Courtney Roby

Abstract

This paper explores Ptolemy’s use of an «ekphrastic» persuasive mode in the *Syntaxis Mathematica* and the *Harmonica*. This approach depends upon the reader’s ability to picture structures and processes which, by virtue of invisibility, impossibility, or sheer scale, are accessible primarily or solely to the imagination. It is achieved by means of vivid descriptions of thought-experiments or real physical phenomena, descriptions which are according to Ptolemy intended to place images before the reader’s eyes. These ekphrastic passages were key to invoking the «scientific imagination», which in turn was an essential component of Ptolemy’s persuasive strategy. The scientific imagination, sparked by the ekphrastic passages in the text, is the ground where sense and reason cooperate, as Ptolemy puts it, «to penetrate progressively into what is beautiful and what is useful», producing true scientific knowledge.

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