that very much,” he said. “I agree completely with what you have argued so far. To tell the truth, your speech has strengthened my view, but I already thought on my own that the Stoics’ view of divination was too superstitious. I was more impressed by the Peripatetics’ account, both that of Dicaearchus long ago and that of Cratippus, who is prominent today. They think human minds contain something like an oracle, through which they sense the future. It can do this if divine frenzy rouses it or sleep loosens it, leaving it free to move without restriction. I would very much like to hear what you think about these kinds, and the reasons you have for rejecting them.”

Book 2, Chapter 49

101 When he had said this, I began speaking again, as if making a fresh start. “Quintus,” I said, “I know your view has always been to question the remaining forms of divination while accepting frenzy and dreams, since these two seemed to spring from the unrestricted mind. So I will tell you what I think about these very two kinds, after first examining the strength of the arguments offered by the Stoics and by our friend Cratippus. As you reported it, this is the reasoning of Chrysippus, Diogenes, and Antipater: ‘If gods exist but do not tell people the future in advance, then one of these must be true: they have no love for humans; they are ignorant of coming events; they regard our knowing the future as unimportant to us; they judge such warnings beneath their divine dignity; or they themselves lack the power to give them.’

102 “But they do love us: they are generous and friendly to the human race. They do know the things they themselves have arranged and planned. Knowing the future does make a difference to us: we will be more careful if we know. They do not think it beneath their dignity: nothing is finer than generosity. And they can know the future in advance. So it cannot be the case that gods exist but do not give us signs of the future. But the gods exist, so they must signal the future. Such signals must come with a way for us to understand them; without one, sending them would be pointless. If they give us those ways, divination cannot fail to exist. Therefore divination exists.’

Book 2, Chapter 50

103 “What sharp minds! They think they have settled the matter in so few words! They base their conclusion on claims not one of which has been granted to them. We should accept a logical argument only when it proves a disputed point from facts that are not in doubt.

“Look at Epicurus, whom the Stoics regularly call dull and uneducated. Consider his proof that the totality of nature, as we call it, has no limit. ‘Whatever is finite,’ he says, ‘has an outer edge.’ Who would not grant that? ‘Whatever has an outer edge can be viewed from something else outside it.’ We must grant that too. ‘Yet there is no outside standpoint from which to see the whole.’ Again, we cannot deny this. ‘So, since the whole has no outer edge, it must be infinite.’

104 “Notice how agreed facts have brought him to a conclusion that was in doubt. Your practice as logicians is different. Your starting claims are not accepted by everyone; worse, granting them would leave you no closer to proving what you want. First you assume this: ‘If gods exist, they are generous to humans.’ Who will grant you that? Epicurus? He denies that the gods concern themselves with anyone’s affairs, their own or others’. Or our own Ennius? He says this to great applause, with the people’s agreement:

“I have always said, and always will, that a race of heavenly gods exists,
But I think they do not care what the human race does.’

“He goes on to give a reason for this view. We need not repeat the rest. All we need to see is that they treat a disputed, doubtful claim as settled.

Book 2, Chapter 51

105 “Next comes the claim that the gods know everything because they arranged everything. Here there is a huge battle, with highly learned men denying that these things were arranged by the immortal gods! ‘But knowing what will happen is in our interest.’ Dicaearchus devotes a long book to showing we are better off not knowing the future. They also claim that giving signs does not diminish the gods’ dignity. Of course: peering into everyone’s little house to see what is good for each person!

106 “‘And they can know the future in advance.’ Those who reject a fixed future deny that they can. Do you see, then, that doubtful claims are taken as certain and accepted? Next they twist things around and conclude: ‘So it cannot be the case that gods exist but do not give signs of the future.’ They think they have proved that by now. Then they add: ‘But gods exist.’ There is no universal agreement even on that. ‘So they signal the future.’ But this conclusion still does not follow. They could give no signs and still be gods. ‘And if they give signs, they also give some way to understand those signs.’ But they could keep that knowledge themselves and not give it to humans. Why, after all, would they give it to Etruscans rather than Romans? ‘And if they give ways to understand, divination must exist.’ Suppose the gods give them, absurd as that is. What difference does it make if we cannot receive them? Their last point is: ‘Therefore divination exists.’ It may be their last point, but it is not proved. As we have learned from these men themselves, you cannot get a true conclusion from false premises. So their entire argument collapses.

Book 2, Chapter 52

107 “Now let us turn to our friend Cratippus, an excellent man. He says: ‘Suppose the eyes’ work and function cannot exist without eyes. Yet eyes can sometimes fail to do their work. Then anyone who has used his eyes to see things truly even once has the visual sense that sees things truly. Similarly, suppose the work and function of divination cannot exist without divination. Yet someone who has divination can sometimes make mistakes and fail to see the truth. So divination is established if even one prediction comes true in a way that seems to leave no room for chance. There are more such cases than we can count. Therefore we must admit that divination exists.’ Neat and brief! But he has assumed what he wanted twice. Even if we were easygoing enough to grant those points, we could not possibly grant the additional claim he makes.

Book 2, Chapter 53

108 “‘Even if the eyes sometimes make mistakes,’ he says, ‘they still have the power of sight, because they have sometimes seen correctly. Likewise, if someone has once seen something clearly through divination, we should think he has the power of divination even when he makes mistakes.’ Please consider, dear Cratippus, how similar these cases are. They do not look similar to me. When eyes see truly, they use nature and a sense. If minds have ever seen truly in inspired prophecy or dreams, they have used luck and chance. Unless perhaps you expect people who regard dreams as just dreams to grant you that, when a dream comes true, it did not happen by chance. But let us grant your two premises—what logicians call *λήμματα*, though we prefer to speak Latin. Still, we will not grant your additional premise, which the same men call *πρόσληψιν*.

109 “Cratippus adds this premise: ‘There are countless predictions that are not due to chance.’ But I say there is not one. See how great our disagreement is! Reject the extra premise, and the argument proves nothing. Yet apparently we are shameless for not agreeing when the matter is so clear. What is clear? He answers, ‘Many predictions turn out right.’ But aren’t far more of them wrong? Doesn’t this very unevenness, which is typical of chance, show that chance is the cause, not nature? Besides, Cratippus, if your argument is sound—and it is with you that I am arguing—don’t you see that the same argument could be used by haruspices, lightning diviners, interpreters of portents, augurs, people who draw lots, and Chaldeans? In every one of those groups, something has turned out as predicted. So the practices you rightly dismiss must count as divination too; otherwise I see no reason to accept the two you retain. The same reasoning you use to bring these in can establish the ones you rule out.

Book 2, Chapter 54

- 110 “What authority does this frenzy you call divine really have? Why should a madman see what a wise man cannot, or a man who has lost his human senses have gained divine ones? We heed the Sibyl’s verses, said to be the outpouring of her madness. Recently a false report led people to expect her interpreter to tell the senate that our safety required giving the title of king to the man who was already our king in practice. If this is in the books, what man and what time does it refer to? The writer cleverly left out any definite person or time, making it seem that whatever happened had been predicted.
- 111 “He also used obscurity as a hiding place, so the same verses could seem to fit different events at different times. The poetry itself shows that this is not the work of someone in a frenzy. It shows more craft and care than excitement and passion. Still more telling is the device called an acrostic: the initial letters of

successive lines spell out something, as in some verses of Ennius, ‘Quintus Ennius wrote this.’ That certainly belongs to an attentive mind rather than a frenzied one.

Book 2, Chapter 55

112 “In the Sibylline books, the first line of each passage is woven through the whole poem of that passage in the initial letters. That is the work of a writer, not someone in a frenzy; someone using care, not a mad person. So let us keep the Sibyl put away and locked up. Let us follow our ancestors’ tradition: the books must not even be read without the senate’s order, and should help put religious fears to rest rather than stir them up. Let us ask their keepers to bring anything out of those books rather than a king. Neither gods nor humans will allow a king at Rome ever again.

“But many people have often prophesied truly. Cassandra, for example:

‘And now on the great sea [...]’

“And the same woman says a little later:

“‘Oh, look [...]’

113 “So are you forcing me to believe stories too? Let them give as much pleasure as you like. Let words, ideas, rhythms, and songs make them more attractive. But we should give made-up things no authority or belief. In the same way, I do not think we should believe some fellow called Publicius, or the prophets called the Marcii, or Apollo’s mysterious sayings. Some of these are plainly invented, others recklessly blurted out. They have never won the approval of even anyone of average intelligence, let alone a wise person.

114 “‘What?’ you will say. ‘Didn’t that oarsman in Coponius’ fleet predict what actually happened?’ Certainly, and what he predicted was just what we all feared might happen then. We heard that the armies were camped opposite each other in Thessaly. Caesar’s army seemed to us to be bolder, since it had

brought war against its own country, and stronger because of its long service. Every one of us feared the outcome of battle, though we did not show it openly, as was fitting for men of steady character. So why be surprised if that Greek lost his steadiness, his reason, and control of himself through great fear, as people often do? Now out of his mind with distress, he said those events would happen—the very ones he had feared might happen while still sane. In the name of gods and humans, which is more likely? Could a mad oarsman understand the immortal gods’ plans better than any of us there at the time—me, Cato, Varro, or Coponius himself?

Book 2, Chapter 56

- 115 “But now I turn to you,
“Holy Apollo, who occupy the earth’s true navel,
From where a savage, wild voice first emerged, spreading superstition.’
“Chrysippus filled a whole volume with your oracles. Some, I think, are false. Some are true by chance, as happens very often in any kind of talk. Some speak in obscure, roundabout ways: you need a second interpreter to explain the first, and other oracles to explain the oracle itself. Others are ambiguous and should be taken to a logician. For when this oracle was given to the richest king in Asia: “Croesus, crossing the Halys, will destroy a great power,’
“he thought he would destroy his enemies’ power. Instead he destroyed his own.
- 116 “So whichever outcome had occurred, the oracle would have been true. But why should I believe this was ever given to Croesus? Why should I consider Herodotus more truthful than Ennius? Wasn’t Herodotus just as capable of making up the Croesus story as Ennius was of inventing the one about Pyrrhus? Who could believe that Apollo’s oracle gave Pyrrhus this answer: “I say, heir of Aeacus, you can defeat the Romans—or the Romans you’?

“For a start, Latin was never a language Apollo spoke. Then there is the fact that this oracle is unknown to the Greeks. Besides, by Pyrrhus’ time Apollo had stopped composing verses. Finally, though the family was always, as Ennius says,

“‘The stupid race of Aeacus:

Stronger in war than in wisdom,’

“Pyrrhus could still have understood the verse’s ambiguity: the words about defeating the Romans applied no more to him than to the Romans. The ambiguity that deceived Croesus could have fooled even Chrysippus. This one could not have fooled even Epicurus.

Book 2, Chapter 57

117 “But here is the main point. Why are oracles of that kind no longer given at Delphi—not just in our time, but for a long while now, until nothing could be held in lower regard? When pressed on this, they say the force of the place has faded with age. This force produced that breath from the earth which stirred the Pythia’s mind to deliver oracles. That sounds like talk about wine or salted fish losing their strength as they get old! We are discussing the force of a place, and a force not just natural but divine. How exactly did it fade? ‘With age,’ you will say. What sort of age can wear out a divine force? What could be more divine than a breath rising out of the ground and stirring the mind until it can foresee events? It not only sees things far in advance, but speaks them in rhythm and verse. And when did this force fade? After people began to be less gullible?

118 “Nearly three hundred years ago, Demosthenes was already accusing the Pythia of ‘siding with Philip.’ His point was that Philip had bribed her. That gives us reason to think there was something dishonest in other Delphic oracles too. Somehow these superstitious, almost fanatical philosophers seem willing to be

anything but sensible. You prefer to think something faded and died out—something that, if it had ever existed, would surely have been eternal—rather than stop believing things that should not be believed.

Book 2, Chapter 58

119 “The error about dreams is similar. How far back they go to defend them! They hold that our souls have a divine nature and come into us from outside. On their account, many souls fill the universe, all in tune with one another. The mind therefore sees the future through its own divinity and its connection with minds outside it. Zeno, however, thinks the soul contracts, and in a sense slips down and collapses. That is what sleeping is. Then Pythagoras and Plato, authorities of the greatest weight, tell us to prepare for bed with a certain way of life and diet, so that we may see more reliable things in dreams. The Pythagoreans tell us above all to avoid beans—as if that food made the mind, rather than the stomach, swell! Somehow nothing is too absurd for some philosopher to say it.

120 “Do we think sleepers’ minds move by themselves when dreaming? Or, as Democritus thinks, are they struck by visions coming in from outside? On either account, people asleep may take all sorts of unreal sights for reality. People on ships see stationary objects as moving, and a certain way of looking makes one lamp flame appear as two. Why mention how many false things mad people and drunk people see? When such sights deserve no belief, what grounds are there for believing dreams? I cannot say. If you like, we can make arguments about these mistakes just as well as about dreams. When stationary things seem to move, you could say this means an earthquake or some sudden flight. The doubled lamp flame could indicate an outbreak of disagreement and rebellion.

Book 2, Chapter 59

- 121 “And from what mad or drunk people see we could draw countless guesses about apparent future events [...] After all, who could throw spears all day without sometimes hitting the target? We dream all night, and there is hardly a night we do not sleep. Yet we are surprised that something we have dreamed sometimes happens! Can anything be less predictable than the way knucklebones fall? Still, anyone who throws them often will sometimes get a Venus throw, and sometimes get it a second and a third time. Shall we foolishly prefer to say that Venus made this happen, rather than chance? If we should not believe false visions at other times, I cannot see what special quality sleep has that lets false visions count as true.
- 122 “Suppose nature made us perform in our sleep whatever we dreamed of doing. We would have to tie up everyone who lay down to sleep. Dreamers would cause more disturbance than any mad people. We should not trust mad people’s visions because they are false. Why, then, should we trust sleepers’ visions, which are even more confused? I do not understand. Is it because mad people do not tell an interpreter what they saw, but dreamers do? Here is another question. If I want to write or read something, sing, play a stringed instrument, or explain a point in geometry, physics, or logic, must I wait for a dream, or use a learned skill? Without skill, none of those things can be done or worked out. Even if I decided to go sailing, I would refuse to let a dream tell me how to steer. The penalty would be immediate.
- 123 “So how does it make sense for sick people to seek treatment from a dream interpreter rather than a doctor? Can Aesculapius or Serapis prescribe treatment for our health in a dream, but Neptune cannot give helmsmen instructions about sailing? And if a dream lets Minerva treat us with no doctor involved, why would the Muses withhold from sleepers the ability to write,

read, and practice the remaining arts? If treatment for health were given, the other things I mentioned would be given too. Since they are not, medical treatment is not given. Take that away, and all the authority of dreams disappears.

Book 2, Chapter 60

- 124 “But these points too have been readily available. Now let us look deeper. Either some divine power, looking after us, gives dreams their meanings; or interpreters understand from dreams what fits with what, and what follows what, through a certain harmony and connection in nature that they call ‘sympathy’; or neither is true, but there is a fixed, long-running record of observation: when something is seen in sleep, what normally happens and follows it. First, then, we must understand that no divine force produces dreams. It is certainly clear that no dream visions come from the gods’ will. If the gods did send these, their purpose would be to help us see events before they happen.
- 125 “How few people follow dreams, understand them, or remember them! How many scorn them and think this superstition shows a weak, old woman’s mind! Why would a god, looking after these people, warn them through dreams which they consider unworthy not only of attention, but even of memory? A god cannot be unaware of each person’s state of mind. And doing something pointless, with no reason for it, is beneath a god’s dignity. That is inconsistent even with a steady human character. So, if most dreams are either unknown or ignored, either the god does not know this, or he uses the signs in dreams for nothing. Neither can apply to a god. We must therefore admit that a god gives no signs through dreams.

Book 2, Chapter 61

¹²⁶ “Here is another question. If a god gives us these visions so we can foresee things, why not give them while we are awake rather than asleep? Perhaps an impact from outside stirs sleepers’ minds, perhaps the minds move by themselves, or perhaps there is some other reason why we seem to see, hear, and act while asleep. Whatever the cause, it could work when we are awake too. If the gods did this for our benefit while we slept, they would do the same when we were awake. This is especially so since Chrysippus, arguing against the Academics, says that what we see awake is far clearer and more certain than what we see in dreams. So if the gods were looking after us, divine generosity called for clearer visions awake, rather than dimmer ones in sleep. Since this does not happen, we should not think dreams divine.

Book 2, Chapter 62

¹²⁷ “And why do we need such a roundabout, winding path that we have to use dream interpreters? If a god cared for us, wouldn’t he simply tell us, ‘Do this; don’t do that,’ and show it to us when we were awake, not in our sleep? “Who would venture to claim that every dream tells the truth? Ennius says, ‘A few dreams are true; that doesn’t mean they all must be.’ Then what is the basis for that distinction? Which dreams belong in the true group, and which in the false? If a god sends the true dreams, what produces the false ones? If those are divine too, who could be less consistent than this god? What could show worse judgment than stirring human minds with false, lying visions? But suppose true visions are divine and false, empty ones human. What right have you to

divide things up like that, saying a god made this and nature made that? Why not say either that a god made all of them, which you deny, or that nature made all of them? Since you deny the first, you must admit the second.

- 128 “By nature I mean the mind’s inability ever to stop and be free from activity and movement. When the body is tired and the mind cannot use its limbs or senses, it falls into shifting, uncertain visions. As Aristotle says, these come from lingering traces of what it did or thought while awake. The confusion of these traces sometimes produces strange dream images. If some are false and others true, I would very much like to know what mark distinguishes them. Without any such mark, what makes these interpreters worth hearing? If they have one, I want very much to hear them identify it. But they will get stuck.

Book 2, Chapter 63

- 129 “Here is what we now have to decide. Which is more likely? Do the immortal gods, who surpass everything in excellence, run around the beds—even the cheap cots—of every human everywhere? When they see someone snoring, do they place before him twisted, obscure visions, so that he wakes in terror and takes them to an interpreter in the morning? Or does nature cause the restless, active mind to seem to see in sleep what it saw awake? Which is more worthy of philosophy: explaining these things through witches’ superstition, or through an account of nature? Even if a true interpretation of dreams were possible, those who claim to provide it could not do so. They belong to the most frivolous and uneducated class. Your Stoics, however, deny that anyone but a wise person can be a diviner.
- 130 “Chrysippus defines divination in these words: ‘The power to recognize, see, and explain the signs the gods present to humans.’ Its function is to know in advance how the gods feel toward humans, what they are indicating, and how these signs should be dealt with and their ill effects removed by religious rites.

He also defines dream interpretation as follows: ‘The power to see and explain what the gods indicate to humans in dreams.’ Well then, does this take ordinary intelligence, or exceptional ability and complete learning? Yet we have known no one like that.

Book 2, Chapter 64

131 “So take care: suppose I admitted the existence of divination, something I will never do. We might still find no one who could divine. And what can the gods be thinking if their dreams communicate neither anything we can grasp on our own nor anything we can get someone else to interpret? If the gods set before us things for which we have neither understanding nor an explanation from anyone else, it is as though Carthaginians or Spaniards addressed our senate with nobody there to translate.

132 “And what is the point of obscure, puzzling dreams? The gods ought to want us to understand warnings they give for our benefit. ‘What? Are no poets or natural philosophers obscure?’ Certainly—Euphorion is even excessively obscure.

133 “But Homer is not. Which of the two is better? Heraclitus is extremely hard to understand; Democritus is perfectly clear. Can they even be compared? You give me a warning for my own good that I cannot understand? Then why warn me? It is as if a doctor ordered a patient to take

“‘An earth-born, grass-walking, house-carrying creature without blood,’

“‘Instead of saying ‘a snail,’ like an ordinary person. In Pacuvius, Amphion says in rather obscure terms:

“‘A rough, low creature of the wild, walking slowly on four feet,

Its head is short, its neck like a snake’s, its look fierce,

Gutted, lifeless, with a living creature’s sound.’

“Then the people of Attica answer:

“We don’t understand unless you speak plainly.”

“He replies with one word: ‘Tortoise.’ Couldn’t you have said that at the start, lyre player?”

Book 2, Chapter 65

- 134 “Someone tells an interpreter that he dreamed an egg was hanging from the frame of his bedroom bed. This dream is in Chrysippus’ book. The interpreter replied that treasure was buried under the bed. The man dug and found some gold surrounded by silver. From the silver he sent a small share to the interpreter, choosing the amount himself. Then the interpreter said, ‘Nothing from the yolk?’ He thought the yolk of the egg had indicated gold, and the rest of it silver. Has no one else ever dreamed about an egg? Then why did this unknown fellow alone find treasure? How many poor people deserve the gods’ help but get no dream telling them how to find treasure! And why was the warning so obscure, with an egg standing for treasure, rather than a plain order to look for treasure, just as Simonides was plainly forbidden to sail?”

Book 2, Chapter 66

- 135 “So obscure dreams are entirely out of keeping with the gods’ dignity. “Let us turn to open, clear ones. There is the dream about the man killed by the innkeeper at Megara, and the dream of Simonides, whom the man he had buried forbade to sail. There is also Alexander’s dream. I am surprised you left it out, Quintus. His friend Ptolemy had been hit in battle by a poisoned weapon and was dying in great pain from the wound. Alexander sat beside him and fell asleep. Then, the story goes, he dreamed that the snake his mother Olympias kept brought a little root in its mouth. It also told him where the root grew, not far from where he was, and said it had such power that it would

easily cure Ptolemy. Once awake, Alexander described his dream to his friends, and men were sent out in search of that little root. With the root found, the story says, both Ptolemy and many soldiers hit by weapons of the same kind were cured.

Book 2, Chapter 67

- 136 “You also brought up many dreams from histories: those of Phalaris’ mother, Cyrus the Elder, Dionysius’ mother, Hamilcar the Carthaginian, Hannibal, and Publius Decius. Then there is the now well-known dream about the leader of the dancers, Gaius Gracchus’ dream, and the recent dream of Caecilia, daughter of Balearicus. But these are other people’s experiences, and for that reason unknown to us. Perhaps some were even invented. Who vouches for them? What can we say about our own dreams? You dreamed that I emerged from a river on a horse and reached the bank. I dreamed of Marius with laurel-wreathed rods of office, ordering that I be led into his memorial. There is one explanation for all dreams, Quintus. In the name of the immortal gods, let us take care that our superstition and distorted thinking do not defeat it!
- 137 “What Marius do you think I saw? ‘His appearance and image, I suppose,’ as Democritus thinks. Where did that image come from? He holds that images flow from solid bodies and definite shapes. So what body of Marius was there? ‘From the body that had existed,’ he says. So this image of Marius followed me into the countryside around Atina?—‘Everything is full of images. No appearance can be thought of except through the impact of images.’
- 138 “—Well then? Do these images obey our orders so readily that they rush up as soon as we want them? Do they even show up for things that don’t exist? Surely the mind can invent any shape for itself, however strange or unreal. We can picture a town’s layout or a person’s appearance without ever having seen them.

139 “So when I think of the walls of Babylon or Homer’s face, does some image of them strike me? Then we can know anything we want to, since there is nothing we cannot think about! No images, then, creep into sleepers’ minds from outside. In fact, no images flow off things at all. I have never known anyone talk nonsense with greater authority. The mind’s power and nature are such that, when awake, it is active without any impact from outside. It moves by itself with an incredible speed. Supported by the limbs, body, and senses, minds see, think, and feel everything more reliably. But once those supports are gone and bodily tiredness leaves the mind unaided, the mind moves under its own power. So shapes and actions pass through it, and it seems to hear many things and say many things.

Book 2, Chapter 68

140 “Of course, in the mind’s weakened, relaxed state, many such things pass through it, mixed up and altered in every way. What moves and stirs in our minds above all are the remains of things we thought or did while awake. At that time Marius was often in my thoughts. I remembered how bravely and steadily he had borne his own terrible fall. That, I think, was why I dreamed about him. You were thinking anxiously about me, and suddenly saw me emerge from a river. Both our minds held traces of our waking thoughts. But some things were added: in my case, Marius’ memorial; in yours, the horse I was riding, which went under with me and then reappeared.

141 “Would any old woman have been crazy enough to trust dreams without these occasional, purely accidental coincidences? Alexander seemed to see a snake speak. The story may be entirely false, or it may be true. Either way, it is not remarkable. He did not hear a snake speak; he seemed to hear it. More astonishing still, its mouth was holding a root as it talked! But nothing is extraordinary to a dreamer. My question is why Alexander had so vivid and definite a dream,

but did not have others, and why other people do not have many. I certainly remember none apart from this one about Marius. So I have wasted all those nights in such a long life!

Book 2, Chapter 69

142 “Now, because I have stopped working in the courts, I have cut back on working late at night and added afternoon naps, which I never used to take. Yet with all this sleep, no dream has warned me of anything, especially in such serious matters. I never feel more as if I am dreaming than when I see magistrates in the forum or the senate in its meeting house.

“And now for the second part of our division. What continuous connection in nature—what they call ‘sympathy,’ as I said—could require treasure to be understood from an egg? Doctors recognize the approach and growth of diseases from certain signs. They also say certain kinds of dream can reveal signs of health, for instance whether we are overfed or starving. But what natural relationship connects dreams with treasure, an inheritance, public office, victory, and many other such things?

143 “Someone is said to have passed small stones while dreaming of sexual intercourse. I see the sympathy there. A vision of that kind appeared to the sleeper because nature’s force, not a mistaken belief, produced what happened. So what natural force presented Simonides with the figure that forbade him to sail? And what natural connection was there in the dream recorded about Alcibiades? Shortly before his death, he seemed in a dream to be wrapped in his mistress’ cloak. His body was thrown out, left unburied, and deserted by everyone. His mistress then laid her own cloak over it. Was this, then, already present in the future and based on natural causes? Or did chance bring about both the dream and the event?

Book 2, Chapter 70

144 “And don’t the interpreters’ guesses reveal their own cleverness more than the force and harmony of nature? A runner planning to go to Olympia dreamed that he was riding in a four-horse chariot. Next morning he consulted an interpreter, who told him, ‘You are going to win.’ ‘That is what the horses’ speed and strength mean.’ Then he went to Antiphon. ‘You must lose,’ he said. ‘Don’t you understand that four ran ahead of you?’ Here is another runner—Chrysippus’ book is full of dreams like these, and so is Antipater’s. But back to the runner. He told an interpreter that he had dreamed he had become an eagle. ‘You have won,’ the man said. ‘No bird flies more powerfully than that one.’ Antiphon told the same man, ‘You fool, don’t you see that you have lost? That bird hunts and chases other birds, so it is always last itself.’

145 “A married woman wanted to have a child but was unsure whether she was pregnant. She dreamed that her genitals were sealed shut and reported it to an interpreter. The interpreter ruled out conception on the grounds that her genitals were sealed. But another said she was pregnant, since people do not normally seal anything empty. What kind of art is this, when an interpreter uses his cleverness to deceive? Do the examples I have given, and the countless ones the Stoics have collected, show anything except the ingenuity of people who use some resemblance to draw a guess now one way, now another? Doctors have certain signs from a patient’s pulse and breathing, and foresee what will happen from many other things. When helmsmen see squid leaping or dolphins rushing into harbor, they think this signals a storm. These things can easily be explained by reason and traced back to nature. The examples I gave a little earlier cannot be, at all.

Book 2, Chapter 71

146 “‘But long observation has built an art by recording events.’ That is the one part still left. Is that so? How could anyone keep a record of dreams? There is no end to the forms they take. Nothing we can imagine is too backward, too disorderly, or too monstrous for us to dream it. How, then, can we hold these endless, always new things in our memory, or record them through observation? Astronomers have recorded the movements of the planets. Order has been discovered in those stars where none was thought to exist. Now tell me what order or pattern of encounters exists in dreams. And how can true dreams be distinguished from false ones? The same dreams turn out differently for different people, and not always in the same way even for the same people. We normally do not believe a liar even when he tells the truth. So I find it strange that, if one dream comes true, these men use the one to confirm countless others, rather than let the many discredit the one.

147 “So if no god produces dreams, if nature has no connection with them, and if observation has not been able to establish knowledge of them, we have proved that dreams deserve no weight at all. This is especially so since the people who see them do not themselves divine anything; their interpreters use guesswork, not nature; over an almost endless span of ages, chance has worked more wonders in every field than those seen in dreams; and nothing is more uncertain than a guess that can be pulled in different directions, sometimes even opposite ones.

Book 2, Chapter 72

148 “So let this divination through dreams be rejected along with all the rest. To tell the truth, superstition has spread through the nations, weighed down almost everyone’s mind, and taken hold of human weakness. The books called *The Nature of the Gods* made this point; in this debate too, getting rid of superstition has been our chief concern. We thought we would greatly benefit ourselves and our people if we pulled it out by the roots. But I want this clearly understood: removing superstition does not remove religion. It is wise to protect our ancestors’ institutions by keeping their sacred rites and ceremonies. And we cannot deny what the universe’s beauty and the ordered heavens show us: a supreme, eternal being exists, and humanity ought to look up to it with admiration.

149 “So just as religion connected with the knowledge of nature should even be spread, every root of superstition must be pulled out. It crowds in and gives you no relief, following you whichever way you go: if someone prophesies within your hearing or you catch words taken as an omen, if you sacrifice or see a bird, if you see a Chaldean or a haruspex, if lightning flashes or thunder sounds, if something is struck from the sky, or if something resembling a portent is born or happens. One of these things is bound to happen often, so you can never settle down with a peaceful mind.

150 “Sleep seems to be a refuge from all our troubles and anxieties. Yet that very thing produces a great many worries and fears. These would matter less in themselves and be more readily dismissed if philosophers had not taken up the defense of dreams. And these are not the most worthless philosophers. They are among the sharpest, able to see what follows from an argument and what contradicts it, and are now considered close to perfect in every way. If Carneades had not opposed their reckless claims, I am not sure they would not by now be judged the only philosophers. Nearly all our argument and debate is

with them, not because we despise them most, but because, when they argue for their own views, no one seems sharper or more careful. The Academy has its own way of working: it commits to no judgment, accepts whatever looks closest to the truth, sets arguments side by side, and lays out what can be said for each position. It adds no authority of its own, but leaves listeners completely free to make their own judgment. We will keep this practice handed down from Socrates. If it pleases you, my brother Quintus, we will use it between ourselves as often as possible.” “Nothing could please me more,” he said. With that, we got up.